

## REVIEW

of the application for the position of Professor in Phonetics and Phonology (English language), branch of science 2.1 Philology, announced in “Darzhaven Vestnik” 30, 15 Apr, 2022.

Reviewer: prof. Vladimir Zhobov, Sofia University “St. Kliment Ohridski”

The only applicant for the position is Associate Professor Snezhina Lyubozarova Dimitrova, a long-time lecturer at the Faculty of Classical and Modern Philology at the Sofia University “St. Kliment Ohridski”. She has submitted 15 publications, all but one (№ 15 in the list of selected publications) written after her habilitation in 2007, including a habilitation thesis: “Prosody in L2: Bulgarian-Accented English” (Sofia: Polis Publishers, 2022, 174 pp.).

The habilitation thesis is concerned with the role of prosody in the learning of a foreign language (L2). Prosody is often thought of as the last resort of what is loosely called “foreign accent”. But while there may be nothing wrong in speaking with an accent, to quote from the text: “speech production errors involving stress and rhythm cause incomprehensibility more often than errors involving individual sounds” (p. 122).

In the introduction (pp. 9 – 21) prosody is defined as comprising such features of human speech as stress, rhythm and tempo, and intonation. Each of these terms is defined succinctly, yet thoroughly in the following pages.

In the second chapter, “Prosody in L2”, Snezhina Dimitrova provides an overview of some of the most popular models of L2 learning (pp. 23 – 26) and concludes that they are preoccupied with segmental acquisition and lack comprehensive theory and model for learning the prosody. She finds such a comprehensive model in Mennen’s L2 Intonation Learning Theory, developed within the framework of Autosegmental-Metrical model originally proposed by Pierrehumbert. At the same time Mennen’s theory builds upon the predictions made by some of the previous models.

Chapter 3 is dedicated to the most influential analyses of English intonation on both sides of the Atlantic, with special emphasis on Autosegmental-Metrical model and the related system ToBI, which is dominating the current literature on intonation. It is important to note that Snezhina Dimitrova was among the first to apply ToBI and its notational conventions to Bulgarian, predated only by Bistra Andreeva, with whom she has collaborated in important research papers. This model is the closest to a prosodic equivalence of the International Phonetic Alphabet that is available, and this is what Dimitrova discusses the last section of the chapter. She

is aware of explicit claims that it “should not be seen as a prosodic version of the International Phonetic Alphabet” (from the ToBI website), but argues convincingly that it has already proven its effectiveness and adaptability. There is no doubt that such a system would be a major achievement, but at present important differences between the two transcriptional tools remain. Both Mennen’s model and Dimitrova’s analyses of English and Bulgarian intonation include, among others, systemic and realizational dimension, in analogy to phonemes and allophonic variation (the term “allophonic” is actually used in the text with such meaning, p. 70). While IPA was never intended to distinguish between phonemes and allophones, ToBI in its present form seems to be less suited to indicate variation in the realizational dimension. The reader may see an illustration of this on page 90 where the same pitch accent is said to be implemented differently but is indicated in the same way. On the other hand, ToBI may prove to be indispensable in some areas, e.g. in annotating corpus data, where the only other way to provide information about the intonation is to make available the sound file.

The next chapter is an overview of the intonation in the two best known varieties of English – American (General American or Mainstream American English) and British (Received Pronunciation or Southern Standard English) – and Contemporary Standard Bulgarian. The Bulgarian part is of special importance and signals a change in the author’s perspective. Besides an overview of previous research, it is also, at least partly, a summary of Dimitrova’s own contribution to the establishment of the ToBI model for Bulgarian (see above for Andreeva’s work in the same area). This model includes the inventory of tonal categories, their relation to the information structure and the communicative type of the utterance, and their phonetic realization, as well as 5 break indices corresponding to the degree of juncture between words and phrases. A full record of an utterance includes the waveform and the spectrogram with the F0 track, and separate tiers for tones, syllables, words, and break indices. I would disagree with the Bulgarian Transliteration Law from 2009 as a guideline for transliteration, because according to this act the vowels written in Cyrillic as *a* and *ъ* are both transliterated with *a*. Phonetic papers do not have to comply with administrative acts or they risk inconsistencies such as in p. 90 where we see “*slyn*” in the syllable tier and “*slanceto*” in the word tier, both under stress.

In the next chapter Dimitrova compares the prosodic features of English (particularly GA) and Bulgarian and makes some predictions about the difficulties that Bulgarian learners may face in the acquisition of English prosody. On the systemic dimension the inventory is almost identical. In the prosodic hierarchy of Bulgarian Dimitrova posits the additional level of “prosodic word”, which is perfectly justified by the large inventory of clitics and the complex structure of the prosodic word in Bulgarian. There are also dissimilarities in the realizational and in

the semantic dimension. It is interesting to speculate whether similarities and dissimilarities in expressing “lack of commitment” (p. 111) in the two languages may have something to do with the fact that this meaning is morphologically encoded in Bulgarian, which has a complex system of evidentials. Special attention is paid to the focus marking in Bulgarian and English, and finally to stress and rhythm, the latter seen as a scalar arrangement of languages from one extreme, stress-timed (exemplified by English), to another, syllable-timed (exemplified by French), with Bulgarian occupying intermediate position.

In the sixth chapter, central to the book, Snezhina Dimitrova reports the results of several experiments that she designed and carried out throughout the years in order to confirm or abandon observations and predictions about the prosody of Bulgarian and English. The focus in the theoretical overview is primarily on the target tones, and the experimental part deals with other prosodic features. The first experiment concerns the perception of stress and rhythm. The results clearly indicate that Bulgarian speakers identify stress in isolated words with very few mistakes but experience problems in identifying rhythm and stress in connected speech, which confirms that the two languages have different speech rhythm.

In the next experiment Dimitrova tested the tolerance of Bulgarian speakers towards stress clashes. The stress clash resolving or un-resolving in Bulgarian can only be a part of the wider picture of rhythmic differences between the two languages, otherwise why testing a rule only because it exists in another language? More importantly, stress clash as a concept must be established by other procedures in Bulgarian, with or without comparison to English. Strictly speaking „орлов поглед“ and „син молив“ can be interpreted as stress clash resolving only if exactly the same speakers say e.g. „орлов кафез“ and „черен молив“. Not in every case of “variable stress” all, or even the majority of speakers use both forms, albeit with preference to one of them.

Dimitrova left out, for no apparent reason, the appendices with the test sentences used in these two experiments. As a reviewer, I can find them in another book, based on her dissertation – “In Search of Speech Rhythm in Bulgarian (in comparison with English)”, № 2 in the list – but the readers of this book will not have this opportunity. The second experiment is presented in this text partly, without the analysis of the stress lapses which can be found in [2]. It is clear that Bulgarian is more tolerant to longer sequences of unstressed syllables, but in some constructions a new stress, which may be termed additional, appears on a clitic. Thus the phrase “не го виждам” has one stress to many compared to both „виждам го“ and „не виждам“.

Finally, in this chapter, Dimitrova presents a comparative analysis of the intonation of Bulgarian, Bulgarian-accented English, and English based on an experiment in progression, in which native speakers of Bulgarian and English read

and recorded Aesop's fable "The North Wind and the Sun". On the first step six advanced learners of English from Sofia University read the fable in Bulgarian and in English, and for comparison Dimitrova used publicly available recordings of the same fable by speakers of RP and GA, one for each. The analysis include the F0 characteristics (mean and median F0, pitch span) and temporal characteristics (mean syllable duration, speech tempo, intonation phrase and pause duration). One of the conclusions from this first analysis is that the native speakers of English use wider pitch span, and the native speakers of Bulgarian used narrower pitch span in English than in Bulgarian. This is, as Dimitrova notes, in line with "a well-known impressionistic observation regarding the intonation of Bulgarians speaking English, namely, that their pitch range is noticeably "flatter" (p. 133). Since this is a book and not a collection of papers, already here it should have been stated that the follow-up studies contradict this observation, no matter how appealing to the intuition. In 2021 six native speakers of English recorded the same fable and their pitch span turned out to be narrower than the one in Bulgarian and in Bulgarian English. The same was confirm in a study by Dimitrova and Andreeva, in which Bulgarian-accented German was added and the number of Bulgarian speakers was raised to ten. In addition to other duration-related parameters, this study takes into account the articulation rate and the speech rate. Predictably, Bulgarian speakers used slower rate in L2. It would be interesting to relate this parameter to the information structure.

One result that is consistent through the three stages of the experiment is that Bulgarian speaker of English produce more intonation phrases and, conversely, use shorter intonation phrases and more pauses that speakers of L1 (English). This is explained with the need for more time for planning. There might be another reason, at least for more confident speakers who would not be daunted by reading in a foreign language, and these are the Bulgarian punctuation rules, which require a comma before each relative clause, restrictive or non-restrictive. Thus in a read passage a pause may appear in places where there would be no actual break in speech. This, however, will wait for further research.

Most of the publications in the selected list are either written in collaboration with other scholars (3, 4, 7, 8, 9, 11, 12, 14, 15), without statement of individual contribution, or are incorporated in the book discussed above (6, 10). All but the last of the co-authored publications are concerned with the two of the long-time subjects in Dimitrova's scientific work – intonation and speech rhythm. They enlarge the characteristic of her approach to scientific research, which is based on well designed and executed collection of data, excellent knowledge in spectrography and other tools for acoustical analysis, sophisticated statistical analysis, and convincing interpretation of the results. Her writing is clear, with well-defined and consistent use of linguistic terminology. Her methodology combines the model of speech

description which serves as a base for the widely accepted IPA's phonetic alphabet with advanced theories such as the Autosegmental-Metrical model. The achievements of Bulgarian phonetics are also integrated, with special care in cases of (partial) terminological difference. A good example of this is the treatment of "vowel reduction" in the book on the speech rhythm (p. 72).

As a long-time lecturer at the Sofia University Snezhina Dimitrova is also interested in the problems of teaching English at tertiary level. Publications 13 and 15, the latter written with Vladimir Phillipov, provide a balanced view on an important problem – the choice of pronunciation model (RP or GA), based on analysis of students' attitudes towards several accents of English.

Quite timely is the paper "Teaching English Pronunciation During the Covid Pandemic", in which Dimitrova discusses various digital resources for teaching English pronunciation. I think that the home page of Peter Ladefoged, not so long ago considered by many to be the world's leading phonetician, is worth adding to the list.

The list of contributions is an adequate account of Snezhina Dimitrova's achievements. These contributions pertain to two subfields of linguistics, phonetics and phonology, in which Dimitrova has proven herself to be a competent and respected investigator. Her scientific work enriches the knowledge about the prosodic and rhythmic structure of Bulgarian, and also the methodology of contrastive studies of intonation. Last but not least, the results of her investigations may be applied in the practical acquisition of English intonation by Bulgarian learners.

Without any reservation, I propose that the scientific jury elect Snezhina Lyubozarova Dimitrova for the academic position of Professor in Phonetics and Phonology (English language), branch of science 2.1 Philology.

10.08.2022

(Prof. Vladimir Zhobov)

