

REVIEW

by Prof. Angel Marinov Petrov, PhD

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

1. Details of the competition

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 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.

There is only one candidate in the competition: Senior Assistant Venera Mateeva-Baycheva, PhD from the Sofia University "St. Kliment Ohridski".

The set of materials presented by Senior Assistant Venera Baycheva, PhD are in full compliance with the Rules for the development of the academic staff of Sofia University. Senior Assistant Venera Baycheva, PhD has submitted a total of 14 scientific papers, of which 2 monographs (one of them on the text of her PhD thesis, successfully defended in 2013), 8 articles (two of which co-authored) and 4 reviews. The candidate for associate professor is a member of teams of authors, which over the years have written a series of textbooks and teaching aids for students and high school students. No procedural violations in the preparation of documents in connection with the participation in the competition have been established.

2. Details of the candidate

Senior Assistant Venera Georgieva Mateeva – Baycheva, PhD was born on January 21, 1982 in the town of Pazardzhik. She graduated from the National High School for Ancient Languages and Cultures "St. Constantine-Cyril the Philosopher" in Sofia city in year 2000. In the period 2000 - 2004 she took a bachelor's degree in Bulgarian Philology at the Faculty of Slavic Studies at the Sofia University "St. Kliment Ohridski". In 2005, she took a master's degree in Linguistics at the Faculty of Slavic Studies at the Sofia University "St. Kliment Ohridski". From 2009 to 2013 she did a PhD degree in General and Comparative Linguistics (Psycholinguistics) at the Department of Bulgarian Language at the Faculty of Slavic Studies at the Sofia University "St. Kliment Ohridski". In 2013 she successfully defended her PhD thesis and was awarded a Doctor of Philosophy doctoral degree.

The professional path of Senior Assistant Venera Baycheva, PhD is closely related to the field of education. In the period 2007 - 2009 she was a part-time lecturer at the National School for Ancient Languages and Cultures "Saint Constantine-Cyril the Philosopher" (Sofia). She has worked consecutively as a teacher of Bulgarian language and literature and manager of educational activities in "Educational Technologies" (2005 - 2008) and in the Educational Center "Interlogos" (2008 - Present). From 2014 to 2015 she was a part-time lecturer in the Department of Bulgarian as a Foreign Language, and since 2015 she has been a full-time lecturer in the same department, where she teaches our seminar classes and lecture courses in Bulgarian as a foreign language. From

2020 until now she has been the head of the Masters degree programme "Language and Cultural Space. Bulgarian as a foreign language". She took part in the development of four research projects, one of which she was a supervisor.

The scientific interests of the candidate Venera Baycheva are in several areas, the most important of which are: Applied linguistics, psycholinguistics, syntax, lexicology, methods of teaching Bulgarian as a foreign language, methods of teaching Bulgarian language.

3. Review of scientific papers

The first monograph, authored by Senior Assistant Venera Baycheva, PhD, is the book "On the Compound Constructions in Children's Speech", Sofia, Erove Publishing House, 2020, which text follows the successfully defended in 2013 PhD thesis on "Model of the ontogenesis of the compound sentence in the Bulgarian language". This gives me reason only to briefly stop my attention on the said work, without going into details. Even in its then first major scientific treatise the author shows the skills of professionally trained linguist researcher who thoroughly examines the syntax of spontaneous speech in children in pre-school period of their linguistic, communicative and cognitive development. She analyzes perception and production of the co-ordinated, subordinated and mixed constructions in children's speech, monitored and analyzed by Venera Baycheva over a long period of time; made scientifically based conclusions about the conjunctions that children use; she collected a body of children's texts, which contains a rich set of complex syntactic constructions needed for current and future research in the identified thematic area. The results achieved of this in-depth and large-scale scientific research are a significant contribution to the development of psycholinguistics of children's speech on authentic Bulgarian language material.

The central work with which the candidate for associate professor participates in the competition is the monograph "*Language aspects of culture sharing (modern methods and procedures in teaching Bulgarian as a foreign language)*", Sofia, Erove Publishing House, 2021. Since the remaining publications (8 articles and 4 reviews in various scientific journals), enclosed to the package of documents, mainly present some aspects of the issues of the book, I will focus primarily on this study. First of all, I would like to note that the work of the candidate Venera Baycheva meets the criteria for a scientific monograph. It is in the volume required by the standards - 183 pages of main text and bibliography, considers comprehensively and from various research points of view an issue relevant to the methodology of teaching Bulgarian as a foreign language, and is distinguished by both theoretical and practical value.

Senior Assistant Venera Baycheva, PhD, offers original scientific research dedicated to linguistic, sociolinguistic, psycholinguistic and methodological problems of the acquisition of the Bulgarian language by foreigners, focusing mainly on two main problems. On the one hand, these are important conceptual issues of the theory of foreign language teaching methodology (relations between first and foreign language; bilingualism and multicompetence; communicative competence in native and foreign language; criteria for successful mastering of a foreign language; cognitive processes in mastering a foreign language, etc.), on the other hand, problems with methodological significance and of practical nature that are directly related to techniques, methods and techniques in studying Bulgarian language from foreigners (primarily activities related to the acquisition of the noun system and of the verb categories in the Bulgarian language from foreigners). The two relatively independent parts of the book are logically connected and represent a single monolithic whole, through which the author realizes her main goal - to interpret "the noun and verb system of the Bulgarian language from a linguodidactical point of view, through the prism

of teaching Bulgarian as a foreign language." (p. 9) Even in the initial chapter of the paper the methodological bases of the research are clearly demarcated - using an interdisciplinary approach, the teaching of Bulgarian to foreign citizens should be modeled in view of the socio-cultural parameters in which the language functions. An important role in the work is played by the study of the *mistakes* that foreigners studying Bulgarian make in speech practice. Leading tasks that the candidate Venera Baycheva solves in the course of the research are the following: to typologize the mistakes in the use of nouns and verbs; to establish the origin of the errors; to construct methodological models for forecasting and to prevent mistakes. The research tools that the author has during the research are characterized by innovation and creativity. These are: study of theoretical sources on the problems of the topic; collection and processing of facts from experiments; substantive and comparative analysis of empirical data; typology and hierarchization of elements of the collected material (correct and incorrect answers); monitoring the speech behavior of foreign students. As in the theoretical examination of theses, ideas and concepts important for the methodology of foreign language teaching, so in the implementation of methodologically justified practices Senior Assistant Venera Baycheva, PhD manifests herself as a scientist with a pragmatically oriented research view, who seeks, finds and scientifically substantiates optimal methodological options for mastering complex grammatical categories of the Bulgarian language from students for whom the language is not native.

The methodological foundations of the research are laid in the second chapter of the paper ("*Learning a foreign language. Some theoretical questions*"). In this important part of the book, the author presents her views on the nature and functions of foreign language learning as a scientific discipline with an integrative nature, which is part of applied linguistics. In presenting basic concepts of theories for the acquisition of a foreign language (e.g. native language, first language, target language, second language, literary language, auxiliary language, intermediate language, interference, types of competencies, elements of communicative competence, stages of the acquisition of a foreign language, linguistic error, classification of linguistic errors, etc.), the candidate Venera Baycheva shows, on the one hand, a wide awareness of the works of both foreign and Bulgarian researchers on these issues, and on the other hand, the depth of the research view, which is always based on evaluative positions in view of certain pragmatic goals. It is safe to say that this part of the book would serve as a reliable source of scientific information (reference) for any university lecturer, student or teacher who has decided to enrich their knowledge of the theory and methodology of modern foreign language teaching.

Of special interest are the third and fourth chapters of the work ("*Acquisition of the noun system in the Bulgarian language*"; "*Acquisition of verb categories in the Bulgarian language*"). In her research approaches the candidate Venera Baycheva is guided by the belief that without reaching a certain level of linguistic competence it is impossible to build a high level of communicative competence of the respective foreign language. The statement, scientifically substantiated by the author, sounds convincing, namely: "*Acquisition of grammatical categories is crucial for achieving semantic and logical completeness of learning the Bulgarian language*" (p. 61). Grammatical errors (morphological and syntactic errors) made by foreign students studying Bulgarian become the subject of serious interest in the chapters. The questionnaires, on the basis of which the experimental research is conducted, are professionally prepared, contain rich and interesting examples of live speech, which assumes that certain weakness will be displayed and makes it possible to prevent them, clarifying their genesis and offering appropriate methodological options for correction. The proposals for the types of tasks through which one works during the classes for mastering grammatical peculiarities of the Bulgarian literary language have a contributing character in the two analyzed chapters of the work. Especially useful for teachers and students are

the practical guidelines for work, through which Venera Baycheva, PhD, shares her pedagogical experience (for example, on p. 75; p. 81, etc.). The author's reasoning for work on mastering the verb system (pp. 118-119), as well as the proposed algorithm for mastering grammatical rules (p. 153) have value of practical methodology for future activities in connection with the considered problems.

I want to emphasize the last chapter of the habilitational work of Venera Baycheva - "*Teaching Bulgarian as a foreign language in a modern context*." The final pages of the research acquaint us with the author's views on the current state of learning modern languages in the Bulgarian educational context. Here is a summary of all the ideas and concepts that have received scientific recognition in the educational community. Important elements of the paradigm of the methodology of foreign language teaching as principles and goals of Bulgarian language teaching as a foreign language are presented in detail and comprehensively. The basics of strategic concepts for foreign language teaching such as *language policies, multilingualism, intercultural competence*, etc. are outlined.

From the remaining works of the candidate Venera Baycheva with which she takes part in the competition for associate professor, I want briefly to pay attention to the article "*Teaching Bulgarian as a foreign language in an electronic environment*" Bulgarian Language and Literature magazine, 3, 2021. The article offers forms of work in Bulgarian as a foreign language, using a special educational platform and currently available digital resources. The place in the educational process of the following elements of the educational process is substantiated - synchronous teaching, assignment of tasks for training and control, assessment of the acquired competencies.

As already mentioned, the candidate Venera Baycheva is a co-author in the creation of a series of textbooks and teaching aids for students and pupils. These teaching aids manifest the theoretical awareness of the candidate for associate professor and her skills to give an adequate clear and useful practical form to the complex linguistic theses and concepts.

The two monographic researches and the other publications of the candidate Venera Baycheva, with which she participates in the competition for associate professor, have qualities of serious scientific works, which enrich with useful ideas the methodology of teaching Bulgarian as a foreign language. They offer a clear structure, interesting scientific ideas, theses and hypotheses, useful for practice variants of methodological solutions.

4. Pedagogical work

I know Venera Baycheva since the beginning of her career as a university scientist and lecturer. I was her teacher of Bulgarian language teaching methodology when she was studying in the bachelor's program in Bulgarian philology at the Faculty of Slavic Studies - Sofia University. Over the years, I have followed her scientific and teaching activities with interest and I have always found a high level of performance. I have witnessed the profound and responsible attitude of Senior Assistant Venera Baycheva, PhD to all activities and projects in which she participated. I know her as an intelligent, serious and responsive colleague.

5. Conclusion

The documents and materials submitted by Senior Assistant Venera Georgieva Mateeva - Baycheva, PhD, meet all legal requirements. The candidate for associate professor has a sufficient number of scientific papers. There are original scientific contributions in the works of the candidate. Her theoretical developments have practical applicability.

After examining the scientific papers submitted for the competition and analysis of their significance, I find it reasonable to give my positive assessment and recommend to the award panel to propose to the Faculty Council of the Faculty of Slavic Studies - Sofia University to elect Senior Assistant Venera Georgieva Mateeva-Baycheva, PhD, for the academic position of Associate Professor at the Sofia University in the professional field 2.1. Philology (Bulgarian language - Applied linguistics).

June 25, 2021

Reviewer:
(Prof. A. Petrov, PhD)