

OPINION

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

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Assoc. Prof. Dr. Snezhina Lyubozarova Dimitrova is the only candidate in the announced competition for the academic position of professor in the scientific specialty **2.1. Philology (Phonetics and phonology (English language))** in the Department of English and American Studies at the Faculty of Classical and Modern Philologies of the University of St. Kliment Ohridski.

The development of Assoc. Dr. Snezhina Dimitrova as a specialist in the field of English phonetics and phonology is inextricably linked with SU “St. Kliment Ohridski”, where she graduated in 1981 with a major in English philology, a second major in psychology and since 1991 she has been teaching at the Department of English and American Studies: until 2007 she worked there as an assistant, senior and chief assistant, and from 2007 to from 2007 to the present is an associate professor of English phonetics. In 1999, she successfully defended her doctoral dissertation on the topic “Rhythmic organization of English and Bulgarian speech: a comparative phonetic study”, which she later revised and published as a monograph (“In Search of Speech Rhythm in Bulgarian (in comparison with English)”, Sofia: Polis Publishers, 2022, 200 pp.).

The high professional qualification of Assoc. Dr. Snezhina Dimitrova is built both in the process of her work at SU and in her numerous contacts with foreign universities: the University of California, Los Angeles: (with a Fulbright scholarship, 2013) and the universities in Reading (1997) and Edinburgh (September 2005 - September 2006; June - August 2009), where she worked on research projects related to the study of prosodic structure.

The long-term teaching activity of Assoc. Dr. Snezhina Dimitrova is carried out in the three degrees of study: Bachelor (Practical phonetics part 1 and part 2, Phonology, Variants of the spoken English language, Languages and cultures of Scotland, Introduction to English

pronunciation for various specialties); master's (Variants of English pronunciation for MP “Language and Culture”) and PhD: she is the supervisor of PhD students, three of whom have successfully defended in the last two years, and two are still working on their PhD theses. The topics of the defended doctoral theses are closely related to prosody in English and Bulgarian - the field of research developed by Assoc. Dr. Snezhina Dimitrova herself. Therefore, it would not be an exaggeration to claim that she laid the foundations of her own scientific school in English and Bulgarian phonology - a rather rare phenomenon in our scientific life of recent decades.

I would like to pay attention to the project activity with which Associate Professor Dr. Snezhina Dimitrova is involved, as it is an expression of her authority as a scientist, teacher and organizer. For two decades (from 2003-2022), Prof. Dimitrova participated in and led bilateral projects with the Institute of Phonetics and the Department of Linguistics and Language Technologies of Saarland University, Saarbrücken, Germany; he is also the head of the departmental projects “Creating a unified system of tests in the linguistic disciplines” (2012) and “Ireland and Europe: cultural and literary encounters” (2015).

The worthy place that Assoc. Dr. Snezhina Dimitrova occupies among specialists in the field of English is also evidenced by her membership in prestigious organizations and unions: the International Phonetic Association (IPA) - since 1999; British Association of Academic Phoneticians (BAAP) – since 2006; The Bulgarian Society of Anglicists (BDA) - from its establishment in 1995 to the present, and in the period 2000-2005 she was its secretary; The international scientific network SProSig – since 2017; she was a member of the Technical and Scientific Committee of the International Congress of Phonetic Sciences ICPHS (2007, 2011, 2015, 2019) and of Speech Prosody (2014 – 2022), Interspeech (2014 – 2022), etc. , she was a reviewer of reports for these scientific forums and for the scientific journal *Phonetica* (2016). From 2000 to 2005, she was the secretary of the Bulgarian Society for British Studies and a member of the board of directors of the Foundation for University English and American Studies FUAA (2012 – 2018).

In the competition for professor, Assoc. Dr. Snezhina Dimitrova applied with two monographs (one of which is presented as a habilitation thesis: Dimitrova, Snezhina. *Prosody in L2. Bulgarian-Accented English*, Sofia: Polis Publishers, 2022, 174 pp., and the other is based on her doctoral dissertation: Dimitrova, Snezhina. *In Search of Speech Rhythm in Bulgarian (in comparison with English)*, Sofia: Polis Publishers, 2022, 200 pp.); with 2 chapters of collective

monographs and 11 studies and articles in scientific collections and journals. To Snezhina Dimitrova's scientific achievements, we should also add four reviews published in “Contrastive Linguistics”, “Bulgarian Language” and The Linguist List, as well as her activity as editor of the book “New directions in synchronic and diachronic phonetics and phonology” (2016) and her participation in 12 prestigious scientific forums, most of which were held outside Bulgaria (Dresden, Lisbon, Canberra, Glasgow, Saarbrücken, Barcelona, Poznan, etc.).

The diverse scientific production submitted for participation in the current competition covers several interrelated scientific fields, which Prof. Dimitrova has presented in the list of her contributions. The first two areas of research are mainly theoretical in nature and refer to the analysis of prosody (intonation and rhythm of speech) in English and Bulgarian, carried out within the theoretical framework of the autosegmental-metric model of intonation phonology (publications No. 1, 2, 4, 7 , 12); the next two areas are related both to fundamental problems of phonology and to questions of linguodidactics, considering the influence of native language prosody on foreign language prosody in the pronunciation of Bulgarians learning English and German, and in the speech production of bilinguals with Bulgarian and Judeo (Publications Nos. 1, 3, 6, 8, 9, 10, 11, 14); the last area has a scientific-applied character and concerns the teaching of English pronunciation to Bulgarian philology students with a focus again on speech prosody (publications no. 1, 2, 5, 6, 9, 10, 13, 15).

In my further presentation, I will focus mainly on the monograph “Prosody in L2. Bulgarian-Accented English”, as it combines most of the above-mentioned areas of research.

The monograph is devoted to an often underestimated aspect of the acquisition and learning of a second or foreign language (united under the term L2): prosody in its manifestations at the level of accented word, intonation and temporal characteristics of speech. We do not need to possess any deep knowledge of the field of research in which the author works in order to realize that this scientific field is too little studied in our country: the bibliographic sources cited by Dimitrova suggest it to us. The publication of this monograph puts phonetics, phonology and linguistic didactics in Bulgaria in step with the latest achievements of world linguistics.

The monograph is structured into an introduction, five chapters and a conclusion, which presents a summary of the most important research achievements as well as opportunities for future research. Following the classic scheme of presenting the information established for the monographic genre, Assoc. Dr. Snezhina Dimitrova first builds the theoretical framework of the

study, relying on an impressive bibliography of 160 titles in English, German and Bulgarian. Introducing the reader to the theoretical problems of prosody (Chapter 1.) begins with a comprehensive and methodical definition of its main aspects: stress, tempo, rhythm and intonation. The second chapter defines the place of prosody in second language acquisition/learning and offers a critical analysis of some of the most popular models for describing English intonation from the point of view of teaching English to foreigners. Particularly important in theoretical and methodological terms is Menen's model (The L2 Intonation Learning Theory, or LILt), in which the classical distinction for linguistics since Saussure is made between emic and etic level, i.e. between phonological representation and phonetic implementation of prosodic parameters – a theory that Associate Professor Snezhina Dimitrova applies in her own research. Chapter 3 contains a description of the British and American tradition of modeling English intonation. The author convincingly motivates the choice of the autosegmental metric model of intonation phonology and the ToBI (Tones and Break Indices) system for transcribing and annotating intonation accents and indices in English. This system has been used for the last 20 years as a general methodological framework and for describing the intonation of a number of other languages, such as German, Greek, Dutch, Japanese, Korean, and thanks to the efforts of Assoc. Dr. Snezhina Dimitrova, as well as of the standard Bulgarian language.

The fourth chapter presents in depth the application of the autosegmental-metric model of intonation phonology and the ToBI system, firstly, to the intonation notation of American English and the so-called RP (or Received Pronunciation of British English - a variant that is often preferred and from the Bulgarian English students), and, secondly, to the Bulgarian intonation system. The precise description of Bulgarian intonation and intonation grammar in the theoretical framework of the autosegmental-metric model of intonation phonology in the BG_ToBI system is based on the development of Assoc. Dr. Snezhina Dimitrova together with Prof. Bistra Andreeva and has a contributing character not only for English studies, but for Bulgarian studies as well. It includes two prosodic units (an intonational phrase and an intermediate phrase), five intonational accents (L*, L*+H, L+H*, H*, H+!H*), two phrase accents (L- and H-) and three boundary tones (L%, H% and %H). An important achievement is the consideration of different communicative types of utterance, along with strategies for signaling informational structure in language through the use of different combinations of word order and intonational accents.

The fifth chapter compares Bulgarian and English prosody in order to reveal the similarities and differences between the two languages and to make predictions about the appearance of probable deviations in the intonation of L2 and standard Bulgarian, since according to the author, good mastery of the prosody of the second or foreign language draws on the well-researched similarities and differences between the two systems. The highlighting of similarities and differences is in several directions: at the system level, at the implementation level, at the semantic level, and at the frequency level. This chapter is completely innovative and contains serious theoretical-methodological contributions to the description of prosody and to the application of this description in L2 language didactics.

The sixth chapter examines the influence of native language prosody on foreign language prosody. It contains a description of author's own experiments investigating the prosodic characteristics of Bulgarian-accented English, with data from native speakers of Bulgarian with an advanced level of English proficiency and from native speakers of British English. Pronunciation differences related to metrical structure, rhythm, and stress in isolated words, phrases, and sentences are described; intonation characteristics (level and range of the main tone), temporal characteristics (duration of the intonation phrase, of the syllable, number of pauses), etc. Focus marking strategies in both languages are reported. The statistically significant differences found may be explained by native language transfer, but the author refrains from generalizations, and rather speaks of a potential source of problems. Summarizing the results of the research in the final 7th chapter, Assoc. Dr. Snezhina Dimitrova reminds that predicting the difficulties and deviations from the intonation model of the English language in the speech production of persons with Bulgarian as L1 requires a larger volume of data - especially when it is about the semantic and frequency dimension of analysis.

The monograph "Prosody in L2. Bulgarian-Accented English" is written with remarkable professionalism and depth in the treatment of the issues under consideration. The systematic description of Bulgarian intonation in the theoretical framework of the autosegmental-metric model of intonation phonology and the application of this model for the contrastive description of Bulgarian and English prosody is innovative in the full sense of this concept. The analyzes of the experimental data are carried out precisely, the conclusions are convincing, and the connection between the theoretical side of the research and its possible application in the teaching of English prosody is emphasized. Furthermore, I would like to mention that Assoc. Dr. Snezhina Dimitrova

has the rare ability to present difficult, unpopular theories to the reader in an accessible way. The many figures and tables that illustrate the text also contribute to this.

As I already mentioned, I will not dwell on the studies and articles from the list devoted to similar problems.

The limited length of this text to which I have to adhere does not allow me to comment on the monograph “In Search of Speech Rhythm in Bulgarian (in comparison with English)”, published on the basis of a defended dissertation for the award of PhD, but I accept the contributing moments in it, which the author pointed out.

I would like to mention just two more areas of research that are also innovative in nature. One is related to the influence of age on prosodic variability in the modern Bulgarian language (researched in the article “Speaker age effects on prosodic patterns in Bulgarian” (No 12 of the list). Age differences are manifested in the frequency range, the minimum values of F0, the duration of syllables and intonation phrases and the duration of pauses. I dare to hope that this pioneering study will be followed by other similar studies.

The other area has an applied nature and two thematic areas fall into it. One is related to a study of the difficulties of distance learning pronunciation during the COVID pandemic (in the article “Teaching English Pronunciation During the Covid Pandemic”, publication No 5 of the list). The advantages and disadvantages of various digital resources that students find useful are discussed. The other thematic area concerns the choice of a pronunciation model by English students and is presented in the articles “The choice of model in teaching English pronunciation at tertiary level” and “Global Spaces, Accent Spaces and their Perception by Bulgarians” (publications no. 13 and 15 from the list).

The reference in Google Scholar for the publication and citation activity of the author reports a total of 308 citations, 96 of which are after 2017. This proves that through her publications Assoc. Dr. Snezhina Dimitrova is not just “visible”, not just “present” in the field of science, but that the texts created by her are an inalienable part of the scientific research discourse in the field of phonetics and phonology and linguodidactics and have had an indisputable influence on the development of the scientific fields she researched.

Referring to what has been said so far, I would like to emphasize that Assoc. Dr. Snezhina Dimitrova meets all the requirements for occupying the position of "professor" under the announced competition, which gives me reason to propose her election to the academic position

of “professor” in the professional field **2.1 Philology (Phonetics and Phonology (English))**, announced in State Gazette No. 30 of 15.04.2022, as well as to appeal to the other members of the scientific jury to give a positive vote.

19.08.2022

Prof. Dr. Juliana Ivanova Stoyanova