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**DIPLOMOVÁ PRÁCE**

**VÝSLOVNOSTNÍ CHYBY ŽÁKŮ NA 1. STUPNI ZŠ  
PRONUNCIATION ERRORS OF YOUNG LEARNERS**

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## VÝSLOVNOSTNÍ CHYBY ŽÁKŮ NA 1. STUPNI ZŠ

Tato diplomová práce je zaměřena na typické chyby v anglické výslovnosti žáků na 1. stupni ZŠ.

Hlavním cílem práce je připravit aktivity, které se soustředí na zjištěné chyby a které by pomohly žákům zbavit se těchto výslovnostních nedostatků.

Pro výzkum byly použity dvě metody. První z nich spočívala v přečtení krátkých textů žáky sledovaných ročníků; na základě těchto textů byly analyzovány chyby žáků. Druhou metodou byl řízený rozhovor s učiteli o typických chybách jejich žáků, jejich odstranitelnosti, o aktivitách, které používají pro zlepšení výslovnosti.

V teoretické části jsem se zejména věnovala aspektům výslovnosti v anglickém jazyce a popsala jsem logický sled zvládnutí výslovnosti konkrétních hlásek, který vždy vychází z percepce hlásky a směřuje k vlastní produkci.

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### **PRONUNCIATION ERRORS OF YOUNG LEARNERS**

This diploma thesis is focused on typical pronunciation errors of young learners. The main aim is to prepare a set of activities that is focused on the discovered errors and that would help the pupils to get rid of these faults.

The results were gained by two methods. In the first method I used three different texts for pupils of monitored years to read; based on these texts I analysed the typical errors of Czech Young Learners. The second method was <sup>2</sup>guided interview with elementary school teachers about typical mistakes of their pupils, possibilities to remove them, activities they use to improve pronunciation.

The theoretical part mainly deals with aspects of English pronunciation and description of mastering pronunciation of individual sounds – from their perception to <sup>production</sup>pronouncing.

## Prohlášení

Prohlašuji, že jsem diplomovou práci na téma **Výslovnostní chyby žáků na 1. stupni ZŠ** vypracovala samostatně s použitím materiálů, které uvádím v bibliografii.

V Českých Budějovicích dne 22. dubna 2006

Jana Sázavská



## **Poděkování**

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## 1 INTRODUCTION

Pronunciation is one of the areas of English language which is often neglected by teachers. There is a variety of possible reasons for this: there is not enough time for pronunciation in the syllabus, teachers cannot see any immediate results of their effort, the rules are far too complicated and there are too many exceptions, students should pick it naturally, so "Why should we teach pronunciation?"

There are two very important reasons why students should be taught pronunciation. They need to understand and to be understood. If they cannot understand or if they cannot produce comprehensible speech, they are cut off from the language. They can only communicate in its written form, which can be of some use, but they cannot hold any conversation with either native or other English language speaker and therefore their effort in language learning loses its point. English, so as any other language, is a means of communication and if a speaker does not produce understandable sounds, it loses its main purpose.

I have chosen this topic because I deal with incorrect pronunciation at my work every day. Therefore I am interested in this problem and I would like to get acquainted with all the possible ways of its solving. I also believe that study of this matter will increase my teaching skills and my students will benefit from it.

In my work, I would like to find out which English sounds cause most problems to children at Czech primary schools and try to propose several activities, which would not only be helpful to primary school teachers, but also enjoyable for young learners. The main aim of my work is to make pronunciation a part of English language education at primary school and therefore to increase the level of children's communicative skills.

## INTRODUCTION

In the first part of my work, I would like to point at all the important aspects of pronunciation in language learning. I would focus on sounds that may be difficult for Czech learners and analyse these sounds. I will also describe the way that leads to correct pronunciation of these sounds and give several guidelines how to reach correct pronunciation of individual vowels and consonants.

In the second part of my study, I will prepare questions for guided interviews with primary school English teachers and three different texts for children to read. There are going to be three different texts for three different levels of English language acquisition, as the file of my survey is going to consist of three groups of learners of different age and length of studying. All the students of the research file attend a special language primary school. The second part of my work will also contain a statistic analysis of the survey results; and based on these results, I will pick the most problem sounds and project a set of various activities and games in which students may practise these sounds.

The aims of my research are:

- Determine all the problem sounds of English
- Find out, if these problems recede with acquired level of English
- Compare methods that teachers use for teaching pronunciation
- Compare the mistakes the learners make in pronunciation to what the teachers consider to be problem sounds
- Design a set of activities that would enable teachers to practise difficult sounds in efficient and enjoyable way.

**THEORETICAL PART**

## 2 WHY SHOULD WE TEACH PRONUNCIATION?

As I have already mentioned, there are two main reasons why pronunciation is so important. Without correct pronunciation, students will not be understood and they will also have difficulty understanding. If the learners can realise this, they are more likely to enjoy, and to benefit from, pronunciation teaching.

It may sometimes be very difficult for learners to distinguish small differences in sounds in English and in their mother tongue. They have a strong tendency to hear sounds of English in terms of sounds of Czech. [Kenworthy, 1990] Sometimes a learner may continue in his misperception until someone points out the difference to him. Part of the role of the teacher is to help learners perceive sounds. Some sounds of English do not occur in Czech. Sometimes learners are able to imitate the new sound themselves, but if they cannot, then the teacher needs to give some hints which may help them to make it.

Learners themselves cannot say if they have pronounced the sound correctly, so the teacher must provide them with information about their performance. Learners need to know what they should pay their attention to and what to work on. This is mainly in cases, where only a slight difference in pronunciation can cause a complete difference in meaning. These "minimal pairs" occur very often. Pointing out these differences will be not only enjoyable for young learners, but it will also provide them with very important information: Pronounce correctly is important, because otherwise I may say something I do not want. For example, there is only a small difference in words "hers" and "hairs". *The dog's hers. The dog's hairs are all over my back seat.*

*to join with the first?*

## 2.1 CRITICAL PERIOD HYPOTHESES (CPH)

Many researchers feel that there is a critical period in a human's development in which second language learning may occur, to the extent that the person will be able to speak the additional language at the level of a native speaker. It is believed that after the onset of puberty the critical period has passed and it becomes nearly impossible to learn language to a high degree of proficiency. [Krashen, 1985]

In language learning, the rule of thumb is: the earlier the better. According to Birdsong (1999), children exposed to language from birth are uniformly successful in first language acquisition (L1A), whereas those deprived of contact with language during childhood are pathologically deficient. In second language acquisition (L2A), the difficulty of learning after puberty is routinely attested anecdotally and has been the subject of numerous scientific studies. It is widely believed that age effects in both are developmental in nature. Native levels of attainment in L1A and L2A are thought to be possible only if learning began before the closure of a 'window of opportunity', a critical or sensitive period. Increasingly, this popular wisdom is being called into question. Triggering this re-evaluation is evidence that some late-starting learners achieve native-like competence in a second language and evidence of age effects past the presumed closure of the window of opportunity for learning.

There have been a lot of arguments about the critical period. The results of many studies show that there clearly exists the old notion that the nature of L2 acquisition changes suddenly and dramatically at around the age of 12-13 because of changes in the brain is much too simplistic. [Asher, 1969] However, there are some theories that say that it is possible to achieve proficiency even if the process of learning starts after the period of puberty.

### 2.1.1 SUPPORT IN FAVOUR OF THE CPH

There are many children in the Czech Republic whose parents have moved into our country from a foreign country, usually Eastern Europe or Asia. I have a lot of experience with these children as I work with them at school or in summer. After several years of living in the Czech Republic and the everyday exposure to the language, their Czech is undistinguishable from the speech of native speakers. However, their parents, who have spend the same, sometimes longer, time in the same language environment still speak with a strong accent and sometimes it is difficult to understand them. The reason for this may be that they have already lost their access to language learning faculty. Also, the neural plasticity in the brain gets lost with age and so it happens with the processing capacity. [Birdsong, 1999]

### 2.1.2 SUPPORT AGAINST THE CPH

Although children in the age between 8 and 12 years of age are very keen on learning and have a great learning capacity, there are also some points which try to deny the CPH. They argue mainly with the fact that older learners acquire a second language more quickly and more efficiently. Further they say that the idea that neurological differences in children and adults are misattributed to differences in second language acquisition and proficiency. Although it is understood that these differences exist, there is not substantial proof that they cause differences in second language acquisition. They also claim that even if they are very few, there are people who achieved proficiency in L2 even if they started learning it in the older age. There is also a problem with testing the current level of knowledge with children. [Birdsong, 1999]

## WHY SHOULD WE TEACH PRONUNCIATION

According to what I have learnt I still believe that the earlier the L2 acquisition starts the better. The progress of adults' acquisition is definitely quicker and more obvious. Also their motivation may be stronger as they often need English for their job. But their L2 acquisition often ends with the 'use it then lose it' philosophy.

The children's L2 acquisition is slower, it is very similar to the way they acquired their mother tongue and therefore it is more permanent. In the age from 8 to 12, children are very inquisitive, they are happy to learn and due to their neural plasticity in their brain they have great memory. Young learners also have well developed imitating ability as they take over the behaviour of adults. The teacher usually expresses something like a model for children, teachers are loved and adored by most children and therefore the children try to imitate them. This may also be very efficiently used in language teaching, especially in teaching pronunciation.



### 3 INTELLIGIBILITY

It is not necessary for the learners to have a pronunciation indistinguishable from that of a native speaker. Instead, it is generally accepted that intelligibility is the most sensible goal. What is intelligibility? "Intelligibility is being understood by a listener at a given time in a given situation. So, it is the same as 'understandability'. If a foreign speaker substitutes one sound or feature of pronunciation for another and the result is that the listener hears a different word or phrase from the one the speaker was aiming to say, we say that the foreigner's speech is unintelligible." [Kenworthy, 1990, p.13]

In other words we can say that we should teach our students to be as close to the native-like pronunciation as possible. We need to be close enough to be understood. We must be careful especially about sounds which are similar in words with different meanings. Of course, there are many cases in which the students will be understood even if they mispronounce ~~the~~ certain sound. This will occur mainly after the native speaker gets used to their way of pronouncing and will have only small problems understanding sentences like: "*I want to go out.*"

"Although intelligibility depends mainly on 'counts of sameness' it is often affected by other aspects of speech. Decrease in intelligibility may be caused by excess usage of self-correction, hesitations and grammatical restructurings. These problems may be, along with others, caused by low confidence about pronunciation." [Kenworthy, 1990, p. 14] Another speaker factor may be the high speed of speech, which is usually a problem of native speakers but not of ESL learners. However, the next speaker factor is often a problem of Czech learners – intonation. As Czech language is very monotonous comparing to English, we are not used to a strong sentence stress and we find using it difficult and sometimes amusing.

### 3.1 SOURCES OF INTELLIGIBILITY PROBLEMS

#### 3.1.1 Sound Substitutions

One of the most common strategies how a learner copes with new sounds is that he is trying to use a sound of his native language and substitute it for a sound of English. This happens mainly when the sound of English does not occur in the mother tongue and therefore is difficult to pronounce and makes the student feel uncomfortable. [Kenworthy, 1990] Many speakers of Czech find it difficult to pronounce either 'th' sounds. The most common way in substitution is the usage of /s, z, f/ sounds, which may result in a word confusion, as for example the words 'sing' and 'thing' or 'sick' and 'thick' sounds exactly the same.

*Handwritten notes:*  
sing - thing  
sick - thick

#### 3.1.2 Sound Deletions

Sound deletion is a term for leaving out sounds. This occurs mainly with single consonants at the beginning, middle, or end of a word. One or two consonants in a group or a cluster may be deleted as well. This may as well result in unintelligibility. [Kenworthy, 1990] In my experience, sound deletion is <sup>2</sup>very common mainly with students who are not very good speakers of the Czech language. Some words are simply too difficult for them and it takes a lot of repetition until they are able to pronounce the correct word. The most common example is the word 'crisps' where the learners often omit the first 's' so it sounds like /krips/.

### 3.1.3 Sound Insertions

Another set of problems is called "sound insertion", where the speaker adds various sounds. [Kenworthy, 1990] These sounds may be added because the speaker is not sure what to say and tries to prolong the time period that he has for thinking things over; then the result may be a sound similar to the indefinite article. Sometimes, the speaker may add sounds as he is not familiar with the correct pronunciation of certain words. This feature occurs mainly with mute letters, e.g. in words *knee*, *castle*, *hour*, etc.

## 3.2 THE ASSESSMENT OF INTELLIGIBILITY

According to Kenworthy (1990) the way how to assess intelligibility is quite easy, although it can never be completely accurate. Someone must only listen carefully and then say how difficult or easy it was to understand the learner. It is not very good, if the listener, the 'intelligibility judge', is a teacher. Teachers are used to hearing various pronunciation mistakes and therefore are very skilled listeners. The teacher of the tested student is used to the student's accent, pronunciation of sounds, and intonation, so what may seem quite comprehensible to the teacher may as well be very hard to understand for others. The best 'judge' is an ordinary English speaking person, preferably a native speaker.

This method is only a subjective opinion on the learner's intelligibility. There also exists an 'objective' assessment which is based on carefully designed procedures and statistical analysis. However, there have been several studies in which both 'subjective' and 'objective' assessments have been carried out on the same speakers. The results of the two types of assessment tend to agree. [Smith, L., Bissaza, J., 1982].

## 4 BUILDING PRONUNCIATION

Learning to pronounce is a very complex task. There are many components in English pronunciation such as sounds, word stress, rhythm, sentence stress, using of weak forms, intonation. In my work, I would like to focus mainly at learners' ability to produce English sounds.

### 4.1 ENGLISH SOUNDS

New and different sounds are expected<sup>2</sup> by the learners. Especially the 'th' sounds, which are very rare in other languages, are usually known prior to the beginning of learning itself. The problem is that learners sometimes do not exactly distinguish the difference between the sound of their mother tongue and a similar sound in English. These perception problems come out of the mother tongue. Let's compare the nasal sound of English and Czech. In the Czech language there exist only two nasal sounds - /n/ and /m/ but in English there is one more sound - /ŋ/. Therefore the Czech listener who is used to distinguish only between the two sounds finds it difficult to sort this new sound to a different category. *new - all the phenomena.*

There are of course more sounds in English that do not occur in the Czech language. One of them is schwa. This vowel is used in unstressed syllables and weak forms which are very common in English. However, for majority of learners it is difficult to produce or hear the unstressed syllables, mainly at beginnings of words. Weak forms are language phenomenon that is also new in English.

The traditional way of how to help the perception is to give many examples in which the learner can compare the new sound to familiar ones. The sound should be heard

in words, not only isolated. It is also good to hear the sounds substituted for each other in the same surroundings, in minimal pairs. Minimal pair is a pair of words that differs only in one phoneme. [Kenworthy, 1990] There are various activities for individual sounds identification. Some of them could be found in the second part of my work.

#### ***4.2 FACTORS INFLUENCING THE LEARNER'S SOUND PERCEPTION***

There are many factors that influence the learner's perception of new sounds. According to Kenworthy, (1990), one of them is the learner himself. It is partly a matter of his inbuilt ability or aptitude. This ability is also believed to deteriorate with age through the lack of use. The older the learner is and the less exposure to the language he has, the perceptive abilities begin to atrophy.

Another factor is the exposure to the language. Long-term exposure to the language proved itself to lead to 'permanent' results. So if the training is stopped out, the results will probably regress.

The next factor is attitude and motivation. If learners want to hear the difference, it is easier for them to distinguish it. Motivation is usually not a problem with young learners as they are open to new things and they are enthusiastic to learn during their critical period.

#### ***4.3 PRODUCING NEW SOUNDS***

Many learners are able to simply imitate the sound. If all the students possessed this aptitude, there would be no point in my work. Unfortunately, all students are not so

gifted. If the pupil is not able to produce the correct sound only by imitation, the teacher needs to give him some hint.

I have already spoken about the first step to success. The basic thing is to be able to percept the sound correctly and distinguish it safely from other sounds. If the student cannot imitate the sound, teacher may give him some guidance of how to move the vocal organs. Some of the movements of the vocal organs are easy to describe, e.g. of the lips. The learner may use a mirror to see if his lips are moving in the same way as the teacher's. Then the teacher must try to describe the position of the tongue and teeth, which is more difficult as the learner cannot see the whole action. A lot of repetition is of course necessary.

It is generally easier to produce a new sound in initial position; therefore it is good to start with words that have the problem sounds at the beginning. Then we go on to words in which the sounds occur at the end and finally, we practise words with the sounds in the middle or in a cluster. As sounds do not occur isolated in any speech, teachers should try to avoid demonstrating or asking learners to produce such sounds. Sounds occur in syllables and therefore it is important to practice them in this way. It is preferable to use words that do not contain other difficult sound at the beginning of the training. Pronunciation of consonants in isolation is sometimes quite impossible as some of them sound very different in initial or final position. [Kenworthy, 1990] Consonants that are pronounced with aspiration in the initial position (/p/, /t/, /k/) are one example.

As the students get more and more pronunciation practice, they start to be able to correct them. This self-assessment is a very valuable step in their learning, because it is a sign for the teacher that the learner can percept the correct sound and is aware of his own mispronunciation. These attempts of self-correction must always be strongly encouraged by the teacher because they finally result in learner's pronunciation autonomy.

#### **4.4 DIFFICULTIES WITH SINGLE SOUNDS**

I expect the most problem sounds of English to be the sounds that do not occur in the Czech language. This means sounds: /θ/, /ð/, /ɜ:/, /ə/, /ɪ/ and /w/. These sounds are new for many ESL students. Young learners have a great advantage in learning to pronounce these sounds correctly. Their brain has not, due to their early age, lost its neuroplasticity; and it is still prepared for a language acquisition which is connected with new sounds. According to the CPH, [Krashen, 1985] the person's brain assigns language to different parts and therefore L2 cannot be learnt at the same level as L1.

Therefore in this chapter I will have a close look at how these sounds are produced.

##### **4.4.1 Vowels**

Supposing Czech young learners do not have problems with pronunciation of vowels used in Czech, the remaining sounds for practice are: /ə, ɜ:, æ/. When pupils have difficulties pronouncing a certain vowel, it may be because their tongue is in a wrong position, either too far away or too close to the roof. [Kenworthy, 1990] For example if the /e/ or /a/ sounds are exchanged for the /æ/ sound. The /æ/ sound is especially difficult for Czech learners. The nearest sound in Czech is /e/ so they tend to use this incorrect sound. So if the learner tries to produce /æ/ sound like in 'bad' and instead of that he produces /e/ like in 'bed' it means that the tongue is probably too close to the roof and needs to be brought further.

"Vowels are made by voiced air passing through different mouth shapes; the differences in the shape of the mouth are caused by different position of the tongue and of the lips. It is easy to see and to feel the lip differences, but it is very difficult

to see or to feel the tongue differences, and that is why a detailed description of the tongue position for a certain vowel does not really help us to pronounce it well. Vowels must be learned by listening and imitating." [O'Connor, 1990, p.79]

#### 4.4.2 Aspiration of /p/, /t/, /k/

/p/, /t/ and /k/ belong to the group of stop consonants. In stop consonants the breath is completely stopped and at some point in the mouth, by the lips or tongue-tip or tongue-back, and then released with a slight explosion. All three consonants are strong sounds and have a special feature, which other strong consonants, like /f/, /θ/, /s/, /ʃ/, and /tʃ/ do not have: they cause the following sound to lose some of the voicing which it would otherwise have. [O'Connor, 1990]

Aspiration is a slight puff of air which is released in a very short pause before the following vowel when sounds /p, t, k/ are made. Aspiration is very typical feature of English language and does not exist in Czech. For a foreign listener, it is usually not difficult to distinguish these sounds even without aspiration but English listeners may hear these sounds as /b, d, g/, because <sup>voice of variety</sup> /b, d, g/ are not aspirated in English. The teacher must also make students aware of the fact that the sounds /p, t, k/ are not aspirated when they are not at the beginning of a word or a syllable, i.e. when they occur after another consonant or at the end of a word.

One way, how to teach aspiration is an activity which is usually very funny for children. This activity was used by one of my English teachers and all the class had a good laugh. It is also very simple. Each pupil has got a tiny peace of light paper (I remember using toilet paper) and holds it in front of his mouth. Then learners are asked to pronounce or repeat words with /p, t, k/ in initial position. When their piece of paper moves, the sound was made correctly, when it does not, there was probably



not enough air in the puff. The children usually love this activity and they love to imitate their teacher doing so. I have tried this activity with children and I find it more efficient than another technique how to teach aspiration, which consists in adding the /h/ sound after these three consonants. This practice uses a word like 'hat' that is repeated several times and after that the learner says the word 'cat'. To pronounce the word 'cat' correctly, the learner is advised to say /k/ and then add the word 'hat'. After several examples and demonstration, the student can be advised of only "thinking of the /h/ sound. [Kenworthy, 1990]

#### 4.4.3 Difficulties with /r/

Along with /j/ and /w/, /r/ belongs to a group of sounds called gliding consonants. These three consonants consist of a quick, smooth, non-friction glide towards a following vowel sound. [O'Connor, 1990]

"This is the position of the speech organs for /r/:

- The tongue has a curved shape with the tip pointing towards the hard palate at the back of the alveolar ridge, the front low and the back rather high.
- The tongue tip is not close enough to the palate to cause friction.
- The lips are rather rounded, especially when /r/ is at the beginning of words.
- The soft palate is raised; and voiced air flows quietly between the tongue-tip and palate with no friction." [O'Connor, 1990, p.60]

There are many varieties of the /r/ sound in English. Scottish speakers use an /r/ made by striking the tongue against the roof of the mouth several times very quickly, which is very similar to Czech. However, in Czech schools Standard British English is taught, therefore the children should use the /r/ of British RP. This /r/ sound is produced with the tongue in the middle of the mouth. In RP, /r/ is also not pronounced after a vowel e.g. in words like 'car' or 'hurt'. /r/ only occurs before

*How do you pronounce it?  
important to understand it.*

vowels, never before consonants. This is sometimes a big difference to other varieties of English, e. g. some accents of American English, and Irish or Scottish English. On the contrary to Czech /r/ sound, for the RP /r/ sound, the tip of the tongue never touches the roof of the mouth.

There are several instructions in Kenworthy, (1990) how to produce the 'gliding, almost vowel-like' /r/ sound. They are all based on uses of another sound as a starting point or help-sound, so they are only usable if the learner can make the supporting sound. Some of the suggestions are based on sounds that I suppose to be difficult for Czech young learners, so I have only chosen the option that uses sounds that also occur in Czech.

"/j/ as in 'yes' and /i:/ as in 'eat'

These are useful sounds for learners who tend to use a trilled or rolled /r/ in the mother tongue (Italian, Spanish, Arabic, and Czech). For both /j/ and /i:/ the sides of the tongue are held tightly against the upper back teeth, as for the target sound /r/. This inhibits a trilling action of the tongue tip:

- Get ready to pronounce /j/ (or /i:/).
- As you make the sound, curl the tip of the tongue slightly upwards.
- Don't move the sides of your tongue or touch the tip against the roof of the mouth." [Kenworthy, 1990, p. 73-74]

#### 4.4.4 'Th' sounds - /θ/ (three) and /ð/ (this)

There are nine consonants in English, /f/, /v/, /θ/, /ð/, /s/, /z/, /ʃ/, /ʒ/, and /h/, which all have friction as their most important feature, they are called friction consonants or fricatives. For all of them the lungs push air through a narrow opening where it

causes friction of various kinds. [O'Connor, 1990] /θ/ is a strong sound and /ð/ is weak.

“Both have this position of the speech organs:

- The soft palate is raised so that all the breath is forced to go through the mouth.
- The tip of the tongue is close to the upper front teeth: this is the narrowing where the friction is made.
- The noise made by the friction for /θ/ and /ð/ is not very great, much less than for /s/ and /z/.” [O'Connor, 1990, p. 29]

*? u h. of see?*

Czech learners often substitute these two sounds for the other fricatives. It is often suggested to teach students by exaggerated version of the sound. I believe that this way may be quite useful with adults as they have great trouble pronouncing these sounds. However, this is not the way native speakers use these sounds. Young learners have, due to their brain neuroplasticity in the early age, according to CPH, a great potential in L2 acquisition. They also see these sounds as funny and they love to imitate them.

“One of the techniques for the practice of ‘th’ sounds is the ‘chewing gum technique’.

- Give each learner a small piece of gum.
- After a few moments of communal chewing tell them to press the gum up against the back of the upper front teeth.
- Then tell them to touch the tongue lightly at the bottom edge of the gum, and force the air out.

The novelty of the gum technique can make the required tongue position for /θ/ and /ð/ memorable." [Kenworthy, 1990, p. 75]

Another technique which may be used with Czech children, especially when they are going to start learning English Language in their third year [www.rvp.cz] is using Czech words with substituting the /s/ sound for /θ/sound and /z/ for /ð/. This is also a funny way of revising the Czech list of words where we write 'y' after a certain consonant. As these lists are in the curriculum for the third year, it can also work as an example of extra-curriculum relations.

#### 4.4.5 /ŋ/ Sound

This is the third nasal consonant and the only one likely to cause trouble, because we do not have it in the Czech language. This is the position of the speech organs:

- "The soft palate is lowered and all the air passes out through the nose.
- The mouth is blocked by the back of the tongue pressed against the soft palate.
- The sound is voiced." [O'Connor, 1990, p.51]

/ŋ/ does not occur at the beginnings of words in English, but it does occur between vowels, where it is more difficult than in final position. It is difficult to avoid saying a /g/ after /ŋ/ and pronouncing /sɪŋgə/ instead of /sɪŋə/.

The training of /ŋ/ in the final position is easy and enjoyable for young learners. It is also very important as this sound is very common in English, mostly thanks to continuous tenses and some adjectives, gerunds or participles. The children are asked

*to repeat the word Kongo several times  
and think of the sound /kɒŋ/*

to repeat the word Kongo several times. To very young learners, it is also good to mention, that Kongo is a river and a country in Africa. The next step is to say only the first syllable aloud /kɒŋ/ and only think the second syllable /gəʊ/ but do not say it aloud. After several repetitions, the pupils are aware of the /ŋ/ sound isolated from /g/ in final position. The following exercise is to say as many words with /ŋ/ at the end as possible. When the learners master this sound at the end of words, it is possible to proceed to training the sound in medial position.

“In some words /g/ is normally pronounced after /ŋ/ before a following vowel, for example in words ‘anger’ /æŋgə/ or ‘finger’ /fɪŋgə/. A useful general rule is that if the word is formed from a verb, no /g/ sound is pronounced, as with ‘singer’ /sɪŋə/, ‘hanging’ /hæŋŋ/, but if not, /g/ is pronounced, as in ‘stronger’ /strɒŋgə/, formed from the adjective strong /strɒŋ/, and anger /æŋgə/, which is not formed out of a shorter word.” [O’Connor, 1990, p.53]

These are some of the most common words containing /ŋ/: anger, drink, finger, hungry, language, sink, thank, think, thing, bring, evening, long morning, sing, song, spring, strong, wrong, young, etc. On the contrary to ‘g’, ‘k’ is always pronounced after the /ŋ/ sound. *by each learner*

#### 4.4.6 /w/ and /v/

Although there is no /w/ in the Czech language, this consonant is usually not a problem for pupils. This sound consists of a quick glide from the vowel /ʊ/ to whatever vowel follows. The learners start with /ʊ/ and follow this immediately by

the vowel /i:/ - this is the word 'we' /wi:/. The /w/ part must be short and weak and the lips must be rounded quite firmly. When /w/ follows a consonant it is made in the same way; but the lips are rounded ready for /w/ before the previous consonant is finished. Here are some examples of these words: sweet, swim, quite, twenty, twin, etc. [O'Connor, 1990]

In my opinion, Czech pupils are able to make the /w/ sound easily. However, they tend to substitute it for /v/ as well; therefore it is important to point out the difference to them. To demonstrate the difference, minimal pairs are the best way again. Here are a few examples of minimal pairs containing /w/ or /v/: worse/verse, wet/vet, wheel/veal, wine/vine, while/vile, wary/vary, etc.

#### **4.5 VOICED AND VOICELESS SOUNDS IN FINAL POSITION**

This problem concerns mainly the pair consonants, weak and strong (voiced and voiceless): b/p, d/t, g/k, v/f, z/s, ʒ/tʃ and ð/θ. Speakers of the Czech language pronounce all these consonants as voiceless in final position. Therefore it is sometimes difficult for children to spell the consonants at the end of words correctly. However, in English, these consonants are not only spelled and pronounced differently, but they also affect the vowel that comes before them. "In final position (before a pause) /p/ is aspirated and shortens the vowel before it, whilst /b/ is particularly weak and makes only very little noise and lengthens the vowel before it." [O'Connor, 1990, p. 41] These are some examples of minimal pairs where to practise the difference: rip/rib, rope/robe, cup/cub, cap/cab, tap/ tab.

When /f/ and /v/ occur at the end of words, after a vowel, they have an effect on the length of the vowel. The strong consonant /f/ makes the vowel shorter; the weak

consonant /v/ makes the vowel longer. This is a general rule which applies to all the pairs mentioned above: "strong consonants at the end of words shorten the preceding vowel, weak consonants lengthen it." [O'Connor, 1990, p. 27] Here are some other examples of minimal pairs: leaf/leave, surf/serve, life/live, safe/save. Here are a few examples of minimal pairs containing the pairs of a weak and a strong consonant in final position after a vowel:

- /θ/ and /ð/: mouth (n.)/mouth (v.)
- /s/ and /z/: bus/buzz, place/plays, price/prize, loose/lose, hiss/his
- /t/ and /d/: bet/bed, heart/hard, late/laid, sight/side, set/said
- /k/ and /g/: pick/pig, back/bag, dock/dog, lock/log
- /tʃ/ and /dʒ/: rich/ridge, H/age, etc.

## 5 OTHER ASPECTS OF ENGLISH PRONUNCIATION

### 5.1 LINKAGE OF SOUNDS

“When we talk, we do not talk in single words but in groups of words spoken continuously, with no break or pause; we may pause after a group, but not during it.” [O’Connor, 1990, p.90] Words are strung together in phrases. There are pauses of different lengths between these phrases, depending on how closely connected the phrases are, either grammatically or according to their meaning.

### 5.2 WORD STRESS

Word stress in English is much stronger <sup>than</sup> the word stress in Czech. Also, the first syllable is the one carrying stress in vast majority of Czech words, whilst there is no simple way of knowing which syllable or syllables in an English word must be stressed. However, this information could be found in every good dictionary. If a wrong syllable is stressed, it spoils the shape of the word and an English hearer may have difficulty in recognizing the word. [O’Connor, 1990]

There are many rules which words and syllables are stressed and some of them are quite complicated. As my thesis is not focused mainly on word stress, the full list of the rules along with detailed explanations can be found in Roach, P. (1990).



### **5.3 WEAK FORMS**

There are some words in English that can be pronounced either in their strong form (stressed) or weak form (unstressed) in different situations. Some words also have more than one weak form. There are 35 words in English whose weak forms must be learnt if a speaker wants his English to 'sound' English. These are mainly words of one syllable which are purely grammatical, like pronouns, prepositions and articles. Other one syllable words are always stressed, for example verbs, nouns, adjectives and adverbs. The full list of weak forms and their usage can be found in O'Connor, (1990), p. 92 – 94.

### **5.4 SENTENCE STRESS**

"Speakers often decide that they want to give more or less prominence to a particular word. A word may be given less weight because it has been said already, or it may be given more weight because the speaker wants to highlight it. This aspect of pronunciation is called sentence stress." [Kenworthy, 1990, p.11]

### **5.5 RHYTHM**

"English speech resembles music in that it has a beat." [Kenworthy, 1990, p.10]  
There is not only a difference in the prominence of the stressed syllables but also in their length. The unstressed syllables before the stress are said very quickly and they are as short as possible; but the stressed syllable is as long as usually, so there is a great difference of length between the unstressed syllables and the stressed one. There may also be some unstressed syllables after the stress, but these unstressed syllables are not said especially quickly. [O'Connor, 1990]

### *5.6 INTONATION*

“Speech is also like music in that it uses changes in pitch” [Kenworthy, 1990, p.11] Comparing to Czech, English intonation is very rich. Intonation is specific for each language. The voice goes up and down and the different notes of the voice combine to make tunes. It can even jump up suddenly in pitch as singers do. There are two basic melodies, rising and falling. These can also be put together in various combinations. Rhythm, sentence stress, weak forms, and intonation are very closely connected and create the typical melody of English and make it an attractive language.

**PRACTICAL PART**

## **6 TYPICAL PRONUNCIATION ERRORS OF CZECH YOUNG LEARNERS**

### ***6.1 AIMS OF THE RESEARCH***

The main purpose of my work is to study Young Learner's typical mistakes in English individual sounds pronunciation. Nowadays, pupils start to learn English when they attend the fourth year of elementary school. According to the new Educational Framework of the Ministry of Education, pupils will start with second language acquisition one year earlier. Therefore I have chosen a special language school for my research. The regular English lessons start at the beginning of the third year and there are three English lessons weekly in the curriculum for each monitored class. I suppose that there are a great number of pupils who have problems pronouncing sounds that do not occur in Czech. Due to my previous teaching experience I suppose that approximately 25% of pupils have problems pronouncing the /θ/ and /ð/ sounds. I would like to find out which sounds cause most difficulties, what is the most common way of pronouncing these sounds, how teachers fight these problems, and if they would be interested in putting this set of activities on the programmes of their lessons.

### ***6.2 METHODOLOGY OF THE RESEARCH***

I have used two methods in my research. For the first part of my research, I have prepared short texts for the pupils to read. There were three different texts as I monitored three different levels of English (see appendix 1). I carefully designed the texts so that each of them contains only words that are familiar to the children.

The texts are designed on the base of the vocabulary range of the textbooks used in the school, which are Strange, D., (1991), Chatterbox 1 in the third year; Strange, D., (1990), Chatterbox 2 in the fourth year and Hutchinson, T., (1990), New Project English 1 in the fifth year. Each text also contains all sounds of English that I have assumed may cause problems to young learners. The presumption for the monitoring was the fact that none of the pupils had pronunciation problems in Czech. There was a little problem with the text for the third year as the vocabulary of the pupils is not large. As a result, the text for the third year only contains individual expressions or phrases. The other two texts are short stories.

To evaluate these texts I used special grids (see appendix 2). The process of monitoring was the same in all classes. Although the words from the text were familiar to all the pupils, I read the text twice to them. I had asked them to listen carefully. Then I asked one child after another to read the text to me and while they were reading, I marked their mistakes into my grids. The rest of the class were working with the teacher, so I think my research did not disturb the lessons much. As the rest of the class was working I also eliminated the problem of pupils copying one another; therefore I consider the results to correspond with the real condition of the pupils' pronunciation skills.

My research was held in the basic school of Eduard Beneš in Písek. This school is considered to be one of the best schools in the region. There is an extensive language learning that starts in the third year. Children who want to attend the classes with language extension must pass a special entrance exam. The exam is oral and specialised teachers test the children on language skills and try to find out if they are talented. They also consider their results in the Czech Language and Mathematics as their further studies are more demanding. Every year a number of pupils cannot be accepted because there is a huge interest for the school from the parents' side and the capacity of the school does not enable to enrol all the

students. There are two classes with the language extension in each year. These classes are divided into four groups for their English lessons; each group consists of approximately 13 pupils. There is also a specialised laboratory with computers, mainly for learning English. Therefore I think that the results I got from my study are better than the results I would have got at other elementary schools.

### ***6.3 THE COURSE OF THE RESEARCH***

The research took place from 1 to 10 March. This means that the pupils had already reached three quarters of their books when they were tested. And even the classes that had started learning English in September were aware of all sounds of English.

I prepared eleven questions for my guided interview with elementary school English teachers. (Appendix 3) These questions were the basic points of all the interviews but I also used additional questions when the teachers' answers were not complete. I interviewed twelve teachers who teach English to young learners. Five of them were teachers of the monitored classes. All the teachers answered all my questions willingly and had enough time for the interview. The other teachers were from different schools, mostly from the basic school Pohůrecká in České Budějovice, where I spent four weeks of my teaching practice. Some of these teachers were primary school teachers who had no education in English methodology.

## 6.4 RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

### 6.4.1 Analysis of the Typical Mistakes in Pronunciation of Young Learners

The research file for the first part of my study consisted of 153 pupils from the basic school of Eduard Beneš in Písek. Out of this number, 54 pupils were in their third year and had started studying English in September 2005 (level 1), 49 pupils are in their fourth year and had been studying English for nearly two years (level 2), and 50 pupils are in their fifth year and had been studying English since September 2003 (level 3). All students of the same year were tested with the same text. The texts varied in difficulty according to pupils' knowledge.

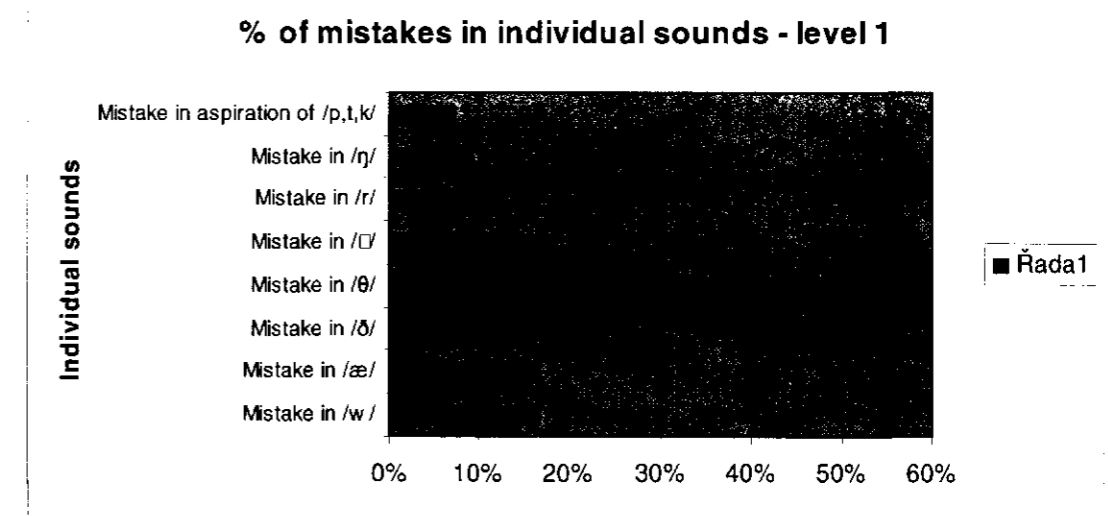
### 6.4.2 Level 1

Chart 1: Number of tested pupils - level 1

Number of Level 1 pupils	54	100.00%
Mistakes in /w/	9	16.67%
Mistakes in /æ/	9	16.67%
Mistakes in /ð/	13	24.07%
Mistakes in /θ/	26	48.15%
Mistakes in /r/	10	18.52%
Mistakes in /r/	7	12.96%
Mistakes in /ŋ/	5	9.26%
Mistakes in aspiration of /p,t,k/	4	7.41%

*That job is quite for  
fly? Klučina via abba  
...*

**Graph 1: % of mistakes in individual sounds - level 1**



**Chart 2: Incorrect substitutions of the /θ/ sound – level 1**

Number of mistakes in /θ/	26	100.00%
Substituted by /s/	12	46.15%
Substituted by /f/	9	34.62%
Substituted by aspirated /t/	4	15.38%
Substituted by /ð/	1	3.85%

**Chart 3: Incorrect substitutions of the /ð/ sound – level 1**

Number of mistakes in /ð/	13	100.00%
Substituted by /d/	6	46.15%
Substituted by /z/	2	15.38%
Substituted by /dz/	5	38.46%

Out of these numbers we can see that the sound /θ/ caused problems to the greatest number of pupils – 48.15%. The most common substitution for this letter was the sound /s/ - 46.15%, closely followed by /f/ - 34.62%; also sounds /t/ -



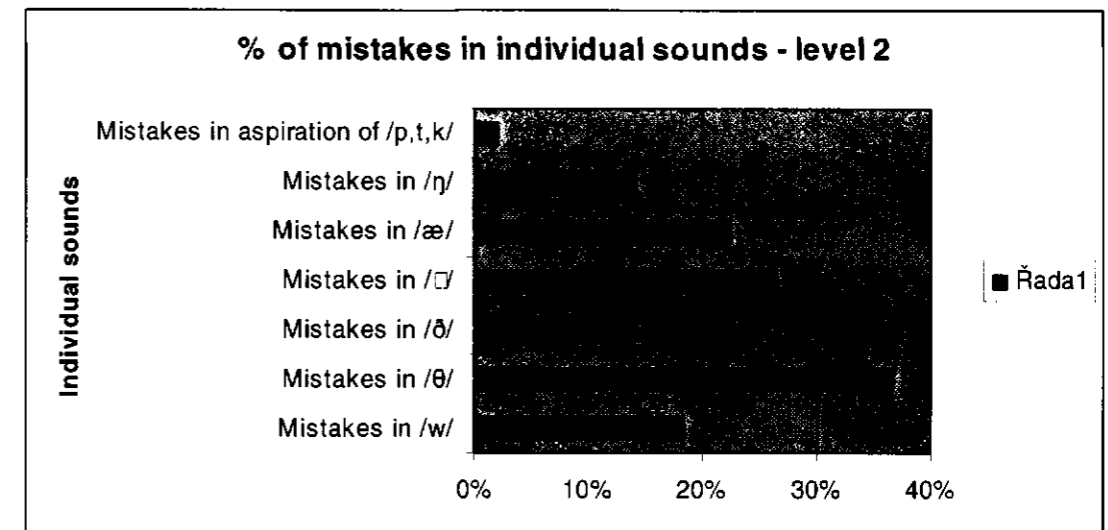
15.38% and /ð/ - 3.85% appeared. Only half as common as the mistake in the /θ/ sound was the mistake in /ð/ sound – 24.07%. The most common substitution was the /d/ sound in this case – 46.15%, and /dz/ - 38.46% and /z/ - 15.38% sounds also occurred. Schwa /ə/ also caused a lot of trouble – 18.52% and was usually substituted for a vowel that the pupils could see in the written text. The /w/ sound was mispronounced in 9 cases – 16.67% and was always mistaken for the /v/ sound. The /æ/ sound was not pronounced correctly in 9 cases as well, in 7 of them it was said like /e/ and in 2 of them like /ʌ/. /ŋk/ was the way how a number of participants pronounced /ŋ/ - 9.26%. The last problem in pronunciation of level 1 tested pupils was aspiration, which caused problems to 4 pupils – 7.41%.

### 6.4.3 Level 2

Chart 4: Number of tested pupils – level 2

Number of tested pupils - level 2	49	100.00%
Mistakes in /w/	9	18.37%
Mistakes in /θ/	18	36.73%
Mistakes in /ð/	7	14.29%
Mistakes in /ɪ/	13	26.53%
Mistakes in /æ/	11	22.45%
Mistakes in /ŋ/	7	14.29%
Mistakes in aspiration of /p,t,k/	1	2.04%

**Graph 2: % of mistakes in individual sounds – level 2**



**Chart 5: Incorrect substitutions of the /θ/ sound – level 2**

Number of mistakes in /θ/	18	100.00%
Substituted by /s/	10	55.56%
Substituted by /f/	5	27.78%
Substituted by /t/	3	16.67%

**Chart 6: Incorrect substitutions of the /ð/ sound – level 2**

Number of mistakes in /ð/	7	100.00%
Substituted by /d/	6	85.71%
Substituted by /z/	1	14.29%

As we can see in chart 4, number of mistakes has slightly decreased but not much. The prevailing number of mistakes was in the /θ/ sound - 36.73%, the most common sound that was used by the pupils to substitute /θ/ was /s/ - 55.56, followed by /f/ - 27.78%; and /t/ appeared in 3 cases – 16.67%. The second most

frequent mistake was in schwa – 26.53%, which was again mispronounced as the sounds of the spelled letters. The third position takes the /æ/ sound that was pronounced as /e/ in all the wrong cases – 22.45%. 18.37% of the pupils in level 2 pronounced /w/ as /v/. The number of pupils who made mistakes in /ð/ and /ŋ/ sounds was the same with both sounds – 14.29%. While /ŋ/ was always mispronounced as /ŋk/, there were two different consonants substituting /ð/ - /d/ - 85.71% and /z/ - 14.29%. Only one of the pupils did not pronounce aspirated /p/, /t/, and /k/ - 2.04%.

#### 6.4.4 Level 3

Chart 7: Number of tested pupils – level 3

Number of Level 3 pupils	50	100.00%
Mistakes in /w/	7	14.00%
Mistakes in /æ/	9	18.00%
Mistakes in /ð/	14	28.00%
Mistakes in /θ/	19	38.00%
Mistakes in /ɪ/	5	10.00%
Mistakes in /r/	2	4.00%
Mistakes in /rj/	5	10.00%
Mistakes in /ɜ:/	1	2.00%

Graph 3: % of mistakes in individual sounds – level 3

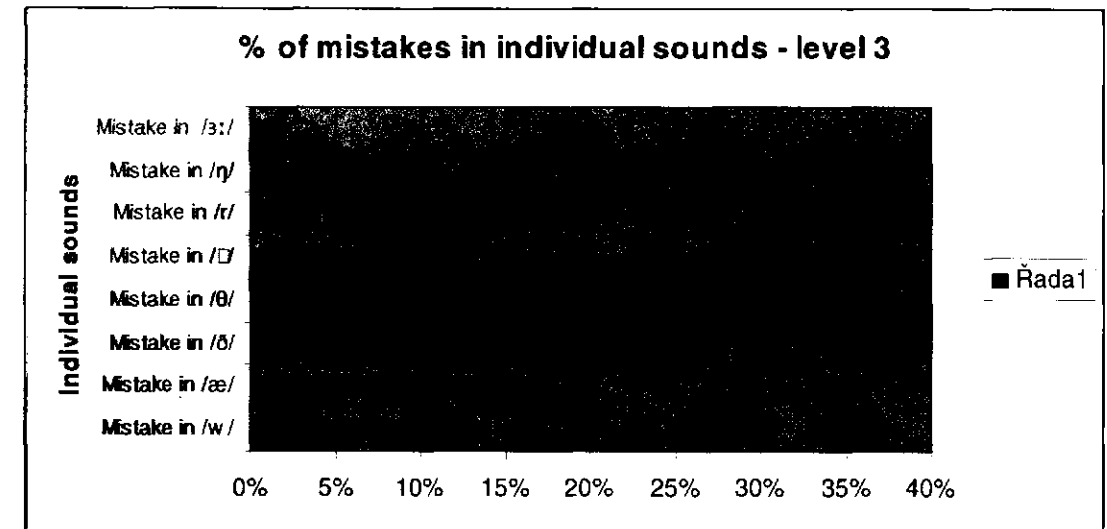


Chart 8: Incorrect substitutions of the /θ/ sound – level 3

Number of mistakes in /θ/	19	100.00%
Substituted by /s/	4	21.05%
Substituted by /f/	13	68.42%
Substituted by /t/	2	10.53%

Chart 9: Incorrect substitutions of the /ð/ sound – level 3.

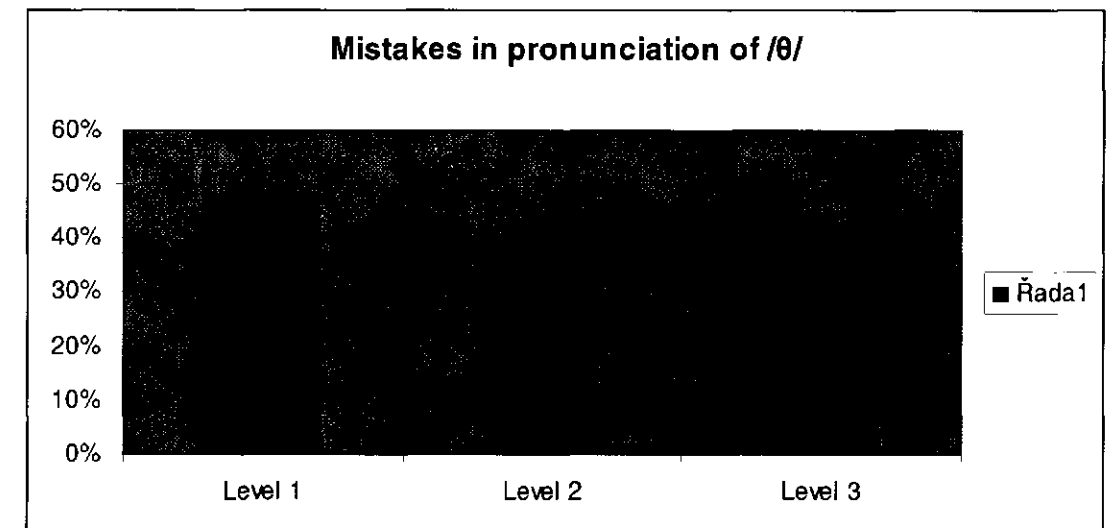
Number of mistakes in /ð/	14	100.00%
Substituted by /d/	6	42.86%
Substituted by /z/	1	7.14%
Substituted by /dz/	7	50.00%

As we can see in the charts above, there is still very high number of mistakes in many sounds of English. The biggest problem is caused by the /θ/ sound again – 38%, this time the most common sound used instead of /θ/ was /f/ - 68.42%, then

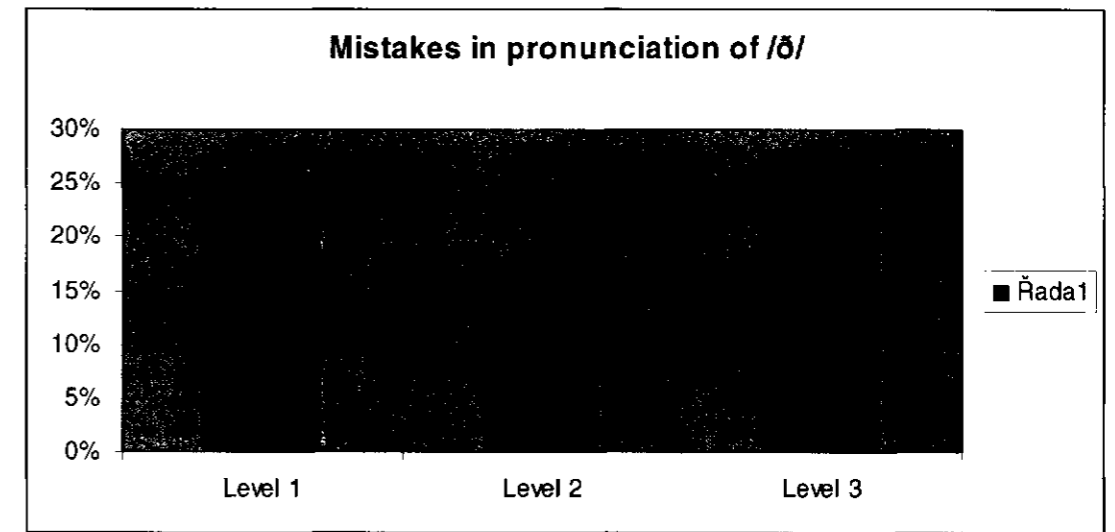
/s/ - 21.05% and /t/ - 10.53%. Unlike in the previous two levels, where the /ð/ sound was not one of the main problems, it takes over the second position with level 3 pupils; mistakes were made in 14 cases – 28%; with /dz/ being the most common mispronunciation – 50%, right before /d/ - 42.86%; /z/ also appeared, but only once – 7.14%. Then, the same mistakes as with the two previous level repeated again - /æ/ - 18%, /w/ - 14%, both /ə/ and /ŋ/ - 10%, /r/ - 4% . There occurred one new mistake that had not been made by any pupil in level 1 or 2 - /ɜ:/, but it was only made by one pupil – 2%.

#### 6.4.5 Comparison of Monitored Levels

Graph 4: Comparison of mistakes in pronunciation of the /θ/ sound in levels 1, 2 and 3



Graph 5: Comparison of mistakes in pronunciation of the /ð/ sound in levels 1, 2 and 3



These two graphs show how the number of mistakes in pronunciation of /θ/ and /ð/ sounds varies in different tested levels. Quite surprising is the fact that there is lower percentage of mistakes made by level 2 students than by level 3 students. The numbers of mistakes of course vary with other sounds as well. Some of the mistakes did not occur in all the tested levels. In level one, there were eight sounds that were mispronounced - /w/, /r/, /ð/, /θ/, /ŋ/, /ə/, /æ/, and aspiration of /p/, /t/, /k/. In level two, there were only seven sounds that were said incorrectly by some of the pupils - /w/, /r/, /ð/, /θ/, /ŋ/, /ə/, /æ/; the problem with aspiration of /p/, /t/, /k/ has not appeared. So was the situation in level 3, but there occurred one more mistake that had not arisen before – the mistake in /ɜ:/.

#### 6.4.6 Guided Interviews with Elementary School English Teachers

The research file for the second part of my study consisted of 12 English teachers. Each of them teaches at least two of the monitored levels. There are five teachers who teach English at basic language school of Eduard Beneš and seven teachers who teach English at basic school Pohůrecká in České Budějovice. There were eleven basic questions that I used for my interview. All the teachers answered all questions, sometimes adding even more details. All the teachers responded in privacy therefore they were not influenced during the interview. The respondents were not familiar with the results of the previous part of my research.

**Question 1:** *What classes do you teach English in?* I used this question to find out more about the range of lessons the teacher have in different basic schools. I have found out that five English teachers teach from class 4 to 9, two teachers from 3 to 9, three teachers from 3 to 5, and two teachers from 3 to 4. However, this question did not have any significant value, as the answers to other questions did not vary depending on the range of taught classes.

**Question 2:** *What textbooks do you use?*

**Chart 10: The most commonly used English textbooks**

Textbook	Year 3	Year 4	Year 5
Chatterbox	5	12	5
New Project English	0	0	5
Happy House	2	0	0

There was not a great variety of textbooks as I interviewed teachers from only two different schools. The most popular textbook for young learners is Chatterbox which is used in 5 of 7 third year classes, all 12 fourth year classes, and half of the

fifth year classes. New Project English is used at the language school for the fifth year classes as they start with regular English lessons one year earlier than at other schools. Happy House is only used by two teachers for English classes in the third year of ordinary basic school and they use it for English as an after school activity – 45 minutes twice a week.

**Question 3:** *What are the most common pronunciation problems of your students?*

*Handwritten note: The most common pronunciation problems are /θ/ and /ð/.*

**Chart 11: The most common pronunciation problems according to English teachers depending on levels 1 to 3**

Problem sound	Level 1	%	Level 2	%	Level 3	%
Aspiration of /p, t, k/	5	71.43	6	50	2	20
/θ/	7	100	12	100	10	100
/ð/	7	100	12	100	9	90
/æ/	7	100	9	75	6	60
/v/	2	28.57	2	16.67	1	10
/ŋ/	3	42.86	5	41.67	4	40

As there are different numbers of teachers of each level that I interviewed, there is always a percentage of how many respondents indicated the sound to be difficult for learners. For this question, all the respondents were given the complete chart of English sounds. They were asked if any other significant problems in pronunciation (intonation etc.) occurred. Three of the teachers claimed that intonation becomes a problem when the pupils reach puberty, as they start to be shy to use English intonation. However, all teachers – 100% of all levels of English consider /ð/ and /θ/ sounds to be the biggest problem of their learners. The second most problem sound, according to English teachers, is /æ/ - 100% in level 1, 75% in level 2 and 60% in level 3. Some of the teachers find /v/ a problem

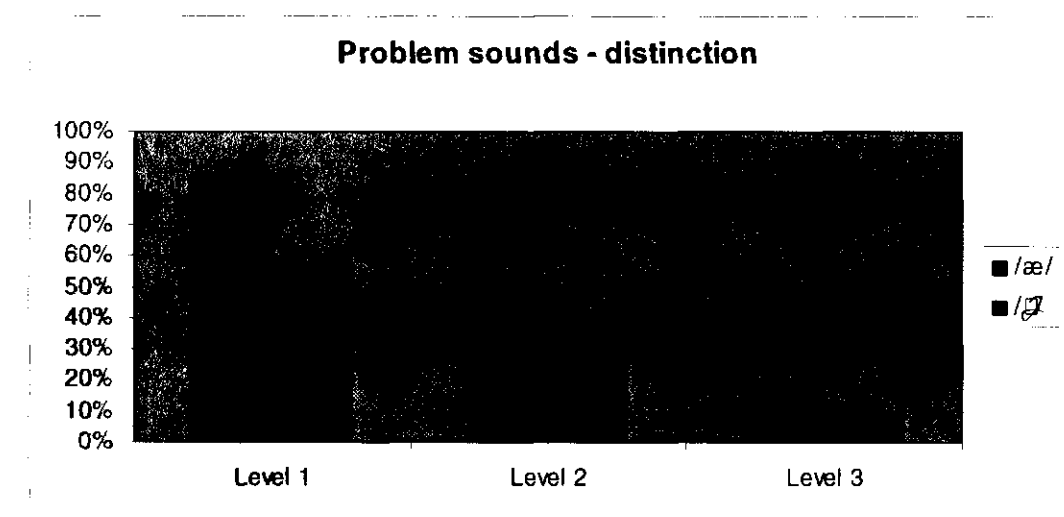


sound too, as many children use /w/ instead of it. /ŋ/ in final or middle position is a problem too – level 1 – 42.86%, level 2 – 41.67%, level 3 – 40%. One of the teachers believes that mistakes in /θ/, /ð/ and /æ/ occur because the pupils are shy to pronounce these sounds. All teachers claim that there are no other problems in pronunciation of their learners.

**Question 4:** *Do the same problems repeat or do you always find a new problem with a new class?* All teachers responded that the problems were the same with all their classes. One of the teachers added, that she could not say for sure as she was not experienced enough.

**Question 5:** *Which sounds are difficult for the students to distinguish and which are difficult to produce?* The sounds that are difficult to produce are the sounds mentioned in question 3, chart 11. However, some of these sounds are simple to for pupils to recognize in words. The only sounds that the teachers claimed were difficult to distinguish from others were sounds /æ/ and /ə/.

Graph 6: Problems in distinction of /æ/ and /ə/



The most problems in distinction of these sounds occur with level 1 students. They tend to mistake the /æ/ sound for the /e/ sound. Schwa is very difficult for them, as they sometimes claim that there is no sound at all or they mistake it for various different vowels. This, in my opinion, is quite natural, as schwa exists in many different forms. However, the problem of sound distinction seems to recede with higher levels of English language acquisition.

**Question 6:** *Do these pronunciation problems vary with the level of pupils' knowledge?* All teachers claim that the pronunciation of problem sounds and their distinction in spoken language improves along with the level of pupils' advance and the time they study English.

**Question 7:** *Do you teach English pronunciation?* Two teachers responded that they taught mainly pronunciation in their English lessons – these were the two teacher teaching English as after-school activity. All the other teachers said that they taught pronunciation regularly, which meant nearly every lesson. The time

they devote to pronunciation varies every lesson; the most usual answer was from 5 to 15 minutes.

**Question 8:** *What methods, exercises or activities do you use in teaching English pronunciation?* All the teachers use only activities that are in their textbooks or the “repeat after me” practise. They very often use the cassettes to their textbooks.

**Question 9:** *Are there any activities to develop pronunciation in the textbook that you use?* All the teachers using the same books responded in similar way: Chatterbox: listen and repeat exercises, many songs, cartoons, listen and point exercises; New Project English: pronunciation corner – listen and repeat activities, circle a word which contains a certain sound.

**Question 10:** *If a set of activities dealing with the problem sounds was given to you, would you try using it in your lessons?* All the teachers responded that they would welcome some interesting ideas how to develop pronunciation and would definitely try using such materials.

**Question 11:** *Do you think it is important to teach English pronunciation to young learners?* All teachers think that it is important to teach English pronunciation and four of the teacher<sup>s</sup> admitted that they were aware of the fact that they should devote more time in their lessons to teaching pronunciation.

## 7 CONCLUSION

I am aware of the fact that in my thesis I have only dealt with a fragment of English language pronunciation. However the task of pronunciation is so broad that it is impossible to cover all the aspects (intonation, word and sentence stress, weak forms, etc.) in the scale of one thesis. Therefore I had decided to focus my work on problem sounds.

I have found out that the most problem sound of English is the /θ/ sound. It causes problems to the highest percentage of learners. All the teachers are aware of this problem; however, there are many pupils who cannot produce this sound. The other sounds mentioned above also cause problems to young learners but the number of pupils who cannot say them correctly is lower. I consider the fact, that there were higher percentage of mistakes in level 3 than in level 2 quite alarming. Why does this happen? It might have been just a coincidence, but the difference in percentage is so significant that it does not seem to be so. In my opinion, this feature might have occurred due to higher focus on developing pronunciation at the early stages of English acquisition and its subsequent replacement by other kinds of training – focus on grammar, vocabulary, writing, etc.

Comparing the real condition of children's pronunciation and the problems the teachers are aware of, I must say that there appeared a wider range of mispronounced sounds that the teachers indicated as problem. Most of the teachers mainly focused on /θ/ and /ð/ sounds and none of them mentioned problems with for example /r/. This only proves the theory that teachers should not be the assessors of intelligibility of their pupils, as they can understand quite well nearly everything the learner is trying to say.

*Vyssi Klavina*

## CONCLUSION

From the guided interviews with the teachers I have also found out that they would love to teach pronunciation, but they do not want to repeat the same activities on and on, as young learners sometimes find these activities boring which makes it difficult to keep their attention. I was very surprised with the answers to question 8. (*What methods, exercises or activities do you use in teaching English pronunciation?*) I had expected a wide range of activities and games for developing pronunciation, but there were none. All teachers claimed to use only repetition and exercises in the textbook. I hope that this situation does not appear at all basic schools.

*quality of the materials?*

In conclusion I can say that my hypotheses have been fully confirmed. Actually, I must admit that I had expected the percentage of mistakes in these sounds to be slightly lower than it came out from the study. As the research was done with pupils who are considered to be talented in language learning, I am afraid that the situation might be even worse at other schools in the Czech Republic.

### 7.1 RECOMMENDATION

Based on the results of my research and the opinions of qualified teachers I have designed a variety of activities suitable for the monitored levels. These activities are adapted to be used in English lessons with Czech ESL learners. The number of pupils in classrooms and the technical equipment available in each school are taken into account, so are the time possibilities of elementary school teachers. I recommend these activities to be repeatedly and regularly used in English lessons as they are designed to practise the sounds which cause most problems to a great number of pupils.

## 8 ACTIVITIES TO DEVELOP CORRECT PRONUNCIATION OF YOUNG LEARNERS

I have chosen the following activities on the basis of the results of my research. All the activities are designed for young learners, especially in their first three years of learning English. However, most of them can be modified for older students, as these students sometimes have the same problems as young learners. I have found out that many schools in České Budějovice and in Písek use these textbooks: Chatterbox 1 (Oxford) in the first year of English learning, Chatterbox 2 (Oxford) in the second year and New Project English 1 (Oxford) in the third year. With the New Project English series they usually continue till the end of the school. Therefore the activities I have designed are mostly based on vocabulary used in these textbooks. There are also words that are not in the textbooks, but these words are carefully chosen and can also be used as a vocabulary extension for the topics given in the books.

The most problem sounds in English proved to be these: /θ/, /ð/, /ŋ/, /æ/, /ə/, so the majority of activities are aimed to practise these sounds. Some of the activities are designed to improve the sound perception, some of them to produce sounds and some of them testing learners' intelligibility. There is a great variety of activities from exercises involving learners working individually to group and whole-class games.

The phonetic transcription of the words I have used is the International Phonetic Alphabet (IPA). The source for the transcription was Longman Pronunciation Dictionary. This is used mainly for the convenience of the teachers, as they will give examples of the sounds in familiar words to learners.

These activities are designed for beginners, thus there cannot be a great variety of vocabulary. These activities could also be used for vocabulary practice. As young learners have only limited vocabulary there are not many minimal pairs used, although whenever it is possible I try to provide some because I consider them to be very effective in pronunciation learning. Minimal pairs are also amusing and highly motivating for children. Each activity is given an interesting name, which is useful not only for children's motivation but they will be able to remember the name, which can save time when repeating. If an activity is taken from a resource book for teachers, the name is kept the same for easier orientation in literature.

One of the tasks I was given in the assignment of the thesis was to try to create an audio recording that could be used along with these activities. However, the character of these activities does not require any additional material, as they are all based on teachers' work in the classroom and their main aim is reaching intelligibility. In majority of these activities, pupils need to cooperate in groups or pairs while using English.

### ***8.1 ACTIVITY FRAMEWORK***

**All the activities are given in this framework:**

NAME: Name of the activity, sometimes prompting the point.

POINT: Which sound or sounds and skill this activity develops.

LEVEL: Which level it is designed for.

TYPE: If it is an individual, group or whole-class activity.

TIME: The approximate time this activity takes in the class.

AIDS: What the teacher needs to prepare for this activity.

PRESENTATION AND CONDUCTING: How to present the activity to learners step by step and what hints to give during the activity.

KEY: Key to the exercise if there is any.

MODIFICATION: Possibilities of adjusting the activity either to a different level, different sound practice or for following usage.

NOTES: Further comments on the activity, why I have chosen it.

### 8.2 PRONUNCIATION JOURNEY [Hancock, 2000]

POINT: minimal pair practice, distinction of different sounds

LEVEL: level 1

TYPE: individual activity

TIME: 15 minutes

AIDS: a copy of worksheet for each student (appendix 4), two columns of words on the board:

<b>left</b>	<b>right</b>
book	look
her	hair
man	men
bad	bag

*← to the right of the page  
by the side of the page*



PRESENTATION AND CONDUCTING:

- Give each pupil a copy of the map.
- Read out the words from the board.
- Read out the words from the board in random order and ask the pupils to say which list they are from.
- Tell the students to mark the route and turn left in their maps if they hear a word from the left column and turn right if they hear a word from the right column.
- Repeat the words again for a check
- Ask the students which words they have heard and go through the route together.
- A pupil who marked the correct route can come to the board and substitute the role of the teacher.

MODIFICATION:

This game could be used with all three monitored classes. It is not always necessary to use minimal pairs; here are a few other suggestions of words that are sometimes confusing for young learners: toy/toe, here/her, here/hair, tree/three, day/they, money/many etc. This game is also good for practising numbers, it is good not to write them on the board in full words, but make the pairs like this: 15/50, 12/20, 70/17 etc.

It is also possible to divide pupils into small groups of three or four children and let them conduct the game themselves.

NOTES:

There is a possibility to vary this game a lot. If the teacher asks the pupil to use crayons of different colours, they can use the map many times. It is also easy to remember the rules of this game so when playing the game for the second time it will be less time-demanding.

### **8.3 DOMINO [Hancock, 2000]**

POINT: /θ/ and /ð/ sound practice

LEVEL: level 2

TYPE: pair work/ work in small groups

TIME: 20 minutes

AIDS: cut domino cards for each pair (appendix 5), enlarged copy of the cards for the final check if you have a magnetic board

#### **PRESENTATION AND CONDUCTING:**

- Divide the class into pairs or groups of three and give each group a pack of cards
- Tell the pupils that they must build a track by matching the cards together and give them an example. They must place the card so that it touches one of the sides of the last card that was placed on the table, the side which contains the same sound.
- Let the pupils work, and walk through the class if they need any help.
- Check the route together on the magnetic board.
- Say all the words and ask students to repeat them.

#### **KEY:**

Words containing /θ/: thanks, something, Thursday, thirteen, bathroom, thousand, south, Earth, through, teeth.

Words containing /ð/: that, the, there, this, they, then, together, them, father, mother

**MODIFICATION:**

This game could be played with different pairs of sounds. If the pupils enjoy the game, the teacher can use the same cards again, this time make this activity a competition. Pupils work in groups of three or four. For correct placing of the card the player scores one point. If he does not know where to place the card, he puts it under the pack and it is another's player's turn. If he places the card incorrectly, he scores no point and again, the card is put under the pack. The teacher can make one pupil responsible for counting the score.

**NOTES:**

This game also develops reading skills and reinforces problem sounds awareness. The pupils also learn to work in groups and assess work of their classmates.

**8.4 BINGO**

**POINT:** confusing sounds perception

**LEVEL:** level 3

**TYPE:** whole-class listening activity

**TIME:** 7 minutes

**AIDS:** list of words written on the board

Example of a list of words: her, here, hair, tall, tell, day, they, life, live, like, lake, some, same, bed, bad

**PRESENTATION:**

- Ask the pupils to draw a grid of nine boxes into their exercise books.
- Read the list on the board and ask pupils to repeat after you.
- Ask the pupils to choose 9 words and write one word into each box.
- Then read the words in random order and let the students cross out the words they hear. The pupil who crosses out all the words in any line is a

Line Winner. You can continue the game in a search for a Grid Winner – a pupil who first crosses out all the words in the grid.

MODIFICATION: One of the students can take over the teacher's role and so while others practise listening, the chosen student practises speaking.

NOTES:

This game is usually played as a game to reinforce vocabulary. From my experience I know that children love this game and therefore they want to play it often and this can be used to practise the difficult sounds in a friendly way. It is also very efficient to use minimal pairs, so the children must listen really carefully.

### **8.5 SILENT READING**

POINT: guessing vowels and their correct production, making young learners aware of phonetic symbols

LEVEL: any

TYPE: whole-class activity, pair-work

TIME: 5 minutes minimum, possible extension in pair work

AIDS: list of words written on the board, each word with a different vowel sound

Example of a list for level 1: red, green, blue, black, white

PRESENTATION AND CONDUCTING:

- Get the class together in a small circle so that everyone can see your mouth.
- Give the pupils 30 seconds to look at the words on the board and ask them if they know how to pronounce them.

- Now try to whisper one word very quietly and see if they can guess the word.
- After the pupils' successful attempt, do not whisper the next word but only move your lips
- After some repetition send the pupils back to their desks and let them continue in pairs.

**KEY:** red /red/, green /grin/, blue /blu:/, black /blæk/, white /waɪt/

**MODIFICATION:**

This game could be played as a competition between two teams. For vocabulary practise, the teacher can hide the list of words after a while and pupils have to guess the words by heart. There is also a possibility of a follow-up activity, where the pupils try to think up words containing the same vowel. This can be a whole-class activity, team competition or individual competition.

**NOTE:**

This activity uses vocabulary from the course book, and involves listening and pronunciation practice. This task is challenging and motivating and can be used at any level.

**8.6 SOUND PICTURES**

**POINT:** consolidate pronunciation of different vowels

**LEVEL:** level 1

**TYPE:** drawing whole-class activity

**TIME:** 45 minutes

AIDS: a quarto paper for each pupil, crayons, scissors, several large plain posters, glue, felt tip pen

**PRESENTATION AND CONDUCTING:**

- Make a list of pupils first names on the board.
- Ask them to take their English textbook and choose a word that they would like to draw a picture of.
- Write a different word to each name.
- After the pupils finish their pictures, ask them to cut them out.
- Draw phonetic symbols as headlines of the posters and divide the pictures according to the vowel which they contain.
- Finally stick each picture on a corresponding poster and exhibit the poster in the classroom.

**MODIFICATION:**

Posters do not have to contain vowel sounds; they can also be used for problem consonants like /θ/. Also, the pictures do not have to be stuck to the poster but can be used for various matching activities.

**NOTE:**

This activity is not designed for an English lesson, but it is one of the possibilities how to exploit extra curriculum relations. Many teachers lack imagination of what to do in Art lessons – they want to do something useful. This is a good idea how to connect Arts and English.

### **8.7 BRAD AND JENNY**

POINT: practise the difference between the /e/ and the /æ/ sounds

LEVEL: any

TYPE: whole-class activity

TIME: 10 minutes

AIDS: Each child must have two cardboard pictures – a male (Brad) and a female (Jenny) and the teacher needs two lists of words – one with the /æ/ sound and one with the /e/ sound.

#### PRESENTATION AND CONDUCTING:

- Explain the pupils that they will show you the picture of Brad when they hear the /æ/ sound and the picture of Jenny when they hear the /e/ sound.
- Then read the words from your lists in random order and check if all the pupils show the correct picture.
- When teaching new vocabularies that contain these sounds, you can always ask: “Is it a Brad word or a Jenny word?”

#### MODIFICATION:

This activity could be used in reverse order, which means that the pupils may be asked to think of some ‘Brad’ and some ‘Jenny’ words.

### **8.8 SOUND MAZE [Hancock, 2000]**

POINT: the /θ/ sound

LEVEL: level 3

TYPE: individual activity or pair-work

TIME: 15 minutes

AIDS: a copy of the maze for each pupil or pair (appendix 6)

**PRESENTATION AND CONDUCTING:**

- Explain to the pupils that the only way out of the maze is to follow the /θ/ sound.
- The beginning of the maze is in the upper left-hand corner and the end is in the bottom right-hand corner.
- They can move from one square to the next horizontally or vertically, but not diagonally.
- When the students have finished, check the route together.

KEY: The correct route follows these words: three, thanks, thirsty, thirty, think, teeth, something, thick, thin, mouth, Thursday, earth, north, thousand, healthy, south, path.

**MODIFICATION:**

This is just an example of a sound maze. It can be created to practise any sound. If the students are familiar with the phonetic script, they can be asked to transcribe the words in the correct path, perhaps for homework.

***8.9 SOUND DICE [Hancock, 2000]***

POINT: Producing problem sounds, making the pupils aware of phonetic symbols

LEVEL: levels 2 and 3

TYPE: pair competition, or competition in groups of three pupils

TIME: 10 minutes



AIDS: a sound dice for each pair or group. The sound dice can be prepared from ordinary dice with the numbers covered by sticky labels. As these sounds are new to pupils, I would recommend them for the dice: /θ/, /ð/, /æ/, /ŋ/, /ɜ:/, /ə/.

PRESENTATION AND CONDUCTING:

- Explain the rules to the students: the pupil who throws the dice must think up a word containing the sound. If he does so, he scores one point, if not, he scores zero. The player with most points is the winner.
- Check the game quickly by asking students to say words containing given sounds.

MODIFICATION:

This game can be used as a competition for two teams. The teacher has got a big dice, so that everyone can see the symbols. After throwing the dice, each team has got thirty seconds to think up as many words containing the given sound as they can. Another extension may be that only the words that are spelled correctly count.

**8.10 FIND THE RULE [Hancock, 2000]**

POINT: sound distinction

LEVEL: levels 2 and 3

TYPE: whole-class activity

TIME: 10 minutes

AIDS: lists of words that suit the rule

PRESENTATION AND CONDUCTING:

- Get the class to sit in more or less a circle.

- Say your model sentence with an example word in the space. Indicate that the person next to you should repeat the model sentence, changing the word at the end, and so on around the circle. Take part in the game and say a word when it is your turn.
- After each contribution, say whether or not you accept the word given at the end, but do not say why; students should try to guess this.
- When the students catch on to what the rule is, they should not say the rule. Instead, they should simply supply a correct contribution when it their turn.
- When most students appear to have caught on, ask someone to explain what the rule is.
- If nobody seems to be catching on, give a few hints such as *Think about the consonant sounds!* The first time you use this game, more hints will probably be necessary.

**MODIFICATION:**

There are various rules that could be used, for example the word must contain a certain sound that needs to be practised at the moment; must have a certain number of syllables; must start with a certain sound; etc. This game can as well be used to practise different groups of vocabulary.

**8.11 TONGUE TWISTERS**

POINT: increasing pupils' pronunciation

LEVEL: levels 2 and 3

TYPE: group work, whole class activity

TIME: 20 minutes

AIDS: a sheet of paper for each pupil, board

PRESENTATION AND CONDUCTING:

- Ask the students to say some tongue twisters in Czech.
- Tell them, that they will create their own tongue twisters in English and write the following on the board: first name > what does she/he do > where > when.
- Get the students into groups of four people.
- They write a name on the sheet of paper and fold it, so that the others cannot see it and pass the paper to the person on their right.
- Then write what she/he does and fold it and pass it again, etc.
- Finally, each pupil reads the paper he or she has and the group chooses the best tongue twister for the class to learn by heart.

MODIFICATION:

This activity may also be done without folding the paper and pupils then have to pick words with a same initial letter, e. g. Mary makes muffins in the morning. This is more difficult and pupils need to know a lot of vocabulary, but they can use dictionaries.

NOTE:

Here are several English tongue twisters. They can be used at the beginning of each lesson as a warming-up activity.

- She sells sea shells on the sea shore.
- A proper copper coffee pot.
- Around the rugged rocks the ragged rascal ran.
- Red lorry, yellow lorry, red lorry, yellow lorry.
- A big black bug bit a big black bear.
- Peter Piper picked a peck of pickled peppers. Where's the peck of pickled peppers Peter Piper picked?

## SHRNUTÍ

Ve své diplomové práci jsem se zaměřila na výslovnostní problémy, které provázejí výuku anglického jazyka na základních školách v České republice, a to zejména na prvním stupni. Tyto problémy provázejí hlavně hlásky, které se v českém jazyce nevyskytují: /θ/, /ð/, /ŋ/, /æ/, /ə/, /w/.

Toto téma jsem si vybrala na základě svých zkušeností s výukou jazyka. Vím, že tyto hlásky působí problémy nejen žákům základních škol, ale i dospělým studentům. Mým zájmem bylo dozvědět se více o způsobu, jakým jsou tyto hlásky tvořeny, a možnostech zlepšení jejich výslovnosti. Vzhledem k tomu, že v budoucnosti bych se chtěla věnovat zejména výuce angličtiny na prvním stupni, zaměřila jsem se ve svém výzkumu na typické chyby žáků mladšího školního věku.

Práce je rozdělena na dvě části – část teoretickou a část praktickou. V teoretické části jsem uvedla, proč je důležité vyučovat výslovnost zejména u mladších žáků. Tyto poznatky vychází z Krashenovy teorie „Critical Period Hypothesis“ [Krashen, 1975], která předpokládá, že pokud se člověk začne věnovat cizímu jazyku až po dovršení určitého věku, nedosáhne nikdy na úroveň rodilého mluvčího. Jestliže osvojování cizího jazyka začne v raném věku, dítě je schopno dosáhnout velice vysoké znalosti. Existují i teorie popírající Krashenovu hypotézu. Jejich základní argumenty jsem uvedla v kapitole „Support against the CPH“ [Birdsong, 1999].

Dále se v teoretické části zabývám tvorbou jednotlivých hlásek, jejímž základem je správná percepce hlásky a její rozlišení od ostatních. Detailní popis polohy mluvidel a návody na nácvik výslovnosti poté následují zvlášť pro každou hlásku,

o které jsem předpokládala, že bude obtížná pro české studenty. V poslední kapitole se jen stručně zmiňuji a dalších aspektech anglické výslovnosti, jako jsou rytmus, intonace, slovní a větný přízvuk, spojování slov ve větné celky.

V praktické části své diplomové práce se zabývám výzkumem, které hlásky a v jaké míře působí nejvíce obtíží v různých ročnících prvního stupně základní školy. Vzhledem k tomu, že od příštího roku má být do škol zaveden rámcový vzdělávací program ministerstva školství ČR, který ukládá výuku anglického jazyka již od třetího ročníku, vybrala jsem si pro svůj výzkum základní jazykovou školu Eduarda Beneše v Písku, kde již výuka jazyka od třetího ročníku probíhá mnoho let s dobrými výsledky.

Cílem praktické části bylo:

- Určit všechny hlásky, které působí problémy žákům mladšího školního věku při hodinách anglického jazyka
- Zjistit, jestli se tyto problémy liší v závislosti na délce studia a úrovni znalostí
- Porovnat metody, které jednotliví učitelé používají pro výuku výslovnosti
- Porovnat reálné chyby žáků s názory učitelů, které hlásky považují za obtížné
- Navrhnout aktivity, které by učitelům umožnily procvičovat obtížné hlásky účinným a zábavným způsobem.

Pro výzkum jsem použila dvě metody. První z nich spočívala ve vytvoření tří krátkých textů, které se lišily náročností. Na základě přečtení těchto textů jsem analyzovala chyby objevující se v jednotlivých ročnících. Ve druhé části jsem pomocí řízených rozhovorů s učiteli zjišťovala, jaké chyby jsou typické pro jejich žáky a jaké metody učitelé používají k jejich nápravě.

Jako nejproblémovější se ukázaly hlásky /θ/, /ð/, /æ/ a /ə/. Bohužel, tyto hlásky byly špatně vyslovovány ve všech sledovaných ročnících. Ve čtvrtém ročníku se chybovost mírně snížila, v pátém ale opět téměř dosáhla hodnot třetího ročníku. Učitelé pro nácvik výslovnosti používají zejména cvičení, která jsou v učebnici. Hlásky, se kterými mají žáci problémy se z větší části shodují s chybami, které uvedli učitelé.

Na základě výsledků výzkumu, mohu říct, že hypotézy stanovené na začátku se plně potvrdily. Procenta žáků chybujících ve výslovnosti jednotlivých hlásek jsou ale ještě vyšší, než jsem předpokládala, což považuji za znepokojující fakt. Výzkum probíhal ve škole, kde žáci prochází přijímacím řízením, a proto se obávám, že stav na běžných základních školách je ještě horší.

Zjištěné nedostatky mohou být napravovány například aktivitami, které jsem uvedla v poslední kapitole svojí práce. Existuje mnoho příruček, které se zabývají výslovností, mnoho jimi navrhovaných her je však těžko využitelných na našich školách, zejména na prvním stupni. Proto jsem některé aktivity upravila podle nejpoužívanějších učebnic na základních školách v našem regionu. Slovní zásoba odpovídá učebnicím Chatterbox 1 a 2, New Project English 1. Materiální a časové podmínky jsou rovněž přijatelné pro každého učitele na ZŠ.

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**TEXT FOR TESTING LEVEL 1**

This white cat

Jeans for dad

My new television

Three pink shoes

My father has got long hair.

Yes, sit down.

Blue chocolate

A big boy

Happy Birthday!

**TEXT FOR TESTING LEVEL 2**

Hello, my name is Captain Peter Boy. These are my three girlfriends. We are from Japan. The sun is shining here. We all like chocolate ice-cream, it's very good. We love watching television. This is my house. There are two bathrooms. In the garden there are a lot of trees and flowers.

**TEXT FOR TESTING LEVEL 3**

Welcome to our new supermarket. We have got many things here – hamburgers, clothes, shoes, orange juice and TVs. These nice girls are our shop assistants. We have got thirty-three shop assistants; they can help you with everything.



**TEACHERS' GUIDED INTERVIEW**

1. What classes do you teach English in?
2. What textbooks do you use?
3. What are the most common pronunciation problems of your students?

Levels	Problem sounds
Level 1	
Level 2	
Level 3	

4. Do the same problems repeat or do you always find a new problem with a new class?
5. Which sounds are difficult for the students to distinguish and which are difficult to produce?
6. Do these pronunciation problems vary with the level of pupils' knowledge?
7. Do you teach English pronunciation?
8. What methods, exercises or activities do you use in teaching English pronunciation?
9. Are there any activities to develop pronunciation in the book that you use in the classroom?
10. If a set of activities dealing with the problem sounds was given to you, would you try using it in your language teaching?
11. Do you think that it is important to teach English pronunciation to young learners?

**OTÁZKY PRO ŘÍZENÝ ROZHOVOR S UČITELI**

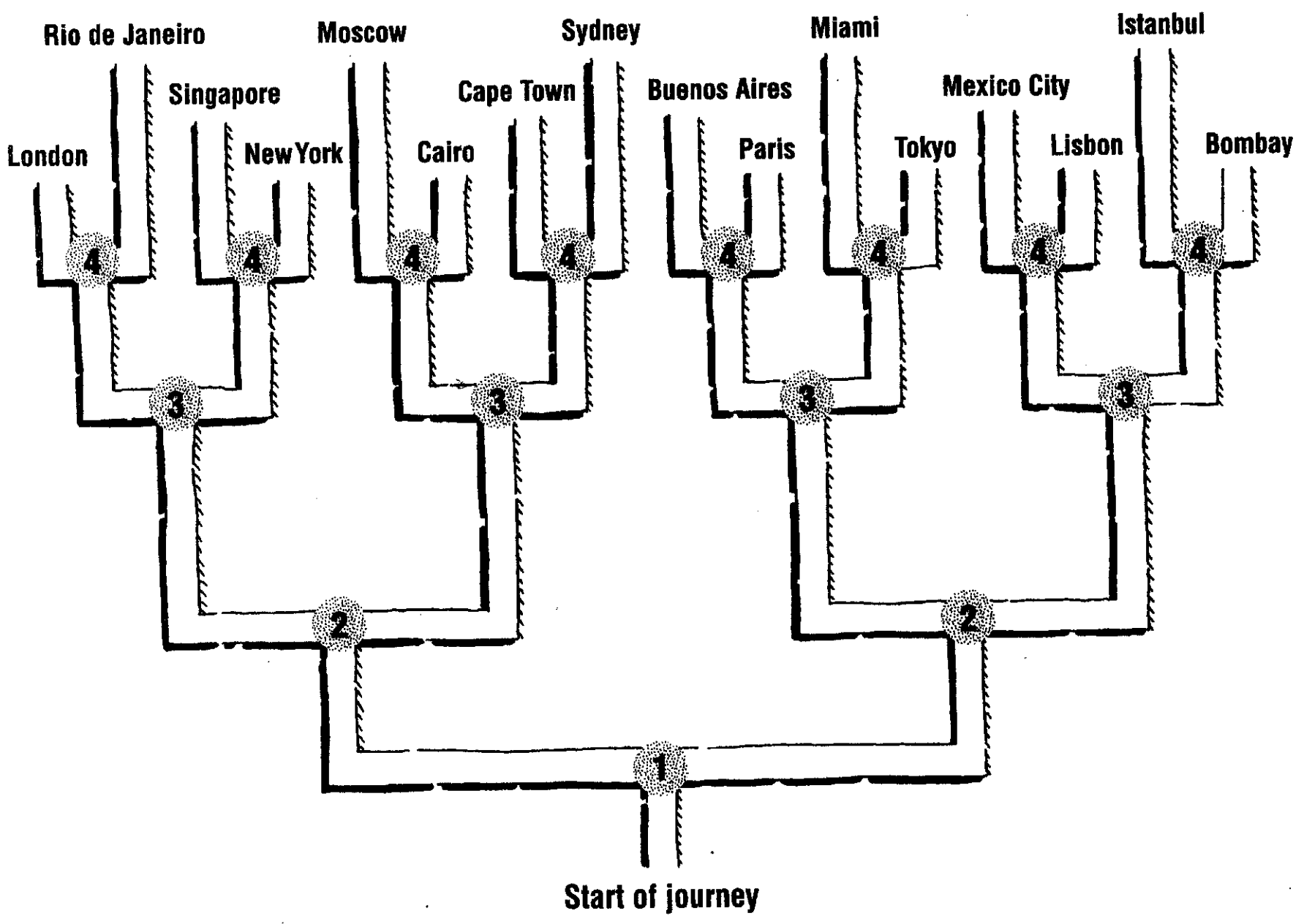
1. V jakých ročnících vyučujete anglický jazyk?

2. Jaké učebnice používáte?
3. Jaké jsou nejčastější problémy ve výslovnosti Vašich studentů?

Úroveň	Obtížné hlásky
Level 1	
Level 2	
Level 3	

4. Setkáváte se stále stejnými problémy nebo s novou třídou přichází i nové výslovnostní chyby?
5. Které hlásky je pro žáky obtížné rozpoznat a které těžko vyslovují?
6. Mění se tyto problémy společně se stupněm znalostí žáků?
7. Učíte výslovnost v hodinách angličtiny?
8. Jaké metody, cvičení či jiné aktivity používáte pro výuku výslovnosti?
9. Jsou nějaké aktivity pro rozvoj výslovnosti v učebnici, kterou používáte?
10. Pokud byste dostal/a sadu různých aktivit zabývajících se problémovými hláskami, použil/a byste je při výuce?
11. Myslíte si, že je důležité učit výslovnost na prvním stupni Základní školy?

Pronunciation journey **B2**





thanks	that
Thursday	there
bathroom	they
south	together
through	father

the	something
this	thirteen
then	thousand
them	Earth
mother	teeth

thanks	that
Thursday	there
bathroom	they
south	together
through	father

the	something
this	thirteen
then	thousand
them	Earth
mother	teeth

three	thanks	trousers	yellow
tree	thirsty	thirty	chocolate
this	together	think	right
money	street	teeth	Friday
elephant	mother	something	remember
mouth	thin	thick	lesson
Thursday	father	Tuesday	chocolate
earth	daughter	straight	computer
north	thousand	healthy	south
forty-five	breakfast	photograph	path