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Nejčastější výslovnostní chyby českých žáků v angličtině

The Most Frequent Errors in English Pronunciation

Made by Czech Students

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Anotace

Nejčastější výslovnostní chyby českých žáků v angličtině

Tato diplomová práce pojednává o nejfrekventovanějších chybách českých žáků v anglické výslovnosti. V teoretické části autorka popisuje všechny důležité aspekty výslovnosti, faktory, které výslovnost ovlivňují a také různé přístupy k výuce výslovnosti. Dále charakterizuje problematické hlásky a uvádí techniky vhodné pro odstranění případných problémů.

V praktické části autorka hodnotí, jakou pozici zastává výuka výslovnosti v některých učebnicích anglického jazyka a jaké typy cvičení jsou nejčastěji používány. Stěžejní částí je analýza výslovnostních chyb žáků na druhém stupni základní školy, srovnání s chybami žáků na prvním stupni a navržení vhodných cvičení pro odstranění nejčastějších problémů.

Abstract

The Most Frequent Errors in English Pronunciation Made by Czech Students

This diploma thesis deals with the most frequent errors in English pronunciation that are made by Czech students. In the theoretical part the authoress describes all the important aspects of pronunciation, factors that influence pronunciation and also some approaches to the teaching of pronunciation. Then she describes the problem sounds and some correction techniques.

In the practical part the authoress evaluates what is the position of teaching pronunciation in some textbooks and which types of exercises are the most frequent. The essential part form the analysis of pronunciation errors made by pupils at middle school, the comparison with mistakes of children at elementary school and the proposal of activities that may be helpful for the removal of possible problems.

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1. INTRODUCTION

My diploma thesis deals with an important aspect of language learning which can either be the focus of a lesson or form a component of any lesson – pronunciation. However, it can also be (and very often is) an overlooked area in the process of teaching second language. There are many teachers who do not teach phonology because they believe that their learners' pronunciation should be acquired by intuitive imitation. There is also a problem that there are many exceptions in English pronunciation and some teachers do not want to burden their students with it.

However, incorrect production of sounds often causes many communication breakdowns between ESL learners and native speakers. Therefore, it may be very useful to acquaint students with some pronunciation patterns. If we decide to involve teaching pronunciation in our English lessons, we can be surprised how it may be attractive for students.

I have chosen this topic because I am very interested in this neglected area of teaching English. I would like to know which sounds cause most problems to Czech learners and I also hope that I will acquaint myself with some interesting techniques of correcting the incorrect production of sounds.

In the theoretical part of my work I will describe the aspects of pronunciation, factors that influence pronunciation and also some approaches to the teaching of pronunciation. Then I will focus on some English sounds that are often difficult for Czech learners to produce and I will also mention some teaching strategies for the removal of contingent problems.

In the practical part of my work I will look at three textbooks that are commonly used by teachers for teaching English. I would like to know whether the textbooks include some exercises for improving learners' pronunciation. The

practical part also contains a research that should find out which sounds cause most problems to Czech pupils at middle school. For this purpose I will prepare four texts – one for each class. Pupils will read the texts to me and I will mark the mistakes. Then I will analyze the results of my research and compare them with the results of the same research that was done at elementary school by Sázkavská, J. (2006). At the end of my thesis I would like to propose a set of activities that can be helpful in practising the problem sounds. The aim of this final part is to show that teaching pronunciation may be very attractive and enjoyable.

The aims of my work are these:

1. To find out whether pronunciation forms a significant part in the textbooks of English language
2. To find out which sounds are most difficult for pupils at middle school
3. To compare the results in all the monitored classes
4. To compare the results of my research with the results of children at elementary school
5. To propose a set of activities that can be helpful in improving learners' pronunciation

2. PRONUNCIATION

English language is one of the most wide-spread languages in the world. Thanks to English we can speak with people we would not be able to without being familiar with it.

However, when we want to talk to English speaking people, we have to know not only the grammar rules and vocabulary but also how to pronounce words. It is often pronunciation that causes great problems to the Czech students. The problem is that English includes some specific sounds which do not exist in the Czech language. Therefore, it can be difficult for Czech people to pronounce them.

As I have already mentioned, pronunciation is an important aspect of learning English. "We can define pronunciation in general terms as the production of significant sound." (Dalton, Seidlhofer 1994:3) The sound is significant because it is a part of a language and it serves understanding between people. It is also important for distinguishing meanings in the context.

2.1 Why is pronunciation so important?

When we want to speak English, we should know how to produce all the English sounds. There are two reasons why we have to pronounce them correctly and both deal with understanding.

Firstly, we need to understand other people. When we do not know the sounds, we cannot understand what the people tell us. Secondly, we have to be understood because if we cannot produce intelligible speech, we are not able to communicate. As we know, the main purpose of every language is

communication and the interaction between people. Therefore, we should speak clearly and understandably.

2.2 The role of a teacher

The teacher is a very important constituent of the educational process. Therefore, the teacher of English must know how to pronounce all sounds correctly. If the teacher makes mistakes in pronunciation, the students would also produce the sounds irregularly. Thus the teacher plays a great role because he/she acts as a model for students.

Teachers should help students perceive and produce sounds. “Sometimes learners will be able to imitate the new sound, but if they can’t the teacher needs to be able to give some hints which may help them to make the new sound(s).” (Kenworthy 1987:1) It is also very important to provide feedback to learners. Teachers should correct the wrong pronunciation of learners because they often do not know whether they have said it in a right way. Students should be also informed about their progress because it really motivates them.

Learners must realize that if the word is pronounced in a wrong way, it can affect the meaning. Then they may say something what can be unsuitable. As an example, we can mention the sentence “He has stopped breathing”. When a learner pronounce the “th” sound as /d/ instead of /ð/, the listener will here: “He has stopped breeding”, and the meaning of the statement is entirely different.

Learning pronunciation is so complex that the teacher must choose some convenient and useful exercises and activities which would provide the opportunities for practice. For example, listening activities may be very useful, because students can hear the pronunciation of a native speaker. The great number of various exercises and activities can help learners improve their speaking skills. (cf. Kenworthy 1987)

2.3 The role of a learner

The second important constituent in the educational process is the learner. We can say that the learner is the most important one because when he/she does not want to learn, the teacher can do nothing about it.

As teachers of pronunciation “we need to take into consideration such factors as our learners’ age, exposure to the target language, amount and type of prior pronunciation instruction, and perhaps most importantly their attitude toward the target language and their motivation to achieve intelligible speech patterns in the second language.” (Celce-Murcia et al. 1996:14) Some of these factors, such as the age of learners, we cannot influence. However, we should be aware of these factors and we need to adapt our teaching methods to them.

2.3.1 The learner’s age

The age of the learner is an important factor in learning language. If we want to attain native-like proficiency in pronunciation, we should start learning it when we are young. “Conversely, if a person doesn’t begin to learn a second language until adulthood, they will never have a native-like accent even though other aspects of their language such as syntax or vocabulary may be indistinguishable from those of native speakers.” (Kenworthy 1987:4) We can say that the younger a learner is, the more native-like his/her pronunciation will be.

“However, for the vast majority of learners, a native-speaker pronunciation is neither necessary nor even desirable. The aim of most is to achieve an easily understandable pronunciation in most situations with most people, with both native and non-native English speakers.” (Hewings 2004:13)

Some researchers believe that in our lives there are certain periods during which our ability of learning language increases. These periods are known as

“sensitive periods”. The researchers also say that after the age between 10-13 years some biological changes take place in our brains and after this age we lose some abilities for language acquisition. This theory is called “Critical Period Hypothesis”. There have been many arguments about it and a lot of studies show that this critical period really exists. However, many researchers state that it is possible to attain proficiency even if we begin to learn the second language after this period.

People, who believe in existence of the critical period say that “if you get too old and pass this period you will have significantly more difficulty learning.” (Ur 1996:287) We can support this by an example. There are a lot of people who had been living in a foreign country and then they moved to the Czech Republic. After many years of living in the Czech Republic they still have a lot of problems with pronunciation and they still speak with a strong accent of their mother tongue. However, their children, are more able to assimilate to a new language and their pronunciation seems to be the same as the pronunciation of native speakers. Some studies say “that the younger a person is, the better he or she will be at accurate perception of the sounds of new languages, but that recent and/or continuous exposure to new language sounds prevents this ability from deteriorating.” (Kenworthy 1987:6)

On the other hand, people, who do not believe that the critical period really exists, argue that there are some people who mastered a second language even though they began to learn it in adulthood. However, there are only five percent of adults who can manage it. (cf. en.wikipedia.org)

We can generally say that “there may not be a critical period at all; or there may be several.” (Ur 1996:287) In my opinion, the earlier we begin to learn the second language, the better. It is true that children learn more slowly than adults, but they have also a better memory and their knowledge of language is more permanent.

2.3.2 The role of the native language

The native language plays a great role in learning to pronounce English. Our foreign accent will always include some of the sound characteristics of our first language. Therefore, the teachers of English pronunciation have to consider the native language of their learners. It can be difficult, when the students come from the different language backgrounds. The teacher should pay attention to the similarities and differences between the two languages and explain how students can take advantage of their mother tongue. We can also say that the more differences between languages there are, the more difficulties the student will have in pronouncing the target language.

For example, there are some sounds that occur in English but do not appear in Czech. Czech learners usually have problems with sounds like /θ/, /ð/, /ŋ/, /æ/, /ɜ:/, or /ə/ because they are not familiar with them. However, many English sounds are similar to the Czech ones and therefore, learners can produce them without difficulties.

2.3.3 Exposure to the target language

Another factor is the amount of exposure to the language the students receive. “They must receive large amounts of comprehensible input before they are required to speak. If true, learners’ exposure to the target language will be a critical factor in determining their success.” (Celce-Murcia et al. 1996:17) If the students have an opportunity to surround themselves with native input in the target language, their learning will be easier. If they do not have this opportunity, the teacher must provide them an adequate model of the language. Therefore, it is good when learners are forced to speak in the English class only English.

2.3.4 Motivation

Motivation seems to be the most important factor of all learning. It depends on both the teacher and the learner. The teacher plays a great role. He/she should make the learners interested in the target language. What the teacher can do to motivate learners to improve their pronunciation? He/she should draw their attention to the fact that if they want to be understood, they should pronounce all sounds correctly. To praise and inform learners about their progress is also very important. Sometimes it can be the personality of a teacher that motivates students to learn more, because teachers are often adored by children and therefore some children try to imitate them.

However, the learner's attitude toward the target language is more important than the role of the teacher. "Some learners seem to be more concerned about their pronunciation than others." (Kenworthy 1987:8) This concern is often expressed in requests for correction. Sometimes, it may be reflected in a reluctance to speak, because a learner does not want to say something if he/she cannot say it perfectly. Conversely, there are some learners who do not care about correct pronunciation and they do not see the value of it. Then these learners are not motivated to improve it. (cf. Kenworthy 1987)

2.4 Aspects of pronunciation

What are the various aspects of pronunciation? First of all there are sounds. However, not only sounds create our speaking. Other aspects are for example stress, rhythm and intonation. When we want to speak English well, we should know all these aspects, because they play an important role in terms of understanding.

2.4.1 Sounds

“As we are learning to speak our first language, we learn what the significant sounds are and how to deal with any variations of them that we come across. In other words, we learn what to pay attention to and what to ignore.” (Kenworthy 1987:45) We should use the same system in learning a second language.

In learning sounds it is important to have enough opportunities to hear all the sounds of the system. It can be useful to hear the new sound together with the familiar sound from the mother tongue. It may be also helpful to hear two new sounds together because then the student can learn the difference between them. The sounds should be used in different combinations, in different positions and not only in isolation. A good way for distinguishing two sounds can be a minimal pair. A minimal pair is a pair of words which are different only in the two sounds being focused on. For example, the two words “coal” and “goal” are a minimal pair which contrasts the two consonants /k/ and /g/. (cf. Kenworthy 1987)

If we want to teach students to produce the sounds correctly, we must provide them with immediate feedback. It is necessary to provide feedback because learners should know where they make mistakes.

2.4.2 Stress

What is stress? Stressed syllables are those syllables that are louder, longer and higher in pitch. These features give that syllable prominence or stress. We can divide stress into two types. Firstly, it is word stress and secondly sentence stress. Czech learners often find it difficult to pronounce the English words (or sentences) with a correct placement of stress. They found it unnatural because of different stress patterns in Czech.

2.4.2.1 Word stress

“The smallest domain in which the contrast between stressed and unstressed syllables surfaces is the word. The characteristic patterning of these two kinds of syllables is commonly called word-stress.” (Dalton, Seidlhofer 1994:38) In some languages it is a simple affair. For example, in Czech it is always the first syllable in the word which carries the main stress. In Polish it is the last syllable. In English the problem of stress is more complicated. Every word in English has its own stress pattern which is an important part of its identity.

In English we can speak about three levels of word stress. These levels are often called strong, medial, and weak (or primary, secondary, and tertiary). We can also call the syllables strongly stressed, lightly stressed, and unstressed. (cf. Celce-Murcia et al. 1996) We can illustrate this on the word “economic” /əːi:kəˈnɒmɪk/. The symbol ə represents the lightly stressed syllable (secondary stress) and the symbol ' represents the strongly stressed syllable (primary stress). Other syllables are unstressed.

There are three factors which influence stress placement. These factors include the historical origin of a word, affixation, and the grammatical function of a word. For instance, in the words of Germanic origin the first syllable of the base of a word is usually stressed.

The word containing prefixes tends to be stressed on the first syllable of its stem. Then the prefix can be either lightly stressed or unstressed. There is also an exception to this general pattern. This exception occurs when a word with a prefix functions as a noun. In this case the prefix is strongly stressed.

The word with suffixes is mostly strongly stressed on the first syllable of the base. However, the suffixes which came into English from French often carry the primary stress themselves. Some suffixes can also cause a shift of stress to the syllable which immediately precedes the suffix. For example, in the word “photo”

the first syllable carries the primary stress. However, when we add the suffix “-graphy” (“photography”) the primary stress will be on the second syllable.

The learners should realize that if they pronounce a word with an incorrect placement of stress, an English listener may have a great difficulty with understanding the word, even if all the individual sounds are pronounced correctly.

2.4.2.2 Sentence stress

Speakers often want to give more prominence to a particular word. A word may be given more importance because the speaker wants to highlight it. “One way of doing this is to put stress on the words which carry the most information. This is usually called main sentence stress.” (Kenworthy 1987:32)

It can be difficult for learners to identify which words are more important than others. The teacher can exercise this with them by trying to write telegrams or newspaper headlines. These two activities may help them to understand this problem. It is also good, when the teacher builds upon the learners’ knowledge of word stress to help them understand sentence stress. Teacher should explain that it helps better understanding when each word and syllable are pronounced distinctly.

2.4.3 Rhythm

Word and sentence stress combine to create rhythm. Rhythm is a regular beat of stressed syllables, unstressed syllables and pauses. In English there is a tendency for the strong beats to fall on the words that carry a lot of meaning. These words can be nouns, adjectives, verbs, and adverbs. The weak beats fall on

the words which have a grammatical function. These are prepositions, pronouns, and articles.

In some languages syllables follow each other in identical intervals of time. It means that the length of an utterance depends on the number of syllables. These languages are usually called syllable-timed. There is also the second group of languages called stress-timed. English belongs to this second group. In stressed-timed languages there is not important the number of syllables, but rather the number of stresses. (cf. Dalton, Seidlhofer 1994)

2.4.4 Intonation

Another aspect of pronunciation is intonation. In fact, intonation is a melody of a speech. There are two basic melodies: rising and falling. Speakers change the pitch of their voices making it higher or lower. We can also combine the two basic melodies. Then we have rising-falling intonation and on the other hand there is falling-rising intonation.

Rising intonation usually begins at the syllable with a prominence (the syllable in the word which provides important information) and continues until the end of the phrase. Falling intonation is the opposite. We begin to fall with our voice and continue to the end of the phrase.

Rising-falling intonation typically begins at a neutral middle level, then it rises to a higher level on the main stressed element of the utterance and later the intonation falls to either the low level or to the middle level. The fall to the low level signalizes certainty and generally corresponds with the end of the utterance. The fall to the middle level signalizes a weaker degree of certainty and corresponds to an unfinished statement, or an incomplete thought. (cf. Celce-Murcia et al. 1996) Falling-rising intonation begins at a middle level, then it falls to a lower level and at the end it rises.

Intonation expresses some attitudinal meanings, such as excitement, surprise, etc. It is also useful for grammatical contrasts, such as contrast between questions and statements. Intonation also serves for marking of the distinction between the information that is already known and the information which is new.

This aspect of pronunciation often causes difficulties to Czech learners. Especially some patterns may be problematic. For example, learners tend to ask questions with rising intonation. Then they can have problems with producing and interpreting many wh-questions, which typically have falling intonation in English.

3. TEACHING PRONUNCIATION

“Pronunciation can be an overlooked area of language teaching, partly because teachers themselves may feel more uncertain about it than about grammar or lexis, worried that they don’t have enough technical knowledge to help students appropriately.” (Scrivener 2005:284) The ideas on the value of teaching pronunciation are often at variance. “Some believe that teachers can do little to influence the natural course of L2 phonological development with its often less than satisfactory results” (Richards, Renandya 2002:176) and others believe that teaching phonology can play an important role in helping learners develop the ways of improving their pronunciation.

In this chapter I would like to mention some views on the teaching of pronunciation and some methods that can be useful, if we decide to involve pronunciation in our lessons.

3.1 Should pronunciation be taught?

Approaches to the teaching of pronunciation have changed significantly throughout the recent history of language teaching. There has been a shift of emphasis from the accurate production of individual speech sounds to concentrating more on the communicative aspects of connected speech. “Many teachers, however, are unsure as to the status of pronunciation and whether or how it should receive systematic attention in a language course.” (Richards, Renandya 2002:175) Commonly asked questions are: Does pronunciation need to be deliberately taught? Is a direct or an indirect approach more effective? And is there any value in using drills on specific sounds and sound patterns?

People who are against the explicit pronunciation teaching insist that pronunciation is an acquired skill and that “focused instruction is at best useless and at worst detrimental.” (Richards, Renandya 2002:179) In other words, this argument claims that the factors affecting second language pronunciation are mainly acquisition variables, which cannot be affected by focused practice and the teaching of formal rules. Proponents of this idea often point to the fact that the factors which most affect the acquisition of L2 phonology (native language, aptitude for oral mimicry, interaction with native speakers and motivation) seem to be those which teachers can influence the least. The problem with this claim is that it tends to underestimate the effect teachers and also classrooms can have in the areas of motivation and exposure. (cf. Richards, Renandya 2002)

The experience of many learners is that pronunciation is often acquired adequately by intuitive imitation. There are many teachers who do not teach pronunciation and their students’ command of it seems nevertheless quite satisfactory. However, there is also an evidence that training and deliberate correction improve learners’ pronunciation. Maybe the deliberate teaching of pronunciation is less essential than, for example, the teaching of grammar or vocabulary, but this does not mean that it should not be done at all. (cf. Ur 1996)

We can generally say that nowadays there are two different approaches to the teaching of pronunciation. Some teachers believe that teaching and practising the L2 phonology may be very useful and therefore the pronunciation forms an important component of their lessons. On the other hand, there are also some teachers who do not find it so important and therefore they do not teach it. Only when their students have a certain problem, they prepare some activities to improve it. In my opinion, we should involve pronunciation in our English lessons, because it is often this area of language that causes many communication breakdowns between ESL learners and native speakers.

3.2 Improving learners' pronunciation

Perhaps the oldest method of teaching pronunciation involves exercises based on imitation drills and reading aloud. With the development of recording technology, the methods based on the "listen and repeat" activities became a persistent part of teaching pronunciation. It is believed that "focused listening can improve oral production and practice in oral production can improve auditory perception". (Richards, Renandya 2002:180) However, some people point out that "the benefits of imitation drills may depend on learners' aptitude for oral mimicry. For learners without 'good ears', drills may cause production to stabilize before reaching the target." (Richards, Renandya 2002:180)

Some teaching materials emphasize the importance of sound discrimination, because if a learner can hear a particular English contrast, then he/she is usually able to reproduce it. Nowadays, both imitation and discrimination drills play an important role in the teaching of pronunciation as a way to help articulation become more automatic and routinised.

However, not only imitation and discrimination can be used. Another means may be for example systematic explanation and instruction including details of the structure and movement of parts of the mouth. We can also record learners' speech and then they will contrast it with a native model, or they will listen to the speeches of their classmates and correct them. Learning and performing dialogues can be also very useful and maybe attractive for students. They can perform the same dialogue several times, but with different speed, volume, or mood. (cf. Ur 1996) The most popular activities are those that are amusing. These are especially rhymes, jingles, songs, or tongue twisters.

4. INTELLIGIBILITY

As I have already mentioned, it is not necessary to attain a native-like proficiency in pronunciation. “‘Perfect’ accents are difficult if not impossible for most of us to achieve.” (Ur 1996:52) The aim of most learners is to achieve a pronunciation that would be understandable. Many people see intelligibility as the most sensible goal in learning pronunciation. The word intelligibility means the same as “understandability” and we can generally say that “the more words a listener is able to identify accurately when said by a particular speaker, the more intelligible that speaker is.” (Kenworthy 1987:13)

To produce a speech that would be indistinguishable from that of a native speaker is almost impossible for Czech learners, because Czech accent is very different from the English one. Therefore, if we set intelligibility as our goal, we are aiming for something that is more attainable. Teachers should draw their learners’ attention to the fact that there are some words with different meanings which contain similar sounds (e.g. ship x sheep) and if they replace these two sounds, it can lead to misunderstanding. However, in many cases the listener will understand them even if they do not pronounce a certain sound correctly.

According to Kenworthy (1987) it depends mainly on “counts of sameness”. “We can compare this process with the way English-speaking adults listen and understand the speech of their young children who are learning English as their mother tongue.” (Kenworthy 1987:13) For example, small children may have problems with pronouncing the /r/ sound, as in “race”, and they may use a /w/-like sound, as in “wish”. Then the child may say: “I see a wabbit”, and his/her parents will understand that the child has seen a rabbit, because they know that /w/ counts as /r/ for their child.

The same process is applied in the way how English-speaking people understand the speech of non-native speakers. Therefore, if we say: “I vill help

you” instead of “I will help you”, we will be understood by a native-speaker without problems.

4.1 Factors affecting intelligibility

There are a lot of factors that can affect a person’s intelligibility and these factors are based mainly on the speaker and his/her mother tongue. However, there are also some factors which are connected to the listener.

We can start with the “speaker factors”. If, for example, a learner’s speech, is full of hesitations, pauses, self-corrections, and grammatical restructurings, then the listener will have a lot of problems with understanding what the speaker wants to say. It has been also found that speakers who hesitate a lot tend to have many pronunciation problems. (cf. Kenworthy 1987)

On the other hand, if the speaker speaks too quickly, he/she can also be difficult to understand. However, when we feel that the speaker is speaking too fast, it is often not the speed that is causing difficulties. The problem may be that the speaker does not use a stress, rhythm, or intonation correctly, because these features of speech are very important in highlighting the important bits of message. “If it’s easy for listeners to hear the ‘important words’, then there will probably be few intelligibility problems.” (Kenworthy 1987:14)

Now, I would like to describe some factors which are connected to the listener. According to Kenworthy (1987) there are two “listener factors” which are very important. Firstly, it is the listener’s familiarity with the foreign accent. In general, people find listening to the English of their fellow countrymen easier than the English of people from another country. We can say that a Czech speaker of English will find the English of other Czech speakers easier to understand than, for example, the English of German speakers. The reason is that the Czech speakers will share features of pronunciation. Another reason can be that they

have more opportunities to listen to other Czech speakers speaking English. We can generally say that the more opportunities we have to listen to a particular type of English, the more easily intelligible that accent is to us. This factor works also at the individual level. “If you know a foreign speaker personally, then you will probably be able to understand him better than a stranger who speaks with the same type of accent.” (Kenworthy 1987:15)

The second factor, which depends on the listener, is the listener’s ability to use contextual clues when listening. It means that the listener is able to recognize the word, which was not pronounced correctly, by means of other words in the statement. If the topic of conversation is clear and there are plenty of meaning clues in the statement, then a listener can understand a mispronounced word, which would cause problems when said in isolation.

4.2 Sources of unintelligibility

In coping with new sounds, learners use a variety of strategies. Some of these strategies may be negative, but there are also some ways of coping that may be useful and lead to success. In this chapter I would like to describe some learners’ pronunciation strategies which can cause problems in intelligibility.

4.2.1 Sound substitutions

Sound substitution belongs to the to the most basic strategies how a learner copes with a new sound. The problem is that a learner is not able to pronounce a new sound and therefore he/she substitutes this sound for another. It occurs especially when the new sound does not exist in the mother tongue. “Some sound substitutions are not very serious and the chances that the word will be correctly identified by the listener are good” (Kenworthy 1987:17), because the substituted sound is very similar to the correct one. However, sometimes a learner may

substitute one sound for another which is also a significant sound in English. For example, a lot of Czech learners substitute the /θ/ sound, as in “think”, for the sound /s/, as in “sink ”. The problem is that /s/ is also a significant sound in English, and the two words “think” and “sink ” will sound the same. Then the listener may find it difficult to recognize what the speaker wants to say.

4.2.2 Sound insertions

A term “sound insertions” is used for situations, when a learner adds some sounds. For example, many learners add a short vowel sound at the beginning of the words like “speak”, or “spoon” and the result is that these words may sound like “a-speak”, or “a-spoon”. (cf. Kenworthy 1987) Then these words have two syllables instead of one and the listener may have difficulty in understanding.

4.2.3 Sound deletions

Another strategy that can affect intelligibility is called sound deletion, where a speaker leaves out a sound. It happens mainly with single consonants at the initial, medial, or final position in the word. However, sometimes one or two of the consonants in a group or cluster may be deleted as well. As an example we can mention the word “hold”. If we pronounce this word without the final /d/, it would sound like “hole”. (cf. Kenworthy 1987)

4.2.4 Links between words

All the previous problems concerned sounds within a word, but there may also be problems at the borders of words. Students should realize that English people generally do not pause between each word when they are speaking. They

move smoothly from one word to the next and there are three special ways of doing this.

Firstly, we can use a linking sound. We can illustrate it with an example: when saying “go in”, speakers add the consonant /w/ between the words. It sounds like “go win”. Similarly, when saying “the aim”, English speakers will insert the consonant /j/. Then it sounds like “the yame”. (cf. Kenworthy 1987)

Another way is to use a composite sound. For example, “when saying ‘this year’ English speakers may use the consonant /ʃ/ as in ‘shoe’ at the border between the two words.” (Kenworthy 1987:18) The result is that the phrase sounds quite like “the shear”.

The last type of link is that one sound merges with another. For example, when we want to say “at all” in a natural way, we move smoothly from the /t/ sound at the end of the word “at” to the vowel sound at the beginning of the word “all”. Then it sounds like “a tall”. (cf. Kenworthy 1987)

Sometimes, learners may find this feature of English difficult to understand. On the other hand, if a learner uses different ways of linking words, then it may be very difficult for English listener to identify the phrases in an utterance.

4.2.5 The use of stress

In my experience, stress is one of the most problematic things in learning pronunciation. Czech learners are used to place stress on the first syllable and they do the same in English. However, the correct placement of stress is very important. For example, if a learner pronounce the word “retain” with stress on the first syllable, the listener will hear it as “written”. “Sometimes wrong stress changes one word into another: *desert* – *dessert*.” (Scrivener 2005:290)

5. DIFFICULTIES WITH SOUNDS

Sounds can be divided into two groups: consonants and vowels. Both consonants and vowels are produced in the vocal tract. The vocal tract contains the lungs, larynx, mouth, lips and nose. In learning the phonemes of standard English we need to know how each sound is produced within the vocal tract and where in the vocal tract each sound is produced. In general, we need to know the manner and the place of articulation. (cf. Underhill 2005)

Students are often not able to recognize small differences in producing sounds. Therefore, the teacher must explain them correctly and simply, where and in which way the sound is produced. We can say that correct creation of sounds is the basis of learning the language.

In this chapter I would like to describe some typical errors which students make in producing sounds. I will mention some of the consonants and vowels that can be difficult for learners to produce and I will try to give some teaching strategies for the removal of these problems.

5.1 Consonants

In general, the main difference between consonants and vowels is that consonants are noises, while vowels are tones. “Consonant sounds are made by restricting or blocking the air flow in some physical way, and this restriction, or the release of the restriction, is what gives the consonant its characteristic sound.” (Underhill 2005:29) By contrast, during producing vowels the vocal tract is open and therefore the air stream escapes unobstructed.

Consonants and vowels also correspond to distinct parts of a syllable. The centre of the syllable is the most sonorous part and is created by vowels, while the beginning and the end of the syllable are created by consonants.

English language has twenty-four consonant phonemes. The word consonant can be also used to refer to a letter of an alphabet that denotes a consonant sound. Letter Y is very interesting. Students should realize that in Czech this letter belongs to vowels, while in English it can be both a vowel and a consonant. It can stand for the consonant /j/, as in “yet”, or for the vowel /ɪ/, as in “mystic”.

As another difference between consonants and vowels we can mention the fact that consonants can be voiced or voiceless, while vowels are always voiced. Sounds that are voiced need less articulation energy than voiceless sounds.

5.1.1 Difficulties with “th” sounds - /θ / x / ð /

/θ/ and /ð/ are the most difficult sounds for Czech students. The reason why they often cannot pronounce them is that these sounds do not occur in Czech and students are not familiar with them. Therefore, the teacher should explain how to produce these sounds.

The best way how to teach them this is to tell them to place the tip of the tongue lightly between their teeth and try to say F. The sound they will hear is /θ/. Then, after practising this sound, we ask them to put the tongue between their teeth again and try to say D. This sound is /ð/. A similar way is to ask them to put the tongue between the teeth again and try to make a hissing sound for /θ/ or a buzzing sound for /ð/.

According to Kenworthy (1987) it is also possible to use the “chewing gum technique”. The teacher gives each learner a piece of chewing gum. After a

few moments he/she tells them to press the gum up against the back of the upper front teeth and then asks them to touch the tongue lightly at the bottom of the gum and force the air through. This technique can be useful for students because they will remember the tongue position and become familiar with it.

“Th” sounds are often substituted for /s/, /z/, /t/, /f/, or /d/. Sometimes it does not matter very much, but in some cases it can affect the meaning of the sentence. For example, when a learner says “Tom is very sick” instead of “Tom is very thick”, the meaning of the statement is entirely different and it will lead to misunderstanding.

It can also be helpful for older learners to know in which words we use especially /θ/ and in which we use /ð/. When “th” occurs in the initial position, we need to know whether the word is grammatical or lexical. In grammatical words (e.g. this, that, the etc.) we pronounce /ð/ and in lexical words (e.g. thing, thunder etc.) we pronounce the “th” sound as /θ/. In medial position it is more difficult, because we need to know whether the word is of Germanic or Romance origin. As an aid we can use the fact that shorter words are often of Germanic origin (e.g. mother, weather etc.) and longer words come usually from Romance languages (e.g. sympathy, authority etc.). In Germanic words we use /ð/ and in Romance words we use /θ/. When “th” stands in the final position the pronunciation depends on the written form of the word. If the word ends only with “th”, as in “breath” or “cloth”, we produce the sound /θ/ but if the “th” is followed by “mute e”, as in “breathe” or “clothe”, we use the sound /ð/.

Students may say these sounds first in isolation and when they can produce them, we should give them a list of words and they try to guess in which word we use /θ/ and in which word we use /ð/. To give students some sentences where both sounds occur can also be very useful, because they can see the difference between them (e.g. This boy is thin.).

5.1.2 Difficulties with /h/

The /h/ sound can also cause some problems to learners because there are a lot of ways how to pronounce it. “/h/ can be articulated in any of the twelve different mouth/tongue postures corresponding to the twelve English monophthongs.” (Underhill 2005:45)

“The /h/ sound in English, as in ‘heat’, ‘hat’, ‘hot’, is not a single sound. It can be produced in many different positions. This can be easily demonstrated by saying each of the above words – the position for making /h/ is different in each one.” (Kenworthy 1987:72) The sound /h/ is in fact a certain period of breath before a vowel. It is a very light sound and the amount of breath that is needed to make it is also very small. Learners should realize that this sound in English is different from the /h/ in Czech.

There are some learners who use /h/ too much. This problem has its source in English spelling conventions. Students often pronounce /h/ even in places where there should be none, for example the word “arm” is pronounced to sound like “harm”. It may be helpful to explain that there is a sound before the vowel, but it is not /h/. English words that begin with a vowel often have what is called a glottal stop before the vowel. The vowel seems to begin very abruptly because this sound is very much like a quick cough. Teacher should demonstrate this to students and tell them to try to give a sharp and abrupt start to those words in which the vowel is in the initial position. (cf. Kenworthy 1987)

5.1.3 Difficulties with /r/

There are a lot of different kinds of /r/ in English. Some speakers in the north of England pronounce /r/ with the back of the tongue. This /r/ is similar to the German type of /r/. On the other hand, there are many speakers who use a gliding /r/ which is produced with the tongue in the middle of the mouth. This is

the /r/ used in British Received Pronunciation. In the RP Pronunciation /r/ is not pronounced after a vowel. For example words like “jar”, “car”, or “fear” have a vowel sound at the end. (cf. Kenworthy 1987) Sometimes Czech learners can have problems with pronouncing this /r/ because in Czech the way of producing /r/ is a little bit different.

We pronounce /r/ in all types of English when it occurs initially. When it stands in the final position, it is also pronounced in many types of English, but not in British RP. The kinds of English which pronounce /r/ in the final position are called rhotic varieties and types which do not pronounce it are called non-rhotic. (cf. Underhill 2005)

It is difficult for some learners to recognize the difference between English /r/ and some other sounds like for example /l/ or /n/. According to Kenworthy (1987) it is good to explain that during producing /r/ the tip of the tongue never touches the roof of the mouth, while when we pronounce /l/ or /n/, the tongue must touch the roof of the mouth.

5.1.4 Difficulties with /ŋ/

The sound /ŋ/ is another one that can be sometimes difficult for learners. It is important to make students know that this sound also occurs in Czech. Teachers can give them some examples because learners do not realize that they use this sound in communication every day. A typical example is the Czech word “maminka”. The sound before /k/ is the same as English /ŋ/.

To see the difference between /ŋ/ and /n/ learners can say two words (e.g. “no” and “sing”) and try to compare them. They will probably observe that the air stream carries the sound through the nose. (cf. Underhill 2005) We can also ask them to pinch their nose and try to say these two sounds. Saying /n/ is simple but when we want to say /ŋ/ it is more difficult and almost impossible. It is more clear

when we pronounce these two sounds longer than usually. This demonstration will help students to remember how to produce the particular sound correctly.

5.1.5 Difficulties with aspiration of /p, t, k/

Aspiration of /p, t, k/ is often also very difficult for Czech students because we do not have something similar in Czech language, and therefore learners find it unnatural.

When we produce these sounds there is a short pause before the following vowel, during which a short puff of air is released. This puff of air is typical for English and is called aspiration. (cf. Kenworthy 1987). The teacher should explain that it is very important to use aspiration when students pronounce these sounds because incorrect pronunciation can lead to misunderstanding. For example if they pronounce words like “pot”, “tip” or “cap” without aspiration, the English listener may hear /p, d, g/ instead of /p, t, k/. Then it is very important to tell them that aspiration does not occur when another consonant, especially /s/, stands before /p, t, k/. For example in “speak”, “stop” or “sky” there is no aspiration, because aspiration is a feature of /p, t, k/ only if these sounds stand in the initial position in the word or a syllable.

According to Kenworthy (1987) there are two possible techniques how to teach students to use aspiration. Firstly, it is a technique which uses some help-words. For example for the word “part” we can use the word “heart”. To pronounce the word “part” students will make /p/ and then they will say “heart”. Similarly, the word “heel” can be used for “peel”, “hat” for “cat” etc. This technique can be very useful, but not for students for whom /h/ itself is a problem sound.

The second technique takes advantage of a lighted match or a thin piece of paper. Students hold the match or the paper in front of their mouth and when the

sounds are pronounced correctly, the match should flicker or the paper should move. This technique demonstrates the presence of a puff of air.

5.1.6 Consonant clusters

Consonant cluster is a sequence of two or more consonants occurring together within one syllable, e.g. /sl/ in “slow” or /spr/ in “spread”. English has many consonant clusters which may be difficult for the learner of English. It depends very much on his/her mother tongue. If the clusters appear also in his/her mother tongue then it is not difficult for him/her to pronounce them. “Consonant clusters should not be confused with single phonemes which happen to be written with more than one symbol in traditional orthography.” (Nilsen, Nilsen 1991:38) For example “th” is pronounced as one phoneme and therefore it is not a consonant cluster.

If an English syllable has three initial consonants, the first one is always /s/. There are some consonant clusters which cannot appear in some position in the word, for example the sequence /nd/ can stand in the final position, as in “end”, but it cannot be in the initial position.

Czech students usually do not have problems with consonant clusters because a lot of them appear also in Czech. However, if they do, teachers should prepare exercises and activities for them to learn them how to pronounce the particular cluster.

5.2 Vowels

As I have mentioned, vowels are tones, which create the centre of the syllable, and are always voiced. The word vowel is often used for a letter of an alphabet that represents a vowel sound. In writing system of English the letters A,

E, I, O, U, W and Y are used to denote vowels. “The correspondences between vowel sounds and vowel letters are very complex” (Kenworthy 1987:104) and therefore if the learner sees the written form of the word, it may be difficult for him/her to recognize which vowel sound he/she should produce. As an example we can mention the letter A. This letter can represent /eɪ/ as in “mate”, /æ/ as in “mat”, /ɑ:/ as in “pardon”, or /ə/ as in “machine”. We can see that this one letter can denote four different vowel sounds. To decide which of the possible sounds a letter in a word stands for, we must look at which position in the word this letter occupies and especially which letters follow the vowel letter in the word. The teacher should know some basic patterns, that are important for recognizing which sound he/she should produce, and explain them to his/her learners, because these patterns can be very useful for them.

According to their length, vowels can be divided into two groups: long vowels and short vowels. For example, compare the vowels in the words “fit” (short vowel) and “feet” (long vowel). “Producing short vowels where long vowels are needed, and vice versa, can seriously interfere with understanding; for example, *this* might be heard as *these* if a long vowel is used.” (Hewings 2004:15)

Vowels can also be divided into three groups. These are: monophthongs, diphthongs and triphthongs. All languages have monophthongs and many languages have diphthongs. However, there are only a few languages which also have triphthongs. We can define monophthong as a vowel sound whose quality does not change over the duration of the vowel. Diphthong is a vowel sound that glides from one quality to another within a single syllable and triphthong is a vowel sound that glides through three qualities. (cf. en.wikipedia.org)

In Czech there are only monophthongs and diphthongs, but English has all three types. For example, the vowel sound in “sit” is a monophthong /ɪ/, the vowel sound in “slice” is a diphthong /aɪ/ and the vowel sounds in “flower” form a triphthong /aʊə/. However, the word “flower” is formed by two syllables and

therefore the vowel sounds in “flower” phonetically form a triphthong, but phonologically they are a combination of a diphthong /aʊ/ and a monophthong /ə/.

In the following chapters I will try to describe some difficulties with monophthongs and diphthongs. I will not deal with triphthongs, because this type of vowels is not so frequent in English.

5.2.1 Difficulties with monophthongs

If a learner has difficulty in producing one of the English monophthongs, then it may be caused by the wrong position of his/her tongue. Another reason can be that his/her lips are in the wrong position. The role of the teacher is to help students realize how each sound is produced.

Teachers can ask students to say /i:/ as in “tea” and /u:/ as in “two”. They will say these two sounds first in isolation and then alternate them /i: ... u: ... i: ... u: .../. They will probably notice two movements: the movement of the tongue sliding backwards and forwards in the mouth, and the movement of the lips from a spread position to a rounded position. Then they can try the same thing with /e/ as in “pen” and /ɔ:/ as in “door” and finally with /æ/ as in “cat” and /ɒ/ as in “pot”. This activity can be also done using fingers (or pencils). Teacher asks students to put the tip of the finger in contact with the tip of the tongue and say again /i: ... u: ... i: ... u: .../. Students should find that their fingers have to move further into the mouth if they are going to keep contact with the tongue. (cf. Underhill 2005)

This activity shows the horizontal tongue position, but it is also necessary to fix the vertical tongue position. It means “to state how far from the roof of the mouth the raised part of the tongue actually is.” (Underhill 2005:8)

For the activity which can be helpful for students to realize the vertical tongue position we can divide the English monophthongs into four pairs. Students

will say /i:/ and hold it. Then they will close the gap between the front of the tongue and the roof of the mouth. They will notice that if they raise the tongue from the /i:/ position too far, they will stop the sound and the air flow, perhaps producing the nasal consonant /ŋ/. Then they will take the position of the sound /æ/ and again close the gap between the front of the tongue and the roof of the mouth. They should realize that the gap is much wider than for /i:/. In fact for /æ/ the tongue is low in the mouth. Later, students can do the same with /ɪ/ and /ʌ/, /ɔ/ and /ɑ:/ and finally with /u:/ and /ɒ/. (cf. Underhill 2005) This activity can help students notice the difference between high and low tongue position. However, there is also a position which is between high and low where other vowels are produced. These vowels are called mid vowels.

Students can find these mid vowels alone. Teacher asks them to say /i:/ and to glide slowly towards /æ/. They will stop at several points along the way and see what vowel they have discovered. In fact there are many possibilities, but only one of them corresponds to Received Pronunciation and it is the sound /e/. “Here the tongue is in mid or neutral position vertically, and in a front position horizontally.” (Underhill 2005:9) Then they will do the same with other pairs. Between /ɪ/ and /ʌ/ they will find /ə/, between /ɔ/ and /ɑ:/ there is /ɜ:/ and finally, between /u:/ and /ɒ/ they should find /ʊ:/.

According to Kenworthy (1987) we can also use the “see-saw technique” to help students find the right position of the tongue. For example, if a learner tries to produce /e/ as in “ten” and the attempt sounds closer to /æ/ as in “tan”, the tongue is probably too far away from the roof of the mouth and needs to be brought closer. If we want to teach him/her to produce /e/ correctly, we can use a vowel with a closer tongue position that the learner can produce. In this case we can choose /ɪ/ as in “tin” or /i:/ as in “teen”. Student will alternate the two extremes and then try to glide slowly from one extreme to the other. Between these two sounds he/she will find the sound /e/. Similarly, if a learner can produce /i:/ as in “sheep” but not /ɪ/ as in “hit”, schwa can be used as a counterweight.

The previous activities should help students realize how important the right position of the tongue is. However, the right position of lips is also very important. “Lip movement is easier to detect, and for many people easier to sense internally than the movement of the tongue.” (Underhill 2005:13)

According to Underhill (2005) students can notice the movement of their lips through their external sense of touch, using their fingers. Teacher asks them to put the tip of the thumb against one corner of their lips and the tip of the forefinger against the other corner. Then they will say /i:/ and change it gradually to the sound /u:/. They should discover that their lips are alternating between spread and rounded. Then they can do the same with /e/ and /ɔ:/ and finally with /æ/ and /ɒ/.

After this activity teacher asks learners to touch the forefinger lightly against the front of their lips and slowly alternate /i:/ and /u:/. They will discover that lips are moving forward when they are rounded, and backward when they are spread. Later, students can also use a mirror to compare the visual movement of their lips with the internal sensation of movement.

Czech students usually do not have problems with producing English monophthongs because almost all of them occur also in their mother tongue. However, there are two sounds which do not appear in Czech: schwa and /æ/.

5.2.1.1 Difficulties with schwa

Schwa is a neutral vowel which is claimed to be the smallest English vowel sound and it is also the only phoneme with its own name. It is the most frequent vowel sound in continuous speech and therefore all learners must be made aware of it at a very early stage. In other words it should be among the first sounds that teachers draw to learners’ attention. This sound has also one important

feature: it never carries stress. Therefore, it is used in unstressed syllables and weak forms.

The symbol used for this sound is /ə/. Even if teachers do not use any other phonetic symbols, there are two good reasons for introducing the symbol for schwa. “First, there is no letter that only represents schwa in the alphabet, and second, *every* vowel letter in English can represent schwa.” (Kenworthy 1987:51) We can illustrate this with following examples: again, payment, incredible, provide, circus. The underlined vowels in these words are all pronounced as /ə/.

Students should realize that schwa is really very important sound in English, because it occurs in almost every English word with more than two syllables. Teacher should demonstrate the sound and ask students to reproduce it. He/she can explain that we sometimes use this sound in Czech. We use schwa when we read the letters of an alphabet (consonants), for example b, d, t /bə, də, tə/. We can also hear this sound after the prefix ne- in the Czech word “neexistuje”.

When the teacher thinks that students are able to hear this sound and discriminate it from other vowels, he/she can do some exercises that will persuade them of the frequency of schwa. For example, teacher can ask students to choose one text from their textbook. Then he/she will read it aloud. The task for students will be to count the occurrences of schwa. They will probably not find them all, but it does not matter. The role of this activity is to show that schwa is really very frequent in English and that any vowel letter can represent this sound.

Another way may be an activity which can be called “de-shwaed text”. Teacher will prepare a short text (three or four lines long) and wherever a shwa would be said in a word, he/she will insert a gap line instead of the vowel(s). All the other vowels will be left as they are. The task for learners will be to go through the text and fill in the missing written vowels. This activity should raise

their awareness about the many ways that the /ə/ sound can be spelt in English. (cf. Scrivener 2005)

5.2.1.2 Difficulties with /æ/

As I have already mentioned, the sound /æ/ does not appear in Czech and therefore it may be difficult for some students to pronounce it. If we pronounce this sound correctly, our lips are open and spread and the tongue is in a low-front position. Teachers can demonstrate the sound and ask students to reproduce it. He/she can also ask them to open their mouths as if they want to say /a:/. Their lips will be open and their tongues will be in a low position. In this position of lips and tongue they will try to say /e/. Their lips become more spread and the sound they will hear is /æ/.

When the teacher is sure that his/her learners can produce this sound correctly and that they can hear it, he/she can prepare some exercises to practise it. The exercises can also include another problematic sound, which is schwa. For example, students will have two cards. They will write /æ/ on the first one and /ə/ on the second one. Teacher will say some words and the task for students will be to show the card with /æ/ when they hear this sound and the card with /ə/ when they hear schwa. Later we can also add another sound, e.g. /e/.

5.2.2 Difficulties with diphthongs

Students should realize that “a diphthong is perceived as one phoneme not two, and therefore as one syllable not two. Thus *say* /seɪ/ is one diphthong and one syllable, whereas *seeing* /si:ɪŋ/ is a sequence of two monophthongs occupying two syllables.” (Underhill 2005:22)

If learners have difficulty with making diphthongs, the teacher should draw their attention to the movement involved in terms of “start” and “finish” positions. For example, for /eɪ/ as in “may” we should start with a slightly lowered jaw and then close the jaw quite quickly, as if we were biting into a bar of chocolate. We can also mention another example. For /ɔɪ/ as in “boy” the start position has lips in an egg-shaped position and the finish position is similar to a slight smile. (cf. Kenworthy 1987)

Czech learners usually have problems with diphthongs which contain /ə/, because schwa itself is a difficult sound. Thus the most problematic diphthongs are: /əʊ/, /eə/, /ɪə/ and /ʊə/. If we want our students to pronounce these sounds correctly, the first step should be to teach them how to produce schwa. If they are able to produce the /ə/ sound, these diphthongs will not cause problems to them. Students can also say each element of the diphthong separately and then they will try to join them with a smooth glide.

The realization of the diphthongs /eə/ and /ʊə/ in RP is also frequently “monophthongized”. It seems to be an on-going tendency to replace /ʊə/ with /ɜ:/. As an example we can mention the word “sure”. There are many people who certainly say /ʃɜ:/ rather than /ʃʊə/. Similarly, the diphthong /eə/ is frequently reduced to a composite monophthong, which sounds like a long /e:/. (cf. Underhill 2005)

To tell students something about the length and stress in diphthongs may be also very useful. “Both of these features are important in determining how a diphthong sounds.” (Underhill 2005:27) Each diphthong consists of two sounds and the first one is usually longer and more stressed. I will mention two activities that may be very helpful for students to realize how important these two features can be.

Teacher will choose some diphthongs, for example /eɪ/, as in “cake”, /əʊ/, as in “home” and /aʊ/ as in “town”. Students will try to make the second element

longer than the first one, and make the first element deliberately short. They will do this with each diphthong on its own, and then in the context of the given words. They should find that the words sound distinctly “un-English”. Later, they will try to make the first element longer than the second one (again in and out of context). They should notice that it sounds more acceptable. (cf. Underhill 2005)

The next activity is similar to the previous one, but with a different focus. It is focused on stress. We can take the same three diphthongs. Students will try to give the second element more stress than the first one, and make the first element deliberately less stressed. Again they will do it with each diphthong on its own, and then in the context. After this, they will give the first element more stress than the second. They should notice that if they stress the second element more than the first one, the word sounds definitely “un-English”. (cf. Underhill 2005)

6. PRONUNCIATION IN TEXTBOOKS

One of the aims of my work is to find out whether pronunciation is taken into consideration in the textbooks and if it is, in which way it is done. It means which activities are used for improving the pronunciation of learners. For this purpose, I have chosen three textbooks which are commonly used by teachers for teaching English. These are: Radley, P., Simons, D., Campbell, C.: *Horizons*, Hutchinson, T.: *Project*, and Betáková, L., Dvořáková, K.: *Way to win*.

6.1 Horizons

The textbooks called “Horizons” include pronunciation corners which contain some exercises for improving learners’ pronunciation. There is one corner in each lesson. The exercises are focused on practising sounds that can be difficult for students to produce. Most activities are based on listening and repeating, where students listen to the teacher (or to a native speaker on CD) and then they repeat what they hear. Firstly, they practise a certain sound in some words and later in sentences.

These textbooks also include some activities that are based on discrimination, where students have to decide what is the sound they hear. The most common exercise that improves learners’ ability to discriminate one sound from another is an activity that can be called “Listen and write the words in the correct column”. We can illustrate this activity with an example: students are practising the two sounds /θ/ and /ð/. They have two columns – one for the words that include the sound /θ/ and one for the words with the /ð/ sound. Their task is to listen to the words and to write them in the right column.

The next activity based on discrimination, which is often used in these textbooks, is the activity where students have a list of words that contain similar sounds. Students listen to the words and their task is to cross out the words that do not contain a certain sound. For example, when they practise the sound /ʌ/, the words can be: dad, brother, cousin, aunt etc.

The previous activities were used in “Horizons 1”. The same types of activities are also included in “Horizons 2”. The new exercises that appear in “Horizons 2” are again based mainly on discrimination. As an example we can mention the activity that should practise the /ə/ sound. Students have a list of sentences. They have to listen to them and underline all the /ə/ sounds.

As regards stress and intonation, there are only a few activities for practising these two aspects of pronunciation in “Horizons”. For practising word stress students listen to the CD and count the syllables in words. The next task is to mark the stressed syllable. The most common activity used for improving intonation is the “listen and repeat” activity. Another step is to decide whether the intonation in sentences is rising or falling.

6.2 Project

The set of textbooks called “Project” also counts with pronunciation in teaching English. In these textbooks there are more pronunciation corners than in “Horizons”. The correct production of sounds is practised in various types of exercises. The “listen and repeat” activities are again the most frequent ones in these textbooks. Included are also exercises, where students have to put the words in the correct column, or underline the correct sound. The activity called “the odd one out” is also very frequent in these textbooks. The aim of this activity is to recognize the word which contains a different sound than the other words in the group (e.g. short, chalk, shirt).

Another type of exercise is to match the words with the same sound (e.g. read – head, fair – hair etc.). Similar to this activity is another one, where students have to match the words with the sounds. In this exercise they have two columns. In one of them there are sounds, for example /ɪ/, /e/, /æ/ and /ʌ/, and in the second one there are words (e.g. mum, yes, Sam, it). Every word contains one of the given sounds and the task for students is to match a certain sound with the word that includes this sound.

Because the most popular are those activities that are amusing for children, there are also some tongue twisters in “Projects”. As an example we can mention two of them: “*She sells sea shells on the sea shore. The sea shells that she sells are sea shells, I’m sure.*” or “*Red lorry, yellow lorry.*”

The exercises used for practising stress deal again with counting syllables and marking the stressed syllable. However, there is also an activity, where students have to listen to the words and put them in the correct column according to their stress patterns.

6.3 Way to win

Like the previous two sets of textbooks, “Way to win” also includes some corners that serve improving pronunciation. However, in “Way to win” there are less activities than in “Projects”. The most frequent activities are again those that can be called “listen and repeat” and “put the words in the right column”. For discrimination between two similar sounds there is also used an exercise that do not occur in other monitored textbooks. One of the two sounds is written in blue and the second one is written in red (e.g. /θ/ x /ð/). The task for students is to listen to the words and hold up something blue in their left hand when they hear the “blue sound”, or something red in their right hand when they hear the “red sound”. Another type of exercise based on discrimination between similar sounds

is the one, where students have to decide what sound they hear and fill the correct letters in the words.

“Way to win” also includes one original activity for practising stress. Children listen to the words and repeat them. They should knock on the desk when they say the stressed syllable.

6.4 Summary

I have found out that all the monitored textbooks take pronunciation into consideration. While in “Projects” there are many activities for improving pronunciation, in “Way to win” the number of activities is lower. However, all the monitored textbooks also include some amusing ways of learning pronunciation, like for example tongue twisters, songs, or poems.

The most frequent activities are “listen and repeat” and “put the words in the correct column”. Also the activity called “the odd one out” is very often used. However, the textbook “Way to win” provides the activities that do not appear neither in “Projects” nor in “Horizons”. The example can be the exercise, where students have to pronounce words and knock on the desk when they say a stressed syllable. As another example we can mention the activities using the “blue sounds” and the “red sounds”.

As regards practising pronunciation, the best textbook from the monitored ones is, in my opinion, “Project”. However, not only pronunciation is important in language learning. Therefore, if I compare these textbooks as a whole, I think that “Way to win” is the best one, because it provides an all-round education and it also tries to connect English with other school subjects.

7. THE MOST FREQUENT ERRORS IN ENGLISH PRONUNCIATION MADE BY CZECH STUDENTS

The main purpose of my work is to find out which English sounds cause the most problems to Czech learners. My research is focused on children who attend middle school. Then I will compare the results with the results of the same research which was taken at the elementary school by Jana Sázavská (2006). Therefore, I have done the research in the same way as she.

7.1 Hypothesis

According to my previous experience with teaching, I know that the most problematic sounds are those that do not occur in Czech. I suppose that the most difficult is the pronunciation of “th” sounds. It means the two sounds /θ/ and /ð/. I think that at least 50 % of children will have problems in producing these two consonants. Another consonant that can be difficult to produce can be the sound /ŋ/. The sound /w/ is very often substituted for /v/ and I suppose that approximately 30 % of pupils do not pronounce this sound correctly.

As regards the vowels, I think that the most problems are caused by the sounds /æ/ and /ə/, because children are often not familiar with them. Because schwa itself can be difficult, I suppose that those pupils who are not able to produce it also have problems with pronouncing the diphthongs that contain this sound.

7.2 The course of the research

Firstly, I have prepared a short text for each class (see Appendix 1). Each text contained all the English sounds and was designed on the base of the vocabulary range of the textbooks which students use. These textbooks are: Harris, M., Mower, D., Sikoryzínnska, A.: Challenges 1 for the sixth class, Harris, M., Mower, D., Sikoryzínnska, A.: Challenges 2 for the seventh class and Lacinová, E., Kadlecová, Š: Učebnice pro 8. ročník základní školy - Ready steady go! for the eighth class. The ninth class do not use textbooks because they repeat what they have learnt during the previous years. Therefore, I tried to choose a vocabulary, I supposed they should know. I have also discussed it with their teacher who acknowledged me that they should really know all the words used in the text. To evaluate the texts I used charts (see Appendix 2), where all the sounds were written.

The research was taken at the basic school in Bernartice and took place on the 7th April. Because I did not want to disturb the lesson much, I took three children to the room opposite their classroom. I read the text to them and then I asked them to read it slowly to me. While they were reading, I marked mistakes into the charts. Then they came back into the classroom and other three children came to me. As there were always only three children, I eliminated the fact that they can copy the mistakes from one another a little. This also ensured that the children were not made nervous by their classmates.

As I have mentioned the aim of my research was to find out which sounds are most difficult for students at middle school and to compare the results with elementary school. At the end I would like to propose some activities that can be useful for improving pronunciation of the problematic sounds.

7.3 Results of the research

The number of tested pupils was 61. Out of this number, 15 pupils were in the sixth class, 19 pupils in the seventh class, 11 in the eighth class and 16 in the ninth class. I should state that in the basic school in Bernartice, children, who attend the sixth and the seventh class began to study English, when they were in their fourth year of elementary school. While children in the eighth and ninth class began to learn it when they were in the fifth year of elementary school. It means that children, who attend the sixth class, and children from the seventh class should be on the same level, because they have been learning English for four years, while children from the sixth class have been learning it for three years and pupils in the ninth class have been studying English for five years.

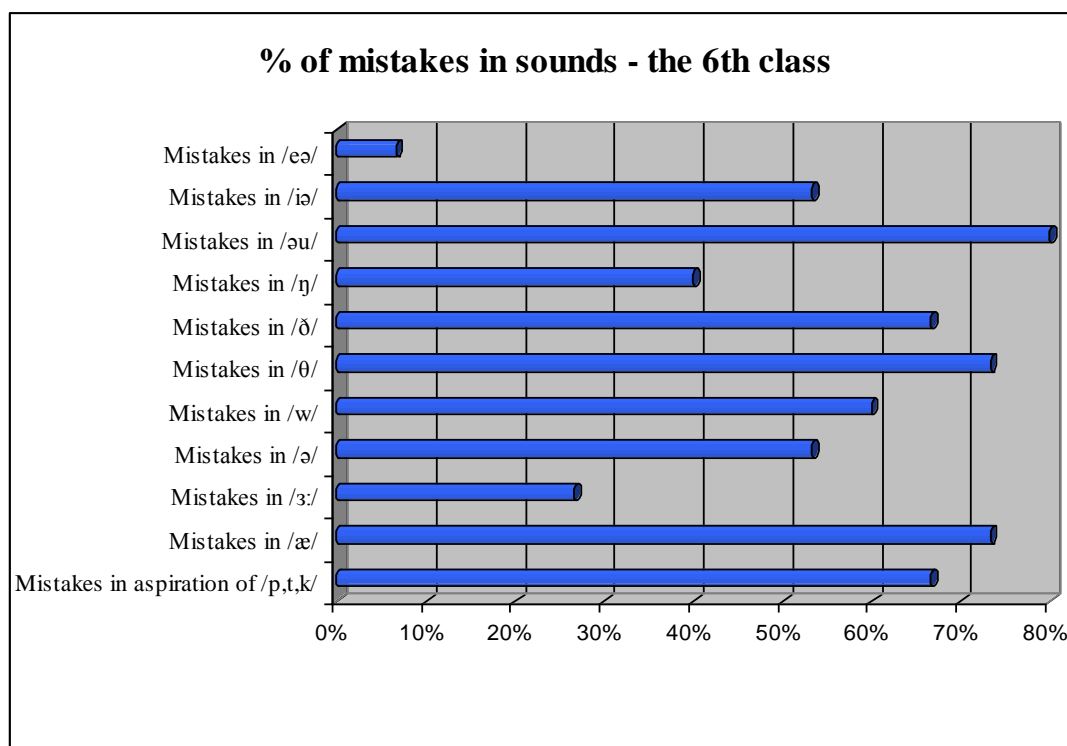
7.3.1 The sixth class

Pupils in the sixth class had problems with eleven individual sounds. The problematic sounds were: /æ/, /ɜ:/, /ə/, /w/, /θ/, /ð/, /ŋ/, /əʊ/, /ɪə/, /eə/ and the aspiration of /p, t, k/.

Chart 1: Mistakes in sounds – the 6th class

Number of pupils	15	100.00 %
Mistakes in aspiration of /p,t,k/	10	66.67 %
Mistakes in /æ/	11	73.33 %
Mistakes in /ɜ:/	4	26.67 %
Mistakes in /ə/	8	53.33 %
Mistakes in /w/	9	60.00 %
Mistakes in /θ/	11	73.33 %
Mistakes in /ð/	10	66.67 %
Mistakes in /ŋ/	6	40.00 %
Mistakes in /əʊ/	12	80.00 %
Mistakes in /ɪə/	8	53.33 %
Mistakes in /eə/	1	6.67 %

Graph 1: % of Mistakes in sounds – the 6th class



Out of these numbers we can see that the most difficult sound was the diphthong /əʊ/, that was pronounced as /ɔʊ/. This sound caused problems to 80.00 % of pupils. Other difficulties were caused by the sounds /θ/ and /æ/. These two sounds were mispronounced by 73.34 % of children. The sound /θ/ was substituted for /t/ in the most cases (45.45 %). Other substitutions were the sounds /s/ (36.36 %) and /f/ (18.18 %). The /æ/ sound was pronounced as /e/ by 10 pupils (90.90 %) and only 1 pupil pronounced it as /ʌ/ (9.09 %). The number of children who made mistakes in /ð/ and in aspiration of /p, t, k/ was the same (66.67 %). The sound /ð/ was substituted for /d/ in 80.00 % of pupils. One pupil pronounced it as /dz/ (10.00 %) and one as /th/ (10.00 %). The /w/ sound was not also easy for them. It was produced as /v/ in all the wrong cases (60.00 %). As I have assumed, schwa also belonged to the difficult sounds. 53.34 % of children were not able to produce it and they substituted it for /e/. The same number of children had difficulty in pronouncing the diphthong /iə/. It sounded like /e/ in all the incorrect cases. The consonant /ŋ/ was substituted for /ŋk/ by 40.00 % of pupils. Another

problem dealt with the production of /ɜ:/ (26.67 %). This sound was pronounced as /ɔ:/ in the word “work” and as /ɪ/ in the word “girl”. The last difficult sound was the diphthong /eə/. This sound was mispronounced by the only pupil (6.67 %), who pronounced it as /eɪ/.

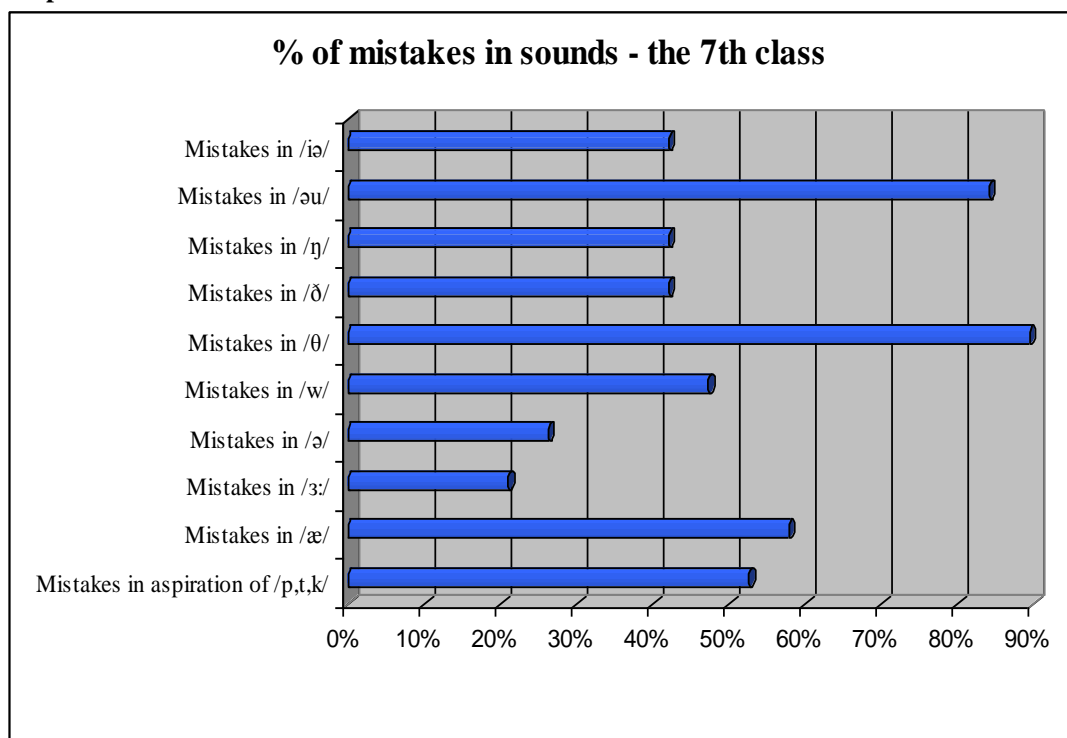
7.3.2 The seventh class

Pupils who attend the seventh class had also difficulties with aspiration of /p, t, k/. Other problematic sounds were the same as in the sixth class: /æ/, /ɜ:/, /ə/, /w/, /θ/, /ð/, /ŋ/, /əʊ/ and /ɪə/. However, these children did not have problems with producing the /eə/ sound.

Chart 2: Mistakes in sounds – the 7th class

Number of pupils	19	100.00 %
Mistakes in aspiration of /p,t,k/	10	52.63 %
Mistakes in /æ/	11	57.89 %
Mistakes in /ɜ:/	4	21.05 %
Mistakes in /ə/	5	26.31 %
Mistakes in /w/	9	47.37 %
Mistakes in /θ/	17	89.47 %
Mistakes in /ð/	8	42.10 %
Mistakes in /ŋ/	8	42.10 %
Mistakes in /əʊ/	16	84.21 %
Mistakes in /ɪə/	8	42.10 %

Graph 2: % of mistakes in sounds – the 7th class



According to these numbers, the most difficulties were caused by the sound /θ/. This consonant was difficult for 89.47 % of pupils and was substituted for /f/ in 52.94 % and for /t/ in 47.06 %. The second most frequent mistake was in the diphthong /əu/ (84.21 %) that was pronounced as /ɔɔ/ in all the incorrect cases. We can see that the number of mistakes in these two sounds made by pupils from the seventh class is higher than the number of mistakes made by children from the sixth class. It is the same with the sound /ŋ/ that was difficult for 42.10 % of children, while in the sixth class there were only 40.00 % of children that were not able to pronounce it. This sound was again substituted for /ŋk/. However, as regards all the other sounds, the percentage of mistakes was lower than in the sixth class. Another problem dealt with the vowel /æ/ (57.89 %) which was pronounced as /e/ (81.82 %), or as /ʌ/ (18.18 %). The aspiration of /p, t, k/ was not easy for 52.63 % of pupils. 47.37% of children substituted /w/ for the sound /v/. The number of pupils who made mistakes in /ð/ and /lə/ sounds was the same (42.10 %). While /lə/ was always mispronounced as /e/, the sound /ð/ was substituted for two different sounds - /d/ (87.50 %) and /dz/ (12.50 %). Schwa was

difficult for 26.31 % of children and was pronounced as /e/. The last problem was caused by the /ɜ:/ sound (21.05 %). It was again substituted for /i/.

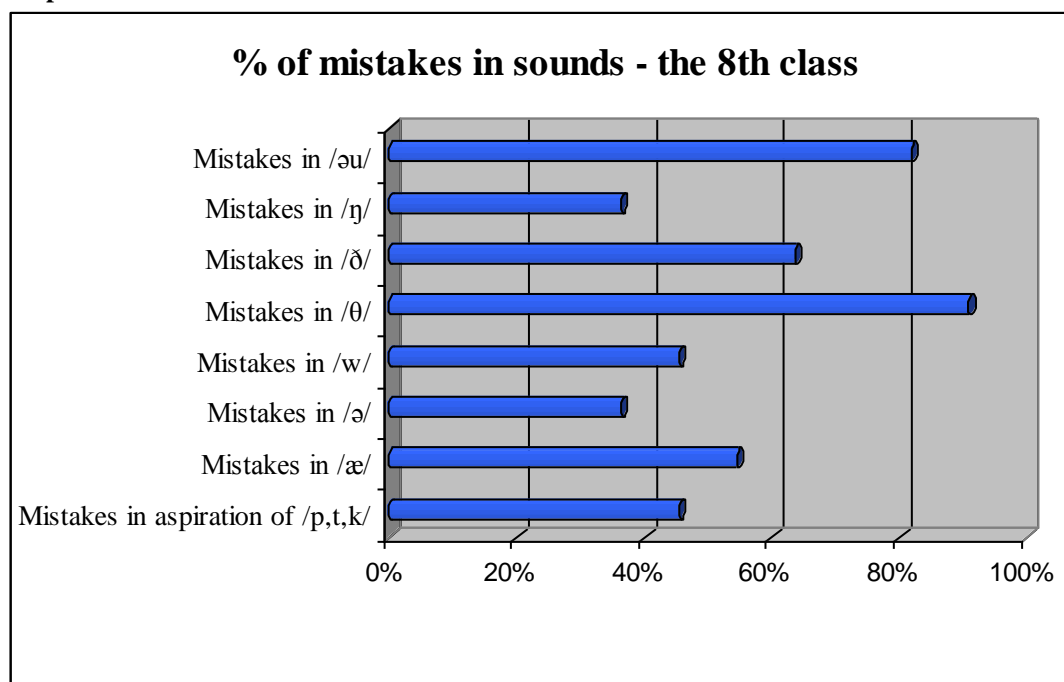
7.3.3 The eighth class

The number of mistakes made by the pupils who attend the eighth class was lower than in the previous classes. These pupils had problems with eight individual sounds: /æ/, /ə/, /w/, /θ/, /ð/, /ŋ/, /əʊ/, and the aspiration of /p, t, k/. The mistakes in diphthongs /ɪə/ and /eə/ did not occur. Also the sound /ɜ:/ was pronounced correctly.

Chart 3: Mistakes in sounds – the 8th class

Number of pupils	11	100.00 %
Mistakes in aspiration of /p,t,k/	5	45.45 %
Mistakes in /æ/	6	54.54 %
Mistakes in /ə/	4	36.36 %
Mistakes in /w/	5	45.45 %
Mistakes in /θ/	10	90.90 %
Mistakes in /ð/	7	63.63 %
Mistakes in /ŋ/	4	36.36 %
Mistakes in /əʊ/	9	81.81 %

Graph 3: % of mistakes in sounds – the 8th class



As we can see in Chart 3, the prevailing number of mistakes was in the /θ/ sound (90.90 %). The most common substitution was the sound /f/ (60.00 %), closely followed by /t/ (40.00 %). The fact that this number is higher than in the previous classes is quite surprising. The second frequent mistake was again in the diphthong /əʊ/. This sound was mispronounced by 81,81% of pupils and it was always pronounced as /ɔʊ/. The third position took the consonant /ð/ (63.63 %), which was substituted for the sound /d/ in 7 cases (87.50 %) and 1 pupil pronounced it as /th/ (12.50 %). 54,54 % of pupils had difficulties with the vowel /æ/. The most common sound used instead of /æ/ was /e/ (83.33 %) and 1 pupil substituted it for /ʌ/ (83.33 %). The aspiration of /p, t, k/ was difficult for 45.45 % of pupils. The same number of mistakes as in aspiration was in the sound /w/ which was again pronounced as /v/. The sound /ə/ caused problems to 36.36 % of pupils, and the vowel /e/ was used instead of it. The last problem dealt with the consonant /ŋ/. It was not pronounced correctly by 6 pupils (36.36 %) and all of them substituted it for /ŋk./

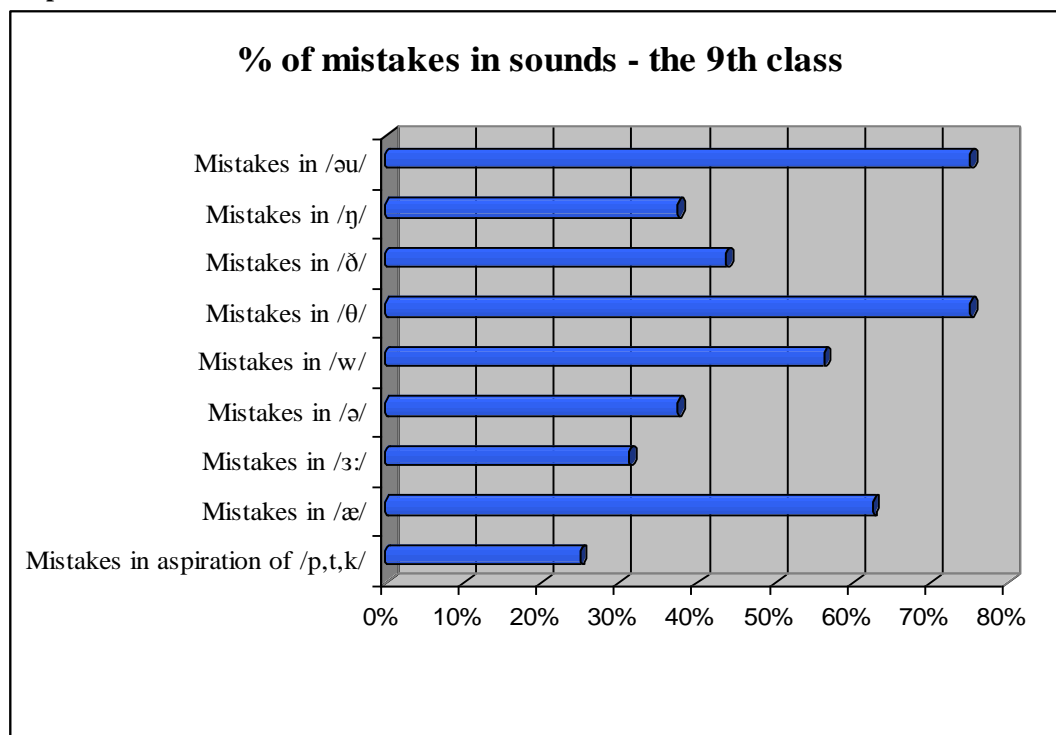
7.3.4 The ninth class

There were nine mispronounced sounds made by pupils from the ninth class. These were: /æ/, /ɜ:/, /ə/, /w/, /θ/, /ð/, /ŋ/, /əʊ/ and aspiration of /p, t, k/. The mistakes in diphthongs /ɪə/ and /eə/ did not appear again.

Chart 4: Mistakes in sounds – the 9th class

Number of pupils	16	100.00 %
Mistakes in aspiration of /p,t,k/	4	25.00 %
Mistakes in /æ/	10	62.50 %
Mistakes in /ɜ:/	5	31.25 %
Mistakes in /ə/	6	37.50 %
Mistakes in /w/	9	56.25 %
Mistakes in /θ/	12	75.00 %
Mistakes in /ð/	7	43.75 %
Mistakes in /ŋ/	6	37.50 %
Mistakes in /əʊ/	12	75.00 %

Graph 4: % of mistakes in sounds – the 9th class



As we can see, the most difficult sounds were again the consonant /θ/ and the diphthong /əʊ/ (75.00 %). While /əu/ was always pronounced as /əʊ/, the /θ/ sound was substituted for three different sounds - /f/ (75.00 %), /t/ (16.67 %) and /th/ (8.33 %). As in the previous classes, the vowel /æ/ belonged again to the main problems. It was mispronounced by 62.50% of pupils and was substituted again for /e/ (90.91 %) and in 1 case also for /ʌ/ (9.09 %). All students who were not able to produce the consonant /w/ used the sound /v/ instead of it (56.25 %). The troubles with the sound /ð/ appeared again. However, the number of mistakes was lower than in the eighth class (43.75 %). This sound was pronounced as /d/ in all the incorrect cases. Other two difficult sounds were /ŋ/, that was mispronounced as /ŋk/, and /ə/ that sounded always like /e/. These two sounds were not produced correctly by 37.50 % of pupils. However, the mistakes in the vowel /ɜ:/ did not appear in the eighth class, they occurred again in the ninth class. This sound caused difficulties to 31.25 % of pupils. The last problem was the aspiration of /p, t, k/. However, the number of mistakes in aspiration was considerably lower than in the other classes, because only 4 pupils did not pronounce it correctly (25 %).

7.3.5 The comparison of all the monitored classes

Chart 5: The comparison of mistakes in pronunciation in all the monitored classes

	The 6th class	The 7th class	The 8th class	The 9th class
Mistakes in aspiration of /p,t,k/	66.67 %	52.63 %	45.45 %	25.00 %
Mistakes in /æ/	73.34 %	57.89 %	54.54 %	62.50 %
Mistakes in /ɜ:/	26.67 %	21.05 %	0.00 %	31.25 %
Mistakes in /ə/	53.33 %	26.31 %	36.36 %	37.50 %
Mistakes in /w/	60.00 %	47.37 %	45.45 %	56.25 %
Mistakes in /θ/	73.34 %	89.47 %	90.90 %	75.00 %
Mistakes in /ð/	66.67 %	42.10 %	63.63 %	43.75 %
Mistakes in /ŋ/	40.00 %	42.10 %	36.36 %	37.50 %
Mistakes in /əʊ/	80.00 %	84.21 %	81.81 %	75.00 %
Mistakes in /ɪə/	53.33 %	42.10 %	0.00 %	0.00 %
Mistakes in /eə/	6.67 %	0.00 %	0.00 %	0.00 %

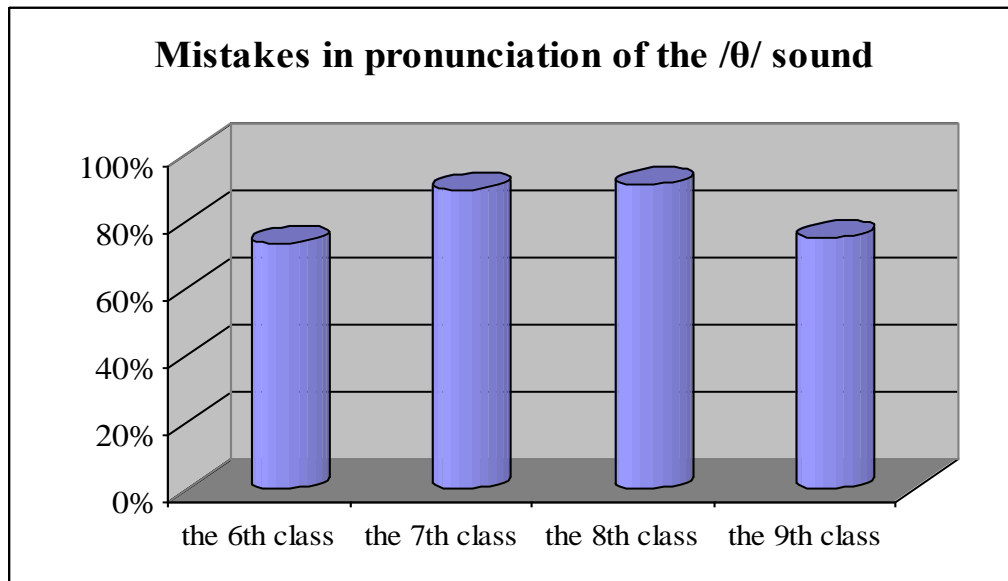
Out of these numbers, we can see that the most difficulties were caused by the consonant /θ/ and the diphthong /əʊ/. These two sounds took the first places in all the monitored classes. The diphthong /əʊ/ was pronounced as /ɔʊ/ in all the incorrect cases. However, in my opinion, it does not matter very much, because the sound /ɔʊ/ does not belong to the significant sounds in English. Therefore, students can be understood by a native speaker without problems even if they do not pronounce the sound /əʊ/ correctly. Another sound that caused a lot of problems was the vowel /æ/. It was very often substituted for /e/ and there were also some pupils who used the sound /ʌ/ instead of it. The pronunciation of the consonant /ð/ was not also very easy. The substitutions used for this sound were: /d/, /dz/ and /th/. The percentage of mistakes in aspiration of /p, t, k/ was still lower. While in the sixth class there were 66.67 % of pupils who made mistakes in it, in the ninth class there were only 25 % of pupils who do not use aspiration.

I supposed that schwa would belong to the most problematic sounds. However, we can see that it was less difficult to pronounce than, for example the sound /w/. It is surprising that children in the seventh class had only a few problems with pronouncing the sound /ə/, while in the eighth and also in the ninth class the number of mistakes increased. Another sound that was mispronounced in all the monitored classes was the consonant /ŋ/ that was substituted for /ŋk/.

As regards the vowel /ɜ:/, I was surprised that this sound was the most difficult for pupils in the ninth class, while in the seventh class the mistakes in this sound did not appear. The last difficult sounds were the diphthongs /ɪə/ and /eə/. However, /ɪə/ was mispronounced only by pupils in the sixth and in the seventh class. In other two classes the mistakes in this sound did not occur. The sound /eə/ was not pronounced correctly by the only pupil from the sixth class. The other students were able to pronounce it without difficulties.

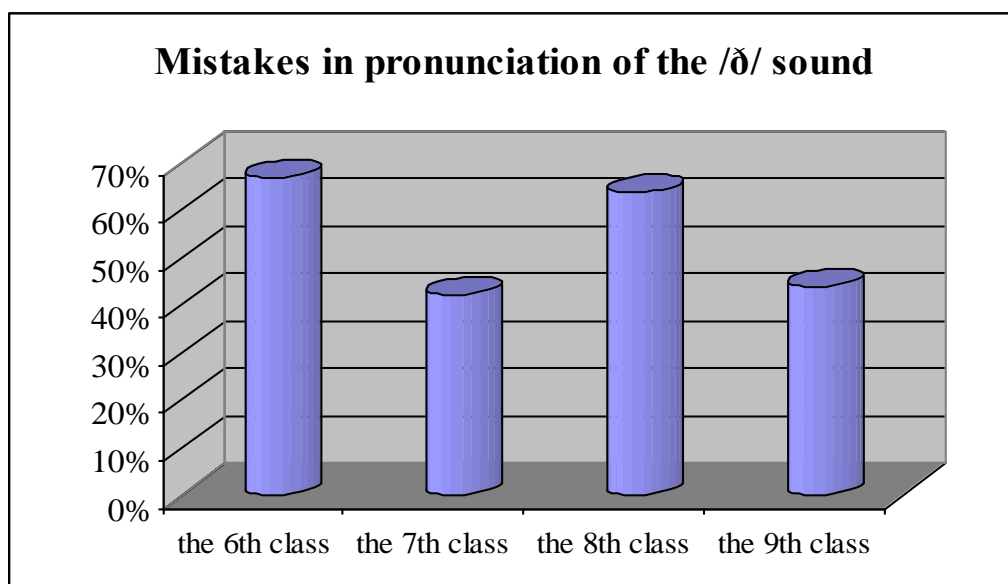
On the following graphs I would like to show how the number of mistakes varies in the different tested classes. For this purpose I chose four sounds that belonged to the most difficult. These are: /θ/, /ð/, /æ/ and /w/.

Graph 5: The comparison of mistakes in pronunciation of the sound /θ/



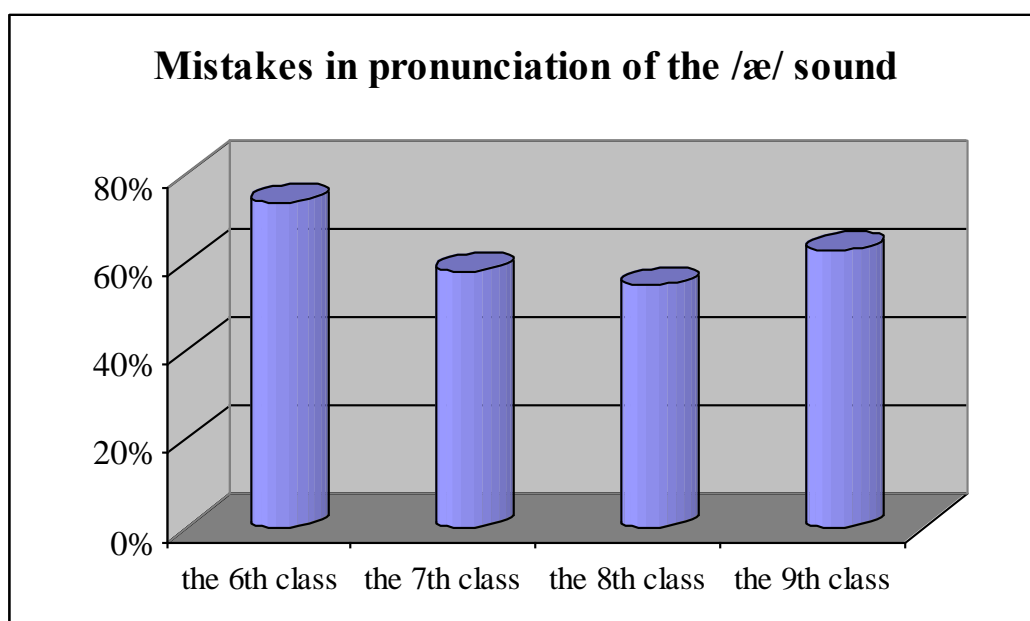
As we can see, the sound /θ/ caused problems especially to the pupils who attend the eighth class. 90.90 % of them had difficulties in pronouncing it. Almost the same situation was in the seventh class (89.47 %). In the ninth class the number of mistakes was lower (89.47 %). However, the fact that the best pronunciation of this sound appeared in the sixth class is quite surprising.

Graph 6: The comparison of mistakes in pronunciation of the sound /ð/



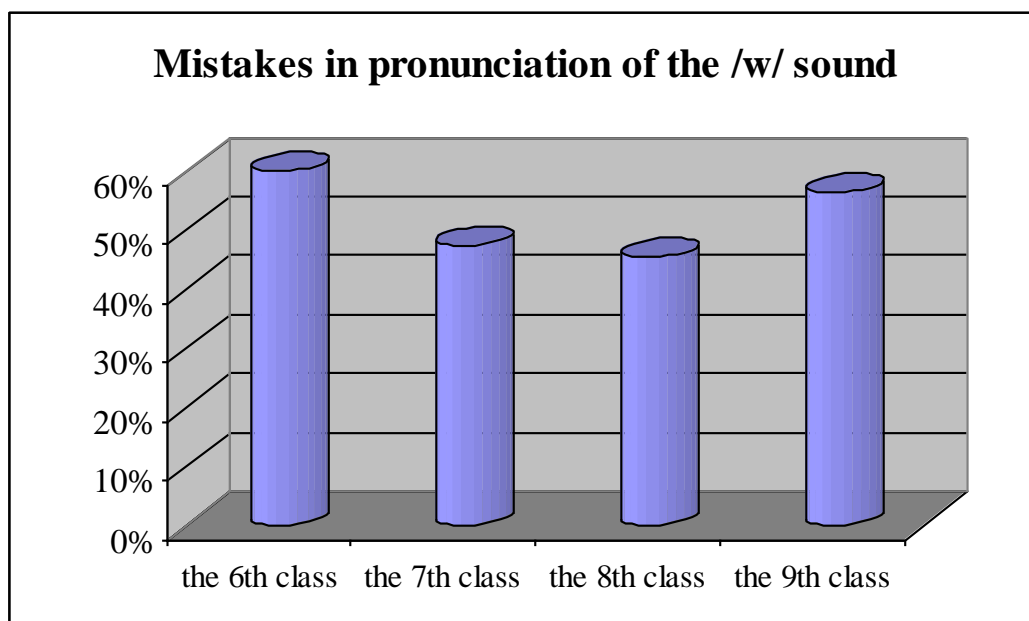
This graph shows that the /ð/ sound caused most difficulties to pupils in the sixth class. It caused problems to 66.67 % of them. In the seventh class the percentage of mistakes in this consonant was only 42.10 %, but in the eighth class the number of mistakes arose again (63.63 %). However, in the ninth class there were only 43.75 % of pupils who were not able to pronounce this sound correctly.

Graph 7: The comparison of mistakes in pronunciation of the sound /æ/



The worst pronunciation of the vowel /æ/ was in the sixth class, where 73.33 % of pupils did not pronounce it correctly. In other two classes the number of mistakes slowly decreased. While in the seventh class this vowel caused problems to 57.89 % of pupils, in the eight class there were 54.54 % of pupils who found it difficult to pronounce the /æ/ sound correctly. However, in the ninth class the percentage of mistakes was a little bit higher again (62.50 %).

Graph 8: The comparison of mistakes in pronunciation of the sound /w/



As we can see, this graph is similar to the previous one, but the numbers are different. The best pronunciation of the /w/ sound appeared again in the eighth class (45.45 %). In the seventh class the percentage of mistakes increased a little (47.37 %). Pupils who attend the ninth class had more difficulties with this sound than pupils in the previous classes. 56.25 % of them were not able to produce it correctly. However, this sound caused the most problems to pupils who are in the sixth class (60.00 %).

7.4 The comparison with the elementary school

According to the diploma thesis of Jana Sázavská (2007), children who attend the elementary school have pronunciation problems mainly with the following sounds: /æ/, /ɜ:/, /ə/, /w/, /θ/, /ð/, /ŋ/, /r/ and with aspiration of /p, t, k/. I have found out that pupils who attend middle school, have problems with: /æ/, /ɜ:/, /ə/, /w/, /θ/, /ð/, /ŋ/, /ɔʊ/, /ɪə/ and /eə/ and the aspiration of /p, t, k/. Because

the diphthong /eə/ was not tested in the research of Sázavská, I will not include it in the comparison.

Chart 6: The comparison of mistakes between the elementary school and the middle school

	The elementary school	The middle school
Mistakes in aspiration of /p,t,k/	3.27 %	47.54 %
Mistakes in /æ/	18.95 %	62.30 %
Mistakes in /ɜ:/	0.65 %	19.74 %
Mistakes in /ə/	18.30 %	37.70 %
Mistakes in /w/	16.35 %	52.46 %
Mistakes in /θ/	41.17 %	81.97 %
Mistakes in /ð/	22.12 %	52.46 %
Mistakes in /ŋ/	11.11 %	39.34 %
Mistakes in /əʊ/	0.00 %	80.33 %
Mistakes in /ɪə/	0.00 %	23.86 %
Mistakes in /r/	5.89 %	0.00 %

This chart shows that the percentage of mistakes in pronunciation at elementary school is incomparably lower than the percentage of mistakes at middle school. This fact is really very surprising. However, pupils who attend middle school did not have problems with pronouncing the /r/ sound, while in the elementary school there were 5.89 % of children who mispronounced this sound.

In my opinion, the reason why the differences are so great may be the fact that the research of Jana Sázavská was done in a special language school, while my research was done in a common basic school, where the language teaching is not so essential. The research of Sázavská was held in the basic school of Eduard Beneš in Písek, where is an extensive language learning. Children who want to attend the language classes must be talented and they must pass an entrance exam. On the contrary, the basic school in Bernartice do not have special language classes and children who want to attend this school need not be talented. I believe that the results of Sázavská's research were better than the results she would have got in common elementary school.

8. ACTIVITIES TO IMPROVE LEARNERS' PRONUNCIATION

In this chapter I would like to propose some activities that may be helpful in improving pupils' pronunciation. The activities were chosen according to the results of my research. There were eleven sounds that caused problems to many pupils at middle school. The difficult sounds were these: /æ/, /ɜ:/, /ə/, /w/, /θ/, /ð/, /ŋ/, /əʊ/, /ɪə/, /eə/ and the aspiration of /p, t, k/. Therefore, the activities were designed to practise mainly these sounds. However, some of them are based on improving pronunciation of all sounds.

The activities are designed especially for pupils who attend middle school, but many of them can also be modified for younger students. However, if we want to use these activities in teaching pronunciation of younger children, it will be necessary to change the vocabulary used in them. Almost all activities can be varied a lot. Teachers can use them only as examples and they can remake them to practise sounds which their students find difficult to pronounce.

Many of the following activities can also be used for practising vocabulary and some of them serve the development of pupils' reading skills. The majority of them can be used either as individual or a group work. There are also some whole-class games. Teachers can use these games as warm-up activities or they can use them in their lessons that are focused on developing pronunciation.

The activities are based mainly on vocabulary which is used in these textbooks: Harris, M., Mower, D., Sikoryzńska, A.: Challenges 1, Harris, M., Mower, D., Sikoryzńska, A.: Challenges 2 and Lacinová, E., Kadlecová, Š: Učebnice pro 8. ročník základní školy - Ready steady go! There are also some words which do not appear in these textbooks, but I think that these are the words which students should know.

8.1 Framework

The following activities are given into this framework:

Focus: Which sounds are practised in the activity

Level: For which class is the activity designed

Time: What time the activity takes in the lesson

Preparation: What the teacher should prepare for this activity

Procedure: How to present the activity to pupils

Note: Some other possibilities of doing the activity and further comments

8.2 Hidden picture

Focus: Practising the two sounds /θ/ and /ð/

Level: the 6th class

Time: 15 minutes

Preparation: Copy the picture in Appendix 3 (one for each student).

Procedure:

1. Give each pupil a copy of the picture.
2. Explain that the task is to colour with blue all the words in which we pronounce /θ/ and with yellow all the words in which we pronounce /ð/.
3. Let the pupils work, and walk through the class, if they need an advice.
4. Say all the words and ask pupils to repeat them.

Note:

This activity also develops reading skills. It can be enjoyed by pupils because it is connected with drawing.

8.3 Tongue twisters (cf. Hewings 2004)

Focus: Saying words with similar sounds

Level: all the classes

Time: 15 minutes

Preparation: Copy the tongue twisters on the board (you can choose some of those in Appendix 4).

Procedure:

1. Display a tongue twister and ask pupils to repeat after you. Then choose individuals to try to say it.
2. Use a short repeated tongue twister (e.g. *Chop shops stock chops...*, or *Red lorry, yellow lorry...*).
3. Then choose two pupils to say the tongue twister in turn (ask them to try to say it as quickly as possible). For example: “Chop shops stock chops.” (Pupil A) - “Chop shops stock chops.” (Pupil B) - “Chop shops stock chops.” (Pupil A) etc.
4. The pupils continue until one of them makes a mistake (you should be a judge) and this pupil is eliminated. Then choose another pupil (or you can ask for volunteer) to take the place of the eliminated pupil to “challenge” the winner.

Note:

Students can also try to create their own tongue twisters. They can do it either in the lesson or it can be their homework. Then the best tongue twisters can be awarded.

8.4 My wife went to Wales (based on ideas in Baker 1997,1981)

Focus: Practising the /w/ sound

Level: The 7th and the 8th class

Time: 15 minutes

Preparation: Write the first sentence on the board.

Procedure:

1. Get the class together in a small circle.
2. Ask students to think about some words that contain the /w/ sound. Give them a few minutes.
3. Then you will start the game saying: “My wife went to Wales and she spent a lot of money there.” (It can be helpful to write this sentence on the board.) Then you add e.g.: “She bought a wheel.”
4. The task for each student is to repeat it and then to add something to the list (they must remember what their classmates have said).
5. Example:

Teacher: “My wife went to Wales and she spent a lot of money there. She bought a wheel.”

Student A: “My wife went to Wales and she spent a lot of money there. She bought a wheel and a bottle of white wine.”

Student B: “My wife went to Wales and she spent a lot of money there. She bought a wheel, a bottle of white wine and a golden watch.” etc.

Note:

This activity can be done for practising all the other sounds. It can also be fun for students to think up a new names of the game. The name should always include the sound that should be practised. For example, for practising the sound /æ/, we can use the name: “Sam travelled to Canada”, for practising the aspiration of /p/, we can have the name: “Peter went to Paris” etc.

8.5 Word routes (cf. Hewings 2004)

Focus: To identify words that contain the same vowel sound

Level: all the classes

Time: 25 minutes

Preparation: Teacher should copy Box 1 and Box 2 (Appendix 5) onto separate handouts, one for each student.

Procedure:

1. Begin by teaching or revising compass points: *north, south, east, west, north east, north west, south east, south west*. It can also be helpful to draw a compass with these points on the board.
2. Give each pupil a copy of Box 1.
3. Explain that in this game we move from one square to another depending on the vowel sound in each word. For example, if you start at the word *car* and hear the word *clear*, then you should move to the word *dear* because the words *clear* and *dear* have the same vowel sound. From there, if you hear the word *turn* you move to *bird* because the word *turn* has the same vowel as *bird*. The final move is a compass direction, so from *bird* if you hear *south east*, you should move to *make* because it is south east of *bird*. The aim of this game is to find the word in the final square.
4. Give a full demonstration. Firstly, choose a route. For example, go from *bear* to *climb*. Then, use the words in Box 2 as prompts for the word route (do not show this to students). The corresponding words in the two boxes have the same vowel sound.

e.g.: You say: "Start at *bear*." Then give the route using words from Box 2: *fill* → *know* → *mouse* → *but* → *south east*

Students move: *bear* → *will* (the same vowel sound as *fill*) → *soap* (the same vowel sound as *know*) → *sound* (the same vowel sound as *mouse*) → *sun* (the same vowel sound as *but*) → *climb* (= the answer)

5. Make up some more word routes and at the end of each one students get a point for a correct answer. After each word route, ask if any student got “lost” and find out where problems appeared, focusing on the pronunciation of the words along the route. Pronounce the words and ask students to repeat them.

Note:

It is also possible to divide students into pairs. Student A will have a copy of Box 1 and Student B will have a copy of Box 2. Student B should keep his/her handout hidden from student A. Then he/she should decide on a start word and an end word on Box 1, and write down the prompt words (from Box 2) for the route, keeping the list secret from student A. Then he/she should take Student A on a word route from the start word to the end. Students do this a few times, and then they can change their roles.

8.6 Category words (cf. Scrivener 2005)

Focus: This activity can be focused on all the problem sounds.

Level: all the classes

Time: 20 minutes

Preparation: Give each group a piece of paper.

Procedure:

1. Divide pupils into groups of three or four children.
2. Choose five or six categories – such as “Food/drink”, “Sports”, “Animals”, “Household Objects”, “Clothing”, etc. – which students should copy down. It can also be helpful to write these categories on the board.
3. Then call out (and write up) a phoneme. The task for each group is to attempt to find a word containing that phoneme for each category. You can give them a time limit (e.g. 1 or 2 minutes). So, for example, if the

phoneme is /w/, a group can choose *water, windsurfing, whale, washing machine, sweater*.

4. The groups then compare words and points are awarded. The group with most points is the winner.

Note:

This activity can be done either in groups or individually. Teacher can also choose different categories and he/she can practise all the sounds that cause difficulties to his/her pupils.

8.7 Find your partners (based on ideas in Hewings 2004)

Focus: Practising problem vowel sounds - /æ/, /ə/, /ɜ:/, /ɪə/, /eə/ and /əʊ/

Level: all the classes

Time: 5 minutes

Preparation: Prepare small cards/pieces of paper, one for each student. Write one word on each card/piece of paper. Every word must contain one of the problem vowel sounds. Three or four words should contain the same sound. You can also use some cards from Box 1 – Appendix 6.

Procedure:

1. Give each pupil one of the cards/pieces of paper you have prepared.
2. Pupils walk around the class and try to find others whose words include the same vowel sound. To do this, Pupil A reads his/her word and Pupil B reads his/hers. If the two words do not contain the same vowel sound, the pupils move on to another pupil and do the same thing. If the two words have the same vowel sound, the pupils form a pair and together they try to find other students who belong to them. This continues until all pupils form into groups.

3. Check the groups by asking pupils to say their words. If someone has not found his/her partners correctly, ask him/her to say his/her word again and discuss with the other members of the class where he/she should be.

Note:

This activity can be useful for dividing students into teams for a follow-up activity, i.e. for a group work, or for a game (teachers can divide them into pairs, or groups of three, four, five, etc). The same activity can be done for practising some difficult consonants. In Box 2 – Appendix 6 there is an example of cards containing the consonants /θ/, /ð/, /ŋ/ and /w/. It is also possible to practise a word stress by this activity. Students should find other students who have the words with the same stress pattern.

8.8 Pronunciation scrabble

Focus: Practising all the difficult sounds

Level: all the classes

Time: 10 minutes

Preparation: Write the basic word on the blackboard.

Procedure:

1. Decide what sound you want to practise and write one word containing this sound on the blackboard.
2. Ask one student after another to come to the blackboard. Their task will be to choose one of the letters and create a new word that contains this letter. However, they must obey the rule that all of the words must contain the given sound. Tell the pupils that they can write the words in all directions and when they write the word they should read it.

Example:

The teacher wants to practise the /æ/ sound. The basic word can be “CAT”. Student A choose the letter T and he/she write the word “TRAM”. Then Student B come to the blackboard. He/she choose the letter M and write the word “STAMP”. Student C choose, e.g. the letter R and write the word “CRASH” etc.

C A T
C R A S H
A
S T A M P

Note:

This game can be used as a warm-up activity at the beginning of a lesson, or teacher can do this with pupils, when he/she sees that pupils are tired and need a rest. This activity follows a kinaesthetic learning style, because students have to link up the movement of their body.

8.9 Wordsearch (cf. Hancock 2003)

Focus: Practising the phonemic symbols

Level: All the classes

Time: 5 minutes minimum

Preparation: Copy a wordsearch (Appendix 7) - one for each pupil.

Procedure:

1. Give each pupil a copy of the wordsearch.
2. Tell them that as they probably know, some phonemic spellings are surprisingly different from normal spellings. You can give them an

example: the word “edge” is in phonemic spelling /edʒ/. Then explain that their task is to find all the words from the list.

3. Explain that the words are horizontal → or vertical ↓ and that every phonemic symbol is used only once.
4. At the end read all the words and ask students to repeat them.

Note:

This activity also practises reading skills and vocabulary. It may be done either individually or in pairs. After this activity, students can try to make their own wordsearch based on the same principles. It can be a voluntary homework and students who will do it can be awarded.

8.10 Family tree (cf. Hewings 2004)

Focus: To identify names that contain the same vowel sound

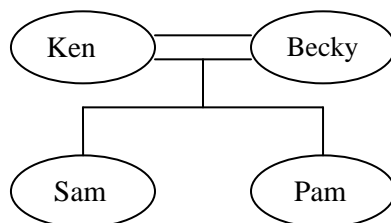
Level: the 9th class

Time: 20 minutes

Preparation: Copy a family tree (Appendix 8) onto a handout for each pupil, and also Appendix 9 if you want to do the extension activity.

Procedure:

1. If necessary, explain the idea of a family tree and the ways of showing children (brothers and sisters) and ‘married to’ (=). As an example, you can draw the following section from a family tree on the board.



2. Explain that this section shows that Ken is married to Becky, and they have two children, Sam and Pam.
3. Give each student one handout (Appendix 8) and explain that in this family all brothers and sisters have the same first vowel sound in their name and that the members of this family get married only to people with the same vowel sound in the name. Ask the name of Daniel's wife (Answer: Janet) to check that they have understood.
4. Before starting, ask pupils to repeat after you the names that are written in the family tree, and then the names in the list at the bottom of the handout.
5. Pupils can work in pairs to complete the family tree (they must use the names from the list underneath).
6. After completing the family tree pupils report back their answers (e.g. Jean is married to Stephen., George and Paul are brothers). Check that the vowel sounds are pronounced correctly, and correct where necessary.

Note:

You can also do some extension activities with your students. Here are two examples:

- Give each student a copy of Appendix 9. Read all the names and ask students to repeat them. Tell them that they will create a family tree on the same principles (they should do both a full version and a gapped version with the missing names underneath) for other students to complete. You can also use some of these family trees at a later time.
- Alternatively, ask students to give as many male and female names as they can think of, and write them on the board. Then give out a handout based on Appendix 9, leaving out all the names. The task for students is to write the names from the board on their handouts. There should be at least two male and two female names for each vowel sound. If there are some gaps, you can think of additional names, or you can provide names from those in Appendix 9. Then follow the procedure in the previous activity.

8.11 Touch the object

Focus: Practising problem sounds

Level: all the classes

Time: 10 minutes

Preparation: Think of the sounds you want to practise.

Procedure

1. Explain that you will say one sound (you can also write the sound on the board). The task for pupils will be to move around the classroom and try to find an object that contains this sound in its name. If they find something, they should touch it. Tell the pupils that they can use everything in the classroom.

Example: The given sound is the vowel /ɜ:/. Pupils can touch: chair, hair, T-shirt, skirt, girl, etc.

2. Give a time limit. All pupils must touch something. If someone does not find an object, he/she is eliminated. Then pupils should name the object they have found. If the word does not contain the correct sound, the pupil is also eliminated. If there is only one pupils in the game, he/she is the winner and will be awarded.

Note:

This game can be used for practising all sounds and it is also useful for increasing vocabulary. Students have to move and therefore they may enjoy this game.

9. CONCLUSION

One of the aims of my work was to find out whether the textbooks of English language include teaching pronunciation and which activities are used for this purpose. I have found out that all the monitored textbooks take pronunciation into consideration. The most frequent activities are those that can be called “listen and repeat”, “put the words in the correct column” and “the odd one out”. All the monitored textbooks include also some amusing ways of learning pronunciation, like tongue twisters, songs, or poems.

The main purpose of my thesis was to determine all the English sounds that cause most problems to pupils at middle school. I have found out that the most difficult English sound is the consonant /θ/. Almost 82% of the tested pupils have problems in pronouncing it. This sound is closely followed by the diphthong /əʊ/ that is commonly pronounced as /oo/. The vowel /æ/ also belongs to the most difficult sounds. The other phonemes mentioned above also cause a lot of difficulties but the percentage of mistakes in them is lower.

As we could see in Chart 6, children who attend the elementary school have also most problems in producing the sound /θ/. I have also found out that the percentage of mistakes made by pupils at elementary school was incomparably lower than the percentage of mistakes made by pupils at middle school. As I have mentioned, the reason for this may be the fact, that the research that was done with children who attend the elementary school took place in a special language school, while my research was done in a common basic school. Another possible explanation may consist in the fact that younger children are more able to imitate what they hear than older children. It also depends very much on teachers. Maybe, the teachers at elementary school concentrate more on developing pronunciation than the teachers at middle school.

I can say that my hypothesis was very optimistic. I have not assumed that there can be so much problem sounds and that the percentage of mistakes will be so high. However, this fact supports my opinion that pronunciation should be included in language teaching.

The activities I have designed can be useful for improving pupils' pronunciation. I think that these activities can persuade some teachers that teaching pronunciation may be fun and that pupils can enjoy it.

RESUMÉ

Ve své diplomové práci se zabývám nejčastějšími výslovnostními problémy, kterých se dopouštějí čeští žáci v anglickém jazyce. Zaměřila jsem se především na žáky na druhém stupni základních škol.

Z vlastní zkušenosti vím, že výuka anglické výslovnosti je na českých školách velice často opomíjena. Učitelé se spíše věnují výuce gramatiky a rozvoji slovní zásoby. Podle mého názoru je ale právě nesprávná výslovnost častým zdrojem nedorozumění a proto by neměla být ve výuce angličtiny přehlížena.

Toto téma jsem si vybrala proto, že mě tato oblast angličtiny velice zajímá. Mým zájmem bylo zjistit, jaké hlásky působí žákům největší potíže a zároveň jsem se chtěla seznámit s technikami, pomocí kterých lze tyto problémy odstranit.

Práce je rozdělena na část teoretickou a část praktickou. V teoretické části popisují faktory, které výslovnost ovlivňují a také se stručně zmiňují o důležitých aspektech výslovnosti, mezi které patří především intonace, slovní a větný přízvuk a rytmus. Další kapitola pojednává o různých přístupech k výuce výslovnosti. V současné době převažují dva rozdílné přístupy. Na jedné straně stojí učitelé, kteří výslovnost považují za velice důležitou a běžně ji vyučují. Na straně druhé jsou ti, kteří výslovnost neučí. Pouze pokud se vyskytnou nějaké potíže, zařadí cvičení vhodná pro jejich odstranění.

Dále se v teoretické části zabývám jednotlivými hláskami, o kterých jsem předpokládala, že budou způsobovat žákům největší potíže. Ke každé hlásce potom uvádím různé způsoby, kterými lze dosáhnout správné výslovnosti.

V praktické části jsem zjišťovala, do jaké míry je výuka výslovnosti zohledněna v učebnicích angličtiny, a jaké typy cvičení jsou pro tento účel nejčastěji používány. Vybrala jsem tři učebnice, které učitelé často používají. Jsou

to: Radley, P., Simons, D., Campbell, C.: *Horizons*, Hutchinson, T.: *Project*, a Betáková, L., Dvořáková, K.: *Way to win*. Zjistila jsem, že všechny tyto učebnice se výukou výslovnosti zabývají. Nejčastěji se objevovala cvičení typu “listen and repeat” a také cvičení, ve kterých žáci mají za úkol přiřadit slova do sloupců podle shodných rysů.

Stěžejní částí byla analýza výslovnostních chyb žáků na druhém stupni základních škol a srovnání s chybami žáků na prvním stupni. Metoda výzkumu spočívala ve vytvoření čtyř krátkých textů, které obsahovaly všechny anglické fonémy. Chyby jsem analyzovala na základě přečtení textů jednotlivými žáky. Nejobtížnějšími hláskami byly : /θ/, /əʊ/, /æ/, /w/, /ð/, /ə/ a /ŋ/. Tyto hlásky způsobovaly problémy ve všech sledovaných ročnících. Velké obtíže činila žákům také aspirace hlásek /p, t, k/.

Pro srovnání s chybami žáků na prvním stupni jsem použila výzkum Jany Sázkové (2006), která se ve své diplomové práci zabývala právě výslovnostními chybami žáků na prvním stupni základních škol. Výsledky srovnání byly velice překvapivé. Zjistila jsem, že výslovnost žáků na druhém stupni je nesrovnatelně horší než výslovnost žáků na prvním stupni. Jedinou výjimkou byla hláska /r/, která činila potíže mladším žákům, ale na druhém stupni se nesprávná výslovnost této hlásky vůbec neobjevila.

Na základě těchto výsledků mohu říci, že mé hypotézy stanovené na začátku výzkumu byly značně optimistické. Nepředpokládala jsem, že se objeví tak velké množství obtížných hlásek a že procento chybovosti bude tak vysoké.

V poslední kapitole uvádím příklady aktivit, které by měly pomoci zlepšit výslovnost problémových hlásek. Cílem této kapitoly bylo navrhnout takové aktivity a hry, které mohou nejen zlepšit výslovnost žáků, ale také přesvědčit učitele, že výuka výslovnosti může být podána velice zábavným způsobem.

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THE LIST OF APPENDICES

Appendix 1 – Texts for the tested classes

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Appendix 7 – Wordsearch

Appendix 8 – “Family tree”

Appendix 9 – List of names - “Family tree”

APPENDIX 1

Text for the 6th class

My mum works as a journalist. There are many beautiful flowers in the garden. I like playing football. Tom is a very fat boy. Do you want to watch television with me? I feel lonely, because I don't have friends in this town. Here is my sister. She is a pretty girl.

Text for the 7th class

There are two cats in the garden. Three girls and five boys went swimming. Can you help me, please? No, I am watching television. There is a small shop in our village. Here is my house. Put the cup on the table.

Text for the 8th class

This boy is very lazy. Did you put sugar in my coffee? Our teacher has four cats. Come hear and bring me a glass of juice. Can you help me with my homework? There is a crowd of people in the shop. I read books for pleasure.

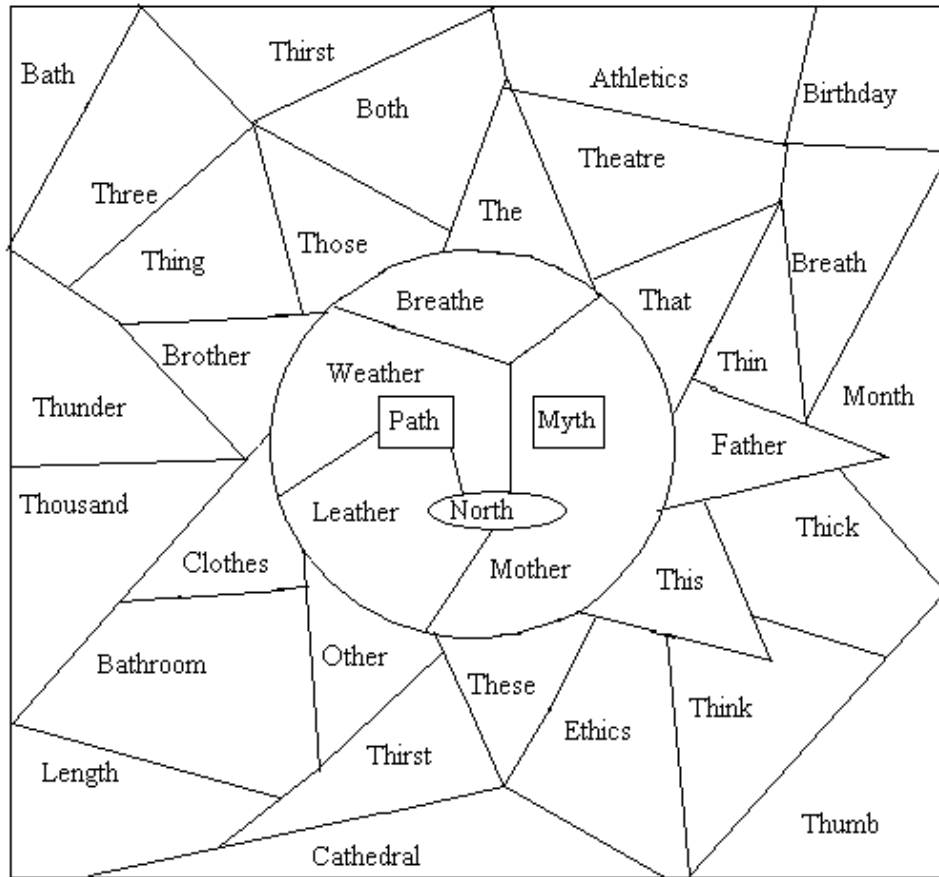
Text for the 9th class

Jane's husband still believes that he will find a treasure. I think that there is a mouse in my room. Give me a piece of cake and a bottle of pure water. This book is full of interesting information. You are the most charming boy in the world. A girl was shaking with fear.

APPENDIX 2

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18	19	20
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APPENDIX 3



APPENDIX 4

Some English tongue twisters:

- Truly rural. Truly rural. Truly rural. (etc.)
- Red lorry, yellow lorry, red lorry, yellow lorry. (etc.)
- Mrs Smith's Fish Sauce Shop.
- She sells sea shells by the sea shore. The shells she sells are surely seashells. So if she sells shells on the seashore, I'm sure she sells seashore shells.
- Give papa a cup of proper coffee in a copper coffee cup.
- Sly Sam slurps Sally's soup.
- Betty and Bob brought back blue balloons from the big bazaar.
- Please pay promptly. Please pay promptly. (etc.)
- Six slippery snails, slid slowly seaward.
- Freshly fried fresh flesh. Freshly fried fresh flesh. (etc.)
- Friendly Frank flips fine flapjacks.
- Three free throws. Three free throws. (etc.)
- The two-twenty-two train tore through the tunnel.
- Chop shops stock chops. Chop shops stock chops. (etc.)
- Shredded Swiss cheese. Shredded Swiss cheese. (etc.)
- A box of biscuits, a batch of mixed biscuits.
- What noise annoys a noisy oyster? A noisy noise annoys a noisy oyster.
- Swan swam over the sea, swim, swan, swim! Swan swam back again, well swum, swan!
- While we were walking, we were watching window washers wash Washington's windows with warm washing water.
- One-One was a racehorse. Two-Two was one, too. When One-One won one race, Two-Two won one, too.

(copied from Hewings 2004)

APPENDIX 5

Box 1

black	slow	room	paid	pure	stop
car	wash	sort	bit	chair	horse
leave	dear	spend	sound	sun	cat
bird	high	poor	soap	beach	climb
start	make	will	book	you	well
wood	bear	real	drum	first	voice

Box 2

fat	home	blue	take	cruel	watch
half	soft	more	still	scared	born
cheap	clear	tell	mouse	but	tap
turn	right	sure	know	deep	lie
large	way	fill	full	who	best
push	wear	ear	run	girl	boy

(Copied from Hewings 2004)

APPENDIX 6

Box 1

cat	flat	man
water	pilot	a car
girl	shirt	bird
clear	beer	tear
phone	home	boat
chair	hair	bear

Box 2

thank	mouth	north	three
that	mother	they	there
sing	tongue	bang	young
wet	sweater	whale	squirrel

APPENDIX 7

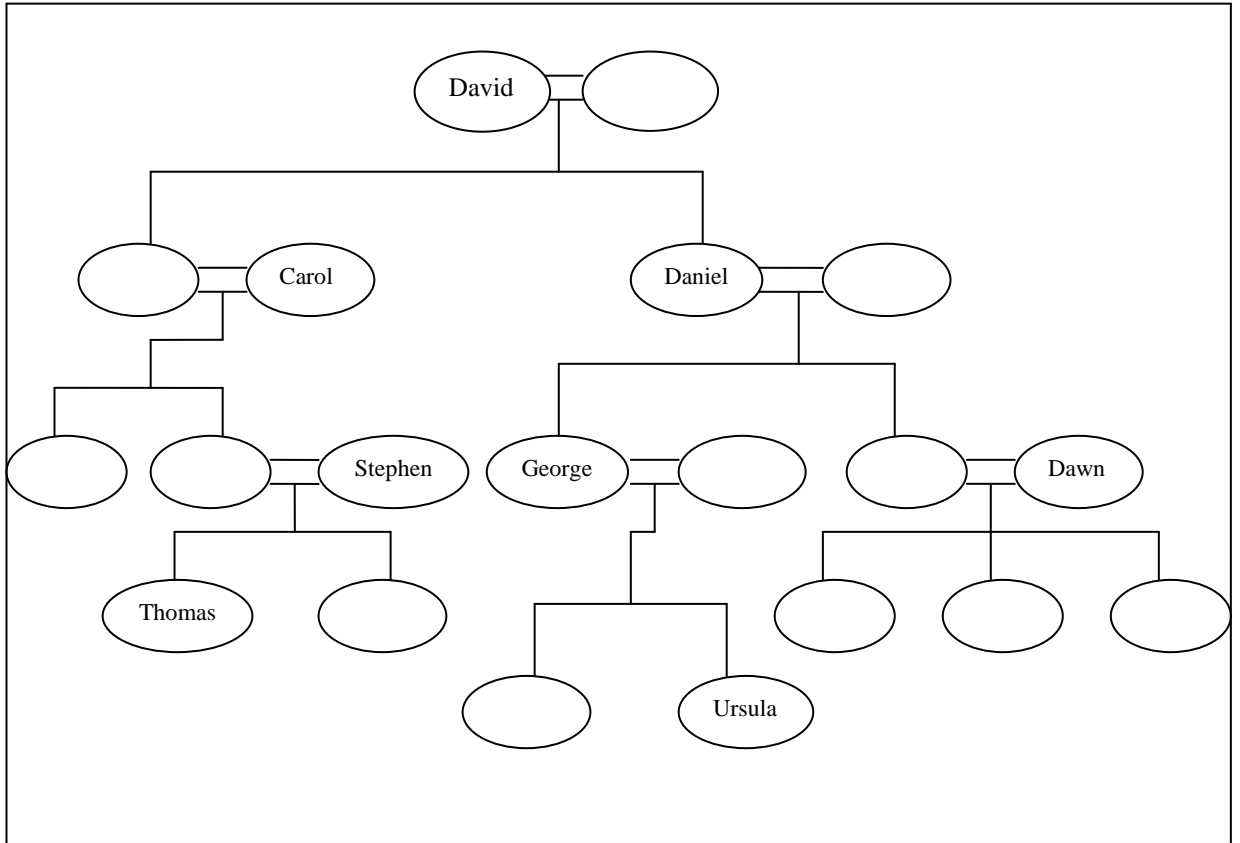
tʃ	eə	ɪ	ŋ	g	l	ɪ	f
m	k	w	e	s	tʃ	ə	n
ɪ	k	n	j	u:	z	b	s
k	w	k	əʊ	s	f	r	ɪ
s	ɪ	w	f	k	j	i:	k
t	k	aɪ	ə	u:	u:	ð	s
e	dʒ	t	n	l	tʃ	z	θ
dʒ	u:	s	f	u:	ə	ð	əʊ

Try to find these words: breathes, chair, edge, English, future, juice, mixed, news, ocean, question, quick, quite, school, shoe, sixth, though

Key:

tʃ	eə	ɪ	ŋ	g	l	ɪ	f
m	k	w	e	s	tʃ	ə	n
ɪ	k	n	j	u:	z	b	s
k	w	k	əʊ	s	f	r	ɪ
s	ɪ	w	f	k	j	i:	k
t	k	aɪ	ə	u:	u:	ð	s
e	dʒ	t	n	l	tʃ	z	θ
dʒ	u:	s	f	u:	ə	ð	əʊ

APPENDIX 8



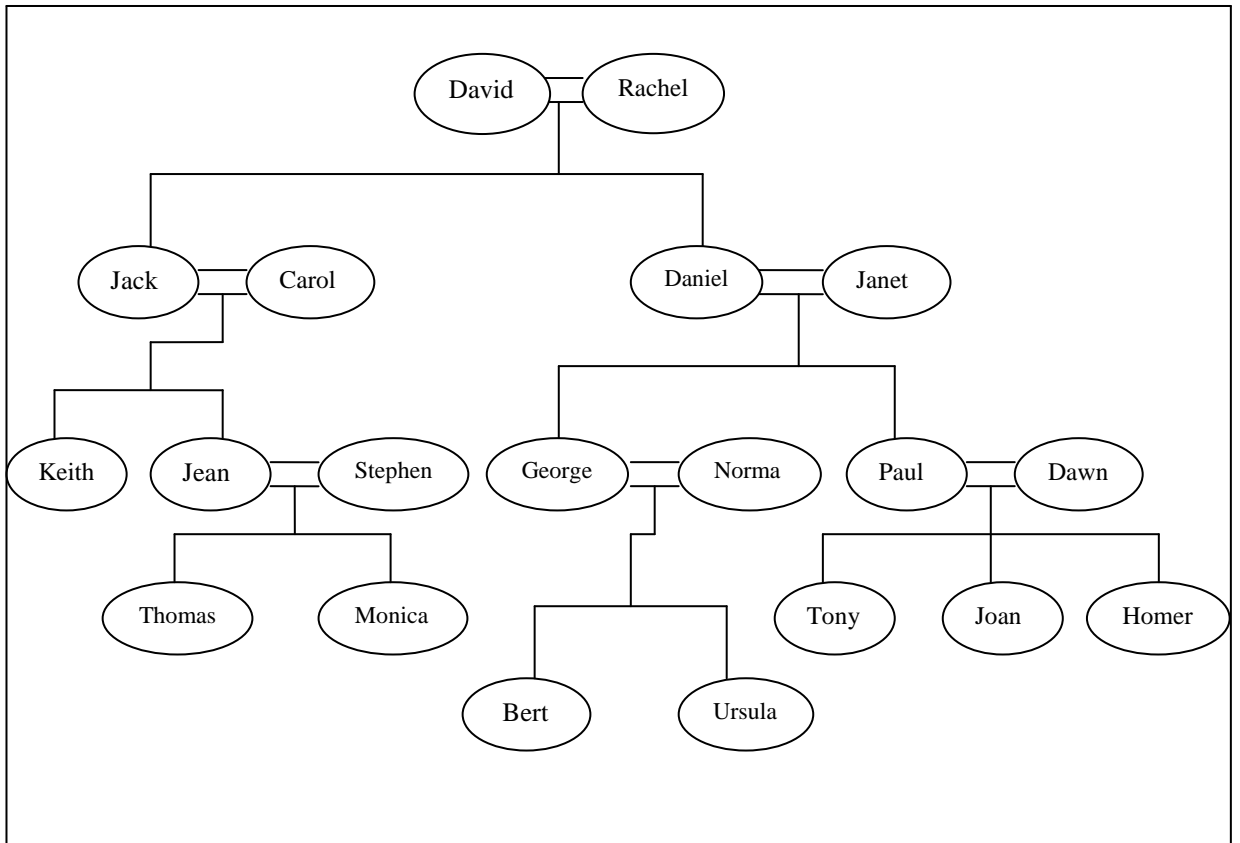
Male: Bert, Homer, Jack, Keith, Paul, Tony

Female: Janet, Jean, Joan, Monica, Norma, Rachel

(Copied from Hewings 2004)

APPENDIX 8

Key:



APPENDIX 9

First vowel sound	Male names	Female names
a: (as in “part”)	Charles, Mark, Martin	Barbara, Charlotte, Margaret
æ (as in “black”)	Barry, Daniel, Patrick	Carol, Frances, Janet
aɪ (as in “drive”)	Nigel, Clive, Guy	Di, Eileen, Irene
eɪ (as in “pen”)	Derek, Gerald, Henry	Beverly, Edna, Heather
e (as in “day”)	David, James, Ray	Daisy, Rachel, Kay
ɪ (as in “sit”)	Chris, Richard, Vincent	Bridget, Linda, Hilda
ɒ (as in “stop”)	Keith, Peter, Stephen	Celia, Jean, Sheila
i: (as in “see”)	Colin, John, Tom	Florence, Monica, Olive
əʊ (as in “phone”)	Homer, Joseph, Tony	Joan, Rose, Sophie
ɔ: (as in “more”)	George, Gordon, Paul	Dawn, Maureen, Norma
u: (as in “choose”)	Bruce, Hugh, Luke	Judith, Susan, Ruth
ɜ: (as in “bird”)	Bert, Herbert, Percy	Bernadette, Ursula, Gertrude

(Copied from Hewings 2004)