Diploma Thesis  Review

Name: Jana Bunkova
Title: Stylistic Differences of Male and Female Members of the European Parliament

Miss Bunkova uses as the focus of her diploma thesis a sociolinguistic study of speeches given by certain members of the European Parliament. The aim of her thesis as she states is to analyze stylistic patterns of the members of the European Parliament according to gender using the quantitative method. In the introduction she outlines the structure of her thesis in the theoretical and practical parts. One of the major problems within her thesis is the deficiency in the competent use of the English language which the diploma thesis is written in. The problems begin on P.2 where she writes “…paid to sociolinguistic category of gender” (missing article.) As stated these errors continue throughout the thesis. The fact that there are missing and misplaced articles at this final stage of her higher level education is not only surprising but considering that the thesis focuses on linguistics is in a way unacceptable and disrespectful to the discipline. It makes the reader wonder as a first impression if the thesis was ever proofread and if so, why was the paper not checked again for errors which show a definite lack of control over the language.

The thesis continues with sections titled “grammatical analysis” and “parts of speech.” As she states her study will focus on the “open-class category.” She does use citations from various scholars during these early sections but to show understanding of the information rather than simply repeating scholars verbatim, especially for a work of this nature, i.e. focusing on parts of speech, I feel it would have been appropriate to have included examples of such structures to fill out this section. The comments written, without brief explanation for example on p. 6 introducing “transitive and intransitive verbs” without a short introduction demonstrating what role they play in the context of the thesis, appear to have been put there to fill out some kind of academic requirement rather than fulfill the purpose of demonstrating understanding as well as the necessary demonstration of professionalism on the part of Miss Bunkova. Without going through a long itemized list, the errors continue throughout this section as well as the following sections. The reader need not look far to find them.

This lack of demonstration of examples continues on p.7 where a contextual example could have been provided to fill out the citations rather than simply offering a quote. I also feel that in these sections parts of the MEP speeches could have been used to demonstrate the contextual reference which would contribute to the purpose and aim of Miss Bunkova’s thesis.

Errors in use of language continue throughout the section on p. 13 “They form nationally diverse group” “gained on size” (P. 15) which demonstrates poor use of prepositions as well as negative transfer from Czech to English. In section 4(p.15) the errors continue throughout the rest of the section so to mention any more would be redundant due to their frequency. She continues in section 6(p.27) with “Grammatical Analysis.” where she analyzes the number of words and time length of the speeches. I read no grammatical
analysis in this section so a more appropriate term to the section would be: “Grammatical Terms Tabulation” since that is all the section really does with no analysis given. Here she also includes such generalizations such as “Men speak longer”(p, 32). I can only guess if she meant “The men speak longer” in reference to the MEPs or she is using this micro study of a miniscule part of the male population to make a generalization about men in general. If she meant the latter, I think she would need more than this study of as specific focus group to confirm that. This is a very specific situation in a very specific context with a very specific purpose and carefully calculated language of the speakers is used so I cannot imagine that this would be used to apply to the general population. I also note the quotation by Holmes on p. 32 “Women are evidently socialized from early childhood to expect to be interrupted” This is the first time I have read such a generalization so perhaps more than one opinion(preferably from a woman)might be appropriate here. In short with such a specific context used as a base of the study, I think it is difficult to make generalization especially where diplomacy is the rule regarding the subjects’ context and tone. As on p. 37 “More adjectives may appear in male speeches because of their better knowledge of English. Though it cannot be proven in this study” Here Miss Bunkova not only makes an unsubstantiated generalization which I suspect many would disagree with but she also de-legitimizes her own comment in the following sentence. One would wonder why such a generalization was made if she herself is not confident of its validity? The comment by Tannen (p.13)confirms this remark: “Tannen questions the one-sided interpretation of these strategies” I think this further de-legitimizes the generalizations taken from quotes from Miss. Bunkova’s own work so I question why these generalizations have been included. On p. 39 she states: “Adverbs can be classified in advanced knowledge.” I know that adverbs are taught in level A2 and in some cases even A1 which are clearly not advanced levels of study. I think in a serious work such as this more care should be taken not only towards the use of language but the professionalism and legitimacy of the content as well for the respect of the intelligence of the reader.

This is repeated on p. 42 “This direct and suggestive is more common for men than women.” My response to this is “Says who?” Is this an indication of the general populace or based on this specific context and therefore how are the two related? If they are not related, how can they be compared?. In short, beyond these generalizations which could be proven by some to be unfounded, I would have appreciated more of a sense of global purpose to the so-called “analysis” which consists primarily of a tabulation of parts of speech with some examples and not enough on the summary and conclusive evidence. I think the work rather than covering all parts of speech could have been more effective if it was focused on certain parts of speech which appeared more prominently in the MEPs’ speeches and then more energy could have been put towards giving it a sense of global purpose. After reading what I consider to be a rather superficial diploma thesis it leaves me wondering beyond this select portion of the population what linguistic purpose is it meant to serve?

Given all that has been described, the painful deficiency in the proper use of the language used, the superficiality of the content, the lack of global purpose, the unsubstantiated generalizations, and general lack of professionalism, I will have to say in my view it
fulfills the absolute bare minimum of the academic requirements therefore I recommend the mark of dobry(3)

Craig Morgan
Charles University, Prague

7th May 2012