

R E V I E W

**by Prof. Velka Alexandrova Popova, PhD – Konstantin Preslavsky University of Shumen,
professional field 2.1. Philology (*General and Comparative Linguistics*)**

**with regard to an open competition for the vacant academic position of Associate Professor in the professional field 2.1 Philology (Bulgarian language – Applied Linguistics) for the needs of the Department of Bulgarian as a Foreign Language at the Faculty of Slavic Studies at the Sofia University "St. Kliment Ohridski", announced in SG no. 22 of
16.03.2021**

The only candidate in the open competition for the academic position of Associate Professor, announced in the State Gazette no. 22 of 16.03.2021 and on the website of the Sofia University "St. Kliment Ohridski" for the needs of the Faculty of Slavic Studies, is Senior Assistant Professor Venera Georgieva Mateeva-Baycheva, PhD from the Department of Bulgarian as a Foreign Language at the Faculty of Slavic Studies at the Sofia University

1. GENERAL OVERVIEW OF THE PROCEDURE

By order №RD 38-240/17.05.2021 of the Rector of the Sofia University "St. Kliment Ohridski" I have been appointed a member of the award panel of an open competition for the academic position of Associate Professor at the Sofia University in the field of higher education, Field 2. Humanities, Professional field 2.1. Philology, Scientific specialty Bulgarian Language (Applied Linguistics) at the Department of Bulgarian Language as a Foreign Language at the Faculty of Slavic Studies at the Sofia University.

Senior Assistant Venera Mateeva-Baycheva, PhD from the Sofia University "St. Kliment Ohridski" is the only candidate in the competition. The documents and materials submitted by her under the procedure are in full compliance with the requirements of the Law for the Development of the Academic Staff of the Republic of Bulgaria /LDASRB/, the Regulations for the implementation of LDASRB, and the Rules on the terms and conditions for obtaining scientific degrees and holding academic positions at the Sofia University "St. Kliment Ohridski".

According to the presented work, the candidate Venera Mateeva-Baycheva has fulfilled the minimum national requirements for the position of Associate Professor in Field 2. Humanities, Professional Field 2.1. Philology. A total of 560 points were scored with a minimum required number of 400 points, and the registered excess is in indicators "D" and "E".

For participation in the competition the candidate Venera Mateeva-Baycheva presented a list of a total of 28 titles, incl. 13 publications in Bulgarian and foreign scientific publications and scientific forums, 2 monographs, 5 textbooks and 8 workbooks, of which 13 scientific papers (one monograph and 12 articles) are accepted for review, which include work on issues outside the topic of the PhD thesis (for doctoral degree Doctor of Philology).

The activity of the candidate in the field of applied sciences and pedagogy are presented respectively with participations in 4 projects; in teaching 3 lecture and 4 seminar courses for undergraduate and graduate study programmes; in the formulation of 7 new syllabuses; in the management of the Ministry of Culture "Language and Cultural Space. Bulgarian as a foreign language". The teaching profile of Mrs. Mateeva-Baycheva also includes extensive experience in ensuring the incoming academic mobility, which is reflected in holding seminars in Bulgarian as a foreign language for students of various degree courses in the Erasmus program (in English).

Mrs. Venera Mateeva-Baycheva approbated the results of her research at solid scientific forums, which testifies to her tangible presence in the dynamic process of exchange of ideas between contemporary researchers.

2. BIOGRAPHICAL DETAILS OF THE CANDIDATE

The candidate Venera Mateeva-Baycheva's professional biography is related to teaching Bulgarian language. Thus, after obtaining a master's degree in the Linguistics program at the Sofia University, she has worked in this field in educational centers such as "Interlogos" and "Educational Technologies", as well as in the National School for Ancient Languages and Cultures "Saint Constantine-Cyril the Philosopher" (Sofia).

In 2013, the candidate earned a Doctor of Philosophy doctoral degree, and in 2015 she acquired the academic position of Senior Assistant. Thus, at present the candidate Venera Mateeva-Baycheva has 6 years of experience at the Sofia University as a senior assistant in the Department of Bulgarian as a Foreign Language at the Faculty of Slavic Studies, and before that in the period October 2014 – June 2015 she was a part-time assistant in the same department. Venera Mateeva-Baycheva teaches the subjects Bulgarian as a Foreign Language, Phonetics and Lexicology of the Bulgarian Language, Gender and Language, Syntactic Interference between Related Languages. Her pedagogical activity impresses with the wide range of future specialists she works with, namely lawyers, medics, pharmacists, chemists. This fact in itself speaks of valuable experience gained in a relatively short time, which is the obligatory basis for full professional realization and academic growth.

3. GENERAL CHARACTERISTICS OF THE CANDIDATE'S RESEARCH ACTIVITIES AND CONTRIBUTIONS

In general, the scientific works proposed for this competition can be defined as original and fully meet the minimum national requirements (under Art. 2b, para. 2 and 3 of LDASRB), as well as the additional requirements of the Sofia University "St. Kliment Ohridski" for holding the academic position of Associate Professor in the scientific field of Humanities, Professional Field 2.1. Philology.

The scientific interests and research of the candidate Venera Mateeva-Baycheva, PhD are permanently connected with the problems of learning the Bulgarian language. They mark her entire creative path so far, and it can definitely be said that the candidate, after the works proposed for the award of the Doctor of Philology doctoral degree, upgrades and expands her contributions in

both thematic and theoretical and methodological plan. If at the beginning of her career, the candidate Venera Mateeva-Baycheva devoted herself to the study of the ontogenesis of the Bulgarian language in the paradigm of psycholinguistics of development, then in the current competition for the academic position of Associate Professor she already participates with work related to many different studies associated with the learning of Bulgarian as a foreign language, which can be defined as contributing in the field of applied linguistics and language pedagogy.

4. CHARACTERISTICS AND EVALUATION OF THE PEDAGOGICAL ACTIVITIES OF THE CANDIDATE

The evaluation of the educational and pedagogical activity of the candidate includes the data from her work related to the diversity of the disciplines she teaches over the years, as well as to the author's formulation and updating of new syllabuses. In this regard, the fact that Senior Assistant Venera Mateeva-Baycheva is very consistent in providing the educational process with textbooks, which is presented quantitatively in 8 textbooks and workbooks, 4 of which are intended for university courses which she teaches. The textbooks presented in the competition, co-authored with different teams, can be defined as a contribution to applied linguistics, as the creation of textbooks and teaching aids in Bulgarian as a foreign language presupposes a personal knowledge of the linguistic facts that underlie the learning of Bulgarian as a foreign language, the difficulties encountered by foreigners in the learning process, effective models of presentation of grammatical and lexical material.

5. EVALUATION OF THE CANDIDATE'S MAIN THEORETICAL AND APPLIED CONTRIBUTIONS

The scientific contributions of the candidate are related to the field of applied linguistics and language pedagogy. They have been approbated in solid publications, as 3 of the articles proposed for review have been published in scientific journals, referenced and indexed in world-famous databases of scientific information (Web of Science). To the papers accepted for review, for which abstracts are offered, I would add the 13 textbooks from the general list related to teaching Bulgarian as a foreign language, as they are a direct expression of the useful applications of the theoretical activities of the candidate Venera Mateeva-Baycheva.

The peer-reviewed publications thematise interesting and current issues in the field of teaching Bulgarian as a foreign language, as this is done in the paradigm of applied linguistics, which in turn can definitely be defined as a rational and effective approach that brings the significance of the results beyond the boundaries of the monodisciplinary and domestic and conservative issues, by ingeniously weaving the good Bulgarian traditions into the palette of the multidisciplinary nature of the modern world humanities.

The works subject to review in this procedure can be thematically divided into the following areas:

- I. Study of the mistakes made in the speech of foreigners in the process of teaching Bulgarian as a foreign language as a basis for methodological approaches;
- II. Modern methods and procedures in teaching Bulgarian as a foreign language;

- III. Modern approaches in applied linguistics, reflected in the compilation of textbooks;
- IV. Ontogenesis of the Bulgarian compound sentence.

The works of Venera Mateeva-Baycheva in all four thematic areas have a clear applied nature and clear adaptability for educational purposes. They are a positive example of a harmonious combination of her creative pursuits as a researcher and as a teacher.

The issues related to the **first and second areas** are reflected in the monograph "Linguistic Aspects of Culture Sharing" (10.B. I.1) and in the articles (10.B. III.1, IV.3, 7, 8). For me, as a reviewer in the procedure, it is appropriate to qualify it as a habilitational work, as it contains the main ideas and searches of the author, which are undoubted contributions to Bulgarian linguistics. It also gives a more complete picture of its research potential and concrete achievements in theory and practice.

The peer-reviewed habilitational work covers two main parts. The first part (developed in the first, second and fifth chapters) presents aspects of the theory of second language learning/acquisition, while the thematization of problems in the field of foreign language learning is carried out in the context of applied linguistics. I would define this approach as rational, as its consistent application has the potential to optimize the theory and practice of language teaching methodology. In this regard, I would qualify as successful the author's attempt to outline the theoretical field of foreign language teaching in applied linguistics as a part of linguistics and to highlight the basic concepts and research procedures with which this scientific discipline works. Sufficient idea is given of the tools with which the researcher of the process of acquisition of Bulgarian as a foreign language could work in order to carry out a serious and modern study, comparable to the good examples of modern humanities. As a positive side of the monograph should also be pointed out the fact that the review of the basic concepts of foreign language acquisition and presentation of the relevant terminology, although following the line of the English tradition, manages to highlight the Bulgarian contributions in field of applied linguistics, actively developing in recent years.

The focus of the second part (developed in the third and fourth chapters) of the monograph are the peculiarities of the acquisition of Bulgarian as a foreign language. As a methodology is used skilfully and adequately the analysis of errors, which is interpreted as a sure way to improve the methodology of teaching Bulgarian as a foreign language and as a source of information about the use of working approaches in the learning process. Based on the empirical observation on language material proposed in the paper, the result of practical work with foreign students at the Sofia University "St. Kliment Ohridski", an analysis of the registered difficulties, mistakes and dependencies in mastering nouns and verbs in the Bulgarian language is made. A typology of the mistakes made in the process of learning Bulgarian as a foreign language has been made, and at the same time an attempt has been made to derive their genealogy. Practical and theoretical models for predicting and overcoming mistakes in students with different mother tongues are also proposed. In connection with this, a purposeful study of the speech production from a large number of students, speakers of different first languages, was carried out. The collected solid empirical material, as well as its precise quantitative and qualitative analysis represent a solid basis for verification of the models proposed by the author.

Undoubtedly, the peer-reviewed work "Linguistic Aspects of Culture Sharing" is contributing in nature in theoretical, methodological and purely practical terms (with shared valuable personal experience). In order to make them even more distinct, I would recommend the author to consider optimizing the structure of the text in the next edition of the monograph. In connection with this, I think it is more appropriate to place the FOREWORD before the first chapter. At the same time, in view of its content, the fifth chapter should be shifted much forward and thus take its place after the second chapter. I suppose that the author has set some other logic in arranging the parts of the monograph, but for the reader it definitely remains understandable.

In view of the content of the peer-reviewed monograph we could say that the generalization on page 182, namely: "The emphasis in the book is on the linguistic aspects of the process of acquisition of Bulgarian cultural identity.", provokes some scepticism. Indeed, the contributions in this regard are indisputable, but they are by no means so comprehensive to be able to fully present the linguistic extrapolation of the phenomenon of Bulgarian cultural identity. Rather, I perceive these words of the author as a request for her dedication and for the future of this large-scale and promising task.

The publications (10.B. III.1, IV.3, 7, 8), which are thematically related to the monograph "Linguistic Aspects of Culture Sharing" are devoted to the problems of the process of acquisition of certain linguistic phenomena by foreigners. Thus, in them the attention is directed respectively to the use of the verb "to be" in **article III.1**, to the pronoun system of the Bulgarian language in **article IV.3**, to the word order of the short forms of the pronouns in **article IV.7** and to the grammatical forms of the predicate in the formal forms in **article IV.8**. The focus is again on the errors in the speech production of foreigners. Each of these developments are built in the same logical order, namely: defining the given linguistic phenomenon in the target language (Bulgarian), bringing appropriate speech material, processing and analysis of errors, possible useful applications for practice.

In general, the scientific developments from the first and second areas of the research work of the candidate Venera Mateeva-Baycheva are focused on those linguistic phenomena, which on the basis of the mistakes are argued by her as the most difficult for foreigners. However, it is not limited to the systematization of the language deviations registered by her, but also offers possible strategies for predicting and overcoming the difficulties in the learning process, which in turn gives grounds to assess the respective author's contributions as purely scientific, as well as applied and practical in nature.

The **third area** demonstrated in the works of the candidate is related to her contribution to the development of textbooks, in which modern approaches in applied linguistics are clearly expressed as they set current and effective learning strategies. These include textbooks and teaching aids in Bulgarian as a foreign language (10A V. 3, 4, 5, VI. 1, 2, 3, 4, 8), as some of them are intended for foreign students at our universities, and the others for Bulgarian language teaching in foreign countries. When developing them, Venera Mateeva-Baycheva co-authored various teams, which also presents the qualities of cooperation and pragmatism of the candidate. They find expression in her going beyond the theoretical and applied terms in her work in the first two areas and the realization of contributions of practical and applied nature.

The production of the candidate in the **fourth area** is closely related to her research on the topic of her PhD thesis. Its undoubted contributions in the process of modeling the syntactic ontogenesis of the Bulgarian language have already been the subject of comment and evaluation on the occasion of a previous procedure, so they will not be commented here. Thus, attention is diverted from the monograph "On the Compound Constructions in Children's Speech" (10B, II.1) to the articles (10.B. IV.1, 9). They consider individual aspects of the summary in the monograph (10B, II.1), focusing on the possible parallels between the acquisition of the Bulgarian compound sentence by children and foreigners, while finding a number of similarities and outlining the boundaries of difference in the processes that can be used in the practice of applied linguistics – in creating syllabuses and methodological organization of education of foreigners or Bulgarian children abroad.

6. EVALUATION OF THE PERSONAL CONTRIBUTION OF THE CANDIDATE

The author's contributions of the candidate Venera Mateeva-Baycheva, PhD can be defined as significant both for the theory and for the practice of teaching the Bulgarian language as a foreign language. They are the result of the candidate's own original research, based on an excellent knowledge of the Bulgarian and world scientific tradition.

7. CONCLUSION

The documents and materials submitted by Senior Assistant Venera Georgieva Mateeva-Baycheva, PhD in the competition for the academic position of Associate Professor in the scientific field 2. Humanities, professional field 2.1. Philology (Bulgarian language – Applied Linguistics), meet the requirements of the Law for the Development of the Academic Staff in the Republic of Bulgaria (ZRASRB), the Regulations for application of LDASRB and the respective Rules of Sofia University "St. Kliment Ohridski".

After getting acquainted with the materials and scientific works presented in the competition, analysis of their significance and the purely scientific, applied-science and applied contributions contained in them, I find it reasonable to give my positive assessment. I would like to note that the achievements of Senior Assistant Venera Georgieva Mateeva-Baycheva, PhD as well as her commitment to science present her, in themselves, as a worthy candidate for the academic position of Associate Professor.

I propose to the award panel to prepare a report-proposal to the Faculty Council of the Faculty of Slavic Studies for the election of Senior Assistant Venera Georgieva Mateeva – Baycheva, PhD to the academic position of Associate Professor at the Sofia University "St. Kliment Ohridski" in the professional field 2.1. Philology (Bulgarian language – Applied linguistics).

27.07.2021

Reviewer:
(Prof. Velka Popova, PhD)