

## **REVIEW**

by Prof. Mira Kovatcheva, PhD

of the research output of Assoc. Prof. Alexandra Bagasheva, PhD

Regarding the selection procedure for the academic position of “Professor” at the Department of English and American Studies, Sofia University, in the professional field 2.1. Philology, discipline (General Linguistics – Cognitive linguistics and word formation, English language), promulgated in State Gazette, issue 48 from 28.06.2022.

The application documents are in order and are in line with the legal requirements. The reference for the national requirements for application shows that the applicant’s achievements exceed the minimal requirements along all three criteria.

### **The applicant’s background**

Assoc. Prof. Alexandra Bagasheva receives her master’s degree in 1995 at the Department of English and American Studies, Sofia University. She has provided certificates for numerous additional qualifications acquired in this country or abroad.

Alexandra Bagasheva’s professional career at the Department of English and American Studies of Sofia University begins in 2002. In 2004 she defends her Doctoral thesis. In 2012 she is appointed as Associate Professor.

### **Evaluation of the applicant’s teaching experience**

Assoc. Prof. Bagasheva has taught at all levels of university education. At BA level her main course has been *Introduction to General Linguistics* but she has taught at least 8 additional courses to do with English semantics and grammar (cf. CV). In various programs at MA level she has taught 7 courses, and at PhD level another 2.

### **Evaluation of research publications**

The applicant’s engagement in teaching has been inseparable from the production of serious theoretical investigations. For the present selection procedure she has submitted one monograph, a dictionary, 4 teaching books and 12 articles, all published after her appointment as Assoc. Prof. in 2012. In reality, Bagasheva’s publications are many more and on a larger scale. They were published by prestigious publishers abroad. However, she has decided not to submit them for the present procedure. Her productivity as a scientist has been remarkable. She is the paragon of a person who does not shy away from work and this can be seen from the number of courses she has designed and taught at the university. I will also add the fact that she has taken part in over 15 research projects, 4 of which she has supervised.

The linguistic community in this country and abroad respect Bagasheva as their active colleague. This transpires from the number of quotations of her publications. Although not very clearly stated in the submitted reference, one can count references to 10 of her articles from the list valid for the present procedure. Most of the quotes in *Scopus* and *Web of Science* refer to other publications but are nevertheless taken into account as fulfillment of the minimal requirements. Another aspect of Bagasheva’s profile is linked to her presence at many Bulgarian and foreign scientific forums where she has given presentations. Her activity as editor and compiler also deserves mention.

I’d like to emphasize that from the very start of her research career Alexandra made known that her unwavering interest stands with theoretical linguistics. Together with the choice of a narrower research field - word formation in English and Bulgarian – she very soon developed a distinct personal style of writing: dense, polemical and in the long run – downright

categorical. One of the merits of her quests is the deliberate search for oft neglected and seemingly peripheral topics. In this way she stands out as a pioneer in the formulation of a certain position regarding controversial linguistic problems, especially with respect to Bulgarian linguistics.

In connection with the innovation orientation of the applicant's thinking one must mention her great erudition. She belongs to those researchers who include long lists of bibliographical references in their publications. It is a pity that certain Bulgarian sources are missing even in her long lists. As a lecturer in general linguistics Alexandra demonstrates good familiarity with most interdisciplinary links between structural linguistics and related disciplines such as cognitive psychology, psycho- and sociolinguistics, cultural studies. Linguistic anthropology, language change, typology etc. As a result, another characteristic feature of her work is interdisciplinarity. The contrastive English-Bulgarian analysis goes without saying.

The major topic in the publications presented for the selection procedure (beside the teaching materials) are English and Bulgarian compounds, whether verbal or nominal (cf. No. 2, 3, 6, 8). No. 4 and 9, as well as the monograph (18) focus on theory. Central in No. 5 and 11 are the interesting observations on imagery from a cognitive point of view. No. 13 and 15 discuss culturally specific aspects of meaning. Six of the publications are co-authored (mainly teaching books).

The expectations for the book *Prototypes, metonymy and word formation* are that one can find there in a crystalized form the continuous efforts of the author to get to the bottom of what motivates compounding. The text covers 140 pages, including the following sections:

*In lieu of an introduction, Theoretical framework, Prototypes and iconicity, The feud between Metonymy and word formation, What have prototypes done to<sup>2</sup> compound nouns in Bulgarian, Reduplicative compounds, What have prototypes done to compound verbs in English, In lieu of a conclusion.* There is also an afterword "for the curious reader", followed by a reference list – long as usual.

The theoretical bias and the choice of research field are not a surprise. The first 3 sections are most ambitious. In her usual intense and provocative style Alexandra introduces us to the newest tendencies in the interpretation of her research object. She demonstrates not only excellent knowledge of the relevant literature, but – what is more important – she strictly follows a path of her personal choice in between the different approaches. These first sections are difficult to follow due to the almost total lack of examples. We find examples in the next 3 sections. The link between the first three and the next ones is rather loose. The reader's own responsibility is to keep in mind the relevance of the two major working concepts of prototype and metonymy. Queries around the examples are unavoidable too. E.g., *взел-дал* does not look like the result of reduplication, could be a construction based on ellipsis. Another nagging question is why contact phenomena have not been mentioned in connection with the Bulgarian N+N compounds (most of them contain a loan-word, e.g. *парти умора, инсентив туризъм*). The Bulgarian verb compounds on the other hand are mostly historical borrowings from Russian. It goes without saying that the cognitive processes involved in the use of existing lexical items differ from the ones involved in creative word formation. This is the same as saying that if words are actions (as Alexandra fortunately believes) then we are dealing with two types of action.

The closing section comes out as an unfamiliar genre indeed. It is as if here the author is looking for justification for the views outlined in the book, which are in fact rather firmly stated. She has added some concessions and a lot more quotations to build something like an

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<sup>2</sup> However, I would have preferred a less "accusing" *What have prototypes done for*....

“argument of authority”. Instead of diminishing the book’s value, I think that such a move shows Bagasheva’s honest treatment of her object of research. If, while reading, I was doubtful about the monograph nature of the work, reaching the end of the book I got to the conclusion that the book is not so much about word formation as about the linguistic quest as a cognitive enterprise and about language as a way of being of human cognition. Although the author’s ideas haven’t reached ultimate crystallization, the work is a worthy effort. As far as word formation goes, the results from the investigation have appeared in many other publications and review articles (cf. the list of publications).

I will use the opportunity to make some general comments on trends in contemporary linguistics for comparison with the theoretical issues raised in the work under review. The end of the twentieth century hastened the decline of structural linguistics and the formal approaches to language. Criticism of them has been focused around the so-called "written bias" since the very birth of linguistics as a science. Because of this bias, the fact that spontaneous speech obeys completely different principles remains unaccounted for. Some authors go so far as to completely deny traditional linguistics as a science of language and give it a place only as a pedagogical discipline. Attention to the human nature of language as an evolutionary product, that is, as a cognitive achievement for optimal survival in the human niche, has intensified. This means that linguistics is more akin to biology, ecology, psychology, phenomenology, cognitive sciences, sociology, anthropology. It also means that language is first and foremost behavior (linguaging). Analytical philosophy and positivism are not suitable methods of inquiry. The relationships inside and outside the organism are so complex that the most appropriate theoretical framework is Complex Adaptive Systems, since well-known features of language find a convincing explanation in the features of the CAS. Their main characteristic is non-linear causality, that is, the interactions are both bottom-up and top-down, and there is no predictable order or number of cycles. An almost mystical feature of CAS is that the result of the interactions of multiple factors is not equal to the sum of the contributions of each factor, but something more – the result is emergent. It is precisely this property of CAS that defines innovation, and in language, creativity. That is why the postulates of analytical philosophy are being displaced by theories of knowledge, which pay attention to the relationship of man with his "Umwelt" - knowledge is not closed within the boundaries of the brain, not even in the body. We are talking about distributed cognition. Also, the thesis about embodiment is supplemented with 3 more aspects - cognition is extended (i.e. uses artifacts from ecology), embedded, enacted. These "4 e-s" define the field of Constructivism in the theory of knowledge. An important advantage of constructivism is the consideration of both the cognitive and the social nature of language.

All these developments are inextricably linked to meaning making, i.e. semiotics is invariably present in the new research studies, and mainly Peircean semiotics. The new cognitive studies on language (since around the 1980s) strive to overcome the main hard problem (known precisely as "the hard problem") for the humanities – about the relationship between matter and consciousness. It may not be possible to reach a solution, but it is important to realize (paradoxically) that there are phenomena inaccessible to consciousness. Peirce famously considered the sign to be a habit, and for Wittgenstein some linguistic phenomena were "forms of life" and cannot be subjected to explanation (both sound like prophetic insights). True icons (firstness) and indexes (secondness) are not accessible to consciousness. Only mediated relationships (thirdness) are accessible to consciousness, i.e. language. There is no initial sign – each sign is a continuation of another sign and generates a subsequent sign. In other words, language is not a collection of words "stored" in the mind, and the "rules" are not accessible to consciousness during "linguaging". Language is not a code and no data is stored in memory as *representations* for use online. The description of rules and categories is a meta-

activity, an analysis of products after the fact, wittily called by a young philosopher "hyperliteracy".

Linguistic behavior (language) is in secondness, therefore there can be no content and signification there. It is no coincidence that most models for describing meaning, such as Relevance Theory, Conceptual Blending Theory, and even cognitive semantics, consider phenomena only post factum and from the listener's point of view or from the data of already reified language units. One of the problems of traditional (and not only) linguistics is identified as unwarranted reification (hypostatization) of epiphenomena.

Since language is an activity (another twist on the spiral of scientific development going back to Humboldt), its parameters are temporal, whereas in traditional and first-generation cognitive linguistics the inevitable metaphorization of linguistic terminology is exclusively spatial (which, by the way, is ubiquitous) – levels of grammar structure and analysis respectively, horizontal and vertical relations, centre and periphery, mental spaces, Langacker's rectangles and trajectories, the circles of Fauconnier and Turner's model of conceptual integration and many others. There is talk of domains, of frames and slot-filling; words are almost boxes in which one part is filled by the concept and the other – by form. According to more recent views, secondness manifests itself in perceptions, feelings, past and immediate experience ("the interface between action and environment", as cited on p. 119). It is there where we talk of pre-linguistic phenomena that do not lend themselves to formalization. As for concepts, they are already thirdness, intrinsically dynamic and develop in conjugation with their symbolic carriers (words). They combine generality, actuality and possibility (modalities of the sign according to Peircean semiotics), and this fact is responsible for the notorious underdeterminacy of the meaning of words. Phenomenologically, words are experienced as names of objects and thus facilitate manipulation in expressing the inherently ineffable (secondness).

This long digression will serve to outline what is innovative in the interpretation of the specific linguistic phenomenon in Bagasheva's book. It is obvious that the study of word formation is eminently suitable as a source of inferences about fundamental theoretical questions. The following aspects of the trends in modern linguistics, briefly described above, are advocated in the book:

- 1 Language should be discussed interdisciplinarily
- 2 Language is a Complex Adaptive System
- 3 Language is a specific phenomenon in the evolutionary niche of man
- 4 Words are actions
- 5 Words are underdetermined
- 5 Meaning making is an emergent process
- 6 Pre-linguistic processes are involved in the generation of innovations
- 7 After exchange in the community, the innovation is reified and entrenched
- 8 Language is not compositional; the impression that it is comes after the fact and is meta-analytic.
- 9 In linguistic analysis it is imperative to distinguish between process and product

Some elements of the approach in the book may be my personal interpretation. For example, I wish the meta-knowledge Alexandra writes about (eg, p. 118) was what Stephen Cowley calls "taking the language stance." It refers to the implicit knowledge (secondness) that there is language available as an expression of thought. Children acquire this stance during life experience in parallel with the acquisition of language. Here I see an opportunity for paradigm

influence, as the author suggests. At this meta-cognitive level, language functions as a form of life<sup>3</sup>.

However, the ostensive structure of language is linear, strictly hierarchical, and phenomena are causally related, unlike the ever-dynamic unconscious. How one comes to be the other is the twilight zone for any discipline. Obviously, memory also plays a role, but the closest thing to any understanding of what memory is is the concept of simulation. Simulation is the only productive model for studying CAS. It is used by experimental psychology e.g. by Barsalou (cited by Alexandra p. 119). Barsalou expressly avoids commenting on what is conscious and what is not regarding man's conceptual system. According to the 4e approach, however, there is knowledge that is part and parcel of action and does not need any representations.

I seem to find similar ideas in Alexandra's book. Unfortunately, very often she does not clarify the terms she borrows from other authors. Her doubts and torments are understandable, since she has to deal with concepts from areas a philologist is not prepared to deal with. Undoubtedly, she takes into account the immense complexity of the process of meaning making through form, but the frequent repetitions and many quotations sound rather declarative.

Another example of the need for a more explicit motivation in the borrowing of terms is the mathematical concept of *superposition* (superstate) as an analogy for the nature of words. For it, Alexandra trusted one of her inspirers, Gary Libben. After consulting a few sources, I came to the belief that this concept is similar to *prototype*. Rather than a set of energy states, the term probably refers to the word as a set of possibilities represented in the generalized meaning. Each current use is one of the fixed possibilities. It can be said that the mentioned modalities of generality/actuality/possibility lie at the basis of the concept, and it is also reminiscent of the semiotic pair type/token.

Regarding the concept of prototype, Lakoff (1987:391) warns of "a profound misunderstanding of the nature of prototype theory", and Gregory Murphy explains that the trouble lies in the reification of a process, which Givon (2005: 46) calls an "adaptive compromise". In other words, a prototype is not a "thing" with causal potential. In general, philologists must handle the philosophical concept of causality very carefully. That is why the titles *What have prototypes done to nominal composites in Bulgarian* and *What have prototypes done to verbal composites in Bulgarian* sound paradoxical to me. In the same connection, I do not understand the usefulness of the term "ontic" (used without explanation p. 29, 47, 52). Heidegger himself renounces it, and later publications argue that the ontic is not given to us in experience (similar to Peirce's firstness). Some philosophers contrast the ontic perspective and the epistemic one, i.e. the observation of states in the system versus knowledge of the system. Then such contrast would be close to the mentioned categories of secondary and tertiary. Still, it is not clear how paradigms as ontic categories can have causal power.

My impression is that the conscious and unconscious levels of language function or analysis are not sufficiently differentiated in the text, incl. by the most frequently cited authors Libben and Schmid. The need for differentiation is actually evident in Alexandra's distinction between composition as a process (both unconscious and conscious, I would add), and compounds as a lexical class (the meta-meta-level of linguistic analysis based on speaker usage). It is also evident in one of her main research questions, whether metonymy is a formal cognitive operation in the configuration of meaning or a substantive cognitive operation at the lexical level. I think that distinguishing pre-linguistic processes from namely semiosis would also be fruitful in the discussion of N+N composites and compounding by reduplication. For

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<sup>3</sup> It is different from the meta-level mentioned as "hyperliteracy" above. Hyperliteracy is rather meta-meta-knowledge on the part of qualified language researchers and is expressed in the proliferation of interpretations and scientific metaphors, of grammatical epiphenomena and theories and then treating them as real.

example, I do not find it convincing that in the first case it is a matter of 2 concepts combined at the pre-linguistic level, say *office* and *furniture* (офис мебели), but a matter of a non-symbolic correlation.

In my opinion, in doing linguistics it is more logical to use concepts from the humanities such as semiotics, phenomenology, epistemology, neuroscience, biology, etc. In the book semiotics is mentioned just in passing, almost as lip service, given that metonymy is an indexical sign. Here there is an opportunity to use the explanatory power of Peirsean secondness and thirdness. Metonymy as an access point (Langacker, cited on p. 57) is probably precisely secondness. In (Gibbs 2012: 63 Interpreting figurative meaning, CUP) direct access is also given priority in the interpretation of figurative meanings. Instead, Ruiz Mendoza uses metonymy as both a semasiological fact and a creative process. I would ask the candidate to give a specific example of where and how she thinks metonymy intervenes in compounding, as the lack of examples in the first part of the book makes it very difficult to judge what has been read.

Regarding the examples – it is a shame they are from dictionaries and no linguistic context is given, let alone concrete usage in spontaneous speech. This stands out as a contradiction to the basic idea of word formation being a process.

### **Evaluation of contributions in the works of Assoc. Prof. Bagasheva**

Alexandra Bagasheva's book raises many fundamental questions and prompts serious reflection. It presents a peak in the many years of in-depth research by the author and is undoubtedly a personal achievement. Alexandra, in her own way, confirms conclusions presented in other contemporary cognitive studies. I have no objections to the chosen method, on the contrary, I believe that it can be applied to describe almost all language processes. Contribution means that one's efforts can influence the understandings of the linguistic community at large. The question arises whether the author's message will reach the fraction of the community she has addressed. Hardly like this. Alexandra's style is intense and "elitist" and requires an effort from the reader to fill in missing links between the parts of the model. I'm sure she will expand on this text in the future.

In my opinion, the applicant's greatest contributions are in the publications on specific material (No. 5, 11, 13, 15). The semantic and cultural-sociological analysis there is original and instructive, in the sense that it fills unexplored areas in word formation. From a theoretical point of view, the greatest contribution, to my mind, is the proof of the non-lexical nature of the components in compounds, as well as their non-compositional creation. Assoc. Prof. Bagasheva accepts that the onomasiological pattern is primary, not the individual building morphemes.

### **Conclusion**

Assoc. Prof. Bagasheva's research and teaching are many-sided and extensive in volume. She is an active member of the linguistic community with a markedly innovative spirit, always ready for challenges. The materials submitted for the selection procedure exceed the requirements not only in quantity, but also in quality. That is why my assessment is categorically positive and without hesitation I recommend Assoc. Prof. Alexandra Bagasheva to the esteemed jury for appointment as Professor in the professional field 2.1. Philology, (General Linguistics – Cognitive linguistics and word formation, English language).

Reviewer:

27.10. 2022 г.

Prof. Mira Kovatcheva, PhD

