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## Diplomová práce

Identifying Specific Pronunciation Errors Produced by Czech Learners of  
English as a Foreign Language

Diagnostika specifických chyb českých studentů angličtiny ve výslovnosti

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## **Abstract**

This diploma thesis concentrates on typical pronunciation errors faced by intermediate Czech learners of English, specifically on word stress and reduction of unstressed syllables (weak forms). In order to analyse these aspects, a project was designed based on recording a sample of 33 first-year English language students at the Pedagogická fakulta in České Budějovice, and a survey was conducted on the learners' attitudes and experiences in pronunciation learning. Two types of speech were recorded (reading an unseen text and spontaneous oral expression) and subsequently analysed. As the Czech language has a different system of word stress and the reduced forms do not exist, it was presumed that interference will be detected from the mother tongue in the field of word stress and there will be prevalence of the strong forms of grammatical words.

Tato diplomová práce se zabývá typickými chybami středně pokročilých českých studentů/studentek angličtiny, konkrétně slovním přízvukem a redukcí nepřízvučných slabik. Jako hlavní nástroj výzkumu byl autorkou práce navržen postup založený na nahrávání ústního projevu 33 studentek/studentů prvního ročníku oboru Anglický jazyk na Pedagogické fakultě v Českých Budějovicích a rovněž také dotazník, jehož úkolem bylo zjistit zkušenosti studujících a jejich postoj k výuce výslovnosti. Byly nahrávány dva typy ústního projevu: čtení neznámého textu a spontánní projev (konverzace). Jelikož český jazyk se od anglického liší v systému slovního přízvuku a nepřízvučné slabiky se v češtině neredukují, předpokládalo se, že bude identifikována interference z mateřského jazyka v oblasti slovního přízvuku a dále, že zkoumaný vzorek studentů bude upřednostňovat plné formy slabik před redukovanými.

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## 1. Introduction

Before starting to study English at the university, I had thought that learning a foreign language meant to do mainly grammar (or morphology) and lexicology. A big surprise and confusion came with the first classes of the Phonetics course in the first semester. I realised that this was something completely new for me and I could not understand why, after some six years of studying English before, I had not heard of anything such as individual sounds and how they differ from the Czech ones; or schwa or word stress in English. I became interested in accents and pronunciation in general and also in the people's ability (or lack of ability) to learn a native accent in particular, not only in English but also in German which is my second subject. I had realized that this is a field which has been vastly neglected at Czech primary and secondary schools and when it came to the diploma thesis, I decided to design a project that would help to find out students' awareness and pronunciation shortcomings.

As phonetics is a very complex field, I needed to determine on what specific problem(s) my project will focus. After considering the possibilities and resources, I decided to concentrate on suprasegmental features - word stress and weak forms problems - because I believed they may be problematic for Czech learners. As these two features of English differ largely from Czech (details will be presented in the theoretical basis) I had presumed that there will be shortcomings detected that may be caused by the interference from Czech.

My hypotheses for this diploma thesis are as follows:

- 1. There will be interference detected from the mother tongue in words stress patterns – with learners stressing the first syllables in words as in Czech**
- 2. There will be prevalence for using strong forms of grammatical words in positions where native speakers would normally use weak forms**

Concerning the theoretical basis for this diploma thesis, firstly, I will try to bring an overview of history, methods and approaches that have been used in pronunciation

teaching. Secondly, I am going to bring the theory background on word stress and weak forms in English (I will use mainly theoretical books on English phonetics by P. Roach, A. Skalickova) and I am also going to describe these two features concerning Czech. For this purpose I am going to use a theoretical book on Czech phonetics (by Z. Palkova). For the review of history and methods I will mainly use books on Pronunciation Teaching (by Celce-Murcia, J. Harmer). Unfortunately, there are almost no sources which would deal with the problem of English pronunciation of Czech learners specifically (except from a small section introduced by Skalickova) so I will not be able to bring any detailed theoretical basis of the specific problems of Czech learners.

The actual practical part consists of two distinct but related approaches: *a survey* based on a questionnaire designed to test some of the issues arising from the theory part and *recordings* for the analysis of errors.

As for the target population of this study, I was allowed by the supervisor of this diploma thesis to work with her first-year students of Practical Language Course (winter semester 2009). My convenient sample consisted of 33 randomly chosen first-year students at the English Department.

To get source materials for the analysis, I needed to record two types of the learners' production: reading an unseen text and spontaneous oral production. The recording part was carried out in November 2009, during four Practical Language classes at Pedagogická fakulta. My analysis of the recordings was carried out in 2010.

Detailed information about the process of the recording and analysing, criteria, methodology and the actual processes used will be presented in the second – practical - part of this diploma thesis together with the findings and observations resulting from the analysis and also results concerning the hypotheses.

At the very end of this diploma thesis there will be an Appendix section with additional information I consider to be important concerning the topic. There will be - among others - detailed lists of the weak forms and word stress problems identified and explanation of some of the terms used in this diploma thesis.



## 2. PART I

### 2.1 History and methods of pronunciation teaching

In spite of language teaching having a very rich and long history, pronunciation teaching is an area that has been on the periphery of the linguists' interest for a long time. The majority of philologists and linguists have focused mainly on grammar or vocabulary, and these areas have been studied and developed since the beginning of modern language teaching which began in the seventeenth century when Latin became the leading language of science and education. By comparison, pronunciation teaching is a relatively "young" branch for it has been systematically studied only since the twentieth century. This is a consequence of the development of foreign language teaching and its methods as a whole: since the beginning of the foreign language teaching, there has been a whole variety of methods and approaches neither of which considered pronunciation teaching as relevant as grammar or vocabulary.

In some cases such as in the Grammar Translation Method, pronunciation was considered to be even largely irrelevant because the foreign language (L2) was taught through the mother tongue of the learners (L1) and focused attention on the grammatical rules and translation from the L1 to the L2 and vice versa while there was just little if any consideration of the spoken language.

Two general approaches have been developed: *an intuitive-imitative approach* and *an analytic-linguistic approach* (Celce-Murcia, 1996). The intuitive-imitative approach is based on "the learner's ability to listen to and imitate the rhythms and sounds of the target language without the intervention of any explicit information" (Celce-Murcia, 1996: 2), which means that the learner doesn't need to know the system, (function or description of articulators, etc.) but should try to imitate a model given by the teacher or by a recording of authentic speech. The analytic-linguistic approach, on the other hand, is based on "information and tools such as a phonetic alphabet, articulatory descriptions, charts of the vocal apparatus, contrastive information and other aids to supplement listening, imitation, and production." (Celce-Murcia, 1996: 2).

Celce – Murcia (1996) puts forward that these two approaches are meant to complement each other rather than be understood as two independent ways of pronunciation teaching and the practice phase should go hand in hand with additional phonetic information.

### **2.1.1 The Reform Movement and Direct Method**

The reform movement reacted to the deficiencies and restrictions of Grammar-Translation, which was an integral part of the foreign-language school curricula in the nineteenth century. This movement is considered to be the first linguistic contribution to the pronunciation teaching. It was influenced by phoneticians who founded the International Phonetic Association in 1886 and are authors of the International Phonetic Alphabet. They also formulated notions about pronunciation teaching, as mentioned by Celce-Murcia (1996: 3):

- the spoken form of language is primary and should be taught first
- the findings of phonetics should be applied to language teaching
- teachers must have solid training in phonetics
- learners should be given phonetic training to establish good speech habits

According to Celce-Murcia (1996), the direct method came as a consequence of the reform movement at the end of the nineteenth century. The translation and using the L1 were considered unwanted and the target language was believed to be the only one used in the classroom and thereby the importance of pronunciation teaching was raised. In direct method the pronunciation was taught through constant imitation and repetition, the students listened to the teacher or records and imitated the sounds as well as they could. This was based on the experience that children acquire their native language and its phonetics just through imitation of their parents and/or teachers and without any instructions. Successors of the direct method developed a number of so-called naturalistic methods whose principal premise was that there should be a purely “listening” period before the learners start to use the language actively.

### **2.1.2 Audiolingualism and Oral Approach**

The Direct method was followed by, among others, two approaches of Audiolingualism in the United States and the Oral Approach in Britain. According to Harmer (2007), Audiolingualism developed from the Direct method in the United States under the influence of behaviourists in the 1920's and 1930's and the Oral Approach came about ten years later. According to Celce-Murcia (1996), in both approaches the pronunciation is considered to be very important and it should be taught from the very beginning. Concerning pronunciation, the main importance lay in the imitation and repetition but, in addition to this, the teachers tried to make use of phonetic information

and description of ways of articulation. Attention was paid to accuracy of the production of sounds. The teachers used the “minimal pair drill” which is based on a drill of word pairs that differ in one phoneme such as: *sheep – ship, sleep-slip* etc. As Celce-Murcia (1996) mentions, by using minimal pairs the learners practice also their listening skills, especially in such exercises where the teacher (or a record) gives the students words and they have to discriminate which sound out of two is being produced.

### **2.1.3 The Silent Way**

The pronunciation teaching re-gained its significance during the 1970’s. Celce-Murcia (1996) characterizes this method as focusing on accuracy of production of both the sounds and structures of the target language from the very beginning of instruction. Attention was paid not only to the individual sounds but also to the suprasegmental features of language such as blending, stress or intonation. In contrast to Audiolingualism, the Silent Way doesn’t need to teach the phonetic alphabet or additional linguistic information.

According to Harmer (2007) the most notable characteristic of the Silent Way is that the teacher speaks as little as possible and communicates with learners through nonverbal instructions and gestures and uses a variety of charts which work with sounds and colours. The founder of the method Caleb Gattegno developed the so-called sound-colour chart which contained all the vowel and consonant sounds and which was used for learning the sounds and words. Gattegno believed that learning is more effective if the learner discovers the language and its patterns than if he/she just memorizes the rules.

### **2.1.4 Community Language Learning (CLL)**

Celce-Murcia (1996) describes this approach as intuitive-imitative. The key tool of this method is a tape recorder which records the student’s utterances which had been practiced with the teacher. In the next phase, the utterance is played back and, if the learner wishes, practiced further with the help of the teacher until the learner is satisfied with his/her pronunciation. Celce-Murcia (1996) appreciates the treatment of pronunciation in CLL as the recording provides an immediate comparison of the learner’s pronunciation with the one of the teacher and also that the progress (in pronunciation) is controlled by the learners themselves rather than by the teacher.

## **2.2 The Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) and Pronunciation teaching today**

The Communicative Language Teaching (or the Communicative Approach) has been the dominant approach since the 1980's. Since the primary instrument and also aim of this method is communication, it gives new impulses and brings urgency to the pronunciation teaching again. As Harmer (2007) asserts, activities in Communicative Language Teaching typically involve students in more or less realistic communication where the intelligibility of their oral production is of the same importance as the accuracy of their language use, yet, some teachers make little attempt to teach pronunciation in an overt way and on a regular basis.

A question that needs to be answered is: how good should the learners' pronunciation be? According to Harmer (2007), the degree to which learners acquire native-like pronunciation depends on their attitude to how they speak and how well they hear. Harmer (2007) and Celce-Murcia (1996) agree that there is no need to sound like a native speaker of a prestige variety of English (since there are only a few gifted and pronunciation-oriented learners who are able to acquire a near-native like pronunciation) but the learners should be able to use pronunciation on such a level that they will be always understood. If the pronunciation is not on this level it is possible that they will fail to communicate effectively.

If the intelligibility of pronunciation is the goal, Harmer (2007) suggests that some pronunciation features are more important than others. Concerning individual sounds, a lot depends on the context which helps the listener to understand the intention of the speaker. The suprasegmental features, such as stress and intonation, on the other hand, are vital to be "produced" and thus the utterance understood correctly.

Since the beginning of the Communicative Approach, there have been debates whether the segmental or suprasegmental features are more important. Celce-Murcia (1996: 10) says that the recent view on this problematic area considers "both an inability to distinguish sounds that carry a high functional load (such as in *list* and *least*) and an inability to distinguish suprasegmental features (such as intonation and stress)" can have a negative impact not only on the communication but also the ability to understand native speakers. As Celce-Murcia (1996) posits, recent pronunciation curricula thus tend to

balance suprasegmental and segmental features, choosing the most important aspects from both and integrating them into English language courses.

### **2.3 Acquisition of correct (native-like) pronunciation and factors which influence it**

The methodology of pronunciation teaching has experienced many different “ways to go” as the whole ESL (English as Second Language) teaching. Concerning pronunciation, there is still no clear consensus on how exactly the teachers should proceed. Celce-Murcia (1996: 14) names several factors which she considers of crucial importance for effective pronunciation teaching. These factors are: “the learner’s age, exposure to the target language, amount and type of prior second language instruction, aptitude, attitude and motivation, and the role of the learner’s first language and its impact on the phonological acquisition of a second language.” Harmer (2007) adds to these factors intelligence and individual differences such as kind (or kinds) of intelligence that a person possesses (originally introduced by Howard Gardner). Some of them (such as age or amount or type of prior L2 instructions) we can hardly influence but over others (such as the learners’ attitude and motivation) we have more control and thus more influence on our students.

From this author’s own experience, there are two other important factors that influence pronunciation: a musical talent of a learner, and thus particular “sensitivity” to hear sometimes very subtle differences not only in pronunciation of individual sounds but also in intonation or stress, and some kind of a willingness to learn to say the word (or a sentence) in a native-like way without feeling uncomfortable among other learners or even in front of the teacher. Some learners have actually problems accepting that the foreign language they are studying disposes of a (more or less) different scale of sounds than their native language. This problem we can see more in adult learners and adolescents rather than in children. In this author’s experience, adult learners also tend to reject pronunciation instruction as something useless or as kind of a “vain fight” and they are often reluctant to cooperate on pronunciation exercises.

In the following chapter, this author decided to focus only on several factors that influence pronunciation although there are more. Within the scope of the practical part of this diploma thesis (the survey), this author decided to focus only on two factors (age, amount and type of prior instruction).

### **2.3.1 Exposure to the target language**

As Celce-Murcia (1996) asserts, learners' exposure to the target language and, especially in case of acquiring correct (or native-like) pronunciation, native input seems to be a critical factor for their success. When there is no possibility to have a native teacher (which is quite a common case in the Czech Republic), the non-native teacher is called upon to provide an adequate model of the target language with help of samples of the authentic native language in the recordings, video clips etc. In summary, "the teacher should try to maximize the students' exposure to the target language and encourage them to expand their own domains of linguistic competence, stressing the importance of language exposure in the process of acquiring all aspects of language: pronunciation, grammar, and vocabulary." Celce-Murcia (1996: 17)

### **2.3.2 Amount and Type of Prior Pronunciation Instruction**

Except for complete beginners, students usually have had prior exposure to English, either while learning it at school (or other institution) or as a self-study attempt. This author's experience is that majority of Czech students (or the students she has dealt with) received pronunciation instructions either in the form of drilling and repeating after the teacher, or they have just heard the correct form of a particular structure once or twice (and sometimes not even said correctly), or pronunciation has not been explicitly dealt with at all and thus the students have not been aware of their errors.

In cases of self-tutoring, the students often do not have any proper pronunciation model and as a result completely wrong pronunciation of a large number of words which became "embedded". In every case, these fossilized errors that are somehow "settled" in the learners' minds are really difficult to unlearn. On this account, Celce-Murcia (1996) states that the teachers are supposed to deal with embedded pronunciation errors at any level of proficiency and the techniques used to unlearn these errors must be adjusted to types of problems discovered among the learners.

### **2.3.3 Aptitude, Attitude and Motivation**

Carroll (1962, 1981) determined four features that constitute language intelligence (aptitude). Among those we consider two of the main importance for acquiring correct pronunciation.

These are:

- Phonemic coding ability: an ability to discriminate and remember foreign sounds in a way they can be recalled
- Memory: the amount of learning activity needed to internalize something (a new sound, pronunciation or spelling of word etc.)

It is presumed that learners with weak phonemic coding ability will tend to have problems with acquiring correct pronunciation and they may not be able to achieve the same level as the more gifted counterparts. It does not mean, however, that weaker learners will be automatically weak in other language skills. As Guiora (1972) posits, accent and pronunciation are unique features of language and there lies the reason for possible remarkable difference between pronunciation level and level of other language skills.

The main factors that relate to attitude in second language learning are, according to Krashen (1981), those that encourage the desire to communicate with native speakers and thus absorb the necessary input in L2 and then utilize it. Utilization of the language (and its pronunciation) means to be “open” to it and unafraid to try it, because hearing the foreign language only is necessary but not sufficient to acquire it.

Krashen (1981) describes two types of motivation which play role in L2 acquisition: “integrative” motivation and “instrumental” motivation. The integrative motivation can be characterized by a desire of the learner to become an indistinguishable member of a target language community. The integrative motivated learners typically do not feel a threat from the native speakers and communicate with them out of pure desire to communicate. This type of motivation is typical for children and young learners and is rather rare among adult learners, because they may consider their accent in the L2 as a feature of their personality and do not want to lose it completely. The integrative motivation seems to be to some extent similar to the “assimilative motivation”, described by Graham (1985), as a type of motivation which children have when learning their L1. The instrumental motivation, on the other hand, can be described as a desire to achieve proficiency in L2 for some practical reasons, such as job or study. These learners want to interact with the native speakers purposefully - because they want to achieve certain goals in L2. Much also depends on the intensity of each motivation because it can happen that a strongly instrumental-motivated person will achieve better results than a person with weaker integrative motivation.



Krashen (1981) also brings a number of affective and personal factors that can, to some extent, influence learners' attitude toward L2 learning, such as self-esteem, type of personality (extroverted people may be less afraid to risk and play with the foreign language), self-confidence, empathy, anxiety, sociability etc.

#### **2.3.4 Age**

Age is believed to play an important role in pronunciation acquisition. Many adult L2 learners are able to attain a native-like proficiency in grammar and syntax but the majority is not capable of reaching native-like pronunciation. The linguists named this phenomenon after Joseph Conrad ("Joseph Conrad Phenomenon"), a Polish-born British author who learned English first in his twenties. In contrast to his excellent mastering of English morphology, lexis and syntax, his English pronunciation remained for all his life rather poor with a strong Polish accent.

Linguists Penfield, Roberts (1959) and Lenneberg (1967) formulated an opinion that a critical period exists in the process of language acquisition. According to this hypothesis, there is a period in human's life around puberty after which mastering of L2 pronunciation becomes less likely. Prepubescent children with adequate exposure to a target language, on the other hand, are able to attain a perfect pronunciation with relative ease. As Celce-Murcia (1996) and Piske et.al (2001) state, recent studies propose that there are several critical periods rather than just one that influence different linguistic abilities, but the first one to be lost is the ability to attain a native-like pronunciation. If this is true, learners who start learning L2 before the critical period for pronunciation will have a better command of pronunciation than those who started learning later. Concerning pronunciation, we can say that the earlier the learner starts to "absorb" authentic L2 pronunciation the better will his/her pronunciation be.

The question is, when exactly (if it is even possible to determine) does the critical period for pronunciation start and end. Scovel (1988) suggests, that critical period for pronunciation ends at the age of twelve; Patkowski (1990) asserts that the crucial age is fifteen. Some linguists suggest that the critical period for pronunciation ends even at the age of five or six. Piske et.al (2001) mentions some studies which revealed several cases of those who began to learn L2 before the period that is believed to be critical but there was still a slight accent detected in their L2.

It is believed that the earlier learners start learning a foreign language, the better their pronunciation and the weaker their accent from their L1 will be. Piske et al. (2001), however, posits that no study yet has verified that early L2 learners will automatically speak without an accent when starting to learn before the age of about six and also, that the speech of those who started learning after puberty will certainly be foreign-accented.

### **2.3.5 The role of the native language**

The language learning groups in schools in the Czech Republic are mainly homogenous according to the nationalities of the learners. We can thus presume that the majority of Czech students will have more or less similar pronunciation difficulties in English caused by the transfer from their mother tongue – Czech.

Celce-Murcia (1996) suggests that teachers should consider three aspects when teaching pronunciation with reference to the mother tongue:

1. To what degree is the process of acquiring the L1 phonology similar to the phonological system of the L2.
2. To what degree the pronunciation patterns acquired in L1 determine the phonological acquisition of the L2 (e. g. the role of interference from the mother tongue).
3. Consider if there are any pronunciation universals that can help students in acquiring L2 pronunciation.

There have been several theories developed which deal with the hypothesis of second-language acquisition from different points of view, such as The Contrastive Analysis hypothesis, Markedness Theory, The Interlanguage Hypothesis, Error analysis and Avoidance, and others. This author will try to introduce the Contrastive Analysis Hypothesis shortly, as it refers to the survey in the practical part of this diploma thesis.

The Contrastive Analysis Hypothesis, introduced by Robert Lado in 1957 is based on the premise that a person learning a foreign language acquires the L2 through the experience and “filter” of his/her L1. Some language features and structures (in morphology, syntax and phonology) may be similar in both languages and then we speak about a “positive transfer” from the native language. When the structures in the two languages differ and the learners tend to apply features or rules from their mother tongue on the L2 that does not work, we speak about “interference” or “negative transfer”. In spite

of being firstly accepted, as it gave a valid explanation of difficulties that learners experience while learning a foreign language, it has been since challenged because of its “inability to predict the degree of difficulty learners would experience with a given item”, Celce-Murcia (1996: 20).

According to Wardhaugh (1970), the Contrastive Analysis Hypothesis which puts two different language systems in contrast exists in two versions: the weak and the strong. The strong version, simply put, expected that the contrastive analysis will be able to predict all learning problems. Later, Wardhaugh (1970) rejected this strong version and the contemporary belief that contrasting two languages will disclose principles of all mistakes made by L2 learners and claimed that it had not proved its validity. He also expressed strong doubts whether it is even possible to accomplish a Contrastive Analysis of two languages.

The weak version, on the other hand, has proved to be “helpful” and could be able to explain the cause of some (but not all) systematic language-learning errors. According to Wardhaugh (1970), we can say that negative transfer is a “significant” factor in L2 pronunciation acquisition which is likely to have a negative impact on both segmental and suprasegmental features, such as stress, intonation, rhythm, etc.

Whereas earlier research on L2 pronunciation acquisition concentrated mainly on the segmental features (pronunciation of individual vowels and consonants), the most recent research studies tend to focus on intonation, rhythm, connected speech, and voice quality.

As Celce-Mucia (1996) states, learners can have three attitudes to pronunciation that can be perceived as barriers: they either think that they just *can't change* their pronunciation (because it is not possible), or they think that they *do not need to change* it (because it is not necessary), or they may *not think it is a good idea to change it* (because of social or cultural prejudices). She also suggests that the teachers' goal in these cases is not only to try to improve their performance but, mainly, to change their attitude and provide arguments for the change.

## **2.4 Comparing the English and Czech sound systems concerning word stress and weak forms**

### **2.4.1 Word stress in English**

Word stress belongs to suprasegmental features of language, together with sentence stress, rhythm, intonation and connected speech. Some teachers could think that suprasegmental features of language are less important than the individual sounds, but as Celce-Murcia (1996: 121) confirms the suprasegmental features carry “more of the overall meaning load” than segmental features and can be the main cause of the misunderstanding of an utterance in spite of the individual sounds being pronounced correctly.

#### **2.4.1.1 Characteristic of stressed syllables**

Roach (1991) distinguished two ways of how stress can be characterized. Stress can be described either from the view of the speaker – what does the speaker do when producing stressed syllables or from the view of the listener – what make a syllable to be heard as stressed. Stress can be generally described as using more muscular energy while pronouncing a particular (stressed) syllable than is used for other (unstressed) syllables.

From the point of view of the listener, Roach (1991) asserts that all stressed syllables have one typical feature in common and that is *prominence*. It means that stressed syllables are more prominent than the unstressed ones in these four aspects: *loudness, length, pitch and quality*. Celce-Murcia (1996: 131) defines stressed syllables as those that are “longer, louder and higher in pitch” but they do not necessarily need to occur in this entire combination in each word.

Concerning loudness, we can say, that if one syllable is pronounced louder than others within a word, we will perceive it as being stressed. Roach (1991) notices however, that it is difficult to change loudness of a syllable without changing its other prominence characteristics. In other words, loudness by itself does not make a syllable stressed.

The length is the next important feature of stressed syllables because if we make one syllable longer than the others within a word, it will be heard by the listeners as stressed.

The pitch being the third important feature of stress is a voice level that helps us recognize the stressed syllables. Roach (1991: 86) asserts: “if all syllables are said with low pitch except for one said with high pitch, then the high-pitched syllable will be heard as stressed and the others as unstressed.”

The last feature in prominence is the quality of a vowel in relation to other vowels within a word, especially, when in English the weak forms of vowels (e.g. ə, ʊ, etc.) occur very often. As Roach (1991) says, these weak vowels are by their nature unstressed and thus indicate the stressed vowels standing in an “opposition” to them.

According to Roach (1991), these four factors are not equally important. From the listener’s point of view, the most important features of stress are probably the length of vowels in stressed syllables and the level of pitch. Loudness and quality, on the other hand, have less effect on stress.

#### **2.4.1.2 Levels of stress**

As Celce-Murcia’s (1996) theories inform us the difference between stressed and unstressed syllables is greater in English than in some other languages and thus English has more differentiated stress patterns. That means there are not just “stressed” and “unstressed” syllables but there are more levels of stress. Celce-Murcia (1996) speaks about three different stress levels: strong, medial and weak. For pedagogical purposes, it is enough to work with three levels of stress in a syllable: strongly stressed, lightly stressed and unstressed syllables.

Roach (1991) also divides word stress into three levels: primary, secondary and unstressed (but he admits that further division is possible). The primary stress is the strongest one, which results from the pitch movement; it means that the stressed syllable has a different tone than the others. In multisyllabic words we can also find a type of stress that we perceive as weaker than primary stress but yet stronger than that in an unstressed syllable. This type of stress is called secondary stress. The third, unstressed level as described by Roach (1991: 87) as an ‘absence of any recognisable amount of prominence’.

For many students the most confusing feature of the English word stress is that it can occur on any syllable. This is caused by historical reasons and influences of other foreign languages, such as French, Greek or Latin.

### 2.4.1.3 Stress placement in simple words

There are several factors that influence stress placement in words. According to Celce-Murcia (1996) the most significant factors are: historical origin of a word (Germanic or other), affixation and the grammatical function of the word in an utterance. Roach (1991) also mentions what should be considered when deciding about word stress. We should pay attention to the following: whether it is a simple or compound word; what part of speech it is; the number of syllables and their phonological structure (one-syllabic words have always primary stress).

According to Celce-Murcia (1996), the first syllable is usually stressed in Germanic two-syllabic words (as in *'father'*, *'water'* etc.) This, for English natural stress pattern, is followed today even by some words that entered English through French and other languages (such as *'doctor'* or *'visit'*).

Roach (1991: 89-90) divides two- and three- syllabic words according to the word classes and puts the rules as follows:

- In ***two-syllabic verbs***, the stress placement depends on which syllable contains a long vowel or diphthong: “if the second syllable contains a long vowel or diphthong, or if it ends with more than one consonant, that second syllable is stressed” (such as in *'apply'* or *'arrive'*), “if the final syllable contains a short vowel and one (or no) final consonant, the first syllable is stressed” (such as in *'open'* or *'enter'*). Final syllables are also unstressed, if they contain ‘əʊ’ (as in *'follow'*)
- For ***two-syllabic adjectives***, the same rule is valid as for the verbs, although some exceptions exist.
- For ***two-syllabic nouns*** the rule is different: “if the second syllable contains a short vowel the stress will usually come on the first syllable” (as in *'money'*); “otherwise it will be on the second syllable”.
- In ***three-syllabic verbs*** the rule is as follows: “if the last syllable contains a short vowel and ends with not more than one consonant, that syllable will be unstressed, and stress will be placed on the preceding (penultimate) syllable”, as in *'encounter'*. “If the final syllable contains a long vowel or diphthong, or ends with more than one consonant, that final syllable will be stressed”, as in *'entertain'*.
- ***Nouns consisting of three syllables*** tend to follow a different rule: “if the final syllable contains a short vowel or əʊ, it is unstressed”; “if the syllable preceding

this final syllable contains a long vowel or diphthong, or if it ends with more than one consonant, that middle syllable will be stressed” (as for example in ‘*potato*’). “If the final syllable contains a short vowel and the middle syllable contains a short vowel and ends with not more than one consonant, both final and middle syllables are unstressed and the first syllable is stressed” (as for example in ‘*quantity*’).

- There is one more rule for some **three-syllabic simple nouns** and **adjectives**: if the final syllable contains a long vowel or a diphthong or ends with more than one consonant, the stress is usually placed on the first syllable. The last syllable is also usually quite prominent so these words tend to have secondary stress (as for example in ‘*intellect*’).

As Roach (1991) asserts, these rules are broad general, do not cover all English words, and there is a large number of exceptions to them. Some English words even have two alternatives of the possible stress pattern and other words can change their stress patterns according to the context.

Since the matter of stress seems to be a highly complicated one, it can lead to persuasion that, instead of studying all the complicated rules and exceptions it may be easier for learners to acquire the correct word stress pattern when learning each new word. However, despite being not as predictable as it is in other languages, word stress in English should be not considered as system without any rules, in this author’s opinion.

#### **2.4.1.4 Stress placement in complex words**

Complex words are words that contain more than one grammatical unit (which is usually stem + suffix/prefix). According to Roach (1991), majority of English polysyllabic words have their origin in other languages, whose way of constructing words is easily recognisable, such as Greek prefixes *mono-*, *micro-*, *dia-*, etc. He also notes, that the difference between a complex and a simple word is often not clear and some words can be difficult to determine as one or another.

Roach (1991) divides complex words into: words containing a simple stem with and affix, or compound words made of two or more independent English words.

### **Affix words**

Affixes in English are either *prefixes*, which come before the stem or *suffixes* which come after the stem of a word. Roach (1991) specifies three possible effects of affixes on word stress: the affix itself is the carrier of the primary stress; or the word is stressed as if the affix was not there; or the stem remains stressed but the stress shifts to a different syllable in a word.

### **Prefixes**

Roach (1991) states that concerning word stress, words with prefixes should be treated the same way as words without prefixes because of lack of regularity and predictability of their word stress.

Celce-Murcia (1996) states that words with prefixes usually have the first syllables of their stems strongly stressed. Thus the prefixes often remain either unstressed or lightly stressed. She also divides prefixes into these of English origin and Latinate origin. The originally Germanic prefixes *a-*, *be-*, *for-* and *with-* are always unstressed whereas others (e.g. *mis-*, *un-*, *under-* etc.) are usually lightly stressed. An exception to this pattern occurs in words with these prefixes that function as nouns. In these nouns, the prefix tends to be strongly stressed whereas the noun is only lightly stressed.

The words with Latinate prefixes (e.g. *ex-*, *dis-*, *in-*, *pre-*, *sub-* and many others) also receive strong stress on the stem. However, unlike Germanic prefixes, majority of Latinate prefixes remain unstressed when forming a part of a verb.

### **Suffixes**

According to Celce-Murcia (1996) and Roach (1991), suffixes influence word stress in three possible ways: they have either no effect on the stress of the stem (e.g. *-able*, *-ful*, *-ing*, *-less*, *-ment* and many others); or they carry a strong stress themselves (these are the suffixes that came into English from French, e.g. *-ee*, *-eer*, *-naire*, *-ese*, *-ain*, *-ette* etc.); or they can cause a shift of the stress in stem from one syllable to another (e.g. *-eous*, *-ious*, *-ion*, *-ial*, etc.).

Celce-Murcia (1996) also notes that in English it is possible to have a word with a different origin of stem and suffix and then the suffixes are those who determine the English stress patterns.



### 2.4.1.5 Compound words

Compound words consist usually of two words which can also exist as independent words. Concerning primary stress, the question is when it is on the first word of the compound and when on the second one. Roach (1991) sets several rules for compounds:

- If the compound consists of two nouns or an adjective plus a noun, the primary stress is usually on the first element (e.g. 'typewriter', 'blackboard'); however, this rule is not completely reliable, and there are compounds where the first word is an adjective and the second has an *-ed* morpheme which has the second element stressed (e.g. 'bad-tempered').
- Compounds where the first element is a number tend to have stress on the second element (e.g. 'four-wheeler').
- Compounds functioning as adverbs are usually stressed on the second element (e.g. 'South-East').
- Verb compounds whose first element is an adverb also have final stress (e.g. 'ill-treat').

### 2.4.2 Weak forms in English

The existence of weak syllables (and thus weak forms) is one of the most noticeable features of English. The weak forms of syllables stand in opposition to their full, strong forms in pronunciation. Concerning what does "weak" and "strong" actually mean, Skalickova (1982) asserts that in English some frequently used words (e.g. articles, pronouns, prepositions, conjunctions, adverbs and auxiliary verbs) have two or even more ways of pronunciation (Skalickova uses for this phenomenon the term "gradation"). In their *strong* forms, all the vowels are pronounced fully, without any quality reduction. This form is found in dictionaries and is typical when using the words as isolated items of vocabulary but rarely occurs in connected speech. In the *weak* forms of words, on the other hand, the vowels are reduced and it changes them in quality and quantity (some syllables even disappear). Weak forms are typical for connected speech when used in a context of a sentence.

From the experience of this author, the strong forms are preferred by the learners for some reasons, and in spite their usage not being a mistake it can cause difficulties. As Roach (1991) explains, it is possible to use strong forms of words exclusively and be still understood by native speakers (or other speakers of English), but there are two reasons that speak for the usage of weak forms: firstly, since the native speakers use weak forms, the

learners using strong forms only would sound unnatural and foreign to them. Secondly, if learners are not familiar with weak forms or do not use them, they very often have problems hearing and understanding what the native speakers (or any speakers who do use them) say, because they expect to hear the strong forms. The learners should be encouraged to use weak forms because if they do so, they will also understand them in other people's speech and it can dramatically improve their listening skills and comprehension of spoken English.

Roach (1991) says that there are about forty words in English that exist in both strong and weak forms and he calls them "function words". Skalickova (1982) brings in a list of fifty-six most important words, and Roach (1991) a list of about forty words, which occur in weak forms. All these words can be pronounced in both weak and strong form but there are certain contexts where only the *strong* form can be used and other where it is common to use their *weak* variation.

Roach (1991) describes four simple rules for the usage of strong forms:

- when being at the end of a sentence, whereas some of the words (such as *the*, *and*, *your* etc.) never occur at the end of a sentence. However, some words (particularly some pronouns) can occur in weak forms even at the end of a sentence. (e.g. *I've met her'*).
- when we want to contrast the word with another word
- when we want to put emphasis on a particular word
- when quoting a word

As it has been already said, weak forms are unstressed function words, which occur in the stream of speech. Celce-Murcia (1996: 230) mentions three types of reduction of unstressed syllables in speech:

- loss of an initial consonant sound (e.g. *his* /ɪz/)
- loss of a final consonant (e.g. *and* /ən/)
- the weakening of the internal vowel to /ə/ (e.g. *can* /kən/)

### 2.4.3 Reduced vowels: schwa

Reduction of vowels is a typical feature of English pronunciation. By far the most common reduced vowel is the “*schwa*” or “*mixed vowel*” which is often found in English unstressed syllables. Schwa can be described as a mid-central, reduced vowel.

Regarding its function, this sound does not have an equivalent in Czech; however, the production of the sound itself should not cause great problems to Czech learners of English (it occurs e.g. when saying the Czech letters: *bə*, *cə*, *də*, etc.). What may cause problems, is pronouncing weak syllables in speech, since the weak forms do not exist in Czech. According to this author’s reasoning, Czech speakers tend to use full forms of syllables in the places where native speakers use the weak forms with schwa

Roach (1991) asserts that schwa is the most frequent vowel in English. It is always connected with weak syllables and described as mid, central, lax vowel (it means not articulated with much energy). The quality of schwa is not always the same but the variations are, as Roach says, not so important.

Celce-Murcia (1996: 108) describes schwa as “produced with the mouth- muscles relaxed, tongue in mid-position in the mouth, and the jaw slightly open.”

According to Skalickova (1982: 68), schwa is a “mid-vowel with neutral lip position”; she also defines it as “*non-A, non-E, non-I, non-O, non- U*”, with a number of variables depending on its surrounding consonants. Because, as already mentioned, schwa is typical for unstressed syllables and it can replace any stressed vocal element with a change of stress in words.

### 2.4.4 Word stress in Czech

As mentioned above, word stress in English is movable and is considered to be one of the features of a particular word. It can also distinguish the meaning of a word (e.g. *'black'bird* vs. *'blackbird*'). As in English, word stress in Czech is a complex feature and the prominence is made with help of several different qualities of the sound.

According to Palkova (1997), the primary stress is in Czech always fixed on the first syllable of a word and it does not have the ability to distinguish words’ meaning. Palkova (1997) further asserts that word stress in Czech functions as a word-boundary and thus has a delimitative function; in other words, Czech stress helps us to recognize where the individual word begins within a connected speech. However, Czech speakers *do not need*

*to make use* of this function when speaking because they are usually understood by others with help of the context.

It is important to say, that word stress in Czech is technically on the first syllable but within a sentence it depends largely on the character of the neighbouring syllables. As Palkova (1997) posits, the first-syllable stress in Czech becomes more obvious when Czech speakers want to pronounce a sentence with a special emphasis on words; then the first syllables of polysyllabic and vowels in one-syllabic words become prominent. In a regular speech *the prominence of the first syllable is usually not very strong*. We can say that isolated words in Czech are stressed on the first syllable but in connected speech some words (polysyllabic words) are pronounced separately (with more or less clear boundaries of the word) whereas other words (one-syllabic words) tend to join neighbouring words and create tacts as in music.

According to Palkova (1997) there is a tendency in Czech to avoid pronouncing one-syllabic words as independent units but linking them to other words. This tendency is to be seen in many languages and the purpose is the rhythm of a language.

As in English, the Czech words also have a secondary stress which, as Palkova (1997) asserts, is on the third syllable of a word, and generally on every uneven syllable. However, this stress is considered to be optional and in a speech of common fluency and rhythm it is usually not obvious at all.

#### **2.4.5 Weak forms and Czech**

Weak forms do not occur in Czech pronunciation. There is no reduction in non-stressed syllables as in English; the vowels in unstressed, grammatical and other words remain pronounced fully under any circumstances.

## 2.5 The most frequent mistakes in pronunciation produced by Czech learners (According to Skalickova, 1982)

This summary of the most frequent mistakes in pronunciation by A. Skalickova which deals with mistakes of Czech speakers of English specifically seems to be a unique one.

By doing this research this author discovered there was a distinct lack of work related to specific Czech problems. The following section is a translation of this author from Czech and brings an overview of the most frequent mistakes in pronunciation of vowels and in rhythm.

### 2.5.1 Mistakes in pronunciation of vowels

1. Mistakes in the length of the vowel elements. Czech learners don't pay enough attention to the length of vowels according to the influence of the following consonants. The Czech vowels have two levels of length – short and long, whereas English vowels have three levels – short, mid-long, and long. Czech speakers of English tend to pronounce English short and mid-long vowels as Czech short vowels (as in *'bet'*, *'bed'*), or mid-long and long vowels as Czech long vowels (as in *'beat'*, *'bead'*).
2. Mistakes in the timbre of vowels. In Czech the timbre of vowels is not so important, hence Czech speakers do not distinguish between the different qualities of vowels in similar words, (e.g. *'should'* vs. *'shoot'*).
3. Czech speakers do not reduce vowels in unstressed syllables. The reason is that the Czech vowels do not have reduced forms and are also pronounced fully in unstressed syllables. Czech speakers tend to substitute English 'ə' with Czech 'e' (e.g. as in *'address'*).
4. Czech speakers tend to pronounce 'r' after vowels diphthongs (e.g. *'her'*, *'our'* etc.), or they at least tend to colour the syllable with 'r' as in American accent (although they do not speak with American accent apart from this).
5. Czech speakers tend to pronounce English 'ɜ:' and 'ɛə' as Czech 'é' (e.g. *'err'*, *'air'*).
6. Czech speakers often pronounce English diphthongs 'aɪ, eɪ, oɪ' as Czech 'aj, ej, oj'.
7. Czech speakers often pronounce the English diphthong 'əʊ' as Czech 'ou'.

### 2.5.2 Mistakes in rhythm

1. Czech speakers often make English syllables as short as the Czech ones. But as Skalickova (1982) says, the English syllables often differ in quantity from the Czech ones. The English syllables tend to be longer (e.g. Czech '*bedly*' and English '*badly*').
2. Czech speakers *do not reduce vowels* within words and thus have problems in pronunciation of some longer words, such as '*vegetable*', '*particularly*' etc.
3. Czech speakers tend to separate words within a phrase, by pronouncing each word of a phrase apart. But, as rhythm is a significant feature of spoken English, this separating has a negative impact on the listener. Native speakers pronounce a phrase (the segment from one stress to the next one) as one word.

(Translated by Eva Kovarova)

## 2.6 Pronunciation teaching today

Since the 1980's the leading method in language teaching which is considered to be the most effective has been the Communicative Approach. This approach is based on the premise that communication is the primary purpose of language acquisition. We use language to communicate and thus communication is the goal and means of language teaching at the same time. The increasing importance of communication in language learning has brought new urgency to the pronunciation teaching. In spite of being indisputably important in the English language teaching curriculum, pronunciation teaching seems to be neglected by many teachers either because they have a feeling that there is already too much to do in classes. Some teachers feel uncertain about pronunciation issues because they do not know how to incorporate it into their classes without confusing the learners or bringing redundant information. Teachers may claim that the majority of their students have been able to acquire favourable level of pronunciation without specific training, but as Harmer (2007) asserts, pronunciation teaching not only makes students aware of different sounds and sound features, but it can also immensely improve their speaking and understanding.

Celce-Murcia (1996) introduces a list of techniques suitable for pronunciation teaching within the Communicative Approach which have been traditionally used to teach pronunciation:

1. Listening and imitation: learners are supposed to listen to a model, either given by the teacher or by a recording, and then repeat and imitate it.
2. Phonetic training and visual aids: involving additional "technical information" in the process of pronunciation teaching, such as drawings, diagrams, charts, pictures, descriptions of articulators, phonetic transcription etc.
3. Minimal pair exercises: putting two similar (or problematic) sounds in contrast, either on the level of word or sentence
4. Tongue twisters: speech-helping strategies
5. Developmental approximation drills: based on L1 acquisition studies which presume, that certain sounds are more difficult to produce than others so they are taught through the less difficult ones
6. Practice of vowel shifts and stress shifts in etymologically related words
7. Reading aloud: can be practiced on poems, dialogues, plays, where the learners focus on stress, intonation etc.

8. Recordings of learners' speech: recording of either pre-learned or spontaneous speech which enables subsequent analysis, teachers' feedback and self-evaluation
9. This author also considers drama to be an important technique used in pronunciation teaching because it demands a certain degree of "overstatement" and interestingly, many people are able to speak better English (pronunciation) when they are acting or playing a certain role.

### **2.6.1 Pronunciation issues**

#### **Phonemic symbols**

Teachers who want to deal with pronunciation thoroughly question themselves, whether to teach the phonemic alphabet or not. Harmer (2007) says that if teachers want, it is possible to work on the English sounds without having to teach a single phonemic symbol. Celce-Murcia (1996) suggests that the decision whether to teach them or not, may depend on the type of course or lessons. Of course, in occasional lessons this would be unnecessary but in regular weekly classes the students can only benefit from it. This author is convinced that, as English differs largely in the written and spoken form, it is advisable for the students to be aware of the phonemic alphabet. Celce-Murcia (1996) considers the usage of phonemic alphabet in case of English even "especially important" because of the incongruence between letters and sounds.

The other reason that speaks for teaching of phonemic symbols is that paper (or digital) dictionaries give the pronunciation of the words and so the learners' do not need to rely on the teacher only as the source of correct pronunciation. It is often the case of adult learners who need to see "it written" so they have something material to rely on. However, it is not necessary for our students to know how to transcribe each word, which means use the phonemic alphabet actively, but to be able to recognize the symbols and know which symbol stands for which sound. When both the teacher and the students know the symbols, it is easier to explain the mistakes being made and, moreover, the reason why had they happened.



## **Dealing with pronunciation problems**

In this author's experience, many problems in pronunciation teaching and learning usually have their reason in what the learners can hear and what they can say. We can find these problems especially in adolescence and adult learners because they have already their L1 sounds register so embedded in their minds that it is very complicated to recognize the English phonemes and they tend to hear the similar sounds of their L1 register instead. (Thereby some Czech learners have problems distinguishing, for example, between the Czech 'f' and English 'θ'.)

As Harmer (2007) suggests, there are two ways of dealing with it. We can either show the students how the English sounds are made through demonstration, explanation and illustrations or we can draw their attention every single time it appears in a conversation or in a recording. The more we will train their ears in correct pronunciation the greater is the chance that they will be able to improve it.

Even if the learners can hear foreign sounds (they are able to admit that they can hear the difference between, for example Czech 'f' and English 'θ'), they may have difficulties to produce them. This is described by Harmer (2007) as a problem of "physical unfamiliarity", which means that it is practically difficult to make the sound using particular parts of the mouth since we do not use these parts in pronouncing our L1. To overcome this, teachers should be able to describe the "the technique", (e.g. where exactly the sounds are produced, what is the position of tongue in relation to the teeth, what is the shape of the lips etc.) and encourage the students in practicing.

Some teachers, however, do not feel comfortable teaching pronunciation because, for some reason, they are not able to hear the nuances in intonation, stress or individual sounds. In this case Harmer (2007) suggests that if teachers are not feeling comfortable in modelling the sentence intonation (or other) themselves, they should at least give the students opportunities to recognise these features on authentic audio tracks or video sequences even without the readiness to discuss the technicalities.

From this author's perspective teachers need to realize, that pronunciation is a highly personal matter – even in one's mother tongue. We can hardly find two speakers of the same L1 who would have hundred percent identical speeches. Thus, it is likely to happen, that even in monolingual classes we will find that different students have different problems in L2 pronunciation. We should not forget to work on whole-group problems as

well as on the problems of individual students. We should encourage students to identify their own pronunciation problems and work on them.

## **2.6.2 Current pronunciation teaching concerning word stress and weak forms**

### **2.6.2.1 Word stress**

From the beginning of learning of English, students should be aware of the fact that each English word containing more than one syllable has its own stress pattern and that the incorrect placement of stress in a word can cause misunderstanding even if the word itself was pronounced correctly. English native speakers rely on stress patterns which help them identify the words they hear. Students should be taught the stress in words from the very beginning of the instruction. Celce-Murcia (1996) advises that the first thing teachers need to clarify is: how native speakers highlight a stressed syllable (the way how to do it), how the unstressed syllables are produced (vowel reduction) and additionally, that there are three levels of stress in English (primary, secondary, and unstressed). There is also a question whether stress should be taught with every single word, or, if it is necessary to teach the rules. According to Celce-Murcia (1996) and Roach (1991), since there are rules for placing the word stress the explicit teaching of the rules (or better stress patterns) should be a part of the pronunciation curriculum. However, from this author's perspective, it should be carefully chosen which rules are the useful ones and for sure not all the rules should be taught because in many cases the rules are too complicated to be useful.

### **2.6.2.2 How to present word stress to students**

For teaching the word stress it is advisable to use besides the oral performance also a written demonstration to have a visual concept and support for the students. Majority of the books which deal with the issue of stress use one of the following styles of highlighting stressed syllables:

- using capital letters in stressed syllables
- using bubbles or dots over the stressed syllables
- underlining stressed syllables
- writing stressed syllables in bold or in italics
- using the vertical accent marks before stressed syllables (as in dictionaries)

Teachers should consider which one of the above mentioned styles they will use in their classes and if they choose one, they should be consistent in its usage. Some of them are more suitable for writing by hand, others for writing on a computer.

This author thinks that bubbles or dots may be more effective and less confusing than capital letters or underlining of stressed syllables, especially if we introduce the learners to this kind of marking from the very beginning of instruction. We can also differentiate the bubbles or dots in size to indicate primary and secondary stress. It is also advisable to present words stress with help of acoustic aids, such as clapping or tapping out the stress pattern while pronouncing the word.

Celce-Murcia (1996) further suggests that at the very beginning of word stress lesson the teachers should discuss briefly the nature of the stress and its historical origins in English (this will help the students to understand why it is quite a complicated and important matter). This should then be followed by an introduction to the basic fixed stress patterns for certain word categories, such as prefixes, suffixes, compound words etc. The teachers should encourage students to reinforce classroom explanations in and outside the classroom and learn to predict the word stress in new words. There should be a little time in each lesson dedicated to word stress instruction (when presenting the learners with new words). Harmer (2007) points out that the teachers can, together with marking where the stress falls in word, draw the students' attention to the weak vowels and schwa in words to teach them, highlighting that stress and weak vowels stand in opposition to each other.

### **2.6.2.3 Working with stress**

There are several techniques used by teachers when working with stress. Celce-Murcia (1996) mentions: listening discrimination, controlled practice, guided practice and communicative practice exercises.

Listening discrimination exercises are based on listening and identifying of stressed (or unstressed syllables). These exercises are the most controlled and receptive, because the learners are not supposed to pronounce the words but just listen and mark the stressed syllables. Before doing this kind of exercise, the teachers should make sure that the learners are able to recognise the difference between stressed and unstressed syllable. As Celce-Murica (1996) suggests, this can be checked by saying nonsense words, such as: *laLAlalaLA*, and stressing certain syllables. This can require some pre-practicing because some students, especially those who are less musical, may find difficulties to hearing the differences at the beginning.

Controlled practice exercises are based on reading and repeating lists of words with the same stress pattern (two-syllabic, three-syllabic) in chorus after the teacher who can

also tap the rhythm at the same time. Drills in chorus are useful because some students can feel ashamed speaking individually.

Guided practice exercises allow learners to work with stress on a more independent level than the previous exercises. In this type of exercises the teachers should make use of the previous knowledge of the learners. It can be based on the shifting of stress in words with the same stem (such as in Nationalities: '*Japan*' and '*Japanese*', numbers, etc.) or compound words.

Communicative practice exercises are most suitable for learners of intermediate and advanced knowledge of English because they are supposed to work with the vocabulary and be able to communicate on a certain level. They are less controlled by the teacher and productive. Communicative exercises can be done in the form of a game where learners work with the language; they can guess compounds or work with derived words as a part of a communicative game.

#### **2.6.2.4 Weak forms and reduced speech**

In spite of being a common feature of spoken language, weak forms are seldom taught in common language courses and that also implies that the majority of the Czech learners of English *do not use* them when speaking. Teaching of weak forms has often been omitted in the textbooks or by non-native teachers for several reasons: the teachers are not used to using weak forms themselves, or they do not know how to teach them or they feel they should rather deal with individual sounds firstly. It is also somehow easier to teach individual sounds than weak forms; there are therefore more materials available for practicing individual sounds than for weak forms.

When starting to learn English, students often tend to use the full forms of words and when they are not in touch with spoken English regularly, they may even reject weak forms as something which is 'non-standard' or too colloquial, according to this author's teaching experience. The truth is that since weak forms and reduced speech occur in everyday spoken language, teachers should train and encourage the learners to use them. The failure to teach weak forms causes difficulties for learners in understanding spoken English of native and fluent speakers and also in speaking comprehensibly.

### **2.6.2.5 How to present weak forms to students**

Before we start dealing with weak forms, it is advisable to make learners aware of the whole concept by introducing the necessary theory. If the students know that weak forms are used in everyday English and are not just a manner of speaking, they will be motivated to learn and use them.

The teacher should then demonstrate weak forms in speech by modelling example sentences or by having students to listen to them from a recording. The teacher should point out the contrast between strong and weak forms, by saying the function word isolated and in a sentence and bring in enough examples of weak and strong forms usage. After this “passive” phase, the teachers should be able to organize some activities for the students to help them master the pronunciation of weak forms, which can be difficult initially. Again, we should not present weak forms as a list of words to learn, but proceed slowly and regularly. It could also be better to teach weak forms according to the parts of speech and not mix them together.

### **2.6.2.6 Working with weak forms**

As with word stress exercises, we can divide weak forms practicing into listening discrimination exercises, controlled exercises and communicative exercises.

In discrimination exercises the learners listen to sentences and discriminate a weak or strong form according to what they hear. At this point it is also advisable to have students repeat whole sentences either in chorus or individually. In controlled exercises we can practice weak forms with help of drilling and repeating after the teacher or record, or the students can do substitution exercises (e.g. for teaching of ‘*can*’ and its weak and strong form, the students can make sentences about what they *can* and *can’t* do.)

As Celce-Murcia (1996) mentions, weak forms of the functions words may sometimes sound identical and it is also advisable to train learners’ ears by dictation exercises where the learners have to fill in gaps with suitable grammatical words according to what they hear.

In case of weak forms, the listening exercises are extremely important, because systematic training in their usage, pronunciation and listening can significantly improve learners’ comprehension and production of spoken English.

### 3. PART II

#### 3.1 Introduction to the practical part of the diploma thesis

The practical part of this diploma thesis concentrates on typical pronunciation errors as produced by intermediate Czech learners of English. There are many pronunciation errors, which can be interpreted as “typical” but I would like to concentrate on the production of suprasegmental features: stress in words and reduction of unstressed syllables (weak forms) in grammatical words.

As Czech and English differ in their language systems, I will try to identify the mistakes that result from this difference and interference from the mother tongue (Czech). In Czech the stress is consistently on the first syllable of words, whereas in English it can be on any syllable. It is then presumed that Czech learners tend to stress first syllables of English words as a consequence of the interference from their mother tongue. Reduced speech and using of weak forms is a typical feature of spoken English, however, and as such it does not occur in Czech. From my experience, Czech speakers are usually not used to reducing unstressed vowels and they tend to pronounce all syllables more fully, the same way as they do in Czech.

The project of my diploma thesis is based on the analysis of two types of English learners’ oral production: reading an unseen text (for the word stress) and spontaneous oral expression (for the weak forms). By this analysis I would like to find out the presence or the degree of the interference from the mother tongue in the field of word stress and weak forms because, from my own experience, suprasegmental features of English pronunciation are usually not dealt with in Czech schools and thus Czech learners are not aware of them. I would also like to find out which mistakes are common to the majority of the learners (if there will be any such) and which are rather individual.

The researched sample (*a convenient sample*) of my project consisted of 33 first-year students of English at Pedagogická fakulta in České Budějovice. All students were presumed by the Faculty to be intermediate speakers of English (as the intermediate knowledge is a basic prerequisite for being accepted to study there) and all of them were members of two randomly chosen Practical English classes at that time taught by the supervisor of this diploma thesis. As a method of my research, I chose to record oral

production of these students on a digital voice recorder and the recordings were subsequently analysed by me.

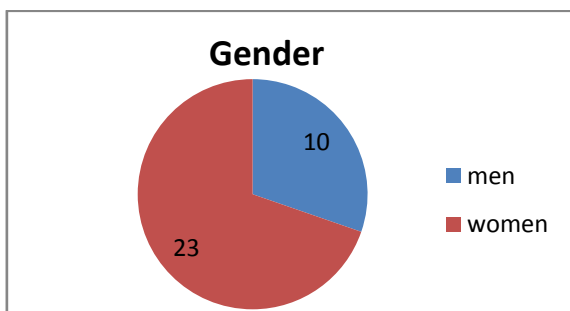
As part of my research I designed a questionnaire (Appendix 2) to find out supplementary information about my convenient sample. The questionnaire was based on the pronunciation issues that I considered important. It should complement the analysis of the students' production. The main aim of the questionnaire was to find out their experience with pronunciation teaching as learners, their opinions on pronunciation teaching and its importance in the curriculum, their views and habits in learning pronunciation acquisition. I also wanted to find out, whether, as future teachers, they are aware of the importance of having correct pronunciation or not and how they assess their own pronunciation. In this questionnaire, I did not include any question that would test their knowledge of weak forms and word stress because I thought they had been studying phonetics only for about two months and might not have been able to answer this kind of questions. The questionnaire concentrates rather on personal experiences and opinions on pronunciation issues. Both questionnaires and recordings were taken anonymously.

### 3. 2 The sample description based on the information from the questionnaire

In this chapter I would like to describe my research sample namely the participants' views, attitudes, experiences and habits in pronunciation acquisition and learning, according to the information I gained via the questionnaire (Appendix 2).

As it has been already mentioned in the previous chapter, the research sample consisted of 33 first-year students from Pedagogicka fakulta in Ceske Budejovice, out of whom ten were male and twenty-three were female (Graph 3.1)

#### Gender distribution of the sample



**Graph 3.1:** This graph shows that females outnumbered males by approximately 2:1.

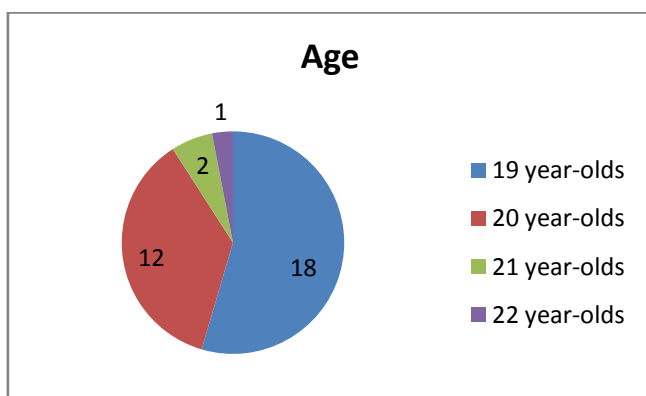
(Source: Eva Kovarova)



### 3.2.1 Age, length of study of English, age of start

All the participants were at the time of the study (2009) first-year students; they were all presumed by the Faculty to have an intermediate knowledge of English. The age spread of the students was 19 to 22 years, whereas the nineteen year olds make up the majority. (Graph 3.2)

#### Age distribution of the sample



**Graph 3.2:** This graph shows that the 19 years-olds made up the majority of the sample. (Source: Eva Kovarova)

According to the length of their English study, it varies largely from four years to eleven years. The biggest group is made up of the students who have been studying English for eight to eleven years. They started studying English at the *age of eight to eleven*, which means at the primary school. There were several individuals who have been studying English for just four years, which means that they started at the secondary school.

### 3.2.2 Experience, opinions and attitudes

In this part, individual questions are discussed and the results are presented together with my personal comments and opinions.

#### **Question No. 1: *Did your teachers pay any special attention to pronunciation?***

The learners were supposed to answer the first four questions in their own words, so it is not possible to score the outcome numerically but just describe the most noticeable features of their answers according to my own assessment.

The biggest part (about one half) of the learners stated that their teachers did not pay any *special* attention to pronunciation. Some of the learners stated that at the primary

school they had not received any pronunciation instruction at all and the situation changed slightly when entering the grammar school or other high school, but not much (in a sense that they would detect any for them noticeable benefit of it).

The second biggest group of the learners say that pronunciation instruction they had received was reduced to correction of mistakenly pronounced words only, especially when a word was completely mispronounced, but the teachers neither taught pronunciation explicitly nor gave them any additional information about the phonological system and how it differs from the Czech one. These learners also mentioned that they have been learning pronunciation in an overt way only since they entered the university.

Only several individuals stated that their teachers did pay *special* attention to pronunciation teaching or that they practised pronunciation issues with native teachers. Concerning further description of what 'special attention in pronunciation' actually meant to them, they mentioned repeating after a recording, repeating after the teacher, watching videos, listening to music in English or doing listening exercises.

From my own experience as both teacher and learner, I have to admit that these results about pronunciation teaching were not surprising at all. When I was at the primary and later at the secondary school, there was no special pronunciation instruction given by the English language teachers. The pronunciation was taught by the teacher when presenting new vocabulary only, but there were no further explanations about how to pronounce the individual sounds (except maybe from the individual sounds /θ/ and /ð/), how they differ from the Czech ones, and no attention was paid to the suprasegmental features such as stress, linking or intonation. The problem is, in my opinion, that English language teachers are not sure themselves about pronunciation issues and also they have had just a little support in books or materials they use in the classroom. The other problem, as I see it, is that Czech teachers traditionally pay more attention to teaching grammar and writing skills than to speaking in general. There is also shortage of research specific to the Czech milieu, as I had discovered while reading for my theory parts.

Concerning the issues dealt with in the questionnaire (experiences, personal views), I also asked my students at the language school where I teach and my private students, all of who are adult learners who have been learning English for some time either at a public school institution or at a private language school. The overwhelming majority (almost all) of these learners have not heard whatsoever of issues such as word stress or weak forms in

English. Surely, they know about the existence of word stress from Czech, but they do not know anything about the various positions of stress in English words. I tried to introduce these issues to the students and I heard many statements from them which can be summarized as follows: “I always felt, that I have problems understanding native English in speech but now, I finally understand where the problem was.” For sure, the presenting itself maybe makes students aware of the suprasegmental features but I find the practicing of both listening and speaking skills in class essential.

As has been already said in the theory part (Chapter 2.3.4), age is an important factor in pronunciation acquisition and thus it is advisable to pay much more attention to pronunciation when teaching, especially to children at the secondary and primary schools. The more the teacher will train the pupils’ ears in imitating native English, the better their speaking and listening skills will be.

**Question No. 2: *Did your teachers correct your mistakes or try to make you unlearn bad pronunciation habits? What methods did they use?***

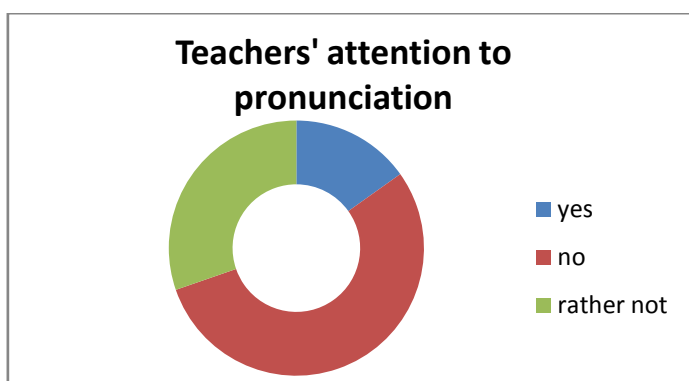
Concerning this question, the majority of the learners say that the teachers corrected their mistakes and just a few individuals were not corrected at all. The question is, however, what we (or the learners) understand by the term ‘mistakes in pronunciation’. As I have learned from the answers, by “correcting mistakes in pronunciation” the majority of the learners understand repeating of words after the teacher only, which clearly is not enough. The respondents replied that their teachers brought pronunciation exercises to classes only rarely or never. Some of them also stated that pronunciation was a bit confusing for them, as different teachers pronounced some words differently and that it was difficult to unlearn bad pronunciation once they have learned it. Several respondents mentioned that their teachers corrected only “big” mistakes, or they corrected them only occasionally.

From my perspective, correcting of mispronounced words is necessary but, if it refers only to individual sounds, it should not be understood as a maximum of what a teacher can do to help the students with pronunciation. It can also be quite difficult for the teacher to find a balance in pronunciation correction because if we correct every single word that has been said, it can have a discouraging effect on our students’ speaking efforts.

**Question No. 3: Do you think that teachers pay enough attention to teaching pronunciation (not only how to pronounce a word correctly but also to suprasegmental features such as word stress etc.)?**

The majority of the learners answered that from their own experience teachers did not pay *enough* attention or they did not pay attention to pronunciation at all. There were about five students whose experience was positive and who thought that their teachers paid enough attention (Graph 3.3). As an explanation the students mentioned following reasons: there was not enough time to deal with pronunciation in classes; the teachers preferred teaching grammar to pronunciation; pronunciation was considered not so important; the teachers considered listening skills more important than speaking; the teachers were not qualified themselves so they did not teach it; the students thought that enough attention to pronunciation is paid at the university only and they found this was too late.

#### **Experiences with teachers' attention paid to pronunciation issues**



**Graph 3.3:** This graph shows that the majority of the previous teachers of the sample did not/ rather did not pay attention to pronunciation issues. (Source: Eva Kovarova)

As a result of this, we can assert that this sample feel that generally there is not enough attention being paid to pronunciation teaching at schools. From my own experience as a student of the same faculty, this negative image of Czech teachers concerning pronunciation - as it results from this questionnaire – may have been partly caused by the fact that the respondents, being first-year students, have just started to study phonetics at the university and began to discover things about English they had not known before. Maybe if they were not students of English language but of a different subject, they would not be as judgmental as they may appear in this questionnaire. However, I consider these results alarming and I think pronunciation teaching in all kind of schools should be given much more space than it has been given so far.

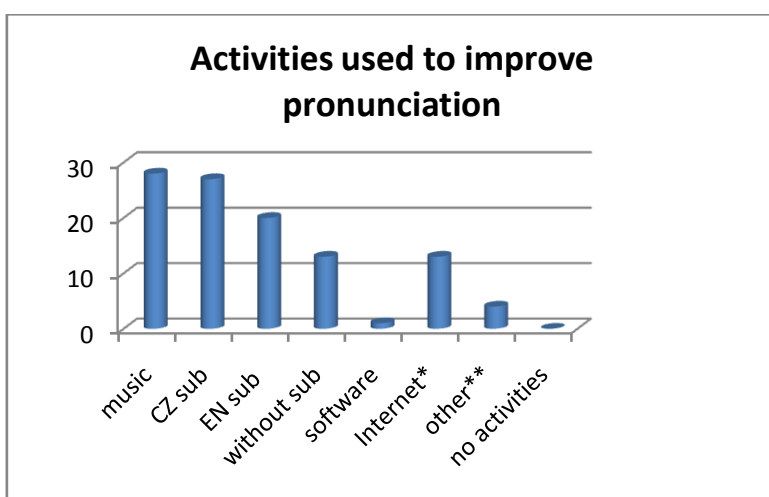
**Question No. 4: *Have you ever tried to systematically improve or work on your pronunciation? Can you describe the methods you were using?***

The majority of the learners answered that they believe they could improve their skills by watching films/TV, listening to music/the radio or in a conversation with native speakers and then trying to imitate what they heard. It was also mentioned several times that they had not known they had problems in pronunciation until they entered the phonetics course at the university and realized they need to start to work on it, which confirms my speculation related to the previous question. Specific methods used were also mentioned: recording and monitoring of one’s own speech, singing and studying the theory.

**Question No. 5: *Which of the listed activities do you use to improve your pronunciation?***

The students were supposed to choose from the suggested activities the ones they use. The majority of the learners ticked the options “watching movies with Czech or English subtitles” and “listening to music”. I think that this kind of activities is quite accessible and profitable but to get the real benefit of it, it has to be done purposefully with focus on pronunciation. We can also say that activities chosen by the students can be used for improving the skills generally and not only to improve pronunciation.

**Activities used to improve one’s pronunciation**



**Graph 3.4:** This graph shows that the most frequent activities used to improve one’s pronunciation were listening to music, watching movies and Internet. The options listed from the left: music, CZ subtitles, EN subtitles, without subtitles, software, Internet, other, no activities.

(Source: Eva Kovarova)

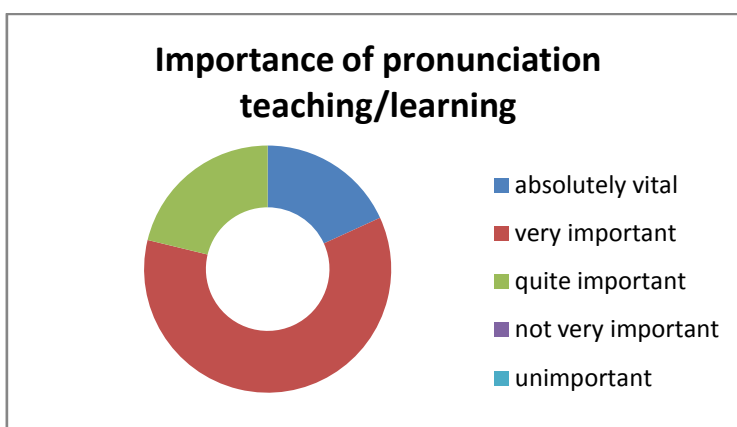
\*as Internet sources were mentioned following web pages: helpforenglish.cz, bbc.co.uk, rottentomatoes.com

\*\*as other means were mentioned: listening to audio books, Skype, computer games

**Question No. 6:** *Try to evaluate the importance of teaching pronunciation when learning English. Please, comment on your choice.*

This question focuses on the attitude to pronunciation learning. From my experience, many English learners (and teachers) find pronunciation quite unimportant compared to grammar or vocabulary. I wanted to find out whether the attitude of this sample as possible future English teachers, differs from the other learners I have met as a teacher before.

### **Learners' attitude to the importance of pronunciation teaching/learning**



**Graph 3.5:** This graph shows that the majority of the sample considered the importance of pronunciation teaching/learning as 'very important'. The options 'not very important' and 'unimportant' got no points so they do not appear in the graph itself. (Source: Eva Kovarova).

As seen from the graph, the majority of the respondents found pronunciation teaching very important. There were no students in this group who would find it “not very important” or “unimportant”. In the comments to this question, the most frequent arguments for pronunciation teaching can be summarized as followed: “We can speak good English, but if we mispronounce words, we can change its meaning and we will not be understood correctly or we may not be understood at all”. Some learners also highlighted the need to merge in native environment or not to make a negative impression by having a strange accent. What I found surprising is that only one person realized that pronunciation learning is equally important for *understanding* native speech correctly.

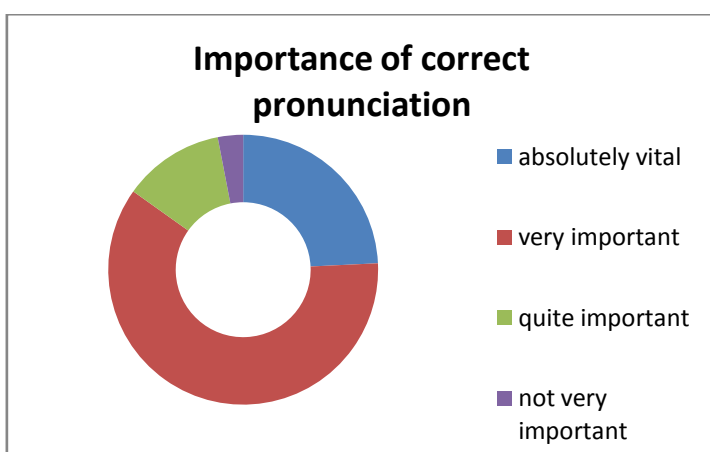
**Question No. 7:** *How important do you think is pronunciation for the speaker to be 'understood' by others? Please, comment on your choice.*

This question complements Question No. 6 and the results were quite identical (Graph 3.6). In the comments, there was mentioned several times that, according to the respondents, having correct pronunciation is more important for people who work with

English (such as teachers) than for other users and that other people understand even if we make mistakes in pronunciation. One respondent mentioned a typical example of how incorrect pronunciation can confuse native speakers in a conversation: a Czech person was telling a story about *dogs*, but after a while it turned out that the native speaker thought they were talking about *ducks*.

I believe that this kind of a personal experience of “failing” in communication due to wrong pronunciation works as the best motivation for the learners. I agree that teachers as models should have correct pronunciation but I disagree with the statement of several of my respondents that people understand even if we make mistakes in pronunciation. This may be true for teachers because they are used to hearing different accents and ‘guessing’ what a learner says even with bad pronunciation. However, it could be a handicap in communication with native speakers who are not used to hearing different accents of English and thus are not capable of figuring out what a person says.

### Importance of having correct pronunciation in order to be understood



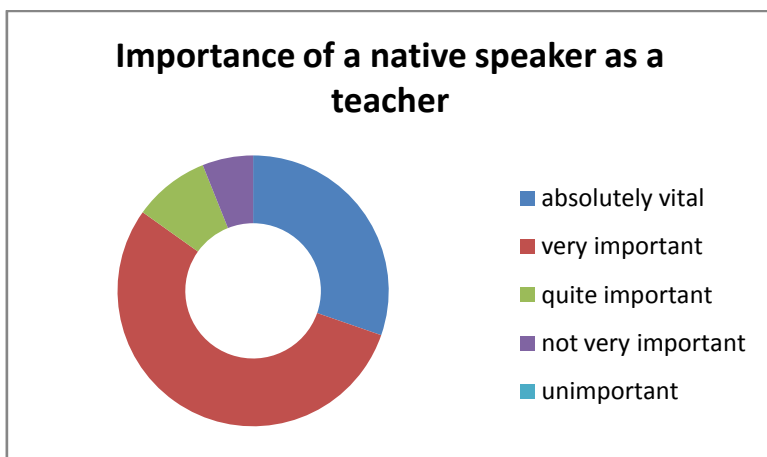
**Graph 3.6:** This graph shows that the majority of the sample considered having correct pronunciation as ‘very important’. The option ‘unimportant’ got no points so it does not appear in the graph itself. (Source: Eva Kovarova).

### **Question No. 8: *How important do you think is the role of a native speaker in pronunciation teaching?***

Interestingly, compared to the previous question, there were slightly more respondents who thought that having a native speaker as a pronunciation model was “vitaly important” on the one hand, but also more respondents who found it ‘not very important’ or “unimportant” on the other hand. Still, the great majority found the presence of a native speaker in classes very impotant (Graph 3.7).

I believe that the role of a native speaker is vitally important especially for primary and secondary school children who are willing to copy the native pronunciation without feeling uncomfortable and so they can acquire better pronunciation with less effort than adult learners. Having native teachers in every single primary school, however, is not an objective goal in the Czech Republic but I think that teachers at the primary schools should have as good pronunciation as possible because, being the first models they have a great influence on the young learners' pronunciation.

### Importance of having a native speaker as a teacher



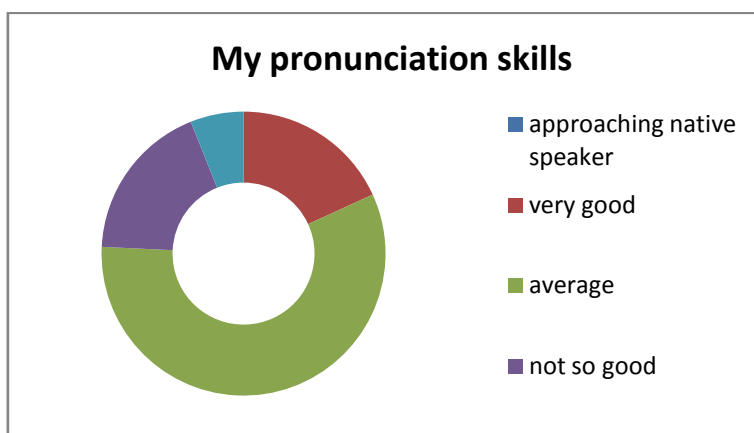
**Graph 3.7:** This graph shows that the majority of the sample considered having a native speaker as a teacher as 'absolutely vital' or 'very important'. The option 'unimportant' got no points, so it does not appear in the graph itself. (Source: Eva Kovarova).

When considering the results of the last three questions, I have gained a slight impression that the respondents find the importance of pronunciation learning in general very important, but when it comes to its importance in a real-life communication, they may find it less crucial.



**Question No. 9: *How do you evaluate your pronunciation skills?***

**Evaluation of one's pronunciation skills**



**Graph 3.8:** This graph shows that the majority of the sample considered their own pronunciation as 'average'. (Source: Eva Kovarova).

According to the graph, the majority of the respondents consider their pronunciation as "average", only several respondents consider it to be either "very good" or "not so good". The option "poor" got no points (so it does not appear in the graph).

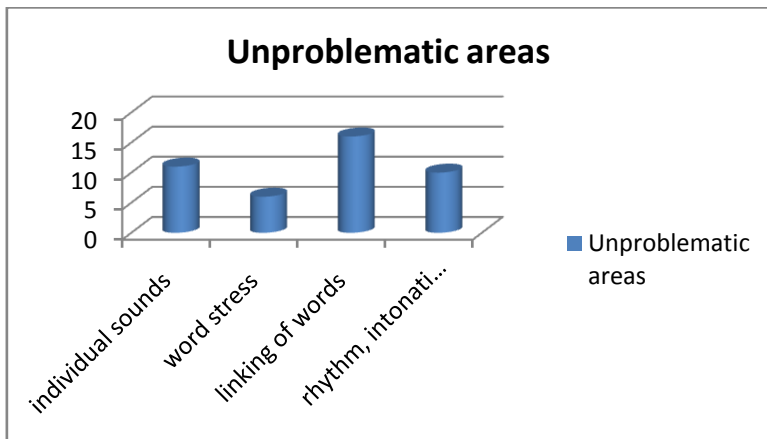
**Question No.10: *If you think of pronunciation, do you see any particular problematic area that you would like to improve? Tick area(s) you think you have problems with.***

**Question No.11: *What are the areas you think you are good at?***

I had expected that the problematic areas of pronunciation will be those which deal with suprasegmental features because I think they are rarely dealt with in Czech primary and secondary schools. Surprisingly, the individual sounds did not get less points than the suprasegmental features (Graphs 3.9, 3.10). The highest number of respondents chose "linking of words" as the area they are good at and "word stress" as the area they have problems with. In the next part of the project, I will try to confirm or disprove this presumption about the word stress.

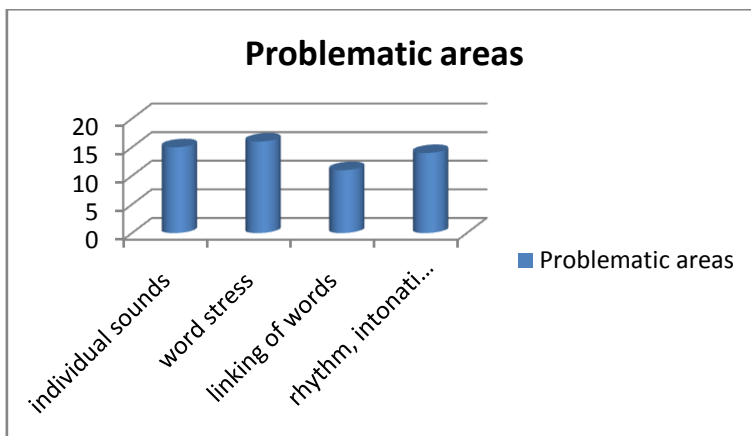
The students were supposed to make multiple choices so they were allowed to tick as many possibilities as they wanted. Thus, the scales on both graphs show the number of students who ticked each option.

### Areas that the respondents consider as “unproblematic”



**Graph 3.9:** This graph shows that the area assessed by the sample as the most unproblematic (they did not think they have problems with) was linking of words. (Source: Eva Kovarova)

### Areas that the respondents consider as “problematic”

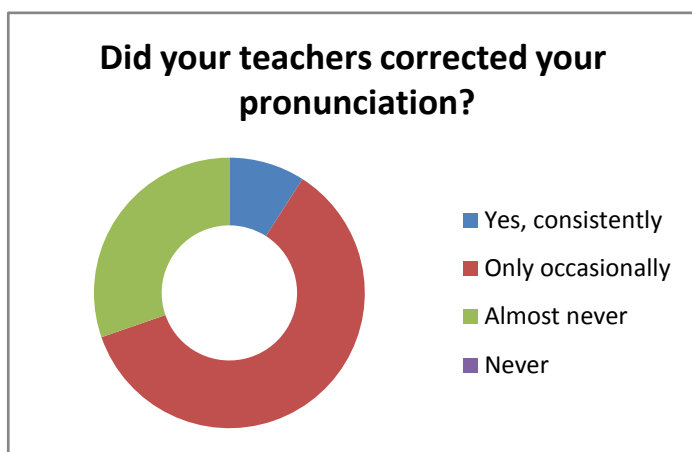


**Graph 3.10:** This graph shows the proportion of areas that were assessed by the sample as problematic (they thought they had problems with). There is no area that would be seen as significantly more (or less) problematic than others. (Source: Eva Kovarova)

**Question No.13: *Did your past teachers try to monitor and correct your own pronunciation?***

This question complements Question No. 2. The respondents say that teachers corrected them but most often mispronounced words only, or only occasionally (Graph 3.11). This result is in agreement with the score of answers to this question, where the majority of the students ticked the option “only occasionally”.

**The amount of teachers’ attention paid to pronunciation**



**Graph 3.11:** This graph shows the experience of the sample concerning their teachers correcting their pronunciation. The majority of the sample was corrected only occasionally at primary and secondary schools. The option ‘never’ got no points so it does not appear in the graph itself. (Source: Eva Kovarova)

**Question No. 14: *Are you able to self-monitor and correct your pronunciation?***

This question tries to answer the question of whether the learners were aware of their mistakes in pronunciation and whether they are able to work on pronunciation on their own. According to the questionnaire, the majority of respondents try to work on their pronunciation but some of them do not know how to do it (Graph 3.12). As a strategy used for correcting own pronunciation repeating after native speakers and singing were mentioned most often. I believe that self-monitoring and self-correcting of pronunciation is closely connected with the awareness of pronunciation issues in general. It is very important for the learners to be informed about issues such as weak forms and word stress because once they know about their existence, they can work on them further.

### The ability to self-monitor and correct one's own pronunciation



**Graph 3.12:** This graph shows that about one half of the learners tried to self-monitor and correct their pronunciation and about one quarter would like to do so, but they do not know how. (Source: Eva Kovarova)

- a) Yes, I try to.
- b) I would like to but I do not know how.
- c) If I am good at English, my pronunciation will improve automatically.
- d) It is something I never think of.

#### Summary of my findings about the sample:

- Their teachers (except for a few) paid attention to pronunciation only in terms of correcting mispronounced words; there was no special attention paid to suprasegmental features or special pronunciation exercises in classes.
- In general, the respondents would appreciate more pronunciation instruction and training received from their teachers at the primary and secondary schools.
- In general, respondents are aware of the importance of pronunciation and they try/or would like to try to work on it, but several of them do not know how exactly they could do it.
- The respondents believe they could improve their pronunciation skills by watching films, listening to music or talking to a native speaker and trying to imitate her/him.
- The majority consider having a native speaker as a model to be: 'absolutely vital' or at least "very important".

- The majority consider having good pronunciation as “absolutely vital” or “very important” to be understood in communication. However, several of them believe to be understood by other speakers anyway.
- The majority find their pronunciation skills in general as “average” but they would like to improve them.
- According to their views, there is no particular area of pronunciation they are significantly better or worse at; they find individual sounds as problematic as suprasegmental features, with words stress being the most problematic feature and linking of words being the least problematic one.

### 3.3 The Project: Identifying word stress and weak forms problems

#### 3.3.1 Introduction to the project

As has already been explained, this research project does not focus on all pronunciation issues Czech speakers may have problems with, but it concentrates on the production of word stress patterns and weak forms. It has been explicitly described in the theory part that in English the position of stress words can vary significantly according to the word's origin, part of speech, structure of the word and its components (whether it is a simple word or a compound etc.), whereas in Czech the word stress is consistently on the first syllable of the words. Using of weak forms of grammatical words in unstressed syllables is an important feature of spoken English but nothing such as reducing of unstressed syllables occurs in spoken Czech. Considering these differences in both languages, my hypotheses for this project were as follows:

**1. There will be interference detected from the mother tongue in word stress patterns – stressing the first syllable in words**

(I presumed that the learners will tend to stress the first syllable of English words as they do in Czech)

**2. There will be prevalence for using strong forms of grammatical words in positions where native speakers would normally use weak forms**

(I presumed that learners tend to use strong forms because they are not used to reducing unstressed syllables, as in Czech unstressed syllables have the same quality as the unstressed ones.)

#### 3.3.2 Methodology of the project and analysis

To confirm or disprove these hypotheses, I designed a procedure where two types of the learners' oral production were recorded: *reading an unseen text* for identifying the word stress problems and *spontaneous oral expression* for identifying the usage of weak/strong forms of grammatical words. The participants in the project were told that the researcher is going to record their speech in order to analyse their pronunciation problems, but they were not told any further details. They did not know in advance what exactly they are going to do, what are they going to talk about or what pronunciation issues is the

project focused on. They were also reassured that their production will not be seen, analysed or evaluated by their teachers.

The participants were asked to come two at a time only to an allocated room and were given the necessary information. They were given two sheets of paper, one with the stress patterns and short sentences to read (for word stress) and one with four topics from which they should have chosen one they were able or preferred to talk about. They were given approximately five minutes to think about the chosen topic and prepare a dialogue together. They were also told that they should ask each other additional questions, ask for opinions etc., because I did not want to enter in their dialogues myself. However, as I expected, some of the participants were not as “talkative” as others, so I occasionally had to ask additional questions so as to obtain more material. Each pair talked for about three or four minutes, depending on how well they were able to keep the conversation going. The next step was reading and recording of stress patterns that were written on a sheet of paper together with eight sentences containing problematic words.

The speech was recorded on a digital voice recorder and later put on a CD. A copy of the CD will be attached to the diploma thesis.

Concerning my criteria used for assessing both word stress and weak forms, I have compiled my research instruments on the basis of two practical textbooks on pronunciation (*Gilbert, G.: Clear Speech; Grant, L.: Well Said*) my own experience and for the reference I used *Oxford Dictionary* (word stress) and *English Phonetics and Phonology* by P. Roach (weak forms).

### **3.3.3 The word stress problem analysis**

As it is given in English, where the stress in a particular word should be placed, there are only two possible ways how the word stress pattern can be realized: either correctly or incorrectly. As a backbone for assessing the stress patterns as ‘correct’ or ‘incorrect’, I decided to compare the students’ production with the standard pronunciation (either British or American English variety) as given by the *Oxford Advanced Learner’s Dictionary*.

The word stress knowledge was tested on a selection of individual polysyllabic words of different stress patterns. In this selection there were words of both Germanic

(e.g. *woman*) and foreign (e.g. *reflection*) origin. I supposed that intermediate students of English, as these students were believed to be, had already heard all of them but as about half of them were not words of every-day usage, they may have not been sure about their stress patterns.

The list of the individual words chosen:

WOMAN – LESSON – BELOW – ALMOST – ECONOMICS – BIOLOGY –  
ELECTRIFY PHOTOGRAPHY – CHAOTIC – ENGINEER – CAPABILITY –  
SEVENTEEN  
ELECTRONIC – RECIPROCATE – DEDICATE – LEADER – BRAZIL –  
REFLECTION  
POSSIBLE – ELEGANT

The individual words were followed by eight sentences with stress-problematic words written in italics, for the students to focus on:

1. I completed the *report* by myself.
2. The *progress* was very slow.
3. We need to *conduct* another experiment.
4. His attitudes amounted to a great *insult*.
5. Are you still *upset*?
6. Can you *collect* the tests?
7. What is the *direct* result?
8. Who is responsible for the *survey*?

I was then listening to the recording of each student and marked the stress according to where the student put it in a particular word (I made a list of the stress patterns for each student and when listening to each word I marked the stress). After marking each word, I compared the outcome with the correct pronunciation and scored the correct and incorrect attempts for each word - three examples (Figure 3.1) are given on the following page (for detailed list of the stress patterns and their evaluation please see Appendix 4). I also noted the mistakes in their pronunciation in general (especially in the individual sounds). The summary of findings will be presented in detail in the following chapter.



### **An example of the findings evaluation: word stress**

**1. woman /'wʊmən/:** This word was pronounced largely with a correct stress placing, there was only one student who pronounced it as /wʊ'men/, several mistakes occurred in pronunciation of the individual sounds. Some students pronounced it with 'ʊ' /'wʊmən/ and did not reduce /mən/ so that it sounded more like /men/.

**2. lesson /'lesn/:** No mistakes.

**3. below /bɪ'ləʊ/ :** The majority pronounced this word with stress on the second syllable. However, it was sometimes not clear whether it is a primary stress or a secondary stress. About ten people put the stress on the first syllable and pronounced it as /'bɪləʊ/.

#### **Figure 3.1**

### **3.3.4 The weak forms problem analysis**

I think that the best way to assess the usage of the weak forms is given by their usual usage in speech summarized by Roach (as described on pp. 24-25): weak forms of grammatical words (articles, pronouns, prepositions, conjunctions, adverbs and some auxiliary or modal verbs) are used in a stream of speech and their strong forms are used when contrasting with another word or statement, citing or putting emphases on particular words, or in some cases when they are at the end of a sentence.

For the purpose of this project, I took a list of the most used weak forms set up by Roach and compared their typical pronunciation with pronunciation of my sample. In relation to the character of the topics, not all of the weak forms mentioned by Roach occurred in the dialogues. I chose those weak forms that were mentioned frequently in the dialogues (for the complete list of weak forms, please see Appendix 5).

For identifying weak forms, I needed to record the subjects' natural spoken language in order to find out whether they use weak forms or not. Because I found it quite difficult to make the Czech students speak, I needed to made up several topics about things the students are familiar with or they would not hesitate to talk about because they are the topics students normally discuss with their peers. I also added several complementary questions to each topic as a 'helpful hint' for the students in case they would not know where to start or what should be said but they did not have to necessarily include them in

their answers. Each pair of students chose one topic they liked most and then they had about five minutes to get prepared for the dialogue. They were allowed to take notes but not to write whole sentences and read them from the paper.

The dialogue topics were as follows (for the complete list of topics with additional questions, please see Appendix 3):

1. "TRAVELING BROADENS OUR HORIZONS"
2. "STUDYING AT HOME vs. ABROAD"
3. "REALITY SHOWS"
4. "SOCIAL NETWORKS"

Concerning the procedure of my analysis, I needed to transcribe each dialogue and identify the grammatical words. I was then listening to the dialogues and while concentrating on the grammatical words I tried to decide how they were pronounced and wrote their phonetic transcription. An example (Figure 3.2) of the recording script with the transcribed forms is given below (for more examples and information, please see Appendix 6).

#### **An example of the recording script with the transcribed forms**

**B:** I definitely would because when travelling **you** /ju/ getting know **the** /ðə/ country where **you** /ju/ are, **the** /ðə/ customs, **the** /ðə/ population, other people **and** /end/ **you** /ju/ also **can** /ken/ get rid **of** /ɒf/ **the** /ðə/ prejudices **you** /ju/ may have. What **do** /du/ **you** /ju/ think?

**Figure 3.2**

I further needed to decide for each word which version was most common for the majority of the subjects -three examples (Figure 3.3) are given below; (for detailed list of the weak forms and evaluation of their pronunciation, please see Appendix 5). The summary of my findings will be presented in detail in the following chapter.

### **An example of the findings evaluation: weak forms**

**1. the:** Almost no problems occurred in pronunciation of the definite article, it was pronounced correctly in its weak form as /ðə/, or /ði/.

**2. a, an:** Generally, the researched students very often omitted the indefinite articles before nouns. The indefinite article 'a' was in most cases pronounced correctly as /ə/, the indefinite article 'an' was pronounced in some cases rather as /en/ than as /ən/.

**3. and:** mostly pronounced with 'e' instead of schwa in the beginning, as /end/ or /ent/, only rarely reduced to /ən/

### **Figure 3.3**

## 4. Discussion

In this chapter the most important observations and findings that result from the analyses of both word stress and weak forms will be presented.

### 4.1 Word stress problem discussion

As described in the methodology of the project, the word stress problems analysis was based on listening to the recordings and comparing the subjects' production with the standard pronunciation (as a reference book was used e.g. Oxford *Advanced Learner's Dictionary*).

Firstly, I would like to present several important observations that were made while analysing the word stress exercises.

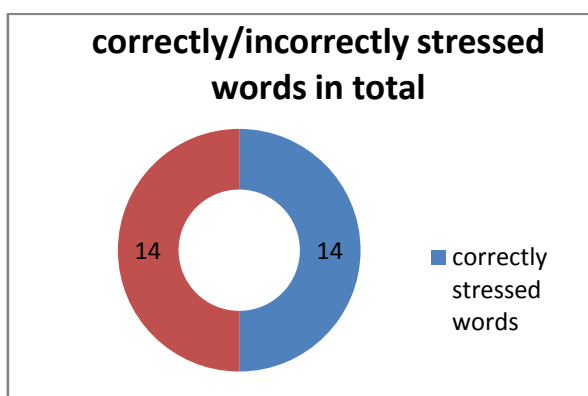
It was described in the theoretical part (p. 20) that the difference between stressed and unstressed syllables is greater in English than in other languages (here in Czech) and also (p. 27), the prominence of the first syllable is usually not very strong in Czech. In other words, Czech primary stress in words is less noticeable than the English primary stress. When analysing the word stress problems, I noticed that in many cases it was quite difficult to decide where the stress was actually put whenever it was not on the first syllable. Thus it happened very often that the words with the primary stress on the second or third syllable (e.g. words *be'low* or *eco'nomics* etc.) were pronounced in a way as if the primary stress was on the first syllable while on the second or third syllable there was a secondary stress, or as if there were two less-prominent (secondary-stressed) syllables but no primary stress. In other words, the learners may have pronounced the words with the right stress placement, but the stressed syllables were not as prominent as they should have been. This, of course, was not the case of all of the learners, but it occurred in such a frequency that I would consider it to be *one of the typical features of the Czech learners' pronunciation concerning word stress*.

The second observation is also connected to the fact mentioned in the theoretical basis (p. 29) i.e. that Czech speaker are usually not used to reducing vowels in unstressed syllables. It means that frequently they do not pronounce the "schwa" sound properly and it sounds rather as a kind of a full vowel (most often 'e') sound which occur in the

particular syllable (such as in /,keɪpə'biləti/, which was often pronounced as /'kepebɪlti/. This may also be connected with the first problem I had mentioned above. If the speakers do not reduce unstressed syllables, it is then difficult to identify the stressed syllables because the prominence is not obvious and all the syllables within a word sound (concerning prominence) very similar. Again, because this appears to be a problem of the entire research sample I consider this to be *a typical feature of Czech English speakers' pronunciation*.

There were twenty-eight words with different stress patterns. There were words with the primary stress on the first, second, or third syllable. The total score of correctly and incorrectly stressed words was balanced: *fourteen to fourteen* (Graph 4.1)

### Score of correctly and incorrectly stressed words



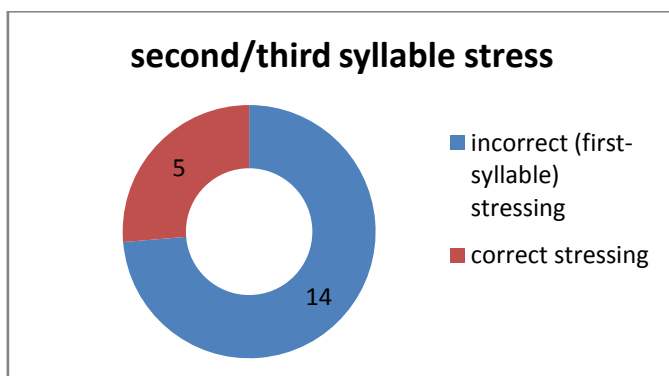
**Graph 4.1:** This graph shows that the score of correctly and incorrectly stressed words in total was balanced. (Source: Eva Kovarova)

Concerning the words with the primary stress on the first syllable **almost no mistakes occurred** or at least, the subjects **did not stress any other syllable more strongly than the first one**. It is logical when we take into account that in Czech the primary stress is also fixed on the first syllable but also (as explained in the theory basis, p. 27) the prominence of the first syllable is usually *not very strong*. This fact seems to explain the difficulty in identifying where the stress was put in words.

By analysing the words with the primary stress on the second or third syllable I found that **only five out of nineteen words were stressed by the majority of the learners correctly** (Graph 4.2), these were: *below, engineer, reflection, conduct, upset*, whereas by the last two, the correct and wrong production was half-and-half (not majority).

The rest of the words – *fourteen* – were by the majority of learners stressed on the first syllable, which means **incorrectly** (Graph 4.2). These results indicate a problem in word stress in the entire researched sample because all the subjects appear to strongly tend to stress the first syllables of polysyllabic words although the stress is not very strong.

### Words with primary stress on second/third syllable



**Graph 4.2:** This graph shows the learners' tendency to stress first syllables of the words with primary stress on the second/third syllable. (Source: Eva Kovarova)

Table 4.1 brings an overview of all the words according to the primary stress (on the first, second or third syllable) and how were they stressed by the majority of the sample. For detailed information about each word, please see Appendix 4.

### Words used for testing word stress according to their stress patterns

1 <sup>st</sup> syllable	2 <sup>st</sup> syllable	3 <sup>st</sup> syllable
woman	below	economics
lesson	biology	engineer
almost	electrify	capability
dedicate	photography	electronic
leader	chaotic	
possible	reciprocate	
elegant	Brazil	
progress	reflection	
survey	report	
	conduct	
	insult	
	upset	
	collect	
	direct	
	seventeen	

**Table 4.1:** C=correctly stressed/ I=incorrectly stressed by the majority of the sample. (Source: Eva Kovarova).

## 4.2 The weak forms problem discussion

In this chapter, I would like to describe the most important observations that were made and then summarize the findings resulting from the analysis of the weak forms.

An interesting observation was made when listening to the recordings. Majority of the sample - again - *did not* reduce the 'a, e, o, u' vowels to schwa but, in many words (such as *and, that, then, as, at, can, have* etc), they seemed to pronounce the strong forms incorrectly. In general, the researched subjects tended to pronounce the sounds /æ/ and /ɜ:/ as 'e' (in words such as *and, at, that etc.*) or 'é' (in words such as *her, there*). In other words, they did not pronounce for example the conjunction 'and' in its strong form as /ænd/ but rather as /end/.

We can say that in these cases they *use strong forms* but they mispronounce the individual sounds - apparently, they tend to mispronounce the English sounds /æ/ and /ɜ:/, with a rather Czech sounding 'e' or 'é'. This problem was also mentioned by Skalickova (1982).

The next observation made was that the more fluent speakers were more likely to use weak forms than the less fluent ones even though they were reducing only certain grammatical words. The less fluent students usually needed to make smaller or greater pauses in their speech and thus they tended to pronounce strong forms of all grammatical words. The more fluent students on the other hand, seemed to be more concentrated on the whole rhythm of the sentence because they did not need to be focused on the grammatical structures and 'compounding' of an utterance as much as the less fluent ones. However, this was not the case of all the grammatical words because some of them (such as *a, an, the, of, to*) were reduced more often than others (such as *for, from, but, some.*) even by the more fluent students.

There were about thirty grammatical words which were used repeatedly (for complete list and detailed information about each grammatical word, please see Appendix 5), so it was possible to focus on their pronunciation and detect the most common features in them.

After listening to all the recordings several times I can say that there were **only several grammatical words that were by the majority of the subjects and in the majority of cases pronounced in their weak forms**; these were: *a/an, the, to*, and partly the preposition *of* (it was reduced especially in phrases such as “a lot of something”), and partly pronouns *we, you, she* (partly because it was sometimes difficult to decide if the final vowel was short enough that we can consider it to be a weak form, but in general, I identified them as “weak”.) All the other grammatical words were in most cases **not reduced** but pronounced in their **strong forms** (Table 4.2) (in words: *but, your, them, us, for, from of, some, must, are, was*) but mostly mispronounced as described above with an ‘e’ or ‘é’ on the places where /æ/, or /ɜ:/ should be (in words: *and, that, than, at, as, there, can, have, had, were, am*). An overview of weak and strong forms used by the sample is in Table 4.2 below.

Also, I would like to mention other mistakes that were repeatedly made in pronunciation of individual sounds: the preposition ‘of’ and the verb ‘have’ were in most cases pronounced with ‘f’ instead of ‘v’ as /hef/, /ɒf/. The verbs ‘does’ and ‘was’ were in most cases pronounced with ‘s’ in the final positions as /dʌs/, /wɒs/. These mistakes all refer to the mispronouncing of lenis and fortis consonants in final positions (this problem also mentioned by Skalickova, 1982).

### Strong and weak forms used by the majority of the sample

Word(s)	S/W	Word(s)	S/W	Word(s)	S/W	Word(s)	S/W	Word(s)	S/W
<i>the</i>	W	<i>then</i>	S	<i>at</i>	S	<i>as</i>	S	<i>should</i>	S
<i>a, an</i>	W	<i>your</i>	S	<i>for</i>	S	<i>some</i>	S	<i>must</i>	S
<i>and</i>	S	<i>we, you</i>	W	<i>from</i>	S	<i>there</i>	S	<i>do</i>	S
<i>but</i>	S	<i>them</i>	S	<i>of</i>	S/W	<i>can, could</i>	S	<i>am, are</i>	S
<i>that</i>	S	<i>us</i>	S	<i>to</i>	W	<i>have, has, had</i>	S	<i>was, were</i>	S

**Table 4.2:** This table shows that the majority of the sample is used to reducing only some grammatical words. S=strong form, W=weak form. (Source: Eva Kovarova)



## Findings Summary

To summarize the findings in both word stress and weak forms problem, we can assert that:

- The subjects seemed not to have problems in words with the primary stress on the first syllable.
- The subject strongly tended to stress first syllable of words with the primary stress on the second or third syllable (they did not make any other syllable more prominent than the first one).
- Generally, the prominence of the stressed syllable was not as obvious (strong) as it should have been.
- The subjects are generally not used to reducing unstressed syllables neither in lexical nor in grammatical words.
- The majority of the subjects are only used to reducing articles *a, an, the*; pronouns *we, you* and prepositions *to* and partly *of*. All the other grammatical words were in most cases *not reduced*.
- The more fluent subjects seemed to reduce unstressed syllables more often than the less fluent ones.

Firstly, as it is obvious from the summary the subjects did not seem to have problems with words which have the primary stress on the first syllable but apparently they have greater problems with words with the primary stress on the second/third syllable. Also, the prominence of the stressed syllable was not very obvious. Compared to the theoretical facts about word stress in Czech (mentioned above in this chapter), these results indicate the influence of Czech and thus we can speak about *interference* from the mother tongue in terms of stress placement which means confirmation of the first hypothesis. There was an interference detected in word stress patterns: the sample tended to stress the first syllables of words as they do in Czech.

Secondly, in the majority of cases the subjects did not reduce unstressed syllables either in lexical or in grammatical words. They seemed to be used to reducing only in several words with frequent usage (articles, some prepositions and pronouns). The majority of the grammatical words were in most cases *not reduced*. According to these results, I can say that also the second hypothesis was also confirmed, but perhaps stronger than

I expected. There was a prevalence detected in the sample for using strong forms of grammatical words in positions where native speakers would normally use weak forms.

## 5. Reflections & Recommendations

To comment on the results, I would like to mention a fact that was surprising to me – that the results were quite ambiguous. I expected there will be more individual differences in production of both weak forms and word stress detected or there will be individuals who will be significantly better than others (due to a stay in an English speaking country etc.) but the subjects seemed to be quite consistent in the kind of mistakes they made. I also expected the results, especially in the case of the weak forms, will be not as bad as they finally were.

The subjects as a whole had problems with both word stress and weak forms. In case of word stress I would say that - according to the survey - it was a matter of deficient pronunciation instruction (they may not have been taught how to stress these words correctly, or they have not been corrected by their teachers), especially in words that I presume these learners surely knew and used actively, such as *fourteen*, *Brazil* or *biology*. In case of the weak forms, I think that the majority did not even know that weak forms exist (or at least before they entered the university) and when they used weak forms it was rather a matter of a natural progress in English than a purposeful usage.

I also noted one important feature concerning verb forms: the subjects only rarely used contracted forms of verbs. They tended to use full forms of verb forms: e.g. “*I would like to*” instead of “*I’d like to*”; “*I am*” instead of “*I’m*” or “*They are*” instead of “*They’re*”. It would also be interesting to find out in a separate study to which degree are the Czech students used to using contracted forms of verbs, because I believe that using contracted forms (as well as weak forms) can distinctively improve comprehension of spoken English (listening skills).

In the recordings there were several students who seemed a bit more fluent than others and who seemed to reduce unstressed syllables more often than others. However, this was the case of not all of the weak forms, because some of the grammatical words were almost never reduced even by those students. Concerning the weak forms and word stress problems, it would be interesting to make a similar study with more advanced learners or with those who have spent some time abroad to ascertain if the usage of weak forms and correct stress placement would increase together with the level of English – “the language will take care of itself” (Allwright, 1979: 170 ) or, if it is a matter of habit and thus difficult to unlearn.

According to the results of this study (and also my own experience), I personally think that Czech students in general have problems with *identifying the “schwa” sound*, or in the case of students that do not study English language as a subject at a university, they do not even know that anything such as schwa exists in English. I consider this to be a result of the general lack of pronunciation instruction in Czech schools. As the results from the survey indicate, the majority of the sample was not satisfied with pronunciation instruction they had received at the primary and secondary schools and they generally felt a need of better pronunciation training.

I believe that there should be much more attention paid to pronunciation at schools of all types but I am bit sceptical at the same time. As both teacher and learner I have met many teachers (or future teachers – my colleagues from college) and not many of them considered pronunciation to be important in the foreign language teaching curriculum for several reasons: they either had a feeling that it is a too complicated field to understand and thus they were not sure about the issues themselves; or they just thought that pronunciation is less important and there should be more attention paid to other fields of language (especially to grammar). Moreover, there are many teachers who are not able to ‘hear’ the specific (and sometimes very gentle) nuances in pronunciation themselves because they do not have sense for music, rhythm etc. And thus it is almost impossible for them to teach these differences.

The next reason why I consider pronunciation teaching so important is a fact that not many teachers take it into account: if a person learn to stress words or use weak forms correctly it will not only increase his/her intelligibility but also their own comprehension of spoken English. In other words, if they used strong forms only, they would not be able to identify weak forms in words and thus they would not understand what has been said to them because they subconsciously expected to hear what they were used to saying.

There is one very common opinion among people (and also mentioned in the responses to my questionnaire) that a person will be understood by the others even with incorrect pronunciation. As I have already said before in my comments to the questionnaire, I considered this to be a completely wrong presumption which can function only in the environment of non-native speakers who have the same native language (e.g. Czech school). All the people who work with English (and especially teachers) are used to hearing a Czech accent but the foreigners are not and thus they are not likely to understand

and “figure out” what we are saying with a strong Czech accent. I believe this is a matter of a personal experience and everyone who has ever been in a situation when they were speaking grammatically and lexically correct English but were not understood due to their accent and mispronouncing of words would most likely agree.

Surely, we can not force non-native teachers to teach pronunciation in details, especially since many do not understand the field themselves, but I believe that there should be certain issues every teacher should be acquainted with and be prepared to deal with in classes (such as the schwa sound or proper stress placement in words), because I consider them to be crucial features of spoken English.

Next matter I would like to address is the theory of the word stress presented in the theory part (pp.19-24). The theory background given by P. Roach is very thorough but I personally think that nobody would be able to keep in mind and apply so many complicated rules when learning new words. Surely, there are some useful rules (e.g. those for compound words) but in general I think these rules are too complicated to be useful. My opinion on this is identical with the one of Celce-Murcia, namely that word stress should be taught but as an integral part of each word, especially of those that do not have primary stress on the first syllable (in case of Czech learners). The more talented students will gradually find the rules for themselves or we can draw their attention to the most common features and teach the most useful rules, but it would be very discouraging for the students to have to learn all the rules.

What I find extremely important, not only in teaching of word stress, but in pronunciation issues in general, is to be consistent in correcting of learners’ mistakes. If we draw our students’ attention on pronunciation only when presenting a word but we do not care how they pronounce it later (as many students mentioned their teachers used to do), they will not get any benefit from it and they will say for example /'hoʊtl/ instead of /hoʊ'tel/ which is a typical fossilized error of Czech speakers of English. This demand, of course, is not true for word stress only but also for other pronunciation issues.

Concerning the sources for this diploma thesis, I found that there are almost no sources which would deal with specific problems of Czech speaker of English except for “Fonetika soucasne anglictiny” by A. Skalickova (1982) which brings a list of mistakes that are typical of Czech speakers (the list in the theory part, pp.28-29 ). Although it is just a summary I found it useful and I also referred to it several times in previous chapters.

However, I did not find any other newer sources which would deal with this problem both theoretically and practically and I think there is a lack of specific research which would refer to Czech speakers' mistakes and how to deal with them or avoid them. I think it may be linked to the fact that pronunciation is still a "Cinderella" among other fields of language and not many people (except from the experts at universities) consider it to be important enough and also, that this kind of research could only a Czech person do but who is also able to assess the whole problem from a native-speaker's point of view.

To help to eliminate the improper habits of Czech learners, I would like to present some suggestions and exercises which could be helpful.

From my perspective, Czech primary and secondary school teachers should know how to teach and deal with the "schwa" sound, because if students know the minimal theoretical background (where the schwa sounds occur in words) and they will practice identifying the schwa in words, it will help them in production of both word stress and weak forms. Also, learners should be aware of the contrast between stressed (clear) vowel and unstressed, reduced (schwa) vowels which stand in an opposition. Thus, when presenting stress in words, teachers can draw learners' attention to the schwa sound at the same time.

Presenting of "schwa" and word stress placement is very important. However, for many students just theoretical explanation is not enough. It might be helpful to present it graphically with help of bubbles or reduced (in case of word stress enlarged) letters. Several examples below:

● ●	● ●
/ə/	/ə/
sofa	about
aqua	around

(Source: Celce-Murcia, 1996)

travel	tr <b>a</b> vəl
Canada	<b>C</b> anədə

(Source: Gilbert, 2005)

For raising learners' awareness of stress placement, various exercises can be used, as described in the theory (pp. 35-36). Before students are able to practice word stress in communicative exercises, it is advisable to use repeating and controlled exercises based on listening discrimination (examples below):

- Teacher reads words with similar stress patterns, learners try to underline the number of the syllable they think is stressed:

1 - <u>2</u> - 3	1 - <u>2</u>	1 - <u>2</u> - 3 - 4
banana	below	photography
dictation	Brazil	reciprocate
chaotic	collect	

(Source: Eva Kovarova)

- Teacher reads two similar words, whereas one is a noun and the other is a verb. Learners underline/circle the word they hear.

Nouns	Verbs
<u>contract</u>	contract
progress	progress
present	present
export	export

(Source: Gilbert, 2005)

To raise learners' awareness of weak forms and schwa the same kind of exercises can be used as for word stress. Before communicative exercises, where learners' should be able to use weak forms actively, repeating and controlled exercises (discriminating exercises) can be used. Several examples below:

- Learners listen and cross out the vowel where they think “schwa” occurs.

problem
economics
attend
pronounce

(Inspired by Gilbert, 2005)

- Teacher says two sentences. One with a weak form, the other with a strong form of a certain grammatical word. Learners decide which version they have heard.

I'd like a cup of tea.	- What are you thinking of?
I can come.	- I can't swim.
What does he do?	- That's what he does.
She was ill.	- Yes, she was.

(Source: Eva Kovarova).



## 6. Conclusion

The main goal of this diploma thesis was to analyse the students' oral production and find out whether there will be any detectable shortcomings and interferences in word stress and usage of weak forms. There were two hypotheses: there will be interference from the mother tongue in the field of word stress and there will be prevalence in using the strong forms of grammatical words. Both hypotheses were unambiguously confirmed.

In the analysis it was discovered that the majority of the sample did not make mistakes in stressing words with primary stress on the first syllable, but they did not correctly stress words with primary stress on the second or third syllables. Concerning the weak forms, it was found that the majority of the sample did not use weak forms in positions where they should have done, according to the common native usage.

As for the results, this author thinks that firstly Czech learners in general receive inadequate pronunciation instruction at schools and secondly, pronunciation as such has traditionally been neglected. Many teachers believe that pronunciation is not as important as grammar or vocabulary or they are unprepared to work on it on a regular basis because they do not understand the issues themselves, or they just underestimate their importance. This problem of pronunciation not being taken seriously is not the case of the Czech Republic only but of the whole ESL/EFL teaching/learning in general. The reasons for it may be that the actual quality of one's pronunciation cannot be adequately measured and that language is a highly personal matter and not all learners are, due to individual differences and preferences, talent, motivation and other factors (described in the theory part), able to achieve as good results as others. Pinker (2007) describes phonetic perception even as a 'sixth sense'. However, it would be a failure to think that pronunciation and accent is something over which we have completely no control, or that it is unnecessary to deal with it.

This researcher believes that the teachers' task is not to push the learners to have a native-like pronunciation (which would be an unachievable goal anyway) but to provide them with such a theory basis and training that they will be understood in communication with native speakers or foreigners because without 'being understood' the whole communication becomes pointless. Therefore, pronunciation exercises should be an

integral part of each long-term English course because infrequent or random attention does not bring any real benefits and enables a rise of mistakes that will be very difficult (if not impossible) to unlearn in the future.

As already said in the previous chapter, there is a lack of Czech-specific research that would help teachers to locate and apply methods suitable for Czech learners. Within the scope of this diploma thesis, it was not possible to refer to all the problems faced by Czech learners and only a small part of a complex field of issues was described. However, this author wanted to discover and point out shortcomings in pronunciation, highlight the importance of correct approaches, and additionally raise other teachers' awareness of the importance of pronunciation teaching in general and weak forms and word stress in particular

## Resumé

Tato diplomová práce se zabývá typickými chybami středně pokročilých českých studentů angličtiny, konkrétně slovním přízvukem a redukcí nepřízvučných slabik. Jelikož se český a anglický jazyk liší v systému slovního přízvuku a zároveň také v realizaci nepřízvučných slabik (v angličtině dochází k jejich redukcí, v češtině nikoliv), předpokládalo se, že zde bude identifikována interference z mateřského jazyka. Z tohoto předpokladu vychází hypotézy pro tuto práci:

1. Bude identifikována interference z mateřského jazyka v oblasti slovního přízvuku (studenti budou mít tendenci klást přízvuk na první slabiky slov jako v češtině).

2. Jelikož v češtině nedochází k redukcí samohlásek v nepřízvučných slabikách, studenti budou mít tendenci k užívání jejich neredukovaných (plných) forem.

Vzorkem pro potvrzení či vyvrácení výše uvedených hypotéz bylo 33 náhodně vybraných studentů/studentek anglického jazyka na Pedagogické fakultě v Českých Budějovicích, jejichž jazykový projev byl nahrán a následně analyzován.

První část práce přináší teoretická východiska pro danou problematiku. Nejdříve byla stručně popsána historie a vývoj výuky výslovnosti angličtiny v rámci jednotlivých učebních metod až do současnosti. Pozornost byla dále věnována procesu osvojování cizího jazyka a vybraným faktorům, které tento proces ovlivňují, a rovněž byly porovnány oba jazykové systémy z hlediska slovního přízvuku a redukce nepřízvučných slabik. Z tohoto porovnání vyplývá, že v češtině je slovní přízvuk vázán na první slabiku slov, zatímco v angličtině může být na kterékoliv slabice slova a dále také, že zatímco v angličtině se redukují nepřízvučné slabiky (gramatická slova), v češtině k redukcí nedochází.

Za účelem prokázání výše uvedených hypotéz byl autorkou práce navržen projekt, který se skládal ze dvou částí. První část projektu byla založena na dotazníku, jehož pomocí autorka získala potřebné informace o testovaném vzorku studentů, zejména jejich názory a zkušenosti s výukou výslovnosti angličtiny.

Druhá část projektu se zabývala nahrávkami studentů a analýzou výše uvedených aspektů. Byly pořízeny dva typy nahrávek: čtení neznámého textu a spontánní projev (dialog).

Analýzou bylo prokázáno, že testovaný vzorek studentů skutečně vykazuje vliv interference z mateřského jazyka v oblasti slovního přízvuku, jelikož studenti měli tendenci umísťovat přízvuk na první slabiky víceslabičných anglických slov, přestože tato slova měla primární přízvuk na druhé či třetí slabice. Dále bylo analýzou zjištěno, že většina studentů není zvyklá redukovat nepřízvučná gramatická slova v mluvené angličtině a že mají tendenci vyslovovat jejich plné, přízvučné formy ve všech pozicích, stejně tak jako v mateřském jazyce.

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## Appendices

### APPENDIX 1

Explanation of some of the terms used

- **L1:** A first language/native language/mother tongue is the language a person has learned from his/her parents or speaks the best.
- **L2:** A foreign language, any language learned after the first language or mother tongue.
- **Fossilization:** A process in which incorrect language becomes a habit and cannot easily be corrected.
- **Fossilized/embedded errors:** Language errors learned during the language acquisition that are difficult to unlearn.
- **Interference:** A negative effect /negative transfer/ of learners' L1 on the production of their L2 in any aspect of language (pronunciation, grammar, syntax, spelling, etc.); applying knowledge from the native language to a second language.
- **Convenient sample:** A sample which is selected because they are convenient
- **EFL:** English as a Foreign Language teaching
- **ESL:** English as a Second Language teaching

## APPENDIX 2

A questionnaire which was given to the sample in order to get supplementary information about their age, experiences and attitudes to pronunciation learning/teaching

### QUESTIONNAIRE

This questionnaire is a part of a survey on pronunciation which is going to be included in my diploma thesis. It is anonymous and the results will be used for the purposes of my diploma thesis only. Please place a tick where required, or write a longer answer. Do not leave any of the questions unanswered. You can reply in Czech if you wish. Thank you for your time.

Eva Kovářová

- Code:                    male  female
- Faculty: \_\_\_\_\_ Study programme: \_\_\_\_\_ Year of study: \_\_\_\_\_ Age: \_\_\_\_\_
- How long have you been studying English? \_\_\_\_\_ years
- At what age did you start learning English? \_\_\_\_\_
  
- Did your teachers pay special attention to pronunciation? If so, can you describe it further? (Activities or exercises they were using).  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
- Did your teachers correct your mistakes or try to make you unlearn bad pronunciation habits? What methods did they use?  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
- From your own experience, do you think that the teachers pay enough attention to teaching pronunciation (not only how to pronounce a word correctly, but also such aspects as word stress?)  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

- Have you ever tried to systematically improve or work on your pronunciation?  
If so, can you describe the methods you were using and why did you choose them?

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- Which of the listed activities do you use to improve your pronunciation?

- listening to music  watching movies in English with Czech subtitles  
 watching movies with English subtitles  watching movies in English without subtitles  
 using special PC software (programs) \_\_\_\_\_ Internet  \_\_\_\_\_  
(name the websites if possible)  other means \_\_\_\_\_  
 no activities

- Try to evaluate the importance of teaching pronunciation when learning English. Please comment on your choice (why do you think teaching pronunciation is or isn't important).

- absolutely vital  very important  quite important  not very important  unimportant

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- How important do you think is pronunciation for the speaker to be "understood" by others (native speakers etc.)? Try to comment on your choice:

- absolutely vital  very important  quite important  not very important  unimportant

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- How important do you think is the role of a native speaker (as a teacher) in teaching pronunciation?

- absolutely vital  very important  quite important  not very important  unimportant

- You consider your pronunciation skills as:

- approaching native speaker  very good  average  not so good  poor  don't know

- If you think of your pronunciation, do you see any particular problematic area that you would like to improve? Make a tick at the area(s) you think you have problems with:

- Individual sounds (vowels and consonants)  
 Word stress  
 Linking of words (connected speech)  Rhythm and intonation

- What are the areas of pronunciation you think you are relatively good at?
  - Individual sounds (vowels and consonants)
  - Word stress
  - Linking of words (connected speech)
  - Rhythm and intonation
  
- What areas of pronunciation do you think are the most problematic for Czech speakers (generally)?
  - Individual sounds (vowels and consonants)
  - Word stress
  - Linking of words (connected speech)
  - Rhythm and intonation
  
- Did your past teachers try to monitor and correct your own pronunciation?
  - Yes, consistently
  - Only occasionally
  - Almost never
  - Never
  
- Are you able to self-monitor and correct your own pronunciation? Tick the statement you most agree with:
  - Yes, I try to
  - I would like to, but don't know how
  - If I am good at English, my pronunciation will improve automatically.
  - It is something I never think of

**LEARNING STRATEGIES:**

Please describe some of the strategies you have used to improve your pronunciation.

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### APPENDIX 3

#### List of the dialogues topics with additional questions

##### **1. “Travelling broadens our horizons”**

It is said that travelling educates, would you agree? Why/ why not?

What are your experiences? What country do you like the most and why?

Can you imagine spending a holiday alone? Have you ever had a chance to travel alone? What are the pros and cons? Imagine, that you have to spend one month on a deserted island in the Caribbean. What would you do all the time? What would you take with you?

##### **2. “Studying at home vs. abroad”**

What motivates young people to study abroad? Are there any disadvantages? What is your opinion? Do you want to spend a semester or more abroad and why/ where? Why do you think it is/is not important? Do you find it important regarding to what subjects are you studying?

##### **3. ‘Reality shows such as "Czechs got talent", "Big Brother", cooking shows etc.’**

What do you think about them? Do you watch any sometimes?

Why do you think many people like them (or hate them)? Why do you think they are so popular nowadays? Could you imagine that you would take part in such a show? What do you think a person motivates to be on TV?

##### **4. “Social networks such as Facebook or MySpace”**

What do you think of this way of communication? Do you like it or not? Why do you think it is so popular nowadays? Do you see any negative aspects? Some people say that Facebook became a lifestyle for them. Would you agree or can you comment on this?

#### APPENDIX 4

A detailed list of the stress patterns and evaluation of the pronunciation of each word

**woman** /'wʊmən/: This word was pronounced largely with a correct stress placing, there was only one student who pronounced it as /wʊ'men/, several mistakes occurred in pronunciation of the individual sounds. Some students pronounced it with Czech 'o' /'womən/ and did not reduce /mən/ so that it sounded more like /men/.

**lesson** /'lesn/: No mistakes.

**below** /bɪ'ləʊ/ : The majority pronounced this word with stress on the second syllable, however, it was often not clear whether it is primary stress or secondary stress. About ten people put the stress on the first syllable and pronounced it as /'bɪləʊ/.

**almost** /'ɔ:lməʊst/: No mistakes.

**economics** /,i:kə'nɒmɪks/: More than a half of the learners pronounced this word either with stress on the first syllable (more than twenty) and the rest put stress on the second syllable. No one stressed it correctly. The learners pronounced this words with Czech 'e' or 'i' at the beginning, but never with a long 'i'.

**biology** /baɪ'ɒlədʒɪ/: All of the learners stressed the first syllable /'baɪɒlədʒɪ/; no one stressed this word correctly.

**electrify** /ɪ'lektɪfaɪ/: The majority of the learners stressed the first syllable and pronounced the word with 'e' instead of 'ɪ': /'elektrifaɪ/ at the beginning and about five learners stressed this word correctly.

**photography** /fə'tɒɡrəfi/: The vast majority (about thirty) learners stressed the first syllable /'photography/ and just three learners stressed this word correctly on the first syllable.

**chaotic** /keɪ'ɒtɪk/: All of the learners stressed the first syllable /'keɪɒtɪk/. This word was also several times mispronounced with the Czech 'ch' instead of 'ɪ' at the beginning.

**engineer** /,endʒɪ'nɪə(r)/: The majority (about twenty) learners stressed this words correctly on the third syllable, but in some cases, the prominence of the first and the third syllable was somewhat the same. The learners also largely tended to pronounce this word with 'i' at the beginning, or very similarly to as it is pronounced in Czech.

**capability** /,keɪpə'bɪləti/: The majority of the learners (more than twenty) put the stress on the first syllable, the rest stressed the word correctly on the third syllable. However, there was almost nobody who would pronounce this word correctly in its beginning; the learners pronounced this word mostly as /'keɪpəbɪləti/.

**seventeen** /,sevn'ti:n/: Surprisingly (as this is a word of frequent usage and this stress pattern is common to a whole group of numerals), the majority of the learners (nearly thirty) did not stress this word correctly and put the stress on the first syllable: /'sevnti:n/.

**electronic** /ɪ'lek'trɒnɪk/: Only a couple of students stressed the word correctly, the rest stressed either the first syllable (the vast majority) as /'ɪlektɒnɪk/ or the second syllable. Again, the students largely tended to pronounce this word with 'e' at the beginning.

**reciprocate** /rɪ'sɪprəkeɪt/: Concerning pronunciation as a whole, this word was the most problematic one. Many students seemed not to know the word at all and mispronounced it. The majority (nearly thirty) stressed the first syllable and pronounced it as /'resɪprəkeɪt/. Only a couple of students stressed this word correctly.

**dedicate** /'dedɪkeɪt/: The vast majority (about thirty) stressed this word correctly. Couple of students put the stress on the third syllable /dedɪ'keɪt/.

**leader** /'li:də(r)/: No mistakes.

**Brazil** /brə'zɪl/: The majority (about twenty-five) students stressed this word incorrectly on the first syllable and also pronounced the 'a' as 'e' as /'brezɪl/ and the rest pronounced it with the right stress-placement but very few students reduced the 'a' to schwa.

**reflection** /rɪ'flekʃn/: The majority (about twenty-five) students stressed this word correctly, the rest stressed the first syllable /'rɪflekʃn/, although, there was a tendency of the students to stress it rather as /rɪf'lekʃn/. Many students also pronounced this word with 're' at the beginning.

**possible** /'pɒsəbl/: All of the students stressed this word correctly on the first syllable; however, they usually did not reduce the 'i' in the second syllable and pronounced it as /'pɒsɪbl/.

**elegant** /'elɪgənt/: All of the students stressed this word correctly on the first syllable. Interestingly, about a half of the students mispronounced this word as /'eledʒnt/.

In the case of the sentences, stress in the words was even less noticeable than in the individual words. Thus I find it logical to assess the words in italics as “stressed correctly”, when there was a noticeable prominence of the right syllable or “stressed incorrectly”, when I found no syllable in the word was more prominent than others.

**I completed the *report* /rɪ'pɔ:(r)t/ by myself:** The majority (about thirty learners) did not stress this word correctly.

**The *progress* /'prɒʊgres/ was very slow:** All the students pronounced this word as more or less prominent (=correctly).

**We need to *conduct* /kən'dʌkt/ another experiment:** In this word, about a half of the students pronounced the second syllable as more or less prominent. The second half did not stress this word correctly.

**His attitudes amounted to a great *insult* /ɪn'sʌlt/:** Only about five learners made the second syllable noticeably prominent, the majority did not.

**Are you still *upset* /ʌp'set/?** About a half of the students made the second syllable somewhat prominent, the second half did not.



**Can you *collect* /kə'lekt/ the tests?** Just a couple of students stressed this word correctly. The vast majority did not make the second syllable prominent and/or, they did not reduce the first syllable to 'kə' and pronounced it fully as Czech 'ko', so thus the prominence was not obvious.

**What is the *direct* /daɪ'rekt/, /dɔ'rekt/ result?** The majority of the learners did not make the second syllable prominent.

**Who is responsible for the *survey* /'sɜ:(r)veɪ/?** The majority stressed this word correctly.

## APPENDIX 5

List of the most frequently used weak forms and evaluation of their pronunciation

1. **the:** Almost no problems occurred in pronunciation of the definite article, it was pronounced correctly in its weak form as /ðə/, or /ði/.
2. **a, an:** Generally, the researched students very often omitted indefinite articles before nouns. The indefinite article 'a' was in most cases pronounced correctly as /ə/, the indefinite article 'an' was pronounced in some cases rather as /en/ than as /ən/.
3. **and:** mostly pronounced with 'e' instead of schwa in the beginning, as /end/ or /ent/, only rarely reduced to /ən/
4. **but:** In the majority of cases, this words was pronounced in its strong form /bʌt/, only sometimes reduced to /bət/.
5. **that:** mostly pronounced with 'e' instead of schwa, as /ðet/ and was only sometimes reduced to /ðət/.
6. **then:** mostly pronounced with 'e' as /ðen/, not reduced.
7. **your:** mostly pronounced with 'o' or in its strong form /jɔ:r/, almost never reduced.
8. **she, he, we, you :** These pronouns were pronounced either correctly with weaker vowels than the /i:/ and /u:/ or as a strong form with a long vowel, although this may be a matter of individual perception because the difference between the weak and strong form is just a little here and can also differ according to the different positions in a sentence. The pronoun 'he' however, was mainly pronounced with an 'h' in the beginning, so it was not reduced correctly to /i/. The pronoun 'we' was often pronounced with 'v' in the beginning, which is (e.g. according to Skalickova) a typical mistake of Czech speakers.
9. **them:** mostly pronounced in its strong form /ðem/, rarely reduced to /ðəm/
10. **us:** mostly pronounced in its strong form /ʌs/, rarely reduced to /əs/

- 11. at:** mostly pronounced with ‘e’ as /et/, rarely reduced to /ət/
- 12. for:** usually pronounced with ‘o’ or in its strong form /fɔ:r/, only in several cases reduced to /fər/
- 13. from:** mostly pronounced in its strong form /frɒm/
- 14. of:** This conjunction was pronounced as both strong and weak form (less often, but especially in the phrase ‘a lot of something’), but mostly with ‘f’ instead of ‘v’ as /ɒf/, was only rarely reduced to /əv/.
- 15. to:** Mostly pronounced as /tu/ (which as according to Roach counted to weak forms) sometimes as /tu:/, but again, in several cases reduced to /tə/.
- 16. as:** mostly pronounced with ‘e’ as /eɪ/, almost never reduced to /tə/
- 17. some:** mostly pronounced in its strong form /sʌm/, almost never reduced to /səm/
- 18. there:** This word was mostly pronounced with a longer or shorter ‘e’ as /ðer/, /ðe:r/ and almost never reduced to /ðər/.
- 19. can, could:** mostly pronounced with ‘e’ and ‘u’ as /kən/, /kud/, rarely reduced to /kən/ or /kəd/.
- 20. have, has, had:** Again, mostly pronounced with ‘e’ on the places where schwa should be, only rarely reduced to /(h)əv/, /(h)əz/, /(h)əd/.
- 21. should:** mostly pronounced in its strong form /ʃʊd/, almost never reduced to /ʃəd/
- 22. must:** mostly pronounced in its strong form /mʌst/, almost never reduced to /məst/
- 23. do:** mostly pronounced as /du/ or /du:/, almost never reduced to /də/

**24. am, are:** These verbs were pronounced either in their weak or strong form, according to what form of the verb they used. If contracted forms, the verb 'am' was usually pronounced in its weak form /əm/. The verb 'are' was usually not used in contracted forms and thus not pronounced in its weak form but in the strong form /ɑ:r/.

**25. was, were:** Usually pronounced in their strong forms, the verb 'was' as /wɒs/, and the verb 'were' with /e:/ as /we:r/, only in several cases reduced to /wəs/ or /wər/. Again, in some cases the students pronounced these words with an initial 'v' instead of 'w'.

## APPENDIX 6

A sample of two recoding scripts with the transcribed grammatical words

For transcription of the vowels, I chose to use 'i' and 'u' instead of 'ɪ' and 'ʊ'. I will also use 'e' in position where the students pronounced it instead of schwa.

### Dialogue No.1 /Travelling

A: So, **we /wi:/** chose travelling because **we /wi/** both like travelling. So, Andrea, it is said **that /ðet/** travelling educates. Would **you /ju/** agree?

B: I definitely would because when travelling **you /ju/** getting know **the /ðə/** country where **you /ju/** are, **the /ðə/** customs, **the /ðə/** population, other people **and /end/** **you /ju/** also **can /ken/** get rid **of /ɒf/** **the /ðə/** prejudices **you /ju/** may have. What **do /du/** **you /ju/** think?

A: Yes, I agree with you. **And /ən/ do /du/** you have any experiences with travelling?

B: Yes, I do. I love travelling...

A: ...Which country **have /hev/** **you /ju/** been to?

B: I **have /hev/** been **to /tu/** France three times **and /end/** in spite **of /ɒf/** not liking **the /ðə/** language I love **the /ðə/** country, especially **the /ðə/** South **of /ɒf/** France, where I **have /hev/** been this year.

A: ...Yes, it **was /wəs/** always my big dream **to /tu/** visit this country because...

B: **You /ju/ should /ʃud/** do this!

A: I **have /hev/** never been **to /tu/** France **but /bʌt/** I like **the /ðə/** culture, **the /ðə/** fashion and...

B: Last year I **have /hev/** been **to /tu/** Paris **and /end/** I **must /mʌst/** say **that /ðet/** **the /ðə/** South **of /ɒf/** France **was /wɒs/** better because it **was /wɒz/** not so in hurry like Paris **but /bʌt/** Paris is awesome. What's **your /jɔ:r/** favourite country?

A: My favourite country is Germany...yes...because I **have /hev/** spent **there /ðɜ:r/** almost one year because I wanted **to /tu:/** improve my language skills **and /ənd/** before my stay here, I thought **that /ðæt/** all Germans are...or they have no sense **of /əf/** humour **but /bət/** thanks this stay I just realized **that /ðæt/** it doesn't depend on **the /ðə/** nationality **but /bət/** on **the**

**/ðə/** people actually, so, it **was /wəs/** really good **for /for/** me.

**B:** Yes, it's said **that** /ðet/ Germans have no sense **of** /ɒf/ humour **and** /end/ **that** /ðet/ they **are** /ɑ:r/ yelling all **the** /ðə/ time...**and** /ən/ **that** /ðet/ Czechs **are** /ɑ:r/ envious...**And** /end/ what country would **you** /ju/ like **to** /tu/ visit?

**A:** I would like **to** /tu/ visit America because **of** /ɒf/ **the** /ðə/ countryside; I **have** /hev/ read **that** /ðæt/ America has **a** /ə/ lot **of** /ɒf/ national parks, **for** /fər/ example **the** /ðə/ Yellow...stone...so, yes. I would like **to** /tu/ see this.

**B:** Me too.

**A:** Have **you** /ju/ ever been **to** /tu/ America, actually?

**B:** Not **to** /tu/ **the** /ði/ United States **but** /bʌt/ **to** /tu/ Canada...

**A:** Yes...because **of** /ɒf/ **your** /jɔ:r/ brother!

**B:** Yes **and** /end/ I must /mʌst/ admit **that** /ðet/ **the** /ðə/ country **was** /wɒs/ beautiful **and** /end/ I **was** /wɒs/ surprised by **the** /ðə/ approach **of** /ɒf/ **the** /ðə/ people. They **were** /we:r/ friendly **and** /end/ not nervous...

**A:** Like in Czech Republic.

**B:** Yes. Everybody's hurrying here **and** /ænd/...they always helped **us** /ʌs/ **and** /end/ they **were** /we:r/...if **we** /wi/ didn't know they **were** /wer/ trying **to** /tu/ explain it, they **were** /wer/ beautiful. **But** /bʌt/ I want **to** /tu/ visit **the** /ði/ United States, New York **and** /en/ this big cities. I'm /əm/ kind **of** /ɒf/ 'city' person.

**A:** **Do** /du/ **you** /ju/ want **to** /tu/ live here in Czech Republic or **do** /du/ **you** /jə/ want **to** /tu/ move...move out?

**B:** I don't really know. I know **that** /ðet/ I want **to** /tu/ live **for** /fɔr/ **a** /ə/ certain time abroad **but** /bʌt/ I think I would always come back because it's my country **and** /end/ I **am** /em/ kind **of** /ɒf/ patriotic, my family is here...

**A:** Yes I also want **to** /tu/ move abroad **for** /fɔr/ one year because **of** /ɒf/ **the** /ðə/ improving English or language skills **but** /bʌt/ I don't want **to** /tu/ stay.

**B:** In my opinion it's almost necessary **to** /tu/ go out... if **you** /ju/ **are** /ar/ studying languages...

**A:** ...**you** /ju/ have to.

**B:** ...**you** /ju:/ **should** /ʃud/ go. **And** /end/ what **do** /du/ **you** /ju/ think about travelling in Czech Republic?

**A:** Travelling in Czech Republic? Yes, I like **the** /ðə/ Czech Republic. **The** /ðə/ countryside is also very nice, especially **the** /ðə/ South Bohemia...actually every summer I spend **some** /səm/ time here under **the** /ðə/...

**B:** tent!

A: Yeah, thank **you /ju:/**...with my friends **and /ən/** so...

B: I actually like visiting castles...in summer

A: Castles?!

B: Yes.

A: **Are /ɑ:r/ you /ju/** keen on history?

B: Not so much, **but /bʌt/** sometimes I want **to /tu/** see something really old **and /end/** it's **a /ə/** good feeling that somebody **were /we:r/** walking **the /ðə/** stairs several hundred years before.

A: Yes. That's why **we /wi/** travel actually, because it really broaden our horizons...

#### Dialogue No. 4: Studying at home vs. abroad

A: So **we /wi/** chose **the /ðə/** topic about studying home or abroad **and /en/** I'd like **to /tu/** know, whether **you /ju/** have **some /səm/** personal experiences with studying abroad.

B: Yes, I do. When I finished my studies in high school I went **to /tu/** Linz **and /ent/** I **must /mʌst/** say it **was /wɒs/** good **for /fɔ:/** me because I improved my German very highly.

A: **And /end/** who brought **you /ju/ to /tu/** this idea originally?

B: Well, **the /ðə/** circumstances after finishing **the /ðə/** studies because I wanted **to /tu/** study law **and /ent/** it **was /wɒs/** too difficult **to /tu:/** study it in Czech Republic so I tried **to /tu/** study in Linz.

A: So **you /ju/ can /ken/** now speak fluently **and /ent/ you /ju/** understand everything?

B: Not everything, **but /bʌt/** I **must /mʌst/** say **that /ðet/** it's better now because I hear **the /ðə/** language better, I have it in my ears...so. **And /ent/** do **du/ you /ju/** want **to /tu/** study abroad during **the /ðə/** bachelor studies or later?

A: Yes, definitely. Well, I will be studying this school I'd like **to /tu/** go **to /tu/** England because I prefer **the /ðə/** way **of /ɒf/** living **of /ɒf/** English people **and /ænd/** they **are /ɑ:r/** somehow nearer **to /tu/** me because...I don't know, I watch English movies...maybe in some way I like their humour **and /end/** I just prefer Englishmen character **to /tu/** German peoples' natural.

B: **But /bʌt/** still, aren't **you /ju/** afraid **that /ðet/ you /ju/ are /ɑ:r/** going **to /tu/** be alone, **you /ju/** will face **to /tu/** everything by yourself...?

A: Yes, that's definitely **the /ðə/** hardest part, **and /ent/** I suppose it **was /wɒs/** **the /ðə/** most difficult **for /fɔ:/ you /ju:/** too...

**B:** Yes, definitely.

**A:** **You /ju/ weren't there /ðe:r/ with your /jɔ:r/ friends...or...didn't you /ju:/?**

**B:** I **was /wɒs/** absolutely alone, without **the /ðə/** family, without friends, so it **was /wɒs/** difficult. It **was /wɒs/** reason why I came back. In fact.

**A:** And **you /ju:/** lived **there /ðe:r/** in **a /ə/** host family or...?

**B:** No, it **was /wɒs/** like 'Studentenheim' so...like **a /ə/** college.

**A:** Yes. So **you /ju/** made **a/e/** lot of **/ɔf/** friends, German friends?

**B:** Yes, not **a /e/** lot of, **but /bʌt/** some **/sʌm/** of **/ɔf/** **them /ðem/**.

**A:** **And /ent/** **you /ju/** stay in touch with **them /ðem/?**

**B:** With my roommate. But **she /ʃi/** was **/wɒs/** terrible. I don't want **to /tu/** be in touch **but /bʌt/** **she /ʃi/** wants **to /tu/** keep it, so...

**A:** **And /ent/** what **can /ken/** **you /ju/** say about **the /ðə/** character **of /ɒf/** **the /ðə/** German people?

**B:** They **were /we:r/** Austrians, **but /bʌt/** ...I **must /mʌst/** say they **are /ɑ:/** like **the /ðə/** Czech people, very much. Yes. It **was /wəs/** **the /ðə/** 'Oberösterreich' so, they are **/ɑ:r/** like Czech people.

**A:** Yes **and /en/** they didn't despise **you /ju/...like** they didn't look down on **you /ju:/?** Like **you /ju/** **are /ɑ:r/** **the /ðə/** Czech, **you /ju/** **are /ɑ:r/** **the /ðə/** lowest person or...

**B:** Yes, sometimes. **And /en/** they have problems with Temelin **as /əs/** well...

**A:** I think it's **the /ðə/** problem **of /ɒf/** English people **as /es/** well, maybe they will look **at /et/** me somehow differently...

**A:** Like **you /ju/** **are /ɑ:r/** **from /frɒm/** Eastern Europe?

**B:** Yes, definitely.

**A:** Russia...

**B:** Maybe, they will think I speak Russian language.