

## OPINION

**of Stefanka Boyanova Abazova, PhD,  
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on a competition for the academic position of **associate professor** at Sofia University St Kliment Ohridski of **2. Humanities; 2.1. Philology (Bulgarian Language – Stylistics)**

### Competition Background

Pursuant to Order No **RD 38-216 of 27 April 2023** of the Rector of Sofia University St Kliment Ohridski, I have been appointed member of the panel in a competition for the academic position of **associate professor of 2.1. Philology (Bulgarian Language – Stylistics)**, as published in the *State Gazette*, issue 24 of 17 March 2023. The only candidate in the competition is Senior Assistant Professor Yana Lyubenova Sivilova, PhD.

All documents and materials, submitted under the procedure and containing all the necessary information, demonstrate that Senior Assistant Professor Yana Lyubenova Sivilova, PhD, complies with the minimum national requirements under Art 2b, Para 2 and 3 of the Development of Academic Staff in the Republic of Bulgaria Act.

### Candidate Background

Yana Sivilova's development as a specialist can be traced back to her high school years. She graduated from the National High School of Classical Languages and Cultures St Constantine-Cyril the Philosopher, and her knowledge of classical languages is important for her work in general linguistics and in Bulgarian studies. In 2001 Yana Sivilova got her master's degree in Slavic philology, specialising in Polish language and culture, and in 2009 she defended a PhD dissertation in general and comparative linguistics, entitled *Playing with Meaning: Pun and Absurdity*. She joined the Bulgarian Language Department of the Slavic Philologies School of Sofia University St Kliment Ohridski after winning a competition for an assistant professor in January 2011, and in November of the same year she became a senior assistant professor.

Before joining the Bulgarian Language Department, she was a part-time assistant professor in the General, Indo-European and Balkan Linguistics Department, and also a part-time assistant professor at the Philosophy School of Sofia University.

Related to her research in the areas of phraseology, etymology and contrastive linguistics, Senior Assistant Professor Yana Sivilova completed two specializing courses at the University of Warsaw and attended a summer course of Polish at Maria Curie-Skłodowska University in Lublin. She has taken part in numerable international conferences in Bulgaria and abroad, and she has participated in several academic projects.

I have known Dr Sivilova since she joined the Bulgarian Language Department. She actively participates in the Department's life and in the discussion of dissertations under consideration, always expressing well-reasoned opinions. The fact that she knows dead languages and she is extremely proficient in Slavic languages (Polish and Russian) allows Dr Sivilova to place Bulgarian studies in a very broad context and to support her views with solid arguments.

### **Academic Publications and Contributions**

Dr Yana Sivilova participates in the associate professor competition with a monograph and 24 papers, published in Bulgarian and foreign academic journals and in national and international conference proceedings, most of which can be found in the reference list of the National Centre for Information and Documentation. Four of these papers are in English and one is in Russian, which makes the research more accessible to the international academic community. Six of the papers were written in co-authorship.

The main publication, submitted in the competition, is the monograph *Archaeology of Phrase*, published in 2022 by the Slavic Philologies School, St Kliment Ohridski University Press. It consists of an introduction, four chapters, a conclusion, a bibliography and an index of Bulgarian expressions. This index greatly facilitates professional and lay readers alike in following references and searching for particular information about the expressions in question. Each section concludes with a summary of observations. The overall style is clear and readable.

In the *introduction* the author presents the topic of the monograph: the origin and use of the phrases. This is a relevant and interesting subject for both experts and the general public, but it

also poses many a challenge for the researcher, related to the sources' unreliability. The author points out that the object of the study are phrases that have long entered the language as well as phrases that have appeared relatively recently, both literary and colloquial, even slang, expressions. The introduction also presents the outline of the monograph.

In the first chapter (*Dimensions of Phrase*) Dr Sivilova outlines the diversity of approaches in phraseology and of views on the scope and content of the term 'phraseme' and its synonyms used in the book: 'phrase' and 'expression'. The relationship between the phraseme and other linguistic units, the lexeme and the sentence, is presented, as well as the relationship of phrasemes to proverbs, sayings, maxims, clichés and text. The author also discusses a paremic genre, banter, relatively recently described in relation to the Bulgarian language, and its relation to phraseology. Pointing out the problematic areas in phraseology and presenting the points of view of both Bulgarian and international researchers, contemporary and now classical, Dr Sivilova outlines the main characteristics of the phraseme and motivates the inclusion in the study of reproducible expressions in the form of sentences, proverbs, sayings, banter, and clichés.

The second chapter (*Historical Map of Phrase*) discusses difficulties in defining the origin of phrasemes, and then traces the entry of famous phrases from Antiquity and biblical texts into Bulgarian. In the first part of the chapter the author illustrates multiple hypotheses in the philological approach to defining the etymology of the phrases *bird milk* (abundance), *my Martinis are shaking* (I am scared), *wooden God* (corporal punishment) and *I don't peel a word* (I do not utter a single word). Then certain apt explanations by folklore researchers are presented, regarding the origin of phrases like *drive through the millet* (to behave with disregard to rules or circumstances), *my heart fell into place* (I was pleased), *pull out his soul with cotton wool* (soft extortion), etc. The second part of the chapter discusses the appearance and the diffusion of some phrases from Aesop's fables in the Bulgarian language (*to kill the goose that laid the golden eggs*, *the boy who cried wolf*, *the lion's share*, *sour grapes*, *the serpent in the bosom*, etc). In examining these phrases, the author draws material from other languages where analogous expressions exist. Referring to numerous publications, Sivilova demonstrates that some of the fables attributed to Aesop, and the expressions associated with them, are of much more ancient eastern origin. Tracing the appearance of these phrases in the Bulgarian language makes it clear that the difficulties in establishing the time when these expressions entered the Bulgarian language are just as substantial. The next part of the chapter is devoted to the so-

called biblicisms: phrases originating from the Bible. The expression *to kick against the pricks* and its analogues in different languages are examined in detail, illustrating the sources of biblical phraseology and the challenges for anyone who would research its diffusion.

The third chapter (*Geographical Map of Phrase*) introduces the reader to calqued phraseologisms, proverbs and collocations from languages that have influenced Bulgarian in different periods: Greek, Turkish, Russian, French, German and English. Certain parallels between Bulgarian and Romanian expressions are also examined. Both in the introductory part of the chapter and in the discussion of the phraseology borrowed from the various languages, the publications of Bulgarian and foreign scholars are discussed, and the problems are indicated which the researcher faces in trying to establish whether a phrase results from calquing or is self-originating, whether it is calqued directly from the source language or has entered through an intermediary language. Much of the difficulty here lies in the fact that most phrasemes are used primarily in oral communication, i.e., their original written fixation is not informative enough about when and how they appeared in the Bulgarian language.

An important contribution of the monograph is the comparison of texts translated during the Bulgarian Revival with the original texts. The comparison of the translated phrases with expressions used in the works of Bulgarian authors of that period allows us to see the calques and the ways phrasemes became established in Bulgarian.

The section of the third chapter on calqued English phrases makes another important contribution. The problems encountered by the researcher of phrases originating in Antiquity or entering Bulgarian in older times apply to a much lesser extent to the phrases calqued from American English in recent decades, and therefore the paths of their entry and use in Bulgarian can be indicated with a much greater degree of certainty. Here, drawing on publications by Bulgarian and foreign authors and on extensive material of her own, excerpted from various sources, Sivilova traces the ways in which calqued English phrases have entered the Bulgarian language; she highlights their common features and puts forward convincing hypotheses about the reasons for their diffusion.

The fourth chapter (*Genre Map of Phrase*) is entirely stylistic and makes an important contribution. Here the author explores the use of phrasemes in oral and written communication. Based on material excerpted from corpora of colloquial speech, as well as her own recordings, Sivilova makes the first detailed analysis in Bulgarian linguistics of the functions of phrasemes

in oral speech. Another significant input are her precise observations on the usage of phrasemes in some non-fiction genres. Weather forecasting is singled out as a formulaic genre wherein attempts to break clichés lead to the emergence of new clichés. Observations on the functions of phrasemes in soft and hard news and in feuilleton are another contribution. The chapter also devotes some space to the uses and meanings of phrasemes in lyric poetry and in the novel in relation to the artistic message of the text.

In the *conclusion*, Sivilova provides a synthesised view of the phraseological issues, summarises her observations and conclusions, and outlines areas for future research.

The *Archaeology of Phrase* is written at a high professional level, while at the same time its style is clear and precise. It combines the best of various approaches to the study of the origin and stylistic function of phrasemes, which places the monograph among the highest achievements in the field of phraseological studies.

Due to limitations of space, I cannot even outline the other 24 papers submitted for the competition. Of these, papers No 2–9 are stylistically oriented. They provide a detailed analysis of stylistic and rhetorical devices and techniques for achieving the meaning of the texts under consideration. Papers No 10 and 11 reveal the place of phrasemes in feuilleton and in formulaic genres. Papers No 12–21 explore the etymology and distribution of different groups of phrases.

The contributions are described comprehensively and correctly.

The author has provided 11 noted citations, including one review of the monograph. One of the citations is in a foreign journal, which indicates that the candidate's work has international resonance.

### **Teaching Activity**

Senior Assistant Professor Dr Yana Sivilova has taught lecture courses in Stylistics to students of Bulgarian Philology and in General Linguistics to students of speech therapy, primary school education and pre-school education. She has taught seminars in Lexicology, Stylistics, Language Competence, General Linguistics, and General and Romance Linguistics. Over the years, we have taught different classes to the same students, and I can say that she is able to

arouse students' interest in linguistic issues and gain their respect, and is one of the department's highly valued lecturers.

### **Conclusion**

Considering the importance and contributions of the candidate's academic work, as well as the quality of her teaching, I give my positive assessment with every confidence and recommend to the panel to elect Dr Yana Sivilova to the academic position of associate professor at Sofia University St Kliment Ohridski of 2. Humanities; 2.1. Philology (Bulgarian Language – Stylistics).

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Associate Professor Stefanka Abazova, PhD