

**STATEMENT OF OPINION  
FOR OBTAINING THE EDUCATIONAL AND SCIENTIFIC DEGREE “DOCTOR  
OF PHILOSOPHY”  
NBU**

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By Assoc. Prof. Dr. Zarina Yuleva Markova, PhD, Southwest University "Neofit Rilski", professional field 1.3. Pedagogy of Education (Methodology of Foreign Language Teaching (English language)) regarding the selection procedure for the educational and scientific degree of Doctor of Philosophy in the professional field of 1.3. Pedagogy of Education, candidate Blagovesta Petkova Troeva-Chalakova

Dissertation topic: Difficulties in reading and writing of adult learners of English with developmental dyslexia

Blagovesta Troeva-Chalakova's dissertation is the result of her long-term interest in a field which, despite many years of research, still needs studies in areas such as the manifestations of dyslexia in adults and its specifics in the acquisition and use of English as a foreign language. Therefore, the problematics chosen by Blagovesta Troeva-Chalakova and her effort to provide and analyze a large body of empirical data to outline guidelines for overcoming the difficulties adults with dyslexia experience when reading and writing in English are relevant from both theoretical and practical perspectives.

The aim of the dissertation is to identify the specific problems in reading and writing in English that adults with dyslexia encounter while studying or using English. To achieve it, the author seeks answers to four research questions, three of which are directly related to the main aim of the dissertation, and the fourth to the practical application of the conclusions of the data analysis. In connection with the first three questions, 17 hypotheses are formulated as to the author's expectations regarding various manifestations of dyslexia in writing and reading. There is a logical correspondence between the hypotheses and the data collection methods of the study.

The thesis is characterized by a logically consistent structure. The first chapter includes a comprehensive review of theoretical models illustrating psycholinguistic, sociocultural, and educational aspects of the reading and writing processes. Emphasis is placed on mastering English spelling as a specific case and on the influence of dyslexia on the

reading and writing processes. Thus, a bridge to the second chapter is created, where the focus is on the essence and manifestations of dyslexia, as well as the specifics of dyslexia in learning English as a foreign language. The need of researching the problems of adult dyslexics of Bulgarian origin who learn English is emphasized.

The theoretical overview in these two chapters demonstrates the author's thorough understanding of the topic, substantiates the directions of her research and serves as a basis for the next chapter – it presents the research methodology, which is well-argued, described in detail, and fully aligned with the aim of the study. The data collection instruments are comprehensive, reflecting both quantitative and qualitative approach and enabling the more accurate detection and elaborate analysis of the various manifestations of dyslexia in reading and writing in English as a foreign language. The use of a semi-structured interview as a data collection tool allows the inclusion of respondents' viewpoints, which is one of the thesis contributions. A considerable effort to ensure the reliability, objectivity and validity of the study can be seen: the research procedures are thoroughly described, the data are triangulated. The ethical standards of research work have been adhered to.

I agree with the position expressed by Blagovesta Troeva-Chalakova regarding the theoretical and practical contributions of her dissertation. Among them, I would highlight the following:

1. The study investigates an underexplored field. It is innovative in several ways: it focuses on the difficulties in reading and writing in English as *a foreign* language; the respondents are dyslexic *adults* who have already passed the initial stages of literacy acquisition and possess self-analysis skills; their first language is *Bulgarian*, which makes the research results particularly valuable for the professional community in Bulgaria. The thesis contributions include the expansion of Vivian Cook's classification of the types of spelling errors, the enhancement of the quantitative data analysis with the personal perspective of dyslexic adults on their difficulties, recommendations for the teaching of English to adults with dyslexia.

2. Valuable data collection tools have been developed: (1) An eight-item test of reading and writing skills that is multifaceted, consistent with current publications on reading and writing difficulties, and able to be adapted for people with dyslexia; (2) A survey to determine the personal perception of the degree of difficulty in speaking, reading aloud, understanding a written text, writing an English text, and applying spelling rules; (3) A protocol for a semi-structured interview aiming to capture the various manifestations of dyslexia in learning English as a foreign language. These data collection instruments can be

used in future research as well as in practice to create individual or group profiles of dyslexic individuals learning a foreign language.

Blagovesta Troeva-Chalakovska has published seven articles on the topic of her dissertation in specialized scientific outlets in Bulgaria - three in scientific journals, three in university annuals and one in conference proceedings. The articles have 22 citations in publications abroad - 14 in scientific articles and 8 in PhD theses.

ИЗ МЪ ОПИНИОН, if published, this dissertation would benefit the professional community in Bulgaria. To improve its quality, I have the following recommendations and notes:

1. Typically, interviews are carried out after the initial analysis of the data collected through the other instruments, with the aim of seeking information to clarify existing contradictions or unclear aspects. In this study, additional questions to the respective individuals could provide more information and allow for more precise or categorical conclusions regarding the possible interpretations of the correct pronunciation of *jigh* and *floost* (p., the surprising (in the author's words) result in the test of hypothesis 5, the lack of definite data in the test of hypothesis 10, the results of the test of hypothesis 8, etc. In this study, for reasons that can be understood, the interview was conducted on the day of collecting the other study data. This somewhat complicates the interpretation of the results and I believe it should be mentioned in the limitations of the dissertation.

2. Some statistical terms are used incorrectly in the dissertation. For example, "effect" instead of "effect size" (p. 96), "deviation" instead of "standard deviation" (p. 196). On p. 196, there is a technical error – the standard deviation of reading trisyllabic words that are non-derivative is actually less than that of the derivative.

In conclusion, I think that Blagovesta Troeva-Chalakovska's dissertation is an original contribution to the theory and practice of foreign language teaching. The submitted documents comply with the requirements of the Act for the Development of the Academic Staff in the Republic of Bulgaria and its accompanying regulations. That is why I give a positive assessment of the dissertation work and propose that Blagovesta Petkova Troeva-Chalakovska be awarded the educational and scientific degree "Doctor of Philosophy" in the professional field of 1.3. Pedagogy of Education, scientific specialty "Methodology of teaching modern languages".

June 6, 2024,

Assoc. Prof. Zarina Markova, PhD