

REVIEW

by Assoc. Prof. Evelina Antonova Christova, PhD

Department of Media and Communication, New Bulgarian University

for the acquisition of the educational and scientific degree "Doctor" in professional direction

2.1. Philology

Research Specialty: General and Comparative Linguistics (General Linguistics)

with a dissertation on the topic: "Linguistic Characteristics of Fake News",

presented by Ruslana Margova, part-time doctoral student in the Department of General, Indo-European and Balkan Linguistics at the Faculty of Slavic Philology of the University of St. Kliment Ohridski"

with supervisor: Assoc. Prof. Ekaterina Tarpomanova, PhD

I. Presentation of the doctoral candidate based on the submitted documentation

Ruslana Margova has worked as an international editor in print and online media since 2004 until today. She is also a freelance translator. Language is the main tool for work and the object of her main activity. Doctoral candidate Margova is a consistent graduate of Sofia State University "St. Kliment Ohridski", where in 1997 she graduated in Bulgarian philology, French language and literature. In 2001-2002, she obtained an additional qualification in English language and literature, and in 2003-2004 – in computational linguistics. She works with Bulgarian, with English and French at level C1 and uses Russian, Spanish, German and Modern Greek.

According to the report of the thesis that has been checked through the anti-plagiarism system, as well as the accompanying documents (Protocol and Opinion of the Research Supervisor), the discovered similarities are regulated and do not bear signs of plagiarism.

II. Evaluation of the qualities of the dissertation text

The problem developed in the dissertation is undoubtedly relevant. Fake news, in all its variations and transformations, is a scourge on modern citizens. Few people manage to navigate the flow of information without getting confused about the truth of the information, the reliability of the sources, and the slant of meaning and analysis offered by the source. The importance of the problem is no less, since fake news can and is used to influence the attitudes and behavior of large groups of people, control their actions and guide their thoughts and intentions in the present and future. Misinformation, not only cannot remain solely in the field of linguistics, but must be considered in the social context for which it is actually created. In this sense, the task that Ruslana Margova has set herself is not easy and to a large

extent vast. She manages, however, to set limits to her research and fulfill them to the maximum extent.

The work he presents consists of 213 pages of text, divided into an introduction, nine parts and a conclusion. The nine parts are as follows:

- Concepts related to fake news
- The topic of fake news in history and journalism
- The border areas
- Philosophical positions
- An overview of researched linguistic markers of misinformation
- The renarrative as a sign of possible misinformation
- Uses of renarrative in the media
- Other markers of misinformation and trends in journalistic headlines
- Linguistic experiments with the use of renarrative
- Documentary records of misinformation cases

I list them like this because the division into nine distinct parts is difficult to follow and confuses the reader. I would suggest that the doctoral student, in future large-scale research, group the texts into fewer chapters that unite parts that are close in meaning.

The aim of the research is to discover the linguistic characteristics of disinformation in the news in Bulgarian in the post-truth era. The object of the study is the Bulgarian language, and the subject of the study are the media texts published in the online media, as well as in the so-called transmedia publications.

The working hypotheses being worked on are that it is possible to have formal linguistic features that suggest that a given text is not credible or more generally: that it is disinformation; and that there are certain linguistic constructs used in journalistic texts such as headlines that suggest the possibility of false information.

After a detailed acquaintance with the work, we can consider the goal as successfully fulfilled, and the working hypotheses as confirmed.

In "Fake News Concepts" (pp. 17-46), the PhD candidate offers a comprehensive conceptual apparatus at the time of writing, selected and arranged in a cluster approach to systematization based on meaning kernels. The first cluster unites concepts related to the description of disinformation itself. The second core is dedicated to concepts related to the ways of disinformation, as well as to the main actors in the field of disinformation who carry out the disinformation itself; as well as some of the effects of misinformation. The third cluster is related to efforts to counter disinformation and new

concepts in modern journalism.

"The Fake News Theme in History and Journalism" (pp. 47-62) offers a historical overview of cases of disinformation. Without being unnecessarily lavish, this piece offers a serious look at the history of fake news, as well as the role of consumers in its spread. I note as a serious omission the absence in the review of P.T. Barnum.

In "Border Areas" (pp. 63-75), the PhD student briefly examines the areas that touch, are influenced by, or use techniques of fake news. I would like to point out that regarding Fake News and Information, it is important to point out that there are good practices on the subject in Bulgaria, such as the Media Literacy course at the Department of Media and Communication at the New Bulgarian University, as well as the introduced civic education within the basic education of all NBU bachelor's programs, in which elements of media literacy are represented.

"Philosophical Positions" (pp. 77-96) is a part of the thesis that marks the fields of truth and falsity in the context of major philosophical theories.

"A Review of Researched Linguistic Markers of Disinformation" (pp. 97-112) examines the detection of linguistic features of disinformation by reviewing existing research and already defined linguistic markers related to disinformation.

In "Renarrative as a sign of possible misinformation" (pp. 113-142), doctoral student Margova gets into the essence of the research problem. Examines the renarrative in its meaning and use, dwells on the inferential, introduces the dubitative, admiring and indicative, as well as the linguistic homonymy of the renarrative.

"Uses of Narrative in the Media" (pp. 143-155) draws on the main characteristic of the media that relays foreign information and the use of narrative in that transmission. In summary, PhD candidate Margova concludes that it is about several manifestations of renarrative in journalistic texts:

1. The author is unclear
2. To pretend to someone else
3. We do not guarantee the content
4. As an alibi
5. Fabulousness
6. Renarrative in misleading headlines

And it goes to the essential point of the dissertation, namely – the use of narrative forms to detect false information.

I would name the section "Other markers of misinformation and trends in journalistic

headlines" (pp. 155 - 176) differently. The use of "others" creates a feeling of not so much importance, while the part examines and explains phenomena and uses important to the topic. The use of clickbait headlines, the use of present tense for something that has not happened and is not happening; the entry of hedging words into the Bulgarian language; disclaimers and satellite sites are a "poisonous" for quality professional journalism and contribute to the creation of an extremely hostile environment for both journalists and communications professionals trying to convey messages to their clients.

Additional strategies presented by Ruslana Margova work together with or parallel to the renarrative, thus contributing to misinforming the public. Adding them to the knowledge base on the subject could make disinformation easier to spot.

In "Language Experiments with the Use of Renarrative" (pp. 178-208) one can see the vast amount of research work that was done for the purposes of the dissertation. In Experiment 1, 622 headlines over a period of 7 years from Bulgarian news media with clear owners were selected and collected manually, analyzed by the PhD student and annotated by three native speakers to detect the renarrative or its homonymous forms in the headlines and trace its function. Experiment 2 examined specific texts grouped thematically. Nine case studies were examined in political news, as well as crime, international, political, health, sports and secular, science and terrorism-related news. In "Documentary Records of Disinformation Cases" (pp. 209 - 215), he presents five cases that provide a documentary account of the perception or creation of fake news and disinformation.

The conclusion of the work frames the research conducted and offers main conclusions. First of all, this is the fact proven by the doctoral student - certain linguistic characteristics of the Bulgarian language - such as the renarrative of the hyperinclination of the reproduced speech realis II - can be read as a sign of misinformation. There are also other language constructs (part of clickbait headlines, replacement leads, and hedge words) that suggest false information. A conceptual apparatus for the Bulgarian language has been compiled to describe disinformation and its manifestations in the media environment in Bulgaria. A historical review of a number of cases parallel to disinformation, manipulation, mystification, and propaganda has been made.

In addition to being extremely professional, I also find the following to be particularly beautiful, almost poetic, said: "Renarrative is in a particularly destructive place - it attributes a certain property to an object and simultaneously takes it away, contradicts the informativeness of the statement and at the same time informs. What is said is said, even if it is corrected later, even if it cancels itself, it leaves a mark, influences, models, predisposes thinking." (p. 51). I suggest that Margova consider it for the back cover of the book she will publish based on her dissertation.

Doctoral student Margova's dissertation is an extremely interesting study with an interdisciplinary approach. For this purpose, she has managed to select significant, up-to-date and adequate sources, through which to achieve depth and comprehensiveness of the study. Ruslana

Margova presents 244 bibliographies of sources, of which 107 are in Bulgarian and 137 in English, German and French. A review of the bibliography clearly shows the multidisciplinary nature of the work and the extremely complex intersection of different and largely disparate fields of science. The bibliographic awareness that is demonstrated across a wide range of topics that would not ordinarily be covered by one person at the same time is surprising.

The merits of the work in terms of proving with new means essential aspects of already existing theories, hypotheses, etc. should be pointed out. I will specifically pay attention to the clickbait strategies described in the English-language scientific literature, proven and supplemented by PhD student Margova in the part "Other markers of misinformation and trends in journalistic headlines". I would like to draw attention to the precision and correctness demonstrated in the collection, processing and analysis of empirical data. Here is the place to note among the merits of the work the fact that the doctoral student did not "stagger" to prove a hypothesis, but analyzed with a "cool mind" the available data from many different directions. The expectation that in such a work there might be a bias towards claims that the use of narrative could prove misinformation was positively unjustified. The use of renarrative is adequately placed in the context of the overall use of language as well as the social aspects of that use.

For this reason, I can estimate a very high degree of credibility of the material on which the contributions are based.

In the course of the work, facts were obtained confirming already known theories about disinformation (such as hedging, clickbait, etc.), and new facts related to the use of renarrative in the journalistic language for the purposes of intentional or unintentional disinformation were also obtained and successfully proven.

The dissertation text is highly compliant with the compositional requirements.

The linguistic and stylistic qualities of the exposition and the degree of deviation from the literary norms of grammar, spelling and punctuation suit a philologist and linguist and are brilliant.

I would like to draw attention to the correspondence of the text of the abstract with the text of the dissertation and remind that according to the normative requirements and academic tradition, the abstract is the only text of the dissertation that can be cited, therefore it would be good for the dissertation to be suitably edited and published for a wide range of readers.

III. Dissertation Research Contributions

The contributions of the work are indicated on p. 220 of the dissertation, divided appropriately into linguistic and interdisciplinary. It seems to me that it would be appropriate to add two to the interdisciplinary - first of all, in Part II - Concepts related to fake news, a kind of dictionary of fake news is created, explained in a linguistic way.

Such dictionaries can be found in various places, but they are often incomplete, not particularly accurate, and it is the game with language that eludes them, which PhD student Margova was able to capture and, above all, explain. As the doctoral student herself notes in the difficulties she experienced in structuring her work, "The third difficulty is the conceptual apparatus. Although largely resolved, there is still some vagueness about the concepts associated with disinformation. The study proposes unification of the vocabulary used in the Bulgarian language" (p. 15). Overcoming this difficulty, she did not realize the contribution made.

The second contributing point I would add is the possibility that the dissertation work, with minor editing, could be published and used as a teaching tool to combat fake news for schoolchildren, students, but also for any citizen who would show opacity on the subject.

I find the contributions that PhD student Margova herself has listed to be relevant.

The conclusions of the dissertation work can be used by teams of specialists who fight fake news and develop software to filter or illuminate it, as well as by teams of people who work on creating and implementing training programs to recognize fake news.

I consider the list of a total of six (of which three in print) publications by Ruslana Margova to be logical and sufficient. The co-authorship demonstrates the applicant's ability to work in a scientific team and participate in research.

Two citations were found, I hope that more authors will find and evaluate the PhD student's papers in the future.

IV. Notes and recommendations

I would like to make a note regarding the naming of the parts in the dissertation. Easier to perceive would be to name chapters and present them that way.

I recommend shortening the underlined web addresses to make it easier to understand the information on the page (for example on page 67)

I recommend Ruslana Margova in her research and practice to try to develop a point further. 8.12. "Algorithm" by contacting colleagues from disparate fields of work in an attempt to compile an algorithm for detecting the renarrative/inferential/statal perfect/dubitative/admirative. An algorithm to automatically detect these evidences would indeed help to automatically detect possible misinformation with the methods of computational linguistics and automatic language processing.

I would like to ask PhD student Margova if she has thought about this issue and is she inclined to continue her work in this or a similar direction?

V. Publications and participation in scientific forums

In this part of the review, I will make a critical note regarding the materials provided for the PhD student, his professional path and participation in conferences. The presented CV is laconic and too short. No data on participation in scientific forums is presented. Ruslana Margova is an established and well-known specialist in the field of media, which is why the presented CV, although puzzling, is still sufficient to fulfill the formal requirements of the procedure. I noted the publications and citations above in the text.

This is not the case with regard to participation in scientific forums. After a gentle search on the Internet, I found the participation of Rulana Margova from November 2022 in the jubilee international scientific conference on the topic "Communication and the media of the XXI century: educational and professional challenges" of the Faculty of Journalism and Mass Communication of Sofia University "St. Kliment Ohridski". Also at the INTERNATIONAL ANNIVERSARY CONFERENCE OF THE INSTITUTE FOR THE BULGARIAN LANGUAGE at the BAS "PROF. LYUBOMIR ANDREYCHIN" 2022. Also in the INTERNATIONAL SCIENTIFIC CONFERENCE "FROM WORD TO ACTION: STORIES AND REPRESENTATIONS" Faculty of Slavic Philology of the Sofia University "St. Kliment Ohridski". I stopped the search, as it became clear that PhD student Margova meets the requirements for this indicator as well.

The requirements of the Regulations for the terms and conditions for acquiring scientific degrees and holding academic positions at SU "St. Kliment Ohridski" for approving and disclosing the results of the research according to Art. 5, item 5, I assess as covered, as well as the minimum national requirements under the Law.

VI. Conclusion

In conclusion, I would like to express my joy to read such a meaningful study and give my strong positive opinion to Ruslana Margova to be awarded the educational and scientific degree "Doctor".

June 23, 2023

Reviewer:

Assoc. Prof. Evelina Christova, PhD