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Review of the Doctoral Dissertation

MA Blerta Krasniqi

***“Predispositions of dyslexia and the neurolinguistics aspect of preschool age children
in the Republic of Kosovo and Poland”***

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The subject of this dissertation is situated at the intersection of several scientific disciplines. Difficulties in literacy acquisition—specifically reading and writing—constitute a primary area of enquiry for psychologists, pedagogues, speech and language therapists, neurocognitivists, and neurolinguists, as well as researchers within the medical and health sciences. As the historiography of the field suggests, scholarly focus on dyslexia has transitioned from a predominantly medical paradigm to the social sciences; in the turn of 20th and 21st centuries, it has emerged as a critical domain within linguistics and cognitive science. While dyslexia was initially conceptualised as a specific difficulty in learning to read (a 'narrow' definition consistent with its etymology), the term soon expanded to encompass deficits in mastering written expression. Contemporary definitions often associate the condition more broadly with learning difficulties.

These conceptual shifts are the result of refinements in research methodology and the increasingly granular findings facilitated by modern diagnostic instruments. Once it has been established that the underlying causes of difficulties in reading and writing are language disorders, the methods of investigating their causes, symptoms, and effective diagnostic and therapeutic approaches have been redefined. Of particular significance are findings indicating the possibility of identifying dyslexia risk factors during the early stages of child development, prior commencement of formal schooling.

The author of the dissertation addresses a significant research problem: the identification of developmental deficits in specific cognitive-linguistic skills that may serve as markers for dyslexia risk in children aged four and five. The empirical data was gathered from preschool

cohorts in Poland and Kosovo. The indicators were expected to be derived from quantitative analyses of the data. These analyses also served to verify the scope and adequacy of the screening tools developed for dyslexia risk assessment in four- and five-year-old children.

An additional merit of this research lies in the collected data, which enabled the author to document developmental characteristics of preschool children who are growing up in a time of rapid socio-cultural change, where new technologies exert a strong influence on development. I hope that these data will provide a valuable foundation for future longitudinal or comparative studies.

The dissertation adopts the so-called *narrow definition of dyslexia* (the one etymologically justified), which results from the age of the participants. The author argues that reading difficulties are conditioned by delays or disturbances in language development and, above all, constitute limitations in *decoding*. It is a point of professional regret that this term was not subjected to more rigorous conceptual interrogation within the text..

The research problem and research objectives are formulated with commendable clarity. They delineated the scope of the investigation: from selected perceptual abilities and working memory to selected features of language abilities in children aged four and five.

Structural Observations

The conceptual design of the division of content is classical. It is easy to distinguish the so-called theoretical, methodological, and empirical parts. However, the division of the entire dissertation into seven chapters sometimes makes the structure appear insufficiently hierarchically organized. It is difficult to be fully convinced of the justification for designating the *Introduction* as Chapter 1 or *Conclusions* as Chapter 7. It might have been preferable to follow the conventional practice of not numbering the introduction and conclusion as chapters. It also seems that the second chapter, *Literature Review*, consisting of nine subchapters (pp. 23–74), would gain clarity if it were reorganized into three main subsections: 2.1. *Learning Disabilities* (pp. 23–37), 2.2. Child Development (incorporating subsections currently numbered 2.2 (pp. 37–41) and 2.3 (pp. 41–45), which would become subsections 2.2.1 and 2.2.2) and 2.4 Dyslexia subchapter (pp. 46–74) changing into subchapter 2.3, containing the following subsections: 2.3.1. *Risk Factors: Genetics* (pp. 54–58), 2.3.2. *Assessing Dyslexia / Diagnosis* (pp. 59–63), 2.3.3. *Early Identification of Dyslexia: The Need and the Importance* (pp. 63–68), 2.3.4. *The Speech Therapist's Impact on Children with Dyslexia* (pp. 68–70).

The important subsection 2.9. *Dyslexia in the Republic of Kosovo and in Poland* (pp. 70–74) could become subsection 2.4, remaining one of the principal sections of the chapter. In my opinion, the current equal status assigned to all subsections in Chapter Two somewhat distorts the hierarchical structure of the content and results in partial repetitions.

Moreover, incorporating Chapter Three, *Research Aim* (p. 75), into Chapter Four, *Methodology* (pp. 76–97), would significantly improve the structure of the dissertation. It would also eliminate doubts concerning the scope of the research methodology and the research procedure applied.

Another aspect that drew my attention is the manner in which chapter and subsection titles are formulated. Such over-economical wording means that the reader does not receive clear indications regarding the scope and approach of the issues discussed in these sections; hence more descriptive headings would better reflect the depth of the author's arguments. Notably, Chapter 5, *Results* (pp. 98-108), a very important part of the dissertation, where the author presents the findings of her own research, should explicitly state that it pertains to quantitative analysis. The current title implies a mixed-methods approach. Although the author begins the chapter stating that statistical analyses are presented, it is not reflected. It is also unfortunate that the research results were not presented in several subsections..

A very effective conclusion to the dissertation is provided by the chapters *Discussion* (pp. 109–121) and *Conclusions* (pp. 122–124).

The dissertation (excluding the *Abstracts in Polish, Albanian, and English*) comprises 109 pages. It is supplemented by a *List of Tables* (7 items), *List of Figures* (2 items), and an extensive bibliography (*References*, pp. 125–184) containing approximately 500 entries.

Substantive Remarks

Regarding the bibliography, it appears that the author compiled a list of works including the publications she identified on the topics of dyslexia, learning difficulties, their consequences and causes (including the role of genetics), terminology, and related issues. However, there is a discrepancy between the works listed and those cited, some of the publications included in this list were not actually used in the dissertation (no references appear in the text); they are not cited or discussed in theoretical considerations or in the discussion of other research findings. A formal bibliography should include sources that are in some way cited in the dissertation. It is therefore difficult to assess whether such extensive bibliography demonstrates a thorough

engagement with the subject matter or merely indicates that the author recognized the attractiveness of the topic in mainly English-language publications accessible through DOI platforms (<https://doi.org/>). The inclusion of classic Polish linguistic and pedagogical literature is somewhat sparse (approximately ten). It is, however, imperative to acknowledge the meticulous precision with which the author has compiled the bibliographic data.

Further remark concerns the chapters devoted to research methodology. In Chapter Four *Methodology* (pp. 76–97), the description of the research sample is too general (4.1. *Participants*, p. 76 – less than one page). In my opinion, categorising children into only two broad age groups may obscure subtle developmental nuances. Given that significant cognitive shifts occur within months at this ages (four and five year olds) (cf. S. M. Baker, L. B. Ames, F. L. Ilg, 2018, *Child Development: From Birth to Ten Years*), a more granular stratification—for instance - children aged 4.0–4.6 and 5.0–5.6 as well as 4.7–4.12 and 5.7–5.12, with an additional gender-based variables—would yield a more precise description of changes in the assessed abilities. It seems that such statistical analyses might have revealed developmental characteristics and specific indicators of dyslexia risk. The analysis based only on two age groups is certainly important, but somewhat incomplete.

The characteristics of the research instruments also require clarification. The information that the author designed her own test for the “assessment of predispositions to dyslexia” should probably be related to research tools previously used by other authors. The author states that the study employed a self-constructed test battery consisting of twelve subtests assessing cognitive abilities, knowledge of shapes and colours, orientation, pen handling and usage, non-verbal and verbal auditory tasks, coping skills, visual memory tasks, and hand and eye lateralization (p. 76). The tasks are presented on pages 78–93. The instrument was prepared in Polish and Albanian language versions and in separate sets for four- and five-year-old children.

It would be academically prudent to clarify whether the research instrument in question fulfils the formal methodological requirements of a standardised test. In my estimation, the dissertation lacks a sufficiently rigorous explication regarding the selection of tasks for each experimental trial, as well as a systematic justification for their utility in assessing discrete cognitive-linguistic abilities. Furthermore, the evaluative criteria employed to measure the children’s performance remain somewhat opaque, thereby warranting further clarification to satisfy the reader’s scholarly enquiry.

I greatly appreciate the inclusion of narrative competence in the research procedure; however, I regret that the analysis was restricted to lexical productivity (word count) produced by the children and did not include the structural features of a narrative. As speech therapists experiences have proven (see S. Grabias, *Utterance as a Tool in Speech Therapy Diagnosis and Treatment. Dialogue, Narrative, Description*, in A. Maciejewska [ed.], *Narracja w Diagnostyce i terapii logopedycznej* [t/note: *Narrative in Speech Therapy Diagnosis and Therapy*], 2021, Siedlce, pp. 13–30), such features indicate the level of cognitive-linguistic competence of individuals.

A significant value of this dissertation resides in the cross-linguistic comparative research undertaken by Blerta Krasniqi. By examining selected abilities of children across two distinct age cohorts and two nations with disparate linguistic typologies, the author addresses a complex research gap. She studied children at a pre-literate stage – a critical period during which children encounter conventions of written language, ways of organizing and conveying content, and decoding the meanings of words through books. The inclusion of supplementary questionnaire providing information about children’s knowledge of letters, shared reading experiences with adults, etc might have been the simplest way of obtaining background data. Research by G. Krasowicz-Kupis indicates that early contact with books and written language prepares children for reading.

Furthermore —perhaps unintentionally—the findings of Blerta Krasniqi’s research contribute to broader investigations (including those conducted by cognitive scientists) into the influence of the structural characteristics of children’s native languages on their ways of decoding content.

The research material analysis is limited to quantitative one. And the statistical methods implemented, i.e. IBM SPSS Statistics 29 , enabled to present the results in a highly condensed form. As the author writes: “The analyses included descriptive statistics with the Shapiro-Wilk test, independent samples t-test with Levene's test for homogeneity of variances, Pearson's r correlation with Fisher's r to Z transformation, and linear regression analysis. The significance level adopted for all analyses was $\alpha = 0,05$.” The selection of analytical tools seems to have made it possible to obtain a fuller picture of the distribution of data and to highlight differences between the examined groups. The relationships between the assessed language abilities were presented in tables and illustrated in charts.

The quantitative analysis enabled the author to achieve the primary research objective: to delineate the predispositions to dyslexia within the studied cohorts, identify cross-national similarities and variances, and establish early markers of risk. Indirectly, these findings contribute to the quest for universal characteristics determining a child's capacity to recognise linguistic structures and comprehend the role of semiotic signs.

The most extensive part of the dissertation—the theoretical section—is a review of information concerning dyslexia terminology and changes in psychological and medical classifications, as well as the causes of difficulties experienced by children and students who struggle with such problems. The author emphasizes the influence of genetic, social, cognitive, and linguistic factors on the occurrence of these disorders and draws upon extensive literature on the subject. Because of the compression of information, some sections are presented in a very condensed form. I consider it imperative that research on dyslexia should not focus exclusively on phonological competence, but should also present more detailed results regarding lexical-semantic competence, syntactic competence, and especially narrative competence.

B. Krasniqi adopts a sophisticated, modern paradigm, conceptualising dyslexic difficulties as a continuum of linguistic disturbances manifesting in early childhood and influence cognitive, emotional, and social development. They constitute a specific disorder conditioned by certain (not yet fully understood) factors. Drawing on the literature, the author repeatedly stresses the need for early identification of deficits and behaviours that may predict difficulties in learning, reading, and writing at school age. To further strengthen the practical utility of the work, the dissertation would benefit from referencing the Dyslexia Risk Scale developed by M. Bogdanowicz (www.ptd.edu.pl).

Conclusion

MA Blerta Krasniqi has addressed a complex and practically relevant research problem. The analysis of the research findings has a practical dimension because—according to the author—it will enable further work on developing a screening test for dyslexia risk in preschool children. Despite the methodological reservations noted, I positively assess the author's high competence in research design, statistical processing, and the interpretation of complex data.

I emphasize the importance of the adopted assumption that difficulties in reading and writing are disorders of linguistic origin. They manifest themselves in the decoding of texts, the acquisition of lexemes, and the construction of linguistic structures. I also appreciate that the

author assigns an important role to speech and language therapists among specialists working with children and individuals with dyslexia.

Undoubtedly, the value of the dissertation lies in the fact that the results of Blerta Krasniqi's research contribute to the search for ways of meeting social, educational, and caregiving needs arising from concern for children's development. It confirms that the development of skills considered foundations of literacy depends on individual characteristics and pace and features of children's cognitive and linguistic development and underscores the necessity of early diagnosis of specific child abilities.

MA Blerta Krasniqi, PhD Candidate, in her doctoral dissertation 'Predispositions of dyslexia and the neurolinguistics aspect of preschool age children in the Republic of Kosovo and Poland,' fully meets the academic standards required for a doctoral degree.

Consequently, I move to admit the candidate to the next stages of the doctoral proceedings.

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Blerta Krasniqi", with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Siedlce, 5.03.2026 r.