

OPINION

by **Assoc. Prof. Dr. Tzvetomira Gueorguieva Venkova**; Sofia University "St. Kliment Ohridski", Faculty of Classical and Modern Philology, Department of English and American Studies

regarding: **competition for the academic position *Associate Professor*** at Sofia University "St. Kliment Ohridski", in professional field 2.1. Philology (Grammar and Historical linguistics – English language)", published in State Gazette, no. 8, October 19, 2021

1. Competition data

The competition is called by the Department of English and American Studies, Faculty of Classical and Modern Philology, Sofia University "St. Kliment Ohridski". I was appointed as an academic jury member for the competition by a Decree *PД* 38-541/ November 17, 2021 of the Rector of Sofia University "St. Kliment Ohridski". The academic jury elected me chairperson at its first meeting on January 5, 2022 and I was assigned an opinion about the competition.

2. Candidates in the competition

The only candidate in the competition is Chief Assistant Professor Dr. Bozhil Petrov Hristov, Department of English and American Studies, Faculty of Classical and Modern Philology, Sofia University "St. Kliment Ohridski".

3. Fulfillment of the requirements for holding the academic position *Associate Professor*

The candidate meets the national minimum requirements according to the Act for the development of the academic staff in the Republic of Bulgaria (Art. 2b) and the Regulations for its implementation (Art. 1, Para. 1). The materials submitted by the applicant meet the requirements of the procedure both in quantitative and qualitative terms.

4. Assessment of the professional background of the candidate

Dr. Bozhil Hristov began his philological education at Sofia University, where he received his Bachelor's degree, and continued at the world-renowned Oxford University, where he was successively awarded Master's and Doctoral degrees. At all three academic levels he performed brilliantly.

This impressive educational start has been followed by a successful academic career - in 2012 he won an assistant professor competition at Sofia University "St. Kliment Ohridski", and soon after that became a chief assistant professor in the same institution.

For ten years he has been an active member of the academic community, both in terms of research and teaching.

First of all, his significant contributions in the field of linguistic research should be noted: he has published two monographs and two chapters in collective monographs, seven articles and studies in scientific journals, four articles in conference proceedings and two articles in peer-reviewed collections. He also has experience as a book editor and reviewer. His interests are in the

field of grammar, historical linguistics and the description of the historical development of language.

Besides, his teaching experience is rich and varied. He teaches a wide range of bachelor's and master's courses: *Practical English/ General and Academic English, Practical Grammar, Morphology, Historical Linguistics, History of English, Analysis of Old English and Middle English Texts, Principles of Linguistic Analysis*. On his own initiative, Dr. Hristov has organized an informal circle for reading and analysis of Old English and Middle English texts. In addition, he has been improving his qualification by participating in projects for digitalization of courses and for developing innovative methods and technologies in education.

In our professional communication, Dr. Hristov has always demonstrated a spirit of collegiality, innovation and enthusiasm. Especially interesting are our discussions, dedicated to modern syntactic non-transformational models.

5. Evaluation of the candidate's submitted materials

The habilitation work presented by the candidate examines in depth the grammaticalization of the perfect in view of its historical development and structure in English and Bulgarian. The 368-page text follows a clear logical structure.

After a short **introductory part**, the actual analysis begins in **Chapter 2**, where its theoretical preconditions are discussed. The reflections focus on the two main concepts: *language change* and *grammaticalization*. The author critically examines the theories of *language change*, comparing the advantages and disadvantages of teleological, intentional and functional approaches, and in conclusion presents his motives for choosing a research model.

Grammaticalization is also convincingly considered in the broader aspect of phonological, morpho-syntactic and semantic-pragmatic changes, justifying the need for complex analytical reanalysis.

In **Chapter 3**, Dr. Hristov presents his concept of the history of the English perfect. The development of *have* and *be* forms and the competition between them is described, in the light of the replacement of some more archaic preterite forms. The author's conclusions are based on his own concordance of examples derived from existing corpora, whose volume is very large – billions of words. This ensures high reliability of the results. The precision and range of processing of the corpus material are impressive. The author has systematized the results in tables and diagrams (Appendix 1), through which he has covered a period of more than two centuries (late XV c. – late XVII c.), focusing exhaustively on each decade. In this way, he has very clearly shown the trends and dynamics of the studied linguistic change according to the occurrences (in absolute and relative value) of the main formants *have* and *be*, their combinations and some other elements. In addition, a comparison with research about later periods was made. All these results are theoretically analyzed in detail as related to other grammatical phenomena, such as passive, polygrammaticalization of generic verbs, ellipsis of auxiliary verb, etc. In the same thorough manner, the causal factors for the change, such as language contacts, areality, general language norms (e.g. logical underspecification), and others, have been considered. This multifactorial historical analysis of the perfect in English is a serious theoretical contribution of the work.

What is more, next in **Chapter 4** and **Chapter 5**, Dr. Hristov goes into even greater depth, focusing separately on the perfect in each period: Old English, Middle English and Modern English. The empirical research aspect is further strengthened through another corpus of specific texts, compiled by the author for the purposes of the monograph. This corpus is smaller but is more

carefully selected and composed than the previously available ones. Such large-scale empirical basis and its precise processing constitute very significant assets to the book. The particular analyses are interesting and can be sources for a wide range of linguistic research, since they draw connections to other phenomena, such as coordination, inflection markers, the passive, copula verbs, ellipsis, etc.

The scope of the analysis is further expanded in **Chapter 6**, where a comparison is drawn to the perfect in the cognate German language (which has preserved both types of perfect forms). Analyzing an 18th century German text, the author provides more evidence for his hypothesis that linguistic change is not mainly motivated by functional reasons but rather results from random changes and language contacts. In addition, Dr. Hristov interprets some specific traits of English in relation to the Carolingian Sprachbund (dominated by the French language). In this way, he provides the analysis with an exceptionally large-scale comparative background, additionally broadened by commenting on the affiliation of Bulgarian language to the Balkan Sprachbund.

Chapters 7 and 8 are devoted to the perfect in the Bulgarian language. Analyzing it, the author appropriately draws connections to the specific interactions between the Bulgarian temporal and aspectual systems. In addition, Dr. Hristov consciously involves himself with a discussion with a long history in Bulgarian grammar, in which many prominent Bulgarian linguists, such as A.T.-Balan, V. Georgiev, K. Popov, Y. Penchev, R. Nitsolova and others, have taken part over the years. The discussion is whether a participle preceded by *imam/ have* represents a newly grammaticalized perfect or just a specific construction. B. Hristov supports the opinion that the grammaticalization of *have*-perfect in the Bulgarian language is today still embryonic at best, and also that its geographical spread is from West to East. He brings to the discussion additional motivation for the emergence of *have*-constructions, which is based

on non-functional reasons. According to him, the factors are, on the one hand, the mixing of active and passive participles and, on the other hand, language contact, namely, the West European or Greek influence. His arguments are thoroughly and convincingly presented. Along these lines, the book makes its significant contribution to Bulgarian grammar and historical linguistics.

Another important contribution here is the preparation of the author's own corpus of Old and Middle Bulgarian, containing four types of texts. In addition, he presents particular detailed analyses of the Bulgarian texts by analogy to those of the English texts in the previous chapters, which preserves methodological consistency and good parallelism in the structure of the whole book. The results are processed in tables, and their interpretation includes convincing comparisons with other forms, such as those of conditional, passive, aorist, imperfect, evidential, etc.

The author also draws attention to the comparative Anglo-Bulgarian aspect of the perfect. He points out that Bulgarian and English are typical representatives of the east-west split in perfect formation. Although this split concerns the participle of the lexical verb in the complex verb form, it also affects the choice of an auxiliary verb. In addition, Dr. Hristov highlights a number of similarities between Bulgarian and English perfect, such as common motivating factors for the grammaticalization of *be/ sym* and *have/ imam*, leading to reanalysis of the non-specific meanings of these verbs.

The last **Chapter 9** of the book contains conclusions, summarizing its most important contributions in a concise and clear manner.

The bibliography section of the book is especially rich and detailed. I would recommend only that some grammatical contributions of Miroslav Yanakiev about Old Bulgarian be added.

In addition to the habilitation book, the candidate has presented a sufficient number of research papers and studies that correspond to the main habilitation topic and have been published in prestigious international magazines.

6. Conclusion

On the grounds of the above considerations concerning the habilitation work, the scientific publications, the teaching activity and the professional development of Chief Assistant Professor Dr. Bozhil Petrov Hristov, I am glad to suggest to the esteemed scientific jury that he be given the title of Associate professor in professional field 2.1. Philology (Grammar and Historical linguistics – English language) at the Department of English and American Studies, Faculty of Classical and Modern Philology, Sofia University "St. Kliment Ohridski".

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