

## REVIEW

Reviewer: Prof. Diana Yankova, PhD

Department of Foreign Languages and Cultures, New Bulgarian University, Professional field

2.1. Philology

of the dissertation

BULGARIAN LANGUAGE SOUTH OF THE EQUATOR

(A SOCIOLINGUISTIC STUDY OF THE LANGUAGE OF THE BULGARIAN

IMMIGRANT COMMUNITY IN SYDNEY, AUSTRALIA),

submitted for the award of the degree of Doctor of Science in Higher Education 2.

Humanities, professional field 2.1. Philology

### 1. Details about the procedure

By Order RD-38-304/22.06.2023 of the Rector of Sofia University "St. Kliment Ohridski" I have been appointed a member of the academic panel for the defense of the dissertation of Assoc. Prof. Dr. Katya Issa. I confirm that I have been provided with the documents and materials necessary for such a procedure pursuant to the Act on the Development of Academic Staff in the Republic of Bulgaria and the Rules of procedure at Sofia University "St. Kliment Ohridski" for applying this Act.

It is evident that Assoc. Prof. Dr. Issa has fulfilled the minimum national requirements under Article 2b, para. 2 and 3 of the Act on the Development of Academic Staff in the Republic of Bulgaria. The check performed by the anti-plagiarism system shows that the work is original.

## 2. Supporting texts and documentation

According to the requirements, the candidate has submitted a summary in Bulgarian, which consists of 60 pages and corresponds to the text of the dissertation. The abstract does not include the contributions according to the author.

The candidate has also submitted 30 scientific publications on the topic of the study, two of which are refereed and indexed in world databases. Overall, the applicant's articles meet and significantly exceed the quantitative and qualitative requirements of Article 2b of the Act on the Development of Academic Staff in the Republic of Bulgaria and Article 1a, par. 1 of the Rules of procedure for applying this Act.

## 3. Characteristics and organization of the dissertation

The dissertation submitted for evaluation consists of 616 pages, which include an introduction, five main chapters, bibliography with 186 titles, appendices, publications on the topic and contributions of the dissertation.

Regarding the main substantive features of the text, I will take the liberty to offer a summary of them and state that I find Dr. Issa's dissertation thorough and interesting work. The topicality of the subject should first be noted. The active and dynamic migration globally, and from Bulgaria in particular, in recent decades has led to the emergence of challenges related to these new conditions. And the question naturally arises to what extent the first generation of emigrants preserve their native Bulgarian language, how it changes under the influence of the new linguistic environment and whether they pass it on to their children born in the country of emigration.

The purpose of the study is clearly stated, and the research questions are well formulated. They are related to the main aspects of the object of study, from where the main hypothesis of the work is derived. Through a study of the Bulgarian linguistic situation in Sydney, Australia, it aims to develop a methodology for investigating changes in the language of Bulgarian emigrants, taking into account the particular linguistic situation in which these emigrants use their native language. This will highlight the changes in the Bulgarian language used due to interference from English, test the hypothesis of whether the native language is used primarily in the home environment, and whether it is lost in second generation Bulgarian emigrants. Through the study of the language used by the Bulgarian diaspora in Sydney, the algorithm of Bulgarian language deformation will be established, and by algorithm Dr. Issa means "a process that in this case traces the movement of speech changes, the deformations of language fragments when speaking Bulgarian, the interferences from English into the speech of the native Bulgarian language (pp. 50-51).

The hypotheses of the study are that lexis is the domain that will be most susceptible to interference, then the phonetics of the code-switched words, while grammatical structures are the most resistant to interference.

The Bulgarian linguistic situation in Sydney is explored on the basis of a field study that includes surveys and interviews recorded with 80 Bulgarian immigrants, as well as a follow-up of government policy towards Bulgarian immigrants and specifically the Ministry of Education's policy towards Bulgarian schools abroad, and the suitability of approved curricula and textbooks.

The author provides scientifically substantiated reasons why she chose to research the language of the Bulgarians in Sydney (pp. 29-35). As a linguist who has researched the language of Bulgarians in Canada, I fully share Dr. Issa's disappointment that fewer Bulgarians than expected agreed to participate in the study. The choice is indeed limited and the researcher must

settle with those immigrants who agree to take part, regardless of important variables such as age, gender, time in the country, education, etc. Therefore, Dr. Issa divides the respondents into three age groups due to the fact that the language of different generations will be characterized by different deviations. Thus, she defines three groups: 5-25, 26-65, and over 66 (I give modified figures because there is no way that one group could be 5-25 and the other 25-65, etc.).

As a result of the study, it is found that the Bulgarian language used by the respondents demonstrates an intermediate language system that is both national and distinctive for the environment in Sydney, and there is a typical language norm for this city. The reasons for code-switching and interference are also examined, mainly in the second group of respondents, due to the insufficient level of proficiency in Bulgarian of the first group and in English of the third group. Dr. Issa introduces the concepts of *отклоняване*, *разбългаряване* and *отродяване* (pp. 506-507) to distinguish interference by type depending on the group into which the individuals under study fall.

Having taught at the Bulgarian Sunday School in Sydney for two months, Dr Issa argues (an opinion I completely share) that the content of the current textbooks does not match the conceptual level of students in Australia, who hardly feel close to names such as Vida, Stoyo, Gruyo and objects and concepts such as *стобор*, *вир*, etc. Grammatical examples from the textbooks are also given that are unquestionably irrelevant to the Australian cultural setting.

In conclusion, according to the author, the factors that would slow down the process of forgetting the Bulgarian language in the case of the English-speaking environment in Sydney are the family, the Bulgarian school and the Bulgarian government policy.

#### 4. Contributions of the dissertation

Not only theoretical but also applied contributions emerge in this dissertation, and a tremendous amount of work has been done in collecting, transcribing and interpreting the interviews. The academic significance of the work is determined by the fact that for the first time a systematic and in-depth field study of Bulgarian immigrants in the city of Sydney, Australia has been carried out from a sociolinguistic point of view, mainly from a synchronic perspective. Ways of slowing down the loss of the Bulgarian language in the immigrant community are analysed.

The methodology is tailored to the complexities of the subject of study. The results of the research are summarized theoretically and build on existing theory. A contributing point is the rethinking of some sociolinguistic terms and concepts, which are filled with new content.

The patterns of deviant speech of Bulgarian immigrants in Sydney and the algorithm of the process are established. The acute need for a new methodology in teaching Bulgarian abroad as a second mother tongue, which differs substantially from teaching Bulgarian as a foreign language in Bulgaria, is highlighted.

The work represents a necessary challenge to the Ministry of Education, the state educational policy, the Agency for Bulgarians Abroad for clear and consistent positions and actions for the preservation of the Bulgarian language in the Bulgarian diaspora.

The dissertation provides perspectives for further research.

The proposed dissertation successfully fulfils the set objectives and answers the research questions posed at the beginning.

## 5. Recommendations and critical remarks

The work would benefit from an update of the results and a comparison with the situation in more recent times. The study was conducted almost a decade ago, which is likely to lead to a difference in results at least in the number of students in school due to the

introduction of blended face-to-face and online learning. On the other hand, when referring to the lists of schools overseas (and those under the Native Language and Culture Overseas Programme for the period 2013 - 2023, the only two schools in Australia are those in Sydney and in Adelaide. Dr Issa states on page 107 that as of 2016 there were 5. Where does this discrepancy come from?

On p. 20 it is claimed that the Bulgarian "morphology does not have the morphological category of case" in personal pronouns, and therefore according to the author the teacher in Vienna was referring to cases in German, but Bulgarian linguists speak precisely of (remnants of) cases for personal pronouns in Bulgarian (e.g. Sotirov 2018, Hadzhieva 2022), and it is clear that the example given is about Bulgarian, not German.

In order for the results of the study to have weight, it would not have been a bad idea to support them with quantitative indicators that confirm or deny the author's hypotheses. Sentences like "Lexical interference (...) in percentage terms would probably occupy at least a quarter of all utterances" (p. 511) do not sound serious and academic.

On p. 537 the following example is given " Ние имаме две кокошка", the deviation being explained by the fact that the English singular form coincides with the plural form and hence the interference in Bulgarian. Probably Dr. Issa is confusing with the meaning of chicken as the meat, which has no plural form. While chicken in the sense of hen has a plural form which is formed quite according to the rules - chickens and therefore cannot be explained with the above argument.

I would also like to take the liberty of mentioning the fact that although King Charles III is Head of State of Australia as well as Canada and New Zealand, all three countries are sovereign and are NOT part of the United Kingdom as Dr. Issa claims (page 72 of the thesis and page 9 of the summary).

When publishing the study I would recommend removing repetitions in the text, e.g. in several places there is detailed information about the Bulgarian school in Sydney, the number and type of respondents, etc. It is also the practice to list abbreviations before the main text to make it easier for the reader to navigate, and this is lacking.

An example is given on page 222, which runs to a total of 21 pages and aims to illuminate the role of the Bulgarian grandmother in preserving the language in the grandchildren. I do not see why it is necessary to provide such a long example to illustrate something that is known a priori and is already stated in several other places in the text. Especially since before that, on page 210, there is another example that runs to 7 pages. In my opinion, this leads to a diversion from the author's main arguments and a dilution of focus.

I would recommend that the bibliography also include English and American authors who are authorities in sociolinguistics, and that the method of making "secret" recordings be reconsidered and respondents be listed by fictitious names.

## 6. Conclusion

My critical remarks and recommendations in no way detract from the undoubtedly enormous work of the candidate in the treatment of the research material and the results achieved. Through the submitted text, K. Issa shows herself to be a linguist who firmly follows the evidence and critically applies academic sources.

I can categorically state that the submitted dissertation 'Bulgarian south of the equator (a sociolinguistic study of the language of the Bulgarian immigrant community in the city of Sydney, Australia),' contains theoretical generalizations and solutions to major academic or applied problems that are consistent with current advances and represent a significant and original contribution to science.

I confidently give my positive assessment of the dissertation and propose that the esteemed jury award the degree of Doctor of Philological Sciences to Assoc. Prof. Dr. Katya Grozeva Issa.

**References:**

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Хаджиева, К. 2022. Морфосинтактичният подход в преподаването по български език като чужд: валентност и рекция на българския глагол. Езиков свят - *Orbis Linguarum*, 20/1: 86-91.

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