

The English Speaking Competence of Czech Native Speakers (age group: 41-50)

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ABSTRAKT

Tato bakalářská práce se zabývá ústní komunikační kompetencí anglického jazyka českých rodilých mluvčích, a to konkrétně ve věku 41-50. Teoretická část je rozdělena na dvě hlavní části. V první části jsou popsány ústní komunikační schopnosti, jejich charakteristika, struktura, faktory a jejich hodnocení. Druhá část se zaměřuje na ovlivňování anglického jazyka českým jazykem a nejčastější chyby Čechů v Anglickém jazyce. Praktická část se zabývá deseti rodilými českými mluvčími, kteří se zúčastnili nahrávání monologu, na základě kterého jsou analyzovány jejich komunikační schopnosti v anglickém jazyce. Tyto výsledky jsou navzájem porovnávány. Cílem této bakalářské práce je zjistit úroveň komunikačních schopností českých rodilým mluvčích v anglickém jazyce a na základě jakých faktorů dosáhli respondenti dané úrovně anglických komunikačních schopností.

Klíčová slova: anglický jazyk, komunikační kompetence, mluvení, český rodilý mluvčí

ABSTRACT

This bachelor thesis deals with the English speaking competence of Czech native speakers (age group 41-50). The theoretical part is divided into two main parts. In the first part, there is a description of oral communication skills, their characteristics, structure, factors, and their assessment. The second part focuses on Czech-English interference, and the most common mistakes made by Czech speakers. The practical part includes ten Czech native speakers who took part in a recorded monologue. Based on this recording, their English speaking competence is analysed and compared. The aim of this bachelor thesis is to figure out the level of English speaking competence in Czech native speakers and determine factors based on which respondents have reached their level of English speaking competence.

Keywords: English language, communicative competence, speaking, Czech native speaker

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INTRODUCTION

Nowadays, the English language is spoken worldwide. As well as in the Czech Republic, people in many states learn English as their second language. This thesis focuses on English speaking competence among Czech native speakers, age group 41-50. The aim of this thesis is to figure out their English speaking competence based on four categories – grammar, usage of vocabulary, pronunciation, and fluency. Furthermore, to find out the circumstances of their English speaking competence acquisition.

In the first part of this thesis, there will be described the characteristics of speaking competence, structure, factors of speaking competence, and assessment of speaking competence. Then, there will be described Czech-English interference and the most common mistakes Czech speakers make.

The second part of this thesis, the analytical part, will focus on English speaking competence research. Firstly, there will be specified research methods used in the research. Secondly, the results of the questionnaire will be described. Then, the results of the test will be analysed. Finally, the correlation between the questionnaire and the test results will be found out. The results were compared and interpreted, and the conclusions were formulated.

I. THEORY

1 SPEAKING COMPETENCE

There are four fundamental skills of language – writing, reading, listening, and speaking. These skills can be divided into active and passive categories. Reading and listening belong to the passive category as learners are not producing anything. On the other hand, writing and speaking show us a productive activity and can be added to the active category (Rao, 2019). Speech can be characterized as a composition of idea units characterized as short phrases or units linked together with *and, but, or, that*. Alternatively, these phrases or units can be spoken with pausing between them (Luoma, 2004).

Speaking skills are essential for communicating effectively in every language and should be developed simultaneously as other skills (Boonkit, 2010). English is spoken worldwide and using the proper language in communication is necessary to achieve our goals and needs. Speaking is the most important and the most effective skill in learning second languages. Almost everything is associated with speaking. For example, with good speech, people can affect others or achieve their goals. Consider all the language skills, speaking is difficult because knowing grammar and vocabulary is a perforce (Rao, 2019). For achieving speaking skills in a foreign language, repetition and practice are demanding (Leong, Ahmadi, 2017).

Concerning speaking situations, it is possible to distinguish three situations – interactive, partially interactive, and non-interactive. In interactive situations, a partner may ask for clarification, request to speak more slowly, and repeat something. It is easy to understand each other. Face to face conversations and phone calls can be included in interactive situations. Consider partially interactive speaking situations, there is a speaker who is not interrupted by a live audience. Based on facial expressions and gestures, the speaker can consider if the audience has understood his speech or not. At the end of the speech, the audience can have questions for the speaker to resolve their doubts. Whereas in non-interactive speaking situations, there is no live audience, the speaker records the speech, and there is no interaction between the speaker and the audience (Rao, 2019).

There are two kinds of speech – planned speech and unplanned speech. Concerning planned speech, the speaker can prepare the speech in advance or say thoughtful attitudes. Idea units are short as the speech must be understandable for the audience. Planned speech is often formal, which leads to the usage of more complex grammar. On the other hand, unplanned speech is a reaction to a concrete moment without preparing the speech in advance. Short idea units and incomplete sentences are typical for unplanned speech.

Unplanned speech can be switched from formal to informal situations. To make communication quick and easy, generic words might be used. These words became natural for second language learners. Vague words like *very*, *good*, *often* help the speaker to fill the sentence. Vague words occur in informal speech (Luoma, 2004).

1.1 Characteristics of Communicative Competence

The human brain has two hemispheres. Each hemisphere – the right brain and the left brain, govern the given part of the human body. The language is created in the left hemisphere. Hemispheres are divided into many areas. Consider areas vital for linguistics, in the Broca's area speech is produced, and the Wernicke's area is responsible for the understanding of speech (Turula, 2010).

1.1.1 Speaking Competence

To teach a language successfully, it is necessary to include some aspects like language usage of particular words as well as their structures, fluency of speaking, use of appropriate grammar, lexical accuracy, a convincing language, and its context. While only lingual competence is obtained, students are successful at school. Nevertheless, their language usage in real-life situations is problematic (Brown, 2001). Speakers should process the language in their heads, set the language in a coherent order to convey the meaning (Harmer, 2001). Three main components of speaking competence are lingual competencies, socio-lingual competencies, and pragmatic competencies (CEFR, 2001).

1.1.2 Lingual Competence

These skills are fundamental to learning languages. Students learn about the language itself. They are aware of lexical, phonological, semantics, and grammar rules. However, students are not able to use it in a specific situation (Gondová, 2013).

1.1.3 Socio-lingual Competence

The importance of being familiar with social conventions like courtesy rules, standards of behavior through generations, genders, or social groups, is needed to communicate through different cultures (CEF, 2001). To have a successful conversation, students should use idioms, choose a suitable greeting, and have a balanced conversation. Students need to know what kind of language they should use in a particular conversation and understand the context (Gondová, 2013).

1.1.4 Pragmatic Competence

Pragmatic competence is the ability to understand different kinds of texts and recognize irony or parody. Students can operate with discourse, cohesion, coherence, and have the ability to create organized and structured texts. They also have skills in the formulation of proposals, requests, and recommendations (Gondová, 2013). According to Littlewood (2004), due to pragmatic competence, speakers use their own linguistic resources to transport and interpret the meaning in real situations.

1.1.5 Discourse Competence

Discourse competence allows speakers to engage in continuous discourse. It means speakers are able to link ideas in long written texts, maintain a long-spoken turn, interact better, and easily open a conversation and close it (Littlewood, 2004).

1.2 Structure of Speaking Competence

1.2.1 Accuracy

One of the important aims in speaking is accuracy. That means speaking should be clear, grammatically, and phonologically correct. The articulation is crucial as well. To make the language clearer, the redundancy of a language is needed. To be successful in speaking, knowledge of the colloquial language is required. Students should be able to use proper phrases, idioms, and words (Brown, 2001).

1.2.2 Grammar

Grammar is a major component of communicative competence (Brown, 2001). According to Turula (2010), grammar should be taught together with words. Concerning grammar in speaking, it has its own constructional principles. Against grammar in writing, the organization is different. Especially in an informal speech, the ellipsis may occur. It means some words are left out, and the meaning of the sentence is not changed. While speaking, condensed questions (e.g., More coffee?) and echo questions often appear (Harmer, 2001). At the beginning of the learning process, students use simple structures and make plenty of errors. During learning, they get better and use complex structures without errors. Grammar consists of features the students need to know and use appropriately, like irregular words, patterns, tenses, or structure. For some students, it may be challenging to choose the proper tense (Luoma, 2004). Consider informal speaking situations, ellipsis may occur. This means some words in the sentence can be omitted (Carter, Mncarthy. 1995).

1.2.3 Vocabulary

Words are fundamental units of the language (Brown, 2001). To communicate successfully, knowledge of vocabulary is needed. Considering the English language, the estimated number of words is from 100,000 to one million. In everyday conversation, the speaker should be able to use around 2,000 words. Students learn vocabulary faster if they see and hear it more often, and they understand the meaning of the words (Lightbown, Spada, 2013). It is easier to learn concrete words than abstract words, as concrete words are easier to imagine and remember (Brown, 2001). In spontaneous speech, common lexical phrases are used (Harmer, 2001). Using the right vocabulary is necessary to express oneself. Choosing appropriate phrases makes descriptions realistic. Speakers who are able to evoke feelings in listeners should be for their ability credited. In spoken discourse, it is common to use ordinary and straightforward words. On the other hand, speakers should use appropriate phrases as well (Luoma, 2004). To know words, students had to be aware of the word's pronunciation, meaning, collocation, and register (Brown, 2001).

1.2.4 Pronunciation

The fundamental features of pronunciation are sounds. It is possible to divide sounds into two categories – vowels and consonants. Each of them has a different function in a syllable. Vowels are at the center of the syllable, and consonants enclose vowels. Sounds may appear in groups. It is called a combination of sounds. In English, some sounds are unique, and it is impossible to find them in any other language. The most important sound in English is the vowel schwa (Kenworthy, 1987). To characterize schwa, it is a reduced vowel (Volín, et al., 2013). In English, there are two types of syllables – strong and weak. The vowel schwa can be associated with a weak syllable. Weak syllables consist of a shorter vowel or lower intensity vowel in a word (Roach, 2009). The English language includes the usage of stress, rhythm, and intonation (Brown, 2001). Non-native speakers need to use correct stress in a word. In case they do not use the stress correctly, a native speaker might not understand them. Rhythm is common in English pronunciation as well. It is a result of word stress. Words with many meanings like adverbs, nouns, verbs, and adjectives are pronounced stronger than prepositions, articles, and pronouns. Thanks to that, sentences have a rhythm. If the speaker wants to highlight some word in the sentence and says it vigorously, it is called sentence stress (Kenworthy, 1987). Using the correct intonation is essential in terms of showing the meaning and feeling about something. Intonation differs when asking a question or making a statement. Foreign speakers often use intonation incorrectly, and the purpose of

their speech is not understood clearly (Harmer, 2001). For English speaking, it is typical that there are no pauses between words, and it is pronounced smoothly. Another aspect of English pronunciation is word stress. If two or more syllables appear in a word, one syllable is said louder than others (Kenworthy, 1987). In addition to word stress, each word has some stressed and unstressed syllables. For stressed syllables, it is typical that they are more prominent than unstressed syllables. It means stressed syllables are longer and louder than unstressed syllables. It is challenging for non-native speakers to decide whether the syllable will be stressed or unstressed. Weak syllables are never stressed. Only strong syllables are stressed (Roach, 2009).

1.2.5 Fluency

Regarding fluency, learners should be able to use connected speech, not just produces individual phonemes (Harmer, 2001). The speaker's speed, pausing, tone, and volume are vital, for example, for storytelling or role-plays (Luoma, 2004). The language of speaking should be flowing and sounds natural. Fluent speech is characterized as phrasal speech. Another aspect that should be learned is how to use hesitation and pauses. There is a place for a time to think about something in English speaking, the fillers like you *know*, *I mean*, *um* are used. The speed of speech should be adequate (Brown, 2001).

1.3 Factors of Speaking Competence

Mam Socheath (2010) introduced several suggestions on how English speaking competence can be improved; for example, learners should find partners or friends with whom they can speak in English. Another suggestion is to read books in the English language, watch movies in English, listen to the radio, and then talk about it and discuss it with someone in English. Taking English classes is another way how one can improve speaking competence. It is crucial to not being shy and be able to speak in English whenever it is possible. There are some speaking barriers, such as lack of grammar exposure, lack of vocabulary, lack of practice, mispronunciation, and influence of the mother language (Vadivel, Genesan, 2020).

1.3.1 Language Aptitude

Some people may have language aptitude, and it is easier to learn a language for them. There are three aptitude elements – phonetic ability, linguistic ability, and memory ability. Memory is the brain activity that allows storing, retaining, and recalling information. Three levels of memory are distinguished. The first level is sensory memory. The sensory memory immediately indicates incoming stimuli and delivers them into short-term memory. Short-

term memory keeps information up to seven seconds. Long-term memory retains information from minutes to years (Turula, 2010). Aptitude may be closely related to the intelligence of a person (Dörnyei, Ryan, 2015).

1.3.2 Native Language

Native language influences the learner's pronunciation the most (Brown, 2001). If the rhythm and intonation of the native language differ from these aspects in English as a second language, it may be challenging to learn the proper pronunciation. The problem may also be related to the speaker's accent. There are many languages in the world, and each of them has a different accent. The foreign accent might be a problem when it leads to failure in communication. (Kenworthy, 1987). Native language also affects the word order and word-for-word phrases translation the most. In a bound morphology, the influence of the native language is weak (Krashen, 1981). As Dušková (1969) said, the influence of the Czech language as the native language has no distinguishing between singular and plural for nouns as in English, and finite verbs correspond with its subject in person and number.

1.3.3 Age

Under the age of puberty, there is a better chance to learn pronunciation at the same level as a native speaker. Above the age of puberty, everybody has the same chance of learning pronunciation, but a "foreign accent" appears (Brown, 2001). According to some studies, older learners learn a second language quicker than younger learners. Nevertheless, every age stage has its pros and costs to learn a second language (Najvar, 2010). According to Singleton (2004), people who learn a second language in adulthood may access a high language level. Mature learners more understand the needs to learn a foreign language, and they are more motivated to learn the language than younger learners. On the other hand, adult learners have less time for studying a second language. Teenagers have enough time to learn against adults. As they spend most of their time at school, learning is a routine for them. Teenagers as adults can learn on their own, and they already have experience with learning (Turula, 2010).

According to Lightbown and Spada (2013), younger learners have more opportunities to use language in a less formal environment, and they are not supposed to use the language fluently and accurately. Young learners have more time to devote to learning a language. On the other hand, older learners more often come to situations where they need more complex language and express more problematic ideas. In these situations, older learners might have worries about their language, and frustration can come. This leads to a decrease in their

motivation. Learners who begin to learn a language in adolescence accomplish higher proficiency for a more extended period than learners who begin to learn a language at primary school.

1.3.4 Exposure

People living in an English-speaking country have a better chance to learn English pronunciation than people who do not. However, the key role is how much time they spend in an English speaking environment. Even though people live in an English speaking country, most of their time is spent with non-English speaking people. This does not help them to improve their language (Kenworthy, 1987). The quality and intensity of exposure are more important than the length of time in a foreign country (Brown, 2001).

1.3.5 Motivation and Concern for Good Pronunciation

According to Dörnyei and Ushioda (2011), motivation consists of three components – the choice of a particular action, the persistence with it, the effort expended on it.

Some students care about their pronunciation more than others do. Motivation to be good in pronunciation and concern with it has the strongest influence on achieving excellent pronunciation (Brown, 2001). To be motivated, students need to see the value of their desired goals. Students might not concern if they think their pronunciation is good and they are not aware of their mistakes (Kenworthy, 1987).

Lightbown and Spada (2013) divided motivation into two factors, attitudes towards the second language community and communicative needs. If learners have a positive attitude toward foreign-language speakers, they are motivated to communicate with them. Learners may need to communicate in a foreign language because they occur in some social situations or they just want to achieve their ambitions in the language.

1.3.6 Phonetic Ability

Every human being has the ability to distinguish different sounds. Thanks to that, they are able to learn the sounds of their native language. However, some people are better at distinguishing different sounds than other people (Kenworthy, 1987).

1.3.7 Language Anxiety

Some students may have a lack of confidence in learning a foreign language. They can feel frustration, uneasiness, or self-doubt. It might be caused, for example, by the fear of negative evaluation (Dörnyei, Ushioda, 2011). Based on several studies, anxiety is connected to

a personality. Students can feel anxious in many situations, such as speaking in front of the whole class. They feel more comfortable speaking in front of a smaller group of people. Anxiety is not always a bad thing for learning a language. Actually, it can help students to motivate them to succeed. Willingness to communicate is connected to anxiety as well. Students may try to avoid speaking in a foreign language even they know the language well. Communicative confidence is needed to have a conversation (Lightbown, Spada, 2013).

1.3.8 Learning Style

Learning style indicates an individual's selected way of processing information and the way they deal with others. Two kinds of learners exist – field-dependent and field-independent. For field-dependent learners, it is challenging to identify the parts that make up a whole. Nevertheless, field-dependent learners are people-oriented, likely to make social interaction more easily. These learners are better at learning informal language as a result of their interpersonal skills. On the other hand, field-independent learners see things analytically. They are more individualistic and do not prefer social interactions. Because of their analytical skills, they are better at learning a formal language (Ellis 2004).

1.4 Assessing Speaking Competence

Firstly, the differences between a test and assessment should be explained. Brown (2004) defines a test as an instrument of how a student's knowledge, ability, and performance can be measured in a given domain. Tests are organized procedures taking place at a fixed time. Learners are prepared, and they are aware that their results will be measured and evaluated. On the other hand, assessment is an ongoing process. A learner responds to a question or comments something, and a teacher subconsciously assesses the learner's performance. So, tests are a subgroup of assessments. Teachers can assess learners using tests.

According to Brown (2004), two types of assessment can be identified – informal and formal. Informal assessment is connected to unplanned comments and responses, for example, saying "Nice job!". On the other hand, formal assessment is a systematically planned technique to evaluate students' achievement. Another two kinds of assessments are formative and summative assessments. Formative assessment leads to improving students' skills and helps them continue in the learning process by providing feedback. Otherwise, summative assessment usually occurs at the end of the language course. It provides a summary of what the student has learned without showing the possible future progress.

It should not be extremely expensive to make tests effective and take too much time to fill in. If the test is time-consuming for students in terms of filling the test, it may also be time-consuming for teachers to correct the test. The test should be easy to administer and has specific and time-efficient scoring or evaluation. The test must be reliable. This means, if the same student takes the same test for the second time, the results should be same as it was for the first time. However, test reliability may be affected, for example, by student's illness, teacher's lack of attention to scoring criteria, or interruption during the test (noises from a street). Another criterion is validity. The test should measure what is supposed to be measured (Brown, 2004). Cohen (2007, p.133) said, "If a piece of research is invalid then it is worthless." Besides reliability and validity, the test should have the property of authenticity. It can be presented by naturalness of the language in the test, meaningful topic, or real-world tasks (Brown, 2004).

Assessing speaking includes several stages. First of all, a person has to realize a need for assessing speaking in a foreign language. This leads the person to set up a plan for assessing speaking skills. It is necessary to specify rating criteria and administration procedures and set up quality assurance procedures to monitor everything. Then the plan can be realized. Two more processes follow. In the first process, participants interact with each other or with examiners to show their speaking skills. The process is usually recorded. In the following process, their skills are rated, and feedback is provided (Luoma, 2004). Making errors is a natural process of learning a language (Harmer, 2001).

Assessment can be done through tasks. Tasks are activities in which a speaker should use his knowledge and skills to achieve some goals. To create tasks for assessment, it is necessary to know the examinees' speaking skills. Based on these skills, a task can be created. Together with the task, instructions to the examinees should be given. A task is also connected to context. Context includes everything in the speaking situation, for example, the talk itself, a place where the talk happens, the speaker's language use, and the conversation's goals. In the speaking situation, context manages what is said and allows the assessment creators to direct a talk during the test. Nevertheless, it is not possible to predict exactly what will be said. Designers of a task should decide what the test be like. It is called initial task design. It has to be clear what students are supposed to do. It may be, for example, description, explanation, narration, or comparison. The tasks can be individual, pair, or group. Tasks that include more students allow the examiner to test several students at one time. Another step to creating tasks is to determine the difficulty of the task. To support students' learning, tasks should be created from the easiest to difficult ones during the whole

learning process. The speaking task can be open-ended or structured. In regard to open-ended tasks, it may be a long activity with more freedom to students' performance, for example, making a presentation or role-playing. Role-playing can simulate some everyday life situations like buying something. With reference to structured speaking tasks, these can be characterized as the speaking equivalent of multiple-choice questions. The answers are mostly short and the same or similar among students, so comparability can be measured (Luoma, 2004).

Brown (2004) distinguishes five types of speaking – imitative, intensive, responsive, interactive, and extensive. Imitative speaking is a type of speaking where a speaker is able to just imitates words, phrases, or sentences. While assessing, the speaker should read written phrases or sentences aloud. Intensive speaking demonstrates a narrow band of grammatical, lexical, phonological, and phrasal. The speaker is aware of the semantics properties to respond. However, the interaction with the test administrator is minimal. The speaker is not able to say a discourse longer than one sentence. To assess intensive speaking, it is advisable to use, for example, directed response tasks, translation of simple sentences, or read-aloud tasks. In a read-aloud task, the speaker's pronunciation is assessed. Concerning responsive assessment tasks, it can include interaction on the level of short conversation, simple request, or small tasks. Another type of assessing responsive speaking is paraphrasing. The test taker gets a text with several sentences, and after reading it, the test taker should paraphrase the text. Interactive speaking signifies longer and more complex interaction than responsive speaking. There are two forms – transactional language and interpersonal exchanges. The purpose of transactional language is to exchange specific information, and the purpose of the interpersonal exchange is to maintain social relationships. Extensive speaking can be characterized as a monologue. Tasks may include storytelling, oral presentation, or speech. For example, the test taker should tell a story based on a set of pictures. These tasks can be long, and there is almost no interaction.

2 CZECH-ENGLISH INTERFERENCE AND COMMON MISTAKES CZECH LEARNERS MAKE

While students start to learn the second language, students already have a knowledge of their first language. The first language and the second learned language come into contact and affect each other. Because of the differences between these two languages, errors appeared (Harmer, 2001). Interference can be characterized as the transmission of components from one language to another in phonological, grammatical, lexical, and orthographical levels. Concerning these levels, learners can transfer, for instance, stress, intonation, rhyme, usage of some parts of speech, tenses, word order, words, and spelling (Skiba, 1997).

To compare English and the Czech language, English is an analytical language, against Czech that is a synthetic language. English and Czech have a comprehensively different structure of grammar. Czech grammar consists of only three tenses – past, present, and future, whereas English holds much more tenses. Because of this difference in tenses, it can be challenging for Czech native speakers to understand all the English tenses and use them correctly (Smolka, 2007). Regarding tenses, one of the most common errors Czech learners make is the omission of suffix *-s* in the present simple tense third person singular (*She live in Prague.) For instance, another common mistake can be noticed in the past continuous tense. Sometimes, Czechs are unable to determine when this tense can be used and when past simple tense is more relevant (*I was bumping into car., *The sun shone.) (Poslušná, 2010).

Another dissimilarity is the English language has a different written form and spoken form, whereas words in the Czech language are written and read in the same way. Phonemes of these two languages overlap hardly, so understanding spoken English is difficult for Czech native speakers. The English language is a stress-timed language, while Czech is a syllable-timed language. Unlike the Czech language, English demonstrates an extensive range of intonation, and Czech speakers are not used to it, and English native speakers may think that Czechs' speech is unemotional and disinterested. As the Czech language has, in most cases, free word order, Czech native speakers have problems setting constituents in English sentences where free word order is impossible (Smolka, 2007). As was mentioned earlier, the English language has a vowel reduction called schwa. On the other hand, in the Czech language, no reducing vowel occurs. (Volín, Weingartová, Skarnitzl, 2013).

Don Sparling (1989) points to many mistakes which Czech people make in the English language. Czech learners often use the word “after” inappropriately, for example, **She is*

after an operation, instead of *She's just had the operation*. In this case, Czech learners tend to use literal translation while communicating in English. Another mistake among the Czech native speakers in English is in talking about age. They forgot to put the adjective *old* – **He is fifteen years* as they translate it as *let/roků*. The other mistake is missing *and*. Sparling shows in on the following example – **Last year we visited Bulgaria, Romania, Hungary*. It is necessary to put *and* before the last word – *Last year we visited Bulgaria, Rumania, and Hungary*. While omitting the *and*, English speaker would think that the sentence is not finished, and something is missing. Using the articles in English is for Czech language speakers also challenging as they are no articles in the Czech language. The most common mistake is using the article before uncountable nouns – **How difficult the life can be*, in this case, the word has a general meaning so the article does not appear – *How difficult life can be*, and before proper names in the possessive case – **I saw a great ballet production last night at the Janáček's Opera House*, the article has to be omitted as well. Adding unnecessary infinitive *to be* between the verb *become* and the adjective or the afflicted patient is another common mistake that Czech speakers make – **The waiter became to be nervous*. Czech learners frequently use a combination of words **in these days*. However, it does not exist in the English language. Instead, *these days* or *nowadays* should be used. They also use the word *enjoy* in the wrong way as they use it with the infinitive and not with the gerund – **I enjoy to listen to their arguments/ I enjoy listening to their arguments*. Czech speakers have a problem with the usage of the word *favourite*. They used to put *the most* in front of this word. However, the word *favourite* is considered as the superlative in English. It is the same as *nejoblíbenější* in Czech, based on that *the most* have to be omitted in this case.

According to Chamonikolasová (2005), most Czech and Slovak students make mistakes in grammar, especially in articles and determiners. Another problem is plenty of errors in verb forms. The verb form should be consistent with the mood, tense, aspect, and subject-verb agreement. “The most typical error type is the use of simple present instead of present perfect with temporal adverbials expressing duration and repetition in a period extending from the past to the present, e.g., **countries that are (> have been) members for a certain period of time...*, **As was (> has been) suggested many times...*, **recently almost nothing is (> has been) so widely discussed.*” (p.55).

Raušer (2017) found seven most common Czech false friends in English in his research. To characterize a false friend, it is a pair of words with a similar sound or looks but with different meanings. The first mentioned false friend is the word *chef* that Czechs translate as

šéf (boss). Another false friend is *gymnasium* and *gymnázium*. In English, the word *gymnasium* is connected to a room where people do physical exercises, whereas *gymnázium* in Czech means a grammar school. *Transparent* and *transparent* are identically looking words. In English, the word *transparent* is an adjective and means see-through. On the other hand, this word represents a noun in the Czech language, and its meaning is a banner. Another false friend that Raušer mentioned is *frequent/frekventovaný*. Synonyms for the word *frequent* in English are *often*, *regular*, or *constant*. Czechs confuse this word with the Czech meaning *busy*. The other popular error among Czech learners is *sympathetic* (loving, sensitive, caring) and *sympatický* (nice, pleasant). It is not just a common mistake among Czech learners, but even some Czech television channels mistranslate this word. While talking about the economy, Czechs use the word *economical* as the adjective of economy which is *ekonomický* in Czech. However, the word *economical* represents the meaning of using the minimum of something and not wasting. The appropriate word would be *economic*. The last false friend that Raušer indicated is *actually/aktuálně*. The word *actually* is the same as words *really* and *in fact*. Nevertheless, Czechs interpretate it wrongly as the word *aktuálně* which means *currently*.

II. ANALYSIS

3 METHODOLOGY

This chapter of the thesis is focusing on the research methodology. Firstly, the objectives will be described. Secondly, the participants will be characterized. Then, the methods will be introduced, and lastly, the procedure will be described.

3.1 Objectives

The aim of this research was to figure out the English speaking competence in a target group of respondents and to find out the factors influencing this competence. For instance, the length and method of learning English, and the frequency of speaking in English. English speaking competence was assessed in the categories: grammar, vocabulary, pronunciation, and fluency. Three research hypotheses and two research questions were formulated:

Hypothesis 1: *There is a significant correlation between the length of learning speaking test assessment and the length of learning English.*

Hypothesis 2: *There is a significant correlation between the speaking test assessment and the frequency of speaking in English.*

Hypothesis 3: *There is a significant correlation between the speaking test assessment and the self-evaluation of speaking competence.*

Question 1: *What are the self-perceived strengths and weaknesses of participants' speaking competence?*

Question 2: *What are the facilitative factors of participants' speaking competence?*

3.2 Participants

Ten Czech native speakers (age 41-50) took part in this research (labelled A-J). Five of the participants have a university degree but none of them have a degree focused on the English language. Nobody has lived in an English speaking country for more than three months.

3.3 Methods

Two research methods were used in the practical part. The first method is a questionnaire. The questionnaire was accessible online and was distributed to participants via social media. The first method is a questionnaire. Several kinds of questions such as multiple-choice questions, rating scales, and open-ended questions can be used in the questionnaire. The questionnaire should look easy and attractive with clear wording and a simple design. Numbered questions are necessary for clarity (Cohen et al., 2007). The questionnaire

contains 7 questions – three of them providing quantitative data (items n. 1, 3 and 4) and four of them qualitative data:

1. How long have you been learning English (years)?
2. Where do you learn English?
3. How often do you speak English (a week/month/year)?
4. How would you assess your speaking in English (1 – very poor, 2 – poor, 3 – average, 4 – good, 5 – excellent)?
5. What are your strengths in speaking English?
6. What are your weaknesses in speaking English?
7. What has helped you improve your speaking in English?

Another research method was a test. English spontaneous monologues (50-second on average) of the participants were recorded and evaluated (minimum 4 points, maximum 20 points). The participants were talking about themselves, their hobbies, jobs, or families. The utterances were evaluated in four sub-components of speaking competence: grammar, vocabulary, pronunciation, and fluency, each in a 5-point scale (Table 1).

3.4 Procedure

The first step was the questionnaire. Participants indicated their letter symbol in the questionnaire. The second step was recording of their spontaneous utterances. The data obtained by the questionnaire were then correlated to the speaking test scores.

Table 1 Speaking test assessment

| GRAMMAR | |
|-------------------|---|
| 5 | Accuracy of grammatical structures and combination of words. |
| 4 | Generally accurate grammatical structures, structures of word and word-order. Occasional errors. |
| 3 | Frequent errors of grammatical structures, structures of words and word-order which occasionally obscure meaning. |
| 2 | Virtually incorrect grammatical structures, structure and combination of words. |
| 1 | Very little response with difficulty to understand. |
| VOCABULARY | |
| 5 | Recognizes, defines and produces words appropriately throughout the oral production. |
| 4 | Minor words recognition, definition and production problems. Vocabulary generally appropriate. |
| 3 | Words recognition, definition and production quite often inaccurate. Occasional correct words. |
| 2 | Recognition, definition and production errors make conversation virtually incomprehensible. |
| 1 | Very little response of the participant. |

| PRONUNCIATION | |
|----------------------|---|
| 5 | Accurate pronunciation, intonation, and stress patterns throughout the speaking situation. |
| 4 | Occasional pronunciation, intonation, and stress errors but generally well comprehensible. |
| 3 | Frequent pronunciation, intonation, and stress errors. Sometimes difficult to understand. |
| 2 | Pronunciation, intonation, and stress problems make speech virtually unintelligible. |
| 1 | Very little response of the participant. |
| FLUENCY | |
| 5 | Speech speed, pauses and sentence length are excellent. Speech is natural and continuous. |
| 4 | Speech speed, pauses, rhythm, and sentence length are affected by slight errors. |
| 3 | Often errors affect speech speed, pauses, rhythm, and sentence length. |
| 2 | Long pauses, unfinished utterances and fragmentary speech make communication almost impossible. |
| 1 | Very little response of the participant. |
| Total score | |

4 RESULTS

This chapter is focused on analysing the questionnaire and test results.

4.1 Questionnaire

1. How long have you been learning English (years)?

10 responses

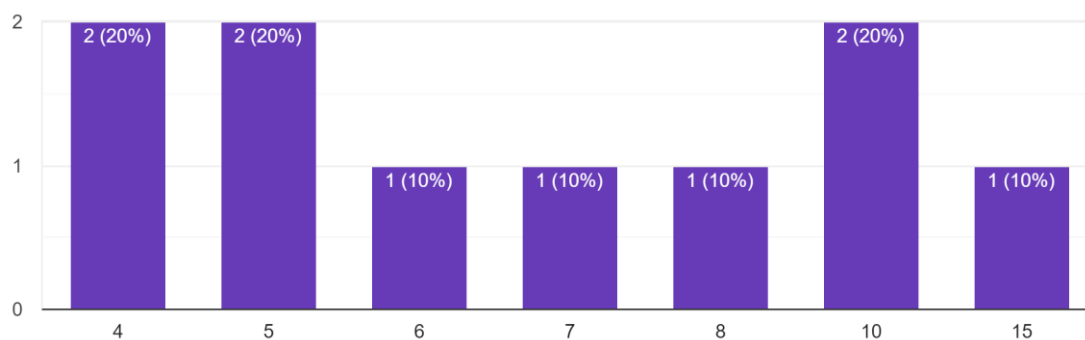


Figure 1 The length of learning English

The average length of learning English among the participants is 7.4 years. The shortest time-period is 4 years (2 participants) and the longest time-period is 15 years (1 participant). The length of learning English among these respondents may be influenced by the communist regime in the Czech Republic during that English was not supported language

2. Where do/did you learn English?

10 responses

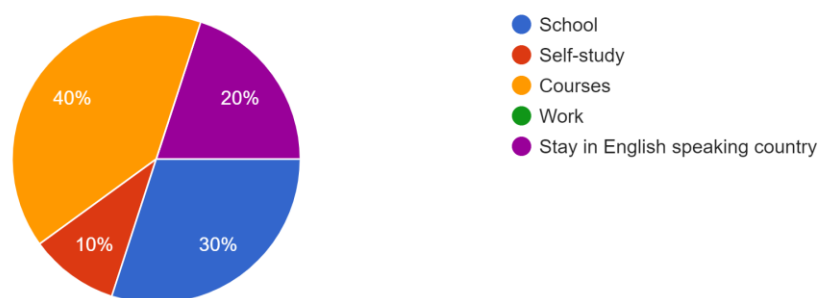


Figure 2 The method of learning English

Most of the participants learn the English language at courses (40%) and at school (30%). No participants learn English at work.

3. How often do you speak English?

10 responses

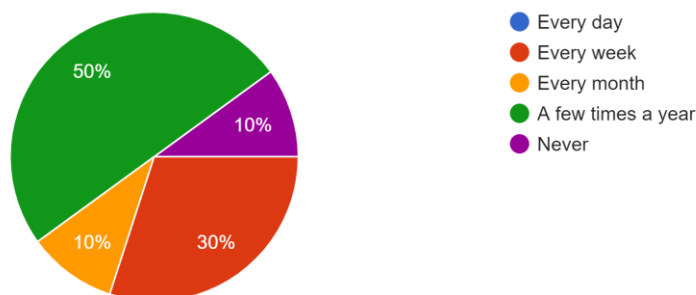


Figure 3 The frequency of speaking English

Half of the participants communicate in English only a few times a year and one third of them speaks English once a week at least. None of the participants speak English every day. For the statistical analysis, we coded the frequency of speaking English giving 5 points to daily communication, 4 points – weekly, 3 points – monthly, 2 points – yearly and 1 point to none communication in English. The average frequency of speaking in English is 2.6 points.

4. How would you assess your speaking in English?

10 responses

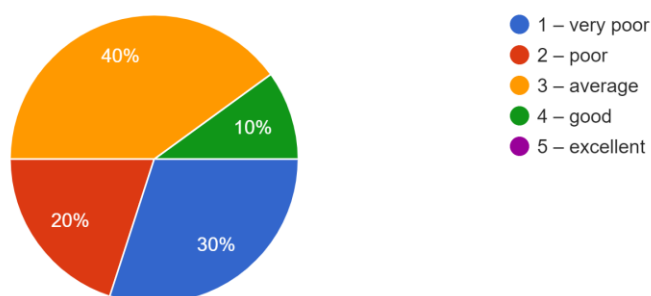


Figure 4 The self-assessment of English speaking competence

The average self-evaluation is 2.4 points. Most participants evaluated their speaking competence as average (40%) or very poor (30%). None of the participants evaluated their speaking competence as excellent.

5. What are your strengths in speaking English?

10 responses

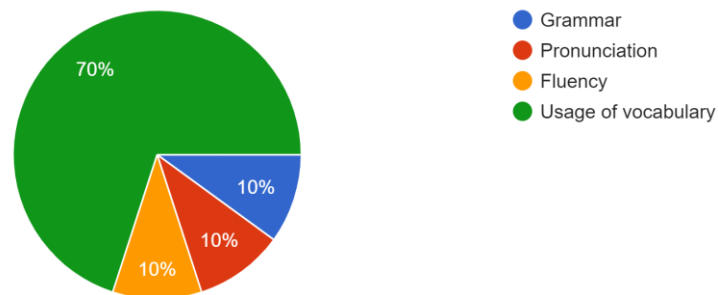


Figure 5 The self-perceived strengths of English speaking competence

Most of the participants (70%) consider the usage of vocabulary to be their strongest point in speaking English.

6. What are your weaknesses in speaking English?

10 responses

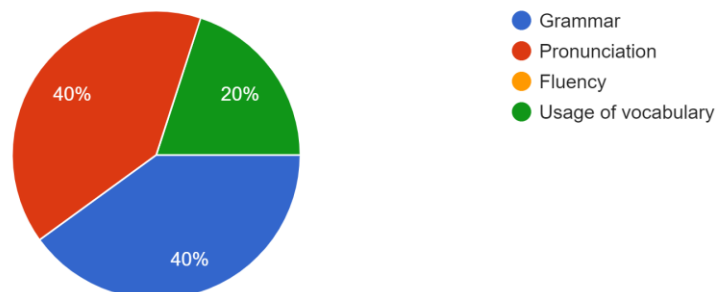


Figure 6 The self-perceived weaknesses of English speaking competence

An equal number of participants (40%) consider grammar and pronunciation to be their weakest points in speaking English. No participant indicated fluency in this context.

7. What has helped you improve your speaking in English the most?

10 responses

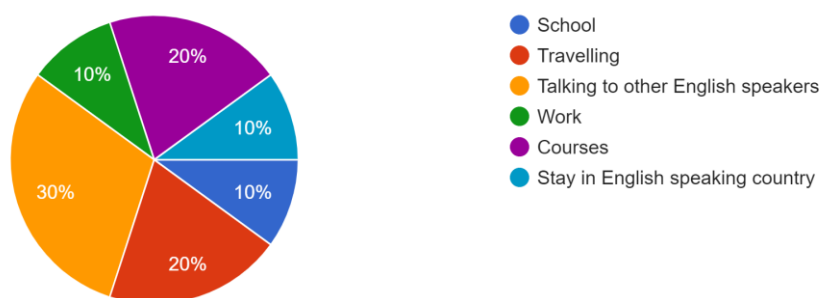


Figure 7 The self-perceived facilitative factors of English speaking competence

The participants mentioned talking to English native speakers (30%), travelling (20%) and courses (20%) as the most facilitative factors that helped them improve their speaking in English.

Table 2 Questionnaire results

| Participant | Questionnaire item | | | | | | |
|-------------|--------------------|-------------|-----|-----|---------------|---------------|---------------------|
| | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 |
| A | 5 | School | 4 | 3 | Grammar | Vocabulary | Work |
| B | 5 | School | 2 | 2 | Vocabulary | Pronunciation | Travelling |
| C | 15 | Stay in ESC | 4 | 3 | Vocabulary | Pronunciation | Stay in ESC |
| D | 10 | Courses | 2 | 2 | Vocabulary | Grammar | Talking to other ES |
| E | 8 | Courses | 4 | 4 | Vocabulary | Pronunciation | Talking to other ES |
| F | 7 | Self-study | 2 | 1 | Vocabulary | Grammar | Travelling |
| G | 4 | Stay in ESC | 3 | 3 | Fluency | Vocabulary | Talking to other ES |
| H | 6 | School | 1 | 1 | Vocabulary | Grammar | School |
| I | 4 | Courses | 2 | 1 | Vocabulary | Pronunciation | Courses |
| J | 10 | Courses | 2 | 3 | Pronunciation | Grammar | Courses |
| Mean | 7.4 | - | 2.6 | 2.4 | - | - | - |

4.2 Speaking Test

Table 3 Speaking test results

| Participant | Grammar | Vocabulary | Pronunciation | Fluency | TOTAL |
|-------------|------------|------------|---------------|------------|-------------|
| A | 4 | 4 | 3 | 4 | 15 |
| B | 3 | 4 | 2 | 3 | 12 |
| C | 4 | 4 | 4 | 3 | 15 |
| D | 2 | 3 | 3 | 2 | 10 |
| E | 4 | 4 | 4 | 4 | 16 |
| F | 2 | 2 | 3 | 3 | 10 |
| G | 4 | 5 | 4 | 4 | 17 |
| H | 2 | 3 | 3 | 3 | 11 |
| I | 3 | 4 | 3 | 4 | 14 |
| J | 4 | 5 | 3 | 3 | 15 |
| Mean | 3.2 | 3.8 | 3.2 | 3.3 | 13.5 |

According to the speaking test results, the average total score of the participants was 13.5 with the highest score 17 and the lowest score 10. The highest partial score was in the sub-component Vocabulary (3.8) and the lowest score (3.2) in the sub-components Grammar and Pronunciation. However, the average score was quite similar in all sub-components.

4.2.1 Comparing Participants with and without a University Degree

Table 4 Speaking test results – participants with a university degree

| Participant | Grammar | Vocabulary | Pronunciation | Fluency | TOTAL |
|-------------|------------|------------|---------------|------------|-----------|
| B | 3 | 4 | 2 | 3 | 12 |
| C | 4 | 4 | 4 | 3 | 15 |
| E | 4 | 4 | 4 | 4 | 16 |
| G | 4 | 5 | 4 | 4 | 17 |
| J | 4 | 5 | 3 | 3 | 15 |
| Mean | 3.8 | 4.4 | 3.4 | 3.4 | 15 |

Participants B, C, E, G, and J have a university degree. Based on the speaking test results, the average total score of the participants was 15. The highest score was 17 and the lowest 12. Concerning the sub-component with the highest partial score, Vocabulary reached 4.4. The lowest score (3.4) was in the sub-components Pronunciation and Fluency.

Table 5 Speaking test results – participants without a university degree

| Participant | Grammar | Vocabulary | Pronunciation | Fluency | TOTAL |
|-------------|------------|------------|---------------|------------|-------------|
| A | 4 | 4 | 3 | 4 | 15 |
| D | 2 | 3 | 3 | 2 | 10 |
| F | 2 | 2 | 3 | 3 | 10 |
| H | 2 | 3 | 3 | 3 | 11 |
| I | 3 | 4 | 3 | 4 | 14 |
| Mean | 3.2 | 3.8 | 3.2 | 3.3 | 13.5 |

Participants A, D, F, H, and I have no university degree. According to the speaking test results, the average total score is 13.5. The highest score was 15 and lowest was 10. The highest partial score was in the sub-component Vocabulary (3.8). The lowest score was in the sub-components Grammar and Pronunciation.

Comparing participants with a university degree and without a university degree, according to the speaking test results, participants with a university degree reached the average total higher score (15) than participants without a university degree (13.5).

4.2.2 Grammar

The most common mistake that participants made was in word order. As it was mentioned before in the theoretical part, the native language influences the word order. The Czech language and the English language have different structures of word order, which could influence the respondents in their speaking ability.

The grammar section has the mean 3.2. It means, the overall participants level of grammar is slightly above the average. Five out of the total ten participants, concretely participants A, C, E, G, and J gained 4 points. These participant's grammar has generally accurate grammatical structures, structures of a word, and word order. Occasional errors appeared. Only one of these respondents found grammar as the strength in the English speaking competence.

Two participants B and I gained 3 points. This means there were frequent errors of grammatical structures, structures of words, and word order which occasionally obscure meaning. Three out of the total ten participants – D, F, and H gained 2 points. According to the test, virtually incorrect grammatical structures, structure, and combination of words appeared. All of these three participants selected grammar as the weakness in their English

speaking competence. The participants' selections signify that these participants are aware of their poor grammar, and maybe they are willing to improve it.

Concerning participants with a university degree – B, C, E, G, J, four of them gained 4 points, and one of them gained 3 points. On the other hand, participants without a university degree – A, D, F, H, I, just one of them gained 4 points, one of them gained 3, and three of them gained just 2 points. Based on this evaluation, respondents with a university degree had higher average score (3.8) at the sub-component Grammar than participants without a university degree (3.2).

4.2.3 Vocabulary

Some of the participants have a problem with vocabulary usage to form accurate parts of speech. They used, for example, an adjective instead of a noun.

However, this category is the most successful one with the total mean of 3.8 points. Out of the total ten participants, two participants – G and J, gained 5 points. The participants recognize, define, and produce words appropriately throughout their oral production. Interestingly, the participant G picked the usage of vocabulary as the weakness in his English speaking competence. Both these participants underestimated their abilities. Nonetheless, these two participants were also quite successful in the previous category of grammar, where these participants got 4 points.

Four points got 5 of the participants – A, B, C, E, and I. Problems with minor words recognition, definition, and production problems occurred. Usage of the vocabulary was generally appropriate. Three of them found the usage of vocabulary as their strength in English speaking competence, so they are aware of their abilities in this section.

Two participants – D and H, gained 3 points in this category. It means words recognition, definition, and production were quite often inaccurate. Occasional correct words appeared. These two participants selected the usage of vocabulary as their strength in English speaking competence. Even the number of points they gained is the average, they would probably expect better results.

The participant F gained 2 points; based on the test results, recognition, definition, and production errors that make conversation virtually incomprehensible were observed. The participants overestimated his usage of vocabulary by selecting it as the strength in the English speaking competence. Same as two participants who gained three points, they gained the lowest number of points which was 2 points, in the previous category of grammar.

Regarding the participants with a university degree, two of these participants gained 5 points, and three of them gained 4 points. None of the participants without a university degree gained 5 points. Two of them gained 4 points, the other two participants gained 3 points, and one of the participants gained 2 points. Participants with a university degree gained a total higher score (4.4) than those without a university degree (3.8).

4.2.4 Pronunciation

As it was said in the theoretical part of this thesis, comparing the Czech and the English language, these two languages have totally different intonation and rhythm. In the Czech language, there is no schwa as it is in English. Based on the monologues, 60% of respondents pronounced words which should contain schwa without it. The pronunciation problems may be affected by the age at what respondents started to learn English. Respondents probably started to learn English much later than children start to learn English nowadays. Because during the communist regime, when these respondents studied, English was not a supported language (Najvar, 2010). Nevertheless, this category obtained the same total average number of points as grammar (3.2 points).

Three of the participants gained 4 points – C, E, G. Their English speaking competence can be characterized as speaking competence with occasional pronunciation, intonation, and stress errors but generally well comprehensible. Two of these participants underestimated themselves and elected pronunciation as their weakness in the English speaking competence.

Six out of the total ten participants – A, D, F, H, I, J, gained 3 points in this category. All these participants have English speaking competence with frequent pronunciation, intonation, and stress errors. Sometimes it is difficult to understand what they are saying. One of these participants picked pronunciation as the weakness and once elected pronunciation as the strength in the English spoken competence. Participant B gained only 2 points in this category. This participant's pronunciation, intonation, and stress problems make speech virtually unintelligible. This participant also picked pronunciation as the weakness in the English speaking competence.

With regard to the participants with a university degree, three of them gained 4 points, one of them gained three points, and one gained 2 points. Each of the participants without a university degree gained 3 points. Consequently, participants with a university degree had the total higher score (3.4) in the sub-component Pronunciation than participants without a university degree (3.2).

4.2.5 Fluency

The category of fluency obtained a mean of 3.3 points. Concerning fluency, four out of the ten participants obtained 4 points. These were participants A, E, G, and I. Participants' speech speed, pauses, rhythm, and sentence length are affected by slight errors. Only one of these, participant G chose fluency as the strength is the English speaking competence.

Five participants gained 3 points in this category – B, C, F, H, and J. Their often errors affect speech speed, pauses, rhythm, and sentence length. The participant D gained only 2 points in this category. There were long pauses in the participant's speed, unfinished utterances, and fragmentary speech that make communication almost impossible.

Concerning participants with a university degree, two of them gained 4 points, and three of these participants gained 3 points. About participants without a university degree, two of them gained 4 points, the other two of these participants gained 3 points, and one participant gained 2 points. Participants with a university degree had the total higher average score (3.4) in the sub-component Fluency than participants without a university degree (3.3).

4.3 Correlation between the Questionnaire and Test Results

The correlations between the quantitative results obtained by the speaking test and the questionnaire: the length of learning English (Table 4), the frequency of speaking English (Table 5) and the self-assessment of one's English speaking competence (Table 6) were submitted to a correlation analysis using Spearman's Rank Correlation Coefficients (R) where:

$0 \leq |R| < 0.3$ – insignificant correlation,

$0.3 \leq |R| < 0.5$ – weak correlation,

$0.5 \leq |R| < 0.7$ – moderate correlation,

$0.7 \leq |R| < 0.9$ – strong correlation,

$|R| \geq 0.9$ – very strong correlation.

Table 6 The correlation between the speaking competence and the length of learning

| Participant | Grammar | Vocabulary | Pronunciation | Fluency | TOTAL | Length |
|-------------|---------|------------|---------------|----------------|---------|--------|
| A | 4 | 4 | 3 | 4 | 15 | 5 |
| B | 3 | 4 | 2 | 3 | 12 | 5 |
| C | 4 | 4 | 4 | 3 | 15 | 15 |
| D | 2 | 3 | 3 | 2 | 10 | 10 |
| E | 4 | 4 | 4 | 4 | 16 | 8 |
| F | 2 | 2 | 3 | 3 | 10 | 7 |
| G | 4 | 5 | 4 | 4 | 17 | 4 |
| H | 2 | 3 | 3 | 3 | 11 | 6 |
| I | 3 | 4 | 3 | 4 | 14 | 4 |
| J | 4 | 5 | 3 | 3 | 15 | 10 |
| R | 0.1463 | -0.0418 | 0.3645 | -0.5313 | -0.0126 | - |

Table 7 The correlation between the speaking competence and the frequency of speaking

| Participant | Grammar | Vocabulary | Pronunciation | Fluency | TOTAL | Frequency |
|-------------|---------------|---------------|---------------|---------------|---------------|-----------|
| A | 4 | 4 | 3 | 4 | 15 | 4 |
| B | 3 | 4 | 2 | 3 | 12 | 2 |
| C | 4 | 4 | 4 | 3 | 15 | 4 |
| D | 2 | 3 | 3 | 2 | 10 | 2 |
| E | 4 | 4 | 4 | 4 | 16 | 4 |
| F | 2 | 2 | 3 | 3 | 10 | 2 |
| G | 4 | 5 | 4 | 4 | 17 | 3 |
| H | 2 | 3 | 3 | 3 | 11 | 1 |
| I | 3 | 4 | 3 | 4 | 14 | 2 |
| J | 4 | 5 | 3 | 3 | 15 | 2 |
| R | 0.7649 | 0.3599 | 0.6210 | 0.4901 | 0.6892 | - |

Table 8 The correlation between the speaking competence and the self-evaluation

| Participant | Grammar | Vocabulary | Pronunciation | Fluency | TOTAL | Self-evaluation |
|-------------|---------------|---------------|---------------|---------------|---------------|-----------------|
| A | 4 | 4 | 3 | 4 | 15 | 3 |
| B | 3 | 4 | 2 | 3 | 12 | 2 |
| C | 4 | 4 | 4 | 3 | 15 | 3 |
| D | 2 | 3 | 3 | 2 | 10 | 2 |
| E | 4 | 4 | 4 | 4 | 16 | 4 |
| F | 2 | 2 | 3 | 3 | 10 | 1 |
| G | 4 | 5 | 4 | 4 | 17 | 3 |
| H | 2 | 3 | 3 | 3 | 11 | 1 |
| I | 3 | 4 | 3 | 4 | 14 | 1 |
| J | 4 | 5 | 3 | 3 | 15 | 3 |
| R | 0.8446 | 0.6392 | 0.5639 | 0.3263 | 0.7611 | - |

The length of learning did not significantly correlate with English speaking competence of the participants. Only two of its sub-components – pronunciation and fluency, revealed a weak correlation with the length of learning.

There was detected a significant correlation between the frequency of communication in English and speaking competence as well as with all the sub-components where grammar appeared to be the most strongly correlating sub-component.

Statistically significant positive correlation was detected between the self-evaluation and the total speaking test results as well as all the sub-components scores, which means that the participants evaluated their speaking competence realistically and their assessment was dominantly based on the level of their grammar.

CONCLUSION

The aim of the bachelor thesis was to figure out the English speaking competence of Czech native speakers, age group 41-50, based on four categories – grammar, usage of vocabulary, pronunciation, and fluency. Three hypotheses were formulated.

The hypothesis 1: There is a significant correlation between the length of learning speaking test assessment and the length of learning English was rejected. It was found that there is no significant correlation between these two. On the other hand, concerning hypothesis 2: There is a significant correlation between the speaking test assessment and the frequency of speaking in English., the analysis showed there is a significant correlation between the speaking test assessment and the frequency of speaking in English as well as with all the sub-components where grammar appeared to be the most strongly correlating sub-component. Lastly, hypothesis 3: There is a significant correlation between the speaking test assessment and the self-evaluation of speaking competence was proved. There is a significant correlation between the speaking test assessment and the self-evaluation of speaking competence. To set up, two of three Hypothesis were proved as correct.

To answer the question 1: What are the self-perceived strengths and weaknesses of participants' speaking competence?, most of the respondents (70%) perceive vocabulary usage as their strength. With regard to weaknesses, an equal number of participants (40%) consider grammar and pronunciation as their weakest points in speaking English.

Responding the question 2: What are the facilitative factors of participants' speaking competence?, the most common facilitative factors among the participants were talking to other English speakers, language courses, and travelling.

Additionally, the participants were divided into two groups – with a university degree and without a university degree, and their test results were compared. It was found out the participants with a university obtained better results from all sub-components.

In conclusion, it can be said that the competence among Czech native speakers, age group 41-50, is quite strong, even though the age group was influenced by the communist regime in the Czech Republic during which English was not a supported language. The most successful category out of four was vocabulary. However, most of the participants use the English language in communication only a few times a year. None of the participants speak English every day.

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

ESC English speaking country

ES English speakers

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