OPINON

by Professor Ruselina Nicolova, Dr. Habil.,

regarding senior assistant lecturer Dr. Bozhil Petrov Hristov,

candidate in a selection procedure for the academic position of *associate professor* in 2.1. Philology (English Grammar and Historical Linguistics) at the St. Kliment Ohridski University of Sofia, advertised by the University of Sofia in the State Gazette No. 87 of 19.10.2021

**Information about the selection procedure**

I was appointed as a member of the selection committee for the academic position of ‘associate professor’ by the Rector of the University of Sofia, letter of appointment No. РД 38-541 of 17.11.2021.

The only candidate in this selection procedure for the academic position of ‘associate professor’, advertised in the State Gazette **No. 87 of 19.10.2021**, is senior assistant lecturer Dr. Bozhil Petrov Hristov.

The materials submitted by the candidate include all the requisite documents necessary for the selection procedure. Dr. Hristov is in compliance with the minimum national requirements set out in Article 2b, Paragraphs 2 and 3, of the Development of Academic Staff in the Republic of Bulgaria Act.

**Information about the candidate**

B. Hristov graduated from the National Trade and Banking High School, as well as Sofia’s English Language High School (as an extramural student); he received an excellent education at two universities – St. Kliment Ohridski in Sofia, where he completed a BA in English Language and Literature, as well as the University of Oxford, where he completed a Master’s and a doctoral degree in General Linguistics and Comparative Philology. He has also attended a wide array of courses and programmes in various fields of linguistics in a number countries: the 4th and 6th Naxos summer schools in early Indo-European languages, Greece; courses in German language, literature and culture in Freiburg and Trier; the LSA’s linguistics summer school at UC Berkeley, doctoral training in linguistics at UCL; teacher training at Oxford, as well as an Erasmus exchange programme at the University of Sheffield’s English Language and Linguistics Department. Apart from his native Bulgarian, he also speaks excellent English, as well as German, and has worked with Slavonic languages too; furthermore, he has knowledge of the following ancient and mediaeval languages: Latin, Old and Middle English, as well as Old Bulgarian, alongside a background in Indo-European studies, which is a prerequisite for working in the diachronic academic field which he has chosen as his specialisation. Last but not least, he has a solid background in general linguistics too.

 **Academic output**

 B. Hristov has submitted a vast amount of academic output for the purposes of the current selection procedure: two books, one of which is based on his doctoral dissertation, in addition to a habilitation monograph, two major book chapters, three chapter-length articles, as well as three journal articles and three articles in collected volumes or conference proceedings, most of which were published in prestigious international outlets.

 In this overview, I should like to pay special attention to the theoretical background of his work, as well as the descriptions he offers of Bulgarian and other Slavonic languages.

 B. Hristov’s doctoral dissertation, published as ‘Agreement and Case Assignment in the Context of Nominal Coordination and Beyond’, is cast in the framework of Lexical-Functional Grammar, whose advantages over other models are defended by the author. I completely agree with the author’s main conclusion that ‘a modular approach to grammar is best placed to deal with the empirical facts’ (p. 310/introdcution). It is necessary to bring together purely morpho-syntactic, declensional information, syntactic hierarchy, order and constituency, coupled with semantics and pragmatics. This conclusion is one of the major contributions.

 The author provides a perceptive critical assessment of the existing literature on agreement, which is instrumental in clearly outlining the specificities of the theoretical model which he then goes on to develop. What is more, he examines agreement in Serbian and Croatian, Bulgarian and English. Since there are often no hard-and-fast rules in agreement, but rather merely statistical tendencies, in his description of Bulgarian the author has collected data from a native-informant questionnaire, comparing it to the material harvested from the Internet, thereby providing quantitative data for individual cases.

 Hristov has offered a neat outline of the question of Bulgarian noun gender, paying special attention to the role of animacy. However, it should be noted that, unlike Russian, Bulgarian does not operate with the semantic dichotomy of animate vs. inanimate; instead, there exist two oppositions restricted to the context of masculine nouns when they are used with different types of numeral: object vs. non-object, as well as person vs. non-person.

 The former opposition between objects and non-objects is instantiated in combinations of masculine nouns referring to objects (inanimate objects, but also animals) with so-called count plural endings in the context of cardinal numerals higher than ten or quantifiers such as *колко/kolko* ‘how many’, *няколко/njakolko* ‘some, several’, *толкова и толкова/tolkova i tolkova* ‘so and so many’, on the one hand, as opposed to masculine nouns with personal reference, which take the ordinary plural when combined with cardinal numerals, on the other, e.g.

*дванайсет стол****а****/dvanajset stol****a***‘twelve chairs.count’, *колко стол****а****/kolko stol****a***‘how many chairs.count’, *толкова и толкова стол****а***/*tolkova i tolkova stol****a*** ‘so and so many chairs.count’; *дванайсет кон****я****/dvanajset konj****a***‘twelve horses.count’, *колко кон****я****/kolko konj****a***‘how many horses.count’, *толкова и толкова кон****я****/tolkova i tolkova konj****a***‘so and so many horses.count’ vs.

*дванайсет учител****и****/dvanajset učitel****i***‘twelve teachers.pl’, *колко учител****и****/kolko učitel****i***‘how many teachers.pl’, *толкова и толкова учител****и****/tolkova i tolkova učitel****i***‘so and so many teachers.pl’.

It is worth noting that the group of objects includes animals, unlike Russian, where animals grammatically pattern with humans in terms of animacy. This confirms that Bulgarian linguistic intuition accords humans a separate semantic class, which is also the case in Polish, for instance, where scholars likewise recognise two classes of nouns: personal vs. non-personal based on their case endings (see Laskowski 1979: 40–43); cf. also examples with pronouns (interrogative, indefinite, negative, universal): ***Какво*** *те е ухапало?/****Kakvo*** *te e uxapalo?* ‘What bit you?’ ***Кой*** *те е ухапал?/****Koj*** *te e uxapal?* ‘Who bit you?’; ***Някой*** *ме удари./****Njakoj*** *me udari.* ‘Someone hit me.’***Нещо*** *ме удари./****Nešto*** *me udari.*‘Something hit me.’ ***–*** the opposition obviously operates in terms of person vs. non-person.

The opposition between object and non-object is marked with dedicated morphology on the member of the opposition which indicates objecthood (i.e. the inanimate noun); in addition, Bulgarian nouns are characterised by yet another opposition, namely one of person vs. non-person, where both members of the pair have their own marking. The morpheme indicating personhood has a special exponent for masculine personal numerals from 2 to 10 with the suffix -*(и)ма/-(i)ma* in combination with masculine personal nouns appearing in their ordinary plural form; by contrast, the morpheme indicating non-personhood finds expression in the count form of the noun, with the numeral being an ordinary cardinal, as in:

***трима*** *учител****и****/****trima*** *učitel****i***‘three teachers’;***петима*** *студент****и****/****petima*** *student****i***‘five students’ vs.

*три кон****я****/tri konj****a*** ‘three horses’, *пет вол****а****/pet vol****a***‘five oxen’; *три стол****а****/tri stol****a***‘three chairs’ *пет нож****а****/pet nož****a*** ‘five knives’.

It is worth noting that when a masculine noun combines with a masculine personal numeral, this can designate not just sets of males, but mixed groups containing females as well: *Там имаше пет****има*** *учител****и*** *– два****ма*** *мъж****е*** *и три жен****и****./Tam imaše pet****ima*** *učitel****i*** *– dva****ma*** *maž****e*** *i tri žen****i****.* ‘There were five.masc.psnl teachers there – two.masc.psnl men and three women.’

 Since different varieties of Bulgarian have different formal variants of the oppositions outlined above, Standard Bulgarian sometimes sees deviations from the norms set out in the preceding paragraphs.

 In conclusion, I should like to stress that B. Hristov’s doctoral work is a piece of in-depth linguistic research with significant contributions based on material from several languages, with Bulgarian and English occupying centre stage. Apart from setting out to collect enough data on some less frequent phenomena, employing various methods of data collection, the author stands out with his erudition when it comes to different areas of linguistics, as well as his critical assessment of other scholars’ work and the ability to create a well-thought-out, theoretically sound model for describing the phenomena under investigation within the theoretical framework selected. It is noteworthy that he thus opens up new research horizons.

B. Hristov’s habilitation monograph *Grammaticalising the Perfect and Explanations of Language Change* appeared as volume 10 of the world-famous *Brill’s Studies in Historical Linguistics* – a fact which cannot fail to underscore its indisputable academic merit. In the author’s own words, the book presents a happy marriage of traditional philological techniques and recent advances in theoretical linguistics and corpus work. The monograph opens with a short but very informative critical assessment of different views about grammaticalisation and reanalysis; quite importantly, Hristov clearly states the theoretical position he will be taking in his work. The study focuses on grammaticalising the perfect in English in comparison with German and Scandinavian, as well as grammaticalising the perfect in Bulgarian and Macedonian in a wider European typological context. Having carried out an in-depth historical analysis of perfect constructions in English, the author concludes that ‘the grammaticalisation paths of *be* and *have* are more likely to have been steered by their non-specific meanings, which easily lend themselves to reanalysis and greater abstraction (instigated by contact or just everyday monolingual interaction), rather than by any perceived “functional needs” or “preferences” of the languages or their speakers’. Although the issue the author takes with the role of functionalism in the respective grammaticalisation processes seems to be fully justified in this case, I do not think that we can completely ignore its role more widely, at least in accepting or rejecting innovations.

The history of the perfect in Bulgarian is also examined in sufficient detail, with very competent analyses of samples from major historical texts, including an interesting comparison between passages by contemporary writers who come from different regions – D. Dimov and D. Talev. The author demonstrates that the Bulgarian perfect did not change dramatically in terms of its semantics prior to the rise of evidentiality. The various agreement deviations exhibited by the participle have to do with semantic phenomena on the sentence level, for instance impersonal constructions, some of which can also appear as personal ones, as in *валяло/valjalo* ‘it was/has been raining’, *минало/minalo* ‘[time] (has) passed’. B. Hristov likewise pays special attention to the new *have*-perfects in Bulgarian and Macedonian. It is regrettable that, despite the rich bibliography, he has missed my 2016 paper *О затруднениях при грамматикализации. Поссесивный перфект и экзистенциальный пассив в болгарском языке* in: *Балканското езикознание днес/Balkanskoto ezikoznanie dnes* ‘Balkan Linguistics Today’, a festschrift on the occasion of the 75th birthday of Prof. P. Asenova, Dr.Habil., Sofia, pp. 140–152, where I examine those two phenomena in detail, including their morphology, semantics, lexical makeup, idiosyncrasies, and information structure, based on corpus material and in comparison with other Slavonic languages – Macedonian, Serbian, Ukrainian, establishing the extent to which they are grammaticalised. I demonstrate that their modern use is due to intellectualising trends in written languages.

I would like to reiterate that B. Hristov’s habilitation monograph is an excellent scholarly volume making a tangible contribution to studying the history of English and Bulgarian, which is moreover highly relevant in terms of theoretical linguistics as well.

In the same vein, I fully support B. Hristov’s conclusions in publication No. 9 concerning the influence of pragmatics and context in grammaticalisation, in view of the availability of more than one interpretation of a given construction. The listener’s background knowledge also comes into play in the context of oral communication.

 B. Hristov has also made a valuable contribution to the development of LFG as a theory, enriching it with Slavonic data in his chapter on Slavic languages published in: Dalrymple, Mary (ed.). *Handbook of* *Lexical Functional Grammar*, ISSN (online): 2366-3529, Language Science Press, Berlin. It is a special honour for a young scholar like him to have been invited to contribute to a handbook of this magnitude. Hristov has sifted through all of the LFG literature on Slavonic, providing a neat and perceptive analytical summary of all the major points, including the morphology-syntax interface, agreement and government, clause structure and information packaging, as well as various types of clauses, among other topics. Throughout the exposition, the candidate highlights the advantages of LFG over other contemporary theories. In addition, he also draws parallels between various matters in Slavonic linguistics and in English.

Building on earlier analyses within LFG, B. Hristov provides a very intriguing theoretical explanation of the curious AANN construction, consisting of the indefinite article *a* + adjective + numeral + plural noun; this study appeared in an OUP collected volume entitled *Modular Design of Grammar.*

 Indexed in Scopus and Web of Science, publication No. 5, *Pronominal Case Assignment in English*, is dedicated to the English case system. B. Hristov distinguishes between three varieties of Modern English in terms of canonical or non-canonical case assignment to pronouns functioning as heads or dependents. The literature review demonstrates that a unified account of the relevant phenomena has up until now remained elusive. The author fleshes out a model within LFG, appealing to three basic notions: constituent structure, functional structure and lexical constraints. The paper ends with the claim that English pronouns still exhibit case distinctions.

 In the paper The Atoms of Language. Review Article on Anna Kibort & Greville G.Corbett (eds.), Features: Perspectives on a key notion in linguistics (Oxford Linguistics)., *Journal of Linguistics*, vol:51, issue:3, 2015, pages: 644–676, Ref, Scopus, Web of Science, B. Hristov reviews in detail the edited volume mentioned in the title, which in turn investigates phonological, morphological, syntactic and semantic features from the vantage points of approaches as diverse as typology, computational linguistics and formal theories like Head-driven Phrase Structure Grammar (HPSG) and Minimalism. The candidate’s review article explores the internal and cross-linguistic validity and correspondence of features, as well as the boundaries between morphology, syntax and semantics. With regard to the latter question, Hristov passionately defends the claim that Bulgarian has only 3 tenses: present, aorist and imperfect, with the other analytic tenses labelled as syntactic combinations. It has long been known that syntactic combinations can become morphological forms as a result of grammaticalisation, which can be more or less advanced, so there is no hard border between those two parts of grammar, and there are no clear demarcations, as noted by Hristov himself. On the other hand, we ought not to lose sight of the fact that every linguistic sign, be it simple or complex, represents a unity of form and meaning. It is the meaning of both synthetic and analytic Bulgarian verbal forms, building an orderly system for the linguistic segmentation of ontological time, that justifies treating them together despite the indisputable (varying degrees of) formal difference between the two types of form.

 Based on a corpus from 2014, Hristov’s publications No. 7 and 8 provide a thorough and accurate examination of the morphological adaptation of the latest English loanwords in Bulgarian.

 Publication No. 11 considers verbal and (predicative) adjectival uses of some Bulgarian particles and interjections, including *ела/ela* ‘come’, *хайде/xajde* ‘come on’, *мерси/mersi* ‘thanks’ and *чао/čao* ‘bye’. Publication No. 12 traces how English historical linguistics has been taught at Bulgarian universities, highlighting the benefits of studying it as a core subject.

 **Citations**

The candidate has submitted for consideration 24 citations, of which six are in journals indexed in Scopus and/or Web of Science, five in overseas dissertations, two in prestigious international monographs, five in conference proceedings, mainly dedicated to Lexical Functional Grammar, and one in a Bulgarian journal. This demonstrates that his work is well known in the international linguistic community. Hristov has served as a member of major international organisations and committees.

**Teaching**

Hristov has taught English at various Bulgarian language schools and has work experience as a translator and editor; between 2008 and 2011 he taught linguistics at Oxford’s Faculty of Linguistics; since then he has been employed as a part-time lecturer, full-time lecturer, and senior lecturer of English, grammar and historical linguistics at the University of Sofia. He has the necessary specialist qualifications for the advertised job. He is the recipient of a number of awards and has served as a member of major international organisations and committees.

**Conclusion**

In conclusion, I would like to stress that the only candidate in the selection procedure for the position of associate professor in 2.1. Philology (English Grammar and Historical Linguistics) at the St. Kliment Ohridski University of Sofia, senior lecturer Dr. Bozhil Hristov, is the best possible choice for the job of associate professor. He has a solid background, coupled with significant academic merit and contributions, some of which internationally recognised, in the field of the history of English and Bulgarian. He is furthermore one of the few Bulgarian scholars who have a penchant for linguistic theory. He is a staunch proponent of the framework of Lexical Functional Grammar. Hristov is a very good lecturer, having taught not only at the University of Sofia, but also at Oxford and other internationally acclaimed institutions. That is why it is with deep conviction that I support the appointment of senior lecturer Dr. Bozhil Petrov Hristov to the position of associate professor in 2.1. Philology (English Grammar and Historical Linguistics) at the St. Kliment Ohridski University of Sofia.

 **Signature:**