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**The perception of English taboo expressions by  
native speakers and Czech learners**

Bakalářská práce

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## **PROHLÁŠENÍ**

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podpis.....

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## **ABSTRACT**

The bachelor thesis deals with dysphemisms, euphemisms and their development, introduces different types of taboo expressions, and focuses on the usage of taboo language by foreign and native speakers of English. The main goal of the thesis was to get insight into the perception of English taboo expressions by native speakers and Czech learners. For the purpose of this project, two separate questionnaires were created and distributed to the two targeted groups via online platforms. The main attention was paid to the respondents' opinions on certain vulgar expressions and emotions evoked by them. The results showed some similarities and differences and are analysed more thoroughly towards the end of the paper.



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# INTRODUCTION

Language can come in many forms, and this thesis is about one of them. Obscenities, vulgarisms, and taboo topics are and have always been a part of human lives. In daily verbal communication, English taboo expressions are uttered by many, and in the following chapters of this paper, this particular side of linguistics is explored. As the title of this thesis suggests, the main focus is to gain insight into the perception of this spicy topic by native speakers and Czech learners of English. Even though several studies regarding foreign speakers and their approach to offensive language were already done in the past, this thesis' targeted group was Czech students of English only, which seems to be quite different from other researches.

The theoretical background is established in the first part of the thesis. The first chapters are concerned with the roots and development of taboo expressions and practices. The reader is introduced to terms like dysphemism, euphemism and orthophemism as well as different types of insults and swearing. The next section is dedicated to different categories of taboo expressions including sex, body effluvia, homosexuality, menstruation, body parts, illnesses and death. The last chapter talks about foreign speakers and their approach to English vulgar expressions as well as some studies and other important information for the practical part.

In the first section of the practical part, the methodology of the research is described. Then the two questionnaires, that were conducted specifically for this research, are analysed. The first questionnaire was sent to native speakers of English living in the UK and US, and the second one was distributed to Czech students of English. The questions mainly focused on the respondents' opinions on certain words' offensiveness and what emotions and feelings were invoked in them while reading about concrete situations in which vulgar expressions were used. Additionally, Czech respondents were asked to compare Czech and English vulgar expressions and the correlation between proficiency in the language and the frequency of swearing in English was investigated as well. The findings and the comparison of the two groups are illustrated in the research results.

# I. THEORETICAL PART

## 1. TABOO

Taboos are actions that are banned by society and are considered a possible source of uneasiness, hurt, and distress. Taboo has its origins in the word *ta-bu*, meaning prohibited, which comes from the language of Polynesian people living on the island of Tonga (Allan 2019, p. 3). It was believed, that not respecting taboos could naturally lead to consequences like suffering, and even death. However, in modern days, people choose to abstain from the usage of taboo words for reasons such as avoiding embarrassing themselves in social situations, and not wanting to be rude or hurt the audience. Some people do not use taboo words because the unpretty nature of the expressions makes them feel uncomfortable. The perception and acceptance of taboos are determined by moral principles and faith, which vary in different societies (Brown et al. 2006, p. 452).

Pinker (2008, p. 326-327) discusses the areas that tend to be tabooed. He mentions that targeted topics are those talking about sexuality, excretion, and body parts that are used during these activities. The list continues with theological matters, death, sickness, despised groups of people such as atheists and nemeses, and people that are part of minority racial groups.

In the Bible, the most tabooed topics are food and sexual matters. Males are forbidden to have sexual relationships with certain types of women. For instance, their mother, granddaughter, sister, and wife of their uncle or brother. Other examples of banned practices include infidelity, sex with a woman who menstruates, and homosexual relationships of men. Intercourse with an animal is prohibited for both women and men. Similarities between rules that are applied to sex and food can be found as some prohibitions of sexual activities have their equivalence with food restrictions. To illustrate this point, a regulation that a young goat should not be cooked in milk produced by its mother is compared to the prohibition of a young man from having sex with his mother (Brown et al. 2006, p. 451).

The acceptance of taboo topics changes over time. A great number of English taboo words come from blasphemy. However, these expressions are not seen as strong as they used to be in the past and are replaced by different tabooed topics. In contemporary society, the new tabooed areas are concerned with “gender, sexuality, disability, and especially race and ethnicity.” At

the beginning of the twenty-first century, a perception of bad language was observed. Racism and negative comments about certain groups of people such as people with disabilities and homosexuals were reported as the most offensive. In the second place were expressions regarding sex and the processes of the body. The third most offensive area was blasphemous language (Brown et al. 2006, p. 458).

## 2. DYSPHEMISM

Dysphemism is a rude, impolite, and widely tabooed expression with an offensive undertone and connotation. Such expressions involve, for example, insulting and swearing. Individuals use dysphemistic words and phrases when talking about something that raises negative emotions in them, they disagree with, or with the aim to embarrass, devalue, and belittle something or someone. Another situation when these expressions are used occurs when a person needs to vent frustration and rage through a stream of expletives (Allan & Burridge 2006, p. 31-32).

It must be said that connotations vary in different circumstances and are dependent on people's perceptions and the context in which the words are used. Although some expressions initially do not connote anything offensive, their meaning can be changed, and they can become dysphemistic. For instance, when the word *dog* is used to mention an animal, the meaning is neutral, it is not dysphemistic nor euphemistic. However, in a situation when the word *dog* is used to refer to a human and the speaker intends to offend the person, the connotation changes, thus the word is used as a dysphemism. Another example is demonstrated by the following two situations, in which the same expression referring to a tabooed body part is used. In the first situation, two partners during a sexual interaction can refer to a part of a body by a word that would be considered dysphemistic. However, because they are intimate with each other, the word comes from their enjoyment and thus is not seen as offending. On the other hand, the same expression would be considered rude and offensive, hence dysphemistic, if a physician used it to refer to a patient's part of a body during a medical procedure (Allan & Burridge 2006, p. 31-32).

Pinker (2008, p. 331) touches on the issue of words' connotations more deeply. He states that three important aspects in which the connotations differ have been distinguished by psycholinguistics many years ago. These three areas are concerned with the connotation's strength, activity, and whether it is marked as positive or negative. Expressions that are recognized as taboo lie on the extremely negative and extremely strong end of the spectrum.

Allan and Burridge (2006, p. 39) also mention dysphemistic euphemisms, which are expressions that are dysphemistic, but their true purpose is euphemistic. These terms are used in a humorous way with the goal to show friendship and fondness to a person that is close to the speaker. For example, naming a friend an *old bastard*, or saying that someone *kicked the*

*bucket* instead of saying someone died. The reversed version of dysphemistic euphemism is euphemistic dysphemism. These words are euphemisms, but they are used as socially more acceptable, somewhat changed, and censored versions of dysphemisms. Their true function remains dysphemistic. As an example, the usage of the expression *Shoot!* instead of *Shit!* The utterance of the exclamation *Shoot!* is not considered to be offensive, yet the intention of the speaker, using this expression, is to swear.

### 3. EUPHEMISM

Euphemism is the opposite of dysphemism (Allan & Burrige 2006, p. 31). In communication, euphemism is the usage of a softer or vague expression instead of an insulting, rude, or explicit one. For example, “using *Gosh* instead of *God*, *terminate* instead of *kill*, *sleep with* instead of *have sex with*, *relive oneself* instead of *urinate*” (McArthur et al. 2018, p. 239). Postman described euphemism as a crucial and smart way of producing a new outlook on a topic. For instance, by referring to a garbage man by the term *sanitation engineer*, a higher possibility, that he will be perceived with more value and admiration, exists (Postman 1976, p. 188).

Although in some settings, like personal and non-public conversations, tabooed topics can be talked about freely, in certain social situations, it is highly inappropriate. In circumstances, when the usage of dysphemistic expressions is perceived as offensive or awkward, therefore not suitable, euphemisms can be used instead (Brown et al. 2006, p. 456).

Different types of euphemisms are displayed in the following table (Brown et al. 2006, p. 456-457, Allan & Burrige 1988, p. 2-5).

Type of euphemism	Non-euphemistic expression	Euphemistic expression
Metaphors	die old	kick the bucket ripe years
Remodeling	shit Christ vagina toilet	shite, shoot cripes tuzzy muzzy umpti-poo
Acronyms	situation normal, all fucked up	snafu
Abbreviations	son-of-a-bitch fuck piss	S.O.B. f pee
Omission	any unwanted word I need to go to the toilet	asterisk (*) or dash (-) I need to go
Circumlocution	toilet excrements	little girl’s room solid human waste
General-for-specific	fuck	go to bed



Hyperboles	death	flight to glory
Clipping	Jesus	jeez, gee
Understatements	die	sleep
Borrowing	sweat syphilis	perspire cupid's measles

*Table 1: Types of euphemisms.*

According to Postman (1976, p. 186), euphemizing can be perceived negatively. Occasions when euphemism is used by people who want to camouflage the honest intention behind their words occur. As an example of a situation, when a softened phrase was used with the purpose of hiding the unpleasant truth, Postman wrote about “Operation Sunshine”. This operation involved bomb testing and the name “Operation Sunshine” was provided by the US Government with the aim to erase the horrific feelings invoked by bombing. Postman called the censoring of the reality behind the experiment unethical.

## 4. ORTHOPHEMISM AND X-PHEMISMS

### 4.1 OTRHOPHEMISM

As we mentioned in the previous chapter alternatives to dysphemistic expressions, euphemisms are not the only available option. The term orthophemism refers to words that are not excessively sweet-sounding (euphemism) nor insulting or harsh (dysphemism). To rephrase it, orthophemistic words are neutral, more formal and their meaning is literal. Alongside euphemisms, otrhophemistic expressions are used in certain situations as a substitution for expressions that are inappropriate, impolite, and undesired, or their usage could lead to unwanted results such as hurting or humiliating the listener, the speaker, or a third party (Allan & Burrige 2006, p. 29, 32-34).

### 4.2 X-PHEMISMS

Allan and Burrige (2006, p. 29) stated in their writing, that the word X-phemisms is a collective name for euphemisms, dysphemisms, and orthophemisms. An important term closely connected to X-phemism is cross-varietal synonyms, which are words, that convey the same meaning but the occasion in which they are used is different. In other words, these synonyms have the same denotation, but they differ in connotation.

For instance, the words *shit*, *faeces*, and *poo* are cross-varietal synonyms. They have the same meaning, but they would not be used in the same context. This leads us to the purpose of X-phemisms, which is to provide different alternatives of a word, so an appropriate one can be chosen and used, according to the situation a person is in (Allan and Burrige 2006, p. 47-48).

The following table exhibits examples of X-phemisms (Allan and Burrige 2006, p. 32).

Orthophemism	Dysphemism	Euphemism
faeces	shit	poo
my vagina	my cunt	my bits
Jesus	Christ!	Lord

Table 2: examples of X-phemisms.

## 5. DYSPHEMISM AS THE STRONG LANGUAGE

“Words are symbolic. The correlation between their form and their meaning is largely arbitrary.” Despite the fact that there is no inherent or inevitable association between the meaning of a word and its structure, it is enigmatic that tabooed words have more displeasing connotations than their euphemistic synonyms, although the expressions convey the same meaning. In all probability, the explanation of this phenomenon comes from a hypothesis that the relation between the word and its meaning is not completely random and that the structure of the word, by some means, demonstrates “the essential nature of whatever it denotes” (Brown et al. 2006, p. 453). It is reasonable, that a dysphemistic expression like *shit* cannot be handled and used the same way as its milder version *poo*. It can be said that “the connotations of taboo terms are contaminated by the taboo topics which they donate” (Allan & Burrige 2006, p. 40). Euphemisms are words that are not stained by taboo topics but are prone to do so over time (Allan & Burrige 2006, p. 43).

The rest of this chapter is dedicated to the explanation of why dysphemistic language is referred to as strong language. The examples mentioned demonstrate that whenever an expression has multiple meanings, one of which is dysphemistic, the word will eventually lose the other non-dysphemistic meanings and will be limited to the tabooed one only (Allan & Burrige 2006, p. 44). Examples also illustrate the degradation of words’ meanings (going from euphemism to dysphemism, from orthophemism to dysphemism etc.).

The noun *undertaker* had multiple meanings and was used in various contexts. One of them was a euphemistic way how to refer to a person who is in a charge of burials. However, after associating the expression with the loss of life, which is a taboo topic, the expression lost the other meanings and is used in the tabooed context only (Brown et al. 2006, p. 453). In the past, the word *penis* used to be a euphemistic expression but became more vulgar throughout the years, and at the present time, is considered indecent. The word *villain* was used to refer to a person who was born in a lower social class. However, nowadays, the meaning shifted, and the word *villain* refers to a vicious and sinful person who participates in committing illegal acts. The noun *toilet* is a neutral label but used to be a euphemism in the past. At present times, the expression is replaced by the word *restroom* or *bathroom* (Allan & Burrige 2006, p. 43). The word *niggardly*, which is a term that refers to a greedy person, caused some offence in the past, because of the unfortunate resemblance of the word *negro*. A *coney*, which is a term referring

to a *rabbit*, is no longer used, most likely because the word *cunt* has similar pronunciation. The primary meanings of the words *gay* and *queer* are lost (Pinker 2008, p. 333-334). The word *queer* was used to refer to something strange or odd, but nowadays, the term is associated with gender identity and sexual orientation (Cambridge Dictionary 2023). Today, *gay* refers to a homosexual, but the outdated meaning of the word is attractive, bright, and happy (Allen 2005, p. 579). Another example of a word losing its original, non-offensive meaning is the word *ass*, which initially referred to an animal. However, because it was mistaken with the word *arse*, the new term *donkey* was introduced instead. Nevertheless, the word *ass* did not vanish from the vocabulary, it is now used as the synonym of the word *arse* (Allan & Burridge 2006, p. 44).

## 6. SWEARING

“Swearing is the strongly emotive use of taboo terms” (Allan 2019, p. 12). Another name for swearing is *four-letter words* (Allan & Burrige 2006, p. 39). The word *swearing* has two meanings. The first one is to make a promise, to vow something. The second one is the usage of offensive, vulgar and blasphemous words. “Swearwords are usually associated with the genitals and sexual activity (*cunt, fuck, prick*), excrement (*crap, shit*) or religion (*Jesus Christ!*) and may combine elements from each area (*fucking shit, fucking hell*)” (McArthur et al. 2018, p. 618, 619).

According to Allan (2019, p. 12-13), people swear because of the following four reasons. The first one is to utter expletives. The second one is to offend or hurt someone. Another reason is to show friendship and belonging to society, and finally, the last one is to strongly express a point of view in a certain situation. Pinker (2008, p. 352) notes that a function of swear words is to express certain emotions and the original utterance would not be complete if a polite synonym was used instead.

Men swear more often and use more vulgar expressions than women do. Despite the variety and quantity of taboo words, the most frequently used swearwords (“*fuck, shit, hell, damn, goddamn, Jesus Christ, ass, oh my god, bitch and sucks*”) remain the same throughout the years (Jay 2009, p. 156).

Pinker (2008, p. 350) lists five types of swearing: “descriptively (*Let’s fuck*), idiomatically (*It’s fucked up*), abusively (*Fuck you, motherfucker!*), emphatically (*This is fucking amazing*) and cathartically (*Fuck!!!*).”

Expressions like *fucking* and *bloody* can be attached to numerous words from different word classes. Their function is to highlight the passion and importance of the statement that is made by the speaker/writer. The presence of swear words in people’s life lasts almost a lifetime. Children start to recognise and use them at the age of one and even old people with damaged linguistic skills are capable of using them because curse words are kept in a different part of the brain than the rest of the vocabulary (Allan 2019, p. 13).

The usage of bad English words originates in a religious source, however, since blasphemous expletives are not as obscene and strong as they used to be, people substitute them with expressions, that are considered to be more powerful at the time (Pinker, 2007).

Pinker (2007) displayed the following examples of these substitutions:

*“Who (in) the hell are you? – Who the fuck are you?”*

*“I don’t give a damn – I don’t give a fuck; I don’t give a shit”*

*“Holy Mary! – Holy shit! Holy fuck!”*

*“For God’s sake – For fuck’s sake; For shit’s sake”*

*“Damn you! – Fuck you!”*

## 7. INSULT

Insult is a taboo and censored language that is used with the intention to harm other people. In different words, insult is verbal abuse and is aimed at the victim's assumed flaws such as his/her personality, looks, intelligence, personal beliefs, and relationships. Allan and Burrige (2006, p. 79-83) provide different types of insults, and they are described further in this chapter.

Firstly, comparing people to animals that are assigned obvious characteristics. As an example, calling an overweighted woman a *cow* or even a *fat cow*, a feminine or gay man a *pussy*, an unpleasant woman a *bitch*, a dishonest, immoral, and insidious person a *snake*, a person who takes advantage of others a *parasite* and a person that is not smart a *turkey*.

Secondly, insulting nicknames that originate in dysphemistic expressions referring to genitals, body waste and sexual activities. Expressions like *fucker*, *whore*, *shit*, *asshole*, *cock-sucker*, and *arse licker* can be used as an example.

Thirdly, insults that focus on the outer appearance of a person such as *fatty*, *cripple* and *baldy*.

Fourthly, offensive expressions that refer to a person with an intellectual abnormality or mental illness. For instance, expressions like *retard*, *silly*, *stupid*, *dickhead*, *shithead* and *moron*.

Lastly, a category that includes "sexist, racist, speciesist, classist, ageist and other -IST dysphemisms function as insults." Racist expressions can be allegedly found in every language and English is no exception. English vocabulary contains various offensive expressions such as *frog* referring to a French person, *chink* for a Chinese person and *kraut* to name a German person. Racist comments do also deal with a person's skin colour. Terms like *nigger*, *black* and *nignong* refer not only to Africans but also to people with similar skin complexion.

## 8. TYPES OF TABOO

In this chapter, different types of taboos are introduced. For deeper insight and better representation, examples of corresponding expressions are included. For more clarity and distinction from the rest of the text, the expressions are written in cursive. They were taken from the following sources:

- *Angličtina: slang, idiomy a co v učebnicích nenajdete*
- *Rozdej si to se svým špatným já: americko-český slangový slovník*
- *Wang dang americký slang: Wang Dang American Slang*
- *Wazzup?: slovník slangu a hovorové angličtiny*
- *The Oxford dictionary of modern slang*
- *The concise new Partridge Dictionary of slang and unconventional English*
- *The Oxford handbook of taboo words and language*
- *Forbidden words: Taboo and the censoring of language*

### 8.1 SEX

Even though sexuality, sexual activities and body parts used during those activities are, and have always been, a natural part of human lives, it is a widely taboo area. Words that fall under this topic happen to be prohibited yet attractive to use. A great number of words relating to sex, certain parts of the body and their synonyms occur in the vocabulary. In spite of the fact that censorship of these words became less strict in the past, it is still a sensitive topic, especially in places with strong faith and religion (Crespo-Fernández 2019, p. 41).

Among the most tabooed subjects in the past were included, for instance, male homosexuality, disloyal wives, and sex without the intention to reproduce. Another hugely taboo activity was masturbating, which was perceived especially negatively by the church. The church characterised masturbating as a sin similar to suicide. It used to be believed that this sexual practice could cause health problems like insanity, losing sight, muscle deterioration and problems with sexual organs and reproduction (Allan & Burrige 2006, p. 145-146).



Expressions referring to intercourse:

*bed, do it, get busy, get lucky, make it, make babies, make love, sleep with, rock and roll, make monkey love, you-know-what, bang, fuck, bust a nut, hanky panky, nookie, quicky, ride, scrog, shag, get into, ease up, boogie.*

Expressions referring to masturbating:

*secret vice, self-abuse, satisfy oneself, caress oneself, self-pleasure, self-pollution, self-sexuality, solitary sin, finger, touch oneself, relive tension, self-manipulation, fly the kite, play with oneself, handjob, work in the garden, beat off, shake the bottle, peel the banana/the carrot, beat the meat.*

Expressions referring to oral sex:

*give head, suck off, give French, sit on someone's face, give/do a blowjob, get/go down on, eat (out), tongue.*

Expressions referring to orgasm:

*climax, spend oneself, the big O, coming, seminal discharge, come, cum, peaking, seed, seminal fluid, spunk, spoof, spit white, get his rocks off, spend himself, drop his load, shoot, cream.*

## **8.2 BODY PARTS**

Tabooed body parts are male and female private parts. Vocabulary relating to reproductive organs is rich in various synonyms, including euphemistic expressions that are used to avoid uncomfortable situations and expressions from the other side of the spectrum; offensive, vulgar, and dysphemistic ones (Crespo-Fernández 2019, p. 56).

Expressions referring to genitals generally:

*down there/bellow, nether regions, credentials.*

Expressions referring to male genitals:

*thing, manhood, organ, member, dick, bollocks, banana, weapon, weasel, sausage, piece of meat, ding-dong, tool, joystick, eggs, balls, tail, basket, gun, ferret, arrow, sword, shoot one's load (ejaculate), dick, bag, cock, King Kong, worm, snake, the Dragon, meat and two veg, lunch meat, diamonds, beeze, prick, middle leg.*

Expressions referring to female genitals:

*cunt (the c-word), pussy, melons, muffin, fur burger, cherry, artichoke, tuna, shell, honey pot, box, purse, back door, beaver pie, vag. twat, beaver, kitty, camel toe, love canal, glory hole, clam, coochie, gash, honey-pot, minge.*

### **8.3 HOMOSEXUALITY**

As it was already mentioned, same-sex relationship is, and has always been, a widely taboo topic. According to the Bible, male homosexuality is considered to be sinful and those who participate in this sin are deserving to die as a punishment. Female homosexuality did not get as much attention as male homosexuality did. In the past, homosexuals were harshly punished for their acts. In Britain, the last executed man for sexual intercourse with men was in the first half of the nineteenth century. However, even though such punishments are no longer practised in contemporary society, homosexuality persisted as a confidential topic and was kept a secret for many decades later (Allan & Burrige 2006, p. 152-154).

*Come/get out of the closet* and its shorter versions *come out/out* are expressions tightly connected with the homosexual community. The term *closet* carries the idea that something is a secret, is kept non-public and its reveal could be shocking or scandalous (Crespo-Fernández 2019, p. 45). Oxford Learner's Dictionaries (2023) provided the following definition: "To tell people in general something that you kept a secret before, especially the fact that you are gay".

Expressions referring to being homosexual:

*ankle grabber, ass bandit, catcher, fudge nudger, jobby jabber, light in the loafers, poof, queer bait, silly savage, snappy diva, wide receiver, homo, crafty butcher, date-packer.*

Expressions referring to being bisexual:

*AC/DC, swinging door, bi.*

## 8.4 BODY EFFLUVIA

Although substances that have their sources in human bodies are a natural part of life, they are perceived in some cultures as disgusting and uncommon. Body effluvia, body openings from which they are released, and excretion are taboo and a source of swear words (Pinker 2008, p. 344-345).

The acceptance of taboo expressions of body effluvia is parallel to the acceptance of the thing they refer to. In other words, the more socially unacceptable it is to exclude a certain body effluvium in public, the more unacceptable the word naming the effluvia is. The list of these substances goes from the most taboo to the least taboo: *Shit-piss-fart-snot-spit* (Pinker 2007).

A possible explanation of why body effluvia are perceived so negatively and why it invokes in people feelings of discomfort and disgust was provided by Curtis and Biran (2001). These two biologists led research focused on the cause of the emotion of disgust and people's approach to hygiene. The research was accomplished through five studies that took place in countries in Europe, Asia, and Africa. The results showed that excrement was always reported as the leading source of disgust. Other bodily substances, such as vomit, sweat, urine, blood, saliva, and fluids released during sexual activities were reported frequently. From all the different answers provided by the respondents (for example, rotten food, decomposition, certain people and animals, not behaving according to rules and moral principles), body effluvia were overall noted as the number one category invoking feelings of disgust in people. A conceivable reason why people view these objects as the nastiest is that these substances are a possible source of many diseases. The emotion of disgust, invoked by the effluvia, is beneficial and keeps people safe. It leads to an interruption of activity, people avoid situations they are disgusted by, and they limit contact with potentially dangerous substances, therefore, the risk of getting infected by illness is smaller.

Expressions referring to body effluvia:

*crap, piss, take a leak, barf, beans, break wind, dookie, pitch a load, poop, scat, shit, shiznit, snot, splodge, fart, pee, burp, boogers, goober, toley.*

## 8.5 MENSTRUATION

Menstruation has always been a taboo topic as it is tied to the fear of diseases spreading. Menstrual blood was believed, in the past, to contain certain dangerous illnesses and spoiled souls. Therefore, on most occasions, menstruating women were forbidden to walk freely in public because they were seen as a potential threat. Men perceive menstrual blood more negatively than women do. Towards the end of the last century, research at a university in Australia was conducted to find what bodily effluvia disgust the students and employees the most and the least. Respondents were asked to put different substances on a scale from one to five (one is not disgusting and five is the most disgusting). More than three-quarters of men surveyed put menstrual blood on four or five, whereas less than half of women did so. A small percentage of women ranked menstrual blood as not disgusting at all, however, zero per cent of men did so (Allan & Burrige 2006, p. 162-164).

Expressions referring to menstruation:

*the red sea, the red flag, the curse, surfing the red wave, the cavalry's here, bloody Mary, I've got my period, monthly flowers, it's blood week, that time (of the month), flowers.*

## 8.6 DISEASES AND DEATH

Diseases have always evoked the emotion of fear in people. In the past, the cause of illnesses was linked to some supernatural and magical causes like cruel souls and penalisation by a godly entity for an immoral act. The word *evil* was used in phrases naming sicknesses. “For example, *the foul evil 'pox', the falling evil 'epilepsy', kings' evil 'scrofula'*” (Allan & Burrige 2006, p. 204-205).

A widely tabooed illness is AIDS/HIV. People infected with this illness were excluded from society and were treated unfairly. Although the illness is much more treatable than it used to be in the past and people living with this condition can live a quality life, AIDS is still stigmatized which leads people to keep their diagnosis private. Alongside sex workers and drug addicts, homosexuals were one of the most commonly infected groups of people. For this reason, terms

like *gay cancer* and *gay plague* were used to talk about the illness. After some time, new acronyms were created so they could be used as euphemistic terms for AIDS. The intention behind creating new terms for this illness was to avoid the unpleasant associations that are tied to a sick person. The acronyms are “*PLWA* (*‘Person Living With Aids’*), *PLWHA* (*‘People Living With HIV/AIDS’*), *PLWArC* (*‘Person Living With AIDS-related Condition’*), or *PISD* (*‘Person With Immune System Disorders’*)” (Benczes & Burr ridge 2019, p. 63-64).

Another illness that is considerably tabooed is cancer. In modern times, open conversations about cancer are more common than in the past. However, in some situations, directly mentioning the illness is still avoided. Instead of explicitly disclosing a person’s condition or the cause of death by cancer, people choose to use euphemistic expressions like “*died after a prolonged illness* or even *after a long battle against illness*” (Benczes & Burr ridge 2019, p. 65).

Natural and inevitable, yet scary and taboo, is the end of human life. Passing invokes horrifying emotions and people use euphemisms instead of explicit expressions when talking about death as a way to cope with the reality of mortality (Benczes & Burr ridge 2019, p. 71).

Expressions referring to death:

*tragic loss, to sleep, pass away, depart, arrival at the final resting place, go to heaven, go to a better place, pass on, part, return to one’s Creator, go to the happy hunting ground, kick the bucket.*

## 9. TABOO EXPRESSIONS AND FOREIGN SPEAKERS

Possessing certain knowledge is a necessity for the suitable usage of offensive expressions. As is mentioned in *The Oxford Handbook of Taboo Words and Language*, “appropriate use of swearwords and taboo words requires proper semantic and conceptual representations as well as considerable sociocultural and sociopragmatic awareness”. In other words, foreign learners of English might be familiar with the meaning of the word, but it is also essential to understand the social practices, cultural norms and context, in which the words are used. In the same book, taboo language is metaphorically compared to a weapon in the sense that the usage of both, the weapon and taboo words, can lead to the user’s desired results, however, the manipulation and utilization of them must be done accurately. If users of taboo expressions with lacking experience, especially foreign speakers, choose an inappropriate word, they can cause undesired results such as embarrassing themselves or offending the audience (Dewaele 2019, p. 219-220).

Another aspect of offensive language that is important for proper use and understanding is emotions. Taboo expressions are considered emotional language. For foreign users (from now on referred to by the abbreviation LX users), to appropriately apply taboo expressions in communication, the emotion concept is crucial (Dewaele 2019, p. 219). Pavlenko (2008, p. 150) described the emotion concept “as prototypical scripts that are formed as a result of repeated experiences...”. Through experience and contact with taboo expressions, LX users are able to gain an understanding of the words’ precise meaning, emotional load and conceptual representation. This helps them to recognize, how to use the words in social situations, including correct usage of intonation, hedges and non-verbal communication, and the consequences that might follow the taboo expressions utterance (Deawele 2016, p. 114).

According to Dewaele (2004, p. 205, 207), taboo words are not commonly taught in classes and are hardly incorporated into study texts. However, learners of foreign languages usually learn these expressions as one of the first through experience outside school, which can lead to incomplete comprehension and limited usage of the words. Multilinguals’ emotional responses to taboo language were observed and according to the findings, the age at which the learning process of the language started has an influence on the emotional responses. For LX learners who started learning the language early in their life, vulgar expressions tend to be emotionally stronger than for those LX learners, who learned the language at an older age.

Several studies observing the approach of multilinguals to vulgar and offensive expressions were made. The findings suggest that multilinguals mostly prefer to swear in their native language. However, instances of swearing in foreign languages occur. The reason for choosing a foreign language over their native tongue is that speakers perceive taboo expressions in their mother language as remarkably more intense than in other languages. Thus using a foreign language helps speakers to express unpleasant ideas and to swear without being emotionally attached to the words as much as to their native language, the situation feels less serious and they feel more comfortable. For some people, swearing in English instead of their native language is a safer way how to release rage without causing any damage (Dewaele 2004, p. 207, Dewaele 2019, p. 222-223). Pinker (2008, p. 332) mentions that people who speak multiple languages perceive their mother tongue as more exciting than other languages. Their body has more physical reaction when hearing taboo expressions in the first language than other ones. According to Dewaele (2019, p. 225), “LX proficiency and use, an early start of acquisition and the use of English outside school when learning the language was linked to more frequent swearing in English across interlocutors.”

In another study, the ability of foreign learners to determine the offensiveness of English taboo expressions was tested. The results point out that foreign learners are unsure about the true meaning of the words and that they find taboo words more offensive than native speakers do. As a possible explanation could be that at school learners are taught to use offensive words carefully, therefore they develop the belief that they are more powerful and vulgar than they truly are (Dewaele 2019, 225-226).

## II. PRACTICAL PART

### 10. METHODOLOGY

This part of the thesis deals with research methods used to obtain information about native speakers' and Czech learners' perceptions of English taboo expressions, and research questions and hypotheses.

#### 10.1 RESEARCH METHODS

The selected method for this project was quantitative research done with questionnaires on the platform Google Forms. To gain insight into native speakers' and Czech learners' perceptions, two separate questionnaires were created.

The first questionnaire was distributed online to native speakers of English through email, students' forums and social media with the help of my friends living in Britain. The research consisted of three parts: personal questions, taboo expressions' offensiveness and emotions evoked by taboo expressions. The number of questions was seventeen, consisting of one open-ended question and sixteen close-ended questions.

The second questionnaire was distributed to native speakers of the Czech language who currently study or studied English in the past, therefore are learners of the English language. The questionnaire was also spread to respondents via online platforms like email and social media. The research consisted of four parts: personal questions, a comparison of Czech and English vulgar expressions, taboo expressions' offensiveness and emotions evoked by taboo expressions. The number of questions was slightly higher, with twenty-three questions, consisting of only close-ended questions.

Both questionnaires included seven rating-scale questions from which an average rating was calculated with a mathematical formula provided by Chráska (2007, p. 45-46). As the main goal of the project is to get access to insight into the perception of both groups and to find potential differences and similarities in understanding and attitude towards taboo expressions, two main parts of both questionnaires (taboo expressions' offensiveness and emotions evoked by taboo expressions) were identical. By getting answers to the same questions from both groups, the differences or similarities in their perception can be observed.



## 10.2 RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

This research aims to find out the perception of native speakers and Czech learners of English taboo expressions and to see whether there are some differences and similarities. The goal was to see how the two groups perceive the offensiveness of selected taboo expressions and what emotions certain situations involving taboo expressions evoke in them. The questions concerning the comparison of both groups are: Do native speakers view English vulgar expressions as less offensive than Czech learners do? Do the emotions evoked by taboo expressions differ in the two groups? Czech respondents were investigated deeper with more questions to gain the information needed to answer the following questions. Do they think that Czech vulgar expressions are more powerful and emotionally stronger than their English equivalents? Does the learners' language proficiency influence how much they swear in the English language?

The following hypotheses of the survey are based on the theoretical part of this thesis.

H 1 Czech learners can be expected to perceive English vulgar expressions as less offensive than their Czech equivalent.

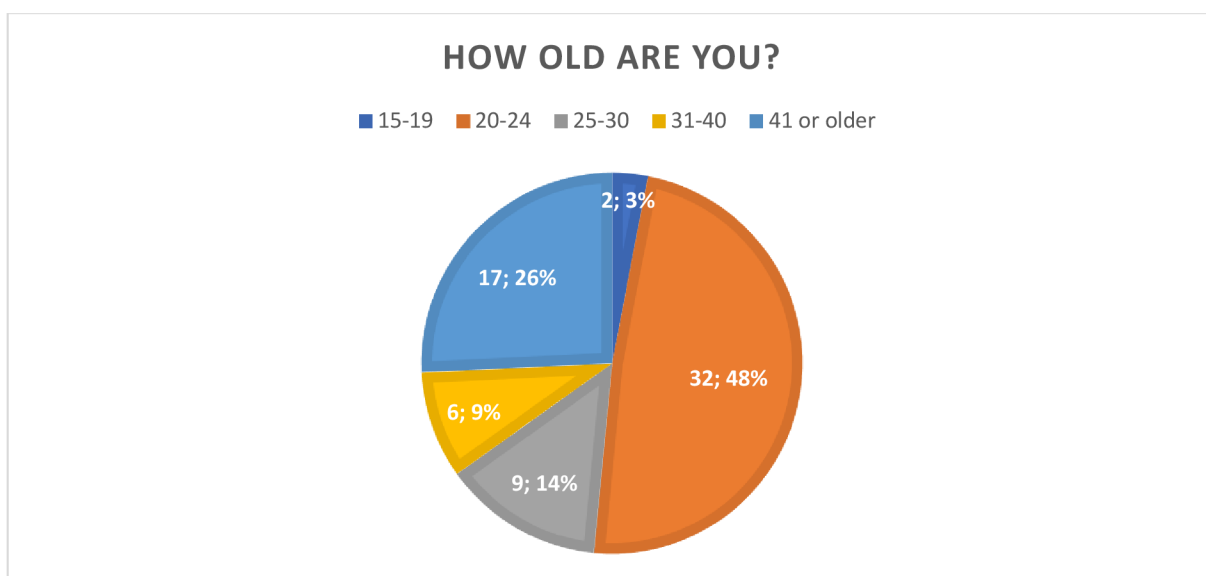
H 2 Czech learners with more proficiency in the English language are more likely to use English taboo expressions more often than learners with a lower level of English.

H 3 Czech learners can be expected to overestimate the strength of English taboo expressions relative to how they are perceived by native speakers.

## 11. RESPONDENTS

The crucial part of this thesis was to investigate the attitude towards English taboo expressions by native speakers and Czech learners. For this reason, two separate questionnaires were conducted and sent to the two targeted groups. All the answers were obtained online via different platforms, mainly email and social media. The final number of answers from native speakers was 66 and from Czech speakers the number went up to 76.

The native speakers' respondents consisted of 51 females and 15 males. The majority of the group lives in the United Kingdom (48 respondents, 73 %). The other respondents came from the United States (18 respondents, 27 %). For clarity, the respondents' age is displayed in the following chart:



*Figure 1: Native speakers-age*

The most represented age group (48 %) was 20-24 years old which was an expected outcome. The survey was sent to a great number of British students, which also explains the large number of respondents from Britain. The second largest group of people is 41 or older and the majority of them (13 respondents) are from the United States.

The Czech learners' respondents consisted of 45 females and 31 males. The age is displayed in the following chart:

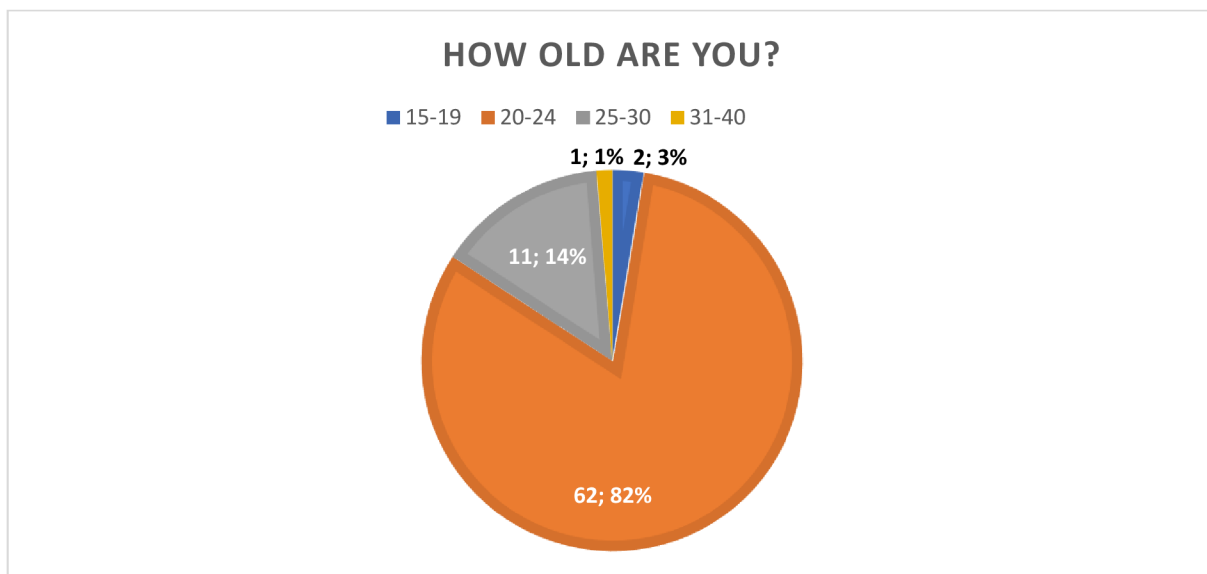


Figure 2: Czech learners-age.

The age diversity is visibly smaller with Czech learners of English as people from 20 to 30 years old make up 96 % of the respondents. One respondent was older than 30 years and 2 respondents were younger than 20 years old.

## 12. QUESTIONNAIRE ANALYSIS

### 12.1 PERSONAL QUESTIONS – native speakers

As was already stated in chapter number ten, the first part of both questionnaires was a set of questions regarding personal information about the respondent. Age, origin and gender were also part of this set of questions, but were already mentioned in the previous chapter, so these questions are not further discussed in the following pages.

Question No. 1

Is English your native language?

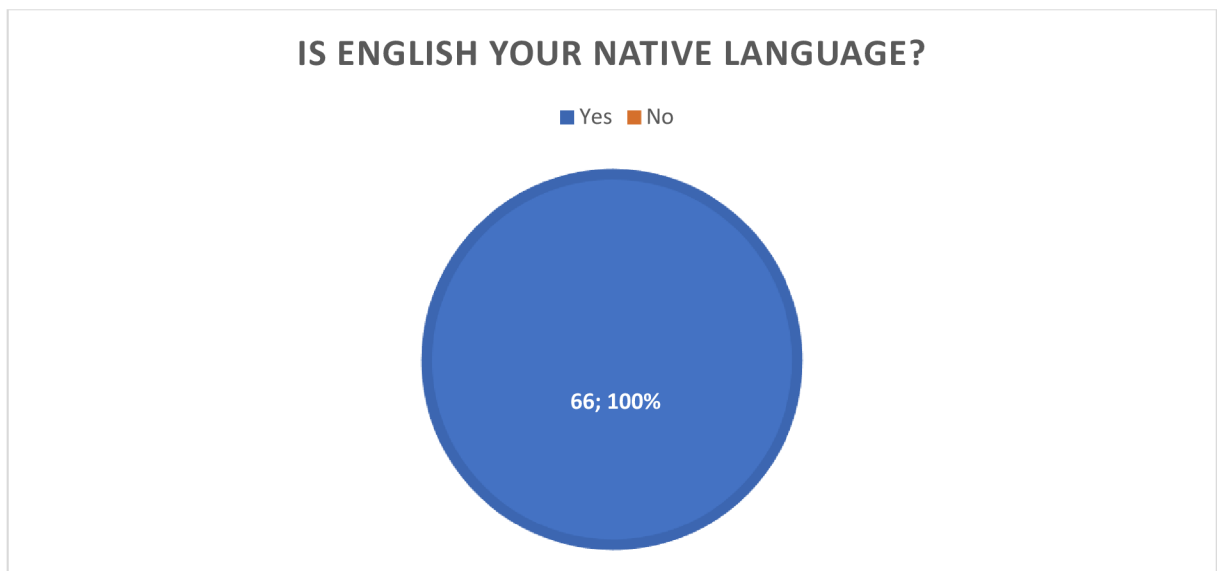


Figure 3: Native speakers-language.

The first question asked was whether the respondent is or is not a native speaker of English. This was done to prevent and deal with potential errors. Since the questionnaires were posted online and a wide circle of people had access to it, it was possible to get answers from non-native speakers of English, which was extremely undesired for this research. Some answers from non-native speakers of English were collected and deleted. As the chart illustrates, after dealing with the errors, all 66 respondents were native speakers of English.

Question No. 2

Do you swear/use vulgar expressions?

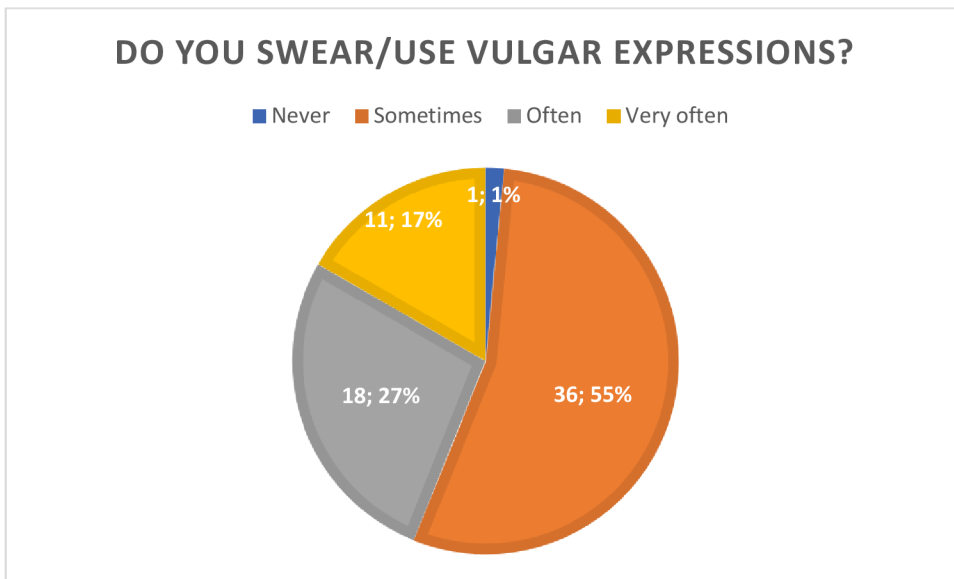


Figure 4: Native speakers-swearing.

This question was the first one to touch on the topic of offensive language. It was done so with the aim to discover the attitude towards the usage of each respondent. The majority (55 %) noted that they sometimes swear, 44 % of respondents swear even more frequently and only 1 respondent out of 66 does not swear at all.

## 12.2 PERSONAL QUESTIONS – Czech learners

The second questionnaire, aiming to get answers from Czech people who study or studied English in the past, also starts with a set of personal questions. The age and gender of Czech respondents were already mentioned so there is no reason to discuss it further in this chapter.

Question No. 1

Is Czech your first language?



Figure 5: Czech learners-language.

Same as in the first questionnaire, this question was asked to prevent potential mistakes. Since the survey was distributed online, it would be possible to collect answers from non-native speakers of the Czech language, which would make the results inaccurate.

## Question No. 2

How long have you been studying English?

(If you are no longer a student of English, for how long did you study the language?)

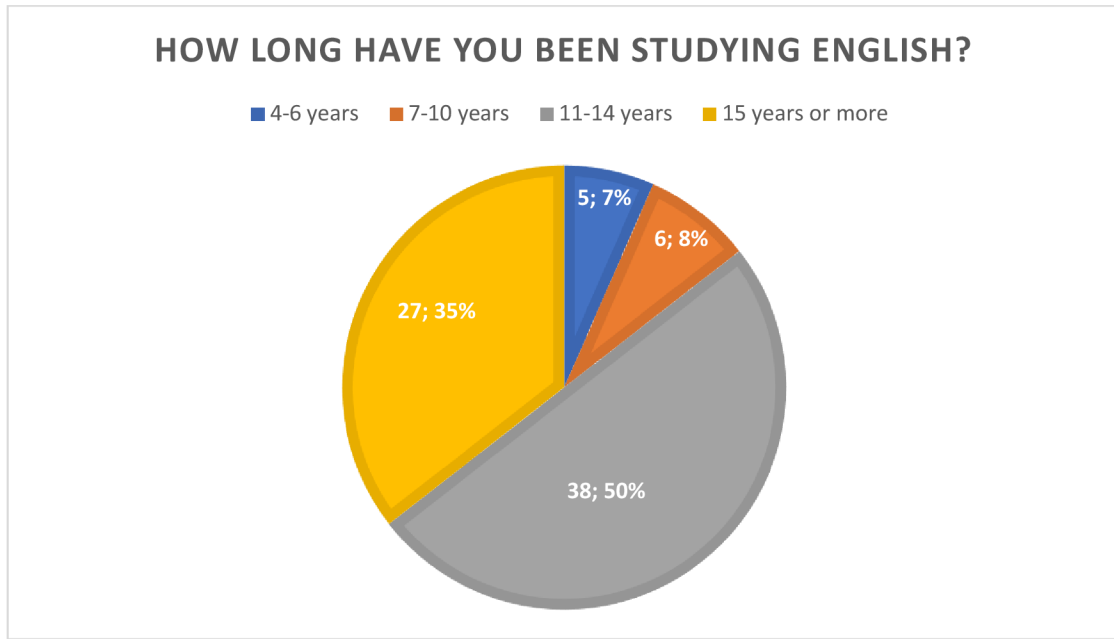


Figure 6: Czech learners-years of English studies.

The research is not focused on all native speakers of the Czech language, but only on those who study or studied English. Having some knowledge of the English language was essential for this research. To get more information about the respondents, a question about the length of their studies was asked. As the chart displays, 50 % of respondents invested 11-14 years into English language studies, 35 % spent 15 or more years studying English, 8 % 7-10 years and 7 % 4-6 years.

### Question No. 3

What is your level of English?

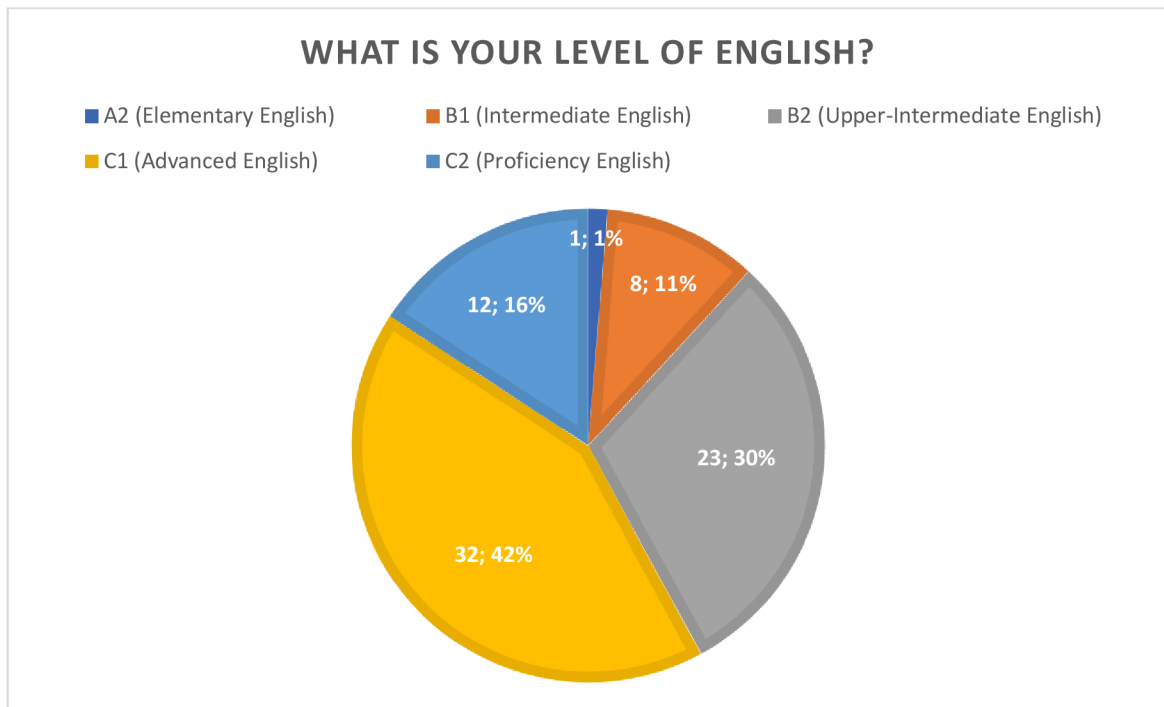


Figure 7: Czech learners-proficiency.

As it was mentioned in the theoretical part (see chapter nine), studies have shown that language proficiency is tied to the usage of vulgar expressions. The biggest part of respondents (42 %) noted their level of English to be C1, 30 % of respondents were B2 level, C2 were 16 % and B1 with A2 made together 12 %.



Question No. 4

Do you swear/use vulgar expressions?

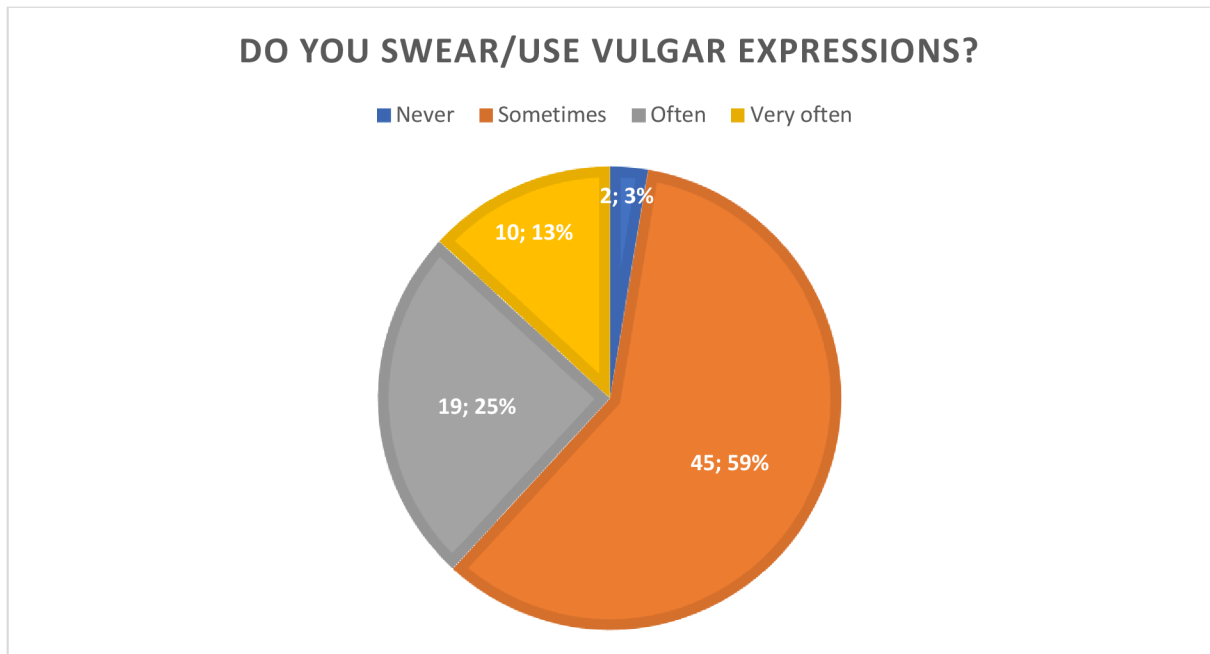


Figure 8: Czech learners-swearing.

Again, the question “Do you swear/use vulgar expressions?” was an initial question regarding the topic of taboo expressions. The answers were similar to the ones of native speakers of English. The majority, 59 % of respondents sometimes use vulgar expressions, 38 % use them more regularly and 2 respondents (3 %) do not swear at all.

## Question No. 5

In what language do you swear/use vulgar expressions?

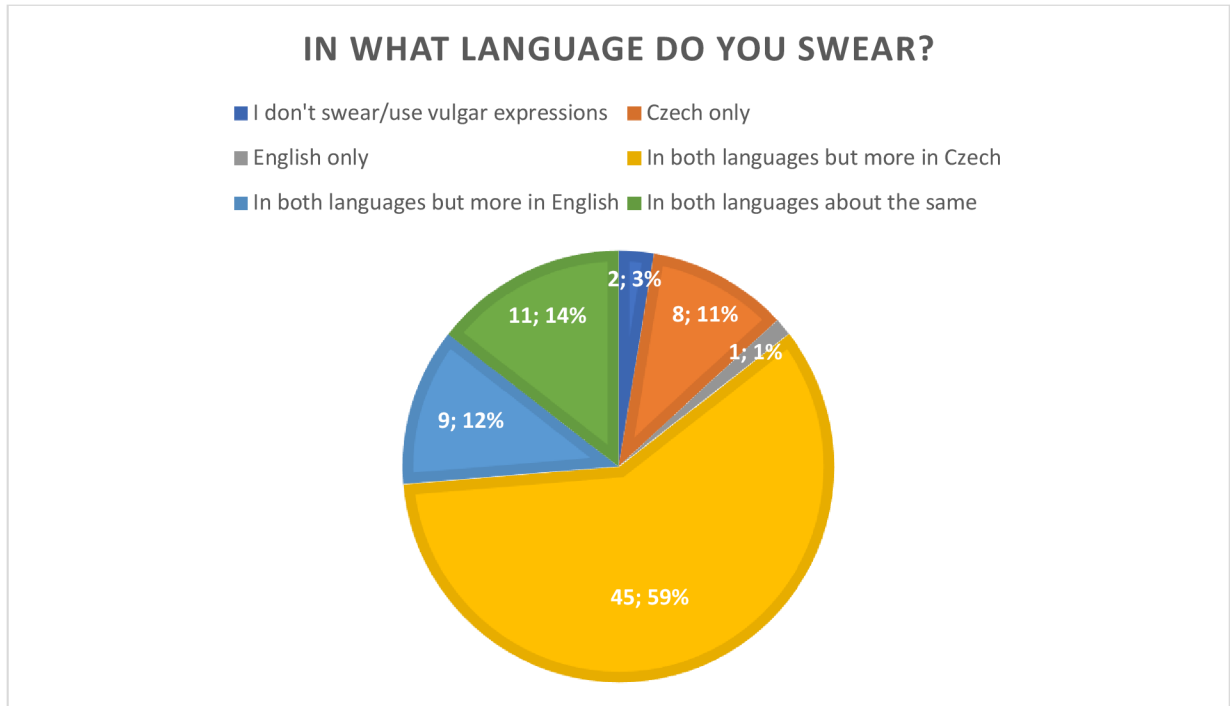


Figure 9: Czech learners-language of swearwords.

Czech people were additionally asked what language they normally swear in. The answers showed that 59 % use both languages for swearing but prefer Czech more, 12 % also use both languages but more often chose English. Swearing only in Czech prefers 11 % of respondents and only in English is preferred by 1 %. The last group (14 %) are speakers who swear in both languages about the same.

## 12.3 COMPARISON OF CZECH AND ENGLISH VULGAR EXPRESSIONS – Czech learners

This set of questions was included only in the questionnaire for Czech learners. In this part, four English vulgar expressions and their Czech equivalents were introduced. Respondents were asked to recognise, what language feels more powerful/emotionally stronger to them.

Question No. 1

Which version feels more powerful/emotionally stronger to you?

- A) She is such a slut.
- B) Ona je taková děvka.
- C) Both the same

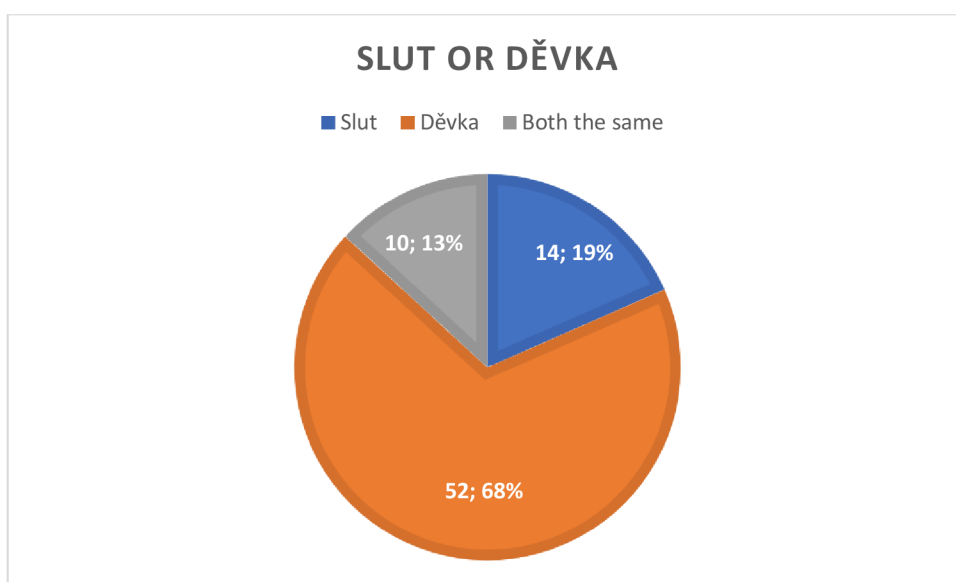


Figure 10: Czech learners-slut/děvka.

The first expression was “She is such a slut” and its’ Czech translation “Ona je taková děvka”. Respondents showed their opinion of which expression feels more vulgar to them and makes them feel more emotions. The results revealed that 68 % of respondents felt like the expression in their native language was stronger than in English. Only 19 % thought that the utterance is stronger when said in English. The respondent could also choose the third option, that the expression feels the same in both languages and 13 % picked this option.

Question No. 2

Which version feels more powerful/emotionally stronger to you?

- A) Fuck!
- B) Do prdele!
- C) Both the same

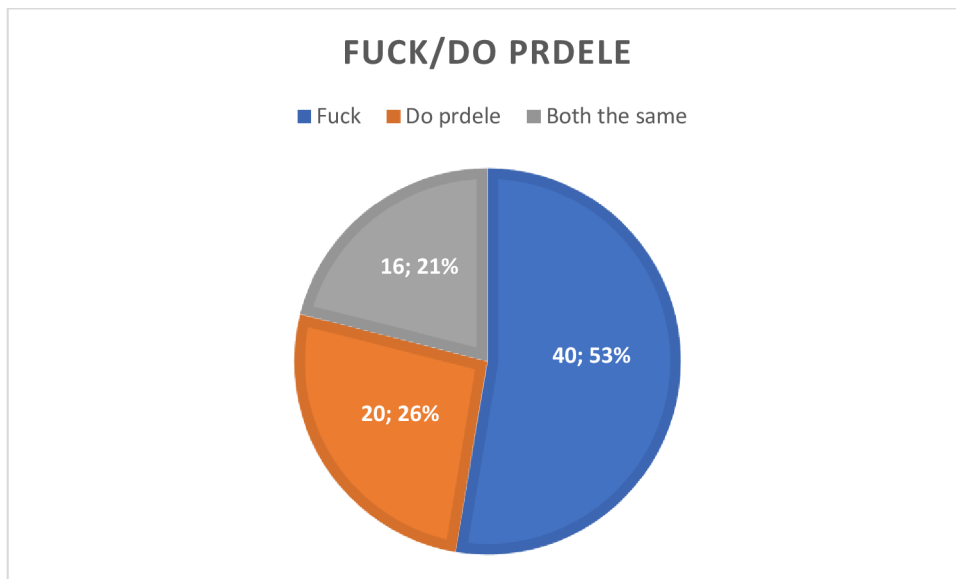


Figure 11: Czech learners-fuck/do prdele.

The next expressions were “Fuck!” and “Do prdele!”. Out of all four questions in this section, this is the only one with a different result. The English expression “Fuck” felt to the Czech respondents stronger than its’ Czech equivalent “Do prdele”. As the chart displays, 53 % of respondents felt that the English version was stronger, 26 % thought that the Czech sentence was more powerful and 21 % did not pick a side.

### Question No. 3

Which version feels more powerful/emotionally stronger to you?

- A) He is a dick.
- B) Je to čurák.
- C) Both the same

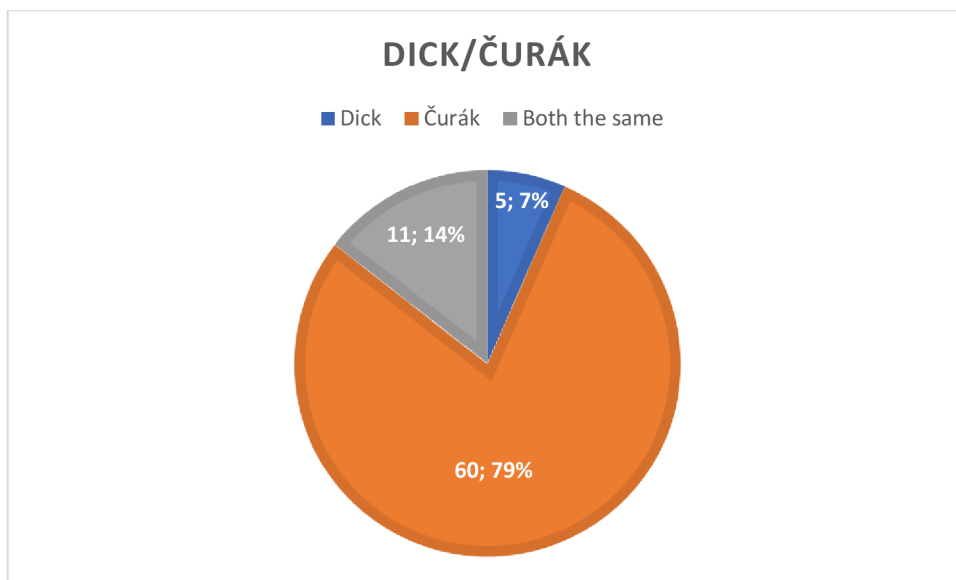


Figure 12: Czech learners-dick/čurák.

The third question offered these two options: “He is a dick” And “Je to čurák”. Out of the four questions, respondents agreed on this one the most with 79 % noting that the Czech expression felt more powerful to them. Only 7 % felt more emotions when reading the English expression and 14 % thought that the expressions were about the same.

Question No. 4

Which version feels more powerful/emotionally stronger to you?

- A) It's crap.
- B) Je to sračka.
- C) Both the same

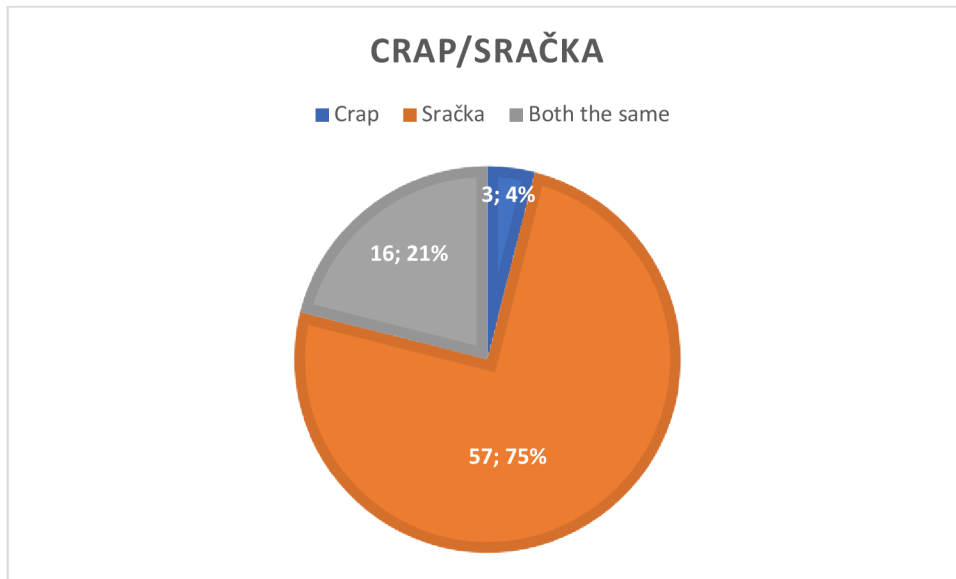


Figure 13: Czech learners-crap/sračka.

The last fourth question of this section dealt with the English expression “It’s crap” and the Czech translation “Je to sračka”. Again, a major part of respondents (75 %) expressed that the Czech sentence felt emotionally stronger to them. “It’s crap” felt more vulgar to only 4 % of respondents and 21 % felt that both expressions were powerful the same.

## 12.4 TABOO EXPRESSIONS' OFFENSIVENESS – comparison of native speakers and Czech learners

In this part of the questionnaire, seven expressions including taboo expressions were introduced to the respondents. Their task was to rate how offensive the expression feels to them and mark their opinion on a scale from one to ten, one being not offensive and ten being extremely offensive. This exercise was completely the same for native speakers and Czech learners of English intending to find differences or similarities in their points of view.

Answers by native speakers of English are noted in the red chart and Czech learners of English in the blue chart. Under each chart, there is a table that displays average ratings by both genders together and ratings of females and males.

### Question No. 1

Don't be a pussy.

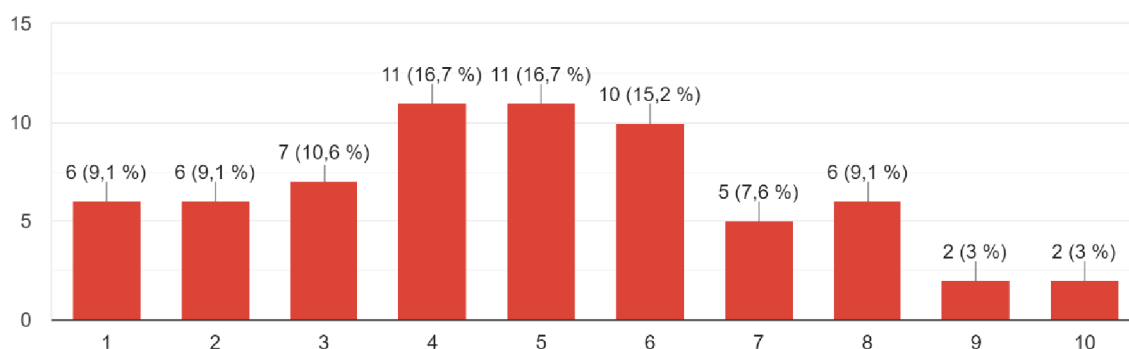


Figure 14: Native speakers-rating 1.

	Both genders	Females	Males
Average rating	4,8	5	4,2

Table 3: Native speakers-average ratings 1.

As the chart displays, the expression “Don't be a pussy” was rated at every number on the scale. The most frequent rating was at numbers 4 and 5, with 16,7 % of respondents each. The average rating by native speakers was 4,8 points on the scale. Female respondents viewed the expression as more offensive than male respondents.

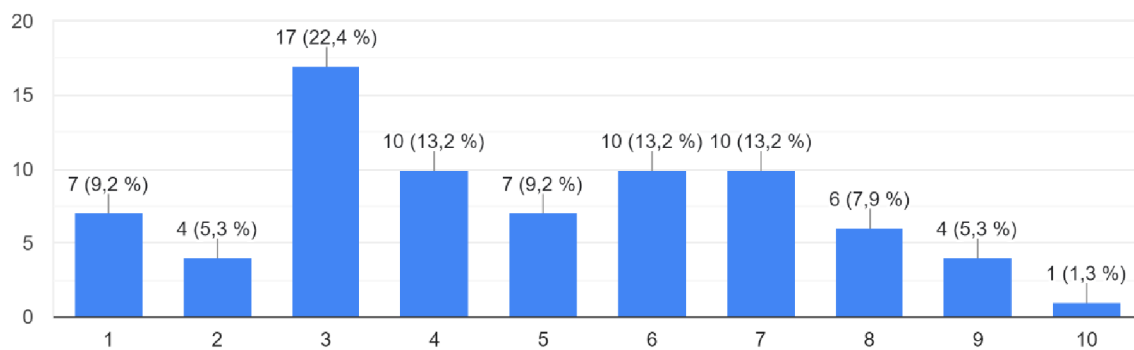


Figure 15: Czech learners-rating 1.

	Both genders	Females	Males
Average rating	4,8	5,6	3,7

Table 4: Czech learners-average ratings 1.

The results of the Czech questionnaire had many similarities to the native speakers' one. The average rating was the same, 4,8 points on the scale and the expression was seen as more offensive by females. The expression was most frequently ranked at number 3.



## Question No. 2

Damn!

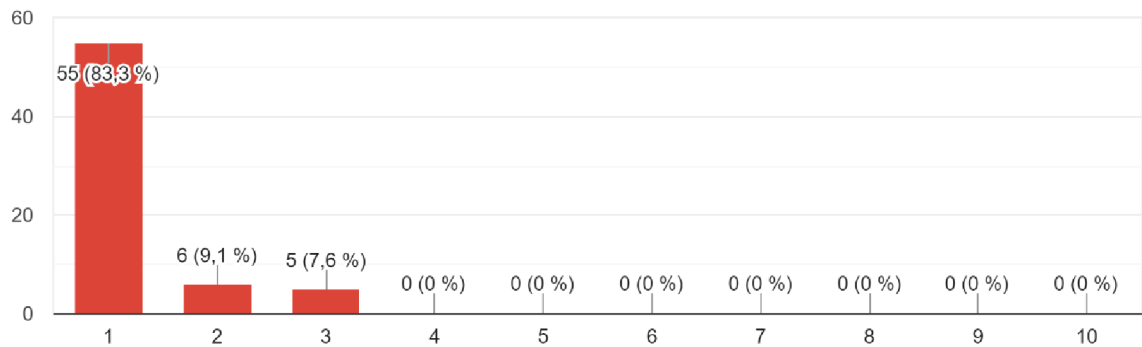


Figure 16: Native speakers-rating 2.

	Both genders	Females	Males
Average rating	1,2	1,3	1,1

Table 5: Native speakers-average rating 2.

The next expression was “Damn!”. Native speakers mostly agreed that the expression is not offensive at all and 83,3 % ranked it as number 1. The average rating of the expression was 1,2 points on the scale.

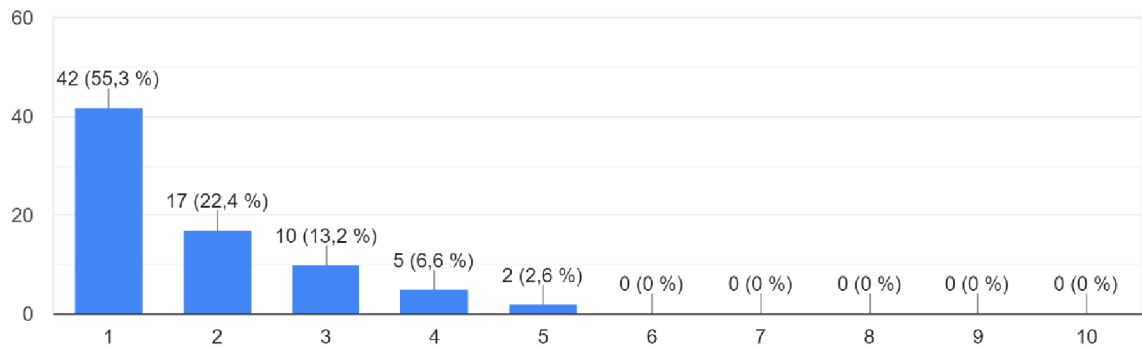


Figure 17: Czech learners-rating 2.

	Both genders	Females	Males
Average rating	1,8	2	1,5

Table 6: Czech learners-average rating 2.

Czech learners understood the expression similarly to native speakers, the majority (55,3 %) ranked the expression at number 1 on the scale of offensiveness. The average rating was slightly higher, with 1,8 points on the rating scale.

### Question No. 3

You motherfucker!

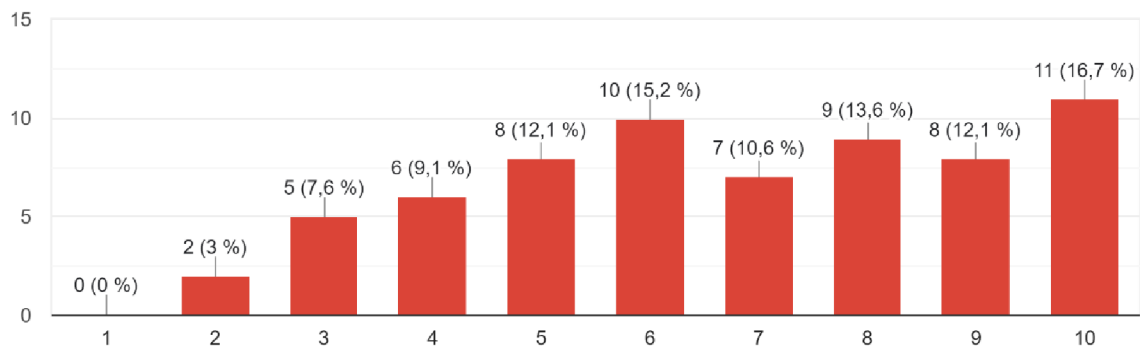


Figure 18: Native speakers-rating 3

	Both genders	Females	Males
Average rating	6,8	6,7	6,9

Table 7: Native speakers-average rating 3.

Question number 3 dealt with the expression “You motherfucker!”. By native speakers, the expression was most commonly ranked at number 10-extremely offensive. The rating was all over the scale except number 1, which brought the average rating of the expression down to number 6,8.

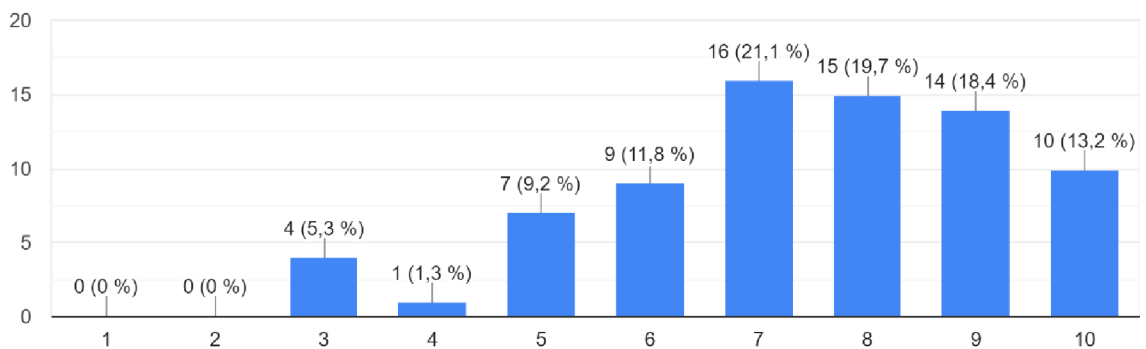


Figure 19: Czech learners-rating 3.

	Both genders	Females	Males
Average rating	7,4	7,5	7,3

Table 8: Czech learners-average rating 3.

Czech respondents concentrated the answers mostly on numbers 7, 8 and 9. The average rating of the expression was 7,4.

## Question No. 4

Don't be a bloody idiot.

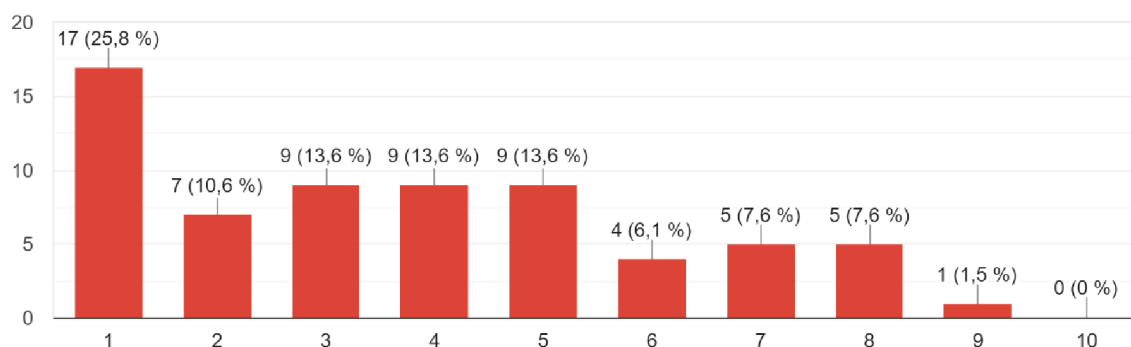


Figure 20: Native speakers-rating 4.

	Both genders	Females	Males
Average rating	3,7	3,8	3,5

Table 9: Native speakers-average rating 4.

The fourth expression our respondents considered was “Don't be a bloody idiot”. The sentence was most commonly ranked at number 1, but since the percentage of respondents providing the answer 1 was only 25,8 %, the rest of the answers spread to higher points including number 9, and the final average rating was 3,7.

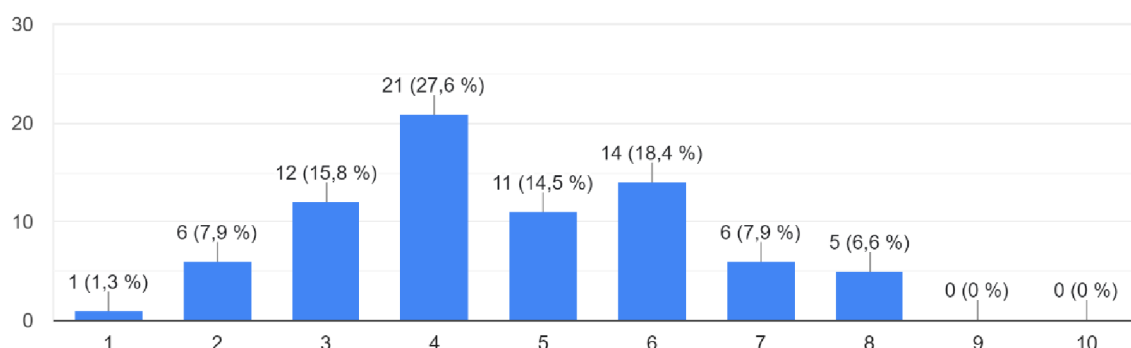


Figure 21: Czech learners-rating 4.

	Both genders	Females	Males
Average rating	4,7	4,8	4,5

Table 10: Czech learners-average rating 4.

Czech respondents provided fairly different opinions on the expressions' offensiveness. The most common answer by the native speakers' group was number 1, but only one Czech person responded the same. The expression was most commonly ranked at number 4. Even though the most frequent answers were quite different, the average rating of both genders is different by one point.

## Question No. 5

Fuck you!

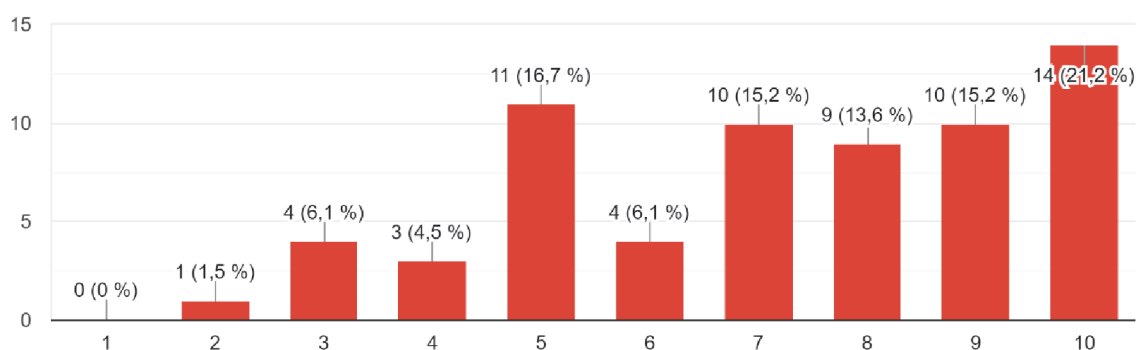


Figure 22: Native speakers-rating 5.

	Both genders	Females	Males
Average rating	7,2	7,1	7,7

Table 11: Native speakers-average rating 5.

In the fifth question, respondents were asked to rate the offensiveness of “Fuck you!”. Zero respondents marked the expression as not offensive at all. On the other hand, the most frequent rating was number 10-extremely offensive. The second most common answer was number 5. The rating went down to the number 2, making the average rating 7,2 points. Out of all respondents to both questionnaires, male representatives of the native speakers’ group saw the expression as the most offensive with an average rating of 7,7.

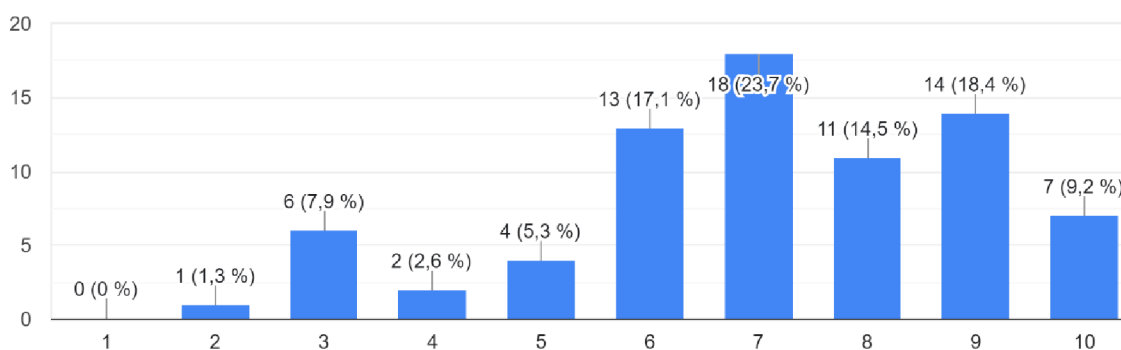


Figure 23: Czech learners-rating 5.

	Both genders	Females	Males
Average rating	7,1	7,1	7

Table 12: Czech learners-average rating 5.

The average rating of Czech learners was almost identical to the average rating of native speakers, 7,1 points on the scale with number 7 being the most common rating.

## Question No. 6

What a cunt.

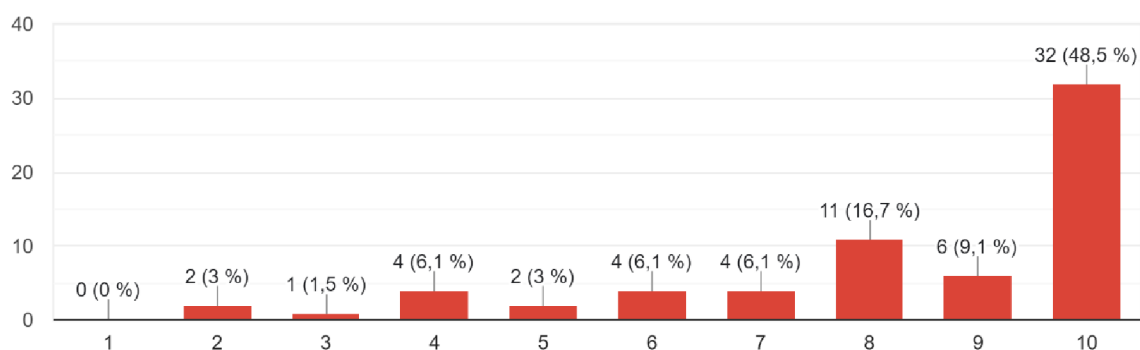


Figure 24: Native speakers-rating 6.

	Both genders	Females	Males
Average rating	8,3	8,3	8,3

Table 13: Native speakers-average rating 6.

The sixth question was concerned with the sentence “What a cunt.” This expression was overall marked as the most offensive out of all provided seven expressions. Almost half of the respondents (48,5 %) agreed that the word “cunt” deserves to be ranked as number 10-extremely offensive. Even though most respondents ranked the expression at the higher numbers, all the lower numbers, except for the number 1, were attacked as well. The average rating was 8,3.

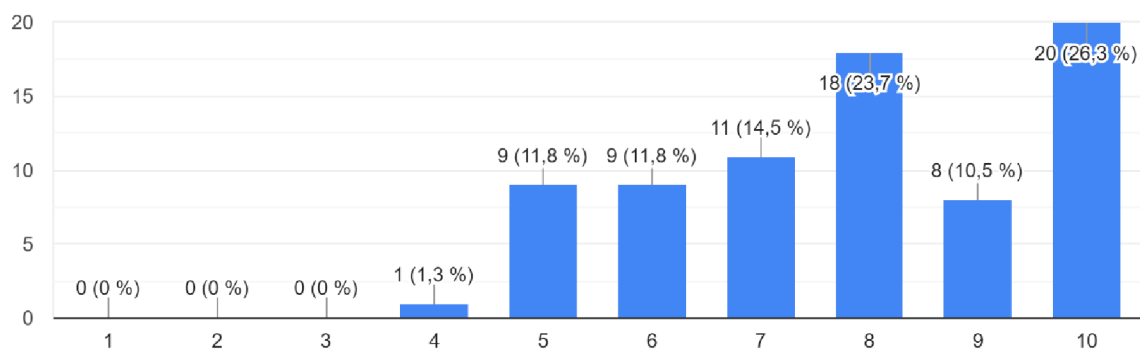


Figure 25: Czech learners-rating 6.

	Both genders	Females	Males
Average rating	7,8	7,6	8,1

Table 14: Czech learners-average rating 6.

Same as native speakers, Czech respondents also found the expression to be the most offensive one out of all seven. Even though the expression was not ranked at the lowest three numbers and the most frequent was number 10, the average rating was 7,8 points, which was a lower rating than the native speakers' one.

## Question No. 7

That sucks.

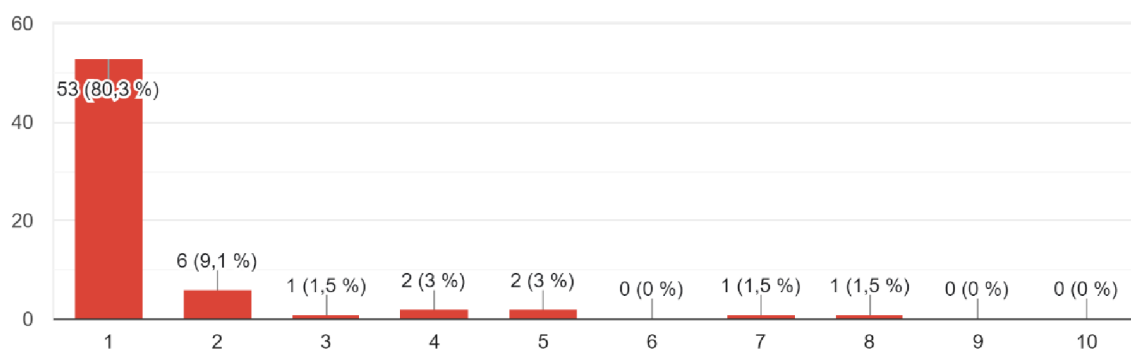


Figure 26: Native speakers-rating 7.

	Both genders	Females	Males
Average rating	1,5	1,5	1,5

Table 15: Native speakers-average rating 7.

The last expression our respondents were asked to rank was “That sucks”. The majority (80,3 % of respondents) ranked the expression as not offensive at all. The scale rating is sensitive to extreme values, which can be seen in this case. Despite the expression being ranked at number 1 by the vast majority, some native speakers felt that the expression was much more offensive and ranked it at high numbers like 5, 7 and 8, making the average rating 1,5.

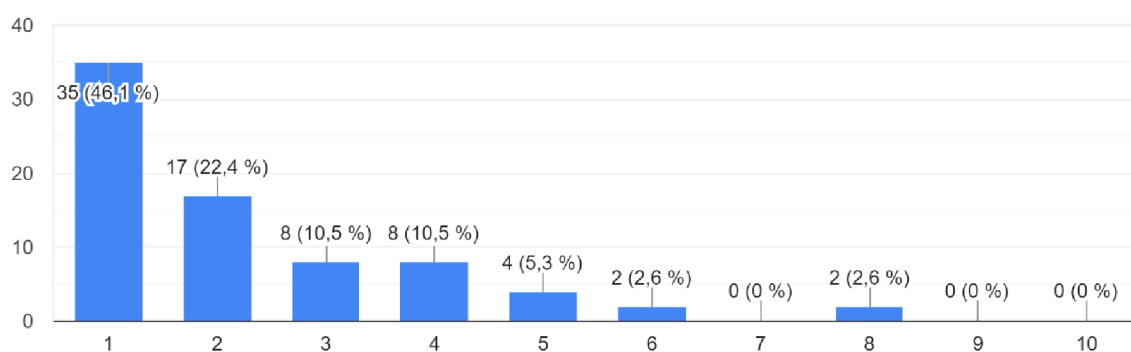


Figure 27: Czech learners-rating 7.

	Both genders	Females	Males
Average rating	2,3	2,6	1,9

Table 16: Czech learners-average rating 7.

Czech learners also most commonly marked the expression as not offensive at all. However, the expression was overall seen as more offensive by Czech learners than by native speakers. The average rating was 2,3 points on the rating scale.

## 12.5 EMOTIONS EVOKED BY TABOO EXPRESSIONS

### – comparison of native speakers and Czech learners

This set of questions focused on emotions and feelings evoked by various situations, in which offensive expression was used. Again, to see the differences and similarities in the attitude towards taboo expressions of native speakers of English and Czech learners, this part was included in both questionnaires and the questions were identical. Five concrete situations were introduced to the respondents. They were asked to say whether they felt awkwardness, disgust, confusion, fear, excitement, joy, surprise, sadness, anger, discomfort, empathy, or calmness. They were asked to choose up to three reactions. The goal of this exercise was to put taboo expressions into a specific context to see native speakers' and Czech learners' reactions.

Answers by native speakers of English are noted in red charts and Czech learners in blue charts.

#### Question No. 1

On public transport, you overhear two strangers' conversation when suddenly one of them says: "I need to PISS."

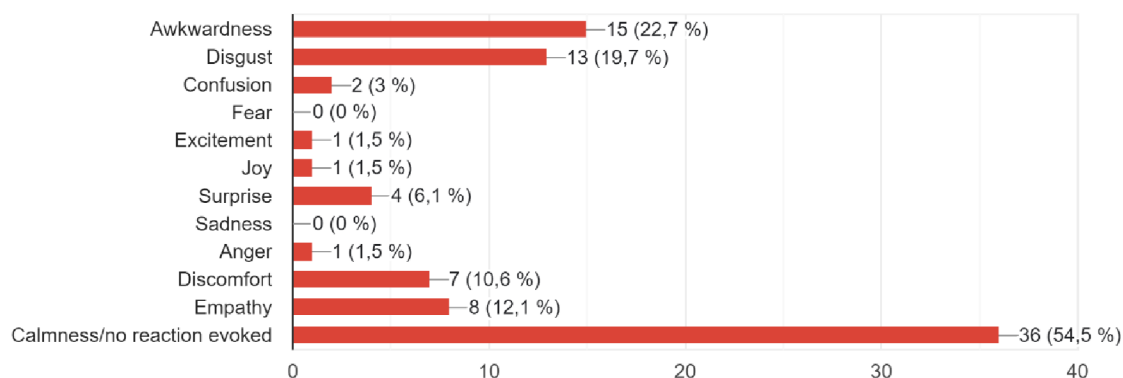


Figure 28: Native speakers-emotions 1.

The first chart illustrates answers from native speakers. As we can see, the majority of the respondents (54,5 %) would not react to the situation at all. If they were to react, the most common answer was the feeling of awkwardness (22,7 %) and disgust (19,7 %). Few respondents also felt discomfort, empathy and were surprised. Excitement, joy and anger were felt by one respondent.

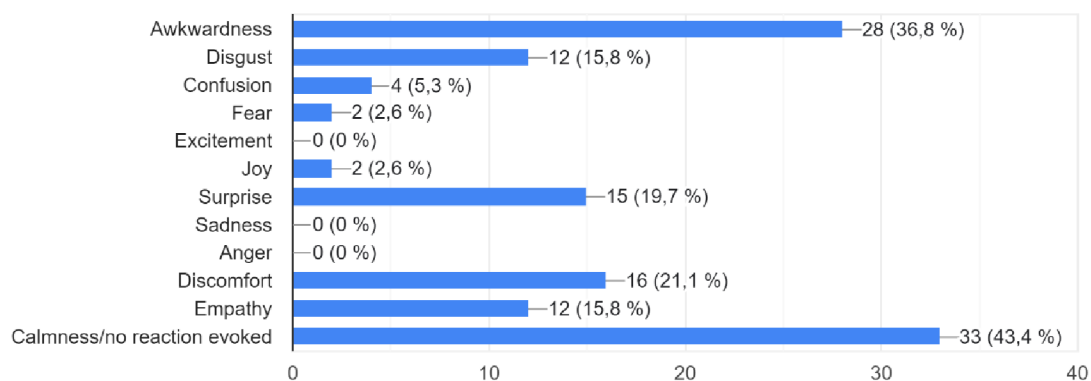


Figure 29: Czech learners-emotions 1.

Czech respondents' leading answer was also no reaction evoked with 33 votes (43,4 %). As the second most common reaction was marked awkwardness with 36,8 %. Discomfort and surprise were felt by 21,1 % and 19,7 % of respondents. Disgust and empathy were noted by 15,8 % of respondents. Confusion, fear and joy were noted by less than 5 respondents and excitement, and sadness by no one.



## Question No. 2

A person trips and falls on a street. A passer-by stops and checks the situation. The fallen person looks up to the passer-by and says: “What are you looking at, ASSHOLE?”

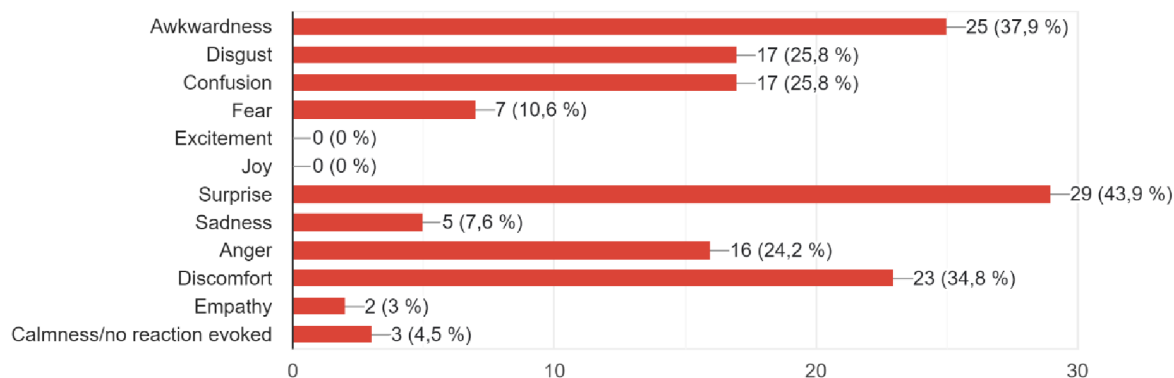


Figure 30: Native speakers-emotions 2.

Surprise was the most common reaction invoked in native speakers by the second situation which was noted by 43,9 % of respondents. Close behind were awkwardness (37,9 %) and discomfort (34,8 %). About one-quarter of respondents felt disgust, confusion and anger.

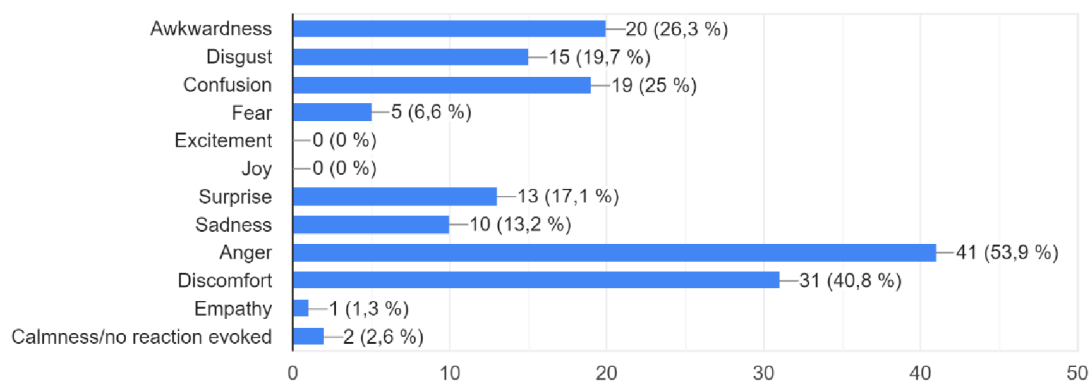


Figure 31: Czech learners-emotions 2.

Czech learners' leading emotion evoked by the second situation was anger with 53,9 %. The discomfort was in second place with a difference of ten votes (40,8 %).

### Question No. 3

A student receives a bad grade on a test and says: “WHAT THE HELL, I studied all day.”

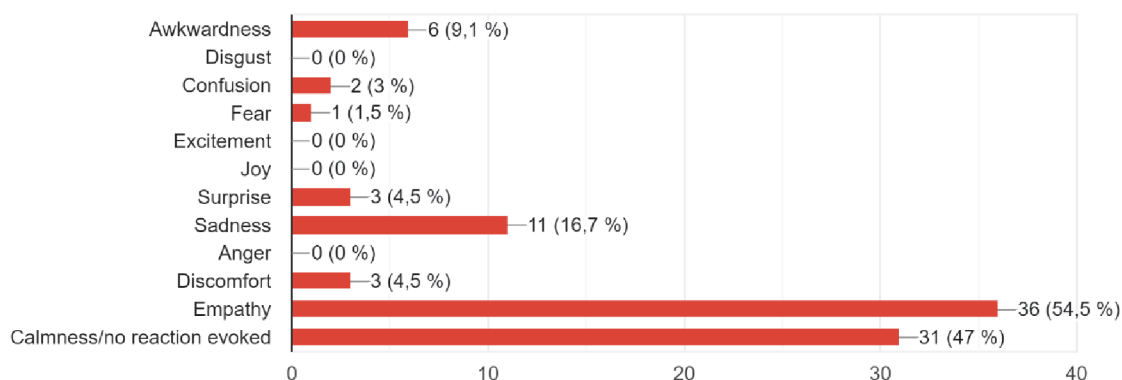


Figure 32: Native speakers-emotions 3.

The majority of native speakers' respondents (54,5 %) showed empathy towards the third situation. A great number of respondents (47 %) stayed calm.

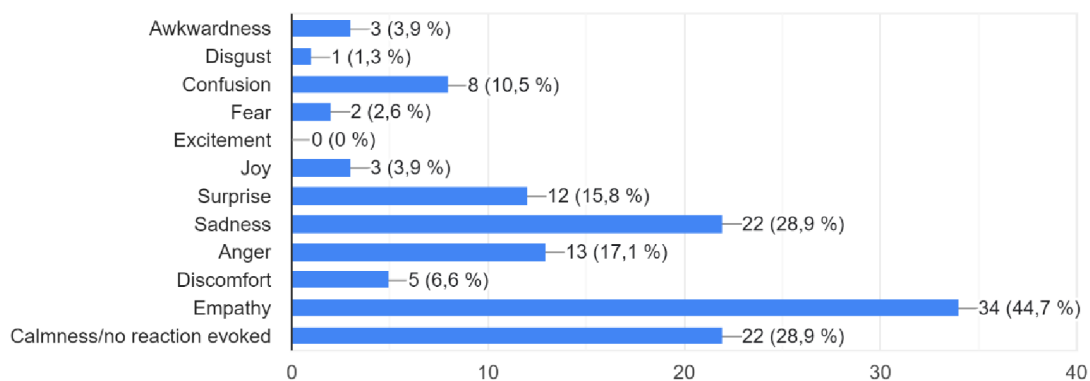


Figure 33: Czech learners-emotions 3.

Czech learners' most common reactions were the same as native speakers. Empathy was felt by 44,7 % of respondents and calmness by 28,9 %, which was the same for sadness. Anger was noted by 13 respondents in contrast to native speakers, where no one did so.

## Question No. 4

A man's mobile phone froze and stopped working. He exclaims: "The phone is a piece of SHIT, this happens all the time."

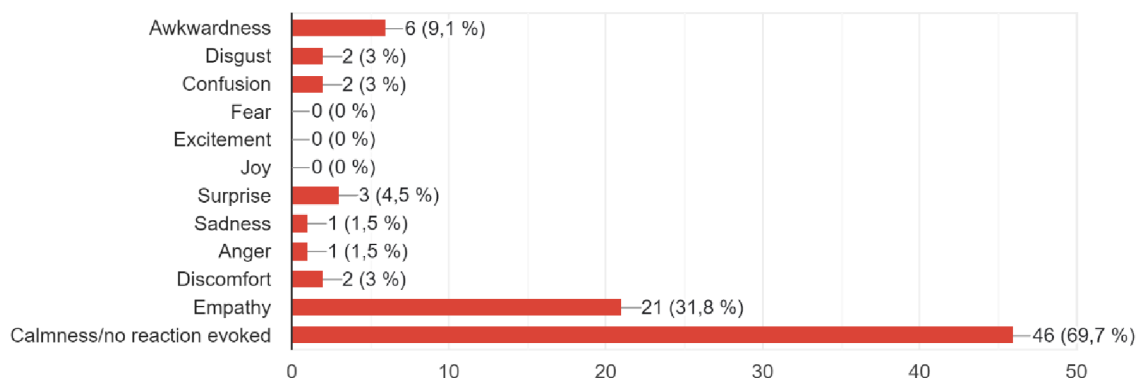


Figure 34: Native speakers-emotions 4.

Native speakers collectively expressed a fairly clear opinion on the fourth situation. Most respondents (69,7 %) would stay calm. If any reaction was evoked, it would mostly be empathy (31,8 %). Less than 10 % of respondents noted the other emotions and feelings.

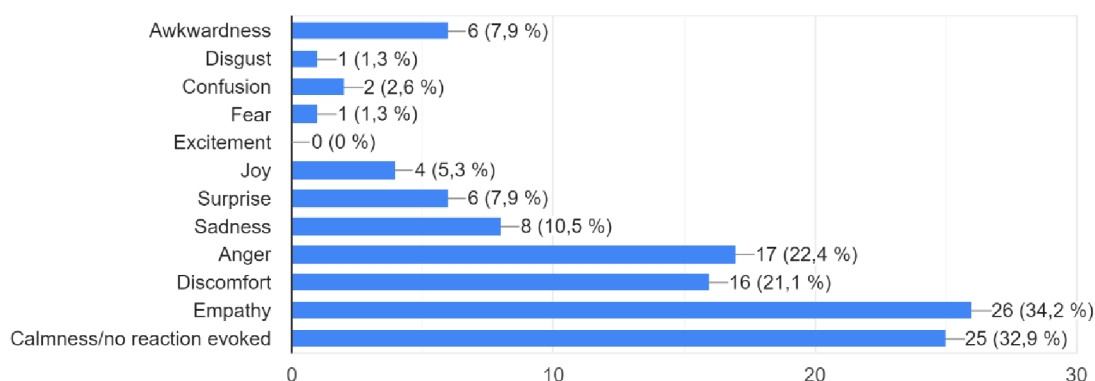


Figure 35: Czech learners-emotions 4.

Czech respondents provided more diverse answers. The most frequently evoked reaction was empathy (34,2 %) and calmness (32,9%), which were the same leading two reactions in the native speakers' group. The situation also evoked anger (22,4 %), discomfort (21,1 %) and sadness (10,5 %). The other reactions were felt by less than 10 % of respondents.

## Question No. 5

A girl says to her friend: “You are my BITCH.”

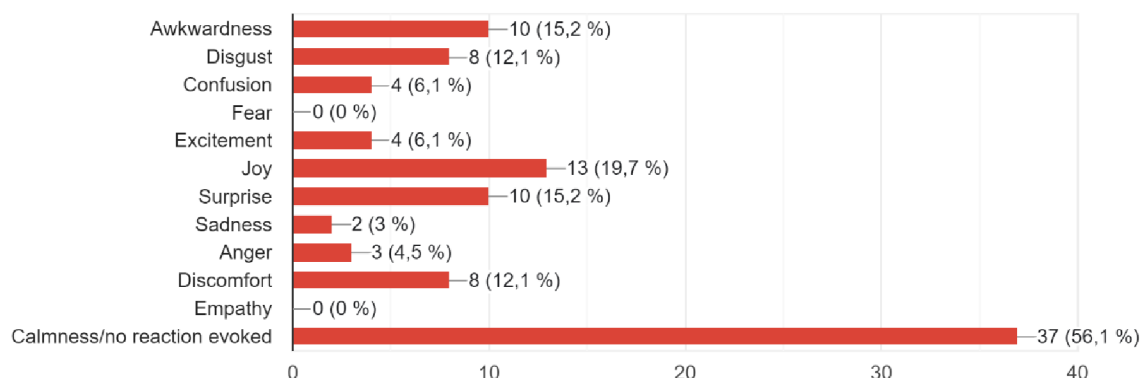


Figure 36: Native speakers-emotions 5.

The last situation evoked the same reaction in the majority of native speakers' respondents with 56,1 % staying calm. Joy was felt by 19,7 % of respondents. Awkwardness (15,2 %), surprise (15,2 %), discomfort (12,1 %) and disgust (12,1 %) were also noted. The rest of the reactions were invoked in less than 10 % of respondents.

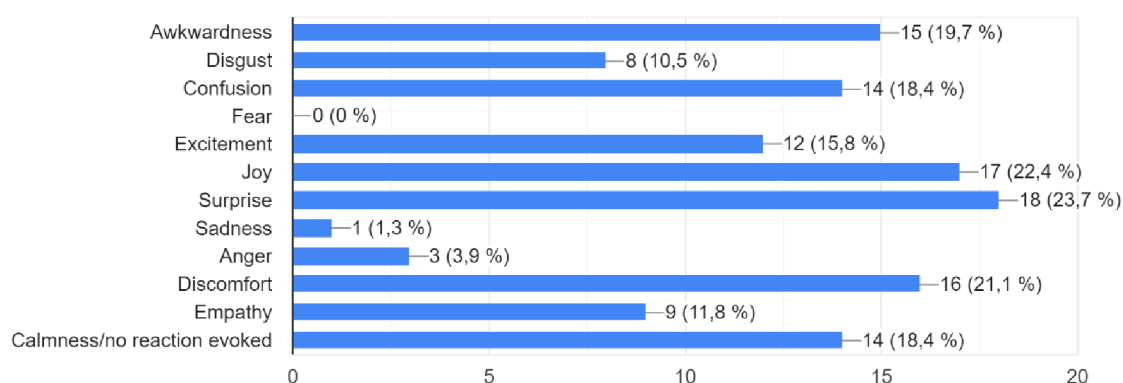


Figure 37: Czech learners-emotions 5.

Czech respondents did not have one clear answer to this question. The answers were mostly divided between surprise (23,7 %), joy (22,4 %), awkwardness (19,7 %) confusion (18,4 %), calmness (18,4 %) and excitement (15,8 %).

### 13. RESEARCH RESULTS

The usage of taboo expressions seems to be a common practice by the majority of people as the results showed that only three respondents out of 142 do not swear at all. Czech respondents do not use only their mother language to express vulgarism, 86,9 % of them use on these occasions English language as well. The connection between the Czech learners' language proficiency and the frequency of swearing in English was tested in the survey. Out of the 76 Czech respondents, 21 answered that they either use both languages about the same while swearing or they even prefer using the non-native language. Considering their level of English, 20 of the 21 respondents' level of English was C1 or C2 and the one remaining respondent was at B2 level. This finding might suggest that the more advanced the learner is, the more comfortable with using English taboo expressions they are.

Another research question was whether Czech learners perceive English taboo expressions or Czech taboo expressions as more vulgar/emotionally stronger. Four questions in which respondents were asked to compare the same expression but in the two different languages were provided. The result showed that the Czech version appeared stronger to the majority of respondents on three occasions. The word *fuck* was the only one perceived as stronger than its Czech equivalent *do prdele*.

As for the emotions evoked by specific situations including taboo expressions, the conclusion is that the majority of native speakers mostly agreed on the same reaction but Czech learners had mostly much more diverse answers.

In the chart below, the average ratings of the offensiveness of taboo expressions by native speakers (NS) and Czech learners (CL) are displayed. The results are sorted from the least to the most offensive expressions. As the chart shows, NS and CL ranked 5 of the 7 expressions in the same positions. *Damn* being the least offensive, in the second place are the expressions *sucks*, then *bloody idiot* and *pussy*. Both groups agreed the most offensive expression is *cunt*. The only differences are seen at numbers 5 and 6 where the expressions *motherfucker* and *fuck* are switched. NS perceived *motherfucker* to be less offensive than *fuck*, CL thought otherwise. Another fact that is obvious from the results is that CL averagely rated 4 of the 7 expressions (*damn*, *sucks*, *bloody idiot*, *motherfucker*) higher on the scale of offence than NS. The expression *pussy* obtained the same average rating from both groups. On the other hand, NS perceived *fuck* and *cunt* as more offensive than CL did. If we took a closer look at genders, we could also distinguish who perceived the expressions overall as the most and the least offensive

out of all respondents. The average rating of Czech female respondents was the highest on 5 occasions. On the contrary, out of all respondents, native speaker males averagely ranked the expressions the lowest (3 occasions).

	damn	sucks	bloody idiot	pussy	motherfucker	fuck	cunt
NS	1,2	1,5	3,7	4,8	6,8	7,2	8,3
	damn	sucks	bloody idiot	pussy	fuck	motherfucker	cunt
CL	1,8	2,3	4,7	4,8	7,1	7,4	7,8

*Table 17: expressions' offensiveness-results.*

## 14. CONCLUSION

The main aim of the thesis was to investigate the perception of English taboo expressions by native speakers and Czech learners of English.

In the theoretical part, the issue of obscene language was introduced. The survey of practical part was realized by two separate questionnaires, one of which was completed by 66 native speakers of English and the other one by 76 Czech students of English. The focus of the questions was on the perception of vulgar words' offensiveness, emotions evoked by different situations in which taboo expressions were used, and the difference between Czech and English offensive expressions. Even though the number of respondents was relatively small to make any general claims that could be applied to everybody, the results make it possible to draw some tentative conclusions.

Regarding the first hypothesis (Czech learners can be expected to perceive English vulgar expressions as less offensive than their Czech equivalent), the respondents perceived 3 out of 4 Czech vulgar expressions as more powerful and emotionally stronger than their English equivalents. It can be said that the results support the hypothesis, but the chosen Czech translations might have influenced the outcome. It is quite likely that a different set of equivalents could yield different results.

The second hypothesis (Czech learners with more proficiency in the English language are more likely to use English taboo expressions more often than learners with a lower level of English) also seems to be correct, but once again, the smaller sample of respondents might not provide enough evidence.

Regarding the third hypothesis (Czech learners can be expected to overestimate the strength of English taboo expressions relative to how they are perceived by native speakers), on most occasions, it seems that Czech learners tend to overestimate the offensiveness of English taboo words as they viewed 4 out of 7 expressions as more offensive than did native speakers. However, the differences were quite small, the biggest one was only one point on the scale.

If there is a more general and relatively significant finding to report, it is that whatever the differences between learners and native speakers in terms of their reactions, they were rather minor. The reactions in both groups were comparable, which suggests that learners' knowledge can be said to approximate native speakers' natural command of this aspect of English.

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# APPENDIX 1

## QUESTIONNAIRE FOR NATIVE SPEAKERS

### **The perception of English taboo expressions by native speakers.**

Dear respondents,

In the form of this questionnaire, I am asking for your help with my research.

I am a university student of English from the Czech Republic and this research regarding English taboo expressions is an important part of my bachelor's thesis. All the answers are collected with the goal to gain a deeper insight into the English offensive language with a focus on the differences in perception of native speakers and Czech learners.

For the purpose of my bachelor's thesis, the only requirement for respondents of this questionnaire is to be a **native speaker of English**.

All the answers are anonymous.

I appreciate all the answers, without this research wouldn't be possible.

Thank you so much for your help with finishing my studies.

Have a great rest of your day,

Iveta.

**1) Is English your native language?**

- A) Yes
- B) No

**2) Where are you from?**

\_\_\_\_\_

**3) What is your gender?**

- A) Male
- B) Female
- C) Other

**4) How old are you?**

- A) 14 or younger
- B) 15-19
- C) 20-24
- D) 25-30

- E) 31-40
- F) 41 or older

**5) Do you swear/use vulgar expressions?**

- A) Never
- B) Sometimes
- C) Often
- D) Very often

**Rate the offensiveness of the following expressions:**

**6) Don't be a pussy.**

Not offensive    1   2   3   4   5   6   7   8   9   10    Extremely offensive

**7) Damn!**

Not offensive    1   2   3   4   5   6   7   8   9   10    Extremely offensive

**8) You motherfucker.**

Not offensive    1   2   3   4   5   6   7   8   9   10    Extremely offensive

**9) Don't be a bloody idiot.**

Not offensive    1   2   3   4   5   6   7   8   9   10    Extremely offensive

**10)        Fuck you!**

Not offensive    1   2   3   4   5   6   7   8   9   10    Extremely offensive

**11)        What a cunt.**

Not offensive    1   2   3   4   5   6   7   8   9   10    Extremely offensive

**12)        That sucks.**

Not offensive    1   2   3   4   5   6   7   8   9   10    Extremely offensive

**What emotions/feelings do the following situations evoke in you?  
You can choose up to three options.**

**13)        On public transport, you overhear two strangers' conversation when suddenly one of them says: "I need to PISS."**

- A) Awkwardness

- B) Disgust
- C) Confusion
- D) Fear
- E) Excitement
- F) Joy
- G) Surprise
- H) Sadness
- I) Anger
- J) Discomfort
- K) Empathy
- L) Calmness/no reaction evoked

**14) A person trips and falls on a street. A passer-by stops and checks the situation when the fallen person looks up to the passer-by and says: “What are you looking at, ASSHOLE?”**

- A) Awkwardness
- B) Disgust
- C) Confusion
- D) Fear
- E) Excitement
- F) Joy
- G) Surprise
- H) Sadness
- I) Anger
- J) Discomfort
- K) Empathy
- L) Calmness/no reaction evoked

**15) A student receives a bad grade on a test and says: “WHAT THE HELL, I studied all day.”**

- A) Awkwardness
- B) Confusion
- C) Fear
- D) Excitement
- E) Joy
- F) Surprise
- G) Sadness
- H) Anger
- I) Discomfort
- J) Empathy
- K) Calmness/no reaction evoked

**16) A man’s mobile phone froze and stopped working. He exclaims: “This phone is a piece of SHIT, this happens all the time.”**

- A) Awkwardness
- B) Disgust
- C) Confusion
- D) Fear

- E) Excitement
- F) Joy
- G) Surprise
- H) Sadness
- I) Anger
- J) Discomfort
- K) Empathy
- L) Calmness/no reaction evoked

**17) A girl says to her friend: "You are my BITCH."**

- A) Awkwardness
- B) Disgust
- C) Confusion
- D) Fear
- E) Excitement
- F) Joy
- G) Surprise
- H) Sadness
- I) Anger
- J) Discomfort
- K) Empathy
- L) Calmness/no reaction evoked



## APPENDIX 2

### QUESTIONNAIRE FOR CZECH LEARNERS OF ENGLISH

## The perception of English taboo expressions by Czech learners.

Vážení respondenti,

formou tohoto dotazníku se na Vás obracím s prosbou o pomoc při mém výzkumu k bakalářské práci, která je zaměřena na anglické taboo výrazy a jejich vnímání rodilými mluvčími a českými studenty angličtiny.

Poroto prosím o vyplnění tohoto dotazníku, pokud je Váš **mateřský jazyk čeština** a pokud **se učíte, nebo jste se v minulosti učili anglický jazyk**.

Všechny odpovědi jsou anonymní.

Moc si vážím Vašich odpovědí, bez kterých by nebylo možné tento výzkum uskutečnit. Předem všem děkuji za pomoc.

Iveta Chadimová, studentka pedagogické fakulty UP.

1) **Is Czech your first language?**

- A) Yes
- B) No

2) **What is your gender?**

- A) Male
- B) Female
- C) Other

3) **How old are you?**

- A) 14 or younger
- B) 15-19
- C) 20-24
- D) 25-30
- E) 31-40
- F) 41 or older

4) **How long have you been studying English?**

- (If you are no longer a student of English, for how long did you study the language?)
- A) 1-3 years

- B) 4-6 years
- C) 7-10 years
- D) 11-14 years
- E) 15 years or more

5) **What is your level of English?**

- A) A1 (Beginner)
- B) A2 (Elementary English)
- C) B1 (Intermediate English)
- D) B2 (Upper-Intermediate English)
- E) C1 (Advanced English)
- F) C2 (Proficiency English)

6) **Do you swear/use vulgar expressions?**

- A) Never
- B) Sometimes
- C) Often
- D) Very often

7) **In what language do you swear/use vulgar expressions?**

- A) I don't swear/use vulgar expressions
- B) Czech only
- C) English only
- D) In both languages but more in Czech
- E) In both languages but more in English
- F) In both languages about the same

**Choose which version feels more powerful/emotionally stronger to you.**

8) **She is such a slut.**

**Ona je taková děvka.**

- A) A
- B) B
- C) Both the same

9) **Fuck!**

**Do prdele!**

- A) A
- B) B
- C) Both the same

10) **He is a dick.**

**Je to čurák.**

- A) A
- B) B
- C) Both the same

11) **It's crap.**

**Je to sračka.**

- A) A
- B) B
- C) Both the same

**Rate the offensiveness of the following expressions:**

12) **Don't be a pussy.**

Not offensive    1   2   3   4   5   6   7   8   9   10    Extremely offensive

13) **Damn!**

Not offensive    1   2   3   4   5   6   7   8   9   10    Extremely offensive

14) **You motherfucker.**

Not offensive    1   2   3   4   5   6   7   8   9   10    Extremely offensive

15) **Don't be a bloody idiot.**

Not offensive    1   2   3   4   5   6   7   8   9   10    Extremely offensive

16) **Fuck you!**

Not offensive    1   2   3   4   5   6   7   8   9   10    Extremely offensive

17) **What a cunt.**

Not offensive    1   2   3   4   5   6   7   8   9   10    Extremely offensive

18) **That sucks.**

Not offensive    1   2   3   4   5   6   7   8   9   10    Extremely offensive

**What emotions/feelings do the following situations evoke in you?  
You can choose up to three options.**

19) **On public transport, you overhear two strangers' conversation when suddenly one of them says: "I need to PISS."**

- A) Awkwardness
- B) Disgust
- C) Confusion
- D) Fear
- E) Excitement
- F) Joy
- G) Surprise
- H) Sadness
- I) Anger
- J) Discomfort
- K) Empathy
- L) Calmness/no reaction evoked

20) **A person trips and falls on a street. A passer-by stops and checks the situation when the fallen person looks up to the passer-by and says: "What are you looking at, ASSHOLE?"**

- A) Awkwardness
- B) Disgust
- C) Confusion
- D) Fear
- E) Excitement
- F) Joy
- G) Surprise
- H) Sadness
- I) Anger
- J) Discomfort
- K) Empathy
- L) Calmness/no reaction evoked

21) **A student receives a bad grade on a test and says: "WHAT THE HELL, I studied all day."**

- A) Awkwardness
- B) Confusion
- C) Fear
- D) Excitement
- E) Joy
- F) Surprise
- G) Sadness
- H) Anger
- I) Discomfort
- J) Empathy
- K) Calmness/no reaction evoked

22) **A man's mobile phone froze and stopped working. He exclaims: "This phone is a piece of SHIT, this happens all the time."**

- A) Awkwardness
- B) Disgust
- C) Confusion
- D) Fear
- E) Excitement
- F) Joy
- G) Surprise
- H) Sadness
- I) Anger
- J) Discomfort
- K) Empathy
- L) Calmness/no reaction evoked

23) **A girl says to her friend: “You are my BITCH.”**

- A) Awkwardness
- B) Disgust
- C) Confusion
- D) Fear
- E) Excitement
- F) Joy
- G) Surprise
- H) Sadness
- I) Anger
- J) Discomfort
- K) Empathy
- L) Calmness/no reaction evoked

## RESUMÉ

Tato bakalářská práce je zaměřena na anglické taboo výrazy a jak je vnímají rodilí mluvčí a Češi, kteří studují, nebo v minulosti studovali Anglický jazyk. Práce se skládá ze dvou částí, teoretické a praktické. V teoretické části byla přiblížena problematika anglických vulgárních výrazů. Pro účely získání informací a vypracování praktické části byly vytvořeny dva dotazníky. Jeden vyplňovali právě rodilí mluvčí a druhý čeští studenti angličtiny. Výzkum se zaměřoval zejména na emoce respondentů a jejich názor na vulgárnost daných výrazů. Analýza dotazníkového šetření, že se názory těchto dvou zkoumaných skupin lehce liší.

## ANOTACE

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Katedra:	Ústav cizích jazyků
Vedoucí práce:	dr hab. Konrad Szcześniak
Rok obhajoby:	2023

Název práce:	Jak rodilí mluvčí a čeští studenti angličtiny vnímají anglické tabuizované výrazy
Název v angličtině:	The perception of English taboo expressions by native speakers and Czech learners
Anotace:	Tato bakalářská práce se zabývá anglickými taboo výrazy a zaměřuje se na to, jak jsou vnímány rodilými mluvčími a českými studenty angličtiny. Pro získání požadovaných informací pro porovnání těchto dvou skupin byl zvolen kvantitativní výzkum za pomoci dotazníku. Cílem této práce bylo zjistit, jaké odlišnosti nebo podobnosti se vyskytují v názorech na vulgárnost určitých výrazů a v pocitech, které sprostá slova v lidech vyvolají. Čeští respondenti navíc porovnávali sprostá slova v obou jazycích.
Klíčová slova:	Taboo, dysfemismy, eufemismy, rodilí mluvčí, čeští studenti, ofenzivnost, obscénnosti, emoce, vulgarismy, urážky, nadávky
Anotace v angličtině:	This thesis dealt with English taboo expressions with a focus on the perception of native speakers and Czech learners. A questionnaire was chosen method for obtaining the information necessary for comparing the two groups. The goal of the project was to discover the differences and similarities in the opinions on certain expressions' offensiveness and emotions evoked by vulgar words.

	Additionally, Czech respondents were asked to compare taboo expressions of both languages.
Klíčová slova v angličtině:	Taboo, dysphemisms, euphemisms, native speakers, Czech learners, offensiveness, obscenity, emotions, vulgarisms, insults, swearing
Přílohy vázané v práci:	2
Rozsah práce:	76 s.
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