

## OPINION

by Prof. Dr. Milena Shushulova-Pavlova, New Bulgarian University,

on the **dissertation of Kalina Ivanova Decheva – Petkova**

titled

LANGUAGE AS A BONDING FACTOR IN MUSICAL-STAGE ARTS

with academic supervisor: Prof. Dr. Toni Shekerdzhieva – Nowak

doctoral student at the Academy of Music, Dance and Fine Arts „Prof Asen Diamandiev” –

Plovdiv

for awarding the educational and scientific degree **Doctor**

Professional field 8.3 Music and dance art,

field of higher education 8. Arts

### Brief biography

**Kalina Ivanova Decheva-Petkova** is an English teacher. In 1995 she graduated from Veliko Turnovo University “St. st. Cyril and Methodius” in 1995, Major: English Philology. She participates in conferences and seminars in the field of foreign language teaching, translation and English literature. Her research interests are in the field of applied linguistics; the influence of music on optimization of the foreign language learning for art students; the role of language as a bonding factor in musical-stage arts, etc. She has also published a number of articles in the field of linguistics and English language teaching.

### Content of the dissertation

The dissertation thesis was discussed and forwarded for public defense at a meeting of the Department of Classical, Pop and Jazz Performing Arts at AMDFA "Prof Asen Diamandiev" - Plovdiv, held on 25.09.2024. It contains a total of 225 pages (including the following number of tables and figures: 17; of photos: 22; of sheet music examples: 2) which are structured into an introduction, three chapters<sup>1</sup>, conclusion and bibliography (with a total of 141 sources used: 72 Cyrillic script sources; 69 Latin script sources), appendices, dissertation contributions, a list of articles by the author on the topic of the dissertation thesis.

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1. **Chapter one:** Theoretical analysis of the constructs under discussion. (1.1 Language as a means of communication; 1.2 Specificity of the English phonetic system; 1.3 Unity of verbal text and music; 1.4 Musical-stage genres and their specificities). **Chapter two:** Language difficulties when staging repertoire in a foreign language, especially English. (2.1 Different Level of Language Proficiency of the Singers; 2.1.1 Strategy for coping; 2.2 Specific Articulation Features of Certain English Sounds by Singers from China; 2.2.1 The English Language Learning System in China; 2.2.2 Strategy for coping). **Chapter Three:** Motivational techniques and strategies for achieving a high quality of language competence and gaining confidence in handling the foreign language on stage. (3.1 Reference to Carol Dweck and her Theory of Motivation; 3.2 How the satisfaction of good text handling while performing musical-stage works ensures stronger motivation in the cast and improves the quality of their performance).

## Precise formulation of dissertation objectives and tasks

The search for concepts of language development and strategies for dealing with the phonetic specifics and semantics of the foreign language and their reflection on the musical-stage performance, as well as on the satisfaction and the sense of self-efficacy **justify the relevance of the topic** of the dissertation under discussion.

**The object** of the research is the specificity of the bonding role that language plays in the musical-stage pieces and its manifestation in the process of working on the musical work.

**The subject** of the research is the relationship that language builds between author – performer-artist and audience. The analysis focuses on the difficulties that singers experience when **articulating correctly in a foreign language**, to perfect their diction and to go deeper into the content of the piece.

**The purpose** of the dissertation thesis is by using theoretical and empirical research methods to prove the role of language as a bond between the author's idea, the singers and their audience when performing a musical-stage piece.

**The tasks** the doctoral student sets are as follows: theoretical analysis of the constructs under discussion (of language as a means of communication; of the English phonetic system with a focus on its specifics; of the musical-stage arts opera, operetta, musical); overview of the opinions of leading music educators and musicologists on the matter; presenting some empirical evidence for the effectiveness of the model for development of language skills; specifying criteria for the transfer of the effects of mastering language abilities in the music-stage activity, taking into account the contextual peculiarities and the level of language competence of the students from the vocal classes; formulating the reasons for failures and difficulties when working with a verbal text in a foreign language (English) when performing a musical-stage piece and suggesting an algorithm for dealing with them.

## Significance of the research problem and relevance

Spoken language and music share academic correlations – they are acoustic by nature and social by conduct . But they use different categories: in music they work with tonalities, notes, formats, but in language they work with phonemes, lexemes, semantics. There are a number of studies of the similarities and differences between the two constructs. For the professional linguist who has been working with student performers from vocal classes for years, it is curious how language connects the performer with the verbal text of the musical-stage piece and the ideas it implies. It is specially intriguing to prove how the mechanisms work to make a bridge between the language, together with music from one side and the audience from the other. Globalization, student exchange and integration of students from different nationalities and cultures rely on language to bring them together in the process of working on the musical-stage piece. **The dissertation thesis traces and analyzes the aforementioned connections, a fact that defines the reason and the motif for choosing this doctoral topic.**

In a nutshell: There are some weaknesses of English language teaching in the English education system of China. Until recently, the emphasis was put mainly on *reading, translation and grammar*, as it was the case with native language learning also. I.e. the educational framework focuses only on the above cited components. *Listening comprehension* was added as an additional component. The communicative function of

English has not been a teaching objective until recently. The difference in the curricula of individual provinces in a large country like China together with the deviations in the professional training and qualifications of English language teachers there, complete the notion. According to the PhD student, in such a situation it is a good idea to implement **Robert Lado's Principles for Teaching a Foreign Language**. [Lado, R; 1964; p.4]<sup>2</sup> as a starting point and framework in the modern digital world. In the dissertation thesis a special attention is paid to the beneficial influence of different music forms in the foreign language learning.

Kalina does a wonderful job explaining and analyzing Dweck's Theory, which argues that over-praising and fostering intelligence in an individual leads to maladaptive self-theories, goals, and coping patterns. Instead, it is recommended **to work towards the increasing of personal self-esteem**. Dweck traces how failure undermines the self-esteem of some and can be an engine for development and growth for others. The research team calls the two types of response *the helpless* and *the coping* patterns, respectively. The beneficial conclusion of Dweck's thesis that we should be moderate in praise and not burden performer-artists with excessive expectations, is especially relevant to any artistic personality, for each artist is vulnerable and sensitive beyond words.

### **Degree of accomplishment of the doctoral student**

Kalina Decheva-Petkova argues in her dissertation thesis that the language of the musical-stage piece is a bonding factor in musical art. Empirical and theoretical methods were used in the present study. The empirical ones include survey and research of the available literature, social questionnaires, interviews, observation. The theoretical methods are used in the comparative studies, analyzes and summaries. **It has been formulated a working model** for achieving correct articulation and good diction when singing. It can be used in the process of training future performers, regardless of their level of English language proficiency, which is very interesting and within reach applicable.

**Chapter one** presents a theoretical analysis of the language with its major function for conducting communication, of the English phonetics, of musical-stage genres (opera, operetta and musical), as well as of the symbiosis between verbal text and music in a piece of music. The aim is that overview to prove the main thesis that language is the very factor which, along with music, serves as a bonding element in musical-stage arts.

**Chapter two** highlights certain difficulties when the repertoire is in English and the cast is of multinational origin. The empirical observations are analyzed and some models for overcoming weaknesses at work are suggested. It is paid particular attention to the specifics of articulation of certain English sounds by the student-singers from China. The reasons for

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<sup>2</sup> Principle 1 Speech before writing.

Principle 2 Basic sentences

Principle 3 Patterns as habits

Principle 4 Sound System for Use

Principle 5 Vocabulary control

Principle 9 Language Practice versus Translation

Principle 10 Authentic Language Standard

Principle 14 Immediate reinforcement

[Lado, R; 1964; P. 50-56; the translation of the Principles in the dissertation thesis is by the PhD student]

the difficulties are analyzed as well as the history and gist of the Chinese system for English language learning is reviewed. A strategy (type of a protocol) is presented to be used in the rehearsal process when working on a musical-stage piece. It is an easily applicable system that ensures good results.

**Chapter three** reveals the motivational techniques following *Carol Dweck's Theory of Motivation*. They will build grounds for high quality of language production and boost the performer's self confidence when using it on stage. Special attention is paid to the performer's satisfaction from the good results achieved.

The extent of applicability of the results of the dissertation thesis is materialized in the shape of **a model for foreign language learning (English)**, enhancing the development of musical-stage abilities (when working on the verbal text in a musical-stage work). Empirical evidence of the effectiveness of the model is presented, as well as criteria for the transfer of the effects of mastering language competence in the music-stage activity. The effects of applying the model in the context of aesthetic experiences and perception of musical works are traced, as well as the influence of the suggested didactic model on motivation, flow experience and mind sets, through which the effectiveness of the learning process and achievements are thematized. The above mentioned model can be used in the process of training future performers, regardless of their level of English language proficiency, which is a guarantee for language development and for mastering specific musical abilities.

The considerable number of theoretical and empirical evidence presented in the dissertation, as well as the personal observations, show that the communicative function of language connects and unites the artists in the cast, language brings the musical-stage piece closer to the audience, language gives meaning to the emotion felt by music.

#### **Accuracy of citations**

Kalina Ivanova Decheva – Petkova's citations are correct.

#### **Abstract assessment for its compliance with the major points and contributions of the dissertation**

The abstract corresponds to the dissertation.

#### **Publications connected to the dissertation subject**

The candidate has published three /3/ articles on the topic of the dissertation thesis:

1. Decheva, Kalina. *Strategies to Deal with Pronunciation when Staging Repertoire in English (Blue Monday by Gershwin, a performance of the AOT /Academic Opera Theatre/ at AMDFA)*; IV International Scientific Conference "Science, Education and Innovations in the Field of Art" AMDFA "Prof. Assen Diamandiev" - Plovdiv, Oct. 26-27 2023, Collection Reports, Volume 1, ISSN 2738-8956, p. 127 -133. – the collection is out of print April 2024.
2. Decheva, Kalina. *The Importance of the Text for its Audience in a Musical-stage Performance. The Outcomes of a Questionnaire*; National Scientific Conference "Spring Scientific Readings AMDFA" Prof. Assen Diamandiev" - Plovdiv, May 2024; under print

3. Decheva, Kalina. *Some Musicologists' Ideas on the Unity between Text and Music in a Musical-stage Performance*; National Scientific Conference "Spring Scientific Readings AMDFA" Prof. Assen Diamandiev" - Plovdiv, May 2024; under print

#### **Contributions of the dissertation thesis**

1. The dissertation presents a critical analysis of the concepts of language development in the context of vocal performers' training, as well as the various barriers while mastering the phonetic features and semantics of the foreign language and their impact on stage musical performances together with the satisfaction and sense of self-efficacy.
2. The dissertation creates a model of language training in a foreign language (English) aiming at the development of musical performance abilities when working on the verbal text of a musical-stage work.
3. The dissertation traces the effects of the model application in the context of the aesthetic experiences and the perceptions of musical pieces. The thesis also highlights the effects of the suggested didactic model on motivation, flow experience and mind sets, which define the effectiveness of the learning process and its achievements.
4. The dissertation supplies with empirical evidence for the effectiveness of the model for the development of language competence, as well as with the criteria for the transfer of the effects of mastering language abilities in musical-stage activity, taking into account the contextual characteristics and the level of development of each class.
5. The suggested model can be used in the process of training performers for musical-stage works, regardless of their English language proficiency level, which is a guarantee for language improvement and for mastering specific musical abilities.

**In conclusion**, I will bring the OPINION to a close with the following assessment:

The academic activity of the doctoral student meets the *scientometric indicators* for acquiring the educational and scientific degree "*Doctor*" according to the Law on the Development of the Academic Staff of the Republic of Bulgaria. The dissertation of **KALINA IVANOVA DECHEVA-PETKOVA** doctoral student at AMDFA, on the topic: **LANGUAGE AS A BONDING FACTOR IN MUSICAL-STAGE ARTS**, together with the contributions she has made with scientific and applied qualities and also her publications in connection with the subject of the above dissertation, I consider totally sufficient to give my **positive assessment** and to propose to the reputable scientific jury to award the educational and scientific degree "Doctor" in professional field 8.3 Music and Dance art, to **Kalina Decheva - Petkova**, according to the requirements of the Law for development of the academic staff in the Republic of Bulgaria.

8.12.2024, Sofia

Prof. Dr. Milena Shushulova-Pavlova