



THE UNIVERSITY OF CHICAGO  
DEPARTMENT OF ANTHROPOLOGY

1126 EAST 59TH STREET  
CHICAGO, ILLINOIS 60637

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Professor Susan Gal  
susangal@uchicago.edu

Dr. habil. PaedDr. Žofia Bárcziová PhD, Dean  
Faculty of Central European Studies  
Constantine the Philosopher University in Nitra  
Dražovská 4, 949 74 Nitra, Slovakia

**Re: assessment of Dr. habil. Mgr. Ildikó Vančo, PhD for promotion to full Professor**

Dr. habil. Ildikó Vančo, who is currently associate professor at Constantine the Philosopher University, Nitra, Slovakia, has submitted her candidacy for Full Professor in the Foreign Languages and Cultures section of the Central European Studies Faculty where she has been teaching for 18 years. You have requested my assessment of her scientific/scholarly and pedagogical achievements. It is a pleasure to do so.

I have known Dr. Vančo since 2015, when I had the honor of being invited as plenary speaker to the 18th Sociolinguistic (Élőnyelvi) Conference, organized by Vančo and her colleagues, at the Constantine U, Nitra. I was immediately impressed with Vančo's enormous intellectual energy and organizational skills. We continued corresponding, since our areas of research and expertise are quite close, in bilingualism and sociolinguistics. Vančo later proposed to organize the translation and publication in Hungarian of a set of my English-language articles. The volume appeared in 2018 to excellent reviews that emphasized the high quality of the editorial work.

Since our first meeting, I have followed Dr. Vančo's scholarly work with interest. In the last few weeks I have systematically read through *all* her publications in both Hungarian and English, as provided for this review. Let me note: the body of work Vančo has produced is impressive. As a comparison, in quality and quantity it would assure promotion to full professor in any first rate American university.

I will focus on three aspects of her activities: (a) scientific/scholarly research publications, based on research activity, (b) teaching activities, (c) participation and organization of scholarly activities, essential for an internationally oriented university.

**Research and publication**

Vančo's educational accomplishments reflect her ambition and initiative. She has earned several MA degrees – in Hungarian language, literature and pedagogy [ELTE, Budapest]; in English language and literature [Comenius, Bratislava] – followed by a

doctorate in Hungarian linguistics [ELTE] and finally a Habilitation [U of Debrecen] in Hungarian linguistics. In addition, I find laudable her energy and initiative to continue training in a number of specializations that have enhanced her research and teaching (see below): on social science methods, on linguistic aggression, and in problems of speech comprehension and interpretation. These have enriched her research and writing.

Vančo's oeuvre is best divided into three substantive categories, in each of which she has published in Slovak, Hungarian and English. In each she has made novel and important contributions. (I will note the type of publication and year in parentheses.)

The first category is the social context of bilingualism and the education of bilinguals. Specifically this means demographic, sociological and pedagogical assessment of the education of linguistic minorities, first of all in Slovakia. It is significant that her monograph – *The Hungarian language in education in Slovakia* – published by the respected Dutch publisher Mercator (**AAA 2020**), has just appeared in a second edition. A second edition is a sure sign of its international influence and ability to stand the test of time. Relying on my own reading of it – and my familiarity with the literature – I add that the work is outstanding in quality.

In addition, Vančo has published a monograph in this area in English with Slovak publishers (**AAB 2015**), analyzing the education of *all* kinds of linguistic minorities, and in *all* the Visegrad countries. Once again, her depth of expertise – demographically, sociologically, historically and pedagogically – is excellent, indeed indispensable. A chapter in this area of expertise has also appeared in recent years in a Hungarian collection (**ABA 2017**), and in two textbooks, published in Slovakia (in Hungarian **ACB 2019, 2015**) focused on the teaching of Hungarian in Slovakia.

In a particularly significant move within this broad area of specialization focused on the pedagogy of linguistic minorities, Vančo has researched the teaching of Slovak to young speakers of Hungarian in Slovakia. This is a crucial piece of minority life: the acquisition of the majority language. Her articles on this issue have appeared in journals listed by Web of Science or SCOPUS (**ADM**) in Hungarian (**2017**) and English (**2019**). She has even extended her research on minorities outside of Eastern Europe, with an interesting article on the Saami of Finland (2020).

To sum up: Vančo Ildikó is an internationally recognized expert on the teaching of minority languages, their demographic, sociological and pedagogical situations, problems and solutions. In this area, Vančo is certainly among the top researchers in the world, providing indispensable, analytical overviews as well as close-up pictures.

A second category in which Vančo has made significant, internationally recognized contributions is the sociolinguistics of Hungarian-speakers in Slovakia. She has explored the attitudes towards language, identity and belonging of Hungarian speakers in Slovakia. She explores the perspectives and opinions of speakers as juxtaposed to the findings of demographers or sociologists. Vančo provides invaluable

insight into the way young people view the relationship between their language and their identity, investigating this through interviews, surveys and observation.

Among the theoretical issues in this area of Vančo's research are: strong evidence for the pluricentric-nature of the Hungarian language; the evaluation of different forms of Hungarian by her interlocutors/interview subjects; and the way they distinguish between an "us" and a "them" (their own variety of Hungarian vs. the standard of Hungary). Her studies have been published in Web of Science or SCOPUS journals (**ADM**, **ADN**, and **AEC**, **AFC**), including some co-authored with colleagues.

These articles give some of the most vivid and persuasive arguments in favor of the pluricentricity of Hungarian, outlining insightfully the debates among Hungarian linguists on this matter and the sources of controversy. Plus, Vančo shows how the denial of pluricentricity has led to the misunderstanding of bilingualism in Slovakia. It hides the way regions and smaller areas constitute the spatial aspect of belonging for Hungarian speakers in Slovakia. Her sensitive ethnographic work on "we" vs. "they" (Slovakia Hungarians vs. Hungary Hungarians), among a sample of Hungarian-speakers, is especially illuminating.

Finally, a third category closely connected to the first two nevertheless stands as a separate, technical expertise: the psycholinguistic investigation of text-understanding among students in Hungarian schools in Slovakia. One result of this work is a monograph in Hungarian (2007 **AAB**). Another is a textbook on this issue that appeared in Prague (**ACA** 2020). Several articles have appeared in English, in Web of Science or SCOPUS journals (**ADM**), some co-authored with colleagues or students.

These three areas, though separate, nevertheless inform each other. All three subject-areas speak to pedagogical issues. Judging by my own experience and the list of works made available to me that have cited Vančo's publications, her work in all three areas is very much a part of international scholarly communication on these issues.

### **Teaching activities**

The list of courses taught by Vančo at various levels is long and impressively varied. It reflects the categories of specialization in which she publishes (see above). The range of topics is considerable: from pedagogical matters, to linguistic ones; from courses on Hungarian language and literature, to the use of Hungarian in bureaucratic institutions; from sociolinguistics and dialectology to the basics in the study of bilingualism, from psycholinguistics to the methodology of social research.

Equally impressive is the list of courses and programs that Vančo has initiated or helped to develop and/or for which she is now responsible. These include courses in all of her special areas of expertise. But she also participated in the overall plan for BA, MA, and PhD programs in these areas. She teaches creative subjects such as "bilingual administration," along with the more familiar ones such as theories of teaching Hungarian grammar, and more general pedagogical courses.

The number of BA theses (34) and MA theses (53) she has supervised is most impressive, as an essential part of Vančo's pedagogical activities. She has also directed 3 doctoral students with two of whom she has also co-authored and published in her (and their) specialties. This kind of training via co-authorship is the gold-standard in international PhD preparation.

### **Scholarly/scientific communication**

Contributing to the quality of teaching is Vančo's active participation in conferences and workshops in the region and across Europe. These are too numerous to name, but a sense of the extent of these is provided by the number of volumes of conferences that Vančo has edited and published, sometimes with the help of colleagues. I count 23 volumes over the last 15 years, which is an astounding number, indicating an extraordinary level of activity in encouraging whole areas of research. This kind of participation in scholarly communication is indispensable for maintaining intellectual life both nationally and internationally. It must be recognized as a crucial part of any scholar's contribution to the life of the university.

Vančo has also taken leadership roles in international research projects in her areas of expertise, winning grants herself (both national and international). These roles reflect the respect of colleagues for her knowledge and expertise.

My assessment is that Dr. Vančo's scholarly/scientific and pedagogical merits are exemplary both in quality and quantity. She has proven herself to be an intellectually first-rate, creative and productive researcher with exciting findings that are widely published – in three languages – and internationally recognized. An energetic scholar, her many ambitious initiatives over the years have benefited the University and her students. She is a most valuable individual, a devoted researcher, writer, organizer and teacher.

I am certain that Dr. Vančo will enrich the faculty of full professors at your University. I express my strong support for this appointment since she meets and exceeds all the criteria, on an international level. Therefore, I strongly recommend that the inauguration process for the appointment of dr. habil. Ildikó Vančo PhD as full-professor should be opened and she should be appointed professor in the field of study of Foreign languages and cultures.

Sincerely yours,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Susan Gal". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "Susan" and the last name "Gal" clearly distinguishable.

Susan Gal  
Mae & Sidney G. Metzl Distinguished Service Professor  
Departments of Anthropology and Linguistics  
Director: Center for the Study of Communication and Society