

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

Reviewer: Prof. Dr. Tatyana Igorevna Aleksieva – academic jury member,
Department of Russian Language, Faculty of Slavic Studies, Sofia University "St. Kliment
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Competition details

The only candidate in the announced competition for the academic position of 'professor' in professional field 2.1. Philology (Phonetics and Phonology (English language)), published in State Gazette, no. 30 of 15.04.2022 and on the Sofia University website for the needs of the Department of English and American Studies at the Faculty of Classical and Modern Philology is Dr. Snezhina Lyubozarova Dimitrova - a long-time full-time lecturer in the same department.

The review of the documentation provided to the Scientific Jury shows that she fully meets the requirements of the Law for the Development of the Academic Staff in the Republic of Bulgaria and the Regulations on the Terms and Conditions for Obtaining Scientific Degrees and Holding Academic Positions at Sofia University "St. Kliment Ohridski".

Applicant details

Assoc. Prof. Dr. Snezhina Lyubozarova Dimitrova has a rich academic biography. In 1991, after successfully winning a competition, she was appointed as a full-time assistant professor in the Department of English and American Studies, and in 2007 she was elected an associate professor of Modern English language - Phonetics and Phonology in the same department.

Snezhina Dimitrova received the educational and scientific degree "doctor" in 1999, after successfully defending a dissertation on the topic of "Rhythmic organization of English and Bulgarian speech: a comparative phonetic study". The doctoral degree was awarded upon completion by the applicant of her doctoral studies at the Department of English and American Studies of Sofia University "St. Kliment Ohridski".

Snezhina Dimitrova has participated in a number of specializations and research projects: guest lecturer at the Department of Linguistics and Phonetics at the University of Reading, Great Britain - 1997; research associate at the University of Edinburgh - 2005-2006 and 2009; Fulbright Professor at the University of California in Los Angeles (UCLA), USA, all of which have increased her qualifications and have enabled her to establish professional contacts with eminent phoneticians outside the country.

I would like to draw particular attention to Snezhina Dimitrova's active participation in a number of university, national and international projects and expert committees:

- Team member of a scientific project funded by the Bulgarian National Science Fund of the Ministry of Education and Culture, entitled "Prosodic aspects of the Bulgarian language compared to other languages with lexical accentuation" (since 2019);

- Head of the Bulgarian team of the project "Prosodic coding of information status in a foreign language" (2018);

- Head and member of bilateral projects with the Institute of Phonetics, the Department of English and the Department of Linguistics and Language Technology of Saarland University, Saarbrücken (Germany) (2003 – 2022): *"English for international communication in academic discourse - creating a corpus of oral speech in international English in the academic field"*; *"Second Language Prosody: effects of L1 experience on rhythm and prominence of L2 speech (German, English, Bulgarian)"*; *"Intonation of Bulgarian Judeo-Spanish"*; *"A Longitudinal Study of the Intonation of the Sofia Variety of Contemporary Standard Bulgarian"*;

- Team leader of university projects: *"Creation of a unified system of tests in the linguistic disciplines"* (2012), *"Ireland and Europe: cultural and literary encounters"* (2015);

- Member of the team of a project funded by the University Complex for the Humanities "Alma Mater" (2016);

- Team member of university projects: *"Sustainable development of human resources for the purposes of university education in different languages at the Faculty of Classical and Modern Philologies through the development and implementation of electronic forms of distance learning"* (2013); *"Integral University Center for Research, Design and Delivery of Quality E-Learning in Diverse Educational Contexts"* (2009).

Assoc. Prof. Dimitrova is a member of authoritative national and international scientific organizations and associations: the Bulgarian Society for the Study of English (since 1995), the International Phonetic Association - IPA (since 1999), the British Association of Academic Phoneticians - BAAP (since 2006). In addition, Assoc. Prof. Dimitrova has served as a member of Technical Scientific committees and reviewer of articles in a number of scientific forums: the International Congress of Phonetic Sciences - ICPHS (2007 - 2019), Speech Prosody (2014 - 2022), Interspeech (2014 – 2022), *Phonetica* journal (2016), etc. She is a highly respected scholar in international professional circles.

Teaching activities

Assoc. Prof. Dimitrova's educational and teaching activities are multifaceted and include lectures and seminars in BA and MA programmes of the Faculty of Classical and Modern Philology. She reads the lectures of the compulsory theoretical course in Phonology for BA majors in English Philology and of the compulsory Introduction to English Pronunciation course for BA majors in Biology and English Language, Chemistry and English Language, Geography and English Language, and History and English Language. Assoc. Prof. Dimitrova also teaches a number of elective courses for undergraduates majoring in English Philology, namely, Varieties of Spoken English, and Languages and Cultures of Scotland. In the MA programme "Language and Culture", she teaches the course in Varieties of English Pronunciation. The subject areas of the courses taught by Assoc. Prof. Dimitrova reflect the fields of her research interests.

Assoc. Prof. Dimitrova successfully passes on her knowledge and skills to younger researchers, and so far three of her PhD students have successfully defended their doctorates, and two more are currently working on the topics of their dissertations.

Description of the applicant's research output

For the habilitation procedure as a professor, the candidate submitted a total of 15 scientific publications: two monographs, one of which is a book published on the basis of a dissertation; two studies; three articles in scientific journals, and eight articles in conference proceedings. This is a significant amount of work. The topics of the presented publications cover the phonetics and prosody of the English language, as well as the methodology of teaching English pronunciation to Bulgarian students of philology. The scientific publications have a marked contribution character and testify to the author's reputation as a profound and accurate researcher.

Of the presented publications, six are independent and nine are co-authored with other scholars. I will not evaluate the book published on the basis of a defended doctoral dissertation because it has been reviewed for another procedure. It is needed only for the purposes of scientometrics at the National Centre for Information and Documentation (NACID). One of Prof. Dimitrova's studies and four of the papers have been published in prestigious journals indexed in Scopus and/or Web of Science.

Scientific contributions

The central place among the works of Snezhina Dimitrova is occupied by the monograph. It is written in English and has the following bibliographical characteristics: *Prosody in L2. Bulgarian-Accented English* (Sofia: Polis Publishers, 2022), ISBN 978-954-796-096-1. The topic is relevant and modern both in terms of the very object of study - language prosody in the acquisition of a foreign language, a topic which has long been neglected by traditional phonology, and because it follows the contemporary trend in linguistics to use an interdisciplinary approach that combines the analytical procedures of experimental phonetics with those of contrastive linguistics and linguodidactics.

The monograph comprises an introduction, five chapters and a conclusion, and is 174 pages long. The bibliography is rich and includes 160 publications on speech prosody and intonation by English and Bulgarian authors. The text is illustrated with tables and figures (about 45) which present the data and experimental results obtained in the course of the research.

In the *first (introductory) chapter*, the status and role of prosody is justified as a substantiating concept which refers to the material means for the actualization of human speech. Here we find the most important terminological explications of major aspects of human speech such as stress, rhythm, tempo and intonation.

In the *second chapter*, a critical review of the theories of speech perception and production in L1 and L2 is made, emphasizing that the focus of these approaches is primarily on mastering the segmental level of the foreign language. For the first time, I. Mennen's model (The L2 Intonation Learning Theory, or LILt) is analyzed, thus outlining the theoretical framework of the candidate's own experimental research. It is argued that the LILt model makes an important differentiation between phonological representation and phonetic

implementation and that the methodology described in it is applicable to the analysis of the prosodic characteristics of both Bulgarian and English, as well as for predicting the possible transfer of prosodic patterns from the native to the foreign language.

In the *third chapter*, which is theoretical as well as methodological in character, an overview is made of the different concepts of intonation systems presented in the works of British and American linguists (the British school of intonation analysis, the Birmingham discourse model, Bolinger's theory, etc.). The competence of the author and her ability to precisely and convincingly comment on linguistic approaches, refracting them through the prism of her own views, is impressive.

For the theoretical framework of the description of the prosodic features of speech in the *fourth chapter*, the author has chosen the autosegmental-metrical (AM) model of J. Pierrehumbert and the ToBI (TOnes and Break Indices) intonational notation system which is applied with certain modifications to many languages, enabling them to be analyzed in a comparable way. The AM approach makes it possible to register with great accuracy the fundamental frequency values in different parts of the phrase.

The *fifth and sixth chapters* present the results of the author's research. The intonation taxonomy is examined in terms of the pitch accents, boundary and phrasal tones found in the English and Bulgarian languages. Through an acoustic and perceptual analysis of a large volume of empirical material (recordings of read and semi-spontaneous speech), areas of common and specific prosodic features in both languages are highlighted in terms of tonal inventories, tonal combinations and sequences in different phrasal positions, association of tonal accents with prominent (metrically strong) syllables - bearers of word stress, and also the correlation of melody with elements of the linear segmental structure and phrase boundaries. The description of the hierarchical intonation structure in both languages is carried out in close connection with their characteristic morpho-syntactic systems. A proposal is put forward to include in the prosodic hierarchy of the Bulgarian language an additional level between the word and the intermediate phrase - the level of the prosodic word, which may create possible problems for Bulgarians learning English. The differences in strategies for marking different types of focus in the two languages emerge as another potential source of deviation for Bulgarians who speak English following the prosodic patterns of their native language. The specificity in the phonetic implementation of the pitch accents in the two languages stands out, and is related to the position of the F₀ maximum in the accents H* and L+ H* in prenuclear position; the greater variability in the realization of the tonal targets in the speech of Bulgarian speakers of English can be a potential case of interference. The strategies and rules for signaling the information structure of an utterance are established using different combinations of word order and intonation categories.

In *chapter seven*, the main conclusions of the study are summarized, and possible perspectives for future studies in the field of language prosody are presented.

Snezhina Dimitrova's work contains important contributions to both contrastive linguistics and linguodidactics: the comparison between the two languages, as well as the prediction of possible difficulties for Bulgarians mastering the prosody of the English language, proves the need for improving students' perception skills by using experimental phonetic data from the field of natural human speech.

I evaluate very highly the papers focusing on the intonation system (#4, 7, 12) integrated into the monograph: they demonstrate that the author's observations and conclusions are the result of many years of careful deliberation and testing.

An important place among the candidate's works is occupied by the papers in which she examines issues of foreign language teaching. I group them in several categories: prosodic-intonational interference in the speech of bilinguals (No. 3, 11, 14), influence of native language prosody on the prosody of the foreign language (No. 6, 8-10), teaching English pronunciation to Bulgarian students (No. 5, 6, 8-10), the choice of pronunciation training model (No. 13, 15). The research on prosodic and perceptual interference can serve as a basis for the development of an original methodology, helping to overcome errors due to negative transfer.

In the publication and citation activity report, Assoc. Prof. Dimitrova indicated 17 citations of her publications. Only four of them are in Bulgarian peer-reviewed publications; 12 citations are in scientific journals indexed in Scopus and/or Web of Science; one is in a prestigious peer-reviewed collective monograph.

Conclusion

I personally know Associate Professor Snezhina Dimitrova as an excellent professional who is completely devoted to research and teaching. She enjoys high respect among her colleagues not only as a prominent Bulgarian linguist, but also as an erudite and ethical person who is always ready to share her knowledge and experience and is able to work in a team.

In conclusion, I will recapitulate that the works submitted for participation in the competition can be rated very highly, and are characterized by innovation and scientific research depth. All of this gives me reason to be fully convinced and vote positively for the election of **Assoc. Prof. Dr. Snezhina Lyubozarova Dimitrova** to the academic position of "professor" at Sofia University "St. Kliment Ohridski" in professional field **2.1. Philology (Phonetics and Phonology (English))**.

10.08.2022

Reviewer:.....

(Prof. Dr. Tatyana Aleksieva)