

Challenges for Students Studying Bulgarian and Chinese: Comparison and Analysis

Kaiyue Zhang

Sofia University “St. Kliment Ohridski” (Bulgaria)

Hristina Teodosieva

Sofia University “St. Kliment Ohridski” (Bulgaria)

Kaiyue Zhang. Hristina Teodosieva. CHALLENGES FOR STUDENTS STUDYING BULGARIAN AND CHINESE: COMPARISON AND ANALYSIS

Abstract. In recent years, with the deepening of cooperation between China and Bulgaria, the joint efforts in the field of education have also increased. The collaboration in education and the mutual exchange between Chinese and Bulgarian students are also prosperous. However, this process is accompanied by many language problems that learners face. This article presents the results of questionnaires, comparative analysis and personal observations of the foreign language learning situation of Chinese and Bulgarian university students. The main factors for the difficulties in the process of education are related to the differences between Chinese and Bulgarian in certain levels: phonetics, verb morphology, tense system and writing. These factors pose considerable challenges for Chinese and Bulgarian students. In the article there are comparison and analyses the results of the two questionnaire surveys conducted with representatives of both groups. The aim is to be provided a deeper, intercultural observation and research of the challenges in learning and to give recommendations that could be used as an authentic basis for future teaching and learning Chinese and Bulgarian.

Keywords: Bulgarian; Chinese; Learning Challenges; Comparison and Analysis; Foreign Language Teaching

Кайюе Джан. Христина Теодосиева. ПРЕДИЗВИКАТЕЛСТВА ПРЕД СТУДЕНТИТЕ, ИЗУЧАВАЩИ БЪЛГАРСКИ И КИТАЙСКИ ЕЗИК – СРАВНЕНИЕ И АНАЛИЗ

Резюме. Задълбочаването на сътрудничеството между Китай и България през последните години повлиява и на съвместните усилия в образователната сфера, а взаимният обмен на студенти между двете страни все повече се увеличава. В същото

време този процес е съпътстван от много езикови проблеми, с които обучаваните се сблъскват. Настоящата статия представя резултатите от проведени анкетни проучвания, сравнителен анализ и лични наблюдения по отношение на ситуацията с чуждоезиковото обучение сред български и китайски студенти. Главните фактори, които предизвикват трудности в процеса на обучение, са свързани с разликите между двата езика на няколко нива: фонетиката, морфологията на глаголите, темпоралните системи и писмеността. Тези фактори водят до значителни предизвикателства пред българските и китайските студенти. В статията са представени сравнение и анализ на резултатите от две анкетни проучвания, проведени със студенти от двете групи. Целта е да се стигне до по-задълбочено межкултурно наблюдение и проучване на предизвикателствата в обучението, както и да се дадат препоръки, които може да се използват като автентична база за бъдещото преподаване.

Ключови думи: български език, китайски език, предизвикателства в обучението, сравнение и анализ, чуждоезиково обучение

Research/Научно изследване

In recent years, with the deepening of cooperation between China and Bulgaria, the joint efforts in the field of education have also increased. The collaboration in education and the mutual exchange between Chinese and Bulgarian students are also prosperous. However, this process is accompanied by many language problems that learners face. The geographical distance between China and Bulgaria, the huge cultural differences and the dissimilar language systems, lead to many challenges for Chinese students studying Bulgarian and Bulgarian students studying Chinese.

This article examines the situation with the study of these two languages as foreign to students at universities in China and Bulgaria through a field survey, questionnaires and comparative analysis. The observation of this process reveals both similarities and large differences in the two cases. This joint study presents the most difficult and easiest aspects of learning both languages and the cultural specifics of China and Bulgaria, as well as a series of topics that arouse students' interest in learning. Two similar surveys were conducted - one among Chinese students studying Bulgarian and one among Bulgarian students studying Chinese. The questionnaires include a large number of open-ended questions and most of the conclusions in this research are based on them.

I. Most difficult and easiest aspects in the learning process

Chinese students who participated in the survey are 34. From them 39% have studied Bulgarian for less than 1 year, 30%: 1 to 3 years, 18%: 3 to 5 years and 12%: for more than 5 years. Thirty of the respondents said they had been to Bulgaria, and 55% had studied in Bulgaria for a year or more. The Bulgarian students studying Chinese who answered our questions were 35. From them 42.86% have studied Chinese for 3 to 5 years, 25.71% of the respondents said that they had studied Chinese for 1 to 3 years, 22.86%: for more than 5 years, and 8.57%: less than one year. 24 of the respondents had been to China, and three of them were only on short-term trips.

The most difficult aspects of learning Bulgarian: 38.24% of the respondents pointed listening and 26.47% noted speaking as difficult. The grammar is problematic for 20.59% of the students, and writing is hard to learn for 14.71% of them. Compared to Bulgarian students studying Chinese, the result is exactly the opposite. According to our survey for 37.14% of the Bulgarian students speaking is the most difficult component, followed by listening – 28.57% and writing – 25.71%.

The easiest aspect of learning Bulgarian for most of the Chinese students is speaking – 38.24%, followed by grammar – 29.41%, writing – 17.65% and listening – 14.71%. For Bulgarian students who study Chinese language, the easiest aspect is grammar 57.14%, while the percentage of those who find it easy to listen, write and speak is not large, respectively 17.14%, 14.29% and 11.43%.

From these results we noted an interesting phenomenon: it seems that it is easier for Chinese students to speak than to understand Bulgarian. For Bulgarian students – on the contrary, listening is easier than speaking. The common point in these two cases, however, is that both Chinese and Bulgarian students believe that verbal communication in a foreign language is the most difficult element in the course of education and in practice, way harder than reading and writing. This is probably because in universities usually there is more emphasis on reading and writing, rather than speaking exercises. The students from both sides point out in their answers a common problem: there are insufficient number of opportunities for interaction with native speakers. The lack of communication using the target language is a determining factor for these difficulties.

II. Difficulties with pronunciation and sentence structure

Both groups answered the question: “Give an example of difficulty in learning Bulgarian or Chinese and explain why it was hard to learn.” (For example: verb system, pronunciation, sentence structure or other). The results are as follows:

Table 1. Respondents' learning difficulties ranking list

Ranking of Difficulties for the Chinese Students studying Bulgarian			Ranking of Difficulties for the Bulgarian Students studying Chinese		
№ 1	13 answers	Bulgarian verb tenses	№ 1	18 answers	The Chinese tones
№ 2	7 answers	Bulgarian pronunciation	№ 2	10 answers	The logic of expression in Chinese
№ 3	5 answers	Bulgarian conjugation of the verbs	№ 3	5 answers	Chinese structure of the sentences
№ 4	5 answers	Bulgarian structure of the sentences	№ 4	3 answers	The Chinese characters
№ 5	3 answers	Listening and understanding Bulgarian	№ 5	2 answers	Distinguishing words that have close meaning

The current study of the difficulties in learning Chinese and Bulgarian shows that Bulgarian students usually consider Chinese tones as the most difficult aspect to learn and master. The second problem they face is the logic behind the expression in Chinese language; the third difficulty is the structure of the sentence; followed by the Chinese characters and the last one is distinguishing words that have close meaning.

For Chinese students studying Bulgarian, the most difficult thing to learn is the temporal system of verbs in Bulgarian grammar; the second comparatively hard aspect is the articulation in Bulgarian. Mainly this means that the pronunciation of some sounds, such as “п”, “р”; the alternation of “б” and “п”, “г” and “к” in different situations); the third difficulty is the conjugation of the verbs in Bulgarian and the sentence structure and the last one is listening.

Difficulties with pronunciation

The first common element, which is observed in both groups, is the difficulty of mastering the pronunciation – respectively the tones in Chinese and sound and soundless consonants in Bulgarian. This problem occurs from the specifics of both languages phonetic systems and the difference between them.

Chinese belongs to the Sino-Tibetan language family, and Bulgarian to the Slavic language family. The most important characteristic of Chinese phonetics compared to Bulgarian is the presence of tones. Chinese is a tonal language and Bulgarian is not. Compared to speakers of tonal languages, Bulgarian students find it more difficult to learn Chinese tones (Chai, 2020: 43-71). Tones have always been a major difficulty in Chinese as a foreign language, especially for Bulgarian students, whose native language has no tones (Chai, 2020: 71). Such pronunciation difficulties are

less common when English-speaking students study Bulgarian, as the phonetic differences between the two languages are not so great. Similarly, people whose native language is tonal, such as Vietnamese, learn Chinese phonetics easier.

Challenges due to word forms and sentence structure

The second matching component is the problem with structure of the sentences and the word order. Perhaps the most specific element in the Bulgarian language that produces difficulties for Chinese students are the verb tenses. Here could be added the conjugation of the verbs in different persons, which is also absent in Chinese. There are 9 tenses in Bulgarian, and the verb form changes with the tense and person. Unlike other languages, Chinese is an isolating language and lacks inflections (Wei, 2015: 9-15). The change of tense in Chinese is mostly realized by some adverbs, auxiliary words and other particles. This makes it difficult for Bulgarian students to recognize the tense of Chinese sentences. In addition, the verbs in Bulgarian have different personal inflections, while in Chinese verbs have no such, which undoubtedly increase students' memory burden and sometimes brings reluctance for studying.

As we all know, the pronunciation of one language is very important and teachers could not leave the articulation problems of the students uncorrected during class. At the same time, however, they cannot "correct all the mistakes". Thus, they need to focus on more flexible teaching methods so as not to break students' enthusiasm for learning. Lv Bisong points out that as second language acquisition progresses, after much memorization and mechanical practice, students are prone to fear of making mistakes (Lv, 2007). Therefore, teachers can organize entertaining games in the first 10 minutes of the speaking classes, such as tongue-twisters, dubbing movies, and other activities such as asking questions, contests, games, quick answers, or so, to show the students that they could find a fun way of exercising. Also, a system of rewards could be created to increase students' interest and enthusiasm in learning. Also teachers could assign homework for speaking as an additional method. This type of task is as follows: the teacher provides the students with an authentic record of Chinese speech, and the students repeat it after listening carefully. The students themselves compare their records with the original ones and send the teacher the best version of their own records. Assignment of "speaking tasks" should not be too frequent, so as not to demotivate students and avoid their fear of mistakes and refusal to learn.

For Chinese students studying Bulgarian, pronunciation is also a serious difficulty. One of the ways to memorize the Bulgarian pronunciation is teachers to give examples of words that sound similar but have completely different meanings. It is clear from practice that the more comical these examples are, the easier they are to remember. Chinese students studying in Bulgaria gave such an example of words that initially sounded the same to them, but later remembered them forever:

“красавица” (beautiful girl) and “краставица” (cucumber). Similar examples can be given in mastering difficult to learn sonorous and inaudible consonants, such as “боб” (bean) and “поп” (priest), “гост” (guest) and “кост” (bone). Of course, this is just one example of how Chinese students can pay more attention to the accurate pronunciation in Bulgarian. In the initial stage of foreign language learning, teachers must mainly correct mistakes that can lead to misunderstanding of the learners’ speech, such as the correct stress on vowels in Bulgarian and grammatical problems. It is also more important for students to get used to speaking the foreign language without worrying about making mistakes. Only when they have crossed this barrier they should continue to fix minor errors in their expression. As the learning process progresses, teachers should continue to point out the various small mistakes made by learners and guide students to correct them.

Should teachers correct all mistakes made by students, or should students firstly get used to speaking the foreign language and then go into detail? One of the options on that matter is to focus only on the most serious mistakes in the initial stage. The smaller mistakes also to be noted sometimes, but not so much attention should be paid to them. On the other hand, it is very helpful for students to listen to correct sentences more often. It is not difficult to see that the fear of mistakes is the biggest obstacle for language learners. Therefore, the teacher should not interrupt the student while speaking, even if he has made a mistake. Only after the student has finished speaking the teacher should give feedback.

III. The influence of cultural and social factors

Among the many questions in the survey we selected for comparative research five of them, which are interdisciplinary and have a significant impact on language learning process. We analyzed the factors which have most influence on the student’s attitude. These questions include: “When did you first hear about Bulgaria? what were your impressions of the country before you started your studies?” The responses of the two groups of students are shown in the table below:

Table 2. Respondents’ first impression of China/Bulgaria survey results

Results among the Chinese students			Results among the Bulgarian students		
Rank	Number of answers	Impressions for Bulgaria	Rank	Number of answers	Impressions for China
№ 1	8	Bulgarian roses	№ 1	13	Chinese language and culture
№ 2	6	Had no impression	№ 2	5	Chinese economic development
№ 3	5	Bulgarian films and musicians	№ 3	4	Have no impression

№ 4	4	Bulgarian yogurt	№ 4	3	Chinese nature
№ 4	4	Bulgarian geographical location	9 of the respondents have knowledge about China as children. There are 14 students who acquired knowledge about China in high school and college.		
№ 4	4	Bulgaria as an exotic country			
№ 5	1	Bulgarian football			
2 of the respondents have heard of Bulgaria as children. 11 of the respondents have heard of China in high school and college.					

Our survey showed that Bulgarian and Chinese students have different background knowledge about the foreign country. Only two of the Chinese students have had heard about Bulgaria when they were in primary school. 9 Bulgarian students were acquainted with some information about China since they were children. When asked for prior knowledge about Bulgaria – most Chinese students chose Bulgarian roses, followed by the “I had no impressions”. The third most popular answer is that they have heard about Bulgarian singers and films, followed by the Bulgarian yogurt, geographical location, and the exotic of the country.

According to the survey results of the Bulgarian students: 9 respondents had some knowledge about China as children and in primary school; 14 people got acquainted with China in high school and university. This is in contrast to the survey results of Chinese students’ impressions of Bulgaria. More Bulgarian respondents had a certain impression of China at a younger age, while fewer Chinese respondents had heard of Bulgaria as children. Bulgarian students’ first impressions of China are mainly linked with Chinese culture; secondly – impressions of China’s economic prosperity and at the next place is the answer “without any impression”. A small number of people had knowledge of Chinese natural scenery.

Differences in learning motivation

In the paper “Motivational variables in second-language acquisition”, published in 1959, Gardner and Lambert examine in detail the problem of learning a foreign language and the motivation behind this choice. They researched the social and psychological factors that influence the motivation, distinguishing them into two types: instrumental and integrative. They are defined as follows: “‘integrative’ where the aim in language study is to learn more about the language group, or to meet more and different people; ‘instrumental’, where the reasons reflect the more utilitarian value of linguistic achievement” (Gardner & Lambert, 1959: 267).

Instrumental motivation refers to pragmatic reasons for learning a foreign language, such as meeting educational requirements, gaining social achievements, potential opportunities for financial benefits, etc. Integrative is the motive for con-

necting with the others and is related to the desire to integrate into different cultural groups, to be part of the community and to understand its characteristics.

The difference between the number of Bulgarian and Chinese speakers leads to the fact that Chinese students rarely choose to study Bulgarian and their overall motivation is not very strong. Now there are 4 universities in China that offer Bulgarian language as a major (as of September 30, 2021 there are 3012 universities in China): Beijing Foreign Studies University, Tianjin Foreign Studies University, Hebei Foreign Studies University, and Second Beijing International Studies University. Data is from the Ministry of Education of the People's Republic of China [http://www.moe.gov.cn/jyb_xxgk/s5743/s5744/A03/202110/t20211025_574874.html], last visited at 29.04.2022. Bulgarian universities (as of April 26, 2021 there are a total of 52 Bulgarian universities) have 3 institutions offering Chinese major, namely Sofia University, Veliko Tarnovo University, Plovdiv University. The 54 institutions of high education include universities, professional and independent colleges. The data comes from the Bulgarian National Statistical Institute [<https://nsi.bg/bg/content/3400/висши-училища-по-вид>], last visited at 29.04.2022.

There are two Confucius Institutes in Bulgaria specializing in teaching Chinese language and culture (the Confucius Institute at the University of Sofia and the Confucius Institute in Veliko Tarnovo) and also several Confucius Classrooms in universities, primary and secondary schools and kindergartens in various parts of Bulgaria. They greatly increase the opportunities for Bulgarian students to understand the Chinese culture.

Chinese has been incorporated into the national education system in Bulgaria. There are middle schools and even primary schools where Chinese is taught. Such are 18-th middle school, the 138-th middle school, some private schools, etc. The students there have several years of experience in learning Chinese before entering university, and some even have passed the HSK level 6 test (the highest level at the Chinese Proficiency Test in old format of HSK). From 2022, the Chinese language exam upon high school graduation is included as an entrance exam at the university. It is believed that more and more Bulgarian students will join the ranks of Chinese learners in the future.

From the above results, it can be concluded that Chinese students who learn Bulgarian tend to have more “instrumental” motivation. Our survey showed that only few Chinese students are provoked by emotional factors for learning Bulgarian. Some respondents started to study the language only because they faced professional needs; life problems; had to do business or settled in Bulgaria. Others went to study abroad and decide to learn Bulgarian. On the contrary, many Bulgarian students had certain impression and understanding of China when they were children and their emotional motivation to learn Chinese is leading.

From the perspective of educational psychology, one of the biggest factors affecting the learning process are the student's emotions (Yan, 2009: 191-192).

Therefore, Bulgarian language teachers should include more information about the current situation in Bulgaria, traditions and culture of the country. This will not only improve the atmosphere in the classroom, but will also increase the interest of students in the country and will allow more Chinese students to gain a comprehensive understanding of Bulgaria.

Both groups are interested in culture-related courses

On the question: “What is your favorite subject and what is taught in it?” the responses in the two groups answered as follows:

Table 3. Survey of Respondents’ Favorite Courses

Results of the Chinese students			Results of the Bulgarian students		
Rank (from high to low)	Number of answers	Type of course	Rank (from high to low)	Number of answers	Type of course
№ 1	4	Translation	№ 1	8	Practical Chinese
№ 1	4	Speaking	№ 2	5	Ancient Chinese
№ 2	3	Culture and traditions	№ 2	5	History
№ 2	3	Listening	№ 3	3	Literature
№ 2	3	History	№ 3	3	Translation
№ 2	3	Bulgarian literature	№ 4	2	Chinese characters
№ 2	3	Don’t have	№ 4	2	International relations
№ 2	3	Grammar	№ 5	1	Chinese Dialectology
№ 3	1	Comprehensive study of Bulgaria	—		
№ 3	1	Simultaneous interpreting			

Through the survey of the interest in subjects, we found that the most favorite courses of Chinese students learning Bulgarian are “Translation” and “Speaking”. The next favorite classes are “History”, “Bulgarian Literature”, “Culture and traditions”, “Listening” and “Grammar”. The students also pointed out “Comprehensive study of Bulgaria” and “Simultaneous interpreting”. The courses that Bulgarian stu-

dents studying Chinese like the most is “Practical Chinese” (which mainly includes listening, speaking, and exercises); the second place is for “Ancient Chinese” and “History” (history of Chinese literature, ancient history and culture, etc.); the third favorite are “Literature” and “Translation courses”; the fourth are “Chinese characters” and “International relations”.

These results reveals that both groups are interested in the ancient and modern culture of the other country. It is a culturally oriented approach to teaching that captures students’ interest and deepens their understanding. While the motivations of many students tend to be pragmatic and related to potential opportunities for career realization, at the same time they are more interested in ethno-psychological, historical, and cultural topics in the process of education.

Similarities and differences in aspiration to learn

The answers to the question “What was the most enjoyable thing for you to learn?” could be classified as follows:

Table 4. Summary of survey results on the most interesting and enjoyable part of the learning process

Results of the Chinese students			Results of the Bulgarian students		
Rank (from high to low)	Number of answers	Type	Rank (from high to low)	Number of answers	Type
№ 1	14	Practice speaking Bulgarian	№ 1	16	Books and characters
№ 2	5	Improving Bulgarian by myself	№ 2	5	Studying Chinese grammar
№ 3	4	Understanding Bulgarian culture	№ 2	5	Learn Chinese Pinyin
№ 4	2	Reading in Bulgarian	№ 3	4	Practice speaking
№ 5	1	Studying Bulgarian history	№ 4	3	Understanding Chinese culture
—			№ 5	2	Read aloud in Chinese
			№ 6	1	Learn to sing Chinese songs
			№ 6	1	Learn Chinese history

The survey of learning preferences shows that the vast majority of Bulgarian students like to write Chinese characters, followed by learning Chinese grammar and Pinyin; speaking; understanding Chinese culture; reading; learning to sing Chinese songs and studying history. Chinese students consider as most interesting to practice speaking and to improve their language skills through informal teaching. For example, some respondents said they like to study abroad, while others like to further improve their language skills through independent study after class. Some respondents expressed their willingness to further learn Bulgarian by reading books and watching Bulgarian films and television. Also it was pointed out that they would like to experience Bulgarian culture and life.

Our survey shows that Bulgarian students like writing Chinese characters, while Chinese students are more willing to speak Bulgarian. The two systems of Chinese: pinyin and characters determine that Chinese characters cannot be spelled directly. Bulgarian students need to memorize pinyin, Chinese characters and tones at the same time when learning. This puts forward higher-level requirements for Bulgarian students. Secondly, the “square characters” with the unique traditional charm of Chinese characteristics and the Cyrillic characters are also very different at every level. Beautifully written Chinese characters can often be extended to higher spiritual levels such as self-awareness and personal cultivation, so called “characters looking like people”, “seeing characters like faces”, etc. This also shows that in addition to learning the knowledge of Chinese language ontology, Bulgarian students began to pay more attention to personal internal training under the influence of Chinese culture. Due to the specifics of Chinese, the phonetic and the writing system, if students like to write Chinese characters, they can avoid the situation of being fluent in Chinese but not able to write. Teachers could also hold Chinese character writing competitions and hold calligraphy exhibitions according to the preferences of Bulgarian students.

Compared with Bulgarian students who like writing, Chinese respondents are more interested in speaking Bulgarian. At the beginning of the paper, we have shown the high level of instrumental learning motivation of them. They expect to be able to improve their language level faster and to communicate smoothly, which also reflects the pragmatism and the learning abilities of the Chinese students. Furthermore, the Bulgarian Cyrillic script and the Latin alphabet show a certain similarity in writing, so the writing of Bulgarian usually doesn't cause great difficulties to Chinese students who already know another foreign language. At the same time, the survey results also show that they often prefer to enjoy independent learning in their free time, such as reading extracurricular books, improving their Bulgarian language skills by meeting with Bulgarian friends and traveling, so as to integrate into the local culture and life more quickly, to research information about Bulgaria, etc.

Opportunities for practicing the foreign language

The answers of the question “How often do you have the opportunity to practice spoken Bulgarian/Chinese and where?” are as follows:

Table 5. Summary of survey results on the frequency of speaking practice

Results of the Chinese students			Results of the Bulgarian students		
Rank	Number of answers	Type	Rank	Number of answers	Type
№ 1	13	Rare or no opportunities	№ 1	14	At the university
№ 2	11	At the university	№ 2	10	Have no opportunities
№ 3	5	In daily life	№ 3	6	In daily life
№ 4	3	In Bulgaria	№ 4	4	Practice everyday
№ 5	2	At work	№ 5	1	Practice often

The frequency of practicing spoken language also shows something in common between the both groups: most students in China and Bulgaria do not have sufficient opportunities to communicate using the foreign language. The survey shows that the majority of Bulgarian students only practice speaking at the university. The second common answer is that they do not have the opportunity to practice speaking. Especially during the epidemic, there are very few opportunities for such activities. The same number of respondents indicated that there are certain opportunities to practice speaking in daily life (this involves friends, imitating the lines and tone of Chinese film and TV shows, through online social platforms, etc.), but it is still insufficient. In the third place, 4 people said that they have the opportunity to practice every day (this is mainly because some students are currently studying in China and the friends they get along with are Chinese, etc.).

The situation with Chinese students is similar. Outside of university, they have too few opportunities to practice speaking. Only 5 respondents noted that they use the foreign language in their daily lives (cafes, boyfriends/girlfriends and social groups, online platforms, etc.); 3 respondents noted that they had the opportunity to practice speaking in Bulgaria, but not in China; 2 people said they have such opportunities at work.

The lack of communication with native speakers of the two languages, and the consequent expressing and understanding problems, is one of the main factors hindering both groups of learning. A possible solution to this problem is to create an online platform as a shared space for students from both sides and to hold regular meetings, such as “Chinese Corner”, which is popular in Chinese universities where foreign students study. This would give students the opportunity to meet and

interact with colleagues from other countries at a defined place and time. Of course, organizing such events in universities in Bulgaria and China helps to achieve this purpose. But since both countries have relatively small numbers of students studying these two languages and are currently affected by the pandemic, it may be more successful to create an online platform that could help bring together more interested people.

Conclusions

According to the surveys, questionnaires and personal observations of the two researchers, the following conclusions can be drawn:

1. In the early stages of education, whether it is a Chinese student learning Bulgarian or a Bulgarian student learning Chinese, it is most difficult to communicate in the target language. In the process of learning, although these difficulties have been slightly reduced, the insufficient number of spoken courses and the lack of real opportunities to use the language in daily life determine the persistence of this trend.

2. The specifics of the pronunciation of the two languages has brought great difficulties to learners. In Chinese, the biggest problem for students is the remembering and articulation of tones, while in Bulgarian, there are voiced and unvoiced consonants, as well as homonyms.

3. The opportunities for verbal communication of the two groups of surveyed students are very limited. This predetermines some of their problems in mastering speaking and understanding.

4. When Chinese students choose their majors, most of them are pragmatic, while Bulgarian students tend to learn Chinese by personal interest. However, with no regard of the different motivations, the share of courses that arouse their interest most are the cultural-related courses. We can also observe a very big change in the level of motivation of the both groups during the course of education.

5. In the learning process, the enthusiasm of students has improved significantly. This benefits from the teachers' professional skills, the applicability of the curriculum and the students' personal interests.

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Kaiyue Zhang, PhD Student

zhangkaiyue2018@gmail.com

Sofia University “St. Kliment Ohridski”

15 Tzar Osvoboditel Blvd., Sofia 1504

Bulgaria

Hristina Teodosieva, PhD

teodosieva_s@abv.bg

Sofia University “St. Kliment Ohridski”

15 Tzar Osvoboditel Blvd., Sofia 1504

Bulgaria

Кайюе Джан, докторант

zhangkaiyue2018@gmail.com

Софийски университет „Св. Климент Охридски“

бул. „Цар Освободител“ 15, София 1504

България

Ас. Христина Теодосиева

teodosieva_s@abv.bg

Софийски университет „Св. Климент Охридски“

бул. „Цар Освободител“ 15, София 1504

България