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Czenglish: Common Mistakes in English

Pronunciation Made by Czech People

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Prohlašuji, že jsem práci zpracoval samostatně a použil jen uvedených pramenů a literatury.

Plzeň, duben 2017

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Table of contents

1	INTRODUCTION	1
2	THEORETICAL PART	3
2.1	DEFINITIONS.....	3
2.2	INTERNATIONAL PHONETIC ALPHABET (IPA).....	4
2.3	ENGLISH VOWELS.....	8
3	PRACTICAL PART.....	9
3.1	MIXING OF ENGLISH VARIATIONS.....	9
3.2	VOICED AND UNVOICED FINAL CONSONANTS	10
3.2.1	<i>The influence of unvoiced consonants on quantity of the preceding vowel</i>	<i>12</i>
3.2.2	<i>The influence of voiced consonants on pronunciation of the following letter -s.....</i>	<i>12</i>
3.3	ASPIRATION	13
3.4	WORD STRESS	14
3.5	ENGLISH CONSONANTS THAT DO NOT OCCUR IN CZECH	15
3.5.1	<i>The semivowel w.....</i>	<i>15</i>
3.5.2	<i>Group of phones th (ð and θ)</i>	<i>16</i>
3.5.3	<i>The allophone ŋ.....</i>	<i>18</i>
3.5.4	<i>The approximant r.....</i>	<i>19</i>
3.5.5	<i>The English h</i>	<i>21</i>
3.5.6	<i>The allophone ɫ (dark l)</i>	<i>21</i>
3.6	CZECH CONSONANTS THAT DO NOT OCCUR IN ENGLISH	23
3.6.1	<i>The sounds of d', t', ŋ (t, c, ŋ).....</i>	<i>23</i>
3.6.2	<i>The sound of the Czech ch (x)</i>	<i>23</i>

3.7	DIFFERENCES BETWEEN CZECH AND ENGLISH VOWELS	24
3.7.1	<i>The mixed vowel ə (schwa)</i>	25
3.7.2	<i>Short vowels (a, ε, ɪ, o, u vs. ʌ, e, ɪ, ɒ, ʊ)</i>	25
3.7.3	<i>Long vowels (a:, ε:, i:, o:, u: vs. ɑ:, æ, i:, ɔ:, u:)</i>	27
3.7.4	<i>Diphthongs</i>	28
4	CONCLUSION	30
5	ENDNOTES.....	32
6	BIBLIOGRAPHY	34
6.1	PRINTED SOURCES.....	34
6.2	INTERNET SOURCES	34
7	ABSTRACT	36
8	RESUME.....	37
9	APPENDICES	38

1 INTRODUCTION

The purpose of the presented bachelor's thesis is not to inform readers about the common rules of English pronunciation, nor about the syntactic, lexical and semantic mistakes that Czech people make. Its purpose is only to point out the **pronunciation** mistakes repeatedly made **by Czechs** in English, and to help them avoid making the mistakes in the future.

The issues are explained by means of the International Phonetic Alphabet (IPA). The transcription of pronunciations covers American English (General American) as well as British English (Received Pronunciation) and was verified on the Cambridge Dictionary website. English transcriptions are distinguished by **green color** and Czech transcriptions by **red color** for better clarity of the text.

Certain level of reader's English is assumed since the thesis is written in English and contains technical terms. Czech phonetics and phonology are used for comparing and are not explained thoroughly in this document since it is expected that the reader is a Czech. This thesis is therefore mainly intended for Czech native speakers with intermediate or advanced level of English who disregarded learning of proper English pronunciation and feel that their pronunciation lags behind their other English skills. This group of learners is truly very numerous.

Speaking from own experience, pronunciation is often a neglected topic when learning a foreign language at schools in the Czech Republic. Students do not get many opportunities to meet a native English speaker and their teachers might not pay much attention to dealing with pronunciation. Sometimes the teachers are not even very precise in terms of pronunciation themselves. If students do not make much effort to learn proper English pronunciation on their own, they often cannot only rely on their teachers to help them do so.

The English learners then become accustomed to the mistakes they make if no one corrects them. They learn many bad habits that are hard to break afterward, sometimes even without realizing it. Despite vast vocabulary, excellent turn of phrase, perfect grammar and listening comprehension, Czech speakers' English might still sound very bland because of their poor pronunciation. Sometimes it may make it hard or even impossible for native English speakers (or non-Czech speakers) to understand. Correct pronunciation is therefore of the same importance as, for example, correct grammar and yet, it remains neglected in the Czech educational system.

My analysis of Czech pronunciation has been happening on a long term basis since my first year of this bachelor's degree. I have been listening carefully to Czechs who were speaking English and I have been analyzing the mistakes they made. These English speaking Czechs were mainly my classmates, my teachers, my pupils I was tutoring, my colleagues at work, singers, Erasmus students and other people around me speaking English at various events. In general, they were Czech people studying or somehow interested in English. I also recorded the speech of many volunteers who were reading sentences containing problematic elements of pronunciation mentioned later in this document. The sentences might be seen in chapter 9 *Appendices*.

The thesis is divided into two parts. The first part is theoretical and explains some general terminology from the field of phonetics and phonology. The second part is practical and deals with all common pronunciation mistakes of Czechs that were found during the analysis. Since each chapter and subchapter in the practical part treats a slightly different issue, some theory was decided to be put in the practical part for better coherence of the text.

2 THEORETICAL PART

2.1 Definitions

Czenglish (A compound of the words *Czech* and *English*): The Incorrect English spoken or written by native Czech speakers who are mixing aspects and rules of Czech and English languages.

Phoneme: “One of the smallest units of speech that make one word different from another word: The difference between "pin" and "pan" depends on the vowel, i.e. the different phonemes **i** and **æ**.”^[1]

Allophone: “One of the ways in which a particular phoneme can be pronounced.”^[2]

Morpheme: “The smallest unit of language that has its own meaning, either a word or a part of a word.”^[3]

Quality (of a phoneme): Quality of a phoneme indicates how certain sound is created in the mouth. It is represented by an IPA symbol (letter).

Quantity (of a vowel): Quantity only relates to vowels. It is represented by the colon (:) which indicates a greater length of certain sound. Long vowels are distinguished by the colon placed after an IPA symbol. In Czech, the quantity is only indicated by the use of diacritical marks above letters (*á, é, í, ý, ó, ú, ů*) and by the colon in the phonemic transcription; however, the quantity is more complex in English (as discussed in chapters 2.3 and 3.7).

Voiced (consonant): “Produced by making the vocal cords move very quickly several times.”^[4]

Unvoiced/voiceless (consonant): “Produced without making the vocal cords move.”^[5]

2.2 International Phonetic Alphabet (IPA)

“The International Phonetic Alphabet (IPA) is an alphabetic system of phonetic notation based primarily on the Latin alphabet. It was devised by the International Phonetic Association as a standardized representation of the sounds of spoken language. (...) The IPA is designed to represent only those qualities of speech that are part of oral language: phones, phonemes, intonation, and the separation of words and syllables.”^[6]

Pronunciation can be transcribed by the use of IPA in a simplified way (phonemically) or in more detail (phonetically). A **phonemic** transcription disregards all allophonic differences and therefore only represents a phonemic structure of a word, whereas a **phonetic** transcription is more detailed. It uses more symbols to distinguish the allophonic differences and to show all aspects of pronunciation. For example, the English word *tell* may be transcribed as **tel** in the phonemic transcription and as **t^heɫ** in the phonetic transcription. The latter indicates the presence of aspiration after the **t** phoneme and the allophonic difference of l (velarized dark **ɫ**).

Pronunciation in this bachelor's thesis is transcribed in accordance with the IPA. The phonemic transcription was selected for it is the most common and known type of transcription and can be found in overwhelming majority of vocabularies and textbooks. However, the phonemic transcription is not always able to fully cover and explain all phenomena. For example, the same symbols might be used for slightly different sounds in more languages; not all allophones are distinguished (e.g. dark **ɫ**, aspirated consonants) and the influence of unvoiced consonants on quantity of the preceding vowel is not indicated. For that reason, a few symbols from the phonetic transcription appear throughout the document when they were needed for an in-depth description of certain issues (e.g. aspiration, dark **ɫ**, specific symbols of AmE).

List of IPA symbols for English phonemes

Short vowels		Long vowels		Diphthongs		(BrE only) Diphthongs	
IPA	examples	IPA	examples	IPA	examples	IPA	examples
ʌ	f <u>u</u> n	ɑ:	p <u>a</u> lm	aɪ	t <u>i</u> me	ɪə	b <u>e</u> er
ɪ	in	i:	f <u>e</u> el	aʊ	n <u>o</u> w	ʊə	t <u>o</u> ur
ɒ	o <u>n</u> (BrE only)	ɔ:	d <u>o</u> or	eɪ	p <u>a</u> y	eə	b <u>e</u> ar
ʊ	g <u>oo</u> d	u:	f <u>oo</u> d	oʊ	g <u>o</u> (AmE only)	əʊ	g <u>o</u>
e	m <u>e</u> n	ɜ:	s <u>i</u> r (BrE only)	ɔɪ	b <u>o</u> y		
ə	ag <u>o</u>	ɝ:	s <u>i</u> r (AmE only)				
ə	h <u>i</u> gh <u>e</u> r (AmE only)						
æ	m <u>a</u> n						

Consonants (unvoiced)		Consonants (voiced)		Consonants (voiced)	
IPA	examples	IPA	examples	IPA	examples
p	p <u>e</u> n	b	b <u>e</u>	m	m <u>e</u>
t	t <u>e</u> n	d	d <u>o</u>	n	n <u>o</u>
k	c <u>a</u> t	g	g <u>o</u>	ŋ	th <u>i</u> ng
f	f <u>o</u> r	v	v <u>e</u> ry	w	w <u>a</u> s
s	s <u>i</u> p	z	is	r	r <u>a</u> t
ʃ	sh <u>i</u> p	ʒ	us <u>u</u> al	l	l <u>i</u> ve
tʃ	ch <u>i</u> ll	dʒ	judg <u>e</u>	j	y <u>o</u>
θ	th <u>i</u> nk	ð	th <u>e</u>	t̬	b <u>e</u> tter (AmE only)

Non-phonemic symbols

IPA	meaning
'	primary stress
ˈ	secondary stress
.	syllable division

Non-phonemic symbols

IPA	meaning
h	aspiration
i	reduced ɪ / i: (e.g. in <i>happy</i>)
u	reduced ʊ / u: (e.g. in <i>to each</i>)

List of IPA symbols for Czech phonemes

Consonants*		Short vowels		Long vowels		Diphthongs	
IPA	examples	IPA	examples	IPA	examples	IPA	examples
ʃ	dě <u>l</u> o, d <u>i</u> v	a	p <u>a</u> ta	a:	p <u>a</u> r	au	a <u>u</u> to
ç	t <u>í</u> ha, t <u>e</u> d', t <u>ě</u> lo	ɛ	P <u>e</u> tr	ɛ:	j <u>m</u> éno	ɛu	e <u>u</u> ro
ɲ	s <u>í</u> ň, n <u>ě</u> co, n <u>í</u> ž	ɪ	p <u>i</u> vo, p <u>y</u> l	i:	kl <u>í</u> č	ou	m <u>o</u> uka
ɦ	h <u>l</u> ava	o	p <u>o</u> t	o:	m <u>ó</u> da		
x	ch <u>o</u> bot, r <u>o</u> h	u	p <u>u</u> d	u:	d <u>ů</u> m, t <u>ú</u> ra		

*only the consonants with special symbols that will be used later in this document are listed

Many references to the expressions explained in Fig. 2 and Fig. 3 are used throughout the whole document.

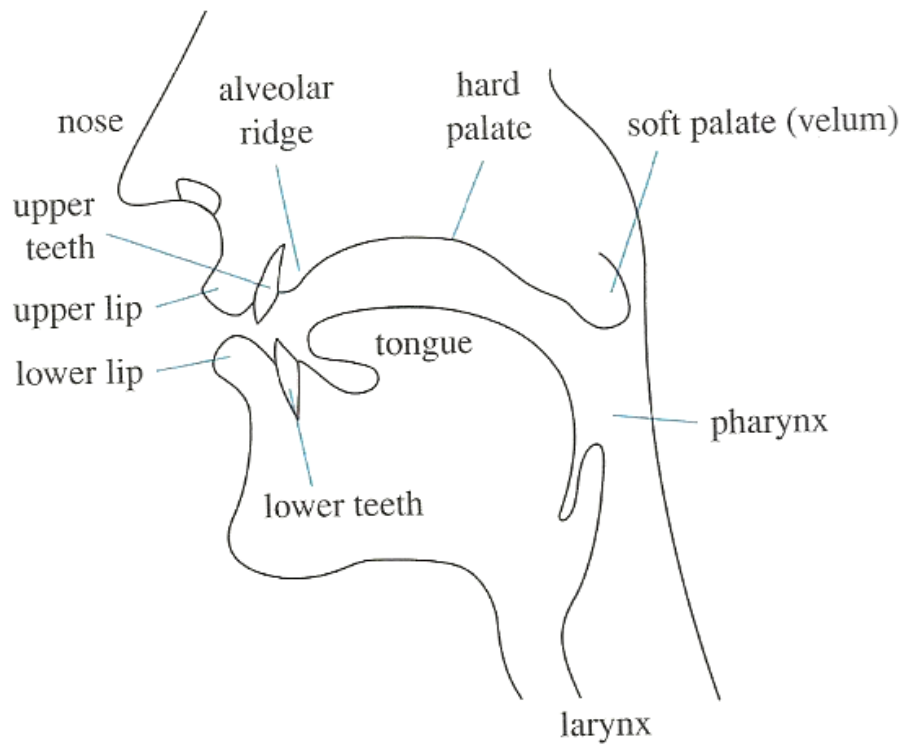


Fig. 2 The articulators^[8]

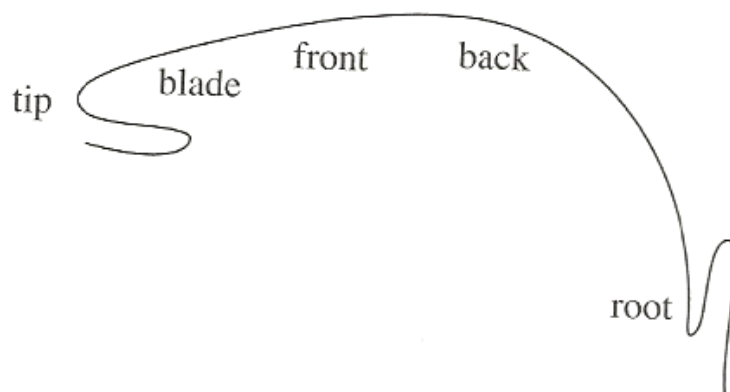


Fig. 3 Subdivisions of the tongue^[9]

2.3 English vowels

As can be seen in the list of Czech IPA symbols, the Czech language is limited to five short vowels. Each of them has its long variation which is of the same quality and double quantity; In other words, the longer vowels only sounds two times longer than the short ones (*with the exception of **ɪ** and **i:** which has a slightly different quality. This is discussed in more detail in chapter 3.7*).

On the contrary, the quantity of English vowels is sometimes irrelevant and influenced by many other factors (such as voicedness of the following consonant, word stress, the position of a word in a sentence, emotionality of the speech). What is more important for the differentiation of short and long vowels in English is their quality. As shown on the list of English IPA symbols, a long vowel always differs from its short pair qualitatively; in other words, the pairs have different symbols and are therefore pronounced in a slightly different way.

Vowels can be classified “according to their level of openness (opened/closed), a part of the tongue that participates in articulation (front/back), duration (long/short), presence of the voice (voiced/unvoiced) etc.”^[10]. In terms of quality, only six vowels appear in the Czech language whereas twelve of them can be found in English. This makes English rules of pronunciation far stricter.

If unsure about pronunciation of any IPA symbol, you may find and listen to its recording on this website:

<http://www.internationalphoneticalphabet.org/ipa-sounds/ipa-chart-with-sounds/>

To hear any sound in context, you may search and play recordings of pronunciations of any English word here:

<http://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english/>

3 PRACTICAL PART

3.1 Mixing of English variations

One of the related problems to not focusing enough attention to pronunciation at schools is mixing of British English (BrE/RP) and American English (AmE/GA). Students are not always aware of the differences of each variation and consequently end up using aspects from both.

Other times, Czech speakers pay no attention to the mixing of English variations and only choose the pronunciation that feels more natural or more logical to them. *These examples are marked in blue in the table below.* For instance, it might be more logical to pronounce words like *box* in RP, since there is the same word with almost identical pronunciation in Czech.

Despite the fact that overwhelming majority of schools teaches Received Pronunciation (the most commonly used dialect of British English), it is the American variation that Czechs tend to use predominantly. It is due to the fact that, apart from schools, students get their English accent through many other media (such as videos, movies, series, music and video games) of which the USA are undoubtedly the biggest producer. *These examples are marked in orange in the table below.*

American English sounds and feels more natural to most Czech speakers; however, they often submit to the British variation or at least get very confused, because not much attention is usually paid to the proper explanation of its particularities at Czech schools.

Due to the vastness of the issue of BrE vs. AmE pronunciation, only the most common examples of mistakes are shown in the following table.

#	Distinction	Examples	BrE (RP)	AmE (GA)
1	b vs. ɑ:	box	bɒks	bɑ:ks
2	ɑ: vs. æ	after, dance	'ɑ:f.tə, dɑ:ns	'æf.tə, dæns
3	t vs. t̚	better	'bet.ə	'bet̚.ə
4	-ə vs. r/ər	beer, liar	bɪə, 'laɪ.ə	bɪr, 'laɪ.ər
5	əʊ vs. ou	no	nəʊ	nou
6	ɜ: vs. ɝ:	bird	bɜ:d	bɝ:d
7	ə vs. e	library	'laɪ.brər.i	'laɪ.brer.i
8	aɪ vs. ə (-ile)	fragile	'frædʒ.aɪl	'frædʒ.əl
9	aɪ vs. ə	civilisation (BrE) civilization (AmE)	'sɪv.əl.aɪ'zeɪ.jən	'sɪv.əl.ə'zeɪ.jən
10	different stress	adult, ballet, garage, donate	'æd.ʌlt, 'bæl.eɪ, 'gær.ɑ:ʒ, dəʊ'neɪt	əd'ʌlt, bæl'eɪ, gə'rɑ:ʒ, 'dɒu.neɪt
11	specific words	again advertisement glacier vitamin	ə'geɪn əd'vɜ:ʒ.tɪs.mənt 'glæs.i.ə 'vɪt.ə.mɪn	ə'gen 'æd.vɜ:ʒ.taɪz.mənt 'gleɪ.jə 'vaɪ.t̚ə.mɪn

3.2 Voiced and unvoiced final consonants

One of the most common and typical Czech mistakes is the wrong pronunciation of English final consonants. In the contrary to English, voiced final consonants are always pronounced as unvoiced in the Czech language. For instance, the Czech words *let* and *led* are both pronounced equally as **let** whereas this would be unthinkable in English. In consequence, Czech speakers tend to pronounce final voiced consonants as unvoiced even in English.

Eight unvoiced consonants can be found in the English language: **p, t, k, s, f, θ, ʃ** and **tʃ**. They correspond to the following voiced forms: **b, d, g, z, v, ð, ʒ** and **dʒ**. All remaining consonants are voiced.

Problematic pairs are presented in the following table:

Pairs	Examples	BrE (RP)	AmE (GA)	Czenglish*
p vs. b	cab	kæb	kæb	kæp → cap
t vs. d	bed	bed	bed	bet → bet
k vs. g	log	lɒg	lɑ:g	lɒk → lock
s vs. z	phase	feɪz	feɪz	feɪs → face
f vs. v	give	gɪv	gɪv	gɪf → GIF

*with no other mistakes but the voiceless final consonants

The voiced consonants only pose a problem when placed (pronounced) at the very end of a word. For instance, the consonant **v** in the verb *give* would not be pronounced incorrectly in a different form where the **v** phoneme is not placed at the end of the word (i.e. *giving*, *given*).

Another problem is exaggeration of the final voiced consonant when, as a consequence, the schwa (ə) sound is added. For example the English word *live* (correctly **lɪv**) is pronounced as **lɪvə** (*liver* in BrE).

There is also a tendency in the Czech language to assimilate voicedness when an unvoiced consonant is followed by voiced consonant. To give an example, “in a sentence such as *I like that black dog* (**aɪ laɪk ðæt blæk dɒg**), Czech students may have the tendency to change the **k** in *like* into the **g** sound, the final **t** in *that* into **d** and the final **k** in *black* into **g**”^[11] making the sentence sound like **aɪ laɪg ðæd blæg dɒg/dɑ:g**.

This issue is also connected to two more rules that need to be followed. An unvoiced consonant shortens the quantity (the length) of the preceding vowel; and a voiced final consonant affects the pronunciation of the following letter -s.

3.2.1 The influence of unvoiced consonants on quantity of the preceding vowel

Unvoiced consonants make the sound of the preceding vowel **shorter**. Nevertheless, the phonemic transcription does not differentiate the changing quantity in this case.

This pattern describes the length differences among four words containing all combinations of long/short vowels **i:** or **ɪ** and voiced/unvoiced final consonants **d** or **t**.

bit < bid = beat < bead
bit < bid = bi:t < bi:d

In the transcriptions above, the differences in the quantity of the vowels are not noticeable, but the length differs. It is indicated by means of the mathematical symbols in the pattern. Regardless of the quality difference in the **ɪ** and **i:** phonemes, more or less the same length of the vowels can be heard while pronouncing a word containing the **ɪ** followed by a voiced final consonant (*bid*) and a word containing the sound **i:** followed by an unvoiced final consonant (*beat*).

The quantity of a vowel is a much more relative concept in English than it is in Czech. Besides the type of a following vowel (voiced or unvoiced), it also depends on the position of a word in a sentence, word stress and emotionality of the speech.

3.2.2 The influence of voiced consonants on pronunciation of the following letter -s

The letter *s* appears at the end of a word very often. It might either be added to a verb in the 3rd person singular in the present simple tense or it can make part of the plural form of a noun. It is pronounced as **s** unless preceded by a voiced consonant when its pronunciation shifts to **z**.

For instance, the word *docks* is pronounced as **ɒks** (RP) or **dɑ:ks** (GA); nevertheless, the word *dogs* has to be pronounced as **ɒgz** (RP) or **dɑ:gz** (GA).

When pronouncing a voiced consonant before the letter *s* properly, it is nearly impossible to pronounce **s** instead of the correct **z**. It means that this issue is solved when a student starts pronouncing final voiced consonants correctly. At the same time, their incorrect pronunciation is even more confusing and harder to understand when the **s** sound is added.

3.3 Aspiration

In the phonetic transcription, aspiration is indicated by the letter *h* in superscript (^h); however, it is not a part of the phonemic transcription. It is therefore necessary to remember the following rules. Aspiration only appears after **p**, **t** or **k** phonemes when followed by a vowel and not preceded by **s**. For instance, *cool*, *pill* and *team* are pronounced with aspiration as **k^hu:l**, **p^hɪl** and **t^hi:m**. In contrast, *school*, *spill* and *steam* are not aspirated: **sku:l**, **sptɪl**, **sti:m**.

In some English dialects, the aspiration is so strong that the aspirated ^h is pronounced in the same way as the regular English **h**. The expression *be top* then sounds identically to *beat hop*.

Aspiration might seem to only be “the icing on the cake” of the English pronunciation; however, it makes a notable difference in the way someone's English sounds and in the comprehensibility of their discourse. Although someone's strong Czenlish accent remains comprehensible (or at least deducible) to Czech hearers, it is usually incomprehensible or confusing to native English speakers (or non-Czech speakers). The English word *pair* (**p^heə** (BrE)/**p^her** (AmE)) sounds more similarly to *bear* (**beə** (BrE)/**ber** (AmE)) to native English speakers if not aspirated.

The absence of aspiration in the Czech language causes difficulties to Czechs when learning it and becoming accustomed to its usage.

3.4 Word stress

Word stress has two levels: primary and secondary. The IPA marks a stressed syllable in transcription by placing a small vertical line before the syllable it relates to. In case of primary stress, the vertical line is placed high up (ˈ) and secondary stress is represented with a low mark (ˌ).

Prominence of the word stress in English “is produced by four main factors: loudness, length, pitch and quality. Generally these four factors work together in combination, although syllables may sometimes be made prominent by means of only one or two of them. Experimental work has shown that these factors are not equally important; the strongest effect is produced by pitch, and length is also a powerful factor. Loudness and quality have much less effect.”^[12] Stressed English syllables are louder, longer and higher than unstressed syllables and their vowels are never reduced. Unstressed English syllables are the very opposite and their vowel might lose its quality; in other words, vowels of unstressed syllables are usually reduced to ə (sometimes to ɪ, u or i). Stressed and unstressed syllables can also be called strong and weak syllables and words can have strong and weak forms.

In the Czech language, the word stress is always placed on the first syllable whereas an English word can have the stress fixed to any syllable. As a consequence, Czechs do not consciously perceive this phenomenon and have difficulties hearing it and imitating it in English. They also find it difficult to use weak forms of common short words (*can, and, of* etc.), and they tend to place equal stress on all words in a sentence. The first-syllable word stress applied on English makes the discourse quite incomprehensible or at least unnatural, monotonic and bland.

Here are some common stress-related mistakes made by Czechs:

Examples	BrE (RP)	AmE (GA)	Czenglish
hotel	həʊ'tel	hou'tel	'hou.t ^ə l
spaghetti	spə'get.i	spə'getʃ.i	'spʌ.get.i
again	ə'geɪn	ə'gen	'egen
away	ə'weɪ	ə'weɪ	'eweɪ
because	bɪ'kɒz	bɪ'kɑ:z	'bɪ.kɔ:z
pronunciation	prəˌnʌn.si'ei.ʃən	prəˌnʌn.si'ei.ʃən	'prɔˌnʌn.si.ei.ʃən

3.5 English consonants that do not occur in Czech

When trying to interpret a new sound in a foreign language, learners frequently prefer to find the closest similar sound in their mother tongue and use it instead. Here is an overview of English consonants that cannot be found in Czech, and their substitutes used by Czechs:

w → v
 ð → d, dz
 θ → s, f or t
 ŋ → ŋg, ŋk or n
 r → r
 h → ě
 ʔ → l

3.5.1 The semivowel w

The sound of **w** poses a problem to Czechs since there is no such sound in their mother tongue. Even though the letter *w* appears in the Czech language in borrowings, it is always pronounced as **v**. This makes it even more confusing, and thus the **w** and **v** phonemes are often confused with each other. Nevertheless, the rule is very simple and without any exceptions. The letter *w* is pronounced as **w** if not preceded by a vowel when it shifts to a similar **ʊ** sound and forms a diphthong **aw** (cow, power) or **əʊ/oʊ** (low, show). The pronunciation of the letter *v* in any position is always **v**.

Basic language users usually substitute **v** for **w**, so the words like was, were, power, week, when or wife are incorrectly pronounced with the **v** phoneme.

On the other hand, intermediate learners usually know the **w** phoneme but they often pronounce it in words where the **v** should be (e.g. very, voice, never, ever, over, everyone).

“The initial phase of the English **w** is similar to the vowel **u:** (or the Czech **u:**) when the upper and lower lips are significantly rounded. The characteristic ending phase of this vowel is made by loosening the lips while passing to the first phase of the following vowel. The most important thing to know for a Czech student is that the **w** is formed by using both lips (it is bilabial) which makes it diametrically opposed to the labiodental **v**. The confusion of **v** and **w** is one of the most common mistakes made by Czechs.”^[13]

3.5.2 Group of phones **th** (**ð** and **θ**)

The group of phones **th** represents the most problematic phonemes for Czechs. Neither of the two phonemes appears in Czech. When the letter **t** is followed by **h** in any position in a word, it always represents one of the two possible sounds: **ð** or **θ**. There are very few exceptions of compound words such as *lighthouse*, *boathouse*, *courthouse*, *lightheaded*, *lighthearted*. In those rare exceptions, the **t** and **h** phonemes are pronounced separately as if the words were separated too (e.g. **'laɪt.haʊs**). Many of these compounds are usually written with a hyphen in order to visualize this issue (*boat-house*, *court-house*, *light-headed*).

“The dental fricatives (**ð** and **θ**) are sometimes described as if the tongue was placed between the front teeth, and it is common for teacher to make their students do this when they are trying to teach them to make this sound. In fact, however, the tongue is normally placed **behind** the teeth, as shown in Fig. 4, with the tip touching the inner side of the lower

teeth. The air escapes through the gaps between the tongue and the teeth. As with **f**, **v**, the fricative noise is weak.”^[14]

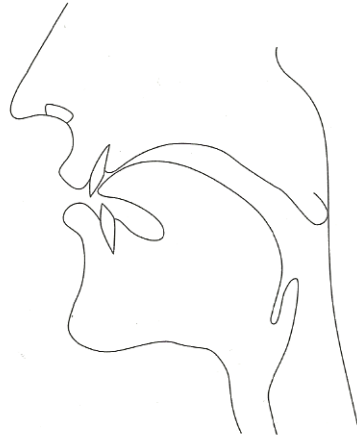


Fig. 4 Dental fricatives^[15]

Here are a few typical mistakes that Czechs make when pronouncing the **θ** and **ð** sounds:

“1. Keeping the mouth closed or “biting” the bottom lip. The **θ** gets distorted and sounds more like the **f**.”^[16]

“2. Not pushing the tongue forward enough or pressing the tongue against the upper front teeth.”^[17] This makes a sound in between the **s**, **z** and **θ** (when trying to pronounce the unvoiced **θ**) or a consonant that sounds more like a **z** (when trying to pronounce the voiced **ð**).

“3. Stopping the airflow with the tip of the tongue.”^[18] The **θ** or the **ð** sound gets distorted and sounds more like **t** or **d**. The airstream should keep flowing and the speaker should be able to stretch both sounds out and make a continuous sound.

When Czechs use the closest similar phonemes from their mother tongue, the voiced **ð** tend to sound like **d**, **dz** or rarely also like **z**; and the unvoiced **θ** is incorrectly pronounced as **s**, **f** or **t**. As might be noticed in the following chart, some substitutions might shift the meaning of a word and create confusion.

Substitution	Examples	BrE (RP)	AmE (GA)	Czenglish	How it sounds
ð → d	the	ðə	ðə	də	–
	there	ðeə ^r	ðer	der	dare
	they	ðeɪ	ðeɪ	deɪ	day
	this	ðɪs	ðɪs	dɪs	diss
ð → dz	this	ðɪs	ðɪs	dzɪs	–
ð → z	brother	'brʌð.ə	'brʌð.ə	'brʌz.ə	–
θ → s	thing	θɪŋ	θɪŋ	sɪŋ	sing
	think	θɪŋk	θɪŋk	sɪŋk	sink
	thought	θɔ:t	θɔ:t	sɔ:t	sought
	mouth	maʊθ	maʊθ	maʊs	mouse
θ → f	thought	θɔ:t	θɔ:t	fɔ:t	fought
	three	θri:	θri:	fri:	free
	death	deθ	deθ	def	deaf
θ → t	through	θru:	θru:	tru:	true
	three	θri:	θri:	tri:	tree

3.5.3 The allophone ŋ

-nk and -ng endings are very common in English. The latter appears in words like *think*, *thank*, *link* or *pink* and is not problematic since its pronunciation ŋk also exists in the Czech language (e.g. *banka*, *Lenka*). The -ng endings are contained in words such as *thing*, *sing*, *hang* or *swing* and mainly in all -ing forms of participles and gerunds that are very frequent in English. These letters create sound of ŋ that does not occur individually in Czech, and therefore is hard for Czechs to learn and causes the tendency to substitute the ŋ for ŋk.

To show a few examples:

thing, *hang*, *wing* and *sing* would sound like *think*, *Hank*, *wink* and *sink*
θɪŋ hæŋ wɪŋ sɪŋ θɪŋk hæŋk wɪŋk sɪŋk

Other times, when trying to pronounce the *-ng* endings precisely, Czechs also tend to say *ŋg* instead of just *ŋ*. Words like *singer* or *swinging* then become *'sɪŋ.gə* and *'swɪŋg.ɪŋg* which sounds very misleadingly.

Nevertheless, there are two cases when *ŋ* and *g* are pronounced successively within an English word. Whenever an adjective ends with *ŋ*, the *g* sound is added in its comparative and superlative forms (*long*, *longer*, *longest* = *lɒŋ*, *'lɒŋ.gə*, *'lɒŋ.gɪst* (BrE) / *lɑːŋ*, *'lɑːŋ.gə*, *'lɑːŋ.gɪst* (AmE)). The second case is when *ng* is contained inside of a morpheme and followed by a vowel (*hunger*, *finger*, *anger* = *'hʌŋ.gə*, *'fɪŋ.gə*, *'æŋ.gə* (BrE) / *'hʌŋ.gə*, *'fɪŋ.gə*, *'æŋ.gə* (AmE))

3.5.4 The approximant *r*

“The English *r* is created when the tip of the tongue forms a narrow against the alveolar ridge (while the tongue is bent slightly backward). Unlike in Czech, the English *r* is formed **further back** and **does not trill** (*Mary*), or only trills once. This once-trilled *r* may appear between two vowels (*for old*), alternatively after *ð* or *θ* (*throw*, *with regard*). When the *r* appears at the beginning of the word and is followed by a back vowel (*rude*, *raw*), the lips are usually rounded. (...) The *r* loses its voicedness when preceded by an unvoiced consonant, and becomes significantly fricative (i.e. only a noise of friction without the accompaniment of voice can be heard).^[19] The word *approximant* describes the fact that “the articulators approach each other but do not get sufficiently close to each other to produce a ‘complete’ consonant.”^[20] In this case, it means that the tip of the tongue never touches the alveolar ridge (with the exception of the once-trilled *r* described above).

“In the RP, the *r* only exists before a vowel or before the syllabic consonant dark *ɹ* (*red*, *very*, *squirrel*, *plural* etc.). It is pronounced at the end of a word only when the following word begins with a vowel (e.g. *for*

ever).”^[21] These rules make the RP a so called non-rhotic accent. The General American, on the contrary, is a rhotic accent which means that the **r** is pronounced in any position. The **r**-colored vowel sounds **ə** or **ɜː** appear in the GA whenever there is a vowel followed by the letter *r* in the same syllable. This is also one of the major problems connected to the mixing of English variations mentioned in chapter 3.1.

Czechs tend to pronounce these sounds as **ər** or even as **er**. For instance, the English words *learn* (correctly **lɜːn**) and *her* (**hɜː** (strong form) or **hə**, **ə** (weak forms)) are often incorrectly pronounced by Czechs as **hər** and **lɛrn** or **her** and **lern**.

What makes a significant difference and is very important to realize about the rhotic **ə** and **ɜː** sounds is that they are each just **one sound**. Many linguists consider the **ɜː** to only be the longer version of the **ə** sound. Both sounds are, informally said, a mixture of the consonant **r** and the vowel **ə**. Although **hə** and **hər** are very close, the latter contains two sounds. The same goes for **lɜːn** and **lɛrn**. Considering that the **ə** is not a phoneme in the Czech language, the sound differences among the English phonemes **e**, **ə**, **ə**, **ɜː** or eventually **ɜː** might be hard to distinguish for Czechs.

The most common problem, however, is the pronunciation of the Czech **r**. A surprisingly big number of Czechs use the trilled **r** while speaking English. This Czech representation of the consonant *r* is not an approximant, and therefore, in this case, the tongue touches the alveolar ridge and “trills 2 or 3 times.”^[22] Even when trying not to trill the **r**, Czech speaker's **r** might still sound not relaxed enough because their tongue is usually very tensed and placed in the position where the Czech **r** is formed (which is further forward in the mouth as the back of the tongue is raised).

3.5.5 The English h

“The English consonant h is basically an unvoiced phone in comparison with the Czech ě (...) which is voiced and very intense (it takes the greatest amount of air of all the Czech phones). (...) It is so subtle that it is sometimes interpreted as the mere unvoiced (aspirated) beginning of the following vowel. The English h is pronounced exclusively before a vowel or a semivowel j (e.g. hat, human, huge) and for that reason, it never occurs at the end of a word. Sometimes the h is silent (honest, hono(u)r, hour).”^[23]

3.5.6 The allophone ɫ (dark l)

Not many learners have ever heard and realized that there are two allophones of l in English: a clear l and a dark ɫ. Even most of native English speakers are unaware of this phenomenon, but they unconsciously distinguish the two sounds when speaking. For better differentiation, the phonetic symbol for the dark ɫ is used in this chapter, since the phonemic transcription only uses the symbol of the clear l for both sounds. The clear l is very close to the Czech l and therefore is not problematic for Czech speakers. What is quite problematic is the dark ɫ, and even though it is not a phoneme in English (it only is an allophone of the phoneme l), it, again, makes a difference in the ears of native English speakers.

The dark ɫ is a **velarized l**. This expression comes from the word *velum* which is the soft palate (as might be seen in Fig. 2). The pronunciation of velarized consonants lies in raising the back of the tongue towards the soft palate (as demonstrated in Fig. 5 and Fig. 6).



Fig. 5 Clear $l^{[24]}$



Fig. 6 Dark $l^{[25]}$

The rules are quite simple: “clear l will never occur before consonants or before a pause, but only before vowels; dark l never occurs before vowels.”^[26] In other words: clear l only occurs before vowels whereas dark l occurs before consonants or at the very end of a word. “The dark l placed at the end of a word can change to an almost clear l if followed by a word that begins with a vowel or a semivowel j (*sell it, will you*). (...) The degree of clearness or darkness of the given representation of l also fluctuates according to the type of the neighboring vowel: clear l is darker when neighboring with a back vowel (e.g. *law*); dark l , on the contrary, is brighter when preceded by a front vowel (*feel*).”^[27]

The dark l is more common phenomenon than it might appear. It can be heard in many frequent words such as *will, tell, film, people, all, well, table, help, feel, milk, sell* etc.

“The letter *l* can quite often be silent as well.”^[D.Melen p.38 author's translation]
(e.g. *half, calm, talk, should, would, could*).

3.6 Czech consonants that do not occur in English

There are four Czech consonants that are widely used by Czech speakers in English, regardless the fact that they do not exist in English. They are: **ɟ**, **c**, **ɲ** and **x** (the sounds of the Czech letters *d'*, *t'*, *ň* and *ch*).

3.6.1 The sounds of *d'*, *t'*, *ň* (**ɟ**, **c**, **ɲ**)

When trying to interpret the English phonemes of **dj**, **tj** and **nj**, Czechs tend to use familiar phonemes of **ɟ**, **c** and **ɲ**. However, those phonemes do not occur in English. Words such as *during*, *Tuesday* and *new* are correctly pronounced as **'dʒʊə.rɪŋ**, **'tʃu:zdeɪ** and **nju:** in BrE (RP) and even without the **j** phoneme in AmE (GA) as **'dʌr.ɪŋ**, **'tu:z.deɪ** and **nu:**.

In many cases, the phenomenon of assimilation occurs which means that **dj** and **tj** phonemes are replaced with **dʒ** and **tʃ**. So, the examples *during* and *Tuesday* are often pronounced as **'dʒʊə.rɪŋ** and **'tʃu:z.deɪ** in the BrE.

This issue is not hard for Czechs in terms of pronunciation; the problem lies in the lack of information and the infamous mixing of BrE with AmE.

3.6.2 The sound of the Czech *ch* (**x**)

The sound of **x** has fallen out of use in most English varieties and can only be found very rarely (e.g. in Scottish English). Many Czech words containing the **x** sound have very similar English equivalents (sometimes even homographs). Such English words where **k** should be pronounced instead then confuse Czech speakers. For example, the English noun *Czech* has a very similar Czech equivalent (*Čech*) that, phonetically, only differs in the **k** and **x** sounds. Once again, the problem only lies in the lack of information.

Examples	BrE (RP)	AmE (GA)	Czenglish
Czech	tʃɛk	tʃɛk	tʃɛx
chaos	'kɛɪ.ɒs	'kɛɪ.ɑ:s	'xɑos
charisma	kə'riz.mə	kə'riz.mə	'xɑ.riz.mɑ
psychology	sai'kɒl.ə.dʒi	sai'kɑ:l.ə.dʒi	'psɪ.xɒl.o.dʒi
chameleon	kə'mi:.li.ən	kə'mi:.li.ən	xɑ'mi:.li.ən
Chris(tmas)	'krɪs(.məs)	'krɪs(.məs)	'xɪs(.məs)

3.7 Differences between Czech and English vowels

To conclude what have been said about vowels so far, there are only six qualities of vowels in the Czech language (a, ɛ, ɪ, o, u, i). Longer pairs of Czech short vowels have double quantity and the same quality (with the exception of ɪ and i:). Much more precise pronunciation is essential in English as there are twelve different qualities of vowels (ʌ, ɑ, æ, e, ə, ɜ, ɪ, i, ɒ, ɔ, ʊ, u) plus, theoretically, the o from the American diphthong ou. (Some linguists say that the ɜ: phoneme is only a longer version of the ə). The quantity of English vowels is shortened when followed by an unvoiced vowel which creates four different length possibilities (as discussed in chapter 3.2.1). The quality and quantity of English vowels can also be significantly influenced by word stress as well as by position of a word in a sentence and emotionality of the speech.

“The basic difference in articulation of Czech and English vowels lies in the **placement of the tongue**. In Czech, the tip of the tongue is practically always in contact with the floor of the oral cavity (with the lower teeth, the gums below them or soft parts of the floor of the mouth). This never happens in English. The tip of the tongue is **relaxed, directed upwards** and hardly ever comes into contact with the floor or the oral cavity. This difference must be taken into consideration even before starting speaking English.”^[28]

Here is a short overview of what Czech speakers usually substitute English vowels for:

ə → sound related to the written form of a vowel

ʌ e ɪ ɒ ʊ → a ɛ ɪ o u

ɑ: æ i: ɔ: u: → a: ɛ: i: o: u:

3.7.1 The mixed vowel ə (schwa)

Schwa is an unstressed, reduced English vowel sound which has no equivalent in Czech. It occurs in unstressed syllables and weak forms of words (as mentioned in chapter 3.4), and it is the most common sound in English.

Czechs often substitute the ə in a weak syllable for the sound related to the written form of the given vowel (they read what they see as in Czech). This issue is mainly caused by not applying word stress.

“The schwa might be pronounced ‘clearly’ (as in the word *miserable*); further back (e.g. *long ago*); with a slight sound of a (mainly at the end of a word: *sofa*); with a slight sound of e (at the beginning of a word: *along*), or it is pronounced similarly to the sound of the original vowel (before reduction) which it replaces (e.g. the in the word *condemn*). In other words, the ə in *condemn* sounds different from the ə in *can*. It might also disappear before a syllabic consonant in disyllabic and polysyllabic words (*history, social*)”^[29]

3.7.2 Short vowels (a, ɛ, ɪ, o, u vs. ʌ, e, I, ɒ, ʊ)

As can be noticed when comparing the IPA symbols of Czech and English short vowels, almost all of them are different which means that they have different quality (have to be pronounced differently). The only two short vowels that have the same symbols are ɪ and I; however, even these two phonemes vary in terms of pronunciation.

As highlighted before, the biggest difference of all English vowels lies in the position of the tongue. When the tongue is relaxed, directed upwards and does not touch the floor of the mouth, it automatically makes most of the Czech vowels sound as their English equivalents (e.g. the difference between **e** and **ɛ** is basically only in the position of the tongue). Nonetheless, the pronunciation of some English vowels is even more complex.

“In comparison with the Czech **ɪ**, the English **ɪ** is formed further back in the mouth, the tongue is lower (farther away from the hard palate), the jaws are more opened (...) and it sounds in a lower tone.”^[30]

“The English **ʊ** is formed further forward in the mouth than the Czech **u**, and it sounds in a higher tone (but lower than the **u:**). The lips are slightly rounded.”^[31]

The English **ɒ** (that only occurs in BrE!) is more opened than the Czech **o**.

“The English **ʌ** is half way between the Czech **a** and the English **ə**.”^[32]

Notice the differences when listening to the following interlingual “homophones” (for example, on the Cambridge Dictionary website):

nut (**nʌt**) vs. *nad* (**nat**)

let (**let**) vs. *let* (**let**)

sin (**sin**) vs. *syn* (**sin**)

lock (**lɒk** in BrE) vs. *lok* (**lok**)

look (**lʊk**) vs. *luk* (**luk**)

3.7.3 Long vowels (a:, ɛ:, i:, o:, u: vs. ɑ:, æ, i:, ɔ:, u:)

The rule about the **position of the tongue** applies to long vowels as well. “The English ɑ: is formed further back in the mouth than the Czech a:; thanks to that, it sounds deeper.”^[33] The same applies to the English ɔ: in BrE; however, it is quite different in AmE. The American ɔ: is very close to the Czech o:, and the lips are not as rounded.

Even though i: and u: have the same IPA symbols in Czech, their quality differs. “The English i: is formed further back than the Czech i:,”^[34] and “the English u: is further forward and more rounded than the Czech u:.”^[35]

Once again, compare the following interlingual “homophones” by listening to recordings of the English words:

dart (BrE) or *dot* (AmE) (dɑ:t) vs. *dát* (da:t)

torn (tɔ:n) vs. *tón* (to:n) (BrE)

beat (bi:t) vs. *být* (bi:t)

doom (du:m) vs. *dům* (du:m)

“The English æ is half way between being a short and a long vowel.”^[36] Its nearest similar Czech substitute is the vowel ɛ (when followed by an unvoiced consonant, as in the word *cat*) or the long ɛ: (when followed by a voiced consonant, as in the word *bad*). “Compared to the Czech ɛ:, the tone of the æ is much deeper and very opened (the jaw opening angle is much bigger, and the lips are far more spread)”^[37]. The tongue should be flattened which happens automatically when opening the mouth, spreading the lips and lowering the jaw properly.

In layman's terms, the sound of æ is a mixture of the Czech sounds a and ɛ.

Examples	English	Czenglish	How it sounds
man	mæ̃n	mɛ̃n	men
pan	pæ̃n	pɛ̃n	pen
dad	dæ̃d	dɛ̃d	dead
bad	bæ̃d	bɛ̃d	bed
had	hæ̃d	hɛ̃d	head
bat	bæt̃	bɛ̃t	bet
and	æ̃nd	ɛ̃nd	end
band	bæ̃nd	bɛ̃nd	bend

3.7.4 Diphthongs

Only three diphthongs can be found in the Czech language: **au**, **ou** and **eu**. The **eu** does not have any English equivalent. English words containing the *eu* letters are pronounced either as **jʊ** (eg. *euro*), **ju:** (*euphoria*), or **u:** (*leukemia*).

All English diphthongs follow the rules that are mentioned in chapter 3.7.1 and 3.7.2; however, the second vowel in a diphthong is usually not pronounced as clearly and loudly as when it stands alone. Furthermore, the quantity of the second vowel is shorter; unlike in Czech, where the quantity of each vowel in a diphthong is equal.

English words never end with the semivowel **j**. Nevertheless, Czech speakers use the **j** as a substitute for the **i** sound in diphthongs **ai**, **ei** and **oi**. For instance, the English words *hi*, *day* and *boy* then sound like the Czech words *háj*, *dej* and *boj*.

Czech speakers often pronounce the diphthong **av** in English words containing the letters *au* (*automatic*); however, it only occurs in English words containing the letters *ou* or *ow* (e.g. *house*, *cow*). The first sound of the English **av** is more opened than the in the Czech **au**. The lips are more spread and the jaw is slightly more lowered; (compare the English word *out* (**avt**) and the Czech word *aut* (**aut**)).

The last Czech diphthong **ou** is very different from the **əʊ** (in BrE). Both symbols have different quality. In English, the lips are slightly rounded only when pronouncing the second part of the diphthong, unlike in Czech where the labialization (lip rounding) “is relatively strong from the very beginning and is even intensified by the end of the diphthong.”^[38] The first sound of the American **oʊ** is a bit closer to the Czech **ou**; nonetheless, it follows the same rules as the British **əʊ**. Compare the sounds of the diphthongs in the English word *broke* and the Czech word *brouk*.

4 CONCLUSION

Generally speaking, the most serious problem for Czechs in terms of pronunciation is the **lack of information**. Most of the times, Czech speakers do not know the rules because not enough attention is usually paid to English pronunciation in the Czech educational system. For instance, the pronunciation is almost never part of the grading in Czech schools.

Besides the lack of information, it is hard for basic users of English to learn the **strange English sounds** that do not occur in the Czech language. Many English phonemes sound unnaturally, ridiculously to the Czech ears, or they are just too hard to learn without proper practice. When trying to interpret a new English phoneme, Czechs frequently tend to **replace it with the closest similar sound in their mother tongue**. Pupils (mainly at elementary schools and high schools) that are trying to pronounce the new sounds very precisely are often an object of ridicule. This frequently causes many complexes about pronunciation to the pupils, and leads to the **shyness or fear** of accurate pronunciation when speaking in front of others (mainly in front of other Czechs).

It is sometimes hard for intermediate and advanced users of English firstly, to acknowledge that **similar Czech sounds of certain phonemes are different (mainly vowel sounds)**; and secondly, to **break the habits of Czenglish pronunciation**. Because old habits die hard, my proposal would be to teach English pronunciation thoroughly from the very beginning, give weight to the proper pronunciation and take it into account during grading.

Very common mistake is also **applying the Czech first-syllable word stress on English** which is also connected to the **incorrect pronunciation of weak syllables**.

What is comprehensible to Czechs might not always be comprehensible to native English speakers. One thing might be negligible, but the discourse becomes incomprehensible when all the phenomena mentioned are combined.

English pronunciation is very complex even besides the Czenglish mistakes (as might be seen, for example, in Gerard Nolst Trenité's poem *Drop your Foreign Accent: The Chaos*). If interested in digging deeper into the mentioned issues, it is recommended to read the used literature (mainly D. Melen's book *Výslovnost angličtiny na pozadí češtiny* and P. Roach's *English Phonetics and Phonology*); and also to watch videos of YouTube channels *Sounds American* (for AmE) and *The English Language Club* (for BrE), because it is hard to describe some phenomena of pronunciation only in the written form.

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7 ABSTRACT

The purpose of this bachelor's thesis is to point out the pronunciation mistakes repeatedly made by Czechs in English, and to help them avoid making the mistakes in the future.

The theoretical part describes phonetical and phonological terms and tools that are used throughout the document.

The practical part is based on long-term analysis of English speaking Czechs, and it:

- helps realize the differences between English and Czech pronunciation
- compares similar and commonly substituted sounds in these languages
- explains certain rules and ways of English pronunciation

The thesis also criticizes the neglect of English pronunciation in the Czech educational system.

8 RESUME

Účelem této bakalářské práce je upozornit na opakované výslovnostní chyby Čechů v angličtině a pomoci Čechům se těchto chyb v budoucnu vyvarovat.

Teoretická část popisuje fonetické a fonologické termíny a prostředky používané v celém dokumentu.

Praktická část vychází z dlouhodobé analýzy anglicky mluvících Čechů a:

- pomáhá si uvědomit rozdíly mezi anglickou a českou výslovností
- srovnává podobné a obvykle zaměňované zvuky v těchto jazycích
- vysvětluje určitá pravidla a způsoby anglické výslovnosti

Práce také kritizuje zanedbávání anglické výslovnosti v českém vzdělávacím systému.

9 Appendices

The following sentences and words were presented to volunteers, recorded and analyzed afterward. The sentences contain as many problematic words as possible (sometimes at the expense of their meaning). The findings from these recordings confirm the pronunciation mistakes mentioned throughout the whole document.

“I have three dogs.”

“Are you cooking spaghetti again?”

“Go away!”

“Due to the new thing that we made during Tuesday...”

“I bet there is a bad bat in my bed.”

“I feel good!”

“I don't feel so well. I think I have a cold.”

“He was singing very precisely.”

“The voice of the singer Steven Wilson is not very powerful, but it surely is specific and charismatic.”

“Our hotel is opened 24 hours a day.”

“My dad has overreacted.”

“Everyone was there.”

“I was thinking about her again.”

“Everyone deserves a fair chance.”

“He always thinks about stupid things.”

“Is it better to give or to receive?”

“I love psycho-linguistics.”

“His pronunciation is very precise.”

“I was going through a hard time; however, this phase is over.”

“I was hanging out with the girl last week.”

“There are only five vowels in the Czech language.”

“Put the food in the frying pan.”

"My wife was a victim of that pervert. That man is the devil himself! He killed six people altogether! What a psycho!"

"They should give more power to the people."

"There's always some chaos in malls before Christmas."

"Chris can be cool too. You should see him when he's not at school!"

"Wherever you go, whatever you do, however you change, I will be here for you."

"Everyone was interviewed shortly after those protests."

"Your Honor, I would like to confess."

"Their death could never stop him."

"Hardware and software of the brewery."

"Peter lived in a silver box swinging above a vast river."

"My foot hurts more than ever."

"Forget it!"

"The New York Times."

"I'm sorry but there's no opportunity to play ping-pong next to the fountain."

"Could you talk calmly for half a minute?"

BE TOP

FILM

BOX

COLD

OLDER AND YOUNGER

HALF

ROCK 'N' ROLL

EURO

OPPORTUNITY

NEUTRAL

TALK