ASSESSMENT OF A THESIS FOR THE AWARD OF THE ACADEMIC DEGREE "DOCTOR"

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Concerning the applicant for the degree of Doctor in the professional field 1.3. Pedagogy of teaching … Vanya Lyubomirova Katsarska.

1. **Significance of the research problem in scientific and applied terms.**

The dissertation traces the development of a syllabus for the teaching of English to military pilots and traffic controllers that focuses on enhancing the communicative competence of beginners. The significance of the problem is great, as it concerns a new area of application of foreign language training - for pilots and air-traffic controllers participating in NATO missions in a multicultural environment. In practise, effective communication is crucial for performing their professional duties, where speaking English is integral part of the operations.

On the other hand, the specific aviation language has acquired a special status within English - with a particular vocabulary and grammatical structures which, judging by the examples given by the PhD candidate, are too often difficult to understand outside the professional community. But avoiding accidents and upholding flight safety depend on adequate language competence. Bulgaria's accession to the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation has led to the emergence of new concepts and activities, new forms of communication and subordination, which need to be draped in the relevant linguistic forms. Thus, language learning takes the form of a training forum for making sense of new realities and applying them in communicative practices.

Secondly, language learning should reflect the needs of the learners and stand as close as possible to the communicative environment in which it will be used. Nothing is more demotivating than the impersonal, and nebulously generalised framework within which language learning moves through a series of levels. It is good for the trainers to get to know the needs of the learners, to see their daily life in their respective professional environment, the communicative situations in which they use the language. Therefore, a pro-active attitude towards syllabus design is an ambitious but highly beneficial step towards a more effective training process.

Thirdly, placing competences in the centre of teaching and the link between professional and linguistic competences present a modern approach to teaching that helps to organically integrate language skills into professional functionality. The set of competencies defined for the purpose of assessment: knowledge, skills and attitudes is here redefined with respect of the professional development of the learners. I find this a significant achievement within language learning, which traditionally features as a decorative complement but not as part of the major set of professional competencies.

2. **Justification of the aims and objectives of the dissertation.**

The doctoral student undertook three activities leading to the design of an English language syllabus: she led a focus group discussion on learner needs, observed pilots and air traffic controllers in their work environment, and surveyed military professionals, language instructors, and learners on the adequacy of the proposed syllabus activities. The data from the three instruments were systematised, analysed, and summarised. As a result, we see program design tenets but not the actual syllabus. In fact, the syllabus program is property of the military academy, while the thesis provides the theoretical framework for the process, which should have been specified in the title..

The thesis begins with an extensive literature review that includes a description of the language of aviation as a particular object of observation. Some of the competencies related to language learning are also reviewed. These include intercultural and communicative competence. Other competences are also suggested by the cited Common European Framework for Languages, but these are left out of the framework in order to relate the model to the professional competences of pilots and air traffic controllers.

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The next stage examines the research tools of the study. Wittgenstein's theory of language games is identified as the philosophical basis, where making sense of reality takes place via language terms. A summary of existing curriculum design methodology is also made.

The empirical data, their conceptualization and the conclusion are presented in the last chapter. The stated aim is achieved through the tools used. More problematic is the presentation of the research in the text. The structure of the aims and objectives in the beginning of the dissertation is not mirrored in the conclusions. The hypothesis formulated at the beginning is forgotten at the end. Literature references appear even in the conclusion itself through the Swiss cheese model, which skips to the next level through the openings of the previous one. The relationship between the literature presented in the first chapter, the design of the research instrument and the results obtained remains ambiguous. However, the advance through the literature, the focus group activities conducted, the observation and the questionnaires form part of a genuine research process and reveals a development of the PhD candidate's thinking.

3.   Conformity between the chosen methodology and research methodology and the set aim and objectives of the dissertation.

The volume of literature on curriculum design is impressive. The review leads to the methodology of the study. Thus, the doctoral student motivates a curriculum based on communicative skills. However, it seems to me that this choice needs no theoretical motivation as it concerns only the candidate. Any other approach would have been equally suitable, had she motivated it rigorously. The reader of the thesis is prepared to approve such a choice even without reviewing the alternatives.

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The description of aviation language does not follow the usual pattern. A philologist would have expected to see a description of the lexical stock, the morphological structure, syntactic organisation and textual features. Claims that 'there is no intonation' followed by descriptions of pauses, tone units and phrasal stress go against the basic tenets of phonetics, since the expression of emotion is not the only use of intonation, as the candidate claims. Given that the candidate is defending a PhD in pedagogy, not in philology, the lapse can be overlooked. However, had a coherent language description been presented, the organisation of teaching units would have been more convincing and easier to follow.

The presentation of the assessment construct evolves from the Chomsky's concept of "competence", in contrast to "performance". Test theory emphasizes the distinctness between Chomsky's concept and the complex of knowledge, skills, and attitudes known as "competence" in assessment. The linking of the two concepts is motivated by the candidate's use of Dell Hymes' notion of communicative competence, which arose in the debate between the two as to whether language is a mental reality generated in the mind of the individual (i-language) or a social phenomenon shared across language groups (e-language). The exposition itself leads to a rejection of Chomsky's 'internal' model of language – a philosophical discussion which strays from the matter in hand in this case. I would, therefore, suggest the exclusion of Chomsky"s theory from the outset because of its strictly cognitive basis.

Plurilinguial competence as defined in the Common European Framework of Languages is presented in the description of communicative competence. The implication that language teaching "often becomes the teaching of culture" actually excludes the understanding of culture as a layer in language, that each language is embedded in a neural network of languages in the learner's mind, rather than as a separate and independent system - which is the essence of plurilingualism.

The collated construct of Byram's model of intercultural competence and Hofstede's institutional culture lacks

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theoretical consistence. While for Byram intercultural competence it a matter of reflexivity, negotiation of norms of communication and understanding, open-mindedness and rejection of stereotypes, Hofstede trains intercultural skills based of a set of, effectively, stereotypes he has developed by quantifying data from structured interviews. The two researchers define culture in different and mutually exclusive ways, so including them in one model is quite eclectic, although it creates a sense of comprehensiveness.

4. **Theoretical and applied contributions of the dissertation (description and evaluation), including the presence of original contributions to the discipline.**

The candidate declares a theoretical contribution to the description of language for special purposes, and in practical terms - the network of four types of competences collated between language and professional skills, as well as the construction of a model for curriculum design. In terms of methodological contributions, she reports the creation of a syllabus that is interesting, varied and closely related to the actual language environment.

I accept the validity of these claims, notwithstanding the inaccuracies pointed out above, as they concern the presentation of the thesis and not the substance of the empirical study and the final result.

5. **Assessment of the publications on the dissertation: number, nature of the publications in which they have been published.**

The applicant has submitted six publications on the topic. The first one concerns formulaic language , published in a journal on teaching language for special purposes. There is a publication on curriculum design, the nature of aviation English, cultural sensitivity, as well as a contribution to the proceedings of the Faculty of Security, Logistics and Management of the Military Institute of Technology in Warsaw, where she specialized. This covers all aspects included in the thesis. Effectively, her findings have been shared even before the publication of the present dissertation.

6. **Quoted works, mentions and reviews of the publications**

Seven citations are presented: in a Brazilian journal and in a dissertation for a Brazilian institution, as well as a publication in a Polish journal. However, the referencing does not follow the standards and assessing the quotes is difficult.

7. Comments and recommendations:

The thesis presents a wide range of scrutinised publications on curriculum design, language-related competencies, the description of aeronautical English, and language teaching for special purposes.

Surveys, observations, and focus group discussions have been organised, conducted, and scrupulously reported. All this has provided the necessary research experience required for the award of the degree of DOCTOR of Education and Research.

8. Conclusion with a clearly formulated positive or negative evaluation of the dissertation.

In conclusion, my assessment of the materials presented for the award of the Degree is positive. I believe that the candidate deserves a doctoral degree so that she can continue her development as a reflective professional in the field of pedagogy

Date April, 10th 2023   Signed…………