S U B M I S S I O N

by Prof. Mira Kovatcheva, PhD (Sofia University)

concerning the scientific publications of Dr. Guergana Furkova,

only candidate in the selection procedure for Associate Professor (2.1. Philology (Applied Linguistics – German for Economic Purposes and Business Communication),

announced in State Gazette No.21/13.03.2020

The candidate Dr. Furkova has a 25-year experience as a teacher of German for Economic Purposes and Business Communication at Sofia University as well as for various companies. She defended her PhD thesis in 2016 titled “Linguistic, paralinguistic and culturally specific dimensions of Bulgarian-German communication in a business environment”. She is principal assistant reader from 2020 (no department is mentioned). She is the author of an impressive number of articles in scientific journals/collections and in the press. She has authored a dictionary and has taken part in the preparation of other 3 and has translated a great number of literary works. She keeps a high profile in the field of intercultural relations which shows her genuine interest in this subject matter.

For the present selection procedure Dr. Furkova has submitted the book *Language of the advertising slogan. German-Bulgarian parallels* (FunTasy 2018), together with 5 articles, one longer study and 4 dictionaries – 11 publications all in all. Six of them deal with problems of communication, one discusses the cultural stereotypes linked to sex and fashion. The assumption is that if the discussion touches upon language and communication the general field is Applied Linguistics – the focus of the present selection procedure.

Still item №3 *Sex and cultural stereotypes in fashion* can hardly be included in the scope of Applied Linguistics and will not be considered. Dr. Furkova emphasizes the interdisciplinarity of Applied Linguistics (№1, p. 12). However, the analytical methods used are determined by the concrete aspect of the problem – whether the focus is on the socio-cultural, psychological, cognitive, the content, formal or functional aspect of the usage vis-a-vis its goal. At present there is no consensus on the question whether Applied Linguistics can be considered as one academic discipline or a few related disciplines[[1]](#footnote-1). That is why the very first encounter with the candidate’s texts I was puzzled by the phrase “From the viewpoint of Applied Linguistics…. “ (№1, p. 12) because a single viewpoint is not possible. An enormous amount of knowledge is required about each of the mentioned aspects so that meaningful relations could be established afterwards and a higher-level synthesis be achieved.

The title of the book *Language of the advertising slogan. German-Bulgarian parallels* sounds fashionable and intriguing. The goal of the slogan being the same in all communities, the refrain repeated throughout the book states that they must be short, expressive, creative and easily remembered. Such characteristics are expected for slogans in any language. The differences obviously are rooted in the socio-cultural context.

The author starts with a description of “what happens on each language level” (p. 10). Due to the alternation of structural and functional descriptions, the exposition is fragmentary and inconsistent in places (e.g. changes in the punctuation among phonological matters, discussion of “neologisms” among morphological matters). A list of rhetorical mechanisms is adduced later but an organic link between form and impact is rarely achieved. Nothing but declarations points to the uniqueness of slogans since the features terseness, creativity and expressivity are valid for other language forms (e.g. slang, poetry). In other words, the lack of methodology strongly limits the possibility for any practical contributions[[2]](#footnote-2). A positive feature of the text is that it is very personal. The question remains whether this is enough for a scientific publication.

Further down I am listing some reasons why I think the reviewed book does not answer the expectations for scientific work.

* The corpus is not described in quantitative terms. The Bulgarian slogans are fewer. There is no classification according to function (informative, convincing, creating demand etc.); according to type (advertising a product or a service, which determines the frequency of nouns or verbs, in the press or on TV etc.). The choice of expressive tools depends on the target group too. According to Janich, a study should consider the slogans of successful campaigns only. It is not clear then what the role is of the negative evaluation of some Bulgarian slogans.
* The crucial role of the context has not been sufficiently made prominent. The slogan is a part of the whole advertisement! The product, the name of the company and its history, the social attitude, the target groups – all this, and more, is context. In and of itself the language of slogans is not a tool for conviction (as said on p. 11). Cf. the trivial phrases:

*Gute Woche.* Kaufland

*Винаги има решение* translated from *Einfach. Für alle*. Praktiker

Conviction emerges non-verbally from the combination with the name of the company and this does not mean that it has been somehow hidden/veiled as the author often maintains. That is why the pragmatic distinction “what is said” versus “what is meant” should have been introduced (in contrast to Lasswell’s model p. 25).

Context is not only socio-cultural but encyclopedic too. The point can be illustrated by the example *Who drank (my) beer?* Ariana (p. 225). I do not think that it is enough to interpret the slogan based exclusively on the stories in the videos. The important point in this case is that the beer is so good that many people are enticed to steal somebody else’s beer. The question serves as an index which creates the meaning through a series of inferences.

* The significance of slogans for language enrichment or their usefulness in foreign language teaching is strongly exaggerated (p. 9). **Every** deviation from the “norm” is a meta-sign which enriches the language. It is true that individual creations from advertising feed the pool of language formulae through their frequent repetition (e.g. *Върхът на сладоледа*). But at the root of the matter is that the greatest number of language usages are formulae anyway and from there they get into adverts (*Защото така!*). It’s only natural for the opposite process to take place too.
* Despite the use of “code” and “coding” („езикът на рекламата е наситен с кодове и значения“ p. 30), the approach is not semiotic (as recommended by Janich and as the practice is in sociolinguistic and cultural studies). For instance, the term *mnemonics* is suitable for the study of memory, but in language semiotic it is a meta-sign or index (conscious or subconscious). There are attempts in the book to explain the concrete case of semiosis descriptively (e.g. by phrases like „a reminding mechanism“ p. 199), but such improvisations without a terminological apparatus sound amateurish and rather foggy, because the emphasis is on the emotional appeal of slogans – they are “sweet“, „amusing“, „playful“, „multilayered“ – and creative of course.
* Problems with terminology

> „инсцениране“ p. 12 in Bulgarian has a negative connotation while its terminological content has not been explained; „transports the message“ p. 19 – this is an outmoded conceptualization, linked to the Shannon-Weaver model; *added* *value* – translated as „добавена“ p. 27 or „принадена“ стойност p. 23, while no Marxist connotations are meant.

> The translation of the term Determinativkompositum (p. 64) as „determinating compound“ does not render the nature of the type since it is just the first component that determines the second (hypotactic link with the head, i.e. „детерминира**на**“).

> Having described the word-formation mechanism producing compounds from familiar **lexemes** (?), Dr. Furkova writes: „в езика на рекламата преобладава словообразуването по пътя на **деривацията(?)**: с образуване на производни от съществуващи в езика лексеми или видоизменяне на заемки от чужди езици“ (p. 59). Should be **stems** and **compounding**.

> The term *composition* has not been used. Other Bulgarian equivalents of terms for mechanisms of word-formation have not been used either (e.g. *телескопия* (*Elephantastisch*)*,* конверсия/ синтактичен механизъм p. 68), neither is there reference to even one Bulgarian source for word-formation.

> The term *genre* has not been mentioned once, even if it is defining of style. Style itself has not been defined either – where does the author position it vis-à-vis her analysis of fragments of language?

> It has not been mentioned that the creativity of language is based on meta-usage (the poetic function according to Jakobson, i.e. implicit commentary on form). This is what Fix means by “Deviation from the canon against the background of the canon” (p. 12).

> The name of the wordplay in examples like *Augen-blick* p.198 and *Einzig. Nicht artig*. Toblerone. p.197 is *Defamiliarization.*

> There is no mention of *intertextuality* despite the wealth of examples.

* The author does not demonstrate familiarity with the original sources for some of the approaches applied, the interpretation of their main ideas is superficial and imprecise.

> The Shannon-Weaver model of communication (с. 25) has long been categorically rejected as suitable for representing language communication because the latter does not convey information but MEANING. That is why statements like „advertisements **transport** information from the producer to the buyer“ (p. 8) does not make sense. Towards the end of the book it becomes evident that such language is used by the neuromarketing specialists Scheier and Held. It is dangerous to borrow their usage of the term *code* for a linguistic analysis since these authors are not semioticians. Their qualifications are in the fields of (neuro)psychology and psychophysics.

> If Theo Herrmann’s criticism of the Shannon-Weaver model is not mentioned, why is his name referred to at all? (p. 25, cf. Theo Herrmann, *Sprache verwenden. Funktionen - Evolution – Prozesse*. [Verlag W. Kohlhammer](http://www.kohlhammer.de) (Stuttgart) 2005).

> Through Sheier and Held’s publications Dr. Furkova refers in passing to the heuristics formulated by Daniel Kahneman (better known as system 1 and 2, not A and B, p. 223). The idea of a quick and a slow mode of thinking has been applied to the analysis of figurative language too and would have been of great use in the analysis of the effect of a given creative suggestion (for bibliography cf.Kovatcheva M., “Language games: ‘being’ and ‘description’”, in *Trees of knowledge: roots and routes.* Essays in Honour of Michael Grancharov. Plovdiv University Press 2016). In the text of the book under review, however, there is an obvious bias in the direction of marketing rather than “language”.

> Another fairly simplistically represented theory is Hofstede’s which formulates some cultural correlations. Hofstede and collaborators have pointed out more than once that the dichotomy individualistic-collectivistic society is based on combinations of 5 correlations and has no causative force. It is a pity that the candidate has not used data about Bulgaria by Mikhail Minkov (recognized as co-author of the theory) neither in her book nor in No. 2

> Another term used in passing and not borrowed from the original source is *anti-language* (p. 30): “онова, което характеризира рекламния език, наречен още от Янушек „анти-език“ (1976), е стремежът му да бъде необикновен“. Whoever Januszek is (he is not in the bibliography), the term’s author is Michael Halliday, a linguist of world renown. According to him *anti-language* is a language which is so deformed that it excludes certain members of the community from communication. That is, the term is not suitable for “the language of advertising”.

> Underrepresented is the idea of *Framing* in communication. The term was introduced by Erving Goffman and is widely used in pragmatic analysis. It has been mentioned in passing as “framing effect” (p. 223). Actually, the concept coincides with the creation of a script (consciously or unconsciously) within which a series of actions or judgements make sense as organization of experience. Conscious framing is the name for the way the initiator of communication defines and structures every piece of information. So frame or script would have been more suitable translations to avoid the ambiguous Bulgarian „инсцениране“.

* The analyses would be less subjective if informants were included in an experiment. An instance of subjectivity in № 2 is the discussion of Lidl’s slogan in Bulgarian *Вече знаеш защо.* It is totally arbitrary and counterfactual. As can be seen from the adverb *вече*, the slogan refers to the TV commercial explaining why Lidl can afford to sell good quality goods for less money. In practice it was an explanation of the original *Lidl lohnt sich*. That is why the slogan begins with *Заслужава си,* but also gives a summary of the commercial. Lidl brochures still include the assurance that the customer does not have to choose between price and quality since they get both.

The comments about Guiness’s slogan *Bring it to life* are not backed by the facts either (p. 226): „Изключително красив и ефектен клип, който утвърждава образа на Guiness като силна бира за силни мъже“. It is not clear why this trivial interpretation had to be given if an ads-review site quotes the very creators of the advertisement explaining the image of the exploding bubbles: beer froth comes into existence only by pouring the beer out. In other words *Bring it to life* in this case means just “Pour yourself a Guiness” <https://adsreviewedtoday.wordpress.com/2013/05/14/guinness-bring-it-to-life-advert/>.

Similar literary phantasies characterize the journalistic style of the whole text in general. E.g. on p. 31 we read: „езикът определено е средство, което се поддава на въздействие, с него може да се направи много, той предлага голям набор от възможности за креативни и продуктивни решения. Затова колкото по-строги са нормите в един език, толкова по-фрапантни и интересни могат да изглеждат отклоненията от тях.“ Part of the quote repeats trivial facts while the rest reflects dated or rejected views about the nature of language. Language is not something external to humans which can become the target of their activity. Its essence is to reproduce itself as a process inseparable from thinking. „Strict norms“ (p. 85) or “boundaries” are formulated only for educational purposes (i.e. for the standard dialect), they do not inhere in language (*norm* in its semiotic sense is ever-changing as the implicit “background” in the never-ending semiosis). What is inherent in language is variability and “human presence” (p. 32). Variability is based on meta-usage as mentioned above. The content of the quote is thus exhausted just by saying *Advertisements are one of the creative language genres*.

The following 8 downright blunders are evidence of an absence of linguistic thinking in the mindset of the author of the book:

**1** In *Apollo Optik* “**the vowel**“o”, which ...has the shape of one of the glasses in a pair of eye-glasses...“ (p. 116) – a very serious mistake as the flow of sound waves has no such shape.

A similar lack of precision is observed in the discussion of *fahr ich, geht’s* (p. 50), described as a case of apocope. But if the advert is written you cannot say a sound has been dropped. The written form refers directly to colloquial speech and only in the actual colloquial pronunciation “against the backround of the canon” there is a loss of sound.

**2** “word formations with the **word** *cool*, *bio*, *mega*, *super*” (p. 60) – the structural units of compounds and derived words are not **words**; the listed units are roots or affixoids.

**3** Despite a quotation from Janich that neologisms are only words accepted by the speech community, **a great number of occasionalisms/nonce-words from slogans are classified as neologisms** (e.g. *чаромат* p. 71).

**4** In *We kehr for you* (p. 49) **there is no transliteration**. The spelling *kare* would have been transliteration. There is no “equation” between *care* and *kehr* either. This is a good illustration of the significance of semiosis in the analysis of advertising. It should be cognitive, not structural.

**5** In examples like *Beck’s ist* *Beck’s* the suggestion is that **a proper noun has turned into a common noun***.* There is no common noun here but there is something called an emblem or in Bulgarian „нарицателно собствено име“, a noun which renders some typical features (as in *Германия е Германия!*, cf. the academic Речник на българския език)*.* Dr. Furkova gives the meaning of the second *Beck’s* as some „absolute value” (p. 115), probably meaning benchmark. In social semiotics such predicatives are known as emblems and the accepted syntactic term for the construction is “tautological predication”, e.g. *A deal is a deal*.

**6** The author is struggling with the description of “superlatives” and “hyperonizations” without the term *intensificator*. A serious mistake is for instance the following description: „Друг популярен вариант за подчертаване на високата ценност, който е приложим и в българските реклами, е комбинацията от **две прилагателни**. Първото е само за подсливане... Най-често използвани за подсилване са думи като: съвършено, абсолютно, перфектно, божествено, уникално, брилянтно, искрящо и пр.“ (p. 100). In other words, for Dr. Furkova phrases such as *съвършено чист* or *божествено вкусен* consist of 2 adjectives...

**7** Punctuation is not part of language and it cannot turn anything into something else, cf.: „името Yahoo само със смяната на въпросителния с удивителен знак се превръща в глагол и съществително” pp. 69-70:

Do you yahoo? (2000) Yahoo!

Do you yahoo! (2006) Yahoo!

Beside the twisted facts (the exclamation mark is part of the logo so the slogan is *Do you … Yahoo!?* with a capital and 2 punctuation marks), the comment is not acceptable because punctuation marks belong to the completely different writing system. They cannot change anything and are just indexes for the particular usage. Cf. the similar statement that declarative sentences turn into exclamations just by adding an exclamation mark p. 162. What we see in the Yahoo! slogan is coercion – in this construction in this slot there can only be a verb. There is no deviation from the rules whatsoever. The second version of the slogan I couldn’t find anywhere.

**8** According to the author **the infinitive is an elliptical phrase** **(?)**, in which the subject has been dropped out as in *Entdecken, einkaufen, entspannen*. Amazon (p.167).

I have listed the critical notes above in order to add arguments to the opinion that the book *Language of the advertising slogan.* *German-Bulgarian parallels* does not fulfil the requirements for a scientific publication in linguistics in spite of the participation of a scientific editor. Of greater concern is the fact that Dr. Furkova seems rather indifferent to the criteria for a scientific publication. I already mentioned the absence of strict application of terminology. I will only add the less than proper referencing in the remaining articles presented for the selection procedure:

In № 2: **9 out of 22** titles in the bibliography are not mentioned in the text.

In № 4: (a shortened version of № 2) **just 2** **out of 17** titles in the bibliography are present in the text.

In № 5: **6 out of 16** titles in the bibliography are not mentioned in the text. There is no reference to Кодийак.

In № 6: **4 out of 12** titles in the bibliography are not mentioned in the text.

In № 7: **just 2** **out of 7** are present in the text, the name Кора Дюбуа (sic) is not included in the bibliography.

**Conclusion**

The close acquaintance with the materials presented for the selection procedure convinced me that Dr. Furkova is a talented translator and journalist as well as an experienced teacher of German for specific purposes. The materials presented, however, do not prove that she fulfils the requirements for receiving the academic title Associate Professor in any selection procedure within the field of **linguistics**. I do not find that the candidate’s claimed contributions are real. That is why **I cannot put forward** a suggestion to the scientific jury that Dr. Furkova be awarded the title Associate Professor.

September 2020 Reviewer:

(Prof. Mira Kovatcheva, PhD)

1. Karlfried Knapp, Applications in Applied Linguistics: AILA Review, Volume 26 [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Everything listed in the book under review has already been published, cf. Gillian Dyer ADVERTISING AS COMMUNICATION, Routledge 1982 (4 editions so far).  
    [↑](#footnote-ref-2)