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DIPLOMOVÁ PRÁCE

Osvojení si druhého jazyka u studentů různých
věkových skupin v rámci českého prostředí

Second Language Acquisition:
Czech Learners and Critical Age Period

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ČJ – AJ / ZŠ

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Abstract:

The study research dealing with a situation of Czech learners of English and its relation to the Critical Age Period has been done. Two hypotheses were set. The first hypothesis was that earlier students start to learn English the better their pronunciation should be. Second hypothesis was dealing with the own perception of English. It states that the better the own perception of English pronunciation is the better the actual pronunciation should be. Students were given questionnaires and they were recorded. On the basis of analysis of these recordings, I was trying to find out if hypotheses will be confirmed or not.

Acknowledgment:

First of all, I would like to express my gratitude and I would like to thank very much to the supervisor of my thesis, Anna Regina Helal, M.A. for guiding me throughout this project. This research would not have been possible without her support and her invaluable assistance.

Next, I appreciate help and enthusiasm of all my students while working on this thesis. They were very helpful and very pleasant to help me with the thesis and to be participants of my study research.

I would also like to thank to my family who supported me and encouraged me to complete this thesis.

Proclamation:

I claimed that I was working on the diploma thesis „Second Language Acquisition: Czech Pronunciation Problems as Related to the Critical Age Theory" on my own and I used the resources mentioned in the bibliography part.

České Budějovice, April 20, 2011

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1.Introduction:

The subject of Second Language Acquisition (SLA) has been a subject of considerable controversy for many decades. Many researchers have been working in the field of SLA in the 20th century. An important part of this topic of SLA is the Critical Age Period, which I have decided to focus on. The Critical Age Period is a limited developmental period during which it is possible for learners to acquire a language, be it the first language or the second language, to normal, native-like levels. If the learner misses this period, he / she might not be able to acquire the language to these levels any more.

The critical period hypothesis may offer a plausible explanation why a lot of learners do not speak their second language as well as non-native speakers, but with various degrees of foreign accent. Majority of learners are able to speak very well, but they do have problems acquiring native – like pronunciation.

Several years ago, I had the subject of Second language acquisition and Critical Age Period at Augsburg university and therefore, I decided to focus on this topic in my diploma thesis, specifically on the field of Critical Age Period and its relation to Czech learners.

I have decided to choose a few main variables which are, according my research, important while studying and acquiring the language and its pronunciation. I constructed a questionnaire for my students around those variables. On the basis of my six year experience teaching English, I felt I could make good comparison among various English students. I made recordings of my students'oral production to be able to analyze their utterances.

I focused on a few of main problems that are typical for Czech learners of English and I was interested if these problems would appear in the utterances of my students and if there would be any difference depending on the age they started to learn English, on the length of their studies and on their own perception of English pronunciation.

My first hypothesis was that the earlier the students started to learn English, the better their pronunciation should be. The second hypothesis was that the better their own perception of English pronunciation is, the better the pronunciation of English sounds will be. This is the hypothesis which corresponds with the essence of the Critical Age Period which states that people have the best opportunities to acquire native like pronunciation between the ages of five and twelve. When they exceed this period, their ability to acquire native like pronunciation starts decreasing.

I had opportunity to do my research with two convenient samples as I had access to two main groups of 47 students, whom I have taught for several years and whom I was working with for a full year: firstly from Bupak company and the secondly from the spa of Třeboň. In the period of one year we were working with pronunciation books later described in my thesis, they were given the questionnaires and I did the recordings with them. Later, I analyzed the recordings and I recorded all the analyzed facts into the tables and graphs. Most of the charts are presented in the result section of my thesis, the charts that were exceeding the topic are included in the apendix.

There is another part of theory added which deals with the related topic of „unlearning errors.“ There follows my own analysis of my students' capalibities to „unlearn fossilized errors.“

2. SLA theory: general

2.1 Second language acquisition - key terms

I would like to define the basic terms which I used in my diploma thesis. These terms are native language, second language, language acquisition and learning. All the exact definitions of these terms can be found in the glossary part of my thesis.

2.2 Important Linguists in the Area of Second Language Acquisition

During my studies at Augsburg university where I first came across the topic of SLA, we as students were discussing researchs written by well known scientists and linguists dealing with the topic of SLA and Critical Age period. I have read a few books written by these authors and here I would like to present some information about them and their attitudes to the theory of Second Language Acquisition.

Noam Chomsky

Noam Chomsky is an influential American educator and a linguist, a philosopher and a political activist, often called one of the fathers of modern linguistics. His theory of transformational grammar is a very important and revolutionary theory in the linguistics. According to his theory, children have knowledge of the basic grammatical structure in

their brains. These structures are the same in all human languages. This innate knowledge is called a *universal grammar*. Chomsky claims that when equipped with a set of grammar rules and a set of terms, people are able to produce an infinite number of sentences. Some of these are the sentences that no person has said before. The area of Chomsky's studies, transformational linguistics, has been strongly influential in psycholinguistics, mainly in the area of language acquisition in children.

Steven Pinker

Steven Pinker was born in 1954 in Montreal, Canada. A psychologist, his main aim is a description of all aspects of language and mind. In recent years, he has been interested in psychology, but at the beginning of his career, he was interested in linguistics, especially language development in children. He wrote two books related to linguistic field, one of them describing the theory of children's acquisition of their mother tongue. In his later works, he has also studied language development in twins and neuroimaging of language process in the brain. According to Pinker's model, all normal human brains are set in their structures for language acquisition. They have an ability to memorize vocabulary, internalize rules regarding their native language's grammar and syntax, and remember irregular forms as well as acquire required pronunciation.

David Birdsong

Dr. David Birdsong, a PhD from Harvard and currently a Professor of French at the University of Texas, is one of the most important experts on critical periods and age effects in second language acquisition. *The critical period in second language*

acquisition, published in 1999, examines linguistic and neuroscientific findings in the field. Recently, he has been working on effects in second language acquisition.

2. 3 Relation between Critical Age Hypothesis and Second Language Acquisition

Second language acquisition is a very important field of linguistic, subject of many scientific debates in the past few decades. Critical Age Hypothesis is one of the significant variables of this field.

David Birdsong describes critical age as a limited developmental period during which it is possible to acquire a language, be it the first language or the second language, to normal, native-like levels. If the learner misses this period, he / she might not be able to acquire the language to a native- like level any more. (1989, 22) There are different opinions to this claim, with some linguists agreeing with the theory, others taking exception to a suitability of it. It is necessary to say that there is not just one version of this. There are a lot of different versions, but most of the literature related to the topic nowadays refers to all of these theories collectively.

This theory states that if the learner starts to learn the second language after the end of this period he / she might not be able to acquire the pronunciation as a native speaker. I would like to explain why this happens and what part of our mind is responsible for this stage. Penfield and Roberts (1971, 35) state that it is Broca's area and that the neural substrate that is needed for language learning is not fully available after the end of the critical period. Further, Lenneberg (1986, 153 - 154) asserted that the end of the critical

period was marked by "termination of a state of organizational plasticity linked with lateralization of function":

> Most individuals of average intelligence are able to learn a second language after the beginning of their second decade… A person can learn to communicate in a foreign language at the age of forty. This does not trouble our basic hypothesis on age limitations because we may assume that the cerebral organization for language learning as such has taken place during childhood, and since natural languages tend to resemble one another in many fundamental aspects, the matrix for language skills is present.

The critical period hypothesis offers an explanation why a lot of learners do not speak their second language as well as non-native speakers, but with various degrees of foreign accent. The end of the critical period is usually connected with a kind of neurological change. Flege (1997, 35) describes that changes that are most often mentioned in works related to the problems of second language acquisition are lost plasticity in brain, hemispheric specialization or neurofunctional reorganization. These neurofunctional changes in human brain are expected to occur at the same age of learners and they have effect on the running and retention of information relating to second language. The critical period hypothesis indicates that some areas of brain capacity that allow young children to learn their first language and to pronounce it exactly is reduced or lost when the critical period is over.

Flege et al. (1995, 121) have done research studies to confirm or disprove the critical period hypothesis. There were 240 participants in their research. These participants were native speakers of Italian who moved to Ottawa, Canada, between the ages of 2 and 23. They had been living in Canada for at least 15 years at the time they were tested. More than half of them claimed that they spoke more English than Italian in

their common lives. The participants were asked to produce 5 English sentences with very simple grammar. The researchers then asked 24 native speakers of English to listen to these sentences and rate the pronunciation. They were rating the overall degree of perceived foreign accent and they used a special scale where they recorded results of their listening.

In the summary, some findings from the research did not confirm the critical age hypothesis. However, there were some aspects that did. None of the Italian speakers who started learning English after the age of 15 received a score that was comparable with the values of native speakers of English. We can see that these students failed in learning their second language without a foreign accent. However, the results of this research should not discourage second language learners who are older than 15 years old and who have just started learning the language. Research made by Bongaerts, Planken and Schells (1997, 24) identified learners who were highly motivated although they had started beyond the end of a critical period,but were able to speak their second language without foreign accent. We can see that *motivation* is also very important aspect in learning and if a child has missed its critical period, it can achieve a near-native- like pronunciation in the future, if he / she is highly motivated.

One of the questions in my questionnaire was related to any other language that the learners were able speak. This is another very important aspect of language learning, too. According to Weinrich (1953, 89 - 90) and his interaction hypothesis, the relation between the learner' s first and second languages is significant. Weinrich made a few research studies related to the topic of this interaction. These participants were bilingual people. Weinrich claimed that bilinguals were not able to divide off the first language

and second language phonetic systems because these systems interact witch each other. The interaction hypothesis also leads to the expectation that if the first language is lost or not used, it can restrict the degree of foreign accent in the learner's second language. In other words, if there is "less" first language, its influence on pronunciation of second language is.

2.4 Production and perception of language

One of other questions in my questionnaire was also how they perceive their ability to learn language. One's perception of one's talent is crucial, too, and I would like to dedicate the next passage to this topic. Second language learners often inaccurately produce vowels and consonants. If other speakers of this language listen to their speech production, they recognize these inaccurate sounds as a foreign accent. The reason for a foreign accent can be the inability of speakers to manage new kinds of articulation. However, a lot of researchers including Flege (1988, 26) claim that a lot of mistakes in second language pronunciation are caused by an incorrect perceptual representation of the properties that specify second language vowels and consonants. Flege created the Speech Learning Model(1995, 78 - 81) where he noticed the close relation between the first and second languages. If the second language learner finds a second language sound that is different from all the sounds in his first language, he finds the closest first language sound. There are dissimilarities between these two sounds, however.

The hypothesis that exactitude of our speech production is influenced by accuracy of our perception is not new. As Flege (1995, 81) asserts on the basis of his observation that "speech perception becomes attuned to the contrastive sound units of a particular

language very early in life, and his statement is based on an experiment he conducted with time, children's production of speech corresponds to what they have heard." Pisoni (1995, 92) mentioned that "phonetic contrasts that are produced by talkers are precisely the same acoustic differences that are distinctive in perceptual analysis." Kuijper (1996, 61) noted that children produce and perceive first language segmental differences very slowly and in parallel in their childhood. But we cannot say that similar kind of relation between production and perception exists in second language acquisition, too. Actually, Bever's hypothesis (1981, 23) states that " a critical period for learning speech exists because the development of production and perception will not be closely linked if speech learning occurs after the first language is firmly established."

According to Bever's hypothesis, once the first language phonology is acquired, the speech production and perception are in relation. Usage of psychogrammar stops its role to arrange production and perception. At this stage of speech development, as Bever hypothesized, the speech production and perception are self-sufficient and the critical period for speech learning is finished. Psychogrammar cannot connect production and perception of the second language any more after the end of critical period. This is the time when the first language phonology has been completely acquired. "It is for this reason that second language learners often learn to discriminate sounds … they cannot distinctively produce." Bever (1981, 24- 26)

2.5 Pronunciation of vowels

Flege, Bohn and Jang (1997, 35 - 37) conducted a study where they presented the evidence of connection between production of late bilingual people and perception of vowels of second language. There were 20 participants in their research, native speakers each of German, Korean, Spanish and Mandarin, respectively. All of them arrived in the United States as adults and that was the first time when they were exposed to English. In this study, they had to read a list of consonant-vowel-consonant English words and all these words included the vowels / i /, / ….. Then they had to recognize the members of two groups of words that contained the same vowels. In the first group, they had to recognize the difference between beat and bit and in the second group, difference between bet and bat. A lot of participants relied mostly on spectral variation to identify the vowels. For many of them, vowel duration was the significant point. The result of this research can lead us to the opinion that accuracy in perception is the preliminary condition for exactitude in production.

2.6 Production and perception of the consonants

In my study, I decide to focus on the production and perception of particular English vowels and consonants. There have also been research studies in this field, for instance, Flege (1993, 41) made a study where he wanted to test the relation between the consonants production and their perception. The participants of this research were native speakers of Chinese. The production and perception of / t / and / d / in the final position of English words was examined. The research was aimed at the duration of vowels. If we listen to the speech of native speakers of English, we can hear that they

make vowels longer before / d / than before / t / when these consonants are in the final positions of the words. Thirty of the research participants were late bilinguals who arrived in the United States as adult people. Nine participants were early bilinguals who were exposed to English relatively young. All of these nine participants arrived in the United States before the age of 10. Both the late and the early bilingual people have made the vowels in the words ending with / d / longer than in the words with / t / in its final position. However, the size of the late bilinguals' contrasts were much smaller than contrasts made by early bilinguals.

If we try to summarize the previous research studies and the evidence they have given, it seems that second language pronunciation of the adult learners and their ability to comprehend the second language are connected. According to Bever's hypothesis, the relation between the production and perception accuracy has been confirmed.

2.7 First Language Acquisition vs. Second Language Acquisition

Newport (1987, 134) states that it is cognitive immaturity, not cognitive maturity, that is good for learning acquisition. He argued that children have just a short-term memory and it enables them to learn just a few morphemes from the linguistic input. He noted that in children's learning, there is a big advantage over adults. Adult learners have a bigger memory and thus they are able to extract more from the linguistic input, but then they have a big problem because of analyzing all at once.

The early language learning – learning language in the childhood - is preferable and it has its roots in the evolution of the human kind. As Pinker (1998, 178) states - after

childhood, the neural circuitry and the language learning ability that is not needed any more are "dismantled". We do not need it any more and there would be a big metabolic cost if it stayed in our organism.

Hurford (1993, 53) has posited a very similar opinion as he asserts that language learning ability has its basics in the early childhood and he connects it with evolution, too. He determined the end of the critical period at around puberty.

3 Description of my project

3.1 Formulation of hypotheses

The first hypothesis that will be examined in this thesis is that the earlier students started to learn English, the better their pronunciation will be. The second hypothesis is that the better students' perception of their own pronunciation is, the better their actual pronunciation will be.

3.2 Defining the variables

When I was preparing the questionnaire for my students, I wanted to focus on variables, but I knew there were variables that I had to leave out because there would not be enough space in the diploma thesis. I realized that there were too many variables at play, so I had to be selective and I decided to drop several.

Variables I left out are the following ones:

- Quality of instruction

- Materials

- Motivation

- Natural ability of learning languages

- Home environment

- Contact with native speakers

Among these, especially motivation is a very interesting and important aspect while teaching language and acquiring its pronunciation. It is very large topic and it is a topic that would covers another diploma thesis.

3.2.1 Quality of instruction

Quality of previous instruction is also a very important variable, but it would be very difficult to define. As most of my students are adult people, they come from different backgrounds and it would be very difficult for them to remember what textbooks they had used in the past. Some of them had started to learn English in their current employment, some of them used to have various English courses at language schools, so their experience with English is varied. It is a very important aspect left out, and it could have fundamental impact on the results of my research study.

3.2.2 Natural ability

Natural ability of learning languages is also another important aspect of learning languages and if I can talk from my experience, I think it is beside motivation to learn language one of the most important aspects, especially in acquiring pronunciation. It is also the topic which belongs more to psychology than to methodology and if every human being has the ability to learn language given inborn, then it is also very difficult to describe and define it.

3.2.3 Home environment

I dedicated one of the questions in my questionnaire to the home environment when I was asking the respondents if any English is ocassionally spoken at their homes. As all responses were negative, I did not concentrate on this topic further.

3.2.4 Contact with native speakers

Many students from both companies are people in their forties or fifties and they usually have not had so many opportunities for contact with native speakers of English. All the teachers in both companies are native Czech speakers. Another option for these students is concerned time in an English-speaking country. This was also one of the questions in my questionnaire but only one answer was positive. Most of my students have not been in an English-speaking country in their entire lives. I was talking to them about this topic and their most common answer to this question was their low motivation. Many of

them started to learn English as adults and they said they were afraid of going to an English-speaking country. For the younger learners, the situation was totally different. They are much more courageous and many have tried to spend some time outside this country. Most of the children I teach have already been in an English-speaking country, many for a significant period of time, usually for a month or two.

4 Chosen variables

Here are the main variables I therefore decided to focus on:

- Length of studying English

- The age of starting to learn English

- Amount of English lessons

- Length of studying English at our language school

- Number of students in one English group – individual / group courses

- Other languages students can speak apart from English

- Reason for studying English

- Own perception of English pronunciation

- Perception of English speaking countries

4.1 Chosen variables and their relation to SLA

According to Lenneberg's theory, the age when student students started to learn their second language is crucial for their other development in the language as well as for

acquiring the correct native-like pronunciation. This is the main point of the hypothesis which is called the critical period hypothesis. This hypothesis offers an explanation why a lot of learners do not speak their second language as native speakers, but with various degrees of foreign accent. The end of the critical period is usually connected with a kind of neurological change. Flege (1997, 43 - 44) describes these changes as lost plasticity in brain, hemispheric specialization or neurofunctional reorganization. I have dedicated more detailed explanation of this theory in part of my diploma thesis called First language acquisition vs. Second language acquisition.

The amount of the English lessons within studying at the Primary, Secondary school and at the University is also very important variable. As we can see from most of the responses that the learners had no contact with English while they were studying at the elementary school. More than a half of them started to learn English when they were studying at secondary school and part of them even at university. There is also a minor group of students who had no contact with English language during their studies at all and they started learning it only when they became employees of Duropack.

The number of students in each group is also significant. For the students I teach, the setting for learning English in both companies where I teach is very good. About half of the people I teach attend individual courses. The second part of the students attends group courses but there are no more than three students in each group. The problem sometimes is to create the groups where students are the same level of English. We try to focus on their speaking ability as well as their vocabulary and grammar. Another important thing is the specialized goals of the groups. Many students work in the accounting department of the company so they need to achieve vocabulary and phrases

mainly from business English as well as the employees of a sales department. Many of my students, however are operators, they need to learn mainly the vocabulary related directly to the production of a paper boxes and cardboard.

The reason for studying English is another important variable that I focused on. My presumption was that most of the students were learning English in the company courses because of its making English into the main communicative language. Some students who work as sales representatives really need to speak English every day on the communicative basis but they need business English. I think motivation to achieve good English is the highest among these employees.

Having an opportunity to learn English outside a classroom is also very useful. My presumption was that most of the students would have at least some opportunity to learn English outside classroom. Most of them spend a significant time of their working time in Vienna where the headquarters of the company is based, and if visiting there, the students are forced to use just English and they have a great opportunity to learn not only from their colleagues in Vienna, but also those from Serbia, Hungary, Romania or Germany. Most of their colleagues are not native speakers of English, but English is usually their second language. I have met some of the international colleagues of my students and it is important to say that their level of English is usually very good.

The students' perception of English pronunciation belongs to other important variables. I wanted the students to mention if they perceive themselves as good at English language and to notice what the biggest problems with pronunciation of English are. As I know my students from the lessons and I know their pronunciation, I presumed that

most of them will mention the pronunciation of dental fricatives /θ/ ,/ð/ or problems with distinguishing between /v/ and /w/ or between sounds /e/ and /æ/.

5 Project

5.1 Description of my convenient sample

My sample represents 47 students of English from Bupak company and the Spa in Třeboň. The first company is based in České Budějovice but its headquarters is in Vienna. As most of the management board speak English, employees of the plant in České Budějovice have been forced to speak English as well. Most had been learning German language for a very long time, usually for 7 or 8 years. In 2001, their mother company bought new divisions in Hungary, Bulgaria, Estonia, Serbia, Germany and Slovenia, and English became the main language spoken within all the company. This was the time were most of the students started learning English. Most were in their thirties or forties at that time.

The second company where I teach is the spahouse in Třeboň. Most of my students there are receptionists or ladies working in the office who have a daily contact with clients. As the spa in Třeboň is very popular both with Czech and foreign tourists, both the receptionists and other people in the office have to speak English almost every day. The advantage is that they are often in contact with native speakers of English, especially in a high season which is for them from May to October. We are learning from a textbook called Tourism and Catering. It includes a lot of units with very useful topics for the people dealing with clients every day such as At the front desk or How to deal with your

customers. Employees of a spa Třeboň are also in everyday telephone contact with clients so we focus a lot on the topic of making and answering phone calls in English.

Another group of my students working in a spa are employees of a local restaurant, mainly waiters and waitresses. These people are learning from the textbook mentioned above, too but we are focused on the dealing with clients in the restaurant and on the important phrases used while serving the customer. These people also have an opportunity to speak with native speakers of English almost every day.

I targeted my questionnaire to all of these students described. They became my research subjects. Their total number was forty – seven.

5.2 Description of the physical setting

The overall conditions for these courses have been very good. Bupak company has its main office building and the manufacturing plant in České Budějovice in Papírenská Street but it also has stockrooms in other parts of České Budějovice as well as outside. The main office building in Papírenská Street is a place where I also teach my students in three classrooms on the third floor of this building. There is very good equipment in the classrooms, we have a flipcharts to write on, we can listen to CDs from the stereo or on the computer. We have a library of English books, related to teaching grammar, vocabulary as well as pronunciation in the classrooms. We can borrow any book from the library for a month or two. There are also 5 computers which are used when we are learning by using interactive exercises founded on the websites. Some of the students

really like listening to English songs. When we listen to it, we also usually use these computers.

The spa resort in Třeboň has many buildings in its complex which includes accommodating facilities as well as eating places or places where all the treatments are provided. In one of the buildings, there are two classrooms which we also use for teaching local students. It is also a very light and quiet room so I think the conditions for learning English there are also very good. We have a flipchart there, too, there are also posters on the wall, there is a TV for watching an English film. We have also device to listen to CDs which we use when we listen to English songs or when we read books in English where CD is given, too. As some of the groups in Třeboň are more numerous, the room is larger. Some of the courses include five, sometimes even six students compared with a typical two students in a group in Bupak.

5.3 Description of the teaching methods and materials used in these settings and by me

The most significant teaching method used in our language school and therefore used for students both In Duropack Bupak and in Třeboň is called suggestopedia. This teaching method was founded in the late 70s by a Bulgarian psychologist Georgi Lozanov. His theory lay in the certitude that students reach psychological limits to learning when they think they are not able to learn as much as they really are. His presumption was that students may use just about 5 to 10 percent of their mental capacity and he believed that the brain could process much more information if there are optimal conditions for learning. His work with students and his attitude to them was based on psychological

research on extrasensory perception. He created a new learning method which was aimed at "desuggestion" of the limitations learning that the students might have. The aim was to provide the students relaxed with a state of mind in which they can acquire language much more easily and they can use the capacity of the brain to its maximum. This learning method was called Suggestopedia.

One of the most key features of this learning method was the usage of baroque music which the students were listening to as they were learning. It was used because of its specific rhythm and a pattern of 60 beats per minute. Lozanov believed in a very good influence of this kind of music in providing a relaxed concentration. Another important aspect of this learning method is the usage of soft comfortable chairs and a dim lightning in the classrooms.

When my students learn English, we listen to music very often, even though it is not just baroque all the time. We usually listen to one whole song at the beginning of the lesson and then one at the end of it. We often listen to quiet music as a background very often for the whole lesson, too.

Key features of suggestopedia learning method are the following ones:

- Learning is a set in the environment that is comfortable as much as possible, using soft comfortable chairs and dim lightning in the classrooms
- Students are given posters or a lot of information in a target language on the wall and they are encouraged by this way to use a method called "peripheral learning"

- The teacher has total control of the class and is given a role of a complete authority

- Psychological barriers in students" minds for learning a target language are "desuggested"

- Students are encouraged to act as childishly as they can while they are in the classroom. They assume new names and roles in the target language

- Music is played softly in the background for students to reach relaxed state of mind

- Students work with dialogues in a target language and they also work with the translation of given text to their native language

- Errors are tolerated, the main focus in on the content rather than the structure

- Students are given homework every lesson which is aimed at revision of the dialogue they were practicing in the class. They are advised to read it once more before they go to sleep and once after getting up in the morning

- Music and arts are integral part of each listen and they are used as much as possible

I think suggestopedia is a very good method of learning English, especially for smaller group of students which is exactly the case of my students in both companies where I teach. I cannot imagine how this method could be used in a typical classroom at the elementary school or high school where the setting is different from the classrooms in private companies. But the setting, especially in Bupak company, provides a really pleasant setting to present this method. We have very comfortable chairs in our classrooms as well as a lot of equipment for listening to music and posters written in a target language on the walls.

5.4 Materials used in our settings

Books related to English pronunciation

These are the books that are used most often in my English classes both in Bupak company and in the spa of Třeboň for practicing English pronunciation. Some of them deal with acquiring and practicing individual English sounds, some of them consider English pronunciation as a whole. I have chosen them all by myself as I considered them to be very useful for practicing English pronunciation and convenient for the English level of my students. In this respect I have been lucky to have an opportunity to choose all the textbooks by myself.

English Pronunciation in Use, Elementary Book, Sylvie Donna and Jonathan Marks, Cambridge University Press, 2007

This is a well-arranged book which clearly explains pronunciation of particular vowels and consonants. At the beginning of each unit, there is a description of a particular sound explained with an illustration where there is shown which muscles are used while this sound is being pronounced. The theoretical unit is divided into other sections where typical spelling of the sound is shown. Other exercises present a few words where this sound appears. The next section presents a few sentences with the sound.

Each unit of this book is divided into two pages. The theoretical part belongs to the first page while a lot of additional exercises are parts of the second page of a unit. Some of

the exercises are "fill- in- the gaps" types of exercises where a student should fill in a word with correct pronunciation into each gap. A CD is an integral part of the book. It helps to listen to all the exercises with correct answers to check their own answers and they can listen to a pronunciation of the words produced by native speakers of English.

Another type of exercise is a matching one where the students' task is to match beginnings and endings of the sentences. They can listen to all the sentences again when they use a CD.

The last exercise of each unit usually uses minimal pairs, two words whose pronunciation is different in only one phonological part. Minimal pairs are used very often in listening tests or pronunciation exercises. Theoretically, it is the existence of minimal pairs which enables linguists to establish the phoneme inventory for a language.

I really like using this book while teaching English pronunciation. As most of my students are adults, they like using it as well, because it is written very clearly and a lot of exercises are repeated. There are a lot of listening exercises which helps students a lot achieve good pronunciation of each vowel or a consonant. The usage of words including minimal pairs is a very useful thing, too, in my opinion.

Ship or Sheep? An Intermediate Pronunciation Course, Cambridge University Press, 2006

This is the book I use a lot for students in Bupak company where most of the students are at intermediate level of English. The whole book is divided into 49 units, each of which is dedicated to pronunciation of a particular vowel / consonant. Units are longer than in the previous textbook, they usually cover from 3 to 4 pages. The book can be used as a self-study device for students but is mainly designed for learning English in the classroom and for the interaction between the teacher and students.

The beginning of a unit is similar to the unit in the previous textbook. The production of a target sound is explained and an illustration is added to an explanation. In the second section, words with a target sound are presented to a student: they can listen to the pronunciation on CD, too. In the third section, they can listen to the same words connected to the sentences. The next section shows the same words to the students, but words appear in a dialogue this time. The topics of the dialogues are taken from everyday English, such as dialogues in the café, in the restaurant or conversation between the sales assistant and the customer in a shop.

This is the book I really like using for intermediate students of English. Not so big part of each unit is dedicated to the pronunciation and to the work of vocal organs while pronouncing each sound. I like using English Vocabulary in Use as a basic material while teaching English pronunciation and then I use just a few exercises from this textbook to give students the opportunity for further practice of each vowel / consonant.

Tree or Three? An Elementary Pronunciation Course, Ann Baker, Cambridge University Press, 2008

This book is arranged for elementary students of English so we use this book a lot while teaching in the spa of Třeboň. Most of my students there have been learning English from one to two years.

Pronunciation of a target sound and an illustration of movement of vocal organs are provided in the first part of a unit. In the second part of a unit are most common English words stated. There are also illustrations next to each word. This is why this book is also a very good device for teaching young learners.

The next part provides a conversation with previous words and target sounds. Another part, students are asked to listen to the same conversation again and underline a target sound whenever they hear it. Another part is for students to practice the conversation and pronunciation of more difficult sounds again. Finally, there is one more exercise at the end of each unit where students listen to the words in CD and they are asked to tick the words with the target sounds.

I like using this book for teaching children. It has many illustrations and all the theories about pronunciation of each vowel / consonant is explained very clearly, so it is very useful even for very young learners of English. Another useful part of each unit is a

conversation where learners can listen to the words and target sounds they have learned in the context.

Pronunciation Practice Activities, A resource book for teaching English pronunciation, Martin Hewings, Cambridge University Press, 2004

This book is different from the previous textbooks. There are not so many exercises to practice particular vowels and consonants, this book is arranged more to realize how language works and to be aware that there is something like English pronunciation which is very different from the pronunciation of our native language.

The book is divided into six units, each of which is divided into subsections. Some units are related to the pronunciation of English vowels and consonants, while other units are dedicated to connected speech, word stress, intonation and spelling. One of the most interesting units for me is the first one which is called Developing awareness of English pronunciation. There are activities in this chapter which give students the opportunity to look at English language as a unit and pronunciation as one part of this unit.

A lot of the exercises in this textbook work with the comparison of English and the students' native language. They do not operate just with the pronunciation of particular vowels and consonants, but also with a pronunciation of consonant clusters. In some exercises, students are asked how they perceive their own pronunciation of English. Own perception of English pronunciation is also very important point. I worked with this variable, too when I was preparing a questionnaire for my English students.

I like using this book, because it is very different from most of the pronunciation books on the market. A lot of the exercises make you really think about the language, think about how language works and what are the similarities and differences between our native language and English. Each unit is not concerned just with one particular sound, but it usually works with the language as a whole. Role plays at the end of each unit are also very useful as they help students practice everyday English they need at common public places. The book is suitable for both larger classes and smaller groups of learners, which is usually my case.

When we have lessons related to grammar, our most used textbooks are English Grammar in Use by Raymond Murphy, intermediate or elementary level of the book depending on the level of English, too. We take also quite a lot of exercises from an English File where the grammar is explained to the students, too and that are also very useful exercises to practice target grammar. This textbook is good especially for students who have been learning English for a longer period of time as there are many of them who know exercise from English Grammar in Use very well and they are happy to try brand new exercises.

I also found the textbook called Grammar with Laughter quite interesting. This textbook is divided into 28 lessons with the most important topics of English grammar. The whole textbook is photocopiable and very easy to use in the classroom. There is one worksheet on each page of a book and there are about ten jokes in each worksheet. These jokes illustrate particular grammar point. I think this book is very good supplement to the exercises from Grammar in Use. Some of the lessons are really funny.

It makes student to understand to the joke and to read it actually and when it is really funny for them I think then it is also more memorable.

If we have lessons focused on vocabulary part, we use the book called Vocabulary in Use very often. It covers very important areas of an English vocabulary. The whole book is divided into 60 units, each of them covers two pages. On the left page, new words and phrases are presented to the students. On the right page there are exercises and activities to help students to practice using the words and to help them to remember it. The book can be used within a classroom as well as a good self-study book. We also use the textbooks both for elementary and intermediate students of English.

As many students from Bupak need mainly business English in their everyday work meetings and conversations, we use a book called Test your Business Vocabulary in Use a lot. This book is divided into 66 unit tests and four summary tests. This book is a good supplement to the book Business Vocabulary in Use by Bill Mascull and it tests vocabulary given in this textbook. The units cover important areas of business English such as sales and marketing, prices, costs, recruitment or time and time management. Significant part of a book is dedicated to sending business e-mails and answering calls in English. Each test takes about 10 to 15 minutes to complete, summary tests are longer, they should take about 45 minutes to complete. There is a target score which students should reach to pass the test. Key words are given at the beginning of each test. You can find many different kinds of exercises in the tests, from matching words to their meanings, choosing a word from a number of alternatives, writing a word to complete the sentences and many others.

Another textbook focused on business English which I like using a lot with students from Bupak is called Business Vocabulary – Test it and Fix it by Kenna Bourke and Amanda Maris. This textbook also covers important topics such as job applications, working conditions, meetings or business travel. It is also divided into a number of tests, there are twenty tests of business English at this time. There is a review of important grammar and vocabulary in each unit. The book is designed in a way to try the test, then to look at the review with all the grammar and vocabulary rules and then go to the exercise again to fix achieved information. Each test also takes about 15 to twenty minutes to complete. There is a part of the book related to the differences between British and American English, in grammar, spelling and vocabulary, at the end of this textbook.

5.5 Timeline

Students were given the test in a particular timeline. I started to test them in October 2009. There was no problem with recordings in Berta Spa and Aurora Spa in Třeboň. The situation in Duropack Bupak was a little bit more difficult because October was the month when a company bought a new division in Slovenia and this was the time when a lot of my students had to go to Slovenia for business trips and they were very often off our language courses. I faced some limitations at the time because of a small number of students in some of my groups. Therefore, I started the second part of giving the questionnaires to the students in Bupak in November and I finished them in January 2010.

The same situations was with the recording of students which was conducted autumn of 2009, too and I finish with them at the end of October in Třeboň and at the end of November in Duropack Bupak in České Budějovice.

There were small problems with the recordings as I told my students that I was going to record them for a certain purpose and some of them were very nervous at the beginning. Finally, after two weeks, students were accustomed to making recordings as part of our English lesson and I received all the data I needed to collect for further analysis.

5.6 Typical Czech errors

Speakers of English usually have certain problems which are common to most of them, but there are also problems specific to speakers of certain linguistic backgrounds. As regards the Czech speakers, these are:

- Devoicing of word – final voiced consonants
- Trouble distinguishing between /e/ and /æ/
- Frequent voicing of /s/ between vowels, and especially after /n/, /l/, and /r/
- The vowel in words like "sure" is commonly pronounced as /ɛ:r/ or /a:r/
- /h/ is murmured as it is in Czech
- Frequent lack of aspiration in unvoiced consonants (p,k and t), making e.g. "park" and "bark" harder to distinguish
- Difficulty in distinguishing between /v/ and /w/, because Czech phoneme inventory does not include the /w/ sound.

- The consonant /r/ is pronounced as it would be pronounced in Czech language. This sound is sometimes pronounced even where it should be silent, e.g. in words as "morning"

- The combination of "ng" is treated as two separate sounds. (The single /ŋ/ sound is in Czech language only when there is a velar sound after a /n/ sound. This, together with word-final devoicing, makes –ing frequently pronounced as "ink" and then words such as "thing" and "think" sound as homophones.

- Problems with dental fricatives /θ/ ,/ð/, these are usually badly pronounced as /d/ and /t/ or /z/ and /s/ as there are no sounds like /θ/ ,/ð/ in Czech phoneme inventory system

- Lengthening the final syllable in words such as "cities", "babies" so that final sound resembles

On the basis of my six-year experience with teaching English, I have decided to focus on following six pronunciation problems which in my estimate are the most frequent pronunciation problems related to native Czech speakers. They are as follows:

- ➢ Problems with distinguishing between /e/ and /æ/
- ➢ Lack of aspiration in unvoiced consonants (p, t, k)
- ➢ Difficulties in distinguishing between /v/ and /w/
- ➢ Pronunciation of an English sound /r/
- ➢ Troubles with the pronunciation of dental fricatives /θ/ ,/ð/
- ➢ Lengthening the final syllable in words such as "countries"

5.7 Choice of research methods

The research I used while collecting data by testing my students belongs to the area of educational research. I would like to explain a few key terms related to the topic of educational research and to the methods used within this type of research. Educational research is kind of research where the objective is to examine behavioral patterns in learners, students or teachers. Educational researches use various types of quantitative and qualitative research methods.

At the beginning of this diploma thesis my hypothesis is mentioned. If I want to verify this hypothesis was true or not I have to use a method for verifying it. Qualitative research method is the method which is used to verify the original hypothesis. Smaller and focused samples are needed in qualitative research which is also the reason why I have chosen this kind of research. I was testing 47 students at all which is still quite a small sample of students.

Qualitative research seeks out the 'why', not the 'how' of its topic through the analysis of unstructured information – things like interview transcripts, emails, notes, feedback forms. It doesn't just rely on statistics or numbers, which are the domain of quantitative researchers.

Qualitative research is used to gain insight into people's attitudes, behaviours, value systems, motivations, aspirations, culture or lifestyles. It is used not just in the field of education but it is also used to inform business decisions, policy formation, communication and research. Focus groups, in-depth interviews, content analysis, ethnography, evaluation and semiotics are among the many formal approaches that are

used, but qualitative research also involves the analysis of any unstructured material, including customer feedback forms or reports.

Qualitative researchers use different ways of collecting data they need to analyse. Some of the most important methods used in a qualitative research are grounded theory practice, narratology, storytelling, classical ethnography and shadowing. There are also different ways of collecting the data needed for further analysing. Some of the researchers use interviews with the participants of the research, some of them use observations or field notes, some of them prepare questionnaires for their respondents. This is also approach I have chosen for collecting data for my students. I prepared a questionnaire where students where asked about the their perception of ability to use English about their perception of English speaking countries, about their experience with a stay in an English speaking country for a significant length of time and many other questions.

As there are certain limitations within a number of students I teach and I have therefore access to 47 students, I was able to make qualitative research in this situation. My 47 students who were given the questionnaires and asked about their perception of ability to speak English and many other variables are my sample. They are also intended to be similar to and to represent a larger number of students.

6 Results

The following graph is showing the percentage of English learners divided by when they started with learning English:

The age of learners when starting learning English
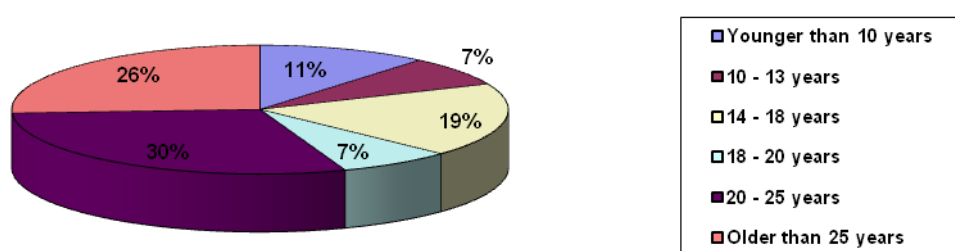
As we can see in the graph, most of the students started learning English quite late. There were 26 per cent of learners who started learning English when they were older than 25 years. The students whose age of starting learning English belongs to the critical age period are shown in the blue and violet parts of the graph. There were just three students who started learning English before the age of 10 which represents 11 % of the total number of my sample students. There were two students who started learning English between 10 and 13 years old. These students make 7 % of the total number of students. Together, there are 5 students from the total number of 47 students who start learning English before the end of critical age period. These students should have the opportunity to acquire native–like pronunciation, according critical age period hypothesis.

Relation between the age of students while starting to learn English and the pronunciation of /th/

Legend:
- Age 10 - 13
- Age14 - 18
- Age 18 -20
- Age 20 - 25
- Older than 25

In this observation, I focused on the relation between the age of students while starting with English and the pronunciation of /th/. Wrong pronunciation of /th/ belongs to one of the most typical errors among Czech learners of English so I decided to focus on it, too. Among my students, most of the students with wrong pronunciation of this sound started learning English when they were older than 25 years old. On the other hand, students who have the smallest problems while pronunciating this sound are students who started learning English quite early, when they were between 10 and 13 years old. On the basis of this observation, we can say that there certainly is a relation between the pronunciation of this sound and production of this sound.

Pronunciation of the /r/ sound

I set three different stages of pronunciating of the/ r/ sound while doing this research. First of them was a sound that corresponds with native-like pronunciation of r sound, second on is called a second stage while the third stage of pronunciation is very close to pronunciation of Czech consonant /r/.
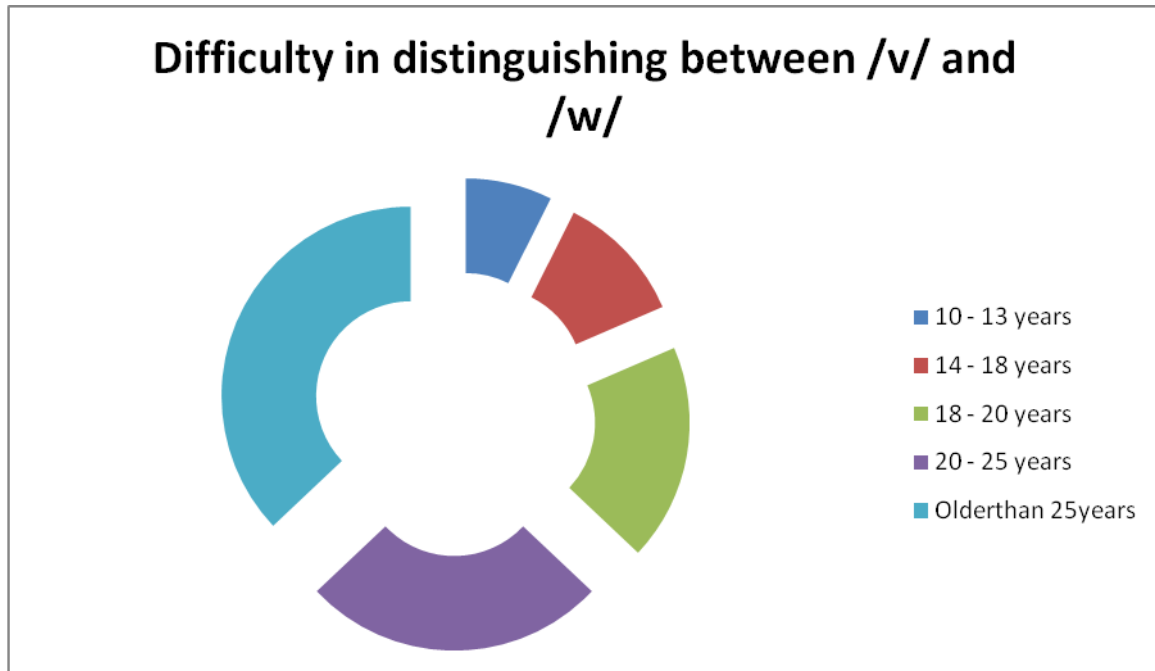
Pronunciation of the /r/sound
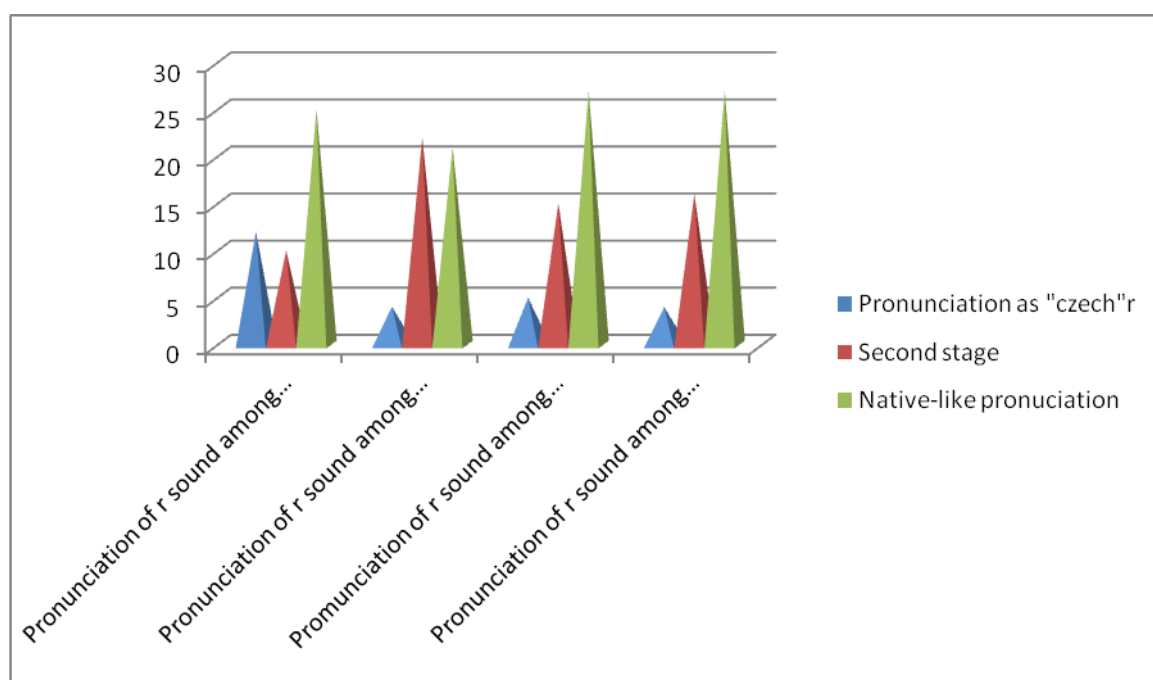
In this observation, I searched for the relation between the production of r sound in the different groups of learners (divided again according to the age when they started learning English) and their final producion of r sound. I divided production of r sound into three different groups, into the pronunciation which is very close to Czech sound r, then second stage which is somewhere between the first and the third stage and then the native – like

pronunciation. I have found out that there not so many of my students had problem with this sound compared with the pronunciation of /th/ sound. There are quite a lot of people in each group who pronounce the sound almost native-like or native-like. In the first group, there were 25 students, in the second group there were 21 of them, in the third group 27 people and in the last group 27 students whose production was almost native-like, too.
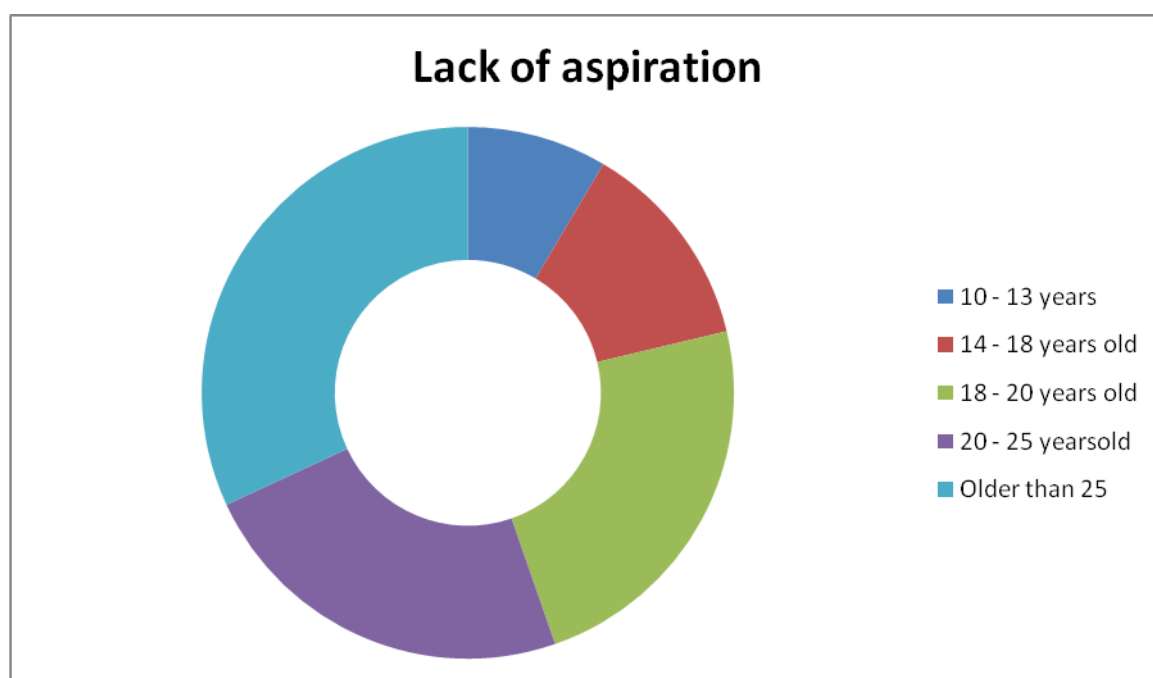
This graph shows the problem of the frequent lack of aspiration in unvoiced consonants (p,k and t). I also related the problem to the age of learners, in particular how old they were when they started learning English. There seems to be a relation between these two criteria as most of the students who had problems with aspiration in unvoiced consonants are in last group, which means in the group of students who started learning English when they were older than 25 years old. Compared to this group, in the first group of students who started to learn English at the age of 10 to 13 years old, were just a few students who had problems with

aspiration. There were just 4 students who had problems with aspiration in the first group compared with the last group where there were 12 such students.

Difficulty in distinguishing between /v/ and /w/

10 - 13 years
14 - 18 years
18 - 20 years
20 - 25 years
Olderthan 25years

This observation was focused on the pronunciation of consonants /v/ and /w/ which are very difficult to produce for many Czech learners, too as sound /w/ is not included in the Czech phoneme system. I related it also to the start of English and as we can see according to the graph, there is again correlation between the age of students and the production and distingushing between these two sounds. As in the first group of learners, who started with English at the age of 10 to 13 were smallest number of people who had problems with distingushing between these sounds. There were just 3 people.On the other hand, in the last group of people who started learning English older than 25 years old were 10 students who had problems distinguishing these sounds. In the second group (14 − 18 years old) were 5 people with problems and it the third group of people were 7 students with problems in distinguishing between /v/ and /w/.

Correlation between students' perception of their English pronunciation and their real pronunciation of particular sounds

As mentioned in the theoretical part of the thesis, own perception of second language is another signifiant variable. In this part of the research I have decided to focus on the correlation between this perception and the real pronunciation of specific sounds.

## Correlation between students' perception of English pronunciation and their pronunciation of th sound
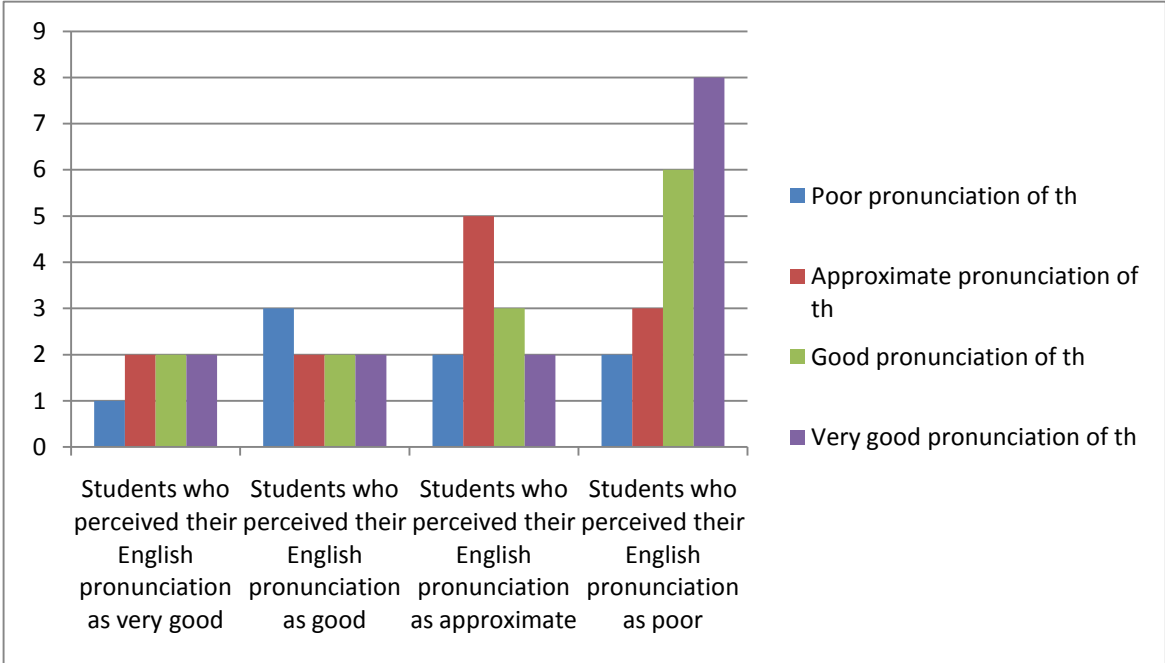
In this observation, I focused on the correlation between two facts, how students perceive their English pronunciation and how they really pronounce a particular sound. In this

observation, I focused on the correlation to the pronunciation of /th/sound. In my convenient sample, there were seven students who perceived their English pronunciation as very good, nine students who perecived their English pronunciation as good, twelve students who perceived their English pronunciation as approximate and ten students who perceived thein English pronunciation as poor. This was very interesting observation, as in the first group of students (who perceived their pronunciation as very good) was the same number of students whose real pronunciation of th sound was approximate, good and very good. On the other hand, in the last group of students who perceived thein pronunciation of English as poor was quite high number students with good and very good pronunciation of th sound. We can assume this observation that the correlation between two observed data is fairly weak.
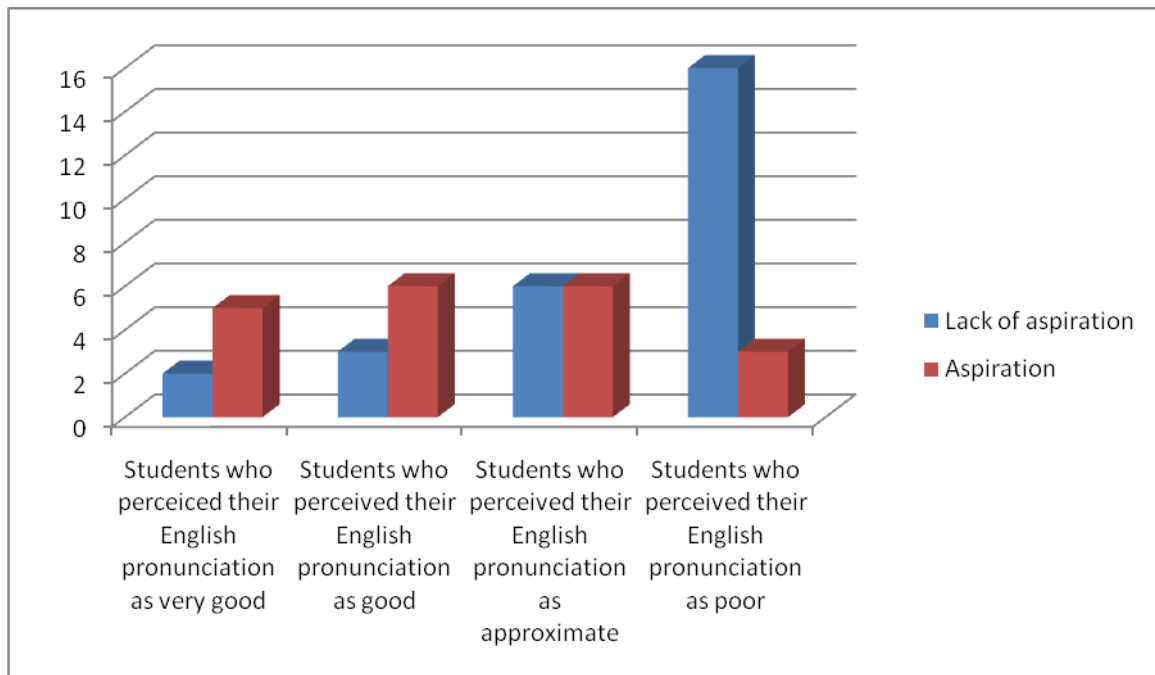
Correlation between students' perception of English pronunciation and their pronunciation of the /r/ sound
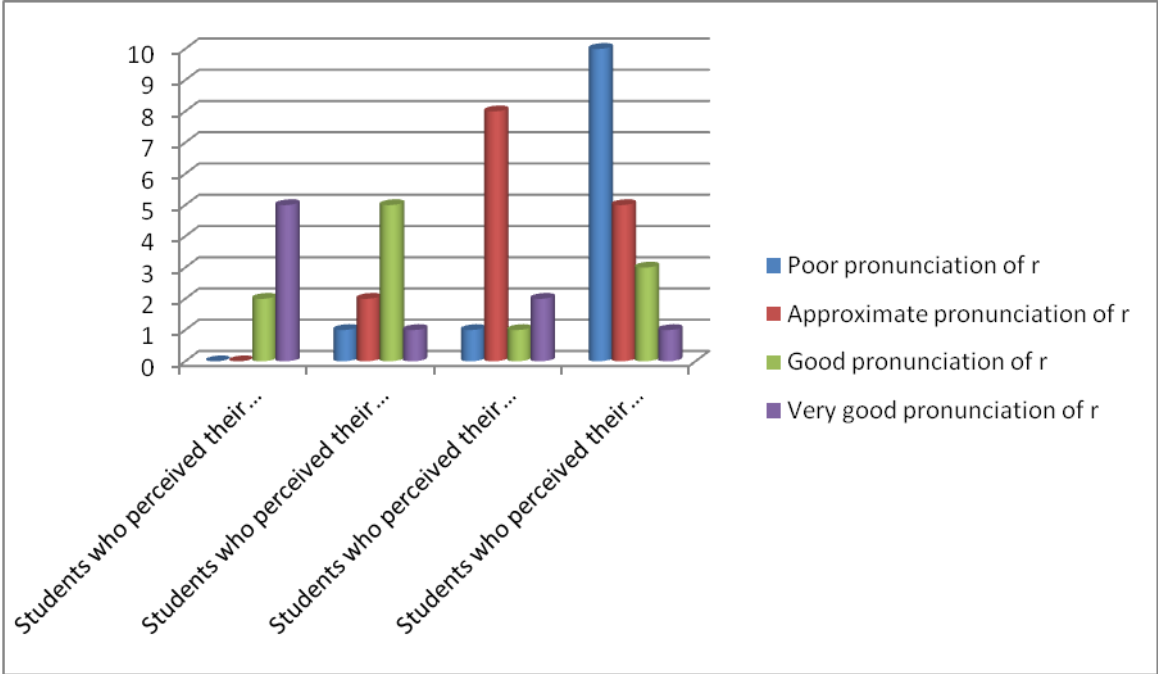
In this stage of my research, the real pronunciation of r sound corresponded quite well with a students' original perception. In the first group of students (who perceived their English

pronunciation as very good) were no students with poor pronunciation of r sound as well as no students with approximate pronunciation of r sound. There were two students with good pronunciation of r sound and five students with very good pronunciation of r sound. In the second group of students (the group of students who perceived their pronunciation as good) were most of the students with good pronunciation of r sound – five students- and two students with approximate pronunciation of r sound. In the third group of students (students who perceived their English pronuciation as approximate) had most of the students real approximate pronunciation of English, there were eight of them. In the last group of students (students who perceived themselves as students with poor English pronunciation), most of the students really had not very good results, there were ten students with bad pronunciation of r sound and five students with approximate pronunciation of r sound, on the other hand there were just three students with good pronunciation of r sound and only one student with a very good pronunciation of r sound. We can assume, that in this case, correlation is very strong.
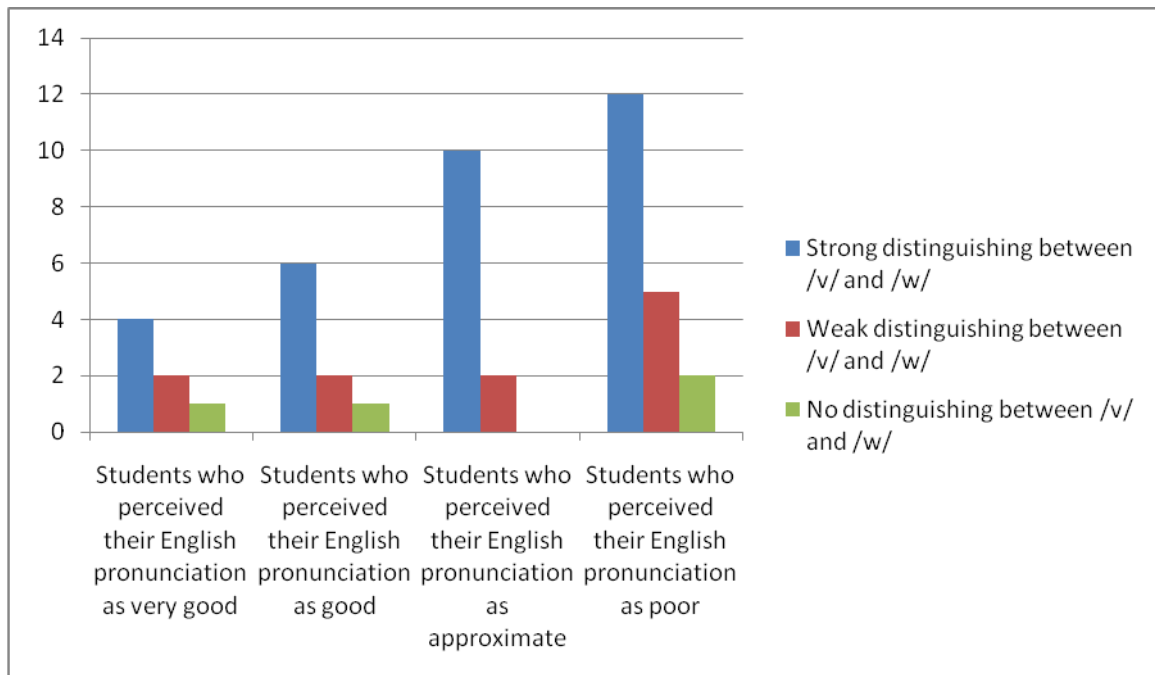
Correlation between students' perception of English pronunciation and aspiration after p, t, k

In this part of my research, I observed the correlation between students' perception of English pronunciation and presence of aspiration in their utterances. In the first group (group of students who perceived thein pronunciation as very good) there were just two students with lack of aspiration in their utterances and five students with an aspiration in thein utterances. In the second group (group of students who perecived their English pronunciation as good), there were free students with lack of aspiration and most of the students, six of them with aspiration in their utterances. In the third group (group of students who perceived their English pronunciation as approximate), there were the same number of students with and without the aspiration. In both groups there were six students. In the last group, there were sixteen students with lack of aspiration and only three students with an aspiration in their utterances. We can say that correlation was also strong in this observation.
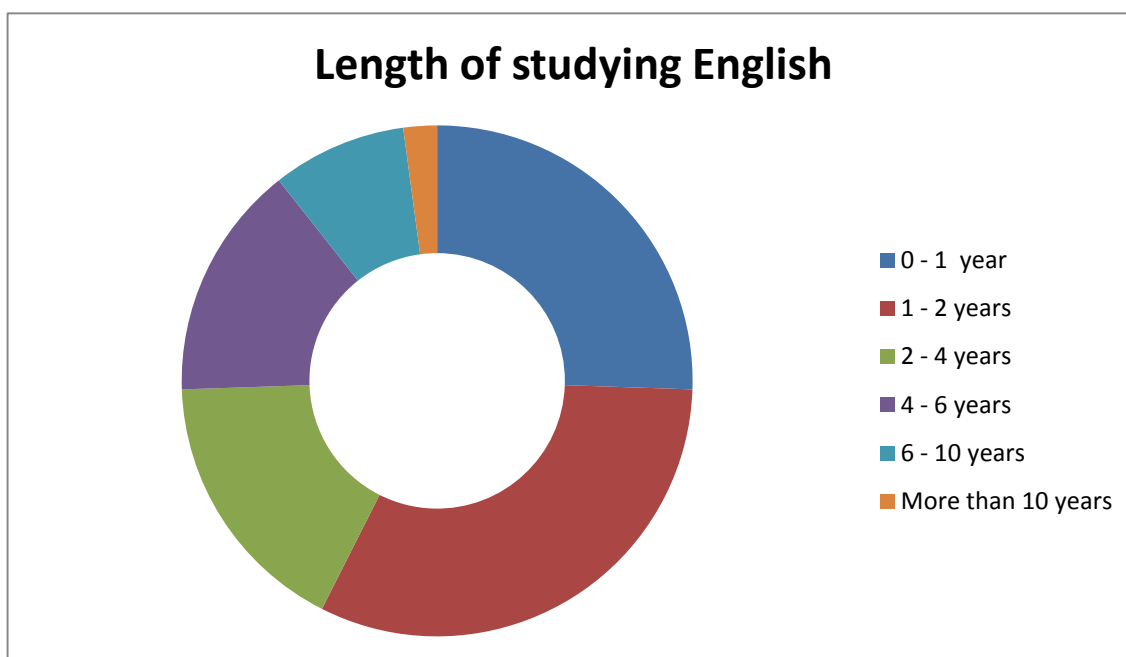
Correlation between students´perception of English pronunciation and distinguishing between /v/ and /w/

In this stage of my research, I observed the correlation between the students' perception of English pronunciation and distinguishing between sounds /v/ and /w/. I stated three stages of this distinguishing – strong distinguishing, weak distinguishing and no distinguishing. In the first group of students (students who perceived their English pronunciation as very good) were most of the students with strong distinguishing between /v/ and /w/, four of them, then two students with weak distinguishing between /v/ and /w/ and only one student with distinguishing between /v/ and /w/. In the second group (students who perceived their English pronunciation as good) , most of the students were able strongly distinguished between /v/ and /w/, there were six of these students and again only one student with no distinguishing between /v/ and /w/. In the third group of students (students who perceived their English pronunciation as approximate), there were ten students who were able strongly distinguished between /v/ and /w/, just two students with weak distinguishing between /v/ and /w/ and no student without distinguishing between /v/ and /w/. In the last group, there were twelve

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students who were able strongly distinguished between /v/ and /w/, five students with weak distinguishing between /v/ and /w/ and only two students with no distinguishing between /v/ and /w/. We can assume that pronunciation of these sounds (/v/ and /w/) and distinguishing between them seems to be quite easy for Czech learners of English. There is also quite strong correlation in this aspect of pronunciation.

Length of studying English

- 0 - 1 year
- 1 - 2 years
- 2 - 4 years
- 4 - 6 years
- 6 - 10 years
- More than 10 years

In this graph shows the percentage of my students and their percentage related to the length of studying English. Most of my students belou to the group of students who have been studying English for one or two years, there are fifteen of them. In the first group, students who have been studying English less than one year, there are twelve students. In the third group, among the students who have been studyiing English between two and four years, there are eights students. Then ther are four students who have been studying English between six and ten years and only one student who has been studying English for atime period longer than ten years.

7 Limitations

While working on my diploma thesis, I was facing several limitations. While doing this research I was limited by the number of people I had access to. I had access only to my students who became my convenient sample. They were people of similar working background, two separate companies, they had simile working conditions and opportunities to learn the language in courses paid by companies. If I had access to a wider number of people, if I were able to make a survey about the students from different language schools or if there was access to a larger number of people of different backgrounds, I think the results could be different.

Another lifting aspect was my attitude to the data collected from my students. I am a Czech speaker of English and so are my students. I think if my data would had been listened to a native speaker of English, thein interpretation of the collected data could be very different from my point of view.

Another limitation was the choice of the variables themselves, as there are many influences that can have effect on speakers' pronunciation. I had to be selective and I had to choose only a few of the criteria. Considering all the variables would have been impossible work and only the field of motivation, for example, could be a topic for another diploma thesis. The question is if the criteria I chose are the ones that are most signifiant for the actual pronunciation of Czech speakers of English.

 Another limitation was also in the final observation of the utterances of participants in my study. I focused only on the pronunciation of particular sounds that are I think most

problematic for Czech speakers of English. It would have been equally very useful to consider word stress as well as intonation of the speakers. This research would exceed the scope of this thesis, too. But it would be very useful to observe these factors in a graduate thesis or in a survey made by a larger group of researchers collaborating.

One of the last limitations while doing the research was the absence of similar surveys related to the Czech speakers of English. There are not many surveys like this that were done in the field of Critical Age Period as well as not many Czech written literature related to this theme.

8 Recommendations:

As I was working on the thesis and especially on the practical part, a few of recommendations for future access to the topic of my thesis appeared on my mind.

It would be useful:

- To replicate the research with the same students after a certain period of time to see how the results are changing and what their progress had been.
- To do a wider research, with more participants to be able to get more valid results
- To ask university to support such a kind of research, possibly with different convenient samples
- To offer the results of the research for the needs of Ministry of Education for the additional usage of the data

9 Unlearning errors

9.1 What does research say about this in general?

The Corder´s study deals with unlearning errors, with the significance errors, with the differences between the mistakes and the errors and with the ways of correcting the mistakes. Before Corder and his study, there were linguists who observed learner's errors, they divided them into categories, tried to distinguish which of them were common ones and which were not, but not much attention was drawn to their role in second language acquisition.

Major concepts of this research are:

- It is the learner who determines what the input is. The teacher can present a linguistic form but this is not necessarily the input, but simply what is available to be learned.

- The second important thing to think of while studying learners' errors is that the learners's needs should be considered when teachers plan their syllabuses. It is essential for the teachers to prepare and plan their syllabuses based on learners' needs not just on the theories.

- Corder is distinguishing between systematic and non-systematic errors. Unsystematic errors are typical for the learners'native language and Corder calls them "mistakes" and states they are not significant for the process of language learning. He provides the term "errors" for the systematic ones that occur in a second language.

- Errors are significant in three ways:

  - To the teacher, as they are showing them a student's progress

  - To the researcher: they show how language is acquired and what learning strategies is the learner using.

  - To the learner who can correct them and learn from these errors.

- If the learners has made an error, the best way to teach him the correct language form is   not to present it to him, but letting him discover it. Corder also states in his study that the most efficient way for a student to learn from the errors is to find the correct linguistic form by searching for it.

- Many errors are due to that the learner uses structures from his native language. Corder states that the possession of one' s native language is facilitative. In such a case, errors are not inhibitory, but they are the evidence of one' s learning strategies.

The thoughts mentioned above played a very important role in linguistic research, and in the approach to the observance and dealing with the learners' errors. Here are some of the areas that were influenced by Corder' s work:

Studies of the learners errors:

Corder distinguished between "errors" (in competence) and "mistakes" (in performance). This distinction attracted the attention of the researchers of SLA to work with errors and provide a more concentrated framework. Therefore, in the 1970s researchers started to describe and examine learners' competence errors and tried to explain them.

Corder in his study research noted for who the research of errors is important. It is important for teachers, for researchers and for learners. Further researches have been done to find out what we can learn from error analysis and try to improve language competence.

Studies of L1 influence on a second language

Different researchers tried to focus their studies on the errors that have influence on students' native language to second language acquisition. Corder was the researcher who pointed out that errors can be facilitative and can provide information about students' learners strategies. Hagege was another researcher who participated in this study. He claims that interference between native and second language is observed in children as well as in adults. In adults, these connections are stronger and seem to have a bigger influence on adults and their learning. He states that if there is a sufficient exposure, then instead of a reaching point where they can longer can be corrected,(as often happens with phonetics features), interference features can be easily eliminated. The teacher should know that the child is in the stage when it is acquiring the language and that child uses the structures that are already created by the first language.

Hagege was also observing influence of the language on accent, he describes that the ear acts like a filter, and after a critical age (which is 11 years according to Hagege's statement), the ear is accepting just the sounds that belong to the person's native language. Hagege states that there is a critical age for language acquisition, especially for the acquisition of a native-like accent. He uses the example of French, that include complex vowel sounds, to show that after a critical age period, the acquisition of certain sounds is not possible and the learners of second language will use only the sounds that exist in their native language.

Hagege is also pointing out the importance of a self correction. He says that it is much more important than the correction made by a teacher. He also focuses on different reactions of children to the error corrections. He states that the corrections should not be avoided at all

but he says that correction of every error as soon as it occurs is not recommended. Immediate correction seem to have negative influence on the language acquisition, even to the less sensitive children, it has consequences as anxiety, fear of making an error or reduced motivation for participation in the classroom.

9.2 My observance in the field of unlearning errors

As I had an access to quite a big number of students in my six year experience while teaching, I also observed a lot of interesting things in the field of unlearning errors. On the basis of Corder's observance, we can also distinguish between mistakes and errors in the utterances of Czech speakers of English. Mistakes could be a wrong pronunciation of /r/ sound or wrong pronunciation of /l/ sound, by the term mistake is meant a wrong production or pronunciation in one's native language. A wrong pronunciation of /th/ sound would belong among errors as an error is a systematic and occurs in the second language.

Significance of errors is also a very important factor. While teaching in both groups in Bupak company and the spa of Třeboň, I was observing these students for the period of two years, some of the students even for the period of three or four years and I can observe the progress they made and the change of errors they did. As Corder states, errors are also very important for the learners themselves as they show them where they need to study further or where is a specific need for particular language structure needed to be acquired.

Self correction is also very important as it gives students' the opportunity to correct their utterances by themselves and not to be corrected just by their teacher. During my English classes, I tried this method quite often while teaching the writing as well as while teaching

pronunciation. When my students write the essays, I often correct the essays, point out the most typical errors and then, in the following lesson my students are given the essays of their classmates and their task is to find the mistakes and correct it. I think it is very useful way for them how to get an overall feedback.

While teaching pronunciation, similar approach of self correction is used. I often record students' utterances while teaching pronunciation. When we have classes aimed at pronunciation, an individual sound is presented and then learners are exposed to this sound while listening to the records spoken by native speakers of English. After that, they are able to make their own speeches, they are recorded while doing these speeches. Then, their recording is analysed by all the students in a group and we are trying to analyse a particular sound and how close the pronunciation is to a native-like accent. This kind of self correction while teaching pronunciation is a very useful method, I think.

10 Reflections

When I was doing this project, I was surprised while easily was to collect theoretical information for my thesis. I originally thought this would be the most difficult part of my thesis and actually it was not. I had a good access to materials as I have kept many research materials from the time of my studies in Augsburg.

Data collecting was also not a difficult part of my thesis as I have an access to quite a lot of students English. They were very friendly and open about being part of this project and I was very pleased about that.

The most difficult and the most demanding part of my thesis was analyzing the data finally where I listened to all the recordings I received during my research, I had to set the stages of pronunciation of individual English sounds and I had to record these into tables and charts to be understable and clear. I had to create my own set of criteria of judging the students' production.

I have learned a lot by this research and I realized I was just at the beginning it was very nice opportunity to try the work of a real researcher and all the steps needed while working on the survey. The most interesting part for me was doing the actual research and giving them questionnaires and doing the recordings. I have found out very interesting information about them and their attitude to acquiring second language and perception of pronunciation and I think it is very useful to have all this information for another research study. I think it would be very useful to provide the data to the Ministry of Education while they could provide it to the schools to help them with an important decision when to start English courses.

11 Conclusion:

The first hypothesis I set was that the younger the students start learning English, the better their pronunciation should be. In the area of pronunciation of /th/ sound we can agree with this theory. There were about 40 percent of students from their overall number whose pronunciation of /th/sound was very good, very close to a native-like pronunciation. All of these students were the students who started to learn English at the age of ten to thirteen years. This is the period that corresponds with a Critical Age Period. In this case, Lenneberg's theory which states that the age when second language is started is crucial for development of the second language and acquiring native-like pronunciation is confirmed.

On the other hand, the smallest number of people who had problems with pronunciation of /th/ sound were mostly the people who started to learn English when they were 25 or older. This can be also influenced by a claim that Flege states in his theory and in his Speech Learning Model. He states that there is a close relation between L1 and L2. It states that if the second language sound is different from all the sounds in the first language, the learner tends to find a sound that is the closest one. That could also be related to my observance as there is no sound in Czech phonetic system similar to English sound /th/. This can be the reason why the students had problems while producing this sound.

While considering the /r/ sound, students at all did not have such problems to pronounce this sound. This can confirm Flege's theory and his Speech Learning Model. There is an /r/ sound in Czech phonetic system so the students have no problems while pronouncing it. On the other hand, Czech /r/ sound and English /r/ sound have a different place of its formation. This was the problem as a lot of participants pronounced the sound which was close to the Czech one. They found the closest sound in Czech phonetic system which also confirms Flege's hypothesis as well as Weinrich's theory. This theory states that there is a significant relation between the first and the second language.

On the other hand, there were quite a lot of students who started learning English at the age of ten to thirteen or at the age of fourteen to eighteen and they still had problems while pronouncing the /r/ sound. In this case, David Lennebrg's theory cannot be confirmed.

While focusing on a lack of aspiration and its relation to the age of learners and their start of learning English, Lenneberg's theory and Flege's theory were confirmed in this case. There

were just a few students who had problems with an aspiration among the group o students who started learning English at the age of ten to thirteen. Among the group of learners who started learning English when they were twenty-five years old or older, there was quite a big number of students having problems with an aspiration. In this stage of my study research, both Lenneberg"s and Flege's hypotheses can be confirmed.

In the area of distinguishing between /v/ and /w/ is also strong confirmation by David Lenneberg's theory as well as Flege's hypothesis.

If we look at overall picture, most of the cases I studied, both David Lenneberg"s and Flege's theories were confirmed. The only case where it was not confirmed was in the case of pronunciation of /r/ sound. It is a question if /r/ sound is specific somehow in the area of other sounds. As there are many other factors influencing the final pronunciation of sounds, we cannot say exactly why in this case a theory was not confirmed.

My hypothesis was confirmed, too, as generally, people who started learning English, really have better pronunciation of English sounds. Their pronunciation is closer to native-like pronunciation compared with the students who started learning English later in their lives.

Next step is the area of the correlation between the students' perception and their actual pronunciation. In the field of /th/ sound correlation was quite weak. There were quite a lot of students who perceived their pronunciation as very good and finally, their actual production of /th/ sound was quite weak and very far from a native-like production. In this field, my theory was not confirmed.

In the area of pronunciation of /r/ sound and own perception of students, there was a strong correlation. There were approximate the same numbers of students who perceived themselves as very good in production of language and their final production of /r/ sound was really good. It was the same for the opposite aspect of this research that students who perceived themselves as bad, really pronounced /r/ sound very far from its native-like form and very close to Czech /r/ sound. In this case, my theory was confirmed and the perception of students and their actual production corresponded.

In the area of the relation between an aspiration and the perception of students the correlation was also very strong and the hypothesis was confirmed in this stage of study research.

Distinguishing between /v/ and /w/ sounds were easy for Czech learners of English as I stated above. While focusing on its relation to the learners' perception there is another strong correlation as students who perceived themselves as good or very good had usually no problems while distinguishing between /v/ and /w/ sounds. On the opposite side, the situation was similar, students who perceived themselves ad bad or very bad, actually had problems while distinguishing between /v/ and /w/. We can assume that my theory was confirmed in the field of distinguishing between /v/ and /w/ and its relation to students' perception.

While focusing on the area of student's perception, my hypothesis was confirmed in three out of four cases I aimed my research at. The students who perceived themselves as bad,mostly had problem while pronouncing particular sounds. Students who perceived themselves as good or very good usually did not have problems while pronouncing the sounds.

12 Glossary:

Native language is a language the person is identified as a native speaker of.

Second language is our first non – native language. It is any language that person learns after the first language is acquired. In a lot of cases, learners never achieve the same level of both pronunciation and comprehension as in their first language.

Language acquisition is one of the basic topics in cognitive science. Every cognition theory has tried to explain the term, and probably no other topic has raised such controversy. Having a language is the essential human feature: all humans speak, no animal does. As Steven Pinker, a well – known linguist who dedicated a few of his works to the topic of language acquisition noted: "Language is the most important mean by which we know about other people's thoughts, and the two must be intimately related. Every time we speak we are revealing something about language, so the facts of language structure are easy to come by, these data hint at a system of extraordinary complexity. Nonetheless, learning a first language is something every child does successfully, in a matter of a few years and without the need for formal lessons. With language so close to the core of what it means to be human, it is not surprising that children's acquisition of language has received so much attention. Anyone with strong views about the human mind would like to show that children's first few steps are steps in the right direction. "

Learning is an active process, a cognitive process. It is a conscious activity that raises the capacity and willingness of individual people, groups, organizations and communities to acquire and usefully apply new skills and knowledge and to adapt to changes and new challenges. Learning enables both individuals and groups to make wise choices and solve problems successfully. It is long-term, lifelong, renewable process. Learning contains academic studies, but it also includes physical, cognitive, emotional and social development of children in their earliest years of their lives.

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Second Language Research: http://slr.sagepub.com/

14 Appendices

A sample of the questionnaire is presented in a few next pages.

Questionnaire for English Learners

1. What is your present age?

    a) 20 – 24 years old

    b) 25 – 30 years old

    c) 30 – 35 years old

    d) 35 – 40 years old

    e) older than 40 years old

2. a) Male

    b) Female

3. Please state attained level of your education:

    a) Basic

    b) Secondary

    c) University

    d) Postgraduate

4. Can you describe your present job?

5. How long have you been studying English?

   _____ year (s)

6. How old were you when you started learning English?

    a) Younger than 10 years old

    b) 10 – 13 years old

    c) 14 – 18 years old

    d) 18 – 20 years old

    e) 20 – 25 years old

    f) Older than 25 years old

7. Did you have English lessons at the elementary school?

    a) Yes

    b) No

   If so, how often did you have English lessons at your basic school?

   a) Once a week

   b) Twice a week

   c) Three times a week

   d) More than three times a week

8. Did you have English lessons at the secondary school?

    a) Yes

    b) No

If so, how often did you have English lessons at the secondary school?

     c) Once a week

     d) Twice a week

     e) Three times a week

     f) More that three times a week

9. Did you have English lessons at the university?

     a) Yes

     b) No

If so, how often did you have English lesson at the university?

     c) Once a week

     d) Twice a week

     e) Three times a week

     f) More than three times a week

10. Do you perceive yourself as good at learning languages?

11. How long have you been attending English courses at work?

     a) Less than 6 months

     b) 6 months – 1 year

     c) 1 year – 2 years

     d) 2 – 4 years

     e) More than 4 years

12. How many students are there in your English lesson at work?

    a) 1 student (individual course)

    b) 2 – 3 students

    c) 4 – 5 students

    d) 6 – 8 students

13. Which language other than English do you speak?

14. At what age did you start learning this language?

    a) Younger than 10 years

    b) 10 – 13 years

    c) 14 – 18 years

    d) 18 – 20 years

    e) 20 – 25 years

    f) Older than 25 years

15. Why are you studying English? Do you need it at work? Do you have other reasons for studying English? Please, specify.

16. Do you often learn English outside classroom? (watching English films or documentaries, listening to the news or radio in English,..)

17. Have you ever stayed in an English speaking country for any significant length of time? If yes, do you think it helped you with your English? Please, specify.

18. Is any English spoken at home from time to time?

19. Which specific pronunciation problems do you think you have?

20. How would you describe your perception of English- speaking culture?

      a) indifferent

      b) occasionally interested

      c) interested

      d) enthusiastic