

OPINION

by

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about the materials, presented by chief assistant professor dr. Donka Petrova for participation in the competition for holding the academic position "associate professor" in the field of higher education Humanities, scientific specialty 2.3. Philosophy (Rhetoric), announced in SG 103/10.12.2021

1. Short information about the candidates professional development

Donka Petrova, PhD finished a language school in Haskovo in 1998 with profiles in English and informatics. In 2002 she completed her bachelor studies in Psychology at the Sofia University "St. Kliment Ohridski" and graduated as the first in her year. Later on she completed a master's degree in Psychology on the topic of "Diagnostics and counseling in childhood and Adolescence". In 2010 she received her PhD in Educational psychology with a dissertation on the topic of "Ageism and cooperation in the communication between teachers and students". In 2014 she completed another master's degree - Nordistics - at the Sofia University.

2. Research activity and results

Dr. Donka Petrova is the only candidate in the competition for the requirement of the academic position of Associate professor in the field of Humanities/2.3. Philosophy (Rhetoric). For her participation she has presented 23 publications created in the period 2010-2021 - 1 monograph, 20 articles - 18 written on her own and 2 in collaboration with prof. Y. Yankoulova, and 2 studies. They are the result of active research activity which contributes to the Bulgarian scientific literature with regard to key contemporary topics like *audience, leadership, stereotypes and prejudice in communication, media rhetoric, conspiracy theories, multicultural communication*.

The monograph "Audience - analysis and rhetorical impact" (2021, UniPress "St. Kliment Ohridski") is presented as a habilitation work. The modern "multifaceted outlook to the audience" gives the author a successful start. The audience is conceptualized not only as a construct, but also as a "dynamic and complex phenomenon", "always changing and in development". The aim is to "combine theories and models which consider its essence, the

ways of its understanding (research and analysis) and the ways to reach it (or accomplish impact)". The aim determines the structure of the work. There are 10 separate chapters which give the content a logical construction and provide details. I would like to describe the design of the monograph as *patchwork* - conscious and targeted choosing of the different *colors* of audiences. A positive characteristic of the work is its separation into two main parts. The first is contributed to the audience analysis and consists of four chapters: *In search of audience; Studying the audiences; Leading theories and research trends; Model for the analysis of the addressed audience; Methods for collecting information about audiences.* The second part is oriented towards the rhetorical impact and consists of six chapters: *Audience adaptation; Ethos; Pathos; Logos; Rhetorical argumentation; Modern theories of persuasion and audience impact.* With the initial title of searching for the audience the author states her signature - curious search and elaborate look into the modern and contemporary ideas of the current rhetoric of the last decades. The author skillfully creates a picture of the research process which not only has informative value, but also stimulates "additional research in this direction". A quality contribution is the inclusion of sources after each chapter. In the first chapter "In search of the audience" the author follows the transformations of the traditional audience and the process of "listening" in today's forms of communication (radio, internet, social networks) which fragment the audience and create multiple different audiences. I would classify as a contribution the author's focus on contemporary ideas about conceptualizing and defining audiences. Citations include theoretical publications of authors who are different, but offer interconnected viewpoints: Drexler 2014; Hartley 2002; Jasinski 2001; Voh 2012, as well as earlier ones like McQuail 1997; Moores 1993; Ede 1984 and others. At the center of the "concept of audience" is the question whom the communicator wants to influence and what can we define as rhetorical audience. The author points out the pragmatization of the research interest towards the audiences as a tendency, reflecting the goals of media institutions, researchers and regulators (Hartley). The return to the topic of the "New Rhetoric" of Perelman and Olbrechts-Tyteca is a bridge between the traditional and modern understanding of audiences as "systematized constructs" of the communicator. The author emphasizes on the key characteristics of the different audiences. Differentiation requires interdisciplinary research approach - its beginnings can be found in Aristotle and classical rhetorical works. According to the authors of the New Rhetoric some chapters of classical works turn into approaches, not only psychological, but also sociological. Specific place has the value approach which pays attention to the opinions and values of the audiences. Accent is also placed on the contribution of Lloyd Bitzer (1968) who introduces *rhetorical situation* as a leading concept in rhetorics. Following the goal of differentiation the author introduces the problem of audience classification. With overview of different authors she offers criteria of such classification, some of which are established, some are new. The media audience is considered in a separate part as it brings dramatic changes in the traditional understanding of audience. In 1987 McQuail defines audience as "an aggregate of persons, which form the readers, the listeners, the viewers of different media and their contents". The abundance of critical viewpoints stimulates the labeling of audiences as masses, publics, social group, market. The influence of the entertainment industry (cinema, tv) is negatively marked. Media

audience is considered also through its composition, the influence of the audience over the media and the feedback. The first chapter of the monograph finishes with the contemporary trends in the development of the active audience and the interactive audiences. The media considers more and more the interactive player, who participates in the selection, interpretation and the use of media contents. The cited definitions enrich the concept of audience activity (Biocca 1988). The importance of reception analysis becomes more and more important - or "how each audience member attributes meaning to the contents". Part 7: Interactive audiences introduces the internet age. The new rhetorical concepts like online rhetoric, virtual rhetoric, digital rhetoric, web rhetoric, online audience emerge in the process of spawning new technologies. They are products of the media environment, which change the roles of the audience all the time, as well as those of creators, institutions, blurring the frontiers among them in media communication. Social media and platforms (Youtube, Twitter) create a climate for activation of audiences and their interactivity. The appearance of the word podcast marks the beginning of new trends - the consumer of contents is turning into a content creator. The relationships among texts leads to intertextuality. The first chapter finishes with the questions of the necessity of audience understanding: how they form, what they are, how they change. The second chapter logically follows with Audience research: leading trends. Detailed look into the rich spectrum of ideas and practices allows the author to use a combination of research methods and to apply the explanatory possibilities of different disciplinary fields: mass communications theory, social psychology, rhetoric, art history. I would add also sociology of culture and especially comparative study of cultures, where comparative rhetoric is applied. In the first part, Changing views of audiences, is offered a review of schools of thought - like the Frankfurt school of Theodor Adorno - the audience as a target of political and commercial propaganda. R. Merton places at the center the media text and the message, which leads to a certain reaction. J. Clapper traces the influence of other factors like format, style, genre, previous experience, personality traits, which interact with media messages. The author considers the influential theory of cognitive dissonance of Festinger as a basis for a new research trend. The cognitive elements like attitudes, perceptions, knowledge define the relationship with media - selection, satisfaction and consumption (D. Morley). In the paradigms of feminism, marxism, structuralism other types of audiences appear and they attribute different meaning to contents. After the 70ies more theories emerge - agenda setting, cultivation theory and the spiral of silence. The behavior of the audience members actualizes the requirements of media literacy, which requires critical thought towards messages, manipulations, fake news. In the next chapter Main research trends in the study of audiences are introduced five of them: effects study; uses and satisfaction; literary critique and reception analysis (Jensen and Rosengrenn). An achievement of the author is the demonstration of the possibilities of the interdisciplinary approach. Logically is introduced the next step: From theory to practice: the application of the two-flow theory of communication and the development of campaigns. At the center of analysis is the opinion leader - his opinion is determined by his personality traits, expertise, contacts. The role of the communication strategists, especially in the virtual space, is requiring more attention to the selection, the motivation for participation in social conversations. Chapter 3: Model of

the analysis of the addressed audience is oriented to a five-level model of analysis: situational analysis, level of interest, demographic analysis, age, etc. Especial interest is shown to the psychological analysis and its components like attitudes, beliefs, values. Following the ideas of M. Rokeach the analysis of values is of great research importance especially in times of radical value changes. The author relates the Multicultural analysis with the global competence - the differences that enrich us and the ones that divide us. An achievement is the analysis of cultural communication: ways of thinking, high- and low-context cultures and national cultures (Hofstede). A pragmatization of the model is reached through an adapted model of few questions that allow for a "short model of audience analysis". Chapter 4: Methods for collection information about the audience the author offers a selection of the leading research methods in the first decades of 21 century. In two parts are introduced the quality and quantity methods, their possibilities and ways of application according to the aims. Quality methods allow for the study of new and unknown phenomena, allow access to subjective experiences and ideas of the audience members. I highly appreciate the selection of the presented quality methods as methods belonging to a new era in audience research. Alongside traditional methods like observation and interviews other methods are presented: focus groups, thinking aloud, protocol analyses, participative rhetoric, rhetoric ethnography, analysis of secondary texts, with information on their application, potential pitfalls and disadvantages.

A serious positive aspect of the second part of the book is the scientific sternness with which is accomplished the application of the model of the audience analysis: adaptation to the audience, ethos, pathos, logos, rhetorical argumentation and modern theories of persuasion. With the concept of centeredness the author defines the direction of rhetorical impact of the communicator - "to place the focus on the audience, its characteristics, needs, and not those of the communicator" (p. 60). An achievement is the application of the social and cognitive psychology as the basis of the analysis, the introduction of the concept of identification, cognitive processes, motivation, attention and volume of the attention, memory and types of memory. By the means of the part entitled "Preliminary adaptation to the audience" the author sets the stage for profiling the audience and the creation of a psychographic profile. Important information is provided by the situational analysis, which focuses on key characteristics like voluntary/involuntary audience, benevolent, hostile, etc. Additional considerations are presented in the part entitled Context and social situation: the context is described in four dimensions: physical, social-psychological, temporal, and cultural. The monitoring of audience participants means drawing information from nonverbal indicators like looks, facial expressions, proxemics. Examples from the practice give ideas about overcoming boredom, hostility, anger among audiences. Humor in rhetorical situations is important for winning over the audience, for reduction of tension, for belittling the opponent, but in case its rules and strategies are well-applied. A contribution is also the analysis of stereotypes and prejudices as hindrances in the way of adaptation. This is not a new problem, but is the viewing of different stereotypizations through the rhetorical impact is enriching the scientific understanding. A strong point in the author's approach is the erudite reading of contemporary authors and modern research.

I appreciate highly the psychological grounding of the persuasive communication influence of the rhetorical triangle of Aristotle - ethos as the character of the speaker, pathos - the emotional impact, and logos - the logical argumentation. The meeting between classical rhetoric and modern rhetoric reflects the contemporary interest towards classics in postmodern thought, the search for the question of the meaning. Petrova demonstrates a rich conceptual apparatus, which defines the scientific value of the theoretical synthesis.

The scientific publications of the author prove active research interest, new ideas and author's analyses of problems, some of which are also present in the monograph. In the article ***Focus group discussions as a means to assess training needs and gather information for audience analysis*** (Rhetoric online, 3, 2021) the author demonstrates the essence, specifics, qualities and effectiveness of the method of the focus groups. A contribution of the publication is the introduction of the methodology for application, and information about organizing, the types of questions and the virtual focus groups, which can give relevant data about audience members.

In the article ***Leadership and ethos (or persuasion through character)*** (Political Horizons, 3, 2021) the author uses the classical concept of rhetorical ethos (Aristotle) and the modern definitions for leadership and ethos of Baumlin (1994), Bermudez (2007), Lucas (2020), Lancaster (2015). Key factors like integrity, consistency, loyalty, typology of character attacks are associated with trust in the leader. Authenticity is introduced as a building component of ethos. The author's analysis of the authentic leader, the destroying of ethos and the typology of attacks against the ethos are contributions.

Charismatic leadership and oratorical skill (Collection of materials from scientific conferences of Rhetoric, 2017): at the center of attention is placed the charismatic leadership through the prism of communication skills and oratorical skills of the leader. The theoretical analysis is in the context of the new neocharismatic views, that characterize leadership rhetorical strategies as visions for a desired future.

The article ***Multicultural communication: an introduction for travellers*** (Geograph, 5, 2021) introduces the topics of cultural differences, the knowledge of which is beneficial for communication. A contribution here is the definition of the concept of global competency: the ability to acknowledge, tolerate, respect and integrate cultural differences.

The identifiable victim effect and the rhetorical pathos (General and comparative rhetoric, 2020) is an article that contains an author's analysis of factors that explain the phenomenon known as "identifiable victim effect". An achievement of the authors is the choice of this problem, not studied in our literature and the idea to view it in relation to rhetorical pathos and its emotional impact. The analysis of the main explanatory model is complemented by some of the possibilities of its use for the purposes of public speaking in charity campaigns and initiatives. An important remark is how it could be also used unethically, with the aim to manipulate.

Audience, negative messages and political cynicism (The transition and the political languages. ed. M. Mizov, 2019) places the focus on one of the possible effects of the negative messages and "black PR" - the political cynicism. New definitions are offered and

the phenomenon is viewed as complex. The sources used are contemporary.

In the article ***Conspiracy theories, rhetoric and argumentation*** (Rhetoric in contemporary society, 2019) the author analyzes the three aspects of the problem: definition and characterization; specific argumentativeness - the ways to achieve persuasion, the ways in which psychological characteristics of individuals and groups make them susceptible to conspiracy theories. The author brings out the most important, key characteristics of conspiracy theories: sensational, unvalidated, based on the belief in absolute intent, acceptance of the existence of absolute malice.

Nonverbal expressions of power and dominance (Collection of papers from International Scientific Conference "Challenges and Perspectives in Contemporary Psychology", 2017) offers an author's analysis of new concepts, trends, achievements and perspectives in social psychology. IN the focus are the non-verbal manifestations of power and domination; leading principles uniting the different nonverbal signals.

Modern Scandinavian rhetoric: developing rhetoric as academic discipline and rhetorical research in Scandinavian countries (Rhetoric and communications, issue: 20,2015). The article presents a perspective research line in rhetoric - a comparative study of the history of rhetoric in other scientific, cultural and educational spaces. An overview has been made of the intensive development of rhetoric in Denmark, Sweden and Norway. Significant events in Denmark are the establishment of a Laboratory for the Study of Public Speech in 1958; two-year rhetoric program by J. Fafner author of "Rhetoric - classical and modern". In 1986, a department of rhetoric was established at the university of Copenhagen. In Sweden K. Johansson writes "Rhetoric - the art of persuasion"; a curriculum in rhetoric is started at the University of Uppsala; in the 90's is published the magazine Scandinavian Rhetoric. Of interest is the specific nature of the development of the rhetorical science: borrowing of foreign research methods and approaches that lead to the creation of shared

informational space, common academic language; through the application of the interdisciplinary approach rhetoric spreads its scope. From foreign approaches they mostly borrow from social studies of gender, culturology and media research. Research trail of Norwegian origin is related to the thematic study of texts (*sakprosa*), non-literary texts, that reflect societal communication models in general. The key figures in Scandinavian rhetoric Jorgen Fafner and Christian Kock are presented with their contributions.

Humor in public speaking (Theoretical collection in honor of the creator of the department of Rhetoric prof. Vassil Ivanov, 2016). The article contains a theoretical analysis of the role of humor in public speaking: definitions, leading theories, effects of its use in speeches by men and women.

The study ***Ageism or stereotyping because of age: definition, effects and research approaches*** (2010) and the article ***Stereotypes and their influence in the communication between speaker and audience*** are dedicated to topics also discussed in the monograph, about which I also wrote.

In her published monograph ***Audience - analysis and rhetorical impact*** chief assistant professor Donka Petrova is present as an author who contributes to the enrichment of the typical sphere of rhetoric with leading contemporary theories and ideas, especially in the field of audience analysis and rhetorical impact. The application of the interdisciplinary approach raises the value of both the research efforts and of the interpretation possibilities of the analysis. Through the rich concept apparatus is accomplished interdisciplinary theoretical synthesis. The laconic, readable language makes the informationally dense texts attractive. These qualities are found in all parts of the work, which I appreciate as a contribution to the scientific research of the relation audience - recipients - rhetorical impacts.

My communication with Dr. Donka Petrova at the department of Rhetoric has always been with respect and pleasure because of her width of knowledge, dedication and preciseness, as well as because of her ethical, professional presence in the organization of academic forums.

In conclusion, after considering the presented for the competition publications, I declare my positive evaluation and recommend to the respected Scientific Selection Committee to offer to the Scientific council of the Sofia University "St. Kliment Ohridski" to select chief assistant professor Donka Petrova for the academic position of *Associate professor* in the field of Humanities/2.3 Philosophy (Rhetoric). I will vote with "yes".

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