



Difficulties in Learning Western and Oriental Languages: A Comparative Approach to Learning German and Mandarin Chinese

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Internship Report

Master in Intercultural Studies for Business

Esta versão contém as críticas e sugestões dos elementos do júri

SEPTEMBER – 2018



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Presented to the Porto Accounting and Business School (ISCAP) to obtain a Master's degree in Intercultural Studies for Business, under the supervision of Professors Yu Yong, and Clara Sarmento, Ph.D.

Abstract

The following internship report aims to analyse and compare the learning difficulties underlying western and oriental languages. In this case, the first group of languages is represented by German, whereas the second group is represented by Mandarin Chinese. Regarding the report structure, it is organized in six parts. Firstly, in the introduction section, a brief contextualization of the research topic is made and the research methodologies are defined. Secondly, in the second chapter, some general theoretical background on foreign language learning, the general difficulties related to it and the role of the language teacher are given. After that, in the third chapter, a detailed characterization of the studied languages is made. Finished the theoretical part, in the fourth chapter, all the practical work performed during the internship as a language teacher is described. Further, in the fifth chapter, the results concerning the learning difficulties are presented. As last part, in the conclusion section, a summing up of the main ideas and findings is made.

Keywords: Western Languages; Oriental Languages; German; Mandarin Chinese; Learning Difficulties

Resumo

O presente relatório de estágio tem como objetivo analisar e comparar as dificuldades na aprendizagem subjacentes às línguas ocidentais e orientais. Neste caso, o primeiro grupo de línguas é representado por Alemão, enquanto o segundo é representado por Mandarim. Relativamente à estrutura do relatório, este é composto por seis partes. Em primeiro lugar, na secção introdutória, é feita uma breve contextualização do tema a ser estudado, e são definidas as metodologias de investigação. Em segundo lugar, no segundo capítulo, é feito um breve enquadramento teórico sobre a aprendizagem das línguas estrangeiras, as dificuldades na aprendizagem e o papel do professor de línguas. De seguida, no terceiro capítulo, é apresentada uma caracterização detalhada das duas línguas investigadas neste relatório. Terminada a parte teórica, no quarto capítulo, é descrito todo o trabalho prático desenvolvido durante o estágio como professora de línguas. Posteriormente, no quinto capítulo, são apresentados os resultados deste estudo. Em suma, na secção da conclusão, é feito um balanço final das principais ideias resultantes desta investigação.

Palavras-chave: Línguas Ocidentais; Línguas Orientais; Alemão; Mandarim; Dificuldades na Aprendizagem.

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1. Introduction

The internship is one of the possible culminating stages of the Master's program, which allows students to put the acquired theory throughout the previous semesters into practice and test their skills. The present report aims at analysing and comparing the learning difficulties of western and oriental languages, namely, when learning German and Mandarin Chinese. It is, therefore, the written result of all the practical work performed as a language teacher during the last semester from 21st February to 16th June 2018.

1.1 Delimitation of the Research Subject and Objectives

In the current globalized world, characterized by falling of geographical borders and political barriers, a growing technological progress, movement of people and information, the interdependence and cultural exchange between nations have become a common, everyday reality (Fernandez, 2008, p. 12). On a daily basis, a language is the most used element of any culture, which reflects the inner nature, values and worldviews of its speakers. Therefore, learning and being able to communicate in foreign languages is the most efficient way to get closer and understand other cultures (Elmes, 2013, p. 12).

Given that, as highlighted by Scarino & Liddicoat (2009, p. 8), people should develop intercultural skills, including language learning, in order to be personally and professionally successful. However, it is necessary to bear in mind, the fact that each language has its own characteristics, structures, rules and meanings (Richards & Schmidt, 2002, p. 283). Due to different historical and cultural backgrounds, these differences become more evident when approaching western and oriental languages.

Having contacted with more than 3 foreign languages on both sides, first as a learner and later as a teacher, has given rise to the need for investigating and making a comparison of difficulties faced, when learning western and oriental languages. Nevertheless, since it is impossible to study all the languages due to their different characteristics, I chose to focus only on the learning difficulties underlying German and Mandarin Chinese, both languages I contacted with during the Master, and also due to their importance in the current world.

European Commission (2012, p.10) and British Council (2013, pp. 27 & 32) point out in their reports several aspects that prove the relevance of these two languages. Concerning German, it is the tenth most widely spoken language in the world with over 110 million native speakers. In Europe, it has official status in the following countries: Germany, Austria, Switzerland, Belgium and Luxembourg. It is also spoken in other regions like Liechtenstein, Alsace-Lorraine (France) and Alto Adige (Italy). Given that, in the European Union, German occupies the first position in terms of native speakers.

Regarding Mandarin Chinese, it is the first most widely spoken language in the world with more than 800 million native speakers. Currently, it has official status in China, Taiwan and Singapore.

Apart from this important data, when selecting the research subject, there was an attempt to combine personal skills with an actual matter needing solutions or improvements, which could be achieved through a more practical approach, namely the internship.

Thus, taking into consideration what has been said above, the main objectives of this research are:

- Identifying and analysing the difficulties manifested by students in the process of learning German and Mandarin Chinese.
- Trying to set a parallel between both languages, by identifying similarities / differences in learning difficulties.
- Providing possible solutions to solve the difficulties.

1.2 Research Methodologies

As often happens in social sciences field, the following report was based on the qualitative research methodologies. To Bogdan & Biklen (1994, pp.47-51), qualitative research can be described as a more naturalistic, descriptive and interpretative approach to the world. This means that qualitative researchers study the phenomena in their real context, attempting to interpret them in terms of the meanings people bring to them. The

present research was based on the combination of two qualitative methods: Focus Group and Direct Observation. The main reasons for choosing the qualitative research methodologies were the research subject nature, as well as, the amount of time available. As suggested by Morgan (1997, p.8) and Krueger (2002, p.1), the Focus Group method is a group interview, in which people with similar characteristics are organized in small groups (from 5 to 10 participants) with the purpose of having a discussion and give their feedback on the investigated topic, which would generate relevant data to the investigation. As my language courses were organized in groups, it was considered pertinent to apply this method to each group and give the chance for participants to share their visions on the difficulties faced.

To complement this Silva et.al (2014, pp.180-186) mention that this method should be understood as a process, comprising five main steps:

- **Planning** – Based on the research objectives, this first step involves the development of a schedule, elaboration of an interview guide and identification of the potential participants. Concerning this report, the planning of the Focus Group was made one month before the actual discussion. Taking into consideration that the investigation topic comprises two languages, it was decided that there would be two separate focus groups that would be asked the same questions, in order to facilitate the comparison of the languages. The interview guide is presented in the Appendix 1. Regarding the identification of the participants, these were University students to whom the courses were taught.
- **Preparation** – This step includes the selection of the participants, materials and place for the implementation of the Focus Group. Regarding the participants, 10 of 24 students were selected to participate in both focus groups: 5 in German and 5 in Mandarin Chinese. This selection was influenced by two factors: the willingness to participate in the debate and the ability to discuss about their own learning difficulties. All the participants were previously informed about the purposes of the research, as well as, the type of questions they would have to answer. The two sessions were scheduled to 29th and 30th of May of 2018 and took place in the Profdomus classroom.
- **Moderation** – Undertaken by a moderator, this step involves the moderation of the discussion and taking of notes. The duration, as well as, the process of each session depend on the moderator's personal skills and experience. In this case,

each session took about 1hour. The students were allowed to bring some notes, which helped them to answer the questions.

- **Data Analysis** – This step involves the transcription of the recorded discussion and selection of the relevant data. Having listened to the records, only those parts answering the research purposes were transcribed and included in this report.
- **Presentation of the Results** – This final step involves the written reporting of the collected results. In the present report, the results are presented in the chapter 5.

Moving on to the Direct Observation method, it can be described, according to Kothari (2004, p.96) and Kawulich (2005), as a qualitative tool of data collection, which is used to study social events and human interactions in their natural and daily environment. Unlike the Focus Group method, under the Direct Observation method, researchers gather and interpret the information according to their own perspective without asking for feedback from the group under study. Apart from that, the authors add that the Direct Observation can be divided into two types: participant and non-participant, depending on whether the researchers present themselves as part of the group they study or stay completely detached.

As a teacher, observing and analysing students' difficulties was my continuous task throughout the internship. Although I did not assume myself as a group member, I conducted the classes and students knew that their performance in the classroom was being recorded. So, it is possible to say that this observation was not completely detached. Regardless of its typology, as referred by L. Jorgensen (1989, pp.12-14), this method is appropriate for descriptive studies, which aim at generating theoretical or practical detailed data about the investigated phenomena, as it is the case of the learning difficulties analysis and comparison. The results of the observations are also reported in the fifth chapter.

As last point to mention, Morgan (1997, p.8) states that Focus Group and Direct Observation are often used together to complement each other limitations, namely the fact that as seen above, each of them focuses on one side of the investigation. Since the learning difficulties analysis and comparison require a real context, and involvement

from both sides, teacher and students, the combination of both methods is appropriate for this investigation.

1.3. Characterization of the Participants

Switching to the students characterization, in this report the whole sample was composed of 24 Bachelor and Master 20-27 years-Old Portuguese students from ISCAP, University of Porto, University of Fernando Pessoa, Catholic University of Porto and University of Aveiro. Their areas of study were Translation, International Trade, Law, Marketing, Languages and Business Relations. Half of students attended German course and the other half attended Mandarin Chinese. It is also important to mention that the majority of participants, 22 students, were fluent in English, 4 had intermediate level in Spanish and other 2 in French. Only 2 students from German course did not have prior contact with foreign languages.

1.4. Report Structure

Apart from the introduction and conclusion sections, this internship report is divided into two theoretical and two practical chapters. As seen above, the introductory part, is a starting point of this paper, and therefore, it contextualizes the investigated topic and approaches the research methodologies, which are the pillars of the whole study. Moving on further, the first theoretical chapter, chapter 2, presents some basic notions underlying the foreign language learning, as well as, some relevant data on most required foreign languages in the current world; general learning difficulties and different roles of the language teacher as the person who coordinates the learning process. To complement this general overview, the second theoretical chapter, chapter 3, deals with the specific characteristics of German and Mandarin Chinese languages, such as: origins, phonetics, writing and tense structure, which are the basis to understand the learning difficulties.

Switching to the practical part, the first practical chapter, chapter 4, refers to the work performed during the internship, which goes from the organizational tasks to actual teaching activity. The second practical chapter, chapter 5, provides the results of the

current study, by describing and comparing the main difficulties experienced in both languages and suggesting possible solutions for each difficulty. As last point of the report, the conclusion section presents a summing up of the major findings and learnings acquired throughout the internship and elaboration of this report.

Chapter 2 – Foreign Language Learning

The present theoretical chapter provides a general overview on foreign language learning, with a special focus on the following aspects: factors underlying the foreign language learning process; performance of the languages in the current global environment; most common learning difficulties and the different roles of the language teacher.

2.1 Foreign Language Learning

According to Richards & Schmidt (2002, p. 284), unlike the mother tongue learning, which children learn at home on a more natural and innate level, foreign language learning usually results from a conscious will and decision, as it was the case of the sample of this report described above.

The language is regarded as foreign when it is not spoken in the society the learner lives (Adiyaman et.al, n.d, p.12). This definition leads us to other two concepts that should be differentiated, namely language acquisition and language learning. Kramer-Moeller & Catalano (2015, p. 327) state that although these terms refer to the same reality, they occur differently: acquisition happens naturally without instructions, when, for example, someone moves abroad and learns a language in a natural context, whereas learning is related to a more formal study, under guidance of a teacher in the classroom. This report focuses on the learning side.

In the second half of the last century several branches of theories on foreign language learning were developed. Taking into account the ideas of Scarino & Liddicoat (2009, pp. 25-27) and Kramer-Moeller & Catalano (2015, pp. 327-328), in this report only three major branches will be discussed. Initially, there was a behaviourist belief that foreign languages are learnt by imitation and responses to outside stimulus. This means that learners keep on repeating tasks designed by the teacher and by doing so, they acquire the target language. Later, this idea was contested by cognitive theories, which claimed that language learning is not a matter of imitation and memorization, rather it is developed through thinking and understanding. According to this approach, each learner processes and assimilates the new content in their own way. In order to be effective, this inherent process of selection and recycling requires a systematic context and guidance. Today, the most widely accepted perspective is that the mental activity and consequent-

ly language learning result from sociocultural interactions. Based on this perspective, the learner assumes an active position and through contacting with others develops language skills.

These theoretical branches provide general ideas on foreign language learning, but as human beings each of us brings a different set of worldviews, features, abilities and experiences into the classroom, which end up influencing our performance as learners. Therefore, it is important to approach this phenomena from the individual point of view. Khasinah (2014, pp. 3-7) and Wang (2014, pp. 28-30) point out internal and external factors that influence the language learning process:

- **Intelligence and Aptitude** – Both concepts refer to cognitive abilities and academic skills, which allow the learner to assimilate and use new information. However, the authors defend that Aptitude goes beyond Intelligence and is more like an innate talent to languages, which cannot be trained.
- **Motivation and Attitude** – Motivation is said to be one of the most important factors in language learning. It is the driving force of the entire process, which keeps the learner engaged. Attitude, on its turn, has to do with a general idea a learner developed about a certain language, its culture and speakers.
- **Personality** – This variable includes several features and, therefore, it is difficult to define and measure it. As stated by the authors, the characteristics with more impact on language learning are: Extraversion vs. Introversion and Anxiety. In simple words, more open and less anxious learners tend to develop better language skills, especially what concerns the speaking skills.
- **Age** – In general, children and adolescents tend to learn and achieve proficiency faster than adults.
- **Classroom environment** – It involves the cultural background of both learners and teacher; the interactions between them; teaching and assessment methods. All these aspects in one way or another influence learners' performance and progress.
- **Learning style** – The way how a certain language is assimilated varies from person to person. For instance, there are learners who assimilate the content better through audio or visual materials and activities, whereas others lean towards writing down and rewriting the content.

- **Native language** – The inherent characteristics of the native language influence the way how the foreign language is assimilated. If both languages are relatively similar, the learning process will flow more easily due to the possibility to make associations. In cases when the native and target languages are too different, it will take some time for learners to find the most appropriate way to set a parallel between them.
- **Prior contact with foreign languages** – In general, there is a tendency, which shows that the more languages a person learns, the easier it is to learn the next one. Relating this to my personal experience, this ease results from the possibility to make mental comparisons between the acquired languages.

Apart from these factors, it is important to mention how the foreign language learning is organized and conducted. This is done based on official language level frameworks. Let us take the European framework as example. As stated by the Council of Europe (2001, pp. 24-26), this framework was created for two reasons: to allow learners to register their progress and achievements and to help teachers to design the syllabus and facilitate the certification procedures. This specific framework comprises three broad bands, marked with letters *A*, *B* and *C*, each of them divided into two scales, for example, *A1* and *A2*. These three letters correspond to elementary, intermediate and advanced levels respectively. These levels are defined and evaluated according to four dimensions: *Listening*, *Reading*, *Writing* and *Speaking*. Sadiku (2015, pp. 30-31) highlights the importance of embracing all these four competences throughout the learning process because it will allow learners to create different contexts and ways of exchanging information in a new language and, consequently, gain confidence. The author defends that nowadays due to Internet and technologies both learners and teachers have tools to develop all the four components.

Little (2005, pp. 328-330), on his turn, argues that his studies have shown that although this framework is a helpful tool, its descriptions should not be taken literally, nor strictly followed and should always be adapted to the context. From my personal experiences, I can also add some observations. Above all, the levels should be adapted to the course duration and participants goals. In situations when this does not happen, learners end up not getting a clear notion on the structures of the target language and, consequently, lose their motivation. Furthermore, the syllabus of each level should not only be grouped

based on their level of difficulty, but also on how often a certain aspect is used by the native speakers in the day-to-day life. This requires a greater focus on the foreign language specific characteristics, instead of blindly embracing the general descriptions of the framework or following a certain textbook.

Having clarified the organizational aspects underlying the foreign language learning process, it is necessary to understand what are the reasons that make people invest in languages and the role these play in the current society. Curran et.al (2000, p. 9) list the four main reasons that motivate people, especially youngsters to learn foreign languages:

- Professional purposes
- Leisure
- Social integration
- Academic purposes

Considering that professional purposes is the first reason, Adiyaman et.al (n.d, p. 21) argue that in the current world, English and other languages most frequently taught in European schools, namely French, Spanish and German are no longer enough to fulfil the labour market needs. The European Commission report (2012, p.19 & 69) showed that these are precisely the most widely spoken foreign languages in Europe: English (38%); French (12%); German (11%) and Spanish (7%). Russian is on the fifth position with 5% of speakers. In each language, the majority of speakers regarded their ability as “*better than basic skills*”. Apart from that, when focusing on the languages investigated in this report, only 17 % and 6% of Europeans considered German and Chinese important for their personal development. This may be so because these people don’t see themselves living or working in the countries where these languages are spoken.

Transferring this to a global stage, especially what concerns the business world, Cere (2012, p.6) presents the following picture: English is regarded as the most important professional language followed by Chinese, Japanese, Spanish, German, French, Italian, Russian, Portuguese and Korean. When comparing the European and world realities, it is possible to say that there are differences in terms of what is required and what is offered.

Given that, in order to avoid these differences and meet the needs of the labour market, Adiyaman et.al (n.d, p. 33) claim that there should be greater cooperation and dialogue between Education and Businesses. In other words, the Higher Education should focus on preparing graduates with advanced and diverse language skills: on the one hand, in-

vest in non-European languages, including Arabic, on the other hand, increase the percentage of speakers of those most widely spoken and other European languages. These needs require a continuous training and financial support from the government or private companies that understand the importance of investing in their potential future employees.

To sum up, when approaching foreign language learning in the Era of Globalization, especially from the perspective of a future language teacher, understanding what shapes the learning process should not be the only priority, it is also important to know which languages are needed in the labour market and how does our knowledge can contribute to professional success of the students.

2.2 Foreign Language Learning Difficulties

Following the idea of turning a foreign language into a day-to-day tool, and before approaching the learning difficulties associated to German and Mandarin Chinese, it is important to understand what kind of general obstacles learners go through when learning a foreign language. The main idea to keep in mind is that these difficulties are influenced by the factors discussed above and by the intrinsic features of the target language. Both perspectives will be discussed below.

Ganschow et.al (1998, pp.1-3) in their Linguistic Coding Differences Hypotheses proposed that the primary causes for foreign language learning difficulties are related to problems with native language skills (reading, writing, spelling and speaking) and a low aptitude for foreign language learning, which to Carroll *apud* Wold (2006, p. 11) includes four kind of abilities: phonemic coding ability (the ability to identify the sounds of a language and relate them to their visual written representation); grammatical sensitivity (the ability to recognize grammatical functions of words in sentences); associative ability (the ability to associate words and their meanings and retain them) and inductive language learning ability (the ability to induce the rules of the language). For example, as referred by the authors, poor readers and writers tend to experience stronger difficulties with phonology, orthography and syntax in both native and foreign languages. This leads us to the idea that, according to Mady & Garbati, (2014, pp. 2-3), the exploration of the learners' native language throughout the classes alongside with the target language is one of the key factors for a successful learning process and maximization of

students' achievements. These authors highlight that several studies have shown that students have the ability to transfer their learning strategies from one language to another, especially when this occurs in settings that recognize the importance of these strategies. Given that, the teacher should find ways to make connections between the first and target languages when conveying the content. The quantity and the manner of the first language use will depend on the target language characteristics, level and time available. Lightbown & Spada (2006, pp. 60-65) add, on their turn, that factors like anxiety, motivation and attitude, although are not considered permanent features, when associated to specific situations and circumstances can also originate learning difficulties. In case of anxiety, this may happen, for example, when a student has to speak in the foreign language in the classroom. Concerning motivation and attitude, there has been a debate on whether these are a cause or a consequence of the difficulties (Ganshow, et.al 1998, p. 2). In other words, a low motivated student can have a low learning performance from the start on, whereas another highly motivated student can lose it throughout the process, when facing other difficulties. On the other hand, the lack of motivation can be linked to the absence of an appropriate learning method, since a significant part of learners have difficulties in finding their own strategy and consequently the motivation decreases. Likewise, it is not always easy to know whether negative attitudes towards a foreign language produce learning obstacles or it happens the way around. However, it is certain that regardless of the way these attitudes are generated, inside or outside the classroom, this factor will affect the learning process (Oroujlou & Vahedi, 2011, p. 997). Faced with this situation, the teacher should identify the roots of the low performance associated to both factors and try to highlight the positive aspects of the target language and find ways to engage students in different activities, for example, asking them to make a list about the reasons why they are learning the language and the most difficult aspects about it. This approach will more likely release their resistance towards the language.

Following these ideas, it is important to mention that there are cases in which one hindering aspect can be mitigated by the other positive one. For instance, if an adult decides to learn a foreign language, based on the age factor they will more likely experience more difficulties, but at the same time, if they are enough motivated or already know another foreign language, the learning process may be equally successful to a younger learner (Lightbown & Spada, 2006, p. 67). Wold (2006, p. 12) mentions other

two habits that will more likely make the learning process more challenging, namely the sporadic classroom attendance and lack of practice outside the classroom.

Apart from these explanations on the relation between the factors and learning difficulties, other authors focus on intrinsic variables of the language: phonetics, writing, grammar and vocabulary, presenting the situations in which these four components can turn into difficulties. The phonetics, as mentioned by Fagan (2009, p.4), is a subfield of linguistics that studies the sounds produced by the human speech. It is the first aspect a learner contacts with when learning a new language. However, these sounds are not produced and combined by chance and bring a meaning in them (Fromkin et.al, 2003, pp. 4-8).

Despite these facts, Fraser (2011, pp. 587-592) states that phonetics is the least investigated and most complex area of linguistics. Therefore, there are unclear difficulties associated to its learning. Gilakjani & Ahmadi (2011, pp. 74-79) refer that each language has its own sounds and when these sounds are too different from the first language, it is hard for learners to make the mental transition. On the other hand, learners are not only expected to produce the foreign sounds, but also recognize them. And these two aspects make phonetics a real challenge. Donaldson (2007, p. 1) complements these ideas by saying that the transcription of the world languages phonetics, namely the International Phonetic Alphabet (IPA) has facilitated their recognition. And although some people are more prone to recognize and retain the sounds, learning phonetics requires a competent guidance from the teacher's side and more than other variables, a real context. Concerning the writing, it is another complex skill, which requires instruction. Based on the words of Robinson & Gadelii (2003, pp. 5-10), Putri et.al (2016, p. 219) and Wang et.al (2014, pp. 66-67), it is possible to identify three kind of difficulties: in alphabetic languages, the written system is the representation of their phonetics, so when learning such languages, the problems with phonetics will more likely affect the writing ability; insufficient grammar knowledge will result in poor writing skills; a different writing system will be more difficult to assimilate.

Moving on to grammar. According to Richards and Schmidt (2002, pp. 230, 481 & 535) grammar is often considered as the heart of a language, which refers to its structures and rules, namely to the way words are grouped and combined to form sentences. This concept encompasses other three ideas, such as: morphology (the study of the word formation and word classes), syntax (the word functions in a sentence) and semantics (the study of meanings). Based on this definition, Swan (2011, pp. 558-564) and Fromkin

et.al (2003, pp. 11-19) point out that the major difficulty about learning grammar relies on the fact that these categories of words and the way these are organized in sentences vary from language to language. On the one hand, there are languages, which own more grammatical categories than others; on the other hand, some languages put more emphasis on the word order than others. The difficulty level is closely related to the mother tongue grammatical system. Regardless of the situation, the authors emphasize that mastering the foreign language grammar is essential to achieve native speaker proficiency.

Regarding the vocabulary learning, Kato (2008, pp. 107-110) argues that the major difficulty about it, is the attempt to grasp it without a context. According to this author, new words should not be simply memorized and removed from their contexts. By doing so, learners will forget them in a while and won't be able to implement them in a daily oral conversation.

As last point, it is necessary to highlight that none of these authors exclude the idea of the primary role of the mother tongue and aptitude presented above. On the other hand, the weaknesses in one language variable will more likely affect the others. For example, poor grammar skills will not only affect the way we write, but foremost the oral language and, at the same time, will condition the vocabulary consolidation due to the inability to create a context. Likewise, problems with phonetics, especially with pronunciation, will more likely lead to speaking and vocabulary implementation difficulties. So, learning difficulties are a complex issue to be studied that differs from language to language, person to person and context to context.

2.3 Different Roles of the Language Teacher

As last point in this chapter and taking into account that the classroom learning is coordinated by a teacher, it becomes important to analyse their roles and what kind of skills a good language teacher should develop.

Livingston, (2016, p.2) highlights once again the impacts of Globalization, by saying that new ways of understanding knowledge and the way we learn, powerful technological tools and intense migration flows have also affected the way language teachers are perceived and the roles they are expected to perform. Generally speaking, today a language teacher is no longer viewed as an authoritarian figure or a simply source of in-

formation who imposes tasks and approaches. Instead of that, these professionals have gained new roles and functions.

Archana & Rani (2017, pp. 2-3) introduce some of these roles:

- **Facilitator** – Being a facilitator means assisting the students throughout the learning process and coming up with diverse activities and methods to engage the class, help them to overcome difficulties and master the target language. Curran et.al (2000, p.9) add that although the traditional teaching methods provide more security for all involved, teachers have to vary their approaches according to the group and context. For example, when looking at the academic background of the students, those studying Translation will more likely require different approaches from those studying International Trade.
- **Learner** – It is important for teachers to develop the ability to think from the learners' perspective and constantly adapt themselves to their students. This also implies openness towards unplanned situations that may happen in the classroom.
- **Manager** – This role involves not only the capacity to coordinate the classroom activities and timing, but also the backstage planning of the syllabus. To complement this, Scarino & Liddicoat (2009, p. 56) state that language teachers should make use of technologies to diversify the classroom activities and engage students, for example, through videos, podcasts and music. However, Lederman et.al (2016, p. 695) call our attention to the fact that schools are not always equipped with all necessary tools, nor language courses provide sufficient time for teachers to carry out their approaches. So, this observation proves that the working conditions to which teachers are exposed also have impact on the effectiveness of their roles.
- **Assessor and Evaluator** – This is a common task within teachers, which aims at verifying the acquired knowledge. When performing this role, it is necessary to remain as objective as possible, so that none is discouraged. Any correction should not be made immediately, in order not to inhibit the student. On the other hand, it is essential to provide different kind of tasks, oral and written, so that students can express their different abilities.

To complement this, Savu et.al (2014, pp. 154-156) present other three functions that a language teacher should be able to perform:

- **Motivator** – Teachers should show enthusiasm about the language they are teaching in order to generate the feeling of motivation in their students. Sharing own experiences as language learners may be helpful at achieving this.
- **Knowledgeable professional** – This is another relevant aspect, reflecting the theoretical and academic knowledge of a language teacher who is not only expected to master the taught language in the four components mentioned above, but also find the best strategies to convey it to their students.
- **Highly-skilled Communicator and Intercultural Mediator** – Being able to communicate in a foreign language is the priority of any language learner. Given that, the teacher is expected to boost and develop the communication skills in their students, by creating pleasant classroom environment and stimulating interaction among the group. Apart from that, and taking into account the global interdependence between nations referred above, teachers should also assume the role of intercultural mediators. This means that there should be a continuous attempt to broaden students' worldviews on the language they are learning, its native speakers and its importance on a global stage. Lederman et.al (2016, p. 695), complement that to fully accomplish this function, a good teacher should foster in their students free thinking, a continuous search for understanding and appreciation for the difference.

Having approached the main roles of the modern language teacher, it is possible to see that most of these concepts were not expected from this profession before. So, current teachers are expected to develop flexibility and ability to undertake a variety of functions on a daily basis. According to Savu et.al (2014, p.153) these holistic competences and abilities can only be acquired through permanent training and professional development. The authors argue that due to a rapid evolvement of the contemporary world, there should be a common awareness about the fact that what is acceptable today can become outdated tomorrow. Given that, a continuous exposure to these experiences is essential for teachers to upgrade and expand their knowledge, beliefs, skills and practices. Boudersa (2016, p. 5) complements this by saying that teachers at all levels need to

be trained in a more broadened way, which goes beyond a workshop on teaching methodologies, but aims at self-questioning process, which will result in conscious changes and improvements.

On the other hand, when approaching student language teachers and their first professional experience, Borg (2011, p. 220) points out that the practicum assumes a fundamental role in shaping their future career, since it boosts the transition from the theory into a real context. In fact, throughout their graduation years, students tend to develop a set of ideas and assumptions regarding the teaching activity, which not always reflect the reality. So, this first professional contact allows them to become aware of the real aspects underlying this profession and develop their own pedagogical skills. However, the author highlights that in order for an internship to have positive outcomes, there should be a strong sense of cooperation between all concerned: the University, the school or other educational entity, the supervisors and the trainee student.

To sum up, based on what has been said above, being a good language teacher in the current world implies acquisition of a variety of skills and development of conditions, which do not only depend on the teachers themselves. So, there should be a common awareness that all the involved parts in the teachers' education have to embrace changes and work for the same goal.

Chapter 3 – Contextualization of the Languages

The following theoretical chapter provides a detailed contextualization of German and Mandarin Chinese languages, namely what concerns their origins, phonetics, writing and tense structure. These four aspects will serve as guideline to identify and analyse the learning difficulties further in the practical chapters.

3.1 Western Language – German

3.1.1 Origins

Alongside with English, Dutch, Afrikaans and other minor languages, German language belongs to West Germanic language group, one of the branches within the Indo-European language family. The emergence of Germanic languages, which dates back to 2000 BC was a result of intense migration flows of Germanic tribes, who settled in northern Europe and throughout the centuries expanded to the south, east and west of the European territory (Hoberg et.al, 2017, p.21) and (Schrijver, 2014, p.94).

As all Indo-European languages, West Germanic languages are inflected languages, meaning that their words suffer morphological changes in person, gender, number, tense and case. German is considered a high-inflected language, and therefore, it encompasses all these categories (Fagan, 2009, p. 56). As the other languages, German has also evolved throughout the time. Firstly, as mentioned by Coutinho (2003, p. 43), between 453 and 700 AC, the language split into two main dialects: High German (*Hochdeutsch*) and Low German (*Niederdeutsch*). This split occurred more in terms of phonetics. For example, in High German, d [d] turned into t [t] (Dag→Tag); k [k] turned into ch [x] / [ç] (Buk→Buch); t [t] turned into z [ts], when at the beginning of a word (ten→zehn), and s [s], when between vowels (better→besser); p [p] also suffered many changes, depending on its position in a word and the letters it follows or precedes (Pund→Pfund; Ape→Affe; helpen→helfen). Secondly, as complemented by Russ (1994, p. 10), the High German itself was sub-divided into four periods of evolution: Old-High German

(770-1050), Middle High German (1050-1350), Early New High German (1350-1650) and New High German (1650-XX century).

Hoberg et.al (2017, pp. 25-29) and Coutinho (2003, pp. 43-45) pointed out some changes occurred during these periods:

- Words with fewer syllables. For example, the word for kingdom or empire evolved from *rîchi* to *Reich*.
- Definite and indefinite articles as case indicators. The majority of German words have gradually lost their endings.
- Reduced use of the Genitive case. It started being replaced by other three cases with the support of prepositions, for example: “*Ich erinnere mich des Vorfalls*” (*I remember the event*) was replaced by “*Ich erinnere mich an den Vorfall*” in the Accusative case.
- Two varieties of verb conjugation: weak (regular) and strong (irregular). For example the verb “*geben*” (*to give*) has an irregular conjugation – it changes its form in the 2nd and 3rd person: *du gibst* and *er gibt*, whereas “*machen*” (*to do*) has a regular conjugation: 2nd person: *du machst* and 3rd person: *er macht*.
- Fixed positions of the verb, in both main and subordinate clauses
- Gradual emergence of different types of verb tenses and moods.
- Reduction and expansion of the words meaning. For example, earlier the word “*Sache*” (*matter*) was used only for the juridical matters, but today it can designate any daily issue (*thing*). In contrast to that, the word “*Hochzeit*” that earlier was related to any religious ceremony, today means “*wedding*”.
- The growing use of foreign words. Here are some examples: the German word “*Abenteuer*” came from the French “*Aventure*” (*adventure*); other words, such as: *Computer*, *E-Mail*, *Hobby* and *parken* (*to park*) came from English
- The use of capital letter in all kind of nouns

Despite some regional varieties, these changes are still present in the current German language.

3.1.2 Phonetics

The standard German phonetics is composed of four categories of sounds: vowels, diphthongs, consonants and grouped consonants. The tables below illustrate all the sounds existing in German language with their respective IPA transcription.

Table 1: German Vowels and Diphthongs

Vowels	Short vowels: a [a]; e [ɛ]; e [ɐ]; i [ɪ]; o [ɔ] u [U]; ö [œ]; ü [Y] Long vowels: a [a:]; e [e:]; ä [ɛ:]; i [i:]; o [o:]; u [y:]; ö [ø]
Diphthongs	ai / ay / ei / ey [aɪ]; au [aU]; äu / eu [ɔy]

(Adapted from Hoberg et.al, 2017, pp. 59-60)

Table 2: German Consonants and Grouped Consonants

Consonants	b [b] / [p]; c [ts]; d [d] / [t]; f [f]; g [g] / [ɣ]; h [h]; j [j]; k [k]; l [l]; m [m]; n [n]; p [p]; r [r] / [R]; s [z] / [s]; t [t]; v [f] / [v]; w [v]; x [ks]; z [ts]
Grouped Consonants	ch [x] / [ç]; chs [ks]; ck [k]; dt [t]; ng [ŋ]; ph [f]; pf [f]; qu [kv]; rh [r]; sch [ʃ]; sp [ʃp]; ss [s]; ß [es]; st [ʃt]; sz [sstss]; th [t]; ti [tsi]; tsch [ch]; tz [ts]

(Adapted from Vaz Pires, 2011, pp.9-11)

Let us now analyse the tables above. Based on the words of Hoberg et.al (2017, pp. 59-60), there are two variants of vowels in German: short: a [a], as in *Hand* (*hand*), and long: a [a:], as in *Vater* (*father*). The authors also refer that this language has the so-

called Umlaut¹ vowels, in which a sound of a standard vowel is modified and pronounced as another vowel. For example: ä [ɛ:], as in Käse (*cheese*), in which the standard “a” is modified and pronounced as “e”. This idea of short and long vowel depends on how long a certain sound is held out. Vaz Pires (2011, p. 8) adds, on his turn, that usually the short vowels are followed by more than one consonant or grouped consonants, as in *Bett* (*bed*) and *Gast* (*guest*), whereas the long vowels are followed by a simple consonant, as in *rot* (*red*) or *schon* (*already*). In terms of diphthongs, these are less comparing to English and are usually represented by different letters (Dodd et.al, 2003, p.4). For instance, the English diphthong “oy” in German is represented by “eu”, as in “*heute*” (*today*) or “äu”, as in “*Mäuse*” (*mouses*).

Concerning the consonants and grouped consonants, based on the statements of Vaz Pires (2011, pp. 9-11) and Donaldson (2007, pp. 3-7), there are two aspects to bear in mind. On the one hand, some sounds in German have a completely different pronunciation from English or Portuguese. For example, the sound “z” in German is pronounced as [ts], while in English and Portuguese it is pronounced as [z]. On the other hand, some German sounds can have more than one pronunciation, according to their position in the word. Let us look at some examples:

- **b** – When at the beginning of a word, it is pronounced as “b”, as in *Boot* (*boat*), whereas at the end, it turns into “p” as in *gab* (*gave*)
- **d** – When at the beginning of a word, it is pronounced as “d”, as in *Dach* (*roof*), but at the end, it sounds more like “t” as in *Hund* (*dog*)
- **h** – When at the beginning of a word, its pronunciation is strongly aspirated, as in *Haus* (*house*), whereas in the middle or at the end, it is silent, as in *Mehl* (*flour*) and *Stroh* (*straw*)
- **s** – When at the beginning of a word and followed by a vowel, it is pronounced as “z”, as in *Sonne* (*sun*), while in the middle or at the end, it is pronounced as “s”, as in *Glas* (*glas*) or *Wespe* (*wasp*)
- **v** – It is usually pronounced as “f”, as in *vier* (*four*), but in the loan words, it is pronounced as “v”, as in *Vulkan* (*volcano*)
- **ch** – After (*a, o, u, au*), it is pronounced with a hard aspiration (the so-called *ach-Laut*), as in *Buch* (*book*), whereas after (*e, i, ä, äu, ö, ü, l, n, r*), it is softly

¹ Umlaut: The two dots over the vowel, e.g.: ä.

aspirated (the so called *ich-Laut*), as in *ich* (*I*). In the loan words, it can be also pronounced as the English “*sh*”, as in *Chance* or “*ck*”, as in *Charakter*.

Looking at this analysis of German phonetics, it is possible to see that despite its similarities with the European languages, it has several different aspects that should be highlighted when learning and teaching this language.

3.1.3 Writing

According to Gschossmann-Hendershot & M. Fuerle (2010, p. 1), as a western language, German has an alphabetic written system and, therefore, it is generally written as it is pronounced. Overall, German alphabet is composed of 26 standard letters and four extra letters: Umlaut vowels and ß (*eszett*). The following table illustrates the standard letters of German alphabet.

Table 3: German Alphabet

German alphabet	A [a:]; B [be:]; C [tse]; D [de:]; F [ɛf]; G [ge:];
	H [ha:]; I [i:]; J [jɔt]; K [ka:]; L [ɛl]; M [ɛm];
	N [ɛn]; O [o:]; P [pe:]; Q [qu]; R [ɛr]; S [ɛs];
	T [te:]; U [u:]; V [faU]; W [ve:]; x [Iks];
	Y [Ypsilɔn]; Z [tset]

(Hoberg et.al, 2017, p. 70)

Regarding the spelling, in this sub-section only some basic principles underlying German orthography and spelling will be approached. Hoberg et.al (2017, pp. 71-73) touch the phonological principles. On the one hand, in this language a letter does not always represent one sound. For example: the sch [ʃ] sound has three letters; on the other hand, the same sound can be represented by different letters or combinations of them. For example, the consonant sound t [t] has the following written representations: *t* (*Tisch*); *tt*

(*Bett*); *th* (*Apotheke*); *d* (*Fahrrad*) and *dt* (*Stadt*). The same rule can be applied to vowels. The sound I [i:] can have four different representations: *i* (*Lid*); *ie* (*Lied*); *ieh* (*sieht*) and *ih* (*ihm*). There are also inverse situations, in which one letter can represent several sounds. For example: the letter *s* can represent these sounds: *s* (*aus*); *ss* (*Wasser*) and *ß* (*groß*). To complement these ideas, Donaldson (2007, p. 11) states that after the spelling reform occurred between 1998 and 2005, one of the most significant changes was the replacement of *ß* (*eszett*) by “*ss*” in cases when it follows the short vowels, as in “*dass*” (subordinate conjunction *that*).

Russ (1994, pp. 137-141) on his turn, approaches three lexical principles. The first principle is related to the homonymous and homophonous words. The first category comprises words with the same pronunciation and spelling, but with a different meaning. For example, the word “*Strauß*” refers to “*ostrich*” and “*bunch*”. The same happens with “*Bank*”, which refers to the institution or a place to sit on. The second category encompasses words with the same pronunciation, but a different spelling and meaning. For example, “*malen*” (*to paint*) and “*mahlen*” (*to grind*) or “*lehren*” (*to teach*) and “*leeren*” (*to empty*).

Moving on to the second principle, it is related to German nouns. As in other western languages, in German any word at the beginning of a sentence is also written with the capital letter, however German is the only one western language, in which all nouns, regardless of their category, are written with the capital letter. For example, *Paul* – *proper noun* (*German masculine name*); *Milch* – *common noun* (*milk*) and *Liebe* – *abstract noun* (*love*). Apart from the nouns, the personal pronoun for the formal “*you*” (*Sie, Ihnen*), as well as, its possessive pronoun “*your*” (*Ihr*) are always written with the capital letter.

As last principle, the author mentions the formation of German compound nouns. In this language, these words are written together and can be formed by different grammatical elements: noun + noun; adjective + noun and verb + noun. Here are the respective examples: “*Kaffeemaschine*” (*coffee machine*), “*Freizeit*” (*free time*) and “*Schlafzimmer*” (*sleeping room*).

Having approached these basic principles, it is possible to say that German writing, as well as, spelling rules complement and clarify its phonetics. Therefore, they should be approached even if not deeply, so that students become aware of their existence from the beginning.

3.1.4 Tense Structure

Before looking into German tense structure, it is important to remind once again that it is an inflected language. In this sub-section, only one type of inflection will be approached, namely the case inflection, since it is essential to understand the simple tense elements and its structure.

According to Dodd et.al (2003, p. 23), in German there are four cases: Nominative; Accusative; Dative and Genitive. Performing their basic functions, these cases correspond to the *Subject*, *Direct object*, *Indirect object* and *Indicator of possession*, respectively. However, taking into consideration the evolution of German language referred above, Donaldson (2007, p. 18) calls our attention to the fact that although the notion of case refers to the noun modification, in German the modifications are applied to the articles (definite, indefinite and possessive) and only in few situations the nouns take the case endings. The table below illustrates the definite and indefinite articles in the four cases:

Table 4: German definite and indefinite articles in the four Cases

	Nominative	Accusative	Dative	Genitive
Masculine	Der (ein)	Den (einen)	Dem (einem)	Des (eines)
Feminine	Die (eine)	Die (eine)	Der (einer)	Der (einer)
Neutral	Das (ein)	Das (ein)	Dem (einem)	Des (eines)
Plural	Die	Die	Den (+ n)	Der

(Adapted from Dodd et.al. 2003, p.36)

Thus, taking into account what has been said, the main clause in German is composed of the following elements: *Subject – Predicate – Object and Adverb* (Dreyer & Schmitt, 2012, p.140). Regarding the word order of the main clause, there are two aspects to consider. According to Fagan (2009, p. 139), as a result of a strong case system, German can have a more flexible word order than English. This means that the elements can change their position and the meaning will remain the same. Nevertheless, Reimann (2010, p.197) argues that there are still rules to be followed when forming a sentence in German. In simple clauses, the *Predicate (the verb)* has a fixed position and should be always the second element, and not necessarily the second word, appearing in a sen-

tence. In this report we will not touch the inverse word order and will focus on the direct word order. For example:

GER: Das Kind lernt jeden Montag Deutsch

ENG: The child learns German every Monday

GER: Jeden Montag lernt das Kind Deutsch

ENG: Every Monday the child learns German

The example above confirms that regardless of the changes in the word order, the verb remains as the second element of a sentence. Analysing each element of the clause, “*Das Kind*” is the Subject (Nominative), “*lernt*” is the Predicate, “*jeden Montag*” is the Adverb and “*Deutsch*” is the Direct object (Accusative). For those learners, for example, English or Portuguese native speakers, whose mother tongues do not have the case system, it is very important to pay attention and try to assimilate this feature of the German language from the beginning.

Moving on further and quoting Dreyer & Schmitt (2012 p. 142), whenever a sentence has two objects, direct (Accusative) and indirect (Dative), the last should come first: “*Der Lehrer gibt den Kindern Schokolade.*” (*The teacher gives chocolate to the children*). In this example, the noun “*Kinder*” receives the ending “*n*” in the Dative case. It is one of the few specific situations, in which a noun itself takes an ending.

When a sentence includes the Genitive, as referred by Reimann, (2010, p. 95), the possessor should come after the possessed object: “*Die Katze der Frau*” (*The woman’s cat*)

Having approached the basic functions of the four cases, Vaz Pires (2011, p. 16) calls our attention to other contexts, in which these cases are used. For instance, the Accusative answers to the question “Where to?” and the Dative to the question “Where?” Furthermore, each case rules a set of verbs and prepositions, which should not be mixed.

Here are two examples, one in Dative and another in Accusative:

GER: Er ist in der Schule

ENG: He is at school

GER: Wir gehen heute in die Bibliothek

ENG: Today we are going to the library

The examples show, once again, that regardless of the context, the element that modifies is mostly the article and by doing so, it indicates the case. In the first example, the article of the feminine noun “*Schule*” (school) is modified to its Dative form “*der*” and together with the preposition “*in*” it indicates the location. In the second example, the article of the feminine noun “*Bibliothek*” together with the preposition “*in*” indicates the direction. Given that, the mastering of the articles changes is essential to master the cases.

Having presented a brief notion of the four cases, as well as of the main clause structure, it is also important to approach the past and future tenses. In both cases, only the simple forms, those which are widely used in the spoken language, will be approached.

Dreyer & Schmitt (2012, p. 352) mention that the most used past form on daily basis is called *Perfekt* and is formed with the auxiliary verbs *sein* (to be) or *haben* (to have) + the main verb in the past participle. Most of the verbs require *haben* as auxiliary verb. Nevertheless, the verbs that involve movement, for instance, *fahren* (to go by transport), *gehen* (to go on foot) and *kommen* (to come) or the change of state, as *aufstehen* (to wake up), *einschlafen* (to fall asleep) and *sterben* (to die) should be used with the helping verb *sein*. Let us take the following sentences to see the structure:

GER: Er ist nach Deutschland gefahren

ENG: He went to Germany

GER: Ich habe einen Kaffee getrunken

ENG: I drunk a coffee

As shown in the examples above, in German the verb has always fixed positions. In this case, as the sentences have two verbs, the auxiliary verb is conjugated and placed on the second position, whereas the main verb in the past participle is moved to the end of the sentence.

Concerning the future tense, it is formed with the verb *werden*, whose literal meaning is “to become” + the main verb in the infinitive form (Dreyer & Schmitt, 2012, p. 134). Since it also involves two verbs, its structure is similar to *Perfekt*. For example: “*Ich werde die Hausaufgaben morgen machen.*” (I will do the homework tomorrow).

As last point, let us look into interrogative phrases and negations. According to Dodd et.al (2003, p. 10), in German the interrogative sentences follow a typical question word

order as in English. The Yes-No questions start by a verb: “*Arbeitest du in Berlin?*” whose meaning is: “*Do you work in Berlin?*” A possible answer to this can be: “*Ja, ich arbeite in Berlin.*”(Yes, I work in Berlin). In case of questions with a question word, the verb occupies the second position: “*Was studierst du?*” (*What do you study?*). A possible answer to this can be: “*Ich studiere Medizin.*” (*I study Medicine*).

Regarding the negations, as said by Gschossmann-Hendershot & M. Fuerle (2010, pp. 232 & 237), there are two types of negations in German, one to negate a noun “*kein*” and another to negate a verb “*nicht*”. The first is placed before the noun: “*Ich habe kein Geld*” (*I don’t have money*), whereas the second is placed after the verb at the end of the sentence: “*Ich verstehe nicht.*” (*I don’t understand*).

The present sub-section has shown three important aspects about German tense structure that should be retained: the predicate has a fixed position; the tense elements are regulated by cases and the verbs are conjugated according to the tense and person.

3.2 Oriental Language – Mandarin Chinese

3.2.1 Origins

According to Liu et.al (2002, p.12), Chinese is considered to be one of the oldest languages in the world, which encompasses a huge amalgam of dialects and whose roots date back to remote antiquity, more than four thousand years ago. When putting all the Chinese dialects together, it is possible to say that this language has more than 1.200 million native speakers (British Council, 2013, p.32). Today, Chinese is regarded as the language of Hans “*Hànyǔ*” (汉语), the major ethnic group that represents 90% of the population living in China (Li, 2008, p.1)

Regarding its typology, Chinese belongs to Sino-Tibetan language family, which is the second largest language group after the Indo-European family (Thurgood, 2003, pp.3-6). Wang *apud* Mai (2012, p.17) adds some relevant characteristics underlying these languages:

- Composed mainly of monosyllabic characters, meaning that each character has a meaning itself
- Tonal languages, in which the pitch dictates the words meaning
- Lack on morphological changes and, consequently, the position of each word in a sentence dictates its syntactic function
- Use measure words to link nouns with numerals
- Use empty words, which do not encompass any meaning and just perform syntactic functions

Concerning Mandarin Chinese, as referred by Xiao (2011, pp. 5-6), it is one variety of the Chinese language based on the northern dialect of Beijing. The main reason for its emergence was precisely the need for creating a common oral language, which would enable people from different regions to communicate with each other. Initially, Mandarin Chinese or as it was called earlier Guānhuá (官话), was considered the language of elites spoken only by the royals in the court. However, as the time went on, it expanded to other social groups. When referring to Mandarin Chinese in the current times, the natives say “*Pǔtōnghuà*” (普通话), which literally means “*common language*”. Since 1949, it is the official language of the People’s Republic of China².

《“普通话”的历史》

3.2.2 Phonetics

According to (Ross & Ma, 2006, p.4), unlike western languages whose alphabetic writing is directly related to its phonetics, Mandarin Chinese is written in characters that do not provide consistent representation of their pronunciation. The phonetics of the characters encompasses three elements: an initial (consonant) that begins a sound; a final (vowel) that ends a sound and a tone (Sun 2006, p. 32). All these elements will be explained throughout this sub-section.

Following these ideas, Wang & Lu (2008, pp. 3-4) add, on their turn, that in order to provide phonetic notation for characters and facilitate the learning process for both na-

² Retrieved from <http://www.hwjyw.com/resource/content/2011/04/15/16945.shtml>, last accessed 04/08/2018.

tive speakers and foreigners, in 1958 the Chinese government approved the phonetic alphabet system called Pinyin, which literally means “*sounds spelled out*”. This system uses Latin letters to transcribe Mandarin Chinese sounds. In 1982, it was also adopted by the International Organization for Standardization (ISO).

The Pinyin encompasses 21 initials (consonants) and 35 finals (vowels): 6 simple 13 compound and 16 nasal. The sounds of Pinyin are illustrated in the tables below:

Table 5: Mandarin Chinese Initials

b [p]	p [p ^h]	m [m]	f [f]	
d [t]	t [t ^h]	n [n]		l [l]
g [k]	k [k ^h]		h [x]	
j [tʃ]	q [tʃ ^h]		x [ç]	
z [ts]	c [ts ^h]		s [s]	
zh [tʃ]	ch [tʃ ^h]		sh [ʃ]	r [ʀ]

(Canuto & Meireles, 2006, p. 35)

Table 6: Mandarin Chinese Finals

Simple Finals	a [a] e [ə] i [i] o [ɔ] u [u] ü [y]	
Compound Finals	ai [ai] ao [aʊ] ei [eɪ] ia [ia] iao [iaʊ] ie [iɛ] iou [ioʊ] ou [oʊ] ua [ua] uai [uai] üe [yœ]	
	Front Nasal Finals	Back Nasal Finals
Nasal Finals	an [an] en [ən] ian [iɛn] in [in] uan [uan] uen [uən] üan [yn]	ang [aŋ] eng [ɛŋ] iang [ɛŋ] ing [iŋ] iong [iʊŋ] ong [ʊŋ] uang [uaŋ] ueng [uɛŋ]

(Adapted from Mai, 2012, p. 33)

Following the ideas of Yip & Rimmington (2014, pp. 2-3), the analysis of the Mandarin Chinese pronunciation is made based on closest equivalents from western languages, and therefore, should not be taken literally. In the same way as in German, let us focus on less common sounds. Regarding the initials (consonants), these are the most different:

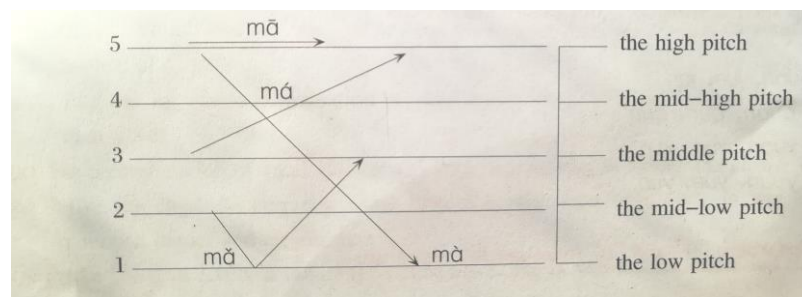
- **b, d** and **g** – These sounds are not voiced as in English. They are similar to the English *p*, *t* and *k*, but with no exhalation. For example, *bā* 八 (eight); *dà* 大 (big); *gēge* 哥哥 (elder brother).
- **p, t** and **k** – Contrary to the previous, these sounds are pronounced with a soft puff of air like in *park*, *taxi* and *kiss*. Transferring these sounds to Mandarin Chinese words, we can take these examples: *pútáoyá* 葡萄牙 (Portugal); *tīng* (to hear); *kǒu* 口 (mouth).
- **j, q, x** – Although similar to the pronunciation of *jeep*, *cheap* and *sheep*, their pronunciation should be softer with the tongue touching the lower front teeth, as in *jiǔ* 九 (nine); *qī* 七 (seven); *xī* 西 (west).
- **h** – Similar to the German aspirated consonant. For example, *hē* 喝 (to drink)
- **zh, ch, sh, r** – These sounds are pronounced with the lips making a smile, as in *jump*, *chain*, *short* and *rain*. For example, *zhù* 住 (to live); *chī* 吃 (to eat); *shǒu* 手 (hand); *rì* 日 (sun).
- **z, c** – These sounds are pronounced with the tip of the tongue curled back, as in *cats*. The first one is pronounced with no exhalation, whereas the second one is aspirated. For example, *zuò* 做 (to do); *cài* 菜 (dish).

Concerning the Finals (vowels), the most unusual feature for westerners is more likely the switch between the two types of nasal finals. The front nasal finals are pronounced with the tongue in front of the mouth and are short, whereas the back nasal finals are formed with the tongue in the back of the mouth and are long. For instance, in “*guānmén*” 关门 (to close the door) and “*péngyou*” 朋友 (friend), the two finals are pronounced differently.

Overall the initials and finals sounds make a total of 56 basic sounds. The combinations of initials and finals plus special cases make up about 413 possible syllables. When applying the four tones, their number increases to 1.600 syllables (Odinye, 2015, p.5).

Moving on to another feature of the Mandarin Chinese phonetics. As mentioned above, Mandarin Chinese is also a tonal language and the tones determine the meaning of the syllables. The tone can be described as pitch contour of the syllable (Ross & Ma, 2006, p.4). The chart below illustrates the four main tones of Mandarin Chinese. There is also a neutral tone, which is not represented in the charts.

Figure 1: Mandarin Chinese tones chart



Liu (2006, p. 14)

When analysing this chart, based on the words of Yip & Rimmington (2014, p.4), it is possible to characterize the tones in the following way: The first tone is high and level. When pronouncing it, the voice is kept monotone. The second tone is rising and can be associated to the question pitch. The third tone is falling-rising, meaning that at first the pitch is low, then it falls and rises again. The fourth tone is falling and short. When pronouncing it, the pitch starts high and then drops to the bottom. Foreigners usually associate it to an angry command. On the other hand, as mentioned above, it is important to keep in mind that mastering the tones is essential to avoid miscommunication in Mandarin Chinese, since the syllable changes its meaning: 妈 mǎ (mother); 麻 má (hemp); 马 mǎ (horse) and 骂 mà (to scold).

Following what has been said and as last aspect in this sub-section, we will approach the tones change rules or the so-called *tone sandhi*. Taking into consideration that Mandarin Chinese words and sentences involve a combination of tones, these tones do not always remain the same. Liu et.al (2002, pp. 9, 28, & 70) refer four situations, in which the tone changes.

- When a third tone is followed by another third tone, the first syllable changes to the second tone. For example, when pronouncing “Nǐ hǎo” 你好 (Hello), “Nǐ”

should be pronounced in the second tone. It is necessary to highlight though that the tone mark over the changing syllable does not change.

- When a third tone is followed by a first, second or fourth tones, it turns into a half-third tone like in “*Wǒ yào*” 我要 (I want).
- When “不” (bù) is followed by a fourth tone, it becomes a second tone like in “*bú shì*” 不是.
- When “一” (yī) precedes a first, second or third tones, it becomes a fourth tone like in “*yì bēi*” 一杯 (one cup). However, when it is followed by a fourth tone, it should be pronounced in the second tone like in “*yí biàn*” 一边 (once).

Looking at this analysis of Mandarin Chinese phonetics, it is possible to deduce that different sounds combined with the four tones make it a very challenging aspect for western students.

3.2.3 Writing

Unlike the phonetics, which differs from dialect to dialect, the Chinese logographic script is common to all varieties of this language (Sun, 2006, p.101). The Chinese writing originated almost four thousand years ago and it is the only one logographic system that reached our days. There are about fifty thousand characters, but only five thousand are actually used. To complement this, Ross & Ma (2006, p.7) highlight that although Chinese monosyllabic characters bring a meaning in them, in modern Chinese the words tend to be polysyllabic. These words are made up by combining two characters. Here are some examples: fàn 饭 (rice) and guǎn 馆 (place for activities) together resulted in fànguǎn 饭馆 (restaurant); diàn 电 (electricity) and nǎo 脑 (brain) together form diànnǎo (computer); xué 学 (to study) and shēng 生 (to give birth) together build the word xuéshēng (student).

Moving on further, let us approach some important facts about the characters writing. Since most of Chinese characters have a significant number of strokes, which should follow a certain order, it is difficult to memorize and write them. Taking this fact into

account, as claimed by Wang & Lu (2008, p.5), it was decided to proceed with the simplification of the Chinese traditional writing, by reducing the amount of characters and number of strokes in a part of them. To see the result of these changes, we can take the following example: 门 door (simplified) and 門 door (traditional). Nowadays, the use of simplified characters is considered an official policy in China and the traditional script is used for the academic or aesthetic purposes (Liu et.al, 2002, p.23).

However, it is necessary to keep in mind that even the simplified characters comprise a set of strokes, which should be written step by step. The following figure presents different types of strokes of Chinese characters:

Figure 2: The strokes of Chinese characters

bǐ huà 笔画	míng chēng 名称	lì zì 例字	bǐ huà 笔画	míng chēng 名称	lì zì 例字
丶	diǎn 点	liù 六	㇇	héng piē wān gōu 横撇弯钩	nà 那
一	héng 横	yī 一	㇇	shù gōu 竖钩	shuǐ 水
丨	shù 竖	shí 十	㇇	wān gōu 弯钩	jiā 家
ノ	piē 撇	rén 人	㇇	shù tí 竖提	mín 民
㇇	nā 捺	dà 大	㇇	shù zhé 竖折	shān 山
㇇	tí 提	xí 习	㇇	shù wān 竖弯	xī 西
㇇	héng gōu 横钩	xiě 写	㇇	shù wān gōu 竖弯钩	diàn 电
㇇	héng zhé 横折	kǒu 口	㇇	shù zhé zhé 竖折折	dǐng 鼎
㇇	héng zhé gōu 横折钩	yuè 月	㇇	shù zhé zhé gōu 竖折折钩	niǎo 鸟
㇇	héng piē 横撇	yòu 又	㇇	xié gōu 斜钩	wǒ 我
㇇	héng zhé tí 横折提	rèn 认	㇇	wò gōu 卧钩	xīn 心
㇇	héng zhé wān gōu 横折弯钩	jiǔ 九	㇇	piē zhé 撇折	gěi 给
㇇	héng zhé zhé piē 横折折撇	jiàn 建	㇇	piē diǎn 撇点	nǚ 女
㇇	héng zhé zhé zhé gōu 横折折折钩	nǎi 奶			

Jia (2006, p.108)

To complement this, Sun (2006, pp.107-109) and Ross & Ma (2006, p.16) list some rules related to the stroke order.

- The character should be written from top to the bottom, as it happens in 云
- The horizontal stroke comes before the vertical stroke, as it occurs in 十
- The character should be written from left to the right like in 他

- The left falling stroke is written before the right falling stroke like in 八
- The inside is written before the outside, as it occurs in 日
- The center of the character should be written before the sides like in 小
- “丶” should be written last like in 我
- Whenever a character has more than one horizontal or vertical stroke, the vertical stroke should be written first and the horizontal stroke at the bottom last, as it happens in 上
- Whenever a character has a horizontal stroke in the middle, this should be written last like in 女.

Another important aspect that should be mentioned is that there are six types of Chinese characters. These are presented by Canuto & Meireles (2006, pp. 23-27):

- **Pictographs** – These characters represent drawings of real-life objects, such as, parts of the body, plants and animals. Some examples of these characters are: 人 rén (person); 木 mù (tree) and 马 mǎ (horse).
- **Ideographs** – Unlike the first type, these characters represent abstract ideas. For example, by adding an additional line to 木 we can get two new characters: 本 běn (root) and 末 mó (tip).
- **Compound Ideographs** – These characters are a combination of two pictographs or ideographs. For example, the character 明 míng (bright) is composed of two characters: 日 rì (sun) and 月 yuè (moon). Another example, when putting two or three trees together, we will have two new characters: 林 lín and 森 sēn, whose meaning is small and big forest.
- **Semantic-phonetic** – About 90% of Chinese characters are semantic-phonetic. This means that they combine an idea and a sound. The radical expresses the semantics of the character, whereas the other part reveals the phonetics. Let us look at the character 爸 bà (father). The radical “父” means father and indicates that the character is related to “father”. The other part “巴” is an independent character that has the sound of “ba”. Another example is the question particle 吗 ma. In Chinese most of question particles have the radical of kǒu (mouth) “口”. The other part “马” gives it the sound of “ma”.

- **Loan characters** – As a result of insufficient characters to represent so many sounds, some of old characters were given a new meaning. For example, originally the character “来” lái had the meaning of “cereal plant”, but today it means “to come”. The same occurred with the character “也” yě whose meaning evolved from “snake” to “also”.
- **Transfer characters** – This category is the most difficult to understand. In simple words, these characters share the same semantics, the same phonetic part (partially) and the same meaning. For example: 顶 dǐng (top) and 颠 diān (summit).

This sub-section has shown that Mandarin Chinese writing is another differentiating aspect of this language, characterized by a set of details and rules that should be respected and followed. Therefore, it takes time to be learnt.

3.2.4 Tense Structure

As mentioned above. Mandarin Chinese grammatical system lacks on morphological changes, but it has a fixed tense structure, in which the position of each element dictates its syntactic function. According to Mai (2012, p.72), the simple phrase in Mandarin Chinese is composed of the following three basic grammatical elements: *Subject – Predicate – Object* and three secondary elements: *Attributive – Adverb – Complement*. Taking this into consideration, the complete tense structure in Mandarin Chinese is the following: *Attributive – Subject – Adverb – Predicate – Attributive – Object – Complement*.

Taking into consideration the ideas of Li & Cheng (2008, pp. 334-342), let us focus first on the basic components by taking these examples:

CH: 我学习汉语

PY: Wǒ xuéxí Hànyǔ

ENG: I learn Chinese

CH: 我很好

PY: Wǒ hěn hǎo

ENG: I'm fine

CH: 我二十岁

PY: Wǒ ér shí suì

ENG: I'm 20 years-old

The phrases above show that unlike the majority of western languages, in Mandarin Chinese there are different kind of Predicate: verbal (学习); adjectival (很好) and nominal (二十岁). This last one can be a numeral, when talking about data, age and hours.

Moving on further, let us look into the phrases with an attributive, which can be described as the element that modifies a noun and is placed before it (Liu et.al, 2002, pp. 87, &105). The phrases below present two types of attributive.

CH: 我的名片

PY: Wǒ de míng piàn

ENG: My visit card

CH: 一个人

PY: Yī ge rén

ENG: One person

The first example illustrates the attributive of possession “的” that modifies the object “名片” by indicating its belonging to “我”. The second example, on its turn, presents a numeral attributive. It is important to mention, however, that in Mandarin Chinese a numeral cannot function as an attributive on its own. Therefore, it is followed by a measure word “个”. In Mandarin Chinese, each noun has its own measure word.

The adverb is another important element in this language. Any adverb should be placed after the subject (Li & Cheng, 2008, p. 105).

CH: 我们都去中国

PY: Wǒmen dōu qù Zhōng guó

ENG: We all go to China

CH: 她明天去北京

PY: Tā míngtiān qù Běijīng

ENG: Tomorrow she will go Beijing

As it is possible to see, both adverbials modal and temporal “都” and “明天” follow the subject. Nevertheless, as mentioned by Ross & Ma (2006, pp.18-19), it is necessary to highlight the importance of the time notion in Mandarin Chinese, meaning that the elements indicating the time of an action should come before the other elements, what does not happen in western languages. Given that, when there are more than one adverbial in a sentence, the temporal should come first. Following this rule, in case if a sentence has

a preposition indicating location “在” (zài), the temporal adverbial should also come before it. For example:

CH: 我星期三在语言学院有汉语课

PY: Wǒ xīngqīsān zài yǔyánxuéyuàn yǒu Hànyǔ kè

ENG: I have Chinese class on Wednesday at the Language Institute

On the other hand, these authors add an important rule concerning the two types of objects in a sentence. As in western languages, Mandarin Chinese also has two kind of objects: direct and indirect. Whenever a sentence has both objects, the indirect should come first.

CH: 我给你一本书

PY: Wǒ gěi tā yī běn shū

ENG: I give you a book

Let us now analyse the Complement. According to Li & Cheng (2008, pp. 271-273), it can be understood as an element that follows a verb or less common an adjective predicate, providing additional information about it. The Complements can be divided into two groups: those that show the duration, direction, result, degree, quantity or possibility of an action and those that indicate the state, number or degree of an object. There are five main Complements in Mandarin Chinese: *Result Complement*; *State Complement*; *Quantitative Complement*; *Directional Complement* and *Potential Complement*. Mai (2012, p.73) and Liu, et.al (2002, pp. 15, 40, 66 & 87) provide detailed information on each of them.

The Result Complement shows the result of an action and is placed after the verb, followed by “了”

CH: 我听懂了

PY: Wǒ tīng dǒng le

ENG: I understood by listening

The State Complement describes an action (verb) by showing its degree. It occurs through the linkage of the verb and the adjective. In Mandarin Chinese a verb cannot be directly followed by an adjective, therefore the particle “得” (de) is required.

CH: 你说得快

PY: Nǐ shuō de kuài

ENG: You speak fast

The Quantitative Complement (Numeral + measure word) shows the quantity of the object

CH: 我去了德国五次

PY: Wǒ qù le Déguó wǔ cì

ENG: I went three times to Germany

The Directional Complement encompasses two elements “来” (lái) and “去” (qù), which are placed after the verb, indicating the direction of the verb. Whenever an action moves towards the speaker, “来” is used and when it moves away from the speaker, “去” is used. For instance:

CH: 他说: 你下来

PY: Tā shuō: Nǐ xià lái

ENG: He says: You come down

The Potential Complement shows the possibility of an action to happen or not to happen. It is placed before the verb.

CH: 他今年可能来北京

PY: Tā jīnnián kěnéng lái Běijīng

ENG: He will possibly come to Beijing this year

As last aspect, let us look into interrogative phrases and negations. As mentioned by Yip & Rimmington (2014, pp. 132-138), in Mandarin Chinese the word order in questions and negations is identical to the word order of declarative sentences. In case of questions, they do not follow a typical question word order as English or German. The Yes-No questions are made with the interrogative particle “吗” (ma), which is placed at the end of the sentence: “你好吗?” (*Nǐ hǎo ma?*), whose meaning is: “How are you?” A possible answer to this can be: “我很好” (*Wǒ hěn hǎo*), which means “I’m fine”. In

case of open questions, these require a question word, which is placed in the place of the word it is asking about: “你学习什么?” (*Nǐ xuéxí shénme?*), whose meaning is: “*What do you study?*” A possible answer to this can be: “我学习文化” (*Wǒ xuéxí wénhuà*), which means: “*I study Literature*”.

Regarding the negations, with some exceptions, the adverb “不” is required, which is placed before the verb or adjective. For example: “我不喝咖啡” (*Wǒ bù hē kāfēi*), which means: “*I do not drink coffee*” Ross & Ma (2006, p.20).

The present sub-section has shown three important aspects about Mandarin Chinese basic tense structure that should be retained: a fixed word order; uncommon word categories, such as measure words and complements and the absence of verbs conjugation and tense.

Chapter 4 – Description of the Internship

Due to its interdisciplinary nature, the Master in Intercultural Studies applied to Business offers the students a wide range of subjects to be investigated and put into practice. Being an active language learner, with some experience in the teaching field, I aimed at an internship, which could provide me the conditions to work as a language teacher and implement my own ideas and methodologies, which I have collected throughout the last few years.

In the following chapter, all the practical work performed during the internship will be described, encompassing a brief history about the foster enterprise, the main responsibilities and a detailed description of German and Mandarin Chinese classes.

4.1 The Organization – Training Vector, Serviços de Formação, Lda.

The enterprise in which I have worked during my internship was Training Vector, Serviços de Formação, Lda, namely in its Tutoring Center, known under the brand Profdomus. When approaching the company's formation in more detail, it is a family business, founded in 2006 by a Network Engineer, Dr. João Ramalho and a Pedagogical Coordinator Dr^a. Lúcia Monteiro, whose core activity is offering certified Training in the field of Network Engineering, mainly to the international business market: about 95% of its target are foreign companies.

Profdomus, located at Praça da Galiza in the city of Porto, was designed mainly for the national pupils and students market and, therefore, provides pedagogical support, translation and tutoring services in diverse fields and subjects, from human to exact sciences, to all educational levels. The Profdomus staff is composed of 26 teachers and the annual amount of students varies between 90 and 100. According to Dr^a. Lúcia, this number has been constant throughout the years.

The main differentiating aspect about Profdomus is its highly-personalized approach. Beyond the usual classes at the Centre's classroom, it offers a home tutoring option, for those who prefer to learn in a more private environment, in the comfort of their home. It was precisely this unusual approach to teaching that originated the name Profdomus. In addition to that, the schedules of the offered classes are very flexible, with a possibility to take classes on the weekend.

Due to its focus on personalization and quality, until very recently the Center provided only individual, private classes. However, in order to increase and expand its demand, Profdomus also introduced group language courses, what allowed me to put my skills into practice.

4.2 Main Tasks

Concerning the main tasks I performed at Profdomus, I was responsible for not only teaching, but also managing four language courses: English, German, Russian and Mandarin Chinese. This means that, before actually starting teaching, I had to spend about one month preparing the courses and go through all the organizational steps related to them, such as:

- **Promotion** – I had to create appellative promotional brochures, in order to advertise the language courses on the Profdomus official Facebook page. These flyers included some details about the courses, as well as, relevant information about my experiences in the field of foreign languages learning and teaching.
- **Contacts and Emails Management** – The online promotion mentioned above resulted in a great response from students showing their interest in taking part in the courses and asking for additional information. So, it was my responsibility to give feedback on the emails and clarify doubts.
- **Organizing the Students in Groups** – This was a challenging stage, since the amount of interested students exceeded the amount of available places. Due to the classroom size, I could only accept maximum 12 students for each group.
- **Elaborating and planning the classes' schedule** – Since the students were from different degrees and some were working students, it was a real challenge to arrange a compatible schedule. So, I decided that the courses would occur after working hours from 6 to 9 pm. I dedicated more hours to German and Mandarin Chinese courses.
- **Planning the courses syllabus and teaching materials** – Respecting the values of the enterprise, I also focused on a more personalized approach. Most of the materials, were elaborated by me. My main criteria while planning the syllabus

and elaborating the materials were the students' level, as well as, the amount of time I had to teach the courses.

It is necessary to highlight that I was given the total autonomy to manage and teach the courses according to my own visions and methodologies. Being in charge of the entire organizational process described above required a lot of responsibility from my side and turned out to be a real struggle at some stages, however, at the same time, it allowed me to become aware of my own organizational and teaching competences. Overall, the encouragement and trust from the company's side resulted in an enriching experience, which led to my personal and professional growth.

4.3 Description of the Classes

My main goal with these courses was to convey the classes in such a way that students would acquire solid basics and clear structures of the languages, which would boost their communication and motivation for the further learning.

On the one hand, I have never taught group courses, so I was not sure if my approach to individual classes would work or I would have to come up with completely different ideas to keep the groups engaged. On the other hand, taking into account that my students were all beginners, I was aware of the fact that my approach would shape their perception on the languages and also upcoming learning difficulties. Both German and Mandarin Chinese classes functioned in a similar way, yet with some differences, which will be described below.

4.3.1 German Classes

Overall I taught 68h of German, giving classes three times per week in the following schedule:

Days of the Week	Time
Monday	18:00-19:30
Wednesday	18:00-19:30
Thursday	19:30-21:00

Regarding the teaching materials, I elaborated a dossier, whose content was extracted from several teaching manuals and grammar books, for example, the *Schritte A1 / A2* by Gerbes & Werff (2009), and *Gramática da Língua Alemã* by Vaz Pires (2011). This portfolio included, not only grammar explanations, but also vocabulary lists organized by themes. As a complementary resource, I also provided *Deutsch Aber Hallo A1 / A2*, work book written by Hanz Witzlinger, for them to practise with me in the classroom and at home.

The main differentiating point about this self-made dossier is the contents sequence and their layout. As a result of my previous experiences as a foreign language learner and teacher, I realized that the contents sequence also influences students' performance in the classroom and their difficulties.

When focusing on the classroom activities, the first lesson was dedicated to the alphabet learning. I called students' attention to the correct pronunciation of the sounds. I insisted on those sounds, which do not exist in Portuguese or have a different pronunciation, for example, vowels with Umlaut: *ä, ö, ü* or the aspirated sound "h".

Each lesson started by a 15 minutes revision and clearing of doubts from the previous lesson. Having done that, I introduced a new topic, by explaining and linking it to the Portuguese language morphology and syntax first, and only then moved on to German itself. Due to their different origins, their grammar systems have many differences, so it was not always possible to set a clear parallel between both languages. For example, unlike German language, Portuguese does not have the four cases: Nominative, Accusative, Dative and Genitive. So, when explaining them to my students, I associated the first three to the *Subject, Direct Object* and *Indirect Object* respectively. Throughout the classes, I also insisted on the repetition and writing of the German word order and tense structure, mainly the fixed positions of the verb in all types of tenses. Apart from the four cases and their different contexts, we also approached other important topics, such as verb conjugation, past and future tenses and modal verbs.

Concerning the vocabulary learning, every week we focused on a list of words related to a certain theme and afterwards wrote a short dictation on it, for example, family mem-

bers, human body parts or professions. In addition to that, I always tried to integrate the approached vocabulary in a context and encouraged the class to make sentences with the new words and implement them in the dialogues.

By the middle of the course, I also introduced more complex writing exercises, such as daily routine and letters, both formal and informal. I tried to plan the classes in such a way that the grammar part is always complemented by the vocabulary and more complex topics are followed by a simple one. As a complementary source, I also provided videos, so that students could revise the contents at home and practise the phonetics.

I also attempted to dedicate some time of the class for the oral exercises. From the start onwards, I encouraged my students to dialogue with each other in pairs (Question-Answer Exercise). This kind of oral exercise not only fostered their communication, but also allowed them to recall the previous contents and become aware of the eventual gaps. Apart from that, students also did short presentations about themselves and their family members.

Nevertheless, the classes didn't always flow the way I planned and predicted due to the different rhythm of my students. Several times in the middle of a lesson I had to change my plans and switch to an "easier" topic because I realized that the group was not ready for the one I had planned. Given that, my major challenge as a teacher was to find the middle ground, so that everyone could follow and learn at ease. Moreover, as the time went on and the content became more complex, I also realized that from time to time it is necessary to do an overall revision of the previous lessons. Therefore, some classes were entirely dedicated to practising and exercising.

By the end of the course, after having gone through the basic grammar and acquired the elementary vocabulary, we focused on more elaborated speaking exercises. The students were asked to express their opinion on Germany and German language, as well as, talking about their preferences.

It is possible to say that the course accomplished its initial purposes. The students acquired the initial level in German and this knowledge will allow them to proceed with their learning in the future.

4.3.2 Mandarin Chinese Classes

Overall, I taught 64h of Mandarin Chinese, giving classes three times per week in the following schedule:

Days of the Week	Time
Tuesday	18:30-20:00
Wednesday	19:30-21:00
Thursday	18:00-19:30

Regarding the teaching materials, I used the course book provided by my supervisor: *New Practical Chinese Reader* «新实用汉语课本», which integrates a new series of textbooks designed for teaching Chinese to English native speakers. Consisting of 70 lessons in 6 volumes, this series covers initial to intermediate level. Each volume includes both textbook and a workbook for practising the listening and writing at home.

The major part of the classroom activities was based on the book. However, the first 3 classes were dedicated to the learning of Pinyin and the 4 tones. During these introductory classes, I insisted on the pronunciation and repetition of the Initials (consonants) and Finals (vowels), as well as, on the pronunciation of the 4 tones. I called students' attention to the fact that despite some similar sounds, most of the Mandarin Chinese sounds are not pronounced in the same way as in Portuguese. To practise, at first the students repeated the sounds in their natural order, line by line, and then I picked a sound randomly and asked them to pronounce it. A similar kind of exercise was done concerning the 4 tones. At first, we learnt the four pitches at once. For that purpose we used the repeat-exercises available in the book. Afterwards, I grouped the tones in pairs and asked students to pronounce them. To complement these classroom activities, students practised the listening exercises from the workbook as a homework.

Having done that, I switched to the book. At the beginning of each lesson, after making a brief revision and clearing doubts from the previous class, I always contextualized it, by mentioning the new grammar components we were about to learn. After that, we proceeded with the vocabulary learning and dialogues reading. While reading and translating them, I highlighted the correct pronunciation of the sounds and the importance of the word order in Mandarin Chinese, which as seen above, is different from the Portu-

guese. Firstly we focused on *Subject – Predicate – Object*. I reminded that in Mandarin Chinese the Predicate does not have necessarily to be a verb, as it happens in western languages. Afterwards, we gradually introduced the other three elements: *Adverb – Attributive – Complement*. It was not possible to approach all of them in detail, but the basic elements were explored.

As in German course, I encouraged my students to work in pairs, both in reading and speaking exercises. This interaction with the classmates helped them to assimilate the contents and, at the same time, lose the fear of communicating. The students, not only read the dialogues together with the partner, but also asked questions to each other based on dialogues.

Concerning the writing, a good part of each class was dedicated for the practising of characters. From the start on, I called students attention for the importance of the stroke order while writing the characters, which was also shown and explained at the end of each lesson of the book. To complement this, I also introduced other kind of exercises, such as dictation on the characters and translation of short texts from Portuguese into Mandarin Chinese, so that students could practise the word order.

It is also necessary to mention that the sequence I taught the characters was different from the manual, since in this book there is a huge gap between the Pinyin of a certain word and its representation in character. Given that, I taught how to write, not only the simple characters at the end of each lesson, but also those in the dialogues, so that students could get used to characters at the same time they were learning the Pinyin. Since the dialogues had several different characters, I decided to group them by themes. For instance, I taught the characters of numbers or personal pronouns all at once.

Apart from that, I aimed at teaching the students how to recognize and read characters without Pinyin. Initially, I showed them simple isolated characters and they had to guess their Pinyin and meaning. By the middle of the course, I brought short dialogues from the first lessons, and after some time, we moved on to pattern drills exercise available in the book.

Similarly to the German course, each 3 lessons, I did an overall revision of the previous contents. In these classes, we focused more on speaking and listening exercises. For that purpose, I used videos. Another reason for bringing videos into the class was the vocabulary expansion. Each video was related to a certain theme, for example, family members, food, professions. By acquiring more vocabulary, the students could improve their speaking skills. By the end of the course, I introduced more complex speaking exercises.

The students were asked to make a short presentation about themselves, referring their family, food preferences and hobbies.

Having done this course, the students acquired basic knowledge on Mandarin Chinese. However, it is necessary to highlight that as a result of its tonal system and different writing system, this language requires more time to be taught and learnt.

Chapter 5 – Discussion of the Results

The following chapter presents the practical results collected throughout the internship. At first, based on the Focus Group method, the learning difficulties will be presented from the students' perspective. Each student was identified with a code created based on the language they learnt and the number attributed to them before the discussion. For example:

“The Grammar, especially the four cases, was the most difficult part.”, GS3 – German course, student number 3.

Afterwards, to complement this, the difficulties will be presented based on my own observations throughout the classes. Each of the mentioned difficulties will be followed by possible solutions, which resulted from the activities performed in the classroom. As last part of the chapter, the difficulties experienced and observed during German and Mandarin Chinese courses will be compared.

5.1 Main Learning Difficulties – Focus Group

Topic	Excerpts
	<i>“The curiosity about this language and the will to expand my skills. I would like to work in Germany or Switzerland in the near future”</i> GS1
	<i>“It is curious, but earlier I always rejected the idea of learning German. As the time went on, I gained interest and now I really want to be fluent. I know that I will get more job opportunities if I learn it.”</i> GS2
1. Reasons for learning German	<i>“First of all, the curiosity about the lan-</i>

	<i>guage. Secondly, because nowadays the knowledge of German is a compulsory requisite in many enterprises.” GS3</i>
	<i>“I always wanted to do my Law Master in Germany and initially I thought that English would be enough for that. But, after visiting Germany and not understanding simple placards on the streets, I realized that I have to learn it.” GS4</i>
	<i>“I’m taking Master in Translation and knowing German is an advantage in this area. Moreover, German “opens doors” abroad” GS5</i>

Topic	Excerpts
	<i>“The two main reasons were the current expansion of the Chinese market and the fact that this language is different in terms of phonetics and writing.” MS1</i>
	<i>“There were three reasons that led me to learn Mandarin. Firstly, the curiosity; secondly, the importance of this language in the international market and also the will to challenge myself.” MS2</i>
1. Reasons for learning Mandarin Chinese	<i>“The two main reasons were the idea that it is an uncommon language and also because it is an advantage in the International Trade area.” MS3</i>

	<i>“I also perceive it as an interesting language and an advantage for the International Trade area” MS4</i>
	<i>“The main reason was the fact that since an early age I have been passionate about Oriental languages.”MS5</i>

Although the reasons for learning a certain foreign language are not directly related to the difficulties, they were the driving force, which boosted the learning process and, therefore, should be taken into consideration when studying the learning difficulties.

According to the answers, it is possible to see that both German and Mandarin Chinese were chosen mainly due to their importance in the current world, as mentioned above, and the will for having more job opportunities in the future. In case of Mandarin Chinese, it was also chosen due to its different characteristics from the western languages.

Topic	Excerpts
	<i>“Before this course, I had no idea that German has so many rules. I thought it was easier, yet I’m motivated to learn it further.” GS1</i>
	<i>“I perceived it as a rude language. Thanks to your approach this idea changed. Thanks to your example, I realized that everything is possible and that I’m able to achieve the fluency too.” GS2</i>
2. Idea of German before and after the course	<i>“I was told that German is very difficult and this discouraged me a bit, yet I accepted the challenge. Despite my initial lack of motivation, my idea of this language changed. Ger-</i>

	<i>man is not difficult, it just requires a bit more dedication. It is worth learning.”</i> GS3
	<i>“Before this course, I perceived German as something completely impossible to learn, but now I see that it just requires time and dedication. It is kind of a test to our capacities.”</i> GS4
	<i>“I always had the impression that German is a very complex language, especially due to its phonetics. I thought it was more similar to English. This course made me realize that it has even more rules than I thought. I was not aware of the four cases and the word order.”</i> GS5

Topic	Excerpts
	<i>Mandarin evoked both curiosity and fear. I wondered how Chinese people memorize all those characters and sounds. Thanks to this course, I realized that the writing is even more complex (laugh), but at the same time that it is possible to communicate in this language even with the initial level. I feel motivated.”</i> MS1
	<i>“I always perceived it as a difficult and formal language, requiring a lot of dedication. I still have the same idea, but thanks to this first contact I realized that it is worth learning.”</i> MS2
2. Idea of Mandarin Chinese before and after the	<i>“I often listen to Chinese music. Before I always thought Mandarin was too complex, but</i>

course	<i>after doing this course, I realized that it is not that complicated.</i> ” MS3
	<i>“I was aware of the characters, but I had the impression they had an alphabet. This course helped me to clarify my ideas about Mandarin.”</i> MS4
	<i>“Before the course, I was not aware of the four tones and the Pinyin. These aspects motivated me to put even more efforts into this language.”</i> MS5

In the same way as in the previous topic, the idea that students have of the language they are learning also influences the learning process and their performance in the classroom. The main intent with this question was, on the one hand, to evaluate students’ perception on the chosen language and, on the other hand, to understand whether the courses were able to transform their initial ideas.

Based on the answers above, initially both languages were perceived as too complex. These discussions confirmed my own experiences and the fact that students tend to have a more negative image of German than of other languages, even if these languages own uncommon characteristics, as it is the case of Mandarin Chinese.

The students also mentioned some specific aspects they were not aware about before in each language, for example, the grammatical rules in German and the four tones in Mandarin Chinese. After the courses, the idea of complexity remained almost the same, but the motivation increased in both cases, what is very important at this initial level.

Topic	Excerpts
	<i>“The Dative case and all contexts related to it caused me a lot of problems. All the cases were difficult, but the Dative was the worst.”</i> GS1

	<i>“The phonetics and the pronunciation were my biggest challenge. For example, it is hard for me to pronounce the “h” sound. Apart from that, I also had difficulties in understanding the four cases and the declinations.”</i> GS2
3. Main Learning Difficulties in German	<i>“The Grammar, especially the four cases, was the most difficult part.”</i> GS3
	<i>“The phonetics and pronunciation were the most difficult. It took me a lot of time to get used to all those unusual sounds and express them.”</i> GS4
	<i>“The pronunciation of the consonants and vowels with umlaut was a real challenge. The “ch” sound like in “Mädchen” was the most difficult. The four cases and the tense structure were also difficult.”</i> GS5

Topic	Excerpts
	<i>“The writing was my major difficulty because it takes a lot of time to memorize the characters and the stroke order. Another difficulty was the word order.”</i> MS1
	<i>“My major difficulties were the phonetics and the pronunciation. I always have this problem when learning a foreign language, but in Man-</i>

	<i>darin it was more challenging due to the tones.</i> ” MS2
3. Main Learning Difficulties in Mandarin Chinese	<i>“My major difficulties were the characters writing and the tense structure. The vocabulary learning also caused some problems because some words have a similar pronunciation, but a different meaning.”</i> MS3
	<i>“My main difficulty was the pronunciation of the four tones. I also had difficulty in recognizing the characters and associating them to Pinyin.”</i> MS4
	<i>“I have some difficulties in pronouncing and distinguishing the tones, especially the second and the fourth. Moreover, I find it difficult to recognize the characters and link them to Pinyin.”</i> MS5

Concerning the learning difficulties, both groups shared part of the difficulties that I also noticed throughout the classes, confirming my observations. In case of German, the phonetics, the pronunciation, as well as, the four cases were the most referred difficulties. Some students even chose to give more detailed responses, by specifying the case or the sounds, which turned out to be more challenging for them. Unexpectedly, the tense structure was not given the prior attention.

Regarding Mandarin Chinese, the main difficulties were also the phonetics, both the four tones and Pinyin, the pronunciation and the writing and reading of the characters. When approaching the characters, students also specified their difficulties. Some focused more on the writing, whereas others highlighted the linkage between characters and Pinyin. This shows that even at the same aspect, the difficulties may be different. On the other hand, once again, the tense structure, was not given the attention I was expecting.

Overall, the results above showed that it is very important to have feedback from students, when studying the learning difficulties. Even though the groups approached the same aspects, the way they categorized and highlighted them was different. Thus, the teacher should never assume that the difficulties are felt and experienced in the same way. There are details that matter.

Topic	Excerpts
	<p><i>“The workbook, the dialogues and the letters – all these materials and activities helped me a lot. On the other hand, the revision of the contents was crucial in overcoming gaps.”</i> GS1</p>
	<p><i>“I agree with my classmate. The Question-Answer exercise and the letters helped me to mitigate my difficulties.”</i> GS2</p>
<p>4. Ways for overcoming the Difficulties</p>	<p><i>“I have many aspects to mention. Firstly, the detailed dossier you provided us. Secondly, the complementary videos you selected and shared with us. Thirdly, the speaking and writing exercises we did in the class.”</i> GS3</p>
	<p><i>“Your dedication as a teacher, as well as, the materials you provided motivated me during my learning process. Personally, I like to re-write the contents. It helps me to memorize and understand everything.”</i> GS4</p>
	<p><i>“Your permanent contact with us throughout the week and not only during the classes, kept me motivated. The speaking exercises helped me to improve my pronunciation and memorize the word order.”</i> GS5</p>

Topic	Excerpts
	<p><i>“I liked the exercises we did in the classroom. Thanks to pattern drills and Question-Answer exercises, I feel more confident. The videos also facilitated the vocabulary learning.”</i> MS1</p>
	<p><i>“The thematic videos helped me to expand my vocabulary and get used to the phonetics.”</i> MS2</p>
<p>4. Ways for overcoming the Difficulties</p>	<p><i>“The videos also helped me with the phonetics and the vocabulary learning. Regarding the writing part, I improved it through rewriting the characters several times.”</i> MS3</p>
	<p><i>“The videos we watched in the classroom helped me to get used to the phonetics.”</i> MS4</p>
	<p><i>“I use post-it notes to memorize the characters and their Pinyin. On the other hand, the exercise of recognizing the characters, the dictations and the videos made my learning easier. I also watch series to get used to the phonetics.”</i> MS5</p>

Having approached the difficulties, it is important to find ways for overcoming them. The main intent with this last question was to find out whether students have found methods that helped them to mitigate or overcome the mentioned difficulties, both individually and in the classroom.

Based on the answers, both groups shared personal approaches, which helped them throughout the courses, however most of them focused on the classroom activities and the provided materials. All of them emphasized different activities and materials. I did

not expect that my approach and warm attitude towards my students would have such a positive impact on their learning process. This feedback showed that the teaching methods play a crucial role in students' learning performance and progress.

5.2 Main Learning Difficulties and Possible Solutions – Direct Observation

5.2.1 German

Phonetics and Pronunciation

Difficulty – Pronouncing the Umlaut vowels and consonants. This difficulty is related to the fact that in German language there are few sounds that do not exist in Portuguese and also those, which have a different pronunciation.

For instance, unlike Portuguese, in German the “*h*” sound should be pronounced at the beginning of a word as in “*haben*” and this was a real challenge because Portuguese students are not used to aspirated sounds. The “*ch*” sound as in “*Ich*” or “*machen*” was also difficult to assimilate. There was a tendency to pronounce it as in English. Concerning the vowels with Umlaut, these were less difficult, yet it took some time for students to get used to the changes. The most difficult to pronounce were: “*ö*” and “*ü*” sounds.

Solution – In order to mitigate this difficulty, these sounds should be taught and learnt in a context, integrated in words. As first step, and taking into consideration what has been mentioned on German phonetics, it is important to pick different words and call students' attention that the pronunciation of the sounds changes according to their position in the word. Concerning the vowels, an effective exercise is picking a standard vowel and an Umlaut vowel and show how the sound changes, by rounding one's lips. The teacher should insist on the repetition and right pronunciation of the sounds, when learning new vocabulary. The oral communication should be also constantly encouraged so that students get used to the unusual sounds.

Writing

Difficulty – Recognizing and writing the different sounds and letters in the same word. In German language a good part of words have many consonants following each other. Therefore, it was difficult for Portuguese students to recognize and distinguish these letters and sounds. For example, they often mixed the “*sch*”; “*sp*” and “*st*” sounds due to their similar pronunciation.

Solution – Taking into account what has been said on German spelling rules, a possible solution for overcoming this difficulty is writing dictations on the vocabulary. This type of exercise will help students to become aware of the different sounds and letters existing in one word. On the other hand, it will also facilitate the new words acquisition. Another more complex, yet effective exercise is writing short letters as I did during my German course.

Syntax and Morphology

Difficulty – Understanding the four cases and their different functions. This difficulty is not only related to the different grammar system, but is also a result of an insufficient knowledge of Portuguese grammar.

Solution – Taking into consideration the roots of this difficulty, the teacher should be able first of all to link the four cases to Portuguese language, by finding similar functions in its grammar and explaining them through examples. Having ensured that students understood those functions in their mother tongue, it is time to switch to German language itself. Apart from that, and keeping in mind the facilitation of the learning process, it is important to highlight that the four cases should be taught and learnt in the right sequence and without jumping from one case into another. On the other hand, all the contexts in which a certain case is required should be conveyed in a chain form following each other, so that students develop a deeper understanding of German language structures from the start. For instance, when approaching the Dative case, there should be an attempt to explain that it doesn't only have the function of the indirect object, but also answers the question “Where?” and rules a set of prepositions and verbs. Thus, following the idea that a certain case rules several different contexts, it is possible to

claim that a solid knowledge on the four cases is essential to achieve the fluency in German.

Tense Structure

Difficulty – Understanding the word order and the tense structure. Since Portuguese does not have a fixed tense structure, it took a lot of efforts from students to assimilate the German word order.

Solution – In order to help the class to overcome this difficulty, at first the teacher should focus on the explanation of the structures through examples in different tenses and contexts. This can be done, for instance, by picking affirmative tenses and transforming them into questions and negations. Having done this, it is necessary to leave some time for students to practise the structures. This implies both speaking and writing exercises, for example, dialogues and letters writing. This approach will help students to become aware of the word order and how it changes according to the tense type.

Vocabulary learning

Difficulty – Memorizing new vocabulary. In case of German, this difficulty is not only linked to the different phonetics of this language, which makes the memorization harder, but also to the words morphology, namely their gender. Apart from the fact that the words gender varies from language to language, German also has the neuter gender, which does not exist in Portuguese. This was very confusing and hindered, at some extent, the vocabulary learning.

Solution – An effective way to facilitate the vocabulary learning is to teach it by themes and integrated in a context. For instance, when teaching vocabulary related to food, as next step, it is necessary to build expressions using these words, for example, talking about food preferences. At this initial level, it is important that the context is somehow related to the students' everyday life. They should first learn to associate the contents to their own reality and only then switch to the outside world. Another helpful activity is doing dictations, as referred above. Thanks to this exercise, students will not only memorize new words, but also their gender.

5.2.2. Mandarin Chinese

Phonetics and Pronunciation

Difficulty – Pronouncing and differentiating the four tones. This aspect of Mandarin Chinese was a real challenge, since the tonal system is something that does not exist in western languages. All the 4 tones turned out to be difficult, both in their pronunciation and recognition. However, when comparing them, the 2nd and the 4th tones caused more difficulties. On the one hand, it was hard for students to recognize whether the pitch of a certain syllable is rising (2nd tone) or falling (4th tone). On the other hand, it was also hard for them to make the right intonation while pronouncing the tones. I became aware of this fact, not only throughout the classes, but also while correcting the listening exercises in the workbook.

Solution – Taking into account that this aspect is unusual to westerners, the four tones teaching and learning require more time than the Mandarin Chinese courses can actually offer. However, there are still ways to mitigate this difficulty. At first, the tones should be taught and learnt applied to different syllables, so that students become aware of the differences in intonation. The repeat-exercises are essential at this initial stage. Afterwards, as second step, the tones should be integrated in words. It is important to focus on words with mixed tones, so that the class understands how these intonations work together. Apart from the right pronunciation, it is necessary to ensure that students are also able to recognize them. At this point, the listening exercises, as those in the workbook, and the thematic videos play a crucial role. In both cases, there should be a continuous practice and acceptance of the tones as an inherent feature of this language.

Difficulty – Pronouncing and differentiating the sounds of Pinyin. This part was less difficult than the four tones, yet there were sounds, which were difficult to assimilate. On the one hand, students had difficulties in distinguishing two groups of Initials: *zh*; *ch*; *sh* from *z*; *c*; *s*. They often mixed these sounds, while reading the dialogues. On the other hand, there was a difficulty in pronouncing *j*; *q*; *x* Initials. The students tended to switch to the Portuguese pronunciation of these sounds.

Solution – An effective way to solve or mitigate this difficulty is to find similar sounds in a foreign language, for example English, as it was shown above. Let us look first at

the *zh; ch; sh* and *z; c; s* Initials. In this case, the teacher can select six English words: *jungle; cheap; sheep* and *bits; birds and song* and show that their pronunciation is not the same. After that, it is necessary to do the same with the Mandarin Chinese words and explain that *zhōng; chá* and *shuǐ* should be pronounced differently from *zài; cāntīng* and *sān*. This approach will help students to distinguish these two groups of sounds.

Concerning the *j; q; x* Initials, it is also advisable to select a set of English words and train their pronunciation together in the classroom. In this case, the teacher can use the following examples: *jeep; cheese; see*. Since western learners are more used to English sounds, this comparison will help them to assimilate the Mandarin Chinese pronunciation in an easier way and, consequently, speak correctly.

In the same way as with tones, Pinyin should be learnt gradually by steps: first separately by groups of syllables, and then integrated in words. Once again, the reading and speaking exercises are essential to master these sounds. Throughout the classes, the teacher should pay attention to those groups of sounds, in which the class experiences more difficulties and then explore together in the classroom. During my course, I read the dialogues several times and after that, I encouraged the reading in pairs. It is also important to remind that Pinyin and the four tones are closely related, so they should be taught and learnt at the same time.

Writing and recognizing the characters

Difficulty – Writing the characters. The Mandarin Chinese writing system is another challenging aspect for western learners in general, not only because this language does not have an alphabet, but also because the writing of the characters follows a strict stroke order, which should be respected. The compound characters were the most challenging.

Solution – Before approaching more specific solutions, it is important to mention that Mandarin Chinese teachers should dedicate a significant amount of time for the characters practising in each class, so that students gain the habit of writing them correctly from the very beginning. An effective way to consolidate this practising and master the stroke order is writing dictations on characters and simple vocabulary. Another helpful strategy is teaching characters by themes. For example, grouping the personal pronouns or question words and explaining them at once. By learning how to write the characters

linked to a certain group of words, students will memorize them more easily. A last possible way to solve this difficulty is picking one character and form words with it. For example, the character 学 (xué) relates to learning and, therefore, it appears in these words: 学生 “xuésheng” (student); 学习 “xuéxí” (to learn); 学年 “xuénián” (academic year) and 小学 “xiǎoxué (school). By writing the same character several times in different words, students will memorize it faster. This exercise applies more to advanced levels, but even at the initial level teachers should introduce it to facilitate the memorization process.

Difficulty – Recognizing the characters. This is another difficulty associated to the characters, since knowing how to write them does not necessarily implies the ability to recognize them. The main reason underlying this difficulty is the fact that the graphic representation of a character is not directly related to its meaning. My students were not the exception. They had more difficulties in recognizing similar characters, both simple and compound.

Solution – Promoting reading exercises is an essential step to help students to overcome this difficulty. At first stage, the characters should be followed by Pinyin, as it happens in the manual, so that students create solid associations between the characters and their phonetics. Nevertheless, after some time and even at this initial level, it is necessary to get away from it. The main point to bear in mind is that this process should be gradual, so that none loses their motivation. Given that, as a first move towards this goal, the teacher can explore those characters that can be easily recognized due to their origins. For example, as the pictographic characters are representations of real-life objects, it is easier to make the associations between the image and its meaning. So, at first the teacher should select the characters and explain their roots, by linking their graphic representation to the real objects they represent. For instance, the character 口 does look like an open mouth and it is possible to guess its meaning just by looking at it.

To complement this, another simple activity is mixing simple characters from the first lessons and show them one by one separately and later make up short dialogues for students to read and try to recognize them without Pinyin. After that, and having ensured that the class is able to recognize at least part of the taught characters, it is possible to switch to more complex exercises available in the book, for example, pattern drills, in which it is supposed to create new dialogues by replacing characters.

Tense Structure

Difficulty – Understanding the word order and the tenses structure. Although the Mandarin Chinese grammatical system lacks on morphological changes, its tense structure is even stricter than the German, meaning that the words do not change their position regardless of the tense type, so my students also found it difficult. When looking into the tense structure closer, at this initial level the most challenging elements were the position of the adverb and question words, which do not appear in the first place as in western languages.

Solution – In the same way as in German, this difficulty can be solved through repetition of the structures with examples in different tenses and contexts. When exemplifying, it is necessary to transform the affirmative tenses into questions and negations, so that students become aware of the word order. Another two ways to overcome this difficulty is to introduce written translation exercises and promote dialogues in pairs. By translating simple phrases from Portuguese into Mandarin Chinese and speaking to each other, students will gradually memorize the word order.

Syntax and Morphology

Difficulty – Understanding different functions of the Predicate. Unlike the western languages, in which the predicate is usually a verb, in Mandarin Chinese it can perform different functions: *verb*, *adjective* and *numeral*. Given that, there are many phrases without a verb, as it is the case of “*Wǒ hěn hǎo*” 我很好. Portuguese students are not used to these different functions, therefore they needed more time to assimilate them.

Solution – The best way to solve this difficulty is to explore the contexts in which each predicate is required through examples. The teacher should decompound the sentences into pieces and call the class attention to the function of each word. To consolidate this, it is necessary to encourage students to make lists with different verbs and adjectives, and then, build sentences with them.

Vocabulary learning

Difficulty – Memorizing new vocabulary. In case of Mandarin Chinese, this difficulty is also a result of its different phonetics. On the other hand, since Mandarin Chinese has a different origin, it is almost impossible for westerners to guess the words meaning by their phonetics.

Solution – The solution mentioned for German also applies to Mandarin Chinese vocabulary learning. Nevertheless, here there should be a greater emphasis on the listening and oral exercises, due to the four tones, and also because the implementation of the written exercises cannot be done so soon, since the characters require more time to be assimilated. Taking this into account, the thematic videos, which I also used in my classes, can be very helpful at listening and memorizing. Afterwards, there should be an attempt to build expressions with the new words and use them to describe the everyday life.

5.3 Comparison of German and Mandarin Chinese Learning Difficulties

Taking into consideration what has been said in the previous sub-sections and when comparing the learning difficulties of both languages, it is possible to say that despite their different origins and other different features mentioned throughout this report, students manifested them in common aspects: phonetics; writing; tense structure; syntax and morphology and vocabulary learning. However, as shown above, the difficulties were experienced in different ways, as a group and individually.

Before comparing these dimensions, it is important to remind that as shown above, Portuguese learners tend to have a more negative impression on German than on Mandarin Chinese and this definitely affects their performance in the classroom. Therefore, before looking into specific learning difficulties, German teachers should try to change this negative image, so that the learning process flows without resistance. On the other hand, it is important to highlight that in general those students who had prior knowledge on foreign languages were more at ease during the entire learning process than those 2 students from German group to whom this language was the first foreign language. The majority of students often used English and with less frequency French and Spanish to

make the associations and understand the contents, when it was not possible to find similar aspects in Portuguese.

Switching to the specific features comparison, both German and Mandarin Chinese own sounds, which do not exist or are pronounced differently in Portuguese, so at this point, both languages were equally difficult. These two languages even have some similar sounds, for example, *h* and *ü*. It was mainly due to the differences in phonetics between Portuguese and these two languages that the vocabulary learning ended up to be a difficulty. Nevertheless, due to the tone system, which does not exist in western languages, the Mandarin Chinese phonetics turned out to be even more difficult than the German. Moreover, after spending one entire semester teaching these languages, it is possible to say that achieving the right pronunciation without a real context is more difficult in Mandarin Chinese than in German, once again due to the four tones.

Concerning the writing, due to the characters system, which does not exist in western languages, learning Mandarin Chinese writing was more challenging and required more efforts from students than the German writing, whose Latin alphabet, despite some different letters, is similar to the Portuguese, and therefore, required less time and efforts to be learnt. It is important to keep in mind that Mandarin Chinese writing is learnt through memorization and associations, whereas German writing is learnt through understanding of the spelling rules. Since Portuguese language also has spelling rules, it was easier for students to assimilate the German rules than the Mandarin Chinese characters stroke order.

Nevertheless, when approaching the tense structure and syntax and morphology, it was German that caused more difficulties. This happened not only because it owns a strict word order, likewise Mandarin Chinese, but also because of a major number of grammatical categories, which have to be inflected, something that does not happen in the Sino-Tibetan languages like Mandarin Chinese. Taking this into account, it is important to highlight that, for Portuguese students, it was precisely the combination of these two factors in German language that made it more challenging than Mandarin Chinese at this point. This happened for two reasons: on the one hand, because the Portuguese words inflection is different from the German; on the other hand, Portuguese has a free tense structure, unlike German. Moreover, when looking specifically into the German syntax and morphology, it has more different grammatical functions than Mandarin Chinese, which are used in too different contexts.

Thus, by comparing these two languages in the aspects mentioned above, it is possible to see that some difficulties turned out to be more significant in German learning, whereas others were more challenging in Mandarin Chinese. Following these ideas, when preparing the classroom activities and designing solutions for these difficulties, it is necessary to put greater emphasis on the more challenging aspects of each language. This was what I tried to do during my internship.

On the other hand, keeping in mind that both German and Mandarin Chinese groups experienced the difficulties in common aspects, although differently, the methods and solutions used to solve some of them also presented some similarities, as it happened in this report, when coming up with activities and solutions to facilitate the tense structure memorization. In spite of focusing on different sentence elements, as described above, the approach was similar.

This doesn't mean though that the less demanding aspects in each language, like the German writing or the Mandarin Chinese grammar should be given less attention from the teacher's side. These aspects remain difficult, therefore, require strategies to be solved. This comparison of the learning difficulties was not made and should not be made based on the level of importance of the faced difficulties. As referred in the previous chapters, it is necessary to keep in mind that these difficulties do not only depend on the foreign language itself, but also on the personal characteristics of a student, as well as, the mother tongue of a certain sample. So, it is possible to deduce that other groups of students will experience other kind of difficulties.

6. Conclusion

This study has shown that foreign language learning difficulties can result from many factors. Being German and Mandarin Chinese two representatives of two different groups of languages: western and oriental, whose importance on the global stage cannot be ignored, the analysis and comparison of the learning difficulties underlying both idioms will be a helpful guide for those planning to learn them.

The results of the present investigation have shown that it is possible to set a parallel between the learning difficulties in western and oriental languages despite their different origins and diverging characteristics. In case of German and Mandarin Chinese, taught to Portuguese students, these difficulties were found in common aspects, but manifested differently. This means that, when looking closer into these two languages, it is possible to find common aspects, which are not visible at the surface, such as similar phonetics and strict word order. These similarities were also reflected in some learning difficulties mentioned in this report.

However, the comparison of German and Mandarin Chinese learning difficulties is only one of the possible combinations within the variety of the world languages, and therefore, should not be perceived as a general guideline for the whole western and oriental linguistic worlds. Other combinations of languages or a sample, with different characteristics, especially with a different native language, will probably originate different results. On the other hand, it is necessary to take into consideration the language level, when studying the learning difficulties. Different levels bring about different difficulties. Moreover, when studying the learning difficulties, it is very important for us teachers to get continuous feedback from our students and do not focus only on our own observations because they might not always correspond to reality. Even if the observations match the real difficulties, students can categorize them in a different way, as it happened in this report.

Regardless of the foreign language, by being aware of the difficulties roots, the language teachers, including myself, will more likely manage their classes in a more efficient way and come up with more suitable solutions that will help learners to overcome difficulties and become successful in the global market

These were my biggest challenges and aspirations during the internship. Thanks to the experience at Profdomus, I became aware of all kind of roles and responsibilities underlying the teacher profession and, consequently, became more confident about my own

capacities. After this experience, I have no doubts about the professional path I should follow.

Summing up, being a language the element, which is in a continuous evolving, its teaching and learning end up being a subject of a constant exploration and improvement. I also hope that the findings of this report will be expanded in the further studies.

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Appendix

Appendix 1: Focus Group Interview Guide

Procedures	Description
Opening	<i>Welcome everyone. We reached the culminating stage of our course. Now we are about to start our discussion on German / Mandarin Chinese learning difficulties. This discussion will be recorded. Please, don't be shy and share your ideas. Let's move on to the first question.</i>
Questions	<ol style="list-style-type: none">1. What were the reasons that motivated you to learn German / Mandarin Chinese?2. What was your initial idea of German / Mandarin Chinese?3. Did the course at Profdomus transform your initial idea?4. What were your major difficulties in learning German / Mandarin Chinese?5. What helped you to overcome these difficulties?
Culmination	<i>We reached the culminating point in our discussion. Thank you very much for your participation. Your feedback will enrich the present study.</i>