



## **Bakalářská práce**

# **Common Errors Czech Students Make in English**

*Studijní program:*

B0114A300068 Anglický jazyk se zaměřením  
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*Autor práce:*

**Kateřina Nuderová**

*Vedoucí práce:*

Richard Madsen, M.A., Ph.D.  
Katedra anglického jazyka

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## Zadání bakalářské práce

# Common Errors Czech Students Make in English

|                          |   |
|--------------------------|---|
| <i>Jméno a příjmení:</i> | <b>Kateřina Nuderová</b>  |
| <i>Osobní číslo:</i>     | P19000196   |
| <i>Studijní program:</i> | B0114A300068 Anglický jazyk se zaměřením na vzdělávání                                  |
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Cílem práce je popsat časté chyby, kterých se dopouští čeští studenti při užívání anglického jazyka. Popis problematiky chyb se zaměřuje také na jejich klasifikaci, která bude rozdělena do několika skupin, zahrnující gramatiku, pravopis a slovosled, a to z důvodu odhalení, která kategorie je pro české studenty nejvíce problematická. Teoretická část se bude zabývat popisem chyb, zatímco část praktická se bude zaměřovat na konkrétní příklady chyb studentů a jejich analýzou. Data, ze kterých budu vycházet, jsou od studentů 4. ročníku Obchodní akademie v Jablonci nad Nisou, které mi na základě mé žádosti zaslala tamní vyučující, Mgr. Michaela Baloghová. Jedná se o 24 prací souvislého písemného projevu.

Metody užití v práci budou zejména studium odborné literatury a shrnutí dosavadních výzkumů. Nadále analýza chyb studentů v souvislém psaném projevu na jejichž základě bude vypracované cvičení na překlad s problematickými jevy a jeho další analýza.

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*Vedoucí práce:*

Richard Madsen, M.A., Ph.D.  
Katedra anglického jazyka

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prof. RNDr. Jan Pícek, CSc.  
děkan

L.S.

Mgr. Zénó Vernyik, Ph.D.  
vedoucí katedry

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## **Abstrakt**

Cílem práce je popsat časté chyby, kterých se dopouští čeští studenti při užívání anglického jazyka. Popis problematiky chyb se zaměřuje také na jejich klasifikaci, která bude rozdělena do několika skupin, zahrnující gramatiku, pravopis a slovosled, a to z důvodu odhalení, která kategorie je pro české studenty nejvíce problematická. Teoretická část se bude zabývat popisem chyb, zatímco část praktická se bude zaměřovat na konkrétní příklady chyb studentů a jejich analýzou. Data, ze kterých budu vycházet, jsou od studentů 4. ročníku Obchodní akademie v Jablonci nad Nisou, které mi na základě mé žádosti zaslala tamní vyučující, Mgr. Michaela Baloghová. Jedná se o 24 prací souvislého písemného projevu.

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## **Klíčová slova**

Lingvistické chyby, gramatické chyby, lexikální chyby

## **Abstract**

The aim of the thesis is to describe frequent errors that Czech students make in English. The description of the issue of errors also focuses on their classification, which will be divided into several groups, including grammar, spelling and word order, in order to reveal which category is the most problematic for Czech students. The theoretical part will deal with the description of errors, while the practical part will focus on specific examples of students' errors and their analysis. The data on which the thesis is based are from the fourth-year students of the Business Academy in Jablonec nad Nisou, which were sent to me based on my request by the teacher there, Mgr. Michaela Baloghová. There are 24 texts of continuous writing.

The methods used in the thesis will primarily be the study of literature and a summary of previous research. Furthermore, analysis of students' errors in continuous writing, on which basis a translation exercise with problematic phenomena and its further analysis will be developed.

## **Keywords**

Linguistic errors, grammatical errors, lexical errors

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# 1. Introduction

There are approximately 1.5 billion people who speak English, and less than 400 million use it as a first language; hence over one billion people learned it as a second or a foreign language. This means that this massive number of people had to learn this language and make mistakes while doing so.

The reason for choosing this topic is the endless curiosity why people make errors when learning a foreign language. Whether these errors are repeated mechanically or, on the contrary, they are completely diverse. What is their cause, and whether they can be prevented in any way. The promising aim of this thesis is to find out the answers to at least some of these questions, especially with regard to Czech students.

It is certainly natural and human-like to make mistakes while learning new things, not just a language. However, it should be possible to prevent these mistakes while learning it in school, for example, by interpreting and pointing out the most common mistakes so that students remember them and do not make them again. There are many kinds of errors in learning a foreign language, such as phonological, syntactic and many more. However, this thesis deals mainly with grammatical and, secondarily, lexical and spelling errors.

The thesis is divided into two parts – the theoretical one and the practical one. In the theoretical part, common errors are described based on previous research and study of literature. It can be seen in the previous paragraphs that the words *mistake* and *error* are used as synonyms. However, one of the chapters explains the difference between these two words. Marginally, it is also mentioned which error analysis is currently used and which of the ones used in the past it has replaced. In the practical part, the focus is mainly on specific errors made by students. Firstly, there is a short

analysis of errors made by students in continuous writing. Secondly, a translation exercise based on these specific errors was done, which is then analysed even further. These errors are described and, in the vast majority of cases, explained – where this error comes from or what it could be caused by. Their frequency is shown in the pie charts for a better idea. Finally, the thesis also includes an evaluation of the errors and whether the errors meet previous expectations or not.

## **2. Errors vs mistakes, and error analysis**

To begin with, it is essential to define what an “error” is and to provide a technique for detecting one. An error in applied linguistics is an unintended deviation from the inherent rules of a language variety made by a second language learner, often because the learner does not have sufficient knowledge of the correct rules of the target language variety. (Ellis 1994, 50–51) According to Brown (2006, 227), errors can originate from a number of various sources, such as interlingual interference from the native language, intralingual errors within the target language, the sociolinguistic context of communication, psycholinguistic or cognitive methods, and, without a doubt, a multitude of affective variables. Nordquist (2020) states that in this category belong spelling, typographical, grammatical errors or even logical fallacies and faulty punctuation. Which errors are made depends on the user’s native language characteristics. Non-native speakers are prone to make errors that are not as common among native speakers. (Brians 2013, 2)

In order to be able to dissect learner language in a proper perspective, it is pivotal to distinguish between errors and mistakes, which are, in fact, two very different matters. (Brown 2006, 226) Mistakes are viewed as an unintentional occurrence associated with the learner’s attention. They may be caused by noise, fatigue, or other distracting factors. Meanwhile, errors are regarded as systematic deviations, implying a lack of knowledge of the language used. (Madsen 2017, 30) Similar to Ellis (1994, 51) who states that errors represent lack of competence, on the other hand, when students fail to demonstrate their competence, they make a mistake. In other words, it is an error, not a mistake, that shows a portion of the learner’s lack of ability to understand or to produce the target language. (Brown 2006, 226) That being said, while the distinction is obvious in theory determining whether a given deviation of a

student from conventional usage is a mistake or an error is nearly impossible in practice. (Madsen 2017, 31) According to Brown (2006, 226–227) these two phenomena can be distinguished from each other, for example, on the basis of self-correction. Because if a mistake is pointed out, the given individual is able to correct himself. Meanwhile, an error cannot be self-corrected. On the other hand, this self-correction does not always appear even if it is only a mistake. Then it is possible to focus on the frequency of the given deviation. If an English learner says, “John cans sing” on one or two occasions but “John can sing” on others, it is challenging to determine whether “cans” is a mistake or an error. If further examination of the learner’s speech, on the other hand, consistently reveals expressions such as “wills, may’s” and so forth, it can be reasonably concluded that these and other such forms are errors implying that the learner has not differentiated modal from other verbs.

Since learners make errors, and because these errors can be observed, analysed, and classified to reveal something of their internal system, errors have led to a surge of study, referred to as error analysis. (Brown 2006, 227) In the 1970s, error analysis replaced contrastive analysis, which sought to predict learners’ errors by identifying linguistic differences between their first language and the target language. (Ellis 1994, 47) A distinction between error analysis and contrastive analysis is that error analysis examines errors attributable to all possible sources, not just those caused by a negative transfer. (Brown 2006, 227) According to Corder in Ellis (1994, 48), there are five steps to follow in error analysis:

1. Collection of a sample of learner language
2. Identification of errors
3. Description of errors
4. Explanation of errors

## 5. Evaluation of errors<sup>1</sup>

The first step is to decide which samples of learner language to use and how to collect these samples. According to the size of these samples, there are three broad types of error analysis: massive, specific, and incidental. The massive sample entails gathering multiple samples of a language use from a large number of learners. The massive sample and associated subsequent analysis can be seen, for example, in Madsen 2017. The specific sample is composed of one sample of a language use collected from a small number of learners. The incidental sample, on the other hand, is only one sample of a language use produced by a single learner. The majority of published error analyses use specific or incidental samples. (Ellis 1994, 48)

After collecting a corpus of a learner language, the errors in the corpus must be identified. As a result, it is necessary to define what constitutes an “error” and to develop a procedure for detecting one. (Ellis 1994, 50)

A comparison of the learner’s unusual expressions with a reconstruction of those expressions in the target language is utilized to describe learners’ errors. As a result, it is necessary to pay attention to the surface properties of the learners’ expressions. (Ellis 1994, 54)

Assuming that errors can be identified and described, the next step is to attempt to explain them. Explanation is concerned with determining the cause of the error, such as why it occurred. This is the most crucial phase in the second language acquisition research as it involves an attempt to understand the processes that occur there. (Ellis 1994, 57)

Whereas the previous stages of error analysis examined errors from the perspective of the learner who makes them, error evaluation considers the effect that errors have

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<sup>1</sup> Many studies do not include step 5 as it has been handled as a separate issue with its own methods of enquiry.

on the person addressed. This effect can be measured in terms of either the recipient's comprehension of the learner's meaning or the recipient's affective reaction to the errors. (Ellis 1994, 63)

### **3. The error types considered in the thesis**

For the purpose of the thesis, the errors will be divided into two categories. First one being grammatical errors with further sub-categories and the second one being lexical errors. The thesis will include the first three steps of this analysis, with an effort to include the fourth and fifth steps as meaningfully as possible.

The error categories mentioned below could be seen as a mix from both a contrastive analysis and an error analysis. But since these are the most common errors and problems faced by Czech students in the English language and are not just assumptions, it is reasonable to lean more towards error analysis. The categories are taken from Poslušná 2009; however, not all of them are mentioned here, only the largest groups. This source was chosen based on its complexity, moreover, it is one of the only ones that deals only with errors connected with the association between Czech and English languages.

However, what should be mentioned is that there is a downside in paying too much attention to students' errors. While errors do reflect a system at work, the classroom language teacher could become so focused on detecting errors that the proper expressions in the second language are overlooked. In the observation and analysis of errors, for all that they indicate about the learner, it is necessary to be careful not to focus too much on errors and lose sight of the importance of positive reinforcement of clearly expressed language that is an outcome of the learner's progress and development. While decreasing errors is a significant factor for improving language competency, communicative fluency is the ultimate aim of second language learning. (Brown 2006, 228)

### **3.1. Grammatical**

Grammatical errors, also known as usage errors, describe an instance of faulty, unconventional, or controversial usage, such as a misplaced modifier or the use of an incorrect verb tense. (Nordquist, 2020) In addition, according to Hernández (2011, 266) among grammatical errors belong incorrect structures, such as inaccurate verbal forms, and syntax difficulties, to mention a few.

#### **3.1.1. Word order**

Studies of basic word order provide an example of how difficulties can arise in determining the extent of mother language influence. Languages differ in how rigid or flexible their basic word order is. (Ellis 1994, 55–58) For instance, English has a rigid S (subject) V (verb) O (object) word order following adverbials with respect to one another, such as M (manner), P (place) and T (time). (Poslušná 2009, 48) Therefore, it is not possible to say in English *In the theatre is played Swan Lake every Monday*; however, it is correct in Czech since the Czech language has an SVO word order as well, but it is much more flexible. It should be mentioned that there is actually some flexibility in English word order, for example in cleft or pseudo-cleft sentences as well as in sentences using fronting. But that flexibility, which does have limits, probably only adds to the confusion of foreign speakers.

Furthermore, the placement of adverbials in English differs from Czech; Fitikides (2002, 75) states that in English, adverbs of time and frequency, such as *always, often, never, nearly, hardly, scarcely*, come before the verb, or between the auxiliary and the verb, for example, *I never see that man*, or *I have never seen that man*.

#### **3.1.2. Nouns**

When speaking about nouns, the most problematic phenomenon is uncountable nouns and plurality. Since uncountable nouns do not have a plural form and yet are not

used with an indefinite article, they tend to be problematic for students. These are mostly materials, liquids, and types of foods, and abstract nouns. The most misused word is *information* which Czech students often use as *informations*, which is incorrect. (Poslušná 2009, 2)

Another issue is that some nouns in Czech are plural only (pluralia tantum) whereas the corresponding English nouns are not; they are regular or singular only (singularia tantum). Therefore, it is obligatory to use a verb in singular form with these nouns. Examples of these nouns are *a door*, *a watch* or *a dress*. (Poslušná 2009, 4) The case of the word *information* is similar. In English, it is singular only (singularia tantum) whereas in Czech, it is regular.

### **3.1.3. Verbs**

Regarding verbs in English, sensory verbs, modal auxiliary verbs, and stative verbs cause difficulties for Czech students. Sensory verbs, such as *look*, *sound*, *smell*, et cetera, are followed by adjectives rather than adverbs like in Czech. Therefore, the correct form is *It looks good*. not *It looks well*. (Poslušná 2009, 11)

A modal auxiliary verb is a verb modifier followed by an infinitive without “to” (except *ought to*). It can never be used with another auxiliary verb. There is no “s” in third person either. (Melvin 2015, 116–117) Thus sentences as *He cans swim well*. or *He can swims well*. are wrong. The only accurate version is *He can swim well*.

The issue with the usage of stative verbs is that these types of verbs do not use a continuous form. Then, it is important to say *Now I remember her*. and not *Now I am remembering her*. (Poslušná 2009, 14)

### **3.1.4. Prepositions**

Many errors are made by direct translation of prepositions by Czech students. Some prepositions have similar Czech interpretations, but they are utilized in different

forms or contexts. (Poslušná 2009, 24) The error here could be as following *I lived there before two years.* however, the sentence should be *I lived there two years ago.*

There are not any definitive guidelines on when to use which preposition. With some prepositions, all that is required is to memorize their usage. In some cases, a wrong preposition is used, in others, a preposition should not be used at all in English, but Czechs put it in a sentence because, in a Czech equivalent, the preposition is used. (Poslušná, 2009 25–26) The examples are *I saw Luke on the bus.* not *I saw Luke in the bus.*, or *The bank is opposite the hospital.* not *The bank is opposite to the hospital.*

### **3.1.5. Articles**

According to Poslušná (2009, 31), articles are among the most problematic aspects of English for Czech learners. The sentence *River Nile is longest river in the world.* would be understood by the native speakers, but *The river Nile is the longest river in the world.* is the only correct form.

It is necessary to always use an article (or possessive adjective) before a singular countable noun. Regarding an uncountable noun, or the plural form of a countable noun, there is no need to use an article. However, as for a specific instance of something, it is required to use the article *the* (or possessive adjective) before a plural noun or an uncountable noun. (Collins Dictionaries 2015, 35)

### **3.1.6. Other errors**

Firstly, the word *so* is usually translated into Czech as *tak*, but English *so* is used only with adjectives, unlike the Czech word *tak*. With nouns, it is mandatory to use the word *such*. (Poslušná 2009, 38)

Secondly, only one negative can be used in English sentences. The most common way is to use a verb in negative form and then add a word such as *anybody*, *anything*, *anywhere*, et cetera. (Poslušná 2009, 40)

Thirdly, there are multiple approaches to say that a person has something in common with someone else. The simplest way is to say *me too*, but this can only be used with positive statements. With negative proclamations, it tends to be utilized *me neither* or *nor + verb + pronoun*; for instance, *I did not sleep well. – Neither did I. or Nor did I.* (Poslušná 2009, 43)

And finally, unlike in Czech language every English sentence needs a subject, with exception of imperative sentences. The only possible way to leave a subject out is in an informal speech where the meaning of the sentence is still clear, for example, *(I) Hope to meet you again.* (Poslušná 2009, 44)

It should be mentioned that the points mentioned first and third are debatable. The source from which it is drawn lists these types as grammatical errors. However, it could also be seen as lexical errors or a mix of these two categories.

## **3.2. Lexical**

Lexical errors are mistakes at lexeme level, which include errors caused by an inappropriate word, misuse of the word, or errors caused by homophone problems. (Hernández 2011, 266)

### **3.2.1. False friends**

There are English words that look or sound similar to Czech ones but have a different meaning. (Poslušná 2009, 52)

Table 1 – Examples of false friends

| Czech word  | English equivalent | Similar English word | Its correct meaning |
|-------------|--------------------|----------------------|---------------------|
| aktuální    | topical            | actual               | reálný, skutečný    |
| eventuálně  | possibly           | eventually           | konečně, nakonec    |
| fabrika     | factory            | fabric               | látka               |
| host        | guest              | host                 | hostitel            |
| koncentrát  | extract            | concentrate          | soustředit (se)     |
| konkurence  | competition        | concurrence          | součinnost          |
| kriminál    | jail               | criminal             | zločinec            |
| prezervativ | condom             | preservative         | konzervant          |
| sympatický  | nice               | sympathetic          | soucitný            |

Source: Poslušná, *Nejčastější chyby v angličtině a jak se jich zbavit*. p. 53 (adapted)

### 3.2.2. Confusable words

Among confusable words belong words that sound the same but are spelt differently – homophones. (Collins Dictionaries 2015, 126) Another category is words that do not have the same pronunciation, but they are spelled quite similarly and also sound similar to foreign speakers thanks to, for example, the word final devoicing in Czech, hence causing foreigners difficulties. (Collins Dictionaries 2015, 132)

Table 2 – Examples of confusable words

|   |  |
|---|--|
| <p><b>Accept</b><br/> <i>Accept</i> is a verb and means “agree to have”: <i>I cannot accept this money.</i></p> | <p><b>Except</b><br/> <i>Except</i> is a preposition and a conjunction meaning “not included”: <i>Everyone was invited except Flora.</i></p> |
|---|--|

|  |  |
|--|--|
| <p><b>Advice</b></p> <p><i>Advice</i> is a noun: <i>Can you give me some advice?</i></p>   | <p><b>Advise</b></p> <p><i>Advise</i> is a verb: <i>I advised him to wait.</i></p>   |
| <p><b>Definite</b></p> <p>If something is <i>definite</i>, it is firm and clear and not likely to be changed: <i>Do we have a definite date for the meeting?</i></p>     | <p><b>Definitive</b></p> <p>Something that is <i>definitive</i> provides a firm, unquestionable conclusion: <i>No one has come up with a definitive answer.</i></p>          |
| <p><b>Dessert</b></p> <p>A <i>dessert</i> is the sweet dish eaten at the end of a meal: <i>Shall we have a dessert?</i></p>  | <p><b>Desert</b></p> <p>A <i>desert</i> is a large, dry, sandy area: <i>We travelled through the Sahara Desert.</i></p> <p>And it is a verb meaning <i>to leave</i> too.</p> |
| <p><b>Loose</b></p> <p><i>Loose</i> is an adjective meaning “not firmly fixed”: <i>The bolts had worked loose.</i></p>   | <p><b>Lose</b></p> <p><i>Lose</i> is a verb meaning “to not have something anymore” or “to be defeated”: <i>I’m always losing my keys.</i></p>                               |
| <p><b>Price</b></p> <p>The <i>price</i> of something is the amount of money that you must pay to buy it: <i>The price of a cup of coffee is almost five dollars.</i></p> | <p><b>Prize</b></p> <p>A <i>prize</i> is something given to someone for winning a competition: <i>He won a prize in a painting competition.</i></p>                          |
| <p><b>Quite</b></p> <p><i>Quite</i> is an adverb and used to mean “very” in a less emphatic way: <i>It was quite expensive.</i></p>                                      | <p><b>Quiet</b></p> <p><i>Quiet</i> is an adjective and describes thing or people that do not make much noise: <i>She had a very quiet voice.</i></p>                        |
| <p><b>Raise</b></p> <p><i>Raise</i> is a transitive verb: <i>He raised his cup to his lips.</i></p>  | <p><b>Rise</b></p> <p><i>Rise</i> is an intransitive verb: <i>Columns of smoke rose into the sky.</i></p>  |

Source: Collins Dictionaries, *Common errors in English*. pp. 132–135 (adapted)

### 3.3. Spelling

This category is separated from the lexical errors since the issues mentioned here are rather of formal matters. Besides the confusable words mentioned above, there are another three spelling categories which tend to be problematic. The first one is missing

or adding letters. Occasionally students leave out or add letters to words without consideration. This is mainly an issue connected with plural forms of nouns ending with *-o* (and adding *-es*). Students then forget the correct spelling form of a singular, for example, *tomatoe* instead of *tomato*. Alternatively, students simply do not remember the correct spelling form of words that contain doubled letters; the typical ones are *recommend*, *accommodation*, *occasionally*, *address* and adjectives which end with *-ful*. (Poslušná 2009, 92)

The second one is mixing British and American spelling. Some common differences are shown in the table below.

*Table 3 – British/American English*

| <b>British English</b>  | <b>American English</b> |
|-------------------------|-------------------------|
| Harbour, colour, favour | Harbor, color, favor    |
| Theatre, centre         | Theater, center         |
| Traveller               | Traveler                |
| Dialogue, catalogue     | Dialog, catalog         |

Source: Poslušná, *Nejčastější chyby v angličtině a jak se jich zbavit*. p. 93 (adapted)

This would not be such an issue if a student would just stick to one style and not mix both of them. But since the standard in the Czech Republic is the British English students (at least in primary and secondary schools) should stick to that.

The last category is writing capital letters. Days, months, and nationalities are always written with a capital letter, unlike in Czech; for instance, *February* not *february*. (Poslušná 2009, 94)

## **4. Practical part**

### **4.1. Description of the data**

The practical part is divided into two parts so that the result is more accurate and based on more data. The first part focuses on the analysis of preparatory essays for the graduation of fourth-year high school students from The Business Academy in Jablonec nad Nisou. The data are based on 24 essays. There are two types of essays. The first type is a short email to a friend about buying a gift with a maximum of 70 words. The second essay is an article for a school magazine about a movie of choice with a maximum of 150 words. The essays are already corrected by the teacher of the students. All the essays were checked after the teacher again as well. But no additional errors or unjustified corrections were found. The subject of this part will be to point out reoccurring mistakes that suggest an underlying error, and find their possible explanation based on the theoretical part of the thesis.

The second part is a short translation exercise where problematic phenomena occur. This exercise was developed by me based on a previous short analysis of errors in essays which was also made by me. There are ten short sentences for translation and three sentences where students must choose the correct option.

### **4.2. Analysis of the data**

#### **4.2.1. Essays**

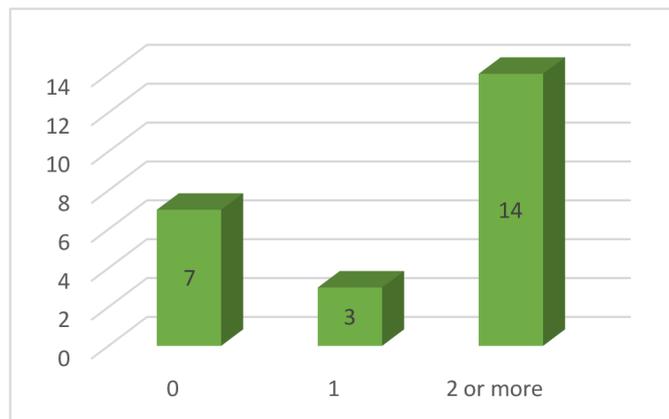
As was mentioned before, this part of the thesis is focused on reoccurring errors in continuous writing made by fourth-year high school students. These are essays of a short format, but at first sight, it was clear that the same mistakes were often repeated. Each category is shown in a chart for better understanding. As these were essays and not mechanical exercises or translation, errors often varied even though they belonged

to the same category. The graphs are therefore processed to show the number of errors within one essay. That is, no error, one error or two or more errors.

To begin with, one of the most problematic categories is undoubtedly the use of articles. This is the only category where more than half of the students had two or more errors in their essay. The issue here is that the Czech language does not have articles; therefore, Czech students tend to forget to use them.

Examples: *Titanic is quite old film.* or *I saw incredible movie.*

*Figure 1 – Articles*



Since articles are divided into definite and indefinite ones and students tend to make errors in them, it would be interesting to analyse this category in a little more depth. As for definite and indefinite articles, it follows from the essays that students make more or less the same number of errors in them. As there were 25 errors in indefinite articles compared to 24 in definite articles across all essays. However, what is interesting is that only once was the indefinite article used instead of the definite article. Meanwhile, the definite article in place of the indefinite one was used six times. Where there should have been no article, an indefinite article appeared only in one case. It is clear from this that students do not have such a problem distinguishing the articles, but above all using them.

Another problematic category, for certain, is prepositions. Errors caused by a literal translation from Czech into English appeared in this category. In addition, complete omission of prepositions or excessive use of prepositions in sentences can be seen as well.

Examples: *They were on a dinner together.*; *He met with her yesterday.*

Here can be seen a couple of examples where the literal translation was used. In Czech it is correct to say *Byli spolu na večeři.* as well as *Setkal se s ní včera.* Nevertheless, in English, it must be said *They were at a dinner together.* and *He met her yesterday.*

Examples: *Can you write me?*; *They hit to the iceberg.*

As the examples above state, students have issues with an omission of prepositions or excessive use of them. The complete omission of the preposition could be caused simply by ignorance of grammar rules or stress while writing an essay. Additionally, the correct version is *Can you write to me?* However, as seen in the second example, excessive usage is again caused by Czech, since in Czech, the sentence would be translated *Narazili do ledovce.*, while in English, the only correct option is *They hit the/crushed into an iceberg.* In other words, the English verb is transitive whereas the Czech one is not.

The last prepositions worth mentioning are *like* and *as*. In some cases, students interchanged them as if they had the same meaning. But the preposition *like* expresses a manner while the preposition *as* expresses a role or a purpose of a person or a thing.

Example: *This book is known like a fairytale for children.*

Figure 2 – Prepositions

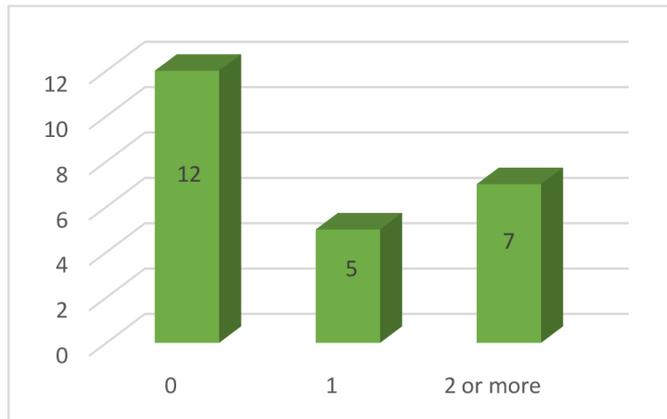
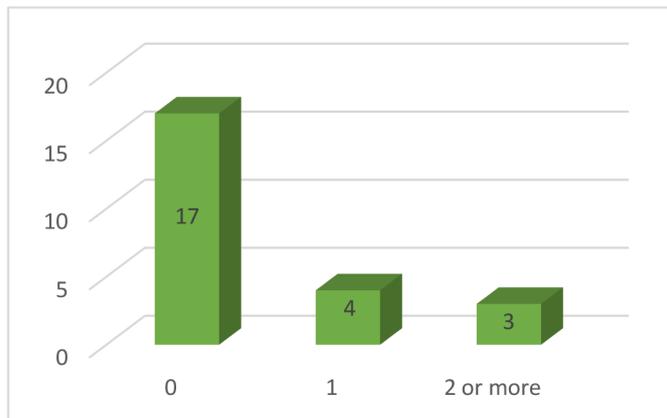


Figure 3 – Prepositions – literal translation



It can be seen in the graph that half of the students did not make a mistake in the prepositions, but they still belong to the problematic categories, as the second half is dominated by students who had two or more mistakes. The second graph shows the literal translation associated with prepositions. Here it can be seen that it is not that significant of a problem. Because of the 12 students who made an error in the preposition, only seven of them made the error based on the literal translation, which here is a different cause of a preposition error.

In a deeper analysis of the prepositions, it was found that the most problematic preposition is unequivocally *on*. Since six students out of 12 made an error in the preposition *on*. Students used it instead of the prepositions *at*, *onto*, *in* and in the place

where the preposition should not have been. The second problem was the omission of the preposition *to* where it should have been.

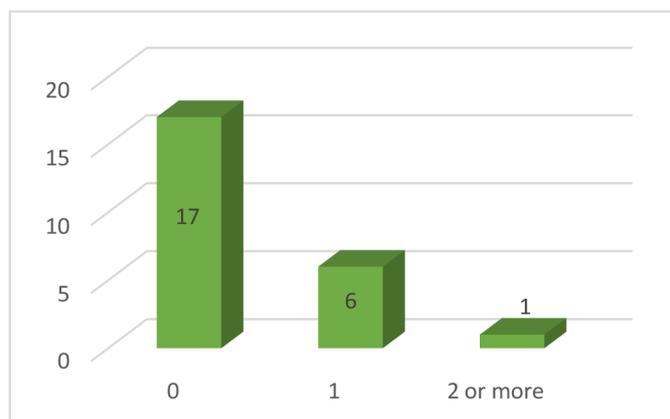
Moreover, errors in word order were quite frequent as well. Here the reason is that students translate the sentences as they would say them in Czech; however, the problem is that English has a strict word order, as already mentioned above.

Example: *In movie stars Leonardo Dicaprio.*

The example shows a direct translation from Czech to English without thinking about English word order. The Czech sentence could be said as *Ve filmu hraje Leonardo Dicaprio.* however, in English, it must be said *Leonardo Dicaprio stars in the movie.* Another issue is the omission of the article in front of the word *movie*.

The chart below shows that in this case errors in word order did not appear so often. However, it can be caused by the fact that these are essays and students choose simple sentences that they know and do not engage in longer sentences where they could, in fact, make a mistake.

*Figure 4 – Word order*

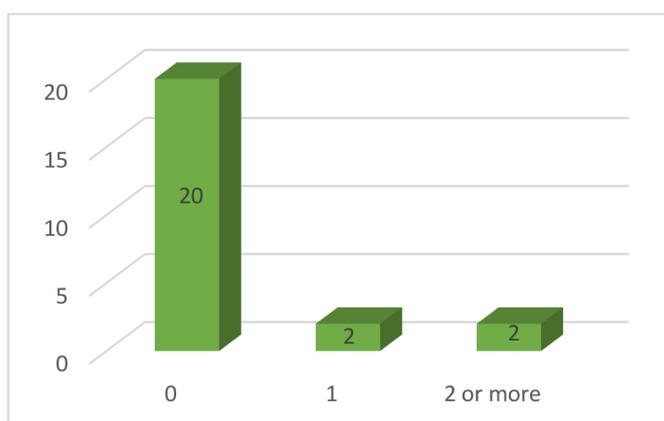


Another problematic category connected with word order is the omission of the subject. As stated above, every English sentence needs a subject; however, it is omitted rather frequently in Czech.

Example: *Received a letter.*

In Czech, the sentence *Obdržel dopis.* makes sense not only because Czech speakers are used to omitting subject habitually but also due to the distinction between masculine and feminine in verb endings; hence it is clear about who is being talked. On the other hand, this sentence is grammatically incorrect in English, and it needs to be said *He received a letter.*

Figure 5 – Omission of subject

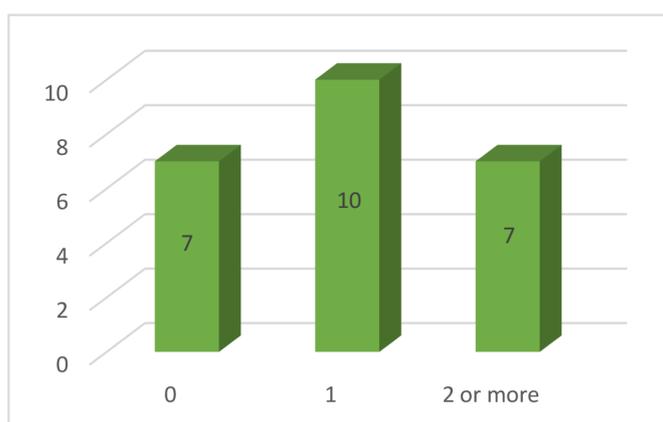


Although this phenomenon has appeared in a few essays, the graph above shows that it is not such a widespread problem.

The last category where the same number of students made mistakes as in the category of articles is spelling. There were different errors here, as can be seen in the examples below. Unfortunately, this category is always difficult to evaluate, it can only be mistakes due to fatigue or inattention, and it is not necessarily an error where the student actually does not know how to spell the given word.

Examples: *dissappointment* (disappointed), *parrents* (parents), *charachters* (characters), *prefere* (prefer), *comedie* (comedy), and many more

Figure 6 – Spelling



#### 4.2.2. Translations

This part is divided into two groups. The first one is a multiple-choice exercise, and the second one is a translation exercise of ten sentences. It should be mentioned that this part consists of more data as the exercise was done by 44 high-school students from the third and the fourth year. The difference between these two age groups should not be significant as the fourth-year students revise the curriculum from previous years in preparation for the final examination. Another thing that needs to be mentioned is that in many sentences, there is only one, in some cases, two, phenomena that will be discussed. In some cases, spelling will be discussed as well. Without a doubt, the sentences would differ a lot if correcting every word and the important issue would fall into the background. Therefore, it will not be done.

The first part serves only as a warm-up for students; there are frequent catches that are often problematic for Czech students. Nevertheless, it is not directly affected by the Czech language.

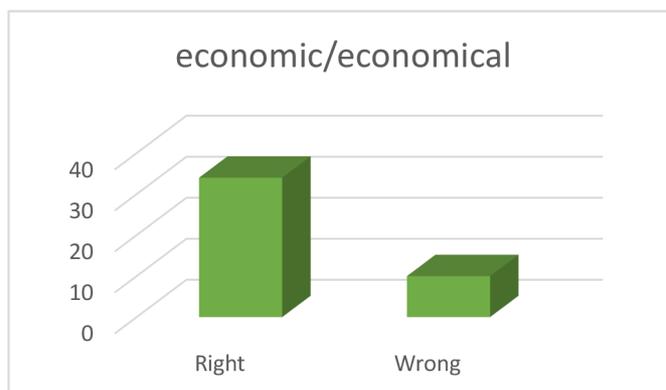
##### 4.2.2.1. Choosing the correct option

###### 1. *Having the lights on all day is not very economic/economical.*

Here the correct answer is *economical*, and as can be seen below, the majority of students answered correctly. The word *economic* is related to economy while the

word *economical* means something that saves money. The high number of correct answers can relate to the fact that the students study economics and also have business English. Hence, the difference between these two words should be evident to them.

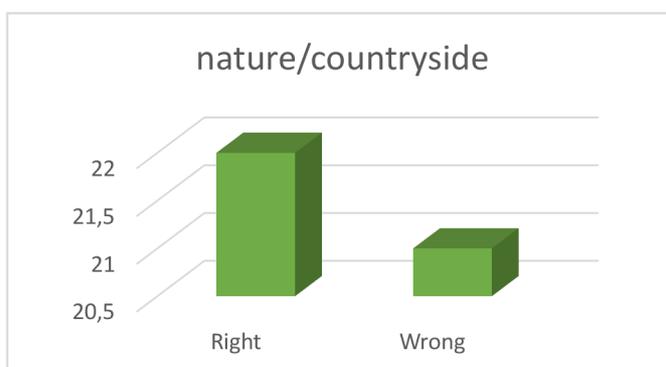
Figure 7 – Adjectives



**2. I spent the weekend in the nature/countryside.**

This sentence was chosen because it always seems that Czech students generally have problems recognizing the difference between nature and the countryside. Here, the correct answer is *countryside*, since nature is everything that is naturally made, such as trees, plants, animals, et cetera. It could be translated as *Matka příroda* into Czech. However, as can be seen below, almost half of the students answered incorrectly. It could be caused by the misinterpretation of the word, as well as not practising these types of sentences enough.

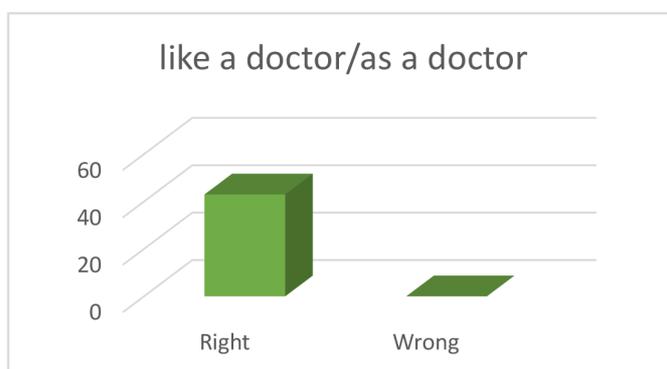
Figure 8 – Nouns



### 3. *I work like/as a doctor.*

This particular sentence was quite surprising because all of the participating students have answered correctly. The correct answer is, of course, *as a doctor*. It is interesting because in the essays, a few students confused the words *like* and *as*, but here everyone answered correctly. Perhaps in this particular sentence connected with a profession, they have a fixed matching phrase *as a ...*

Figure 9 – Fixed phrase



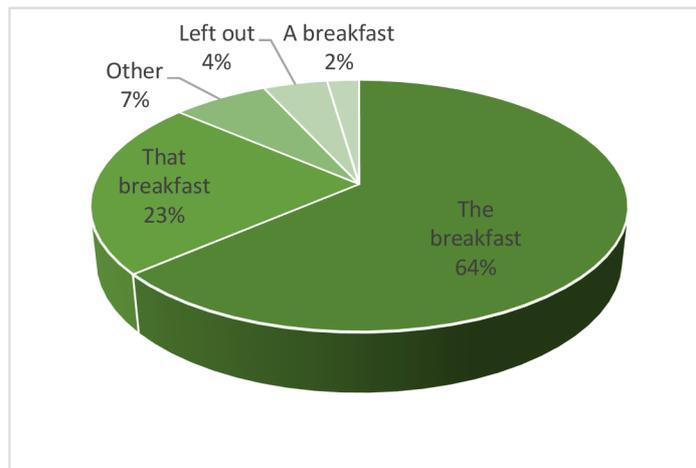
#### 4.2.2.2. Translation

##### 1. *Ta snídaně, co jsme měli včera, byla výborná.*

Correct translation: *The breakfast we had yesterday was delicious.*

This sentence is closely related to the second one. The phenomenon in this sentence is the use of an article. Since we speak about a specific meal, it is necessary to use an article. On the one hand, as shown below in the figure, not every student used it. On the other hand, only four per cent of students left out the article completely and two per cent used an indefinite one, which seems very positive. In the category marked as “other” appeared mainly the demonstrative adjective *this*.

Figure 10 – The use of an article



Another issue worth mentioning is that only 12 students had the whole sentence correct. Besides using an article, there was a problem with defining relative clause *we had yesterday*, where many students used commas which is grammatically incorrect.

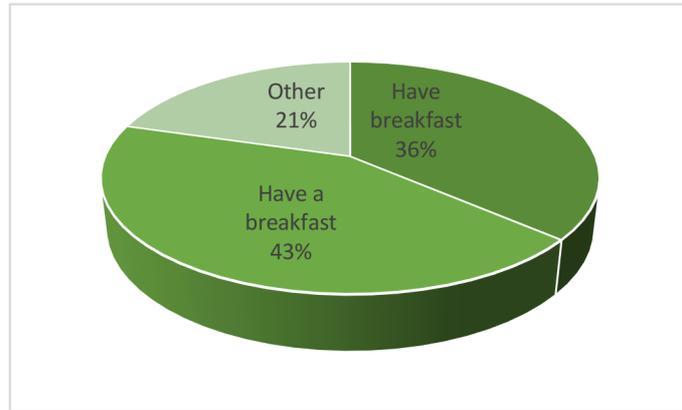
## 2. *Pojďme si dát snídani.*

Correct translation: *Let's have breakfast.*

As was mentioned before, both the first and this sentence examine the use of an article. While in the first sentence it was a specific meal, in this sentence it is generally breakfast, there is no mention about a specific meal, and therefore the article should not be used. Here it can be seen that students use an article, even though it should not be there. The reason could be that they use an article with every noun; however, as was already mentioned before while commenting on the essays, students tend to omit the article almost in every second sentence, so this probably is not the reason. Perhaps there was slight confusion, thanks to the first sentence. These two sentences were listed right after each other in the exercise, which I would definitely change in the future, precisely so that it does not lead students to look at the previous sentence, unfortunately I did not think of this option when creating the exercise.

Concerning the “other” category, many students chose to use a completely different structure, often nonsensical, such as *We go to have breakfast* or *Come to have a breakfast*. A number of students used the word “dinner” instead of “breakfast”.

Figure 11 – The use of an article

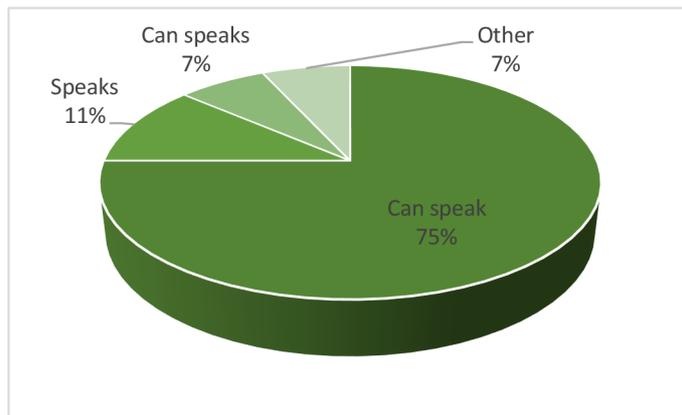


### 3. *Marie umí mluvit 5 jazyky.*

Correct translation: *Mary can speak 5 languages.*

The third sentence is focused on the phrase *can speak*. This phrase could never contain “s” in third person. Yet several students used this incorrect phrase. Here is a relatively easy explanation, students have mechanized that in the third person singular in present tense they must add “s” to the end of the word and do not distinguish whether it is a modal verb or not. Nonetheless, the majority of students answered correctly. Other translations consist of wrong collocation phrases, for instance *Mary can talk 5 languages.* or idiomatic translations including errors such as *Mary know 5 languages.* Another issue found was spelling which was quite surprising. The word *languages* was spelled immensely differently, for example *leangues*, *lenguages*, *langages*, *leanguages*, and unfortunately many more.

Figure 12 – The phrase can speak

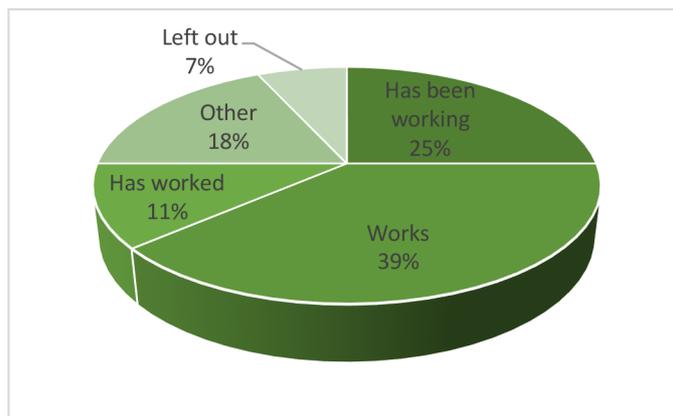


#### 4. *Jana tam pracuje od roku 2007.*

Correct translation: *Jane has been working there since 2007.*

Here the focus is on two phenomena which are closely related. The first one is using the present perfect continuous form of a verb and the second is using the correct preposition. Which preposition must be used is clear precisely because of the tense being use. In this sentence it is undeniably clear that the activity started in the past and it is continuing up till now, therefore the only correct option is *has been working*. The preposition *since* must be used, otherwise the sentence would be incorrect.

Figure 13 – Present perfect continuous

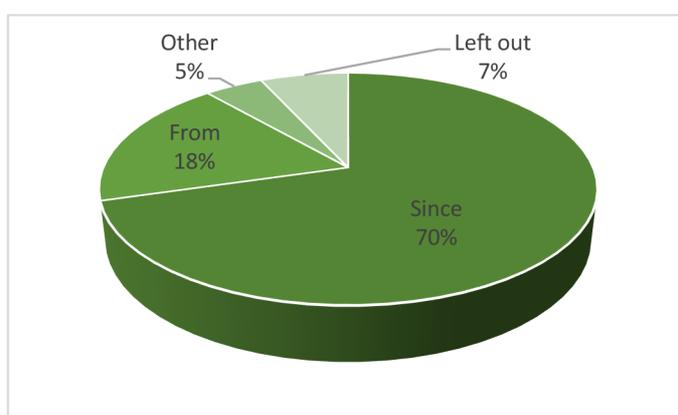


As shown in the figure, only 25 per cent of students used the correct tense. The cause might be that in the Czech language there is no such thing as the perfect tense. Hence, it usually does not occur to students to use this tense instead they will use what

seems natural to them which is present tense in this case. It is interesting that 11 per cent chose to use perfect tense as well but in an incorrect form. In the 18 per cent of “other” appeared forms such as *work, is working, worked*.

Regarding the preposition, more than a half of students chose the correct preposition. What is not surprising is that many students used the preposition *from*. It is a direct translation of preposition from Czech to English. “Other” in this figure means unacceptable spelling of the preposition *since*. Several students wrote *sins* instead of *since*.

*Figure 14 – The preposition since*

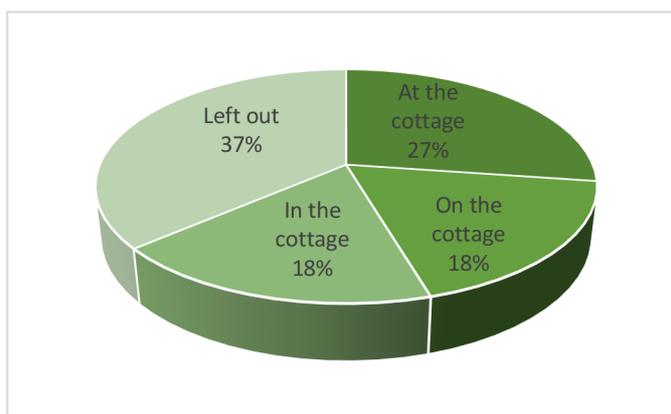


### ***5. O víkendu jsem byl na chalupě.***

Correct translation: *I was at the cottage at the weekend.*

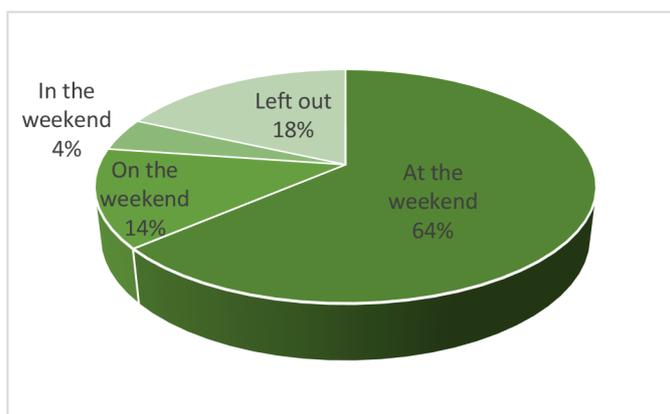
In this sentence, two phenomena are examined as well. Both are connected with prepositions. Here in both cases should be used the preposition *at* since the thesis examines only the British English.

Figure 15 – The preposition *at*



As can be seen above in the figure, the majority of the students left out this part of the sentence completely. It seems that the issue was not the preposition but the translation of the word *chalupa* into English. Using preposition *on* is not surprising as it is a direct translation from Czech to English. On the other hand, what is surprising, is the usage of preposition *in*. There is no logical explanation, because in neither Czech nor English does it make sense. Yet, strictly speaking, it does make sense since one is, in fact, in/inside the cottage. Hence, it is more surprising that neither language uses the logically correct preposition. This might be an instance of an error that cannot be explained by reference to the differences between the two languages. As an explanation for the use of the preposition *on*, it could be an overgeneralization where students substitute the preposition where it is not appropriate in English. As for the preposition *in*, it can be a simple inattention or an inappropriate choice of preposition based on the fact that the student knows that the preposition *on* is wrong and thus chooses the second most common choice in Czech language, which is the equivalent of the preposition *in*.

Figure 16 – The preposition at



The other part of the sentence was much better. More than a half of the students translated this part correctly. Almost everyone from the category “left out” left out whole sentence not just this part. Quite a few students chose to use the preposition *on*, which is not entirely incorrect as it is the correct version in American English. The explanation would be quite easy, young people are used to American English more than British English thanks to movies and series available online. Which then could question the insistence of the education system to British English as the norm.

#### **6. *Sejdeme se v 7 hodin před divadlem.***

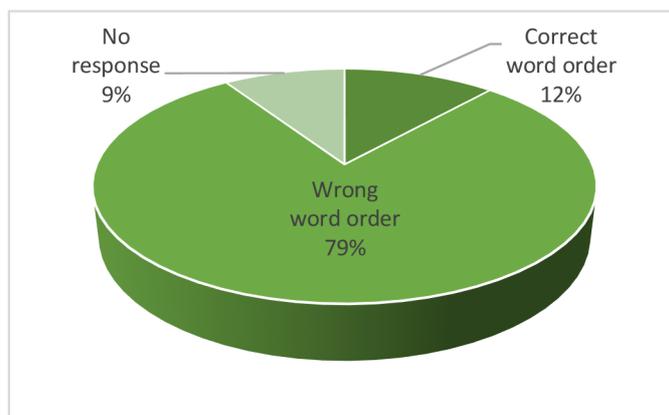
Correct translation: *We are meeting outside the theatre at 7 o'clock.*

First, in this sentence there are many curiosities worth mentioning, such as the correct word order and tense, the preposition regarding theatre and the preposition used with time reference. However, the translations were so different that it would be almost impossible to describe everything and make a figure from all the data in this particular sentence. For this reason, only the correct word order was examined. As was mentioned above place always stands before time, so the correct option is *outside the theatre at 7 o'clock*.

Of course, there are also types of sentences where this word order can be reversed, for example if we use fronting, which is moving an item into initial position

which is otherwise unusual there. The reason for it could be that the item fronted may be the one contextually most demanded or that it provides direct linkage with what has preceded.

*Figure 17 – Word order*



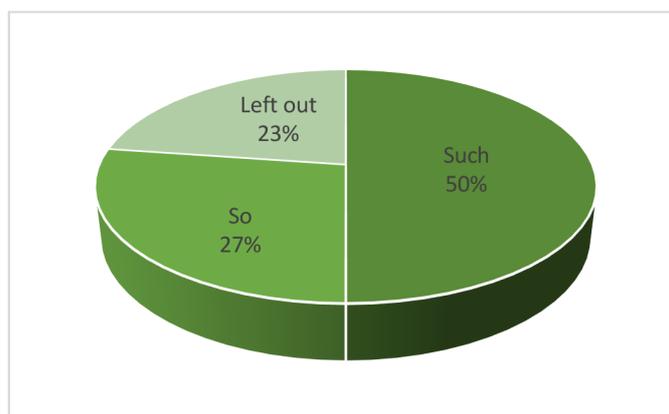
As the results show, almost no one answered correctly. Here are some examples of translated sentences: *We will meet at 7 o'clock in front of the theatre.*, *Let's meet up at 7 in front of the theater.*, *We gonna hook up at 7 o'clock before the theatre.* The explanation could be that the Czech language has a very flexible word order and since the Czech sentence was written with time reference first and the place was at the end of the sentence, students probably translated the sentence directly without thinking. Strict English word order seems to be problematic for Czech students because they are not used to it and possibly, they assume that a native speaker will understand them even if they use incorrect word order.

### **7. *Praha je tak krásné město.***

Correct translation: *Prague is such a beautiful city.*

The focus in this sentence is on two phenomena. The first one is the word *such* which must be used to modify the noun phrase *a beautiful city*. The second one is using an indefinite article before the noun.

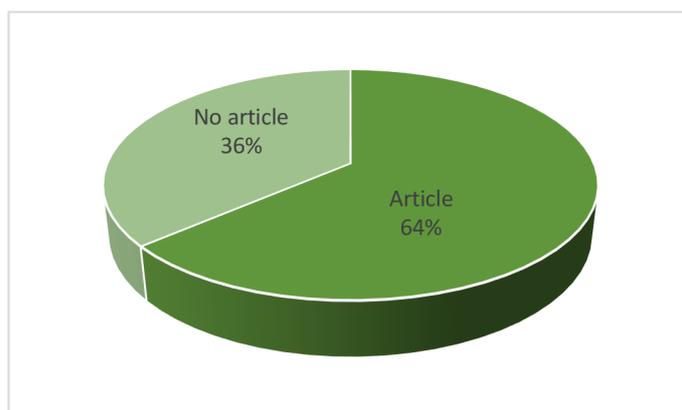
Figure 18 – Such/So



As shown above, half of the students answered correctly using the word *such*. Another group of students chose to use the word *so*. It was mentioned already before that Czech students tend to translate the word *tak* as *so*. Even though it is unacceptable while modifying a noun and not an adjective. It is a direct translation without realizing what word class is in question. However, as always, there are some exceptions, such as the sentence *Prague is so beautiful a city*. where *so* modifies the adjective *beautiful* but the adjective then modifies directly the noun *city*. Then *tak krásné město* is actually quite similar to the English *so beautiful a city* except that the article is missing in Czech. Hence, it might, again, add to the confusion of Czech students.

A similar number of students did not translate the word *tak* at all. As for me, it is an interesting fact at the very least. The translation of this word does not seem difficult. The only reason could be a lack of time, but that would naturally mean that the whole sentence would be left out and not only one word.

Figure 19 – The use of an article



Even more students were successful at using an indefinite article. From my perspective, it seems that students have memorized the phrase *such a beautiful* and therefore use the article automatically, even if they probably would not use it in a similar sentence with a different expression. On the other hand, quite a few students who did not use the word *such* used an article as well which would refute this theory. Hence, it could be divided equally that in some situation Czech students use articles and in other situations do not. To conclude, it does not seem that there are certain rules Czech students follow.

#### **8. *Nikdo nic neví.***

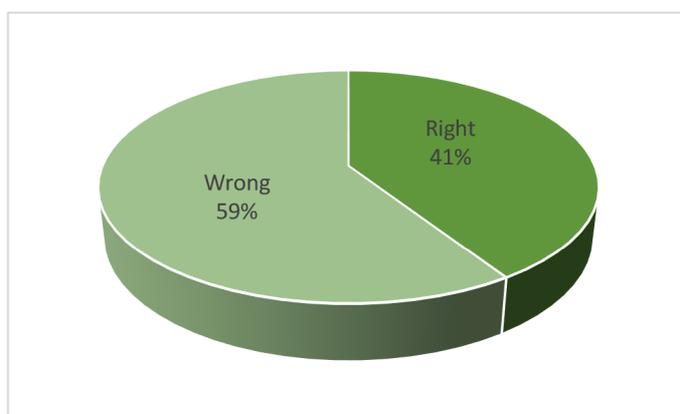
Correct translation: *Nobody/No one knows anything.*

This sentence has been examined as a whole, as the correct version should contain the pronoun *nobody/no one*, the positive verb in the third person singular (*knows*) and again, an indefinite pronoun used with the negative in a sentence – *anybody*. The main focus in this sentence was that in the Czech language can be used as many negatives as possible. Each word can be negative, as seen in this example *Nikdo nic neví*. However, English does not acknowledge this. To be precise, two negatives in a sentence do occur in English, but very rarely; in addition, they cancel

each other producing positive values; for instance, *Nobody has nothing to drink.* means *Everybody has something to drink.*

As shown below, 41 per cent of students translate the sentence correctly, which is not very positive. Regarding the wrong translations, the majority translated the sentence as *Nobody know(s) nothing.*, which is precisely what was said before; those two negatives neutralize each other; additionally, many students left out the -s at the end of the verb. Quite a few students negated both the verb and one of the pronouns as well, leaving the whole sentence as *Anybody don't know nothing.* Again, it is incorrect, and it can be seen that, in this sentence, the conjugation of the third singular person was very problematic, which is interesting since it was not a problem in other sentences. The last issue worth mentioning was an inaccurate spelling of the word *nothing* – many students wrote *nothink*.

*Figure 20 – Negation*



The reason that more than half of the students had this sentence incorrectly translated may be that countless negatives can be used in Czech. However, there is no explanation that it was in this sentence that the students neglected the conjugation of the third person singular when this was not the case in other cases. It can only be a lack of concentration and, therefore, a mistake and not directly an error.

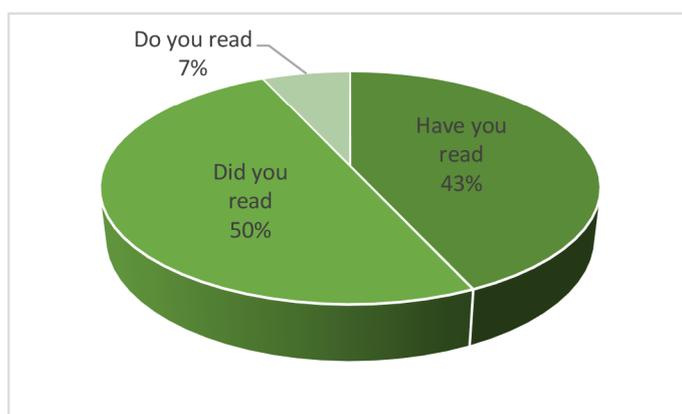
### 9. Četl jsi jeho poslední/nejnovější knihu?

Correct translation: *Have you read his latest book?*

This sentence examines two phenomena related to each other again. The first one is the use of the present perfect tense, and the second one is using the right adjective with the present perfect. As it was already mentioned, present perfect tenses seem to be problematic for Czech students since the Czech language does not have present perfect nor anything similar to it. The solution for Czechs is then using some of the past (or present) tenses instead, even though it is not correct.

In the first pie chart it can be seen that less than a half of students used the present perfect. Here can be precisely seen the evidence that Czech students tend to use a past tense instead of a present perfect tense. It is a logical thing to do for them, as in Czech the sentence is indeed in the past tense. However, the interesting fact is that seven per cent of students used present tense which is illogical both in Czech and English – regarding this sentence.

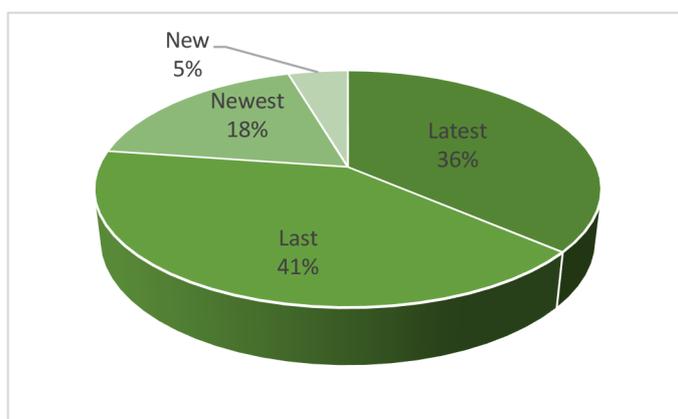
Figure 21 – Present perfect



The other phenomenon is connected with using the correct adjective in the noun phrase *his latest book*. It can be seen that in the original Czech sentence is written *poslední/nejnovější*, which was meant to help the students to imagine the sentence better. Well, in the end, it seems that it confused the students rather than help them

because many of them chose to use the direct translation, which is *newest*. It is not entirely incorrect, but the word *latest* would sound better. Nevertheless, the results are more or less as of what was expected. Students confuse the adjective *last* with *latest* often. The reason could be that the Czech word *posledni* can in fact, be translated as both *last* and *latest*, but there is a difference in the meaning. As the word *last* means being last; for example, in a line or in a competition meanwhile, the word *latest* means of most recent date.

Figure 22 – Adjective

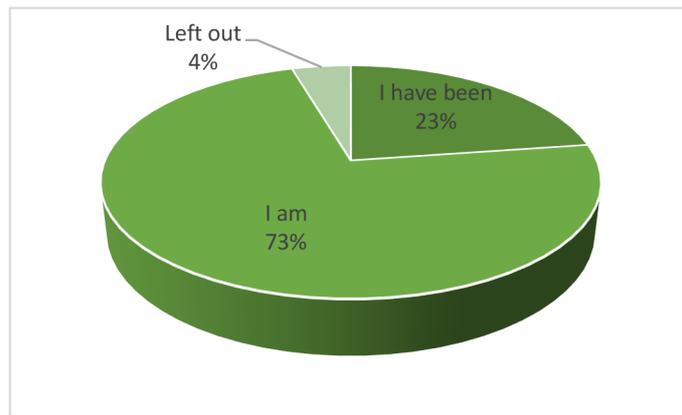


**10. Poslední dobou jsem velmi unavený.**

Correct translation: *I have been very tired recently.*

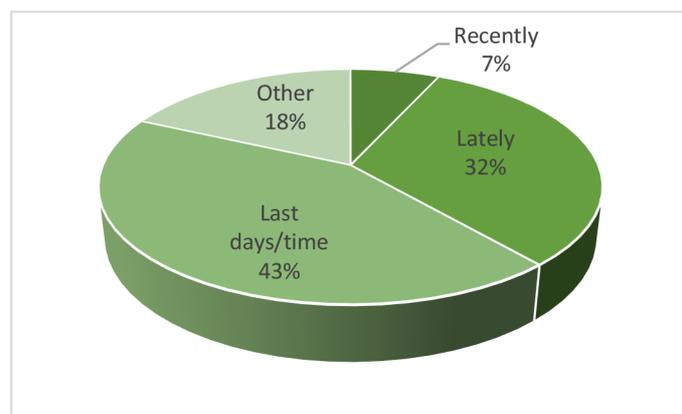
The last sentence focuses on two phenomena as well. The first is using the present perfect tense, and the second is an adverb connected with this tense. The same problem emerges in the previous sentences with present perfect tenses. The vast majority wrote the sentence in the present simple, which is again a direct translation from Czech to English without thinking about it more. Two students did not write anything, which is interesting as well because the sentences should not be difficult for third- and fourth-year students in secondary school regarding the vocabulary.

Figure 23 – Present perfect continuous



The second chart shows that students were not quite precise while translating the adverb either. Only seven per cent, which equals three students, used the correct adverb. In many cases, the adverbs *recently* and *lately* are interchangeable, but not in this particular one. As *lately* can refer to any recurring event in the near past, which here is not the case. Nevertheless, it is still a pretty good option. Although, it is quite hard to find an explanation for the numerous occurrences of the phrase *last days/last time*. In the category marked as “other” there occur phrases such as *very often, as of late, these days, for a while, for the last time* and many more. It is astonishing how many different phrases the students used and invented. It seems that the biggest issue was the present perfect because if the students did use this tense, it would be more evident which adverb to use.

Figure 24 – Adverb



#### **4.2.3. Evaluation of translations**

As for the evaluation of translations, it is quite controversial. The sentences selected for translation were more or less simple or at least should have been for third- and fourth-year students of secondary school. But in the end, it did not appear like that. It is essential to mention that a minimum of students had all the sentences translated correctly, which is misleading because it shows that their English is at a higher level than their classmates. Many students had about five to six sentences correct and the rest with errors. But there were also those who had only one or two sentences translated correctly.

According to the essays on the basis of which the translation exercise was created, it was assumed that one of the most problematic categories would be grammar, specifically the use of articles. Which then has not been proven. In the exercise, there were a total of three phenomena focused on the use of articles (specifically figures 4, 5 and 13). For two of the three figures, more than half of the students had identified and used the articles correctly, which is positive. Moreover, even if, in some cases, they used the wrong article, at least they used one, which indicates that they are aware of the necessary use of articles.

Another category with likely many errors was again grammar, specifically the use of the present tenses. This phenomenon has proven to be problematic. Three figures focused on this phenomenon, figures number 7, 15 and 17. In each of these cases, more than half of the students had mistranslated the tense. The students used the tense that was written in the original Czech sentence – in two cases, the present simple and, in one case, the past simple. Of course, there were some exceptions, but it gave the impression that students indeed have issues with this category.

Another big category related to grammar was prepositions. Again, three figures relate to this category: the numbers 8, 9 and 10. This is a slightly controversial

category, as two of the three figures had the most students correctly translated. On the other hand, many students have entirely omitted translating these sentences, which affects numbers a lot and is also quite strange. Because, as already mentioned, these were easy sentences for students who should have a level of English at B1. Another controversial issue is the use of other prepositions in British and American English, which also proved to be evident in figure 10.

The last category, as large as the previous three, was supposed to be the correct word order, which can, in fact, be very different in Czech and English. However, only one figure, specifically number 11, dealt directly with this category. And indeed, that was a real problem for students, as only 12 per cent of students had it correctly, which is very little. Originally, word order was to be examined in multiple sentences, but it would be very difficult to analyse since the sentences were very different and more important errors (in given sentences) could recede into the background.

Finally, it should be noted that the translations varied. So, it seems that students simply ignore the rules they learn at school or do not pay them the attention they should. On the other hand, some translations may have been unsuccessful only because of a bad day or fatigue, and students would not have made these errors (or mistakes?) on another day, for example. It is a complex subject if the person does not know the students and does not know their level of English. However, only from the essays and translations it seems that many grammatical rules should be reminded to them.

### **4.3. The most common errors**

This chapter focuses only on summarising the common errors that have already been described and, in most cases, explained in previous chapters. The thesis is mainly focused on grammar, but errors in the lexical part also appeared.

As mentioned in several previous chapters, and as seen in several examples, it is clear that the most problematic category is the use of the present perfect tenses. Not only do students, in most cases, not use these tenses, but they also have a problem with words that are clearly associated with them. Most of those who used the correct adjective or adverb, or at least an acceptable variant, usually had the tense correct as well. On the other hand, the rest of the students usually had both of them wrong. This is again linked to the fact that some students seem to have a different level of English than others.

The negative sentence was another very problematic part, where the vast majority was wrong. The Czech sentence contained three words, all negative, which is unacceptable in English. Nevertheless, almost all students used two negatives, which is interesting because they did not use three as it is in Czech, but only two. It could show that in their subconscious, there is something about the fact that they must (should – as mentioned before) not use in an English sentence more negatives, but they cannot use it properly, evidently.

Similarly, one of the recurring errors was the word order. In this case, the difference between Czech and English was clearly visible. Czech has a flexible word order, and students do not realize that English does not have it so flexible. In addition, it seems that not even such emphasis is placed on it in teaching, from which it may come that students use the word order as they wish and do not think about it.

Next, a surprising category was spelling. Indeed, many students cannot write the word "languages", which is strange as it is a frequently used word. Another surprise was that the preposition "since" is also problematic regarding the spelling. The last issue worth mentioning in this category is the already mentioned difference between British and American English spelling of some words. For example, it was not

uncommon for students to use American spelling in the word "theatre", which is viewed as a mistake in education where British English is taught which is a bit controversial.

The articles are the last group that is problematic, but after this analysis, rather disputable. Students do not seem to follow any rules when using articles. They use it in one sentence or phrase but not in the following one. Unfortunately, no explanation was found for this.

## 5. Conclusion

Summarising the findings so far within the analysis seems to be the best option to conclude this thesis. As the practical part consists of two parts, it would be reasonable to compare the results from these two parts. Regarding the analysis of the essays and the errors appearing there, it is a bit difficult to summarize. Since essays are a very subjective type of work, students themselves choose the topic, the words they will use, the difficulty of the sentences, and so on. Therefore, only a superficial error analysis was performed. From this analysis, it became clear that students have the most problems with articles, prepositions, and spelling. However, the subsequent analysis of the translations rather disproved this claim.

On the contrary, the analysis of the translations showed that the most problematic category is the use of the present tenses. This is viewed as more likely, because, as already mentioned, while commenting on the essays, students choose the difficulty of the sentences themselves. At the same time, in the translations, they must manage and translate the given sentence. Well, in this case, the majority of errors really prevailed. As for the lexical part of the thesis, the spelling errors in very common words were surprising, whereas, what was not surprising was the confusion of American and British English types of writing particular words.

There were errors from multiple categories in the essays and in the translations, but the same thing would be repeated. It is, therefore, wise to move on to what these two analyses of errors have brought us. Although the analysis of the essays provided the basis for the creation of the translation exercise, the errors found in it are seen as secondary in this thesis since most of them were subsequently refuted by translations that can be evaluated more reliably since there is not possible to use the avoidance strategy.

This analysis could be evolved in more depth and improved in the future. One example could be to observe students during their classes (whether in spoken or written form) for a more extended period of time so that, based on the personal knowledge of the students, it could be eliminated in which cases it is only mistakes and in which cases it is, indeed, errors. Another option would be to focus on all the phenomena in the sentences, not just one or two, in terms of translations. An improvement within the essays would be to assign the students an essay on a very limited topic, where the exact words or phrases would be repeated. Moreover, as stated before, with over 1.5 billion English speakers worldwide, the possibilities for analysing errors are almost endless.

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## **Appendices**

Appendix: Translation exercise

Sex:

Age:

**Choose the correct option.**

1. Having the lights on all day is not very economic/economical.
2. I spent the weekend in the nature/countryside.
3. I work like/as a doctor.

**Translate:**

1. Ta snídaně, co jsme měli včera, byla výborná.
2. Pojďme si dát snídani.
3. Marie umí mluvit 5 jazyky.
4. Jana tam pracuje od roku 2007.
5. O víkendu jsem byl na chalupě.
6. Sejdeme se v 7 hodin před divadlem.
7. Praha je tak krásné město.
8. Nikdo nic neví.
9. Četl jsi jeho poslední/nejnovější knihu?
10. Poslední dobou jsem velmi unavený.