

OPINION

by

Prof. Dr. Milena Borisova Popova, Department of Spanish and Portuguese Studies, Faculty of Classical and Modern Philology, Sofia University “St. Kliment Ohridski”, appointed as an academic jury member by a Decree № ПД 38-541/17.11.2021

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

Chief Assistant Professor Dr. Bozhil Hristov has published in the fields of Grammar, Historical Linguistics and History of English. He teaches bachelor’s and master’s courses in the same fields at the Department of English and American Studies at Sofia University. The submitted papers and monographs meet the requirements for holding the academic position *Associate Professor*. They are indicative of the evolution of the candidate’s scientific ideas, and reflect his contributions, professional qualities and intellectual potential.

B. Hristov’s habilitation monograph “*Grammaticalising the Perfect and Explanations of Language Change. Have- and Be-Perfects in the History and Structure of English and Bulgarian*” presents in a succinct and systematic way the results of the theoretical and empirical analysis of the grammaticalisation processes and language change in English and Bulgarian, focusing on have- and be-perfects. In the Introduction, the author explains his choice of topic and its relevance, outlines the structure of the monograph and the main research questions. The structure of the work is carefully considered and allows the author to explore the main problems in depth. In Chapter 2, B. Hristov presents and analyses critically the main theoretical

approaches used to conceptualise language change and grammaticalisation. He draws attention to some controversial claims within the evolutionary and functionalist models of language change, offering some alternative explanations instead. In Chapter 3, the candidate explores the main trends in the evolution of have- and be-perfects in Old English. The text is structured following the logic of the general theoretical chapter. B. Hristov presents, first, a detailed and in-depth account of conceptions which explore the competition between the two ways of grammaticalising the perfect. The analysis takes into consideration such factors as morphological marking, frequency of use, and ambiguity. The candidate once again highlights problematic areas and questions the validity of some of the commonly accepted theories. For instance, he argues that theories explaining the domination of *have*-perfects with the functional overload of *be* fail to take into account the polygrammaticalisation of *have*, which can be used in passive, causal and modal constructions. As a result, the author explores and highlights new types of explanations based on the frequency of use and language contacts. The thorough and systematic argumentation of these theoretical claims goes hand in hand with an impressive and ambitious analysis of corpus data.

In the chapters that follow, B. Hristov investigates the main problems using selections of texts from different periods: Old English, Middle English, and Modern English. Furthermore, he explores the functional semantics of have- and be-perfects in Bulgarian from a diachronic perspective, focusing on the interaction between the aspectual and temporal systems. The analysis is again conducted on the basis of a sample of texts selected by the author.

The careful selection of texts and the original research design allow the candidate to test in practice, challenge, and rethink some traditional and widely acknowledged claims. At the same time, he emphasizes some particularities of the

functioning of have- and be-perfects, shaped by the dynamic interaction between their formal, semantic, and pragmatic aspects. The testing of theoretical models with the help of extensive empirical data enables the candidate to combine deductive and inductive approaches, which guarantees the rigour and validity of his final conclusions. In them B. Hristov argues that the grammaticalisation of the perfect cannot be reduced simply to functional explanations related to optimizing the grammatical system by eliminating ambiguity and functional overload. He claims instead that the process of grammaticalisation is often mechanical and depends on the general and unspecific meaning of the verbs *be* and *have*, as well as on language contacts within different language unions. These conclusions are made on the basis of a broad range of theoretical sources and an impressive amount of corpus data that underpins the empirical analysis.

The contributions of the habilitation monograph are particularly important in the context of the latest trends in the development of linguistic theory, increasingly oriented towards flexible and multifaceted epistemological approaches. The latter are best suited to address the complexity of the language semiosis, in which different aspects coexist, complement, and shape each other. These holistic approaches overcome the ambition of some researchers to proclaim their own particular perspective as the only possible one, as the equivalent of the ontological reality. The contemporary scientific paradigms focus on holistic approaches and integrate the achievements of different schools of thought and their interactions. It is in this context that we acknowledge the dynamic and integral approach to *be- and have-perfects*, adopted by B. Hristov, as well as his preference for complex and multifactorial explanations of language change. His approach is crucial for overcoming some of the pre-existing incomplete theoretical hypotheses. His research focuses on the paradigmatic and syntagmatic dimensions of the use of have-

and be-perfects, as well as on the interaction of the latter with the grammatical and semantic parameters of context.

Another important contribution of the monograph is the adequate combination of qualitative and quantitative methods. On the one hand, B. Hristov draws on theoretical advances related to studying rich textual corpora and electronic resources. On the other hand, taking into account the particularities of the sampling and design of existing corpora, as well as the challenges of distant reading, the candidate reaches the conclusion that the analysis of some relevant issues (e.g., ambiguity) requires a broader context, including the relevant parameters of the communicative situation. Considering the primacy of speech in language change, B. Hristov selects texts that approximate oral communication (e.g., comedies, personal correspondence, etc.). This approach helps him to rethink some traditional preconceptions and explain in a new way the dominant ways of grammaticalisation.

Last but not least, the candidate's research makes a valuable contribution to understanding the process of subjectification in grammaticalising the perfect. B. Hristov draws the attention to this process not only in the theoretical part of his habilitation work, but also in a separate article in Bulgarian, titled „Ролята на прагматиката и контекста при развитието на перфектни конструкции със *съм* и *имам* в английски и български език“ (“The Role of Pragmatics and Context in the Development of Have- and Be-Perfects in English and Bulgarian”). The article studies the role of pragmatic context in resolving the ambiguity of the above-mentioned perfects. Their interpretation depends on pragmatic inferencing based on participants' information and communicative intentions. Furthermore, the author claims that pragmatic context turns out to be an important factor in the process of semantic bleaching and grammaticalisation of have- and be-perfects. Such an

innovative approach oriented towards the indexical use of linguistic signs lays bare the internal logic of the historical development of the perfect.

In conclusion, I would like to point out that the documents and the publications submitted by B. Hristov meet 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 candidate's works make original contributions to the explanation of language change, and a large number of them have been published in prestigious international magazines. The author has elaborated an adequate research model for the investigation of the genesis and development of have- and be-perfects in English and Bulgarian, which can be used for future research on grammaticalisation. For example, the aforementioned model could be applied to the analysis of languages that are different from Standard Average European languages, thus enriching the conceptual framework of diachronic analysis. The practical applications of the present work are directly connected with the academic courses taught by B. Hristov.

On the basis of the above-mentioned considerations I would like to suggest to the esteemed scientific jury that Dr. Bozhil Petrov Hristov 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".

02.03.2022

Prof. Dr. Milena Popova