

# Learner profile: Bulgarian

This guide presents common challenges faced by Bulgarian learners of English and typical features of language production. Please note, these guidelines are intended to advise teachers on areas where students may experience problems. However, native speakers may not all find the following points challenging.



## Facts

- **Language family:** South Slavic.
- **Native speakers:** 15 million.
- **Location:** Bulgarian is an official language in Bulgaria and is recognised as a minority language in the Czech Republic, Hungary, Moldova, Ukraine, Serbia, Albania and Romania.
- **Writing system:** Cyrillic script.
- **Alphabet:** Modern Bulgarian uses 30 Cyrillic letters.

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## Pronunciation

- Bulgarian doesn't have the 'th' phoneme and is difficult for many Bulgarians to pronounce.
- Bulgarian speakers may have trouble with some English vowels and diphthongs as Bulgarian vowels are mainly short. They may struggle with minimal pairs like hit/heat, pull/pool.
- Bulgarian speakers may struggle to produce voiced consonants at ends of words, like 'd' or 'g' sounds. This may lead to pronunciation of -ing ending words as -ink e.g. 'thinkink' instead of thinking.
- Bulgarian speakers may pronounce the consonant 'h' with the sound /x/, which is like the 'ch' in 'loch'.
- If a verb ends in -y, a syllable may be lost when -ing is added, leading to pronunciation of words like 'bullying' as 'bulling'.

## Grammar

- Bulgarian speakers may have trouble with definite and indefinite articles. In Bulgarian, the definite article is added to the ends of words and used in more contexts than in English. There is also no indefinite article in Bulgarian as it is implied if a word does not have a definite article.
- Adjectives agree with nouns in number and gender so Bulgarian speakers may try to make plural forms of adjectives in English.
- Questions in Bulgarian are formed by adding the particle 'ли' after the verb if a question word is not used. The verb conjugation shows who is performing the action. In addition, questions which use a preposition have the preposition at the beginning. Bulgarian speakers may struggle with forming questions in English.
- In Bulgarian, negative sentences are formed using 'не' (не) with the correct verb form. Bulgarian speakers may try to use this form when speaking English and omit the auxiliary, using phrases like 'I no like football' instead.
- There is only one present tense in Bulgarian so Bulgarian speakers may not understand differences in usage between the present simple and present continuous. They may also struggle with the present perfect as present simple would also be used to express this in Bulgarian.

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## Writing

- Bulgarian learners will need to learn the Latin alphabet.
- Bulgarian phonics and spelling is typically a one-to-one mapping, one phoneme to one letter, so English spelling may be difficult where there are silent letters.
- There are a number of different ways to translate the word 'but' in Bulgarian, each used in specific contexts. So pupils may attempt to find ways to express these in English.
- Bulgarian speakers sometimes confuse the Bulgarian letter 'g' with the English letter 'd', and the Bulgarian 'u' for the English 'i'. This can lead to spelling and meaning problems.

## Cultural differences

- In Bulgaria, some people nod to mean 'no', with an upward motion of the head, and shake their head in a slightly wavy motion to mean 'yes' - although this is becoming less common, especially in younger generations.
- A sound similar to 'tsk' may be used to mean 'no'.
- School grades are assigned on a scale of 2 to 6.
- Bulgarian has a much wider vocabulary to describe family members and goes into specific detail e.g. one word to describe 'my aunt's husband'. This might lead to Bulgarian speakers overexplaining family relationships or becoming frustrated by simplifications.

## Recommended FlashAcademy® lessons

Some lessons which might help based on the above differences:

Beginner > Letters & Numbers

Beginner > Phonics 1 > Set 1, Set 3, Set 5

Beginner > Home, Time & Leisure > Present Tense

Beginner > Holiday & Travel > 5Ws

Beginner > Shopping, Numbers & Colours > Present Continuous