

## **Review**

by **Associate Professor Irina Nikolova Ivanova, PhD,**

Department of English Philology, Faculty of Humanities,

Konstantin Preslavsky University of Shumen,

Professional area 1.3. Pedagogy of teaching... (Methodology of English language teaching),

for the procedure of awarding a doctoral degree to **Vanya Lubomirova Katsarska,**

PhD student at the Department of Methodology of Teaching Modern Languages at

New Bulgarian University, Sofia

Academic supervisor: **Associate Professor Svetlana Georgieva Dimitrova-Guzeleva, PhD**

### **General information about the dissertation**

The doctoral dissertation titled "Designing a Communicative Competence-focused Syllabus for an Aeronautical English Module for Military Pilots and Air Traffic Controllers" consists of a total number of 238 pages, of which 176 pages of text divided into 4 chapters, 40 pages of appendices and 160 references, most of which are in the narrow scope of the dissertation. The four chapters involve the introduction, the theoretical foundations of the study, the empirical research and its results, and the conclusion. The research focuses mainly on the linguistic aspects of aviation English and the practice of its teaching with the aim of improving trainees' communicative competence. The dissertation presents a good example of quality academic research, carried out in response to an identified need to develop an up-to-date curriculum for training ab-initio military pilots and air traffic controllers. The aviation English program was created for training cadets at Georgi Benkovski Air Force Academy in Bulgaria, with the aim of achieving compliance with modern requirements and regulations in international aviation, and in response to current changes in the language of aviation.

### **Significance of the research problem**

The topic of the dissertation, related to the optimization of the English language training of military pilots and air traffic controllers with the aim of improving their communicative competence, is extremely relevant in view of the global trends in communication and the recent advancements in the development of technology in all areas of life. In the field of aviation, accurate and precise use of language and the ability of effortless fluent communication are of paramount importance, as is the need to update and synchronize training programs for the personnel involved in joint activities and partner programs. As the doctoral candidate points out, the problem of the formation and development of pilots and traffic controllers' professional and communicative competences has not been sufficiently studied in Bulgaria, and in this sense, the dissertation submitted for review is a valuable contribution in a relatively underdeveloped area of teaching foreign languages for specific purposes.

The first chapter of the dissertation is an introduction to the research problem, justification of the relevance of the research, its *целя* and tasks, research questions and hypotheses.

The research offers a comprehensive review of existing research in the area, relevant to the study of the already established professional language in the researched area. The integrated approach to the study of aviation terminology in different European countries enables comparison, aims at unification of the professional language, and is a prerequisite for reliability in the assessment and validation of trainees' knowledge and skills.

The second chapter, which is the literature review related to the study, combines three main focuses – the professional language of aviation and aeronautics, the nature of communicative competence, and curriculum design. The dissertation traces the origins of aviation terminology and its close dependence on the development of the aviation industry, as well as the formation of aviation English as a branch of English for special purposes. The role of learner needs analysis in curriculum development is emphasized, as is the interdependence between teaching general language, special language and standard aviation terminology. The researcher takes into account the fact that the high standardization of aviation English equates native and non-native English speakers in terms of their need for specialized training. Emphasis is placed on the role of corpus studies and authentic records for updating this type of professional communication and its cultural-specific manifestations. A certain merit of the dissertation is the abundance of examples of contextualized use of aviation language, which strengthens the objectivity of the author's

statements. The author discusses the role of operational plain English, ready-made chunks of language (formulaic or pre-fabricated language), collocations and set phrases, as well as switching to native language for communication between pilots and dispatchers sharing the same first language as an option in critical or problematic situations.

Particular attention is paid to the notion of competence, more precisely to communicative competence and the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages and the European Qualification Framework as tools for assessment of competence. The interactive competence of the participants in the context of aviation is examined through the prism of intercultural competence, national and professional culture. The author rightly considers that problems in communication in English are due not only to linguistic factors, but also to discursive, strategic or intercultural factors. As a starting point, the multidimensional model of Celse-Murcia was chosen, which represents communicative competence as an interaction between linguistic, sociocultural, formulaic, interactive, discursive and strategic competence. Intercultural communication is also examined in detail through the prism of Hofstede's model and Minkov's research. Against this background, the focus of attention aptly narrows in the field of aviation, e.g. through a commentary on Monteiro's model of aeronautical communicative

In terms of curriculum design, it should be mentioned that the author refers to most recent research in the field of language for specific purposes, which presents the language of aviation as a specific field in its own right. Different types of curricula following Brown's classification are described and compared, and as a result of this comprehensive and in-depth analysis, the author arrives at idea of a curriculum which is aimed at developing learners' communicative competence which can help them deal with both routine and crisis situations in their daily work. The relationship between language, content and competences is realized through topics related to aviation and the relevant topic vocabulary, with emphasis on selected key language structures. The practical application of the principles of curriculum design is presented through a critical review and comparative analysis of programs for pilot and staff training used in 3 different countries, and the author convincingly argues for their inapplicability to the Bulgarian context.

### **Justification of dissertation aims and tasks**

The main aim of the dissertation is related to creating a draft of an aviation and aeronautical English language curriculum for training pilots and air traffic controllers by

examining their communicative competences necessary for safe and effective communication in this type of specific English language. This objective is well justified based on an analysis of existing standards, professional tasks and training needs. The target competencies of the learners are established through a critical review of research literature and by collecting and analyzing data derived from experts working in the given professional fields but in different linguistic and cultural environments. The main respondents to the survey were teachers of English for specific purposes, pilots, air traffic controllers, flight instructors and managers of training activities.

The research hypotheses are logically deduced and formulated, and are related to: 1. the existence of a relationship between aviation and aeronautical linguistic competence and the interactive, intercultural and professional competence of learners, and 2. the operationalisation of professional communicative knowledge, skills and competences in a curriculum that support the standardization and interoperability of the Bulgarian Air Force and its international partners.

Research tasks are precisely formulated and chronologically presented, which creates a good impression, from the analysis of sources and documents to the piloting of the developed curriculum. The research questions correspond to the goals and objectives of the dissertation research.

### **Correspondence between the chosen research methodology and the aims and tasks of the dissertation**

The chosen research methodology combines various modern research methods, which correspond to the purpose and logic of the research and include analysis of existing theories and ideas in the researched area, needs analysis of the interested parties, as well as piloting of the developed curriculum. Qualitative and quantitative approaches are combined, such as focus group interviews, observations and surveys. The scope of the research is impressive – 53 teachers from 24 countries, as well as a representative number of respondents from Bulgaria. The quantitative research identified significant correlations between the linguistic, professional and intercultural competence of the respondents.

The reliability of the data was confirmed by piloting the curriculum designed by the doctoral student for one academic year. Research procedure is described in great detail and contextualized within the framework of current research in the field, which demonstrates the candidate's good knowledge of the subject area and her excellent analytical abilities. The typology of training activities and the order in which they should be done are described in great

detail. In survey data some of the interesting answers are left in the original language – in Bulgarian, which adds authenticity and is very important for the potential Bulgarian users of the research. The proposed training model has been validated and convincingly defended by the doctoral student on the basis of empirical material, which shows the entirely positive reaction and satisfaction of the trainees. The hypotheses put forward at the beginning of the study were confirmed upon its completion, and the research questions received clear and convincing answers.

### **Theoretical and applied contributions of the dissertation to research in the area**

One of the main contributions of the dissertation is the large-scale survey and systematization of research in the field of aviation English for the training of military pilots and air traffic controllers in the context of teaching English for special purposes. Applied science contributions are related to the interrelation between the four key competencies – linguistic, interactive, professional and intercultural, in the training of military pilots and air traffic controllers, and the presentation of the process of curriculum design (not only its final product – the program). Suggested topics that meet the needs of novice military pilots and air traffic controllers in terms of their professional expertise are also contributory, as is the inclusion of reading skills in the curriculum, in addition to listening and speaking skills. The proposed interactive types of tasks for teaching aeronautical language are based on the daily authentic professional tasks conducted by pilots and traffic controllers.

Vanya Katsarska's publications related to her dissertation have been cited by both international and Bulgarian scholars. She has listed 4 citations in publications abroad and 1 by Bulgarian researchers.

I believe that the author's contributions are original and are the result of her critical reflection on existing research, collection and processing of empirical material, and design of a curriculum model.

The summary correctly reflects and synthesizes the content of the dissertation, and formulates the main contributions of the candidate's research.

### **Recommendations and notes**

Considering the merits of the dissertation work, I would like to make the following recommendations:

1. The contents page of the dissertation does not have an indication of pages, which makes it difficult to navigate in this sufficiently voluminous work. My recommendation is to add page numbers in the published version of the dissertation.

2. In my opinion, the introduction and the conclusion of the thesis should not be counted as chapters, since they have their own specific functions, and are not comparable with the other two chapters in terms of their amount – the introduction contains 12 pages, the second chapter – 84, the third chapter – 69, and the conclusion – 8. When publishing the research, the literature review could be divided into 3 separate chapters, corresponding to the three main focal points of the research – the nature of aviation English, learners' communicative competences, and the syllabus design for this type of training. Chapter three could also be divided into procedure and analysis of the research results on the one hand, and the curriculum design and piloting on the other.

3. I would recommend that upon the publication of this interesting and valuable research, the examples of professional communication in the informants' original language – Bulgarian, be translated into English, as this would make the research accessible to a wider audience, which it undoubtedly deserves.

I would like to point out that these notes and recommendations in no way diminish the merits of the dissertation in the form in which it is presented.

### **Evaluation of the candidate's publications related to the dissertation**

The candidate has submitted five publications directly related to the topic of the dissertation, written in the period from 2018 to 2021. Two of the papers are book chapters related to teaching English for specific purposes and to language policy and security in the 21st century. The inclusion of Vanya Katsarska as the sole representative of Bulgaria among an international team of authors of the books in itself speaks of the prestige and respect that the author enjoys as a specialist in the field of aviation English. Two of the publications are in proceedings of university conferences in Bulgaria, and the last article is in the prestigious "Journal of Teaching English for Specific and Academic Purposes", referenced in Scopus and Web of Science.

### **Conclusion**

In view of the listed merits of the dissertation, its contributions to research, and taking into consideration my recommendations, I believe that the dissertation submitted for review has the necessary qualities for awarding a doctorate degree to Vanya Lubomirova Katsarska. I give my positive review and a recommendation for awarding a doctoral degree to the candidate in the field of higher education 1. Pedagogical sciences, professional area 1.3. Pedagogy of teaching..., subject field Methodology of English language teaching.

Date: 03.04.2023 r.

Reviewer:



/Assoc. prof. Irina Ivanova, PhD/