

## R E V I E W

Regarding: the scientific output and teaching activities  
of Assoc. Prof. Dr. Snezhina Lyubozarova Dimitrova –  
sole participant in the competition for the academic position of Professor in  
professional field 2.1. Philology (Phonetics and Phonology – English language),  
published by Sofia University in State Gazette, issue no. 30 of 15.04.2022.

Reviewer: Prof. Dr. Habil. Stefana Petrova Dimitrova

The documentation provided by the applicant includes all the necessary documents and materials for participation in the competition and fully meets the procedural requirements of the Law for the Development of the Academic Staff.

Assoc. Prof. Dr. Snezhina Lyubozarova Dimitrova's worthy participation in the competition includes a total of fifteen publications: two books – a habilitation monograph entitled "Prosody in L2. Bulgarian-Accented English" (2022, 174 pages) and a revised version of her dissertation entitled "In Search of Speech Rhythm in Bulgarian (in comparison with English)" (2022, 210 pages); two studies and 12 articles, some of which are co-authored. In the present review, the main focus of attention will be on this part of Assoc. Prof. Dimitrova's academic output. But since the contributions of a professor are related to their overall participation in scientific life, the candidate's solid scientific output from the period before the announcement of the competition should not be overlooked.

Prof. Dimitrova's work has been associated with Sofia University since 1991. She went through all the usual stages of research and teaching development in the Department of English and American Studies as an assistant professor, senior assistant professor and chief assistant professor, and in 2007 she received her habilitation as an associate professor. Her successful

teaching career is supported by serious scientific research, covering a total of three monographs, authorship of six book chapters, four studies, thirty articles, four reviews, co-authorship in two textbooks, editing of one collection of papers, work on three articles in preparation, active participation and management of a number of international and departmental projects, etc. Assoc. Prof. Dimitrova's active participation as a presenter at national and international conferences as well as her editorial activity also deserve attention. All this lies at the basis of the high esteem that she enjoys at home and abroad, which is proved by all the citations and reviews of her works, systematically presented in the documentation according to the scientific editions in which they appear (referenced and indexed in world-renowned databases of scientific information, such as Scopus or Web of Science, peer-reviewed monographs and collective volumes, and peer-reviewed non-refereed publications). The candidate is successful both as an independent author and as a co-author of collective works, which testifies to her ability to work in a team which is not easy to achieve in any intellectual field. Her current commitments also include the scientific supervision of two MA students and two doctoral students, reading a number of theoretical courses and conducting practical classes, etc. I must immediately note the wide range of Snezhina Dimitrova's teaching work. She teaches various disciplines to students from all courses, including six undergraduate courses, and also participates in the MA programme "Language and Culture".

At the core of the candidate's scientific interests lie phonetics and phonology and, more specifically, all aspects of the prosody of the English language. The Bulgarian language often appears in her research as a *tertium comparationis* for comparison with the foreign language, as a background for the dominant foreign language analysis and as the main object of scientific observation, to the study of which both home-brewed approaches as well as models of foreign authors created for the investigation of the English language are applied.

In the monograph "*Prosody in L2. Bulgarian-Accented English*" the role and place of prosody (and especially intonation) in the interpretation of several contemporary theories of foreign language learning is subjected to a serious critical analysis. I. Mennen's theory, based on the autosegmental-metrical

model for describing intonation, is thoroughly evaluated. Special emphasis is placed on the important distinction between phonological representation and phonetic implementation which is crucial for predicting possible ways of overcoming potential difficulties in the acquisition of the English language by Bulgarians. The outline of the similarities between English and Bulgarian in terms of their tonal inventories, tonal phonotactic possibilities and the tune-text association is based on serious research carried out by the candidate. Along with the above-mentioned similarities, the differences in the phonetic realization of the pitch accents are also discussed and defined as a potential source of problems related to native language transfer, as a result of which Bulgarian English becomes flat and monotonous. The study "*Bulgarian Tones and Break Indices: a system for intonational annotation*" outlines a system comprising two prosodic units – an intonational phrase and an intermediate phrase, five pitch accents, two phrase accents and three boundary tones, as well as their combinations in some communicative types of statements. The developed system is suitable for annotating the intonation of the Bulgarian language. When familiarizing myself with the argumentation of Assoc. Prof. Dimitrova, I discovered a certain consonance with the investigations of some German-language comparativist authors who compare the prosodic organization of Hochdeutsche with that of a number of Slavic languages, in particular Russian and Polish. What I have in mind are, above all, the monographs of Prof. Werner Lehfeldt (W.Lehfeldt, "*Akzent und Betonung im Russischen*" and "*Einführung in die morphologische Konzeption der slavischen Akzentologie*"). I would like to advise the candidate to familiarize herself with these studies, because in them the phenomena she is interested in are examined from a different point of view. For example, the concept of prosodic word is not found in them, while it is a new unit in the prosodic hierarchy of the Bulgarian language introduced by Assoc. Prof. Dimitrova. I particularly highly appreciate this point because I believe that a terminological code is a requisition for belonging to a school, and the more precise it is, the greater the explanatory power of the works in which it is used. Snezhina Dimitrova also used (without officially using a term for it) the concept of word-order combinations, which I find extremely useful in the general context of her investigations, because she skillfully ties it to the consideration of pitch accents in order to develop original strategies for signaling the linguistic information

structure. The consistent linking of suprasegmental relations with the content structure of the language is characteristic of all the work of the candidate. When Louis Hjelmslev once declared that the plane of content and the plane of expression in language are not isomorphic, a whole cohort of linguists appeared who quite consciously and categorically severed these two entities. This created many insurmountable difficulties in linguistic description regardless of research methodology and operational principles. Fortunately, Snezhina Dimitrova did not succumb to this mood and avoided a number of possible omissions in the interpretation of the observed phenomena which could have arisen in a more fragmentary description. Here once again I want to emphasize the importance of the fact that in the reviewed work word order takes its rightful place. In the article "Prosodic characteristics of sentences with communicatively marked and communicatively unmarked word order", the interest in the information structure of the sentence is manifested in the introduction of markers such as pre-nuclear and nuclear pitch accents. Everywhere the candidate notes very precisely and honestly all the used models and schemes of other authors, for example Mennen's model for the study of intonation in English and Bulgarian (in the habilitation monograph), Dauer's multi-component model for the analysis of rhythm in Bulgarian speech (in the monograph developed on the basis of her dissertation), Steedman's model in which the theme and rheme constituents of the sentence's information structure proposed by the Prague Linguistic Circle are tied to the categories of background and focus. Based on the above-mentioned interest of the candidate, I find the choice of the latter model especially appropriate, since the concepts of background and focus have been successfully used in all modern semantic-pragmatic approaches. The differences established by Assoc. Prof. Dimitrova in the realization through different tonal accents of the theme-background, on the one hand, and of the rheme-focus, on the other, is connected with an investigation of the complex process of de-accentuation. For obvious reasons, for many years scholars have paid more attention to the "obvious" process, called in Slavic-language literature accentuation and re-accentuation. But just as in semantics the process of de-semanticization was hardly studied, so in phonetics de-accentuation was bypassed, with only occasional remarks (mainly with a practical focus). Here I recall a warning by Prof. Vladimir Zvegintzev: "The invisible is just as important as the visible." If we

allow ourselves a looser analogy, we could say that de-accentuation in the prosodic domain is comparable to the null morpheme in morphology.

With inherent modesty, Snezhina Dimitrova makes no declarations about the connection of her works to the pragmatic aspects of the suprasegmental level of language. But a closer look at her research unequivocally proves that this is the scientific output of a truly modern linguist - not only in the temporal sense of the word, but modern both in style and method of work. Thus, the study "Speaker age effects on prosodic patterns in Bulgarian" is an investigation of the prosodic variability in the language of Bulgarians of different age groups. Here, the notion of age, transformed by modern conceptology into a unit of measure, is used very successfully to reveal the differences in the use of prenuclear rising tones with a high target in the stressed and post-stressed syllable. And although the author notes only the analysis of tonal repertoires and frequency of use depending on the age of the speakers, she has actually taken into account other biotic characteristics of the speakers, specifically observing older and younger speakers. In this paper, she touches upon an undeveloped and at the same time an ancient question - that of male and female dialects in human language. Ancient, because observations on it are already present in Sumerian grammar (4000 BC), and undeveloped, because its features, noted at the beginning of the 20th century by Mary Haas, and manifested most distinctly in the Louisiana Yana and Koasati languages, have not been systematically shown to date across language levels in any of the best-described modern living languages. At best, some fragmentary fixations at the lexical level exist which are somewhat satisfactory.

I have already mentioned the creative use of existing research models. I would only like to add that they are usually expanded and equipped with certain additions and, of course, illustrated with Bulgarian language material. Thus, Dauer's model makes it possible to conduct a pilot study of the phenomenon called stress clash - i.e., the tolerance for adjacent stresses, which turns out to be higher in Bulgarian spoken as a mother tongue.

Another point that must be noted is related to the author's specific attention to the phenomena of cross-language and mother-tongue interference. This question has been of interest to us, Slavicists from different countries, for a long time, and has been treated extensively in the materials

from the periodical international conferences on language interference regularly held in Veliko Tarnovo. The viewpoint of an anglicist who is a native speaker of Bulgarian and who, in addition to English, has worked successfully on other languages (in collaboration with native speakers of these languages), e.g., German (see, e.g., "Prosodic characteristics of Bulgarian-accented German"), is in a complementary relationship with the interpretations of various scholars from Slavic circles and is undoubtedly a source of ideas for research "from the other side", from another point of view. The conclusion reached by Mrs. Dimitrova in this area is interesting: "Regarding the linguistic measures ... in the foreign language, Bulgarians realize the majority of the linguistically relevant targets in a way that is very similar to the corresponding realizations in their mother tongue". This conclusion is interesting because when speaking all (or almost all) Slavic languages, Bulgarians deviate most considerably from the way in which they realize the linguistically relevant targets in their native language. This is a case of the so-called prosodic overload, which is defined by many Slavists as "undulating" speech - an absolute antithesis of the flat, monotonous Bulgarian English. In connection with this, one can think about a further psycholinguistic study dedicated to the realization of the linguistically relevant targets depending on the general attitude of the speakers towards the specific foreign language being studied. At the same time, there are, of course, common issues in speaking different foreign languages. First and foremost amongst them is the slower speed of articulation, which does not directly depend on the kinship between the native and the foreign language.

Observations on prosodic interference in the speech of one particular group of bilinguals - the speakers of Bulgarian and Judezmo - occupy a special place in the candidate's scientific work. The results show that these speakers use the same type of pitch accents and boundary tones in both languages, and differ from the Bulgarian monolinguals only in the frequency of use of some pre-nuclear accents in certain positions - something fully amenable to observation and calculation. I consider the above-mentioned observations of Mrs. Dimitrova along the lines of one of our extensive linguistic trends, the foundations of which were laid by Prof. Ivan Kanchev - a researcher of the speech of Bulgarian Jews whose mother tongue is Ladino.

The teaching of English is Assoc. Prof. Snezhina Dimitrova's whole life's work. Therefore, it is only natural that she devoted so many articles, studies, textbooks and teaching aids to it (see No. 1, 2, 5, 6, 8, 9, 10, 13, 15, etc. in the general list of publications). All of her other works would be useful for English language teachers as well because, despite their more theoretical focus, they enrich the teacher with that important kind of knowledge that we call background knowledge. It may not be communicated directly in the classroom, but it always plays an important role in improving the teaching methodology and in the thematic organization of the learning process. I consider the prediction of potential difficulties in learning English by Bulgarians to be one of the most important issues here. Even the individual difficulties associated with distance learning in emergency situations have been foreseen. Of course, the candidate's eyes are primarily focused on the prosodic level of the language being studied. But here I would like to add something that for most linguists should be self-evident. The levels of language are distinguished as a fact of theory, whereas in actual language use, they are intertwined and merge and mutually influence each other. One widely accepted claim in Eric Lenneberg's theory is that the prosodic features of the language, and especially stress are, in a sense, a filter for diagnosing both morphological and syntactic facts. This is in the realm of theory. In real speech acts, their good command facilitates illocutionary processes and generally supports successful perlocution. And vice versa - failure to master prosody often, and in fact almost always, leads to semantically inferior speech acts, called communicative failures, i.e., to nullification of the perlocutionary goal.

Mrs. Dimitrova's scientific output is presented carefully, precisely, in a well-balanced scientific style in both languages. It seems somewhat incongruous to me to make "remarks" on it in the traditional sense of the word. The author is a linguist with whom one can talk and discuss options for broadening and further development of some of the topics presented. I have tried to express some views and ideas on this in my review so far.

As required by the Regulations of Sofia University "St. Kliment Ohridski", the candidate has attached a reference outlining the scientific contributions in her works. The data in it fully correspond to what was done in the reviewed publications. I would even say that Snezhina Dimitrova has shown exceptional

modesty and could have mentioned quite a bit more of her original, innovative approaches and views. I will not repeat the content of the reference, but I want to note only some points that made a strong impression on me in the process of reading her publications. One of them refers to the question of considering rhythm not only as a temporal event, but as a much more complex phenomenon, for the description of which basic concepts are proposed - syllable and foot, isochrony in production and perception, prominence, stress and emphasis. Complex entities such as prosodic convergence and different strategies for symbolizing the information structure of the utterance have been thoroughly explored. The theoretical statements have been successfully coordinated with the experimental studies of fundamental frequency values, duration and number of intonation phrases, pauses, stressed and unstressed syllables in the English speech produced by Bulgarians at an advanced level of proficiency.

Conclusion: Everything stated above gives me reason to confidently assert that Assoc. Prof. Dr. Snezhina Lyubozarova Dimitrova fully deserves to be awarded the title of "Professor" in professional field 2.1. Philology (Phonetics and phonology, English language).

Date: 07.08.2022

Signature:

(Prof. Dr. Habil. Stefana Petrova Dimitrova)