“Linguistic sources of barriers in intercultural communication between China and the European cultural circle” is the title of my PhD dissertation. The first chapter concentrates on human communication in general. The second focuses on some linguistic theories, which I find useful in further analysis, and the third is an empiric presentation of barriers in communication between China and the European cultural circle.

It is a well known fact that every single culture on the globe is rooted in its characteristic cultural patterns, in particular its linguistic system(s). Therefore, searching for them and understanding them, is the first step to achieve success in communication of representatives from two different, or in the case of my studies, entirely different cultures. In the thesis, I was trying to show all possible ways leading to mutual understanding between people from different cultural areas.

The idea of looking for understanding another culture in its linguistic system is not new. It may be found in an ancient Greek philosophy, but it was not put into a complete theory in ancient times. A century ago, an American anthropologist and linguist, whose name was Edward Sapir, suggested that a language affects the way people observe the reality around them. His idea was then developed by his student, Benjamin Lee Whorf, who presented a rule of “linguistic relativism”, which in social science is known as “the Sapir-Whorf hypothesis”. It says that people who use quite different, foreign grammar, which often perceives not only time and space, but also numerous other connotations, in a new and unknown way, are often trapped. To their astonishment the reality, in particular the reaction of their communicators is different than expected. Such situations create intellectual and emotional instability in a surrounding environment, and that is the first step to set up barriers in intercultural communication. The best way to cope with these barriers is to specify them and to find their sources. These problems are dealt with in my dissertation which focuses on intercultural communication of partners from China and the European cultural circle.

My general idea was not to compare different styles of communication practiced in those two distant places, but rather to concentrate on the problem how people raised in European cultural circle understand communication with the Chinese. I come from Europe, but I spent some time in China, so I may say I touched the Chinese culture. That fact inclined me to studying European - Chinese communication, from the European perspective.

Based on my experience, I may say that the first and the most important barrier in intercultural communication in hidden in language. The Chinese use a common language which is commonly known as Mandarin language. Its written form consists of about 40 thousand characters which are pretty hard to remember. Moreover, depending on the context,
characters often change their meaning. Spoken language is also very difficult, because not every character is connected with an exact sound. What is more, the Chinese use tones while speaking. The Chinese culture has been based on that type of language for centuries, and it has created many specific linguistic patterns that are used and respected in everyday life, the communication included. One must understand the base of their linguistic system, if achievement of a success in intercultural communication with the Chinese, is a goal.