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REVIEW

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of a dissertation for obtaining a PhD degree

Author of dissertation: Georgi Kostadinov Dzhumayov, doctoral student at the Section of Computational Linguistics, Institute for Bulgarian Language "Prof. L. Andreychin", Bulgarian Academy of Sciences

Topic of dissertation: Application of Modern Technologies in Language Learning

Georgi Dzhumayov's dissertation presents an in-depth study of the applications of modern computer technology in language learning. New developments in this field are welcome and it is satisfying to see that the presented research has been carried out with vigor and skill. The topic is viable in relation to the ongoing active process of introducing technologies not only in foreign language teaching but in education in general. As this process is often quite chaotic, in different directions and for different purposes, its investigation is valuable both for deciphering its mechanisms, and for its optimization. Moreover, the main focus of the dissertation is on the most studied foreign languages in Europe – English and Spanish, which sheds light on the core aspects of technology application into the language realm.

The dissertation considers the topic in several aspects – general theoretical, didactic and grammatical – aimed at synthesizing the general features of the tense systems of Bulgarian, English and Spanish in regard to studying them with the help of computer technology. In view of these languages, the study consistently links E-assisted learning to the language competence of Bulgarian speakers. This is both theoretical and applied asset of the study since Bulgarian linguistics definitely needs such parallels

The topic is thoroughly investigated: the volume of the dissertation is 319 pages, which include six chapters, a summary of its main contributions, five appendices and a detailed bibliography. The structure of the work is consistently built, following clear research logic and motivation.

The dissertation exhibits a sound knowledge of the background and context of the research problem. The presentation focuses on the central issues, which are discussed in depth. The text refers to works by Bulgarian, English and Spanish grammarians, as well as by leading scientists in computational linguistics, testing, teaching methods and others.

The "language-computer" relation is presented by tracing its key issues, such as the relation between natural language and formal languages, the emergence of the concept of artificial intelligence, the phases of natural language processing. They are presented clearly and with relevant references to current literature sources. Furthermore, the text makes a logical transition to tracing this relation in foreign language learning, where the issue of modern "digital natives" by M. Prensky is discussed, as well as M. Levy's and P. Moore's leading concepts of "blended, inverted and mobile learning".

The three main means for applying modern technologies in language learning: computer, the Internet and mobile devices – are presented in the dissertation in the light of their advantages and problem areas. Unfortunately, at the moment, when the present procedure for the defense of this dissertation

is underway, the world can fully appreciate the relevance of such research, as during quarantine the ongoing E-language learning is becoming a life-saving alternative to the school learning. Some of the principles set out in the dissertation can literally be applied in the ongoing E-learning process, which is characterized by many evident weaknesses in the use of E-resources.

The chosen methodology of the dissertation corresponds to its goals and topic. By means of synchronic contrastive analysis the key features of the tense systems in the indicative mood in Bulgarian, English and Spanish are analyzed. Statistical research methods are also implemented, for example, as statistical programs for answer processing according to Fisher's methodology. The method of language survey is especially interesting, as through it the doctoral student has carried out large-scale independent research among students from foreign language high schools in Bulgaria. The surveys are well structured and representative. The results are obtained through precise statistical methods and appropriate statistical programs. The final summarizing conclusions about the motivation of students in foreign language classes, as well as about the problem areas of learning, are convincing and well-illustrated with tables and diagrams.

One of the main contributions of the work is the detailed and systematic contrastive analysis focused on the category of verb tense in the three languages. My own professional experience in language teaching has shown serious challenges to the process of language acquisition in this language category. The differences in tense systems between Bulgarian, on the one hand, and English and Spanish, on the other, create serious difficulties for Bulgarians to learn these languages. In this respect, the good and well-argued parallels made in the dissertation are very useful. For example, middle and high school students often have no idea that the English present perfect

tense has in some of its meanings an equivalent in Bulgarian – past indefinite tense, and is not as exotic as it is often presented to them. However, they can only see this similarity if their training is oriented towards establishing such a parallel between the category of tense in their mother tongue and in the foreign language they learn. In this direction, the dissertation presents well-argued proposals and creative ideas. Teaching the grammar of a foreign language in our country definitely needs to be more precisely oriented to the language competence of the speakers of the Bulgarian language. It is such systematic and comprehensive parallel approach that is offered by the author of the dissertation. The study identifies similarities beyond apparent differences, presenting a thorough and convincing argumentation.

Other important contributions of the thesis concern upgrading existing teaching methods with current digital approaches and techniques, highlighting new aspects of the history of foreign language learning in Bulgaria, assessing the degree of managing the inter-lingual transfer of tense forms with the help of modern technologies and the analysis of learners' motivation. The experiments conducted by the author have a wide range and precise planning and implementation. The data from them are well summarized and have become a fruitful basis for significant linguistic conclusions.

Finally, some critical remarks might be added, as well. Basically, I think that the title of the dissertation could be a little more specific in view of the verb tense as the focus of the application of modern technologies in language teaching. In addition, it would be good to clarify the author's position on two main distinctions. First of all, the division "time – aspect" can be better specified, as many of the modern morphological models of the English language distinguish these two categories with their respective values: temporal (past - present - future tense) and aspectual (simple - progressive - perfect - perfect- progressive aspect). Naturally, the author has

the right to choose a synthetic temporal-aspectual model, however, such choice should be more clearly justified. Furthermore, the distinction “neutral tense use versus modally and pragmatically motivated tense use” can be presented with more detail. However, despite some minor flaws, it should be noted that the dissertation is characterized by a consistency, innovation and comprehensiveness.

The author has four publications on the topic of the dissertation and one publication on a related comparative topic. One of them is in a refereed journal.

The summary of the dissertation corresponds to its content and presents correctly and clearly its main scientific contributions.

On the grounds of the excellent qualities of the dissertation, I give my positive assessment and propose to the respected scientific jury to award the educational and scientific degree "Doctor" to Georgi Kostadinov Dzhumayov.

21.11.2020

Sofia

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