

REVIEW

Regarding: the competition for the academic position of **professor**
in higher education area 2. Humanities,
professional field 2.1. Philology
(Phonetics and phonology – English language),
published in State Gazette, issue no. 30 of 15.04.2022

Candidate: Associate Professor Dr. Snezhina Lyubozarova Dimitrova,
Department of English and American Studies, Faculty of Classical and Modern Philology,
Sofia University “St. Kliment Ohridski”

Reviewer: Prof. Dr. Dimitar Dimitrov Popov, Department of Bulgarian Language, Faculty of
Humanities, Konstantin Preslavsky University of Shumen

The only participant in the competition for the academic position of professor in professional field 2.1 Philology (Phonetics and phonology - English language), which was announced by Sofia University “St. Kliment Ohridski”, is Assoc. Prof. Dr. Snezhina Lyubozarova Dimitrova. The documents submitted by the candidate have been prepared carefully. They provide the academic jury with all the necessary information regarding the candidate’s professional research and teaching qualities and qualifications. This allows me to claim that the candidate Assoc. Prof. Dr. Snezhina Dimitrova meets all the requirements of the Law for the Development of the Academic Staff in the Republic of Bulgaria and the Regulations on the terms and conditions for obtaining scientific degrees and employment to academic positions in Sofia University „St. Kliment Ohridski“.

1. Education and professional career

Snezhina Dimitrova’s career has been associated with Sofia University since she was a student: in 1981 she defended her master’s thesis in the Department of English Philology, and in 1999 she received her PhD from the now renamed Department of English and American Studies of Sofia University, where she continues her academic career to this day. From 1991 until 2007, she worked first as an assistant professor, then as a senior and principal assistant professor, and in 2007 she qualified as an associate professor. She has also worked at a number of foreign universities.

Between June and September 1997, she worked on a project at the Department of Linguistics and Phonetics, the University of Reading, UK. From September 2005 to September 2006 she held the position of research associate on the project “Prosodic structures and processes in speech production” at the Department of Linguistics and English Language,

Edinburgh University, Scotland, UK. Between June and August 2009 she worked on another project at the same department. From January to June 2013 she was a Fulbright Fellow at the Department of Linguistics, the University of California Los Angeles. The main topics of her research and teaching during her work abroad are in the field of Bulgarian and English language studies, as well as in certain areas of general linguistics, including applied ones.

2. Scientific research activities

The diverse research interests of Associate Professor Snezhina Dimitrova are oriented towards various aspects of the field of practical and experimental phonetics, the contrastive analysis of English and Bulgarian speech, the teaching of English pronunciation, the modeling of English pronunciation, the acoustic analysis and annotation of speech databases, speech prosody with a focus on speech rhythm and intonation, as well as the prosodic transcription of speech.

She participates in the current competition with an impressive number of scientific publications - a total of 49 published ones, including 3 monographs (2 of them for participation in the competition), 6 chapters in collective monographs, 2 teaching aids, 5 studies (2 of them for participation in the competition) and 29 papers (11 of them - in refereed publications for participation in the competition), i.e. published after occupying the academic position of "associate professor". The papers represent the scientific contributions of Snezhina Dimitrova in the above-mentioned thematic areas of her research interest and fully correspond to the profile of the announced competition for professor.

Assoc. Dr. Snezhina Dimitrova's research presented in the monograph *Prosody in L2. Bulgarian-Accented English* possesses the qualities of a habilitation thesis for the purposes of the competition and is focused on the prosodic characteristics of Bulgarian-accented English. In it, the author reviews some of the most popular theories of second language acquisition and describes the most popular patterns of English intonation. The chosen methodology for comparing the prosodic systems of L1 and L2 is based on the L2 intonation learning theory, and the preferred theoretical framework is based on the autosegmental-metrical phonology outlined by Janet Pierrehumbert and Mary Beckman. Using the ToBI model as an analytical framework and annotation tool, the author manages to compare the intonation systems of English and Bulgarian in order to reveal the similarities and differences between the two languages, on the basis of which she makes predictions about the likely intonation deviations in the L2. As can be seen from the results, the systematic comparison of the phonological models of English and Bulgarian intonation reveals a number of similarities between the tonal

inventories, the tonal phonotactic possibilities and the tune – text association in the two languages. However, one of the differences which the researcher found refers to the hypothetical existence of the prosodic word as a unit in the prosodic hierarchy of the Bulgarian language. This is a serious contribution to enriching the theory and terminological inventory of Bulgarian intonology. And although additional research is probably needed to confirm this hypothesis, the assumption is made that the different hierarchies of prosodic units in the two languages could create problems for Bulgarians learning English and that in their speech we can expect possible deviations from typical English norms due to native language interference at the prosodic word level. That is why the author rightly notes that it is exactly such kind of detailed analyses of the tonal phonotactics which compares the tonal combinations in English and Bulgarian that emerges as another topic for a future study in the systemic dimension, and which could also reveal a number of other important differences between these two languages. In addition, Dimitrova notes an additional potential source of difficulties for Bulgarians in acquiring the prosody of English as L2, namely, the differences that exist between English and Bulgarian in focus marking strategies, such as the rare de-accentuation of old information in Bulgarian. Bulgarian pitch accents, which often have variable alignment of the tonal target with the syllable that by definition carries the tone, are described in detail by the author: according to her, this variability is due both to speaker-specific articulation strategies and to the position of the stressed syllable in the phrase. Therefore, it can be concluded that due to native language transfer, the variable positioning of the tonal targets is the likely cause of deviations in the English pronunciation of Bulgarians.

Another difference in prosodic realization noted by the researcher is the presence of a wider range and higher level of the fundamental frequency used in Bulgarian and in English spoken with a Bulgarian accent, compared to native English. The conclusion that emerges from this comparative cross-linguistic study of prosody in the two languages is that, based on the differences between English and Bulgarian in terms of lexical accents and positions, it can be predicted that Bulgarians are likely to have difficulty acquiring English word stress. The „syllabic weight-insensitive“ system of Bulgarian and the rather complex information needed to identify the stress position in an unfamiliar English word can make it difficult to formulate and teach clear rules for stress placement in English. The different cues to stress which seem to be important in the two languages are also a potential source of problems – both in the production and the perception of stress. In conclusion, on the ground of everything said so far it can be argued that the use of lexical stress is a likely cause of possible problems – both in the systemic and the realizational dimensions of the prosodic model used. Thus, the comparison of

the rhythmic characteristics of English and Bulgarian can even predict the deviations from the stress-timed rhythm typical of English in the speech of Bulgarians learning the language, precisely because of native language interference. Therefore, and also through the approbation of the results presented by the author in the conclusion of the monograph, the theory of L2 intonation learning proposed by Mennen (2015) is becoming increasingly popular as a tool for learning L2 intonation, for comparing the similarities and differences between native and foreign intonation, and for formulating and testing research hypotheses about the difficulties experienced by foreigners acquiring L2 prosody. Overall, the study shows the progress of the autosegmental-metrical theory of intonational phonology, as well as the growing popularity of the ToBI analytical framework and annotation system, which open up new perspectives for the study and teaching of foreign language prosody.

Compositionally, Snezhina Dimitrova's research is structured symmetrically, following the classical concordant proportionality of differentiating the individual parts. The bibliographical information from the cited sources testifies to the exceptional professional competence of the author.

Both in terms of content and structure the monograph unequivocally meets all the requirements for creating a scientific text according to the genre's regulations. It will be useful for specialists, bachelor and doctoral students who are interested in the problems of modern English phonetics, interpersonal communication and foreign language learning.

The book is the first monographic research in English and American studies in Bulgaria whose aim is to address questions from different research areas in the field of phonetics and pronunciation training, some of which are yet to be investigated on a larger scale because of their relevance and multifaceted character/nature.

3. Teaching activities

The teaching of Assoc. Prof. Dr. Snezhina Dimitrova at Sofia University "St. Kliment Ohridski" includes core undergraduate lecture courses and seminars for students in disciplines such as *Practical Phonetics 1 and 2*, *Phonology*, *Discourse Phonology*, *English Intonation*, as well as the elective courses *Varieties of Spoken English* and *Languages and Cultures of Scotland*.

The MA lecture courses read by Assoc. Prof. Dimitrova at Sofia University include *Applied Phonetics and Phonology*, *Phon2: phonetics beyond the basics*, *Introduction to English Pronunciation* and *Varieties of English Pronunciation*.

She also regularly teaches an *English Phonetics* course as part of teacher retraining

courses.

The materials developed by her for lecture courses, seminars and electives are either completely qualitatively new or have been periodically updated.

Assoc. Prof. Dimitrova's teaching and advisory activities go hand in hand with her work on various research and educational projects. She was the head of four projects during the evaluated period: head of the Bulgarian team during the final stage of the international Copernicus project No. 1304 “*BABEL: a multi-language database*” (1995-1998); head of the Bulgarian team on the international Socrates – Erasmus project “*Phon2: Phonetics Beyond the Basics*” (2000-2002); head or team member of bilateral projects with the University of the Saarland, Saarbruecken, Germany; head of two departmental projects “*Creation of a unified test system for the linguistic disciplines*” (2012), “*Ireland and Europe: cultural and literary encounters*” (2015).

Assoc. Prof. Dr. Snezhina Dimitrova has supervised a number of successfully defended diploma theses, mainly on topics relating to phonetics and the teaching of English pronunciation. She is currently the supervisor of two doctoral students, whereas three of her other doctoral students have already successfully defended their dissertations.

As can be seen, the teaching activities of Associate Professor Snezhina Dimitrova are extremely rich and diverse in subject matter, and they fully meet the requirements of the profile for holding the position of professor in the current competition.

4. Administrative activities and participation in academic community life

Assoc. Prof. Dr. Snezhina Dimitrova was secretary of the Bulgarian Society for British Studies (2000-2005) and board member of the Academic Foundation for English and American Studies (AFEAS – 2012-2018). It is especially important to note S. Dimitrova’s membership in authoritative national and international organizations: the International Phonetic Association - IPA, the British Association of Academic Phoneticians - BAAP, the Bulgarian Society for the Study of English. In addition, Assoc. Prof. Dimitrova has served as a member of Technical and Scientific committees and as a reviewer of papers for a number of scientific forums: the International Congress of Phonetic Sciences - ICPHS (2007 - 2019), Speech Prosody (2014 - 2022), Interspeech (2014 – 2022), *Phonetica* journal (2016), etc.

In addition to what has been said so far, I would like to point out her team spirit, high professional ethics as well as her collegial propriety in her work as a co-author and member of the Department of English and American Studies at Sofia University.

5. Contributions

The interdisciplinary character of Assoc. Prof. Dr. Snezhina Dimitrova's research is

reflected in her papers, studies and monographs. Her work has contributed to the pool of existing studies in the field of the humanities in Bulgaria, to comparative, English and American studies, by expanding the range and content of the terminological apparatus of the Bulgarian language in the field of experimental phonetics and phonology. These contributions are directly applicable in her own teaching of practical phonetics. It is obvious that this routine in English pronunciation training has already been tested during classes with students, which has helped the author to realize its empirical adequacy and turn the text into a mature product for habilitation.

Amongst the many merits of her works, the originality and systematicity of the descriptive and explanatory models, the solid and extremely diverse nature of the illustrative empirical material, the many observations, conclusions and generalizations stand out.

More specifically, what has been said so far can be summarized as follows: The scientific contributions in the publications submitted for participation in the current competition are focused on the following interrelated scientific areas which correspond to the field of the announced competition for the academic position of “professor” in professional field 2.1. Philology (Phonetics and Phonology (English language), namely:

- **intonation analysis** with a focus on the intonation systems of the modern Bulgarian and English languages, conducted within the framework of the autosegmental-metrical model of intonational phonology and the intonation transcription and annotation system ToBI (see publications No. 1, 4, 7, 12 from the list of publications presented for participation in the competition);
 - **analysis of the rhythm of speech** with a focus on modern Bulgarian in comparison with English (see publications No. 1 and 2 from the list of publications submitted for participation in the competition);
- **influence of the native language prosody on the prosody of the foreign language** in the pronunciation of advanced Bulgarian learners of a foreign language (English and German) (see publications no. 1, 6, 8, 9, 10 from the list of publications submitted for participation in the competition);
 - **prosodic interference in the speech of bilinguals** - bilingual speakers of Bulgarian and Judezmo (see publications No. 3, 11, 14 from the list of publications submitted for participation in the competition);
- **teaching English pronunciation** to Bulgarian students of English philology with a focus on teaching speech prosody and on the choice of pronunciation model (see publications No. 1, 2, 5, 6, 9, 10, 13, 15)

Assoc. Prof. Dr. Snezhina Dimitrova is a researcher with solid theoretical and methodological training who puts forward productive ideas, develops them conceptually successfully, and tests their validity through adequate experimental design.

CONCLUSION

As a member of the scientific jury and in my capacity as a reviewer, I express my unequivocal support of the choice of the candidate Assoc. Prof. Dr. Snezhina Lyubozarova Dimitrova to hold the academic position of 'professor'

The documents and materials presented by Assoc. Prof. Dr. Snezhina Dimitrova **meet all the requirements** of the Law on the Development of the Academic Staff in the Republic of Bulgaria, the Regulations for its Implementation and the relevant Regulations of Sofia University "St. Kliment Ohridski".

The candidate in the competition has submitted a **sufficient** number of scientific works published after her habilitation as an associate professor. The candidate's publications contain original scientific and applied contributions that have received international recognition. A representative part of the publications appear in journals and scientific collections published by renowned international academic publishing houses.

The theoretical works have practical applicability, and some of them are directly oriented to be used in teaching. The scientific and teaching qualifications of Assoc. Prof. Dr. Snezhina Lyubozarova Dimitrova are **unquestionable**. The results she has achieved in her academic and research activities **fully** correspond to the specific requirements of the Department of English and American Studies at the Faculty of Classical and Modern Philology of Sofia University "St. Kliment Ohridski".

След детайлно запознаване с представените в конкурса материали и научни трудове, анализ на тяхната значимост и съдържащите се в тях научни, научно-приложни и приложни приноси, намирам за основателно да дам своята **положителна** оценка и да препоръчам на Научното жури да изготви доклад-предложение до Факултетния съвет на ФКНФ на Софийския университет „Св. Климент Охридски“ за избор на доц. д-р Снежина Любозарова Димитрова на академичната длъжност ‘професор’ After getting acquainted in detail with the materials and research papers presented in the competition, an analysis of their significance and of the scientific, scientific-applied and applied contributions contained in them, I find it reasonable to give my well-grounded positive assessment. I recommend that the scientific jury prepare a report to the Faculty Council of the Faculty of Classical and Modern Philology of Sofia University "St. Kliment Ohridski" proposing the

election of Associate Professor Dr. Snezhina Lyubozarova Dimitrova to the academic position of "Professor" at Sofia University "St. Kliment Ohridski" in higher education area 2. Humanities, professional field 2.1. Philology (Phonetics and Phonology (English)) for the needs of the Department of English and American Studies of Sofia University "St Kliment Ohridski".

13.08. 2022

Shumen

Reviewer:



/Prof. Dr. Dimitar Popov/