

**M A S A R Y K
U N I V E R S I T Y**

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Importance attributed to English teachers' pronunciation

Master's thesis

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Abstract

The present diploma thesis addresses pronunciation and its role in teaching English at the lower-secondary level of elementary school. The theoretical part provides insight into pronunciation issues from both phonetic and phonological perspectives. It also compares the English and Czech sound systems and highlights common errors made by Czech speakers. Additionally, the theoretical section discusses the evolution of the importance attributed to pronunciation in English language classes and state-of-the-art trends in pronunciation teaching methods. The research part examines the role pronunciation plays at a specific lower-secondary school. Information was obtained through a process of triangulation: semi-structured interviews, analysis of recordings, and specific documents analysis were conducted.

Key words

pronunciation, Czech, English, teaching, methods, errors, pupils' pronunciation, lower-secondary school

Anotace

Tato práce se zabývá výslovností a její úlohou ve výuce angličtiny na druhém stupni základní školy. Teoretická část nabízí vhled do problematiky výslovnosti, jak z pohledu fonetiky, tak z pohledu fonologie. Zároveň porovnává anglický a český systém hlásek a upozorňuje na časté chyby českých mluvčích. V neposlední řadě pak teoretická část zmiňuje vývoj důležitosti, která byla výslovnosti přikládána v hodinách anglického jazyka a doplňuje také aktuální moderní trendy v metodách výuky výslovnosti. Praktická část pak zkoumá, jakou roli hraje výslovnost na konkrétní základní škole. Informace byly získány pomocí metody triangulace: proběhly rozhovory, analýza nahrávek a analýza vybraných dokumentů.

Klíčová slova

výslovnost, čeština, angličtina, výuka, metody, chyby, učitelé, učitelky, výslovnost žáků, druhý stupeň základní školy

Declaration

“I hereby declare that I have worked on this thesis independently and the information used in the thesis has been acknowledged in the text and included in the list of references.”

Brno, 20 April 2024

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Bc. Jana Muzikářová

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1 Introduction

Having attended Mrs. Hůlková's courses of phonetics and phonology at Masaryk University sparked my interest in this aspect of language from two points of view, as a student and as a teacher. The foundational principles of pronunciation instilled in us in this courses created an understanding of how to pronounce words correctly and improve my comprehension and pronunciation in English. Understanding the importance of segmental and suprasegmental features of languages made me want to spread this awareness and contribute to improvement of comprehensibility and intelligibility of Czech speakers.

However, facing the reality of Czech school system was quite a shock. Here, I realized that school curricula often emphasize grammar and that there is only little space to focus on pronunciation in ESL (English as a second language) lessons, if any. What is more, I started to be attentive to the fact that explicit pronunciation instructions are not often included in textbooks and school curricula, and in case they are they are often omitted. This observation made me want to investigate this situation in more detail.

The purpose of this paper is to understand how much attention is attributed to pronunciation by teachers at a specific lower-secondary school in Czechia.

In theoretical part, this paper explores the essential features of English phonetics and phonology, both at segmental and at suprasegmental level. Later, the Czech sound system is introduced and subsequently, both systems are compared emphasizing the possible problematic features of English for Czech speakers. Lastly, in theoretical part this paper mentions the evolution of importance of pronunciation throughout the history, followed by modern trends in pronunciation teaching methods.

In the empirical part, this paper tries to find the answer to three research questions: What importance do teachers attribute to teaching pronunciation, what methods are used when teaching pronunciation, and how skilled are pupils at pronunciation? The research was conducted in Czech Republic at a specific lower-secondary school and consisted of three parts: semi-structured interviews, analysis of recordings of pupils' pronunciation, and documents analysis. The main respondents for interviews were three lower secondary teachers and three lower-secondary pupils. In order to contextualize the data, the research sample was supplemented with interviews with the headmistress, primary school teacher and with analysis of recording of primary school pupil's pronunciation.

2 Theoretical part

When it comes to teaching English as a second language (ESL), the focal point often rests on grammar and vocabulary which capture the primary focus of teachers when teaching ESL lessons (Jůzlová, 2007). However, to fully master a language, one must explore all its facets, i.e. grammar, morphology, syntax, semantics, pragmatics, and finally, phonetics and phonology.

Despite the fact, that pronunciation plays a vital role in successful and intelligible communication, Sturm (2018) claims that it does not receive satisfactory attention. This is argued by researches done by Fischer (2022) and Čtvrtečková (2023) who both came to similar conclusion; reviewed Czech teachers positively surpassed researchers' expectations in regard the amount of attention teachers lay on pronunciation in ESL lessons. In the researches, Fischer (2022) highlights the amount of attention teachers lay on linking and vowel reduction, and Čtvrtečková (2023) confirms that intelligibility (to understand and to be understood) is prioritised when teaching pronunciation, however, elimination of foreign-sound-like accent does not seem to be at the forefront of teachers' focus (Levis & Sonsaat, 2019).

According to Celce-Murcia (2001), pronunciation is a language feature that has the power to distinguish between nativelike and non-nativelike speakers. Even though “the focus generally shifted to fluency rather than accuracy” (Celce Murcia, 2001, p. 117), understanding the process of speech sound production, as explored in linguistic field of phonetics, and understanding their functional role in the language system, as explored in linguistic field of phonology, remain essential in the process of mastering the pronunciation (Roach, 2009, p. 8) and the language itself. A description of both fields can be found in the following chapters.

2.1 Phonetics

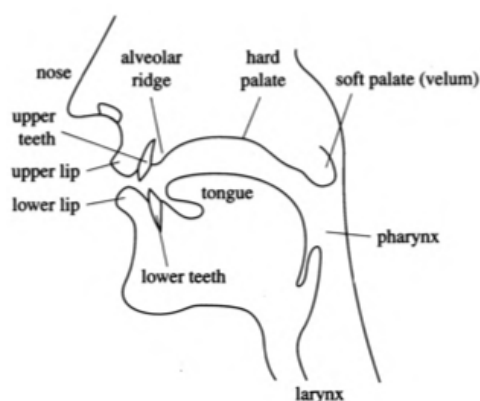
A linguistic field that deals with the physical production of sounds and studies “the way humans make and receive sounds” (Crystal, 2018) is called phonetics. According to Yule (2010, p. 26) phonetics studies sounds – phones, and can be divided into three areas of study:

- Articulatory phonetics (a study of how sounds are articulated)
- Acoustic phonetics (a study that deals with physical properties of speech, e.g. sound waves)
- Auditory phonetics (a study that deals with the perception of sounds)

When exhaling air out of lungs, air flows through larynx and continues to either mouth cavity (the vocal tract which ends with mouth), or nasal cavity (the vocal tract which ends with nostrils) where it may interact with articulators before escaping the human body. The articulatory phonetics deals with this controlled and physical production of sound through the oral equipment (articulators) humans naturally possess. A depiction of the articulators used in sound production can be seen in Figure 1.

Figure 1

Articulators



Based on the way of pronunciation of the sounds, which can be with an obstruction made by an articulator (consonants) or without an obstruction in the airstream (vowels), manner, and place of the pronunciation (see chapter 1.2), phoneticians use an organised depiction of the system of sounds that can be uttered in English language, called International Phonetic Alphabet (IPA), see Figure 2. In the IPA consonant sounds are organised according to the place (horizontally) and the manner of articulation (vertically). Sounds on the left are voiceless, sounds on the right are voiced.

Figure 2

International Phonetic Alphabet - Consonants

	Bilabial	Labiodental	Dental	Alveolar	Postalveolar	Retroflex	Palatal	Velar	Uvular	Pharyngeal	Glottal
Plosive	p b		t d			ʈ ɖ	c ɟ	k ɡ	q ɢ		ʔ
Nasal	m	ɱ	n			ɳ	ɲ	ŋ	ɴ		
Trill	ʙ		r						ʀ		
Tap or Flap		ⱱ	ɾ			ɽ					
Fricative	ɸ β	f v	θ ð	s z	ʃ ʒ	ʂ ʐ	ç ʝ	x ɣ	χ ʁ	ħ ʕ	h ɦ
Lateral fricative			ɬ ɮ								
Approximant		ʋ	ɹ			ɻ	j	ɰ			
Lateral approximant			l			ɭ	ʎ	ʟ			

According to Roach (2009, p. 8), “all the sounds we make when we speak are the result of muscles contracting.” Based on the place where the articulators are involved in the consonant sound production and on the position of vocal folds located in larynx (spread apart = voiceless, drawn together = voiced), Yule (2010) distinguishes:

- Bilabials - both upper and lower lip is involved in the sound production, e.g. [p] and [b]
- Labiodentals – upper teeth and the lower lip interact with each other, e.g. [f] and [v]
- Dentals - sounds are made through an interaction of the tongue tip and upper front teeth, e.g. [θ] and [ð]
- Alveolars – the tip of tongue interacts with the alveolar ridge, e.g. [t] and [d]
- Palatals – the tongue interacts with the hard palate, e.g. [tʃ] and [dʒ]
- Velars – the back of the tongue interacts with the soft palate (velum), e.g. [k] and [g]
- Glottals – no articulators are involved in the sound production, e.g. [h]

Ladefoged and Johnson (2010, p. 12) add two more to the list:

- Retroflex – includes an interaction of a tip of a tongue with the back of the alveolar ridge (many speakers do not use these sounds at all), e.g. in words “ray” and “row”
- Palato-Alveolar – interaction of a tongue blade and the back of the alveolar ridge, e.g. “sea” and “sew”.

Another way of distinguishing the production of the same consonant sounds can be through the process (manner) of their articulation. Here, Yule (2010, p. 31-33) distinguishes seven manners of articulation:

- Stops (plosives) – the stream of air is stopped (blocked) and then let go, e.g. [p] and [b]
- Fricatives – the air is almost stopped, the air is pushed through a narrow gap, e.g. [θ] and [ð]
- Affricates – result of combination of a momentarily blockage of airflow which is followed by a release, e.g. [tʃ] and [dʒ]
- Nasals – the air is stopped in the oral cavity but continues through lowered soft palate and leaves through nasal cavity, e.g. [m] and [n]
- Liquids – “air streams around the sides of the tongue, tip of the tongue touches the middle of the alveolar ridge”, e.g. the initial sounds in led and red [r], [l]

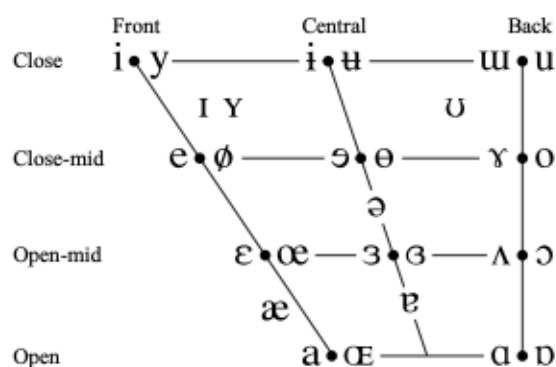
- Glides – uttered sounds are made by a tongue “gliding” from one position to another, e.g. [j] and [w]
- Glottal stops – produced when vocal folds are closed and released, e.g. in expression Oh oh!, they are represented by the symbol [ʔ]
- Flaps – tongue tip taps the alveolar ridge, e.g. symbolised as [D] or [ɾ]

To visualize the previously mentioned characterization of the English consonant sound production, see Figure 2.

Since consonants are not the only sounds that can be uttered in English language, vowels must not be omitted. As previously mentioned, vowels are produced when there is no contact between the articulators and the airstream exhaled from the lungs (Ladefoged & Johnson, 2010). However, an important role in their production plays the position and shape of the tongue and lips. To understand how the vowels differ from each other, phoneticians use Cardinal Vowel Diagram, where vowels can be described as close to open (based on the height of the tongue) and front to back (based on what part of tongue is raised). The position of the lips classifies the vowels as either rounded, or unrounded (Ladefoged & Johnson, 2010).

Figure 3

International Phonetic Alphabet – Vowels



General way of transcribing the phonetic form of sounds is by enclosing them within square brackets, i.e. [].

Having described the field of phonetics and its elementary terminology, let us move to the linguistic field of phonology.

2.2 Phonology

Phonology is a linguistic field whose primary focus does not lay on the production of sounds (as does in phonetics), but on the function of those sounds. In terminology of phonology, these sounds are referred to as phonemes, which themselves are abstract units. “The complete set of these units is called the phonemic system of the language” (Roach, 2009, p. 32). Čejka (1965, p. 34) claims that phonemes can be defined as “a set of sound properties, encompassing both articulatory (pronunciation) and auditory (listening) characteristics, sufficient for a language user to distinguish a certain sound from all other sounds based on this set of properties as a distinct and unmistakable unit aiding in distinguishing word meanings.” In other words, phonemes have distinctive function in the language system (Kovářová, 2017).

In contrast to phonetics, where phones are transcribed within square brackets [], in phonology, phonemes are enclosed within slashes / /. Same as in the field of phonetics, a chart that describes the system of phonemes present in English language is broadly used. In this case, it is called Phonemic Chart (Figure 4). It comprises of forty-four phonemes of British English Received Pronunciation (RP). These phonemes are divided into several categories: vowels, consonants, monophthongs (phonemes made of one sound), diphthongs (phonemes made of a combination of two sounds). Vowels are typically voiced, consonants are either voiced, or unvoiced. Out of these forty-four phonemes, one stands out. One of the most common sounds in British English is a phoneme called schwa / ə /, which is never voiced (stressed) and is frequently one of the sounds combined in diphthongs, as well.

Figure 4

Phonemic Chart

ɪ	I	ʊ	u:	Iə	eɪ	ɔ:	ʌ
e	ə	ɜ:	ɔ:	ʊə	ɔɪ	əʊ	
æ	ʌ	ɑ:	ɒ	eə	aɪ	aʊ	
p	b	t	d	tʃ	dʒ	k	g
f	v	θ	ð	s	z	ʃ	ʒ
m	n	ŋ	h	l	r	w	j

Phonemes are not the only features of language phonology deals with. There are two branches of phonology recognised: segmental and suprasegmental. While segmental deals with segments – phonemes, mentioned in the previous lines, suprasegmental phonology deals with bigger segments of the language. Even though “there has never been full agreement about how many suprasegmental features are to be found in speech” (Roach, 2002, p. 75), stress, rhythm, and intonation are the most mentioned ones.

Concerning stress, two types are distinguished: word stress and sentence stress (Wulandari, n.d.). When words or elements are stressed, they become prominent and are usually uttered louder and longer (Roach, 1991). However, Lehiste (1970) argues that this is not the case in languages such as Hungarian or Serbo-Croatian.

Celce-Murcia (2001) states that in uttered sentences each statement (thought) contains one crucial element which is emphasized. Usually, the emphasized element contains a new information, information that contrasts with the previous information, or the most important item in the statement. To better understand the importance and influence of stress in a sentence, see the following example Celce-Murcia (2011, p. 119-120) mentions in the paper. In the example, each question shapes the context and each time a different element is emphasized (stressed):

	I am reading.
What are you doing?	I am reading .
Who’s reading?	I am reading.
Why aren’t you reading?	I am reading.

In word stress, Roach (1991, p. 87) recognizes two types of stress: primary, marked as ['], and secondary, marked as [,]. There is also a third type of stress called “unstressed” which carries no recognisable amount of prominence in a word. One of the features of stress is its distinctive function in a language. English, as an accent timed language, in contrast to Czech, which is a syllable timed language (Palková, 1994, p. 159), can “distinguish meaning based on the position of stress within a word” (Kovářová, 2017, p. 38) as seen in an example below:

Table 1

Stress in two-syllable nouns and verbs

Noun	Stress	Verb	Stress
object	● •	object	• ●
project	● •	project	• ●
contrast	● •	contrast	• ●

This phenomenon usually occurs with two-syllable nouns and verbs. Most two-syllable nouns carry the stress on the first syllable, while most two-syllable words carry it on the second syllable (Hůlková, n.d.).

Another mentioned suprasegmental feature is intonation. In some languages, through a specific change of intonation (tone) of some words or parts of words, the meaning of words can be changed (Roach, 1991). Even though English is not part of these so-called tone languages, it still uses “intonation to communicate the meaning” (Ashby & Maidment, 2005, p. 165).

As Roach (2009, p. 146) says, without an intonation, “all syllables would be said on the same level of pitch, with no pauses, and no changes in speed or loudness.” Through intonation, much can be expressed, and the process of interpreting spoken communication becomes easier (p. 146). Beside others, according to Roach (2009, p. 146), intonation has four elementary functions:

- Attitudinal function (allows expressing emotions)
- Accentual function (marks important words)
- Grammatical function (aids understanding grammar and structure)
- Discourse function (indicates new information, contrast, expected responses)

Intonation manifests through alterations in pitch. Both Roach (1991) and Halliday (1967) distinguish five types of intonation, however, they differ in the used terminology. Both lists of types of intonation they mention can be seen in the following figure.

Figure 5

Types of intonation according to Roach (left) and Halliday (right)

- | | |
|--------------|-------------------------------|
| 1. fall | 1. \ falling |
| 2. rise | 2. { / rising |
| 3. fall-rise | 3. { \ / falling-rising |
| 4. rise-fall | 3. — rising |
| 5. level | 4. ^ (rising-)falling-rising |
| | 5. v (falling-)rising-falling |

While intonation helps carry a meaning, associating a specific intonation with a specific emotion can be treacherous. Intonation is one element among many that helps communicate attitude (beside word choice, grammar, gestures, body languages etc.) (Celce-Murcia, 2001).

Finally, another inseparable part of spoken English is rhythm. The rhythm in speech is established through alternating longer (stressed) and shorter (unstressed) syllables (Celce-Murcia, 2001). This constant alteration helps to divide the speech into more or less equally smaller units called feet, “each of which begins with a stressed syllable” (Roach, 2002, p. 67). As the stressed syllables occur longer (Roach, 2002) and on regular intervals (Celce-Murcia, 2001), English belongs to group of stress-timed languages, whereas languages such as Japanese and French belong to group of syllable-time languages, where the length of stressed syllable is more or less the same as the length of the unstressed syllable (Roach, 2002).

In English, not all words tend to carry a rhythmic stress. Generally, it is borne by content words (words that carry a meaning), such as nouns, adjectives, verbs, and adverbs. Words that usually do not bear the rhythmic stress are the grammatical (function) words, such as articles, pronouns, prepositions, possessives, auxiliary verbs, conjunctions (Celce-Murcia, 2001), (Ashby & Maidment, 2005).

To sum it up, this chapter dealt with phonology at its segmental and suprasegmental level. The RP phonemes and their division according to various criteria were introduced. From the suprasegmental level, stress, rhythm and intonation were mentioned and specified. In order to understand the differences between English and Czech, the latter sound system will be described in the following lines.

2.3 Czech sound system

Czech language belongs to West Slavic group of languages, alongside Polish and Slovak. More than twelve million speakers speak Czech, homeland as well as abroad (Sussex & Cubberley, 2006). Czechia comprises of two main areas, Bohemia and Moravia; however, four main dialects are recognized by Short (1993) in Comrie and Corbett (1933):

- Bohemian
- Central Moravian
- Lach
- Moravian-Slovak

As Sussex and Cubberley (2006) point out, it is crucial to note, that Czech exhibits significant phonological variations across its national written standard, standard spoken and colloquial forms (*spisovná čeština*, *hovorová čeština*, *obecná čeština*); the more eastward, the greater the difference.

The Czech sound system, as well as the English one, comprises of two main categories: vowels (voiced) and consonants (voiced or unvoiced).

Vowels usually represent the nucleus of the syllable and in their production, there is no obstruction in the airstream (Dokulil et al., 1986). In Czech, all vowels are fully pronounced; there is no reduction in the pronunciation (Palková, 1994). There are two main categories, how vowels can be distinguished (Palková, 1994):

- Monophthongs
 - Long /a/ /e/ /i/ /o/ /u/
 - Short /á/ /é/ /í/ /ó/ /ú/
- Diphthongs /eu/ /au/ /ou/

Further graphic representation of the vowel system can be demonstrated through Hellwag's triangle, which dates back to 1781. In this triangle, which Kovářová (2017, p. 7) describes in introduction to phonetics and phonology course, monophthong vowels are organised in a way that corresponds with placement of the tongue (front, central, back, and high, mid, low) and lips (labialized and delabialized) (Palková, 1994).

Table 2*Hellwag's triangle*

Tongue position	front	central	back
high	i/í		u/ú
mid	e/é		o/ó
low		a/á	
Lips position	delabialized		labialized

In the middle of this triangle (middle central position), the English phoneme schwa /ə/ could be localised, nevertheless, in Czech language, this phoneme does not exist and is not used.

In Czech, as well as in other Slavic languages like Slovak, Slovenian, and South Slavic languages, “length is able to distinguish words, though virtually only in the vowel system” (Sussex & Cubberley, 2006, p. 177). As an example they mention Czech word “dráha” (road) and “drahá” (dear).

In contrast to vowels, consonants are made due to involvement of articulators which make obstruction in the airflow. Czech sound system is similar to the English sound system; however, the latter includes specific sounds (phonemes) e.g. sound schwa, open æ, θ, and ð, which are not present in the former and therefore learners should pay extra attention to the process of their pronunciation. On the other hand, the inventory of Czech sounds includes sounds whose equivalents cannot be found in the English, e.g. /ř/, /tʲ/, /dʲ/, /ň/ (Skaličková, 1979).

Czech comprises of “thirty-one consonants, twenty-four phonemes and seven consonant pairs which are variations of the same phoneme” (Palková, 1994, p. 208). Even though it was mentioned that vowels are the nucleus of a syllable and have the ability to form syllables, such ability possess some consonants, as well, namely /r/, /l/, /m/ and /n/ (krk, vlk, sedm, Newton) (Balkó, n.d.)

Similar to English, Institute for Czech language (Ústav pro jazyk český) (n.d.) categorises consonants in Czech according to:

- Manner of articulation
 - Occlusives /p/ /b/ /t/ /d/ /tʲ/ /dʲ/ /k/ /g/
 - Semi-occlusives /c/ /č/ /z/ /ž/
 - Constrictives /f/ /v/ /s/ /z/ /š/ /ž/ /j/ /ch/ /l/ /r/ /ř/

- Involvement of soft palate /m/ /n/ /ň/

Palková (1994, p. 209) mentions further possible categories according to the sound's:

- Place of articulation
 - Bilabial /p/ /b/ /m/ /ɸ/
 - Labiodental /f/ v/ /ɱ/
 - Prealveolar /t/ /d/ /n/ /s/ /z/ /c/ /ɟ/ /ʃ/ /ʒ/ /tʃ/ /dʒ/
 - Postalveolar /š/ /ž/ /č/ /ǰ/
 - Palatal /tʃ/ /dʒ/ /ɲ/ /j/
 - Velar /k/ /g/ /ŋ/ /x/ /ɣ/
 - Glottal /ʔ/ /h/
- Voicing
 - Voiced (lenis)
 - Unvoiced (fortis)

In Czech, the distinction between voiced and unvoiced sounds is not maintained at the end of words, which contrasts with the situation in English (Skaličková, 1974). The complex graphic depiction of consonant system in Czech made by Dokulil et al. (1986) can be seen in the following table.

Figure 6

Consonants in Czech

Podle způsobu tvoření		Podle místa tvoření										Podle sluchového dojmu					
		retné	reto- zubné	přední		zadní		předo- zadobáshové		zadobáshové				hrtanové			
				-	+	-	+	-	+	-	+						
				-	+	-	+	-	+	-	+			-	+	-	+
				- neznělé, + znělé													
Podle způsobu tvoření	závěrové	ústní	p b			t d			tʰ dʰ	k g			ražené				
		nosní	m			n			ɱ	ŋ							
		hlasivkové									ʔ						
	polozávěrové					c ɟ	č ǰ					polosykavé					
	úžinové	středové				s z	š ž					sykavé					
				f v				j	x ɣ		šumové						
		bokové				l					šumové	třené					
		kmitavé				r					bez šumu						
		hlasivkové				ʀ ʁ					šumové						
			retné	předo- zadobáshové		středobáshové		zadobáshové		hlasiv- kové							
Podle artikulačního orgánu																	

On the suprasegmental level, features of the Czech language are stress, quantity and tone (Sussex and Cubberley, 2006).

Compared to other west Slavic languages, Czech does not have the strongest one; Polish stress is stronger (p. 179). As stated by Sussex and Cubberley (2006, p. 179), Krčmová (2008, p. 171), and Palková (1994, p. 157) we can say that stress in Czech is fixed on the first syllable in a word, however, in more syllable words a secondary stress can be found on penultimate syllable. Even though Czech is considered to be a fixed-stressed language, there can be some exceptions in the stress placement on the first syllable. These deviations can be determined by lexical meaning (mostly in foreign words, e.g. 'literatura meaning a literature) or by clitics (affixes) which are as a rule unstressed (e.g. 'do města meaning to town) (p. 179-181).

Another feature, which has a distinctive function in language, is quantity (length). In Czech, double consonants can appear, however, they are pronounced as one consonant (Sussex & Cubberley, 2006, p. 187), e.g. in name Anna. The length distinctive function of vowels was common in all Indo European and in late Proto-Slavic languages, out of modern Slavic languages, though, only Czech, Slovak, Slovenian, and South Slavic still possess this feature (p. 187) and “only in Czech and Slovak is the length marked in the orthography” (p. 189). The distinctive function of vowel length can be seen in minimal pairs the authors mention on page 187 and 188:

Table 3

Minimal pairs – vowel length

Czech		English	Czech		English
Piǰ.	1 st person singular	I drink.	Piǰǰ.	3 rd person plural	They drink.
Sp̌i!	2 nd person singular	Sleep!	Sp̌ǰ.	3 rd person singular	He/She/It sleeps.

In English, the order of sentence elements can distinguish the function of a sentence (I like apples. vs Do I like apples?) compared to Czech, where the only element of distinction of a sentence function can be an intonation (Přijedou už v pondělí. vs Přijedou už v pondělí?) (Balkó, n.d., p. 86).

This change of pitch (tone) in a sentence can be utilized to express speaker's attitudes such as “agreement, disagreement, refusal, irony, warning” (Balkó, n.d., p. 86). As mentioned by Balkó (n.d., p. 86) five types of intonations are overall used to convey different meanings and functions in speech:

- Fall
- Rise
- Rise-fall
- Fall-rise
- Level

Based on the context, sentences can retain different types of intonations. Balkó (n.d.) and Sochorová (2007) say that declarative sentences, exclamatory sentences, sentences expressing a wish, and questions that seek specific information, ordinary wh-questions usually end with falling intonation (e.g. *Kéž by tady byla!, Je tady. Udělej to! Jak se jmenuješ? etc.*). Rising intonation can be found mainly in yes-no questions or in rhetorical questions (*Máš mě rád?, Může se nad tím někdo zamyslet?*) (Balkó, n.d., p. 108).

Having introduced the basic attributes of segmental and suprasegmental features of both English and Czech, the next chapter will deal with differences between these two languages and will list the most problematic phonemes which are a part of the English inventory sound system, but not Czech's.

2.4 Problematic English features for Czech speakers

In the preceding chapters, this paper has discussed the fundamental characteristics of English and Czech phonemes. Given that English utilizes combinations of manners, places, and articulators for the pronunciation of certain phonemes, which are not present in Czech, it is evident, that learners of English as a second language (ESL) may encounter challenges in accurate pronunciation of these sounds. These challenges can occur at both levels: segmental as well as at suprasegmental level.

At the segmental level, Skarnitzl and Rumlová (2019) conclude, that Czech speakers err especially in pronunciation of vowels open a /æ/, schwa /ə/, dental fricatives /ð/ /θ/, velar n /ŋ/, and /v/, /w/ sounds. Furthermore, they struggle with aspiration, assimilation and stress placement. According to Skaličková (1979, p. 181), Czech speakers err regularly in insufficient reduction of stress in unstressed syllables, pronouncing unvoiced syllables with full voicing and vice versa (p. 183), they also omit aspiration of /p/, /t/, /k/ sounds (p. 184) and pronounce so-called silent letters (e.g. /h/ in hour) (p. 185). In the following paragraphs of this paper, we will focus on some of the problematic features of English listed above. The mentioned problematic features will be divided into two categories: problematic segmental features with its

subcategories vowels and consonants; and problematic suprasegmental features including aspiration, assimilation, and stress placement. A passage will be focused on a list of silent letters which are not pronounced in English. Among other things, a basic description of phoneme formation will be mentioned which can aid to avoid errors in production of previously mentioned phonemes.

2.4.1 Problematic segmental features

Vowels

- **Open /æ/**

According to Šimáčková (2003), the incorrect pronunciation of this sound by Czech speakers is most frequently caused by a substitution with pronunciation of mid to open mid phoneme, /e/. When it comes to distinguishing these two sounds, Czech speakers primarily use the length of vowels and as a result, these two sounds often overlap, i.e. the phrase bad bed would be pronounced as /be:d beð/ (Skarnitzl & Rumlová, 2019).

To correctly articulate this sound, Adrian Underhill highlights in one of his videos provided by Macmillan Education ELT (2015) the importance of correct position of the mouth. The jaw needs to be quite open, and the lips quite spread which helps build a tension. In order to achieve this position, one can commence with the pronunciation of sound /i:/, continue through /e/ and through lowering of the jaw, get to the position for /æ/ sound.

	ɪ	ɪ	ʊ	u:
	e	ə	ɜ:	ɔ:
↓	æ	ʌ	ɑ:	ɒ

When we compare the /e/ and /æ/ sounds, Skaličková (1979) comments that it is crucial to remember that /æ/ is “much more open than Czech /e/” and “cannot occur in final position but can occur in initial or medial position (as in “ant” or “sad”). She also mentions (p. 38-39) that the length of /æ/ may seem shorter before a fortis consonant and longer before lenis consonant.

- **Schwa /ə/**

One of the most prominent sounds in British English is sound schwa with its symbol /ə/. This sound does not have its Czech equivalent and therefore might seem confusing for some ESL learners what subsequently contributes to non-native like speech (Volín et al., 2013). However, articulation of this mid central unstressed vowel is quite uncomplicated, all articulators are neutral, relaxed (Macmillan education ELT, 2015a). To make it more relatable to ESL learners, Underhill (Macmillan education ELT, 2015a) calls this sound a “small idiot” (in contrast to the “big idiot” which is the /ɜ:/ sound, as it might resemble a sound produced in a situation when the speaker is unsure of the answer and says only /ɜ:/). As already mentioned, “unstressed syllables tend to be reduced in English” (Skarnitzl & Rumlová, 2019, p.113), however, Czech speakers frequently pronounce syllables with schwas fully and not only in content words but also in grammar words (p. 113) the “Czech schwas remain still too prominent” As a result, the insufficient vowel reduction takes place in the speech what modifies the rhythmic structure of English (Volín et al., 2013).

Since there is no equivalent in Czech, Czech ESL speakers try to substitute this sound with one familiar to them. Usually, these substitutes are /e/ in words like system, /ɔ/ in words like official or /ʌ/ in words like India. Less frequently, the schwa is substituted by /u/ (e.g. surprise) /ɪ/ (allegations), /ɔ:/ (effort), /oʊ/ (protester), or /eɪ/ (affordable) (Skarnitzl & Rumlová, 2019, p. 121-122).

Consonants

- **Dental fricatives /θ/ and /ð/**

These notorious dental fricatives may be difficult to articulate for speakers whose language sound inventory does not include them, with Czech being one of them. Even though Jenkins (2000) claims that incorrect pronunciation or substitution of these two sounds by other sounds like /t/, /d/, /f/ or /v/ does not cause phonological unintelligibility, /ð/ still remains “the sixth most frequent phoneme in connected speech” (Skarnitzl & Rumlová, 2019 p. 112) and appropriate attention should be paid to these sounds by the English learners. /ð/ sound occurs not only in grammatical words, but also in lexical words (p. 117)

and can be found in “eleven out of one hundred most frequent English words” (p. 112).

Both sounds are pronounced similarly, one being voiced /ð/ and the other unvoiced /θ/. In order to correctly practice the articulation of the sound /θ/, Underhill recommends starting with the sound /f/, where the top teeth touch lower lip and the tongue tip rests at the bottom of the mouth, doing nothing. Saying this sound /f/, the tongue tip can now replace the lip as it is brought forward. This change of position of the tip tongue results in articulation of phoneme /θ/ (Macmillan education ELT, 2015c).

P	b	t	d
f	v	θ	ð
m	n	ŋ	h

From this step forward, the articulation of sound /ð/ becomes quite simple, only voicing is added. According to the research made by Skarnitzl and Rumlová (2019), both sounds tend to be replaced by other sounds. Out of ten Czech speakers, only three of them correctly articulated /θ/ in all cases. Three speakers articulated this phoneme correctly only in less than 25% of the items. In other cases, it was replaced by /t/, /s/, /f/, /ð/, [ts] and [th]. “The voiced dental fricative /ð/ was pronounced as /ð/ in 33% cases and substituted by the plosive /d/ in 58% cases” (Skarnitzl & Rumlová, 2019, p. 117). In other cases, it was replaced by /t/, /s/ and /θ/ (p. 118).

- **Velar nasal /ŋ/**

“This velar nasal sound /ŋ/ functions as an allophonic variant of /n/ in Czech” (Skarnitzl and Rumlová, 2019, p. 120) and it usually appears before velar consonants /k/ and /g/ (Volín & Skarnitzl, 2018).

This sound can cause trouble to ESL learners due to the place of its articulation which is the same as that of /k/ and /g/ (Roach, 2009), however, its pronunciation “is not more difficult than production of /m/ or /n/” (Roach, 2009, p. 48). Despite its quite simple production, in Skarnitzl and Rumlová’s research (2019), this sound was mispronounced in nearly 75% of the cases, especially in -ing

morphemes at the end of present progressive forms of verbs, substituted with alveolar [n].

It can frequently be found in medial or final positions but /ŋ/ never occurs in initial position of a word (Roach, 2009, p. 46), which contrasts with Czech /ŋ/ that can be found only in medial position before /k/ and /g/ (Skaličková, 1979). Roach (2009, p. 47) says that the velar nasal sound can be found in words ending orthographically with -ng where words always end with /ŋ/ and are never followed by a /g/ (e.g. bang = /bæŋ/) “if it occurs at the end of a morpheme (column B); if it occurs in the middle of a morpheme it has a following g (column A)” (p. 47). To understand better, Roach (2009, p. 47) presents the following figure:

A	B
'finger' fɪŋgə	'singer' sɪŋə
'anger' æŋgə	'hanger' hæŋə

- **/v/ and /w/ sounds**

Phoneme /w/ is known as a labiovelar approximant. Typical for approximants is that “the articulators approach each other but do not get sufficiently close to each other to produce a “complete” consonant such as a plosive, nasal or fricative” (Roach, 2009, p. 49). In contrast to /v/, /w/ does not have its equivalent in Czech (Skaličková, 1979, p. 113) and subsequently, Roach (2009, p. 51) warns against pronouncing it as a fricative or affricate which would be considered inaccurate. Interesting about this phoneme is that from phonetical point of view, it is like vowel but phonologically it is like consonant, “but despite this vowel-like character we use it like consonant” (Roach, 2009, p. 50). This semivowel can be found in initial or medial position in words (Skaličková, 1979, p. 114).

The labiodental fricative /v/ is produced via contact of the lower lip and the upper teeth. Despite its name, the fricative noise is scarcely audible in its production (Roach, 2009, p. 40). Roach says (p. 42), it can be found in initial, medial, and final position which contrasts with the Czech /v/ that can be found only in initial and medial one (Skaličková, 1979, p. 117). Concerning its articulation, Skaličková (p. 117) says there are not any significant differences. Despite the forty-years-gap difference in which these authors published their

findings, Skarnitzl and Rumlová (2019, p. 118-119) came to the same conclusion after carrying out a research, where both /w/ and /v/ articulated by Czech speakers were pronounced without any significant errors in more than 70% of the cases.

Silent letters

Even though Czech also includes letters in its inventory which are present in the spelling and simultaneously can be omitted in pronunciation in certain circumstances, e.g. letter j in conjugation of verb to be: byl jsem [byl sem] (Ústav pro jazyk český (Akademie věd ČR), n.d.-b), this feature is typical for English language. In its inventory, there are ample words with letters in their spelling that are ignored and not pronounced due to the evolution of English and its form throughout the centuries, and via the influence of other languages like Latin or French (Newton, 2020). In some cases, the spelling of words has remained consistent over the centuries, serving as a reminder of how words were once pronounced, however, pronunciation has since evolved (Newton, 2020). Carney (2012) says that letters present in spelling but reduced in speech can be any letters except j, q, v, and y. In the following lines, Newton (2020) and Mahapatra (2017) explain in what circumstances some of the most common silent letters usually occur:

Silent vowels

- **Silent E** can be found at the end of words, e.g. have, hope, site.

Silent consonants

- **Silent B** occurs after m, and before t, e.g. thumb, tomb, debt.
- **Silent C** usually occurs after consonant s, e.g. muscle, descend, scissors.
- **Silent H** is usually silent after vowels a, e, o, u, consonant r (rhyme) in words with French origin (heir), and after consonant g at the beginning of a syllable (spaghetti).
- **Silent K and G** occur before n, e.g. knight, knee, sign.
- **Silent L** occurs after vowels a, o, and u, e.g. calf, salmon, yolk.
- **Silent N** usually occurs after consonant m, e.g. autumn, column, solemn.

- **Silent P** occurs at the beginning of words followed by a consonant it does not blend with. These words are usually Greek or Latin origin, e.g. pneumonia, psalm, psychology.
- **Silent S** occurs before l, e.g. in word island or in other common words like aisle, patios.
- **Silent T** occurs in common words like castle, fasten, listen.
- **Silent U** usually occurs after consonant g and before a vowel, e.g. guess, guitar, tongue.
- **Silent W** usually occurs in initial position before r, e.g. write, wrist, wrong, or in pronouns who, whose and whom.

2.4.2 Problematic suprasegmental features

Aspiration of /p, t, k/

The linguistic feature of aspiration is not present in the Czech language. Instead, the distinction between voiced and unvoiced consonants is achieved through implementation of phonetic voicing (Skarnitzl et al., 2016, p. 64-69). This differs from English, where aspiration is used to distinguish between voiced (/b/, /d/, /g/) and unvoiced sounds (/p/, /t/, /k/). Gimson (1989) mentions following examples where mispronunciation of aspirated /p/ /t/ or /k/ without aspiration can change the meaning:

p in	b in	t ry	d ry	c rate	g reat
p ark	b ark	t une	d une	c old	g old
p eer	b eer				

In English, aspiration usually accompanies three fortis (voiceless) plosives: /p/, /t/, and /k/, provided they are in the initial position and are not preceded by the letter s. If preceded by s, the aspiration is not present, e.g. speak, skate, steal. Gimson (1967, p. 146) adds that “when /p, t, k/ are followed by /l/, /r/, /w/, /j/ the aspiration is manifested in the devoicing of /l/, /r/, /w/, /j/ e.g. please, pray, try, clean, twice.”

Aspiration (audible plosion, a burst of noise) essentially means that a consonant is pronounced with a significant release of breath that resembles /h/. Roach (2002, p. 7) explains that “this is the result of the vocal folds being widely parted at the time of the articulatory release.” He also adds that some ESL teachers teach their students to practice aspiration through method of blowing out a candle flame with the air exhaled after /p/, /t/ or /k/. This method can help students pay attention to aspiration; however, he also suggests that it may result in exaggerated aspiration (p. 7).

According to Gimson (1989), Slavic and Roman languages speakers are highly likely to make errors in aspiration. The same was concluded by Skarnitzl and Rumlová (2019) who conducted a research in which they focused on correct pronunciation of the previously mentioned aspirated fortis plosives by Czech speakers. In their findings they mention that in 23% of the cases these plosives were aspirated even when a preceding s was present (e.g. street). They also concluded that not all plosives were evenly aspirated; the least aspiration was observed with /p/. Interestingly, Czech speakers were more prone to aspiration at the word's onset (in 53% of the cases). This suggests a tendency towards initial aspiration among speakers of the Czech language. In case the later syllable was stressed, only in 23% of the cases aspiration was present (e.g. impartial).

Even though aspiration may pose a problem to some Czech speakers, Pospíšilová (2011) demonstrates that learning correct aspiration can be achieved within a single semester.

Assimilation

In natural connected speech, there is only a small gap between uttered words, which can result in assimilation (or elision), where the sounds of neighbouring words influence each other, leading to changes in pronunciation (Roach, 2002, p. 16). Two types of assimilation are distinguished: progressive and regressive. In the former, a “sound influences the following sound”, while in the latter “a sound influences one which precedes it” (Roach, 2002, p. 7). In English, both types are common. When conducting a research about Czech speakers’ skills in pronunciation, Skarnitzl and Rumlová’s (2019) focus lay on analyzing regressive assimilation of voicing, as well, which is not “typically treated in much detail in the classic textbooks of English” (Skarnitzl & Šturm, 2016, p.

206). To understand the results of their research we must remember that “Czech is a language where most obstruent clusters undergo regressive voicing assimilation, and all obstruents undergo word-final devoicing” (Dvořák, 2019). Even though some samples needed to be excluded from the inventory of investigated recordings due to speakers’ tendency to separate the words by a pause, Skarnitzl and Rumlová (2019) were still able to analyze a significant portion of the recordings to draw meaningful conclusions from their research. “Approximately 40% of word-final voiceless obstruents, both fricatives and plosives, were assimilated in their voicing when a voiced sound followed (e.g., West Bank pronounced [wezd beŋk])” (p. 121). In their findings they also observed great differences in the amount of assimilated voicing with one speaker assimilating “in over 80% of her items and two speakers not assimilating at all” (p. 121). Poor realization of assimilation can result in noticeable foreign accent (Roach, 2009).

Beside the regressive assimilation of voicing, Roach (2009, p. 111) draws attention to another type of assimilation, one called coalescent assimilation. In this progressive assimilation, “a final t, d and an initial j following often combine to form /dʒ/ and /tʃ/” so instead of not yet /nɒt jət/ we say /nɒtʃət/ and instead of would you /wəd ju/ we say /wudʒu/.

Stress placement

“Numerous pedagogical resources on ESL pronunciation advocate teaching non-native speaker suprasegmentals to improve the intelligibility of their speech” (Hahn, 2004, p. 201), however, there is only little empirical evidence that proves that teaching suprasegmental features is essential (Hahn, 2004).

While Czech word stress carrying the prominence is fixed and placed on the first syllable of the word, English word stress is important in maintaining the rhythm of fluent speech (Weingartová et al., 2014) and in contrast to Czech, “fixed, in the sense that the primary accent always falls on a particular syllable of any given word, but free, in the sense that the primary accent is not tied to any particular point in the chain of syllables constituting a word” (Cruttenden 2014, p. 241).

The variability of primary (●) and secondary (○) word stress (see Chapter 2.2) placement is nicely illustrated in one of exercises in Hůlková's (n.d.) phonetics and phonology coursebook:

Table 4

Variations of primary and secondary word stress placement

after	●●	modification	○●●●
supply	●●	disability	○●●●
afterwards	●●	pronunciation	●○●●
introduce	○●●	confusability	●○●●●
departure	●●●	parapsychology	○●●●●
introduction	○●●●	legitimization	●○●●●
biologist	●●●	inconceivability	○●●●●

The importance of stress placement and its role in the intelligibility was one of the main objectives to Hahn's (2004) research. This research offers evidence that primary stress contributes significantly to the intelligibility of non-native discourse (p. 218) which is also concluded by Jenkins (2002, p. 96) who claims that understanding the placement of primary stress is one of the key features of "mutual intelligibility in interlanguage talk." Surprisingly, there is one more element that plays a great role in successful intelligibility: listener's attitude. Based on a study by Rubin (1992) it can be said that involvement of racial or ethnical prejudice could result in smaller intelligibility: "if listeners merely thought that a person might be from a different language background, they understood less of what was said" (Derwing & Munro, 2009, p. 486).

In general, the rhythm and stress pattern of English can be challenging for ESL learners. Some of the typical ESL speakers' mistakes concerning stress placement include misplacing primary stress and stressing utterances equally, without one prominent stress and a change of pitch and volume (Hahn, 2004, p. 204). This phenomenon was also observed by Skarnitzl and Rumlová (2019, p. 121) in whose conducted study "the lexical stress was misplaced to the first

syllable of the word in about 50% of the cases, regardless of word length,” and what is more, in several cases “stress was also misplaced to another (incorrect) syllable.”

Fortunately, mastering this suprasegmental feature of language can be easily taught and learned. Both Pennington and Ellis (2000) and Dalton and Seidlhofer (1994) proved that when the ESL learners are provided with explicit instructions on primary stress production, improvement is inevitable. According to Derwing, Munro and Wiebe (1998), twenty minutes of instructions per day is enough to see an improvement in comprehension and fluency in speaking.

In this chapter we mentioned some of the most frequent mistakes Czech speakers tend to make as ESL learners according to Skaličková (1979) and Skarnitzl and Rumlová (2019). Despite the significant gap in the years when these studies were conducted and their results were published, all authors agree that the most common errors are in articulation of vowels open a /æ/, schwa /ə/, consonants /θ/, /ð/, /ŋ/, /v/ and /w/. On the suprasegmental level, the errors frequently include insufficient aspiration of /p/, /t/, /k/, incorrect assimilation, and stress placement. Last but not least, we also mentioned the importance of understanding so-called silent letters, which are written in words but not pronounced.

2.5 Teaching and learning pronunciation

One of the crucial elements that directly impacts communication is pronunciation. Clear and accurate pronunciation enhances understanding and ensures effective communication between speakers. It facilitates comprehension, reduces misunderstandings, and enhances the overall quality of interaction, whether in everyday conversations, professional settings, or academic contexts.

Even though the importance of proper pronunciation is commonly known, it “is at the same time virtually absent at lower stages of education” (Lipínska, 2018, p. 97) where the focus frequently lies on teaching and learning grammar and vocabulary instead of implementing practice and understanding of segmental and suprasegmental features of language (Sokyrská, 2023). Zrzavá (2023, p. 27) says that “the majority of teachers assume that pupils will acquire the right pronunciation naturally and therefore do not need any support,” however, the absence of explicit pronunciation instructions can result in fossilization

of incorrect pronunciation and can lead to lowering of intelligibility (understandability) among speakers (Yakut, 2020), therefore presence of explicit instructions is highly recommended as a mere exposure to language is insufficient for most students to acquire correct articulation (Dalton and Siedlhofer, 1994).

The positive impact of explicit pronunciation instructions both in laboratory and classroom settings was proved by ample empirical studies (e.g. Elliott, 1997; Neri et al., 2008; Saito, 2011, Couper, 2006; Derwing et al., 1998; Derwing et al., 2014; Kennedy and Trofimovich, 2010) as well as in a study made by Zhang and Yuan (2020) who observed progress in English pronunciation skills of Chinese students who received explicit pronunciation instruction within eighteen-weeks course. Compared to the control group that did not receive any, in these groups a significant progress in pronunciation was observed.

The contrast between understanding the importance of correct pronunciation and recognizing the limited emphasis placed on it in the ESL classrooms raises the question: why is this the case?

Gordon (2023) mentions some of the most frequent reasons for not implementing explicit pronunciation instructions by ESL teachers who are often non-native English speakers:

- Lack of training in linguistic fields of phonetics and phonology
- Lack of training in pronunciation pedagogy
- Teacher's attitudes towards the importance of pronunciation in ESL lessons
- Lack of confidence with their knowledge of teaching pronunciation
- Concern about teacher's foreign accent
- School context
- Methods and activities implemented in teaching

Cox et al. (2019) add following reasons:

- Low priority given to teaching pronunciation
- Not perceiving pronunciation as a fundamental skill
- Deliberate overlooking of pronunciation in ESL lessons

Both studies (Gordon, 2023) and (Cox et al. 2019) mention the importance of sufficient knowledge in the linguistic field that correlates with the use of metalanguage (terminology) that is essential in giving explicit pronunciation instructions (Gordon, 2023). Should the teachers receive proper training in pronunciation, students can be provided with instructions and

feedback to effectively identify and address their pronunciation difficulties: “learners understand not just that there is a problem with their pronunciation but also precisely where the problem lies” (Couper, 2011, p. 176). According Galante and Piccardo (2022) these problems causing insufficient intelligibility most commonly lie in: mispronunciation of vowels, consonants, vowel length, misplacing syllable or tonic stress, and word stress. Jenkins (2000) adds the negative influence on intelligibility by anxiety and listener’s lack of familiarity with language discourse.

In his work, Gordon (2023) also addresses the debunking of the possible assertion that non-native speakers cannot be as proficient in teaching pronunciation as native speakers. He adds that the ability to teach pronunciation largely depends on the approach and knowledge of the teacher (p. 721). Teachers’ decision to implement explicit pronunciation instructions varies greatly, as some foreign language instructors do not consider pronunciation a fundamental skill. They often rank it as less important compared to other language skills like writing and reading, while “students rated pronunciation as the third most important language skill, behind communication and grammar” (Cox et al., 2019, p. 3).

To improve the situation when teachers feel inadequate to teach pronunciation and to incorporate pronunciation to ESL lessons, Cox et al. (2019, p. 7-8) offer four possible solutions:

1. Teachers need proper training that should be incorporated in teacher-education programs. This step would make the teachers prepared for teaching pronunciation; however, it does not cover the needs of already practicing teachers who are often busy with their lesson plan preparation or bureaucracy related to their work.
2. Teachers who do not feel adequate to teach pronunciation might rely on computer assisted pronunciation teaching (CAPT), where computers and programs “allow students to study pronunciation on their own” and “allow teachers to provide pronunciation lessons beyond their own instructional abilities” (p. 7). Nevertheless, a disadvantage of these programs might be their price.
3. In order to improve in their pronunciation skills, teachers can participate in a quite time-consuming process of watching videos “to become educated in pronunciation techniques” (p. 8) or use the already existing materials.

4. Choosing the optimal or most appropriate videos can be a daunting task for teachers who are not trained in ESL pronunciation instruction and have little time available to hunt for videos online, and so the last, and as Cox et al. (2019) call it – the most workable solution, might be to visit a database of ESL pronunciation videos that “show teachers how to teach pronunciation to students” instead of “focusing on the thousands of online videos for students to learn from” (p. 8). Videos in this database called “English Pronunciation Guide: ESL Teacher’s Guide to Pronunciation Teaching” made by Cox and Henrichsen (2017) have been already previewed by other teachers and should meet the criteria for sufficient explaining of explicit pronunciation instructions.

In the process of teaching and learning language and its pronunciation system, there are two types of participants: teachers and learners. Until now, this chapter mostly focused on teachers’ role in this process. However, Sokyrska (2023) finds it important to mention possible reasons, why the process of learning (and teaching) pronunciation may stagnate from learner’s point of view. According to Sokyrska (2023, p. 123-124), the key factors that negatively influence learner’s progress in learning segmental and suprasegmental features of language are:

- “Native language interference” – the inventory of sound systems of L1 and L2 can differ
- “Lack of exposure” – usually in countries where English is not the native language
- “Limited practice” – seeing improvement requires learner’s proactive attitude
- “The age factor” – learning pronunciation may be more challenging to older learners than to younger ones
- “Phonetic ability” – skills of individuals can vary; however, everyone has ability to acquire language to some extent
- “Attitude and identity” – precise pronunciation can be influenced by identity and affiliation
- “Motivation and concern for good pronunciation” – language learner’s motivation may vary; level of anxiety may also play an important role

- “Lack of feedback” – when learners do not receive proper feedback, they cannot identify areas for improvement
- “Fear of making mistakes” – learners do not consider mistakes as a part of process of improvement, causing a fear of being judged
- “Complex sound system” – specific complex sounds can be difficult to articulate correctly

2.5.1 History of teaching pronunciation

It has been already mentioned for several times that pronunciation is not generally given enough attention in ESL lessons, but it has not always been so. Ketabi and Saeb (2015, p. 182) comment that “pronunciation has constantly changed position as various methods of language teaching have come and gone” The importance “has been either elevated to the highest stature by some methods and approaches, e.g. Audiolingual method, or has been assigned the back seat in the language classroom, as has been the case with Grammar-Translation Method” (p. 182).

In the period between 19th and 20th century, International Phonetic Alphabet was made by linguists which was used in pronunciation training (Ketabi & Saeb, 2015). Quite popular was Direct method in which the learners did not receive any explicit instruction and in which the learner relied exclusively on listening and “imitating the rhythm and sound system of the target language” (p. 182).

In the early 1940s and 1950s, pronunciation remained a priority in the ESL classrooms, with two new methods in the forefront: Audiolingual method and Oral approach. The emphasis of both methods was placed on “pronunciation and to start teaching it explicitly from the very first lesson; accuracy was supported rather than fluency and the target sound system was practiced through pattern drills, mimicry, repetition, and the elimination of aberrant native language influences” (Ketabi & Saeb, 2015, p. 183).

A major turning point occurred in the 1960s and 1970s when the importance of pronunciation diminished. A new method, the cognitive approach, emerged during this period. This method stressed grammar and vocabulary study, urging learners to creatively uncover language's underlying rules (Ketabi & Saeb, 2015). Beside this method, approaches like Total physical response (TPR), Suggestopedia and Natural approach appeared on the scene. Here again, “direct teaching of pronunciation is not supported since it is believed that learners will develop satisfactory pronunciation over time given the right conditions” (Ketabi & Saeb, 2015, p. 183).

1980s brought a fresh new start for pronunciation as teachers showed interest of bringing the pronunciation back into language curriculum, and who also raised awareness of issues of intelligibility and “of the critical role of pronunciation in communication” (Ketabi & Saeb, 2015, p. 184) that lead to emergence of communicative approach.

According to Ketabi and Saeb (2015, p. 184), since 1990s there is an ongoing debate regarding pronunciation, i.e. intelligibility (to understand and to be understood) versus nativeness (mastering the target language). Even though pronunciation has not been regarded the same importance as in the 20th century and in the Audiolingual method, it is slowly getting more and more attention in the 21st century. In the following lines, Sokyrska (2023) lists some of the modern trends in teaching pronunciation.

2.5.2 Trends in pronunciation teaching

Trends in pronunciation teaching are influenced by many factors. First of all, a shift towards implementation of technology is prominent. The advance in technology brings many new possibilities in pronunciation teaching and learning. The presence of social media, apps, movies, series, games in English diminish the lack of exposure to English. Second of all, software with speech recognition an ability to provide an instant feedback on learner’s pronunciation were developed, enabling learners to practice on their own without teacher’s input (Sokyrska, 2023).

A third trend in pronunciation teaching is a shift from grammar-translation method, where words are taught and learned as single units, to communicative activities with the emphasis on more natural conversation: e.g. “role-playing, debates, discussions, project-based learning activities, presentations, podcasts, videos, where students in group use correct pronunciation and intonation” when delivering a message (Sokyrska, 2023, p. 120).

Another trend is “a focus on individual needs” where teachers pay more attention to the fact that “each student has unique pronunciation needs, and they are tailoring their teaching approach accordingly” (p. 120). Thanks to this teachers can customize exercises to address individual pronunciation challenges, facilitating personalized improvement for each student.

The fifth trend that Sokyrska (2023) mentions is the implementing L1 into teaching of L2. Comparing the sounds inventory of both mother tongue and the target language can help find similarities and differences between these two, and so improve learner’s pronunciation.

Finally, a trend of gamification can be observed when teaching pronunciation in ESL lessons. “By incorporating elements of competition, challenge, and reward, teachers can create a more engaging and motivating learning experience for students” (Sokyrská, 2023, p. 121).

As one of the reasons why teachers omit pronunciation in their lessons listed by Gordon (2023) at the beginning of this chapter is the lack of “methods and activities implemented in teaching”, we find it highly useful to mention some that can be used when teaching pronunciation. According to Sokyrská (2023, p. 133) pronunciation practice can be done through: “tongue twisters, minimal pairs exercises, stress and intonation exercises, connected speech exercises, vowel and consonant drills, role-playing exercises, phonemic bingo, memory game.” For teachers seeking support on websites, she mentions resources available on websites: “Pronunciation Power, Speechling, English Central, The British Council, FluentU, ELSA Speak, American English Pronunciation, ESL Pronunciation Lessons, Oxford Online English” (p. 135-136).

The mapping of pronunciation teaching at a specific school in the Czech Republic is presented in the empirical section of this work.

3 Empirical part

3.1 Introduction to the empirical part

Sturm (2018) says that “despite its essential role in oral communication, pronunciation is known, anecdotally and increasingly also empirically, to be allocated the least amount of time and attention in the L2 (second language) classroom” (Sturm, 2018). Since I work as a full-time teacher at a lower secondary school and I get in touch with the everyday routine of teaching, I wanted to map whether the situation can be described as similar to that disclosed by Sturm.

The aim of this thesis is to investigate the problematics of teaching pronunciation at a specific Czech school and to explore what stress and importance is laid upon pronunciation in general. Hannahs (2007, p. 51) points out that pronunciation has been severely overlooked in traditional teaching, which is supported by Olson (2014, p. 51) who claims that “in the traditional language classroom only a few minutes per week are devoted to pronunciation instruction.”

To analyse the situation at the chosen Czech school, a qualitative research methodology was selected, specifically a case study that Hendl (2016, p. 102) defines as “a detailed study of one case or a few cases.” Průcha et al (2013, p. 231) further explain:

In empirical educational research, particularly in qualitative studies, this research method focuses on the analysis of individual cases such as students, small groups of students, teachers, particular classes, or schools. These cases are described and explained in detail, leading to a level of understanding that cannot be achieved by studying the same objects in a larger sample.

In other words, the purpose of the case study is to “catch the complexity of a single case” (Stake, 1995). For this purpose, a design of a descriptive multiple-case study was used in which at least two participants (cases) must be involved (Chrastina et al, 2015). To catch the complexity of this case study, several cases were studied and are described in the following chapters.

3.2 Research aims and questions

Even though “studies of second language teachers’ cognition of pronunciation have increased in the past 10 years” (Gordon, 2023), there has been only a limited focus on researching teachers’ beliefs regarding pronunciation (Baker, 2014). Based on Macdonald’s

research (2002) the teaching of pronunciation might be overlooked by teachers due to their “insufficient knowledge of how to assess student pronunciation” or due to “lack of institutional resources” (Baker, 2014, p. 3). A combination of these two factors can contribute to a total absence of pronunciation in ESL (English as a Second Language) lessons.

The goal of this paper is to find out what importance is laid upon pronunciation in ESL lessons, what is the approach to teaching pronunciation at a particular Czech school and to find out if some of the former factors presented by MacDonald’s (2002) play any role in teaching pronunciation at the specific Czech school. To explore this issue, the following research questions were posed:

- What importance do teachers attribute to teaching pronunciation?
- What methods are used when teaching pronunciation?
- How skilled are pupils at pronunciation?

3.3 Description of the research sample

The school at which the research was realized operates three facilities in one city: the nursery school facility, the primary school, and the lower secondary school. According to the school's latest characteristics from 2017, slightly over 440 students attended this school but as of the current date (2024), this number is approaching 700, out of which 68 are diagnosed with special educational needs, with 15 of them undergoing education according to an individual educational plan developed by the school.

Each of the facilities has its deputy director, and the school also has a School Counselling Centre (ŠPP), consisting of two prevention methodologists, a school psychologist, and an educational counsellor. Classrooms are furnished with modern furniture, but most classrooms (except for specialized ones) lacked ICT technology. The school addressed this issue in 2022 by installing data projectors and speakers in all classrooms. A few classrooms in the lower secondary school (3) were equipped with interactive whiteboards, whereas in the primary school, there are interactive whiteboards in each classroom. The school's educational program is now titled School for Life, aiming to motivate and support active learning towards life-important competencies and to cultivate a student who is confidently capable of expressing opinions, and respecting the views of others. The latest inspection by the Czech school inspection (ČSI) was conducted in 2017.

The research sample in this case study was originally supposed to be represented by three lower secondary pupils (two 8th graders and one 9th grader) and three lower secondary English teachers. However, given that the mentioned sample of teachers and pupils referred multiple times during the interviews to the teaching of pronunciation and the acquisition of pronunciation basics from the first grades of primary school, two primary school teachers were also approached for interviews during the research process, out of which one agreed to conduct the interview. Furthermore, the headmistress of the school was approached as well, with the request to provide insight and describe the formal background of the school from the management's point of view through a semi-structured interview. Finally, a primary school pupil (4th grader) was approached and agreed to participate in the research. In this case, an interview wasn't conducted (due to the low age of the primary school participant). Instead of that, only the recording of pronunciation was requested. Since the pupils are not adults yet, a legal representative of each pupil was asked to provide written consent to participate in the research, which they did. In the following tables, some basic pieces of information about the participants are provided – lower secondary teachers (Table 5), primary school teacher and the headmistress (Table 6), lower secondary pupils (Table 7), and the primary school pupil (Table 8). To preserve the anonymity of the participants, they are given fictitious names.

Table 5

Basic information about lower secondary school teachers

	Eleanor	Emma	Erin
Education	Faculty of Philosophy (Moscow) Faculty of Education (Brno and Olomouc)	Faculty of Philosophy (Olomouc) Teaching Qualification (Kunovice)	Faculty of Philosophy (Ostrava)
Accreditation	Russian Language German Language English Language Civic Education	Theory and History of Dramatic Arts	English and American studies Educational Counselling
Experience	30 years	13 years	15 years
Subjects taught	English	English, Geography,	English
Grades taught	8., 9.,	6., 7., 8., 9.	6., 7., 9.,

Table 6*Basic information about the primary school teacher and the headmistress*

	Emily	Headteacher
Education	Faculty of Education	Faculty of Education
Accreditation	Special School Primary School	Czech Language Civic Education
Experience	25 years	3 years (Headteacher) 12 years (Teacher)

Table 7*Basic information about the lower secondary school pupils*

	Alice	Anthony	Amelia
Grade	9 th grade	8 th grade	8 th grade
Age	14	14	13
Latest Grade Point Average (GPA) In English	1	1	1
Pupils in English Class	21	24	23
English Lessons per Week	4	4	4
Favourite Feature of English	Speaking	Not Specified	Speaking

Table 8*Basic information about the primary school pupil*

	Aaron
Grade	4 th grade
Age	10
Latest Grade Point Average (GPA) In English	1
Pupils in English Class	22
English Lessons per Week	4

3.4 Data gathering instruments

To outline the issue of teaching and learning pronunciation as comprehensively as possible and to provide valid samples of data collection a qualitative method of triangulation was used in the data gathering. The main part of the research is represented by semi-structured interviews, both with the teachers (and headmistress) and with the pupils. The second part of the research concentrates on pupils' pronunciation which was recorded and analysed. The final phase of the research entails gathering specific documents and subsequently conducting their analysis. All methods are closely described in the following chapters. The data collection took place from December 2023 to February 2024. Originally, data collection was intended to be enriched by the direct observation method, where specific phenomena related to pronunciation would be observed and noted in observation sheets, however, this method had to be abandoned due to external factors.

3.4.1 Interviews

The main research method chosen was semi-structured interviews, to comprehend the unique and subjective participants' points of view with the possibility of supplementing and modifying questions during the interviews (instead of structured interviews, where this is not possible). According to Zandlová (2020), semi-structured interviews are preferred for gaining insights that are minimally predefined by the researcher's questions. What is more, interviews are preferred especially when looking for data, that cannot be obtained any other way, e.g. when describing a phenomenon from the participant's perspective, when we are interested in the participant's opinions, experience, attitudes, or when we are curious about participant's perspective and description of a social reality (Zandlová, 2020).

The data collection through the interviews started at the beginning of November when three teachers from the lower secondary school were approached with a request to participate in the research for my diploma thesis. The topic of the thesis and the whole procedure were then explained to them and the dates for the interviews were set. However, the following weeks were full of extra afterschool activities (e.g. organization of the Christmas market, excursion to Vienna), and some of the respondents had to deal with some personal matters, therefore the agreed-upon interview dates were postponed multiple times. In the meantime, respondents from amongst the pupils were sought. Ideally, I wanted to approach one pupil from each teacher's group, which, in the end, was accomplished. Teachers were approached with a request to

recommend a respondent from among the pupils. Since I do not teach in their classes and am not familiar with their pupils, I asked them for a recommendation of a potential respondent who would be willing to conduct the interview. After they told me their suggestions, I approached the pupils, explained my request, described the procedure, and unofficially asked them if they would be willing to participate in my research. They were provided with two days to think about it, after which they all confirmed their interest in participating in the research. Following that, the pupils and their legal representatives were approached via Bakaláři once again, where all important information were provided (topic and procedure of the research, anonymization of the research, etc.) and requested for their written consent, which they all provided. After that, interview dates were set.

To be able to find answers to the main research questions, questions addressing specific areas had to be formulated (the whole sets of questions used in interviews with teachers, pupils, and the headmistress can be found in appendices). The three main areas this research was interested in were the role of pronunciation in ESL lessons, the methods and materials used, and the pupils' perception of pronunciation. Since none of the respondents underwent similar research in the past years, there was a certain level of uncertainty and stress on their side. The first research question was therefore formulated in a way which should provide the respondents with a certain level of comfort, encouraging them to open up and share their thoughts on the discussed phenomenon. To make the younger participants (lower secondary pupils) even more at ease, they were provided the set of questions one day in advance and for the same purpose, the anonymization of the whole interview was repeatedly emphasized. Information about the interviews can be seen in the following table (LST stands for lower secondary teacher, LSP for lower secondary pupil, ET is short for primary teacher and HM represents headmistress). Time is marked in minutes and seconds.

Table 9

Information about interviews

	LST1	LST2	LST3	LSP1	LSP2	LSP3	ET	HM
Date of the Interview	<i>1st Dec 2023</i>	<i>1st Dec 2023</i>	<i>5th Jan 2024</i>	<i>12th Jan 2024</i>	<i>17th Jan 2024</i>	<i>12th Jan 2024</i>	<i>30th Jan 2024</i>	<i>1st Feb 2024</i>
Length of the Interview	<i>27:33</i>	<i>16:57</i>	<i>15:28</i>	<i>12:58</i>	<i>7:49</i>	<i>15:53</i>	<i>18:23</i>	<i>16:05</i>

The interviews were conducted face-to-face in the teachers' (the researcher's or the respondents') room, where the setting was quiet and comfortable, and during or after office hours (some of the students were excused for the time of the interview from music and art lessons with the permission of the deputy headmistress). At the beginning of the interviews, respondents were asked whether they agreed to be recorded on a phone recorder, to which they all gave their permission. Following that, respondents were asked primarily the designed questions, but additional ones arose during the interviews and were asked. The entire contents of the recorded interviews were transcribed via the website oTranscribe. Responses of the respondents (designated as "T" as a teacher, "P" as a pupil, and "H" as a headmistress) and of the researcher (designated as "R" as a researcher,) were precisely marked in these transcriptions. For the most accurate capturing of responses, the transcription includes pauses between responses, intonation of statements, and non-verbal expressions. The next step in data processing involved detailed coding of the transcribed interviews. The importance of objectivity and conciseness during this data-processing step is emphasized by Švaříček and Šed'ová (2014). No program was used for coding; it was done manually in Microsoft Word by marking specific parts of the text (thoughts) and entering notes (codes) alongside the text. After creating the codes, the next step involved grouping the codes into categories and subcategories, aiming to find commonalities, and characteristics, and establishing connections among the codes based on their relationships into the relevant categories." (Muzikářová, 2021).

When describing potential weaknesses of semi-structured interviews, Kakilla (2021) highlights potential data loss due to chosen platforms (e.g. online platforms), language barriers, limited understanding of the topic, or limited responses. To prevent the mentioned weakness of a language barrier, the interviews were conducted in the Czech language, the native language of all respondents. Vaňková (n.d.) complements the potential weaknesses of the semi-structured interviews with the following points:

- "we will not discover things that the informant does not want to tell us
- we will not discover things that the informant is not aware of
- the interview depends on the informant's memory," which might not be reliable

The mentioned potential weakness of a respondent deliberately withholding information from the researcher was observed during one of the interviews with the pupil who (to the understanding of the researcher based on the comments she made) at first did not want to provide information that would negatively depict one of the teachers and their way of

implementing pronunciation into the lessons. Another potential weakness the researchers can come across when conducting an interview, is the possible presence of social desirability bias which Bergen and Labonté (2020) define as “a tendency to present reality to align with what is perceived to be socially acceptable” and also suggest that “the researchers should acknowledge as a reality” (Bergen & Labonté, 2020). To try and avoid this phenomenon, all suggestions made by Bergen and Labonté (2020) were followed: rapport was previously built with all the participants (at least to some extent), participants were tried to put at ease thanks to using humour or making displays of respect, details and procedure of the study were clearly explained to the respondents, and finally, how the data shall be analysed and finally, that all shall remain anonymous.

3.4.2 Recording and analysing pupils’ pronunciation

To be able to find the answer to one of the main research questions (How skilled are students at pronunciation?) pupils were asked to record themselves while reading a short text (lower secondary pupils) and several unrelated sentences (primary pupil). Both types of pupils were also asked to record themselves while reading a list of minimal pairs (lower secondary pupils read 10 pairs, while primary pupils read 7 pairs). The provided texts and list of minimal pairs were focused on some of the most troublesome phonemes which the teachers mentioned in their interviews when asked about challenges their pupils face when it comes to pronunciation, and which might be difficult for Czech pupils to pronounce due to their absence in the Czech language system. The data analysis involved listening to recordings and assessing the pronunciation of specific phonemes in both isolated words and selected words within the text containing the same observed phonemes. The correctness or incorrectness of pronunciation of phonemes was then marked, and the results were compared internally.

3.4.2.1 Lower secondary respondents

The lower secondary pupils were asked to record themselves on a recording device while reading the following short text, which was taken from a handout used in the Phonetics and Phonology course the researcher attended in the spring semester in 2019 at Masaryk University.

“I haven’t got a car of my own, but sometimes I borrow one from a friend and drive to see my brother and sister-in-law, who live about 60 miles from London. I have done the journey in all kinds of weather, but the worst time I ever had was on a very foggy day in the middle of November. When I started to drive, the weather was a bit misty, but I didn’t think it was bad enough to postpone my trip or to go by train, which, although it was possible at that time, wasn’t very convenient.”

The reason this text was chosen is to observe, how pupils are able to pronounce phonemes in the context of other words. The pronunciation of specific (underlined) words was observed which include the same phonemes as the ones that are listed in Table 10: law, journey, very, that, see, bit, possible, who, train, sister, miles, think, from, done, brother, a, sometimes.

To see if their pronunciation skills differ when articulating phonemes in isolation, not in the context of other words, a list of minimal pairs was provided which can be seen in Table 10 where W1 and W2 represent the words of the minimal pair and Ph stands for the specific observed phonemes the pupils were to pronounce.

Table 10

The list of observed minimal pairs (lower secondary pupils)

W1	Four	Ten	Pen	Sheep	Box	Chess	Dice	Thin	Dare	Another
W2	Fur	Turn	Pan	Ship	Books	Chase	Dies	Fin	There	Other
Ph	ɔ: ɜ:	e ɜ:	e æ	i: ɪ	ʊ u	e eɪ	s z	θ f	d ð	ə ʌ

3.4.2.2 Primary school pupil

In the case of the primary school pupil, instead of asking to record himself reading a short text, the pupil was asked to read a set of shorter sentences in which possible troublesome phonemes appeared. These sentences were created based on the vocabulary already learned, with which the fourth grader has come into contact and should, according to the curriculum, be familiar with ¹(numbers up to 20, verb “to have” and “to be” in the 3rd person, basic lesson instructions, adjectives, possessive pronoun “her”, part of the human body, and pets). The recording was made with the help of the legal guardian and analysed, as the recordings of the

¹ This was confirmed right before the recording, when the pupil was asked to point out any words he would not understand. No words were pointed out.

other pupils were. The sentences used for the research can be seen in the following list:

1. Tom has three tall trees.
2. Jane has a happy cat.
3. My little brother is thirteen years old.
4. The friend says „Please, be quiet. “
5. She has got a cheap computer but an expensive dog.
6. That is her mouth and her hair.
7. There is a free mouse.

The reason these sentences were chosen was to find out, whether the pupil has enough theoretical (and practical) knowledge on how to pronounce specific phonemes which the primary teacher identified in the interview as problematic. The observed words in this case were: free, tree, cheap, dog, brother, happy, but, her, hair, mouse, mouth, thirteen.

Just like in the case of the older pupils, the younger pupil recorded words and the pronunciation of phonemes both in a context and in isolated words. The list of the minimal pairs used can be seen in the following table, where W1 and W2 stand for words of the pair and Ph represents the observed phonemes.

Table 11

The list of observed minimal pairs (primary pupil)

W1	free	cheap	day	bat	hair	mouse	three
W2	tree	Jeep	they	but	her	mouth	free
Ph	f t	tʃ dʒ	d ð	æ ʌ	eə ɜ:	s θ	θ f

3.4.3 Gathering documents and their analysis

The structures of ESL lessons are closely related to the materials used in those lessons. To be able to understand the steps the teachers take in their teaching of pronunciation, we must delve into the set of materials that teachers have at their disposal, typically use, and work with. For the purposes of this paper, several types of documents are analysed: firstly, this paper focuses on the books and workbooks teachers and pupils work with. Secondly, the Framework Education Programme for Elementary and Lower Secondary Education (Rámcový vzdělávací program pro základní vzdělávání) and the representation of pronunciation within it is investigated. The information obtained are complemented with insights from the School

Education Program (Školní vzdělávací program)². “Materials for analysis are partly created using graphical screenshots and have been used to complement contextual data” (Muzikářová, 2021).

3.5 Results of the research and interpretation of the data

3.5.1 Documents

3.5.1.1 Framework Education Program and School Education Program

The main goal of analysing the documents in this paper is to create enough contextual data based on which would be possible to understand the representation of pronunciation in the Czech educational system, and at the specific school as a whole. According to the Framework Education Program (2023), Czech schools should focus on teaching key competencies, out of which one is communicative competence. Among other things, according to the description of this competence (p. 11), pupils should, by the end of basic education, be able to express their thoughts “concisely, coherently, and cultured in both written and oral expression” and appropriately “respond and actively engage in discussions.” Pronunciation is mentioned briefly in this document. It says that the pupils should “understand various types of texts and records, visual materials, commonly used gestures, and sounds” (p. 11). When looking further into the document, pronunciation as the auditory and graphic representation of the language is mentioned in the expected outcomes of education both for the primary and the lower secondary levels. Pupils of primary school are expected to passively know symbols of the phonemes used in the English language, understand the ways of pronouncing phonemes, and understand the connection between oral and written forms of words (p. 27), whereas outcomes of education of the lower secondary pupils are a little bit broader: pupils are expected to “sufficiently develop clear pronunciation and the ability to distinguish by ear elements of the phonological system of language, word and sentence stress, intonation, and master spelling of words from acquired vocabulary” (p. 30). Formulation of these educational goals and outcomes allows for sufficient flexibility for modification within the School Educational Program (SEP).

The program of the school on which the research was conducted describes the goals of understanding features of correct pronunciation in bigger detail. First of all, English is taught at this school from the second grade onward, and according to the SEP, by the end of this grade, pupils should be familiar with specific phonemes and be able to articulate them correctly,

² To preserve the anonymity of the school, School Educational Program won't be specifically mentioned in the list of references.

namely phonemes: I³ /aɪ/, W /w/, th /θ/, t /r/, ng /ŋ/, o /ɒ/, r /r/, a /æ/, some of which were investigated in the recorded materials. In the third grade, the SEP mentions only one brief comment on outcomes regarding pronunciation, i.e. “the pupils articulate phonemes correctly” (p. 66). Pronunciation is also taught in the fourth grade, where teachers need to teach “basic phonemic symbols” and practice “pronunciation of phonemes in words” (p. 68). In the fifth grade, the last grade of the elementary level, pupils should be taught “vowels and consonants, phonemic alphabet, pronunciation of schwa, short and long vowels, pronunciation of /r/ and /l/, phonemes /ɒ/ and /əʊ/, rhythm and stress in sentences, phonemes /ʃ/ and /s/, word stress and intonation, and then again vowels, stress, intonation, and syllables” (p. 69-73).

The problematics of pronunciation are incorporated in the lower secondary level as well. The SEP states, that in the 6th grade, pupils should be able to understand the “auditory and graphic representation of the language, develop sufficiently intelligible pronunciation and the ability to distinguish, through listening, elements of the phonological system of the language, word, and sentence stress, and intonation.” (p. 75). In the seventh grade the goals are to “develop sufficiently clear pronunciation and the ability to distinguish by ear elements of the phonological system of the language, the phonemic alphabet, word and sentence stress, intonation in sentences, and mastering the spelling of words from the acquired vocabulary” (p. 78). The goals of understanding and articulating correct pronunciation in the eighth grade are very similar to that in the seventh: pupils are to understand the phonemic alphabet, acquire the ability to pronounce sufficiently intelligibly and understand the problematics of word and sentence stress (p. 80). In the last grade of lower secondary school, pupils should be taught, besides the things already mentioned in the previous lines, how the connected speech works in English language (p. 83).

Based on the analysis of the FEP (framework educational program) and the SEP (school educational program), pronunciation should be incorporated in ESL lessons both at the primary level and at the lower secondary level. By the end of their studies, pupils should be aware of connected speech, word and sentence stress, rhythm, and intonation, articulate and distinguish specific phonemes, be familiar with the phonemic alphabet, and most of all, be able to pronounce sufficiently intelligibly.

³ The list of the phonemes was copied from the SEP and contains a mistake in the transcript of a phoneme (I). The school meant either the phoneme /ɪ/ or the pronunciation of a personal pronoun I /aɪ/.

3.5.1.2 Textbooks

Since this paper already proved, that pronunciation should be a part of lessons that teachers conduct, we must find out, to what extent do textbooks and materials used in the lessons at this school provide suitable conditions for this goal.

At the primary level, teachers currently work with two types of textbooks: the old one, *Angličtina pro 4. ročník ZŠ* published by SPN in 2007, used in the 4th grade (Figure 7, on the left) and since this school year (2023/2024) the new one, *Funpark 1*, published by Klett in 2022 used in the 3rd grade (Figure 7, on the right)⁴.

Figure 7

Textbooks at the primary and lower secondary level



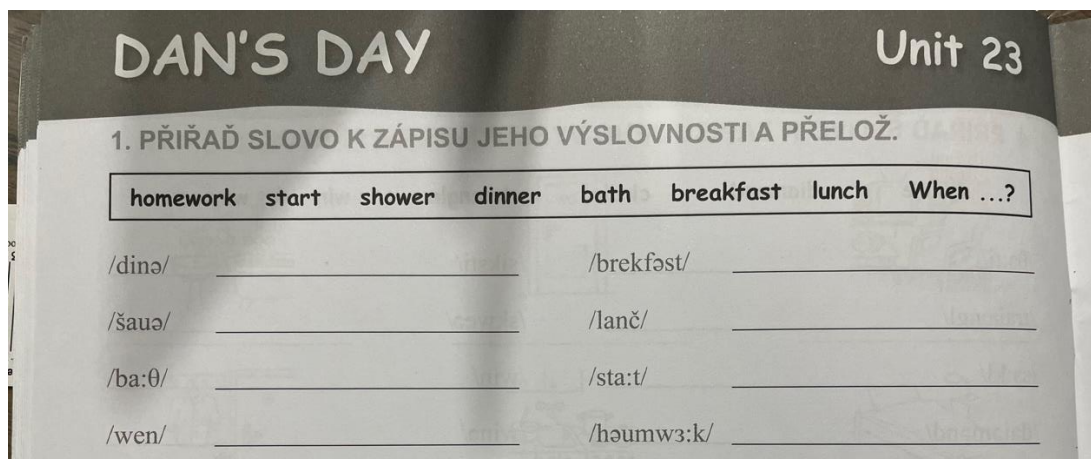
Besides the great difference in the year of publishing, there is a significant contrast in the content of these textbooks. First of all, the textbook by SPN does not provide any interactive support, only a CD with recordings, songs, and chants, whereas Funpark comes with an extensive offer of interactive features. The whole textbook and workbook are uploaded on the official website and the teachers can work with them in the classes. Thanks to this, teachers can project the assignments as well as results on the interactive boards. Second of all, the SPN textbook includes instructions only in Czech to simplify the comprehension of instructions (*Angličtina pro 4. roč. – SPN a.s. n.d.*) different from the Klett textbook which operates with

⁴ There is one more book that is used in the 2nd grade, however the respondent did not provide the name of it. The 5th graders use book *Angličtina pro 5. ročník* published by SPN.

instruction both in Czech and in English. One of the features, that is included solely in the SPN textbook and workbook, is the presence of symbols of phonemic transcription. These can be found in the wordlists (textbook, workbook) and the exercises. In figure 8 you can see an exercise where the pupils are asked to match a word to its corresponding transcription.

Figure 8

Transcription exercise in textbook (primary level)



Note that the symbols are somewhat transliterated into Czech (instead of /f/ and /tʃ/ there is /š/ and /č/). Such exercises can be found in each unit. Klett's textbook and workbook, however, do not include any symbols of phonemic transcription. Based on the research, their materials try to emphasize speaking and listening skills and all the exercises in the materials are adapted to this aim. Regarding assessing the pronunciation, neither SPN nor Klett textbooks assess the pronunciation skills or theoretical and practical knowledge of phonemes.

At the lower secondary level, a textbook called Project (4th edition) is used. Up to the last school year (2022/2023), sixth graders would start with the fourth edition of Project 2 and cover the first 4 topics in it. In the first half of the seventh grade, the last two topics would be covered and in the second half of the school year, the first two topics from textbook Project 3 would be covered. The eighth graders would then finish the remaining topics in Project 3 and by the end of the grade, they would start with the first topic in Project 4. All remaining topics would be covered by the end of the ninth grade. However, this year has been a pilot year and English language teachers have decided to update the choice of the textbook and work with a textbook called Project Explore 1 instead. So far, it is used only in the sixth grade but eventually it will be used in all grades. Both versions (Project and Project Explore come with a workbook that the students are required to obtain).

Both textbooks are published by the same publisher (Oxford University Press) who provides interactive versions of the books and workbooks, however, a license only for the latter (Project Explore) was purchased by this school. In other words, if they want to use the official online materials, only the teachers in the sixth grade are equipped to work with interactive whiteboards (or with projectors), the rest must work with CDs, CD players, or the recordings uploaded on the school network, played through the speakers, or projectors. As the research was conducted with eighth and ninth graders, only the Project textbooks are the subject of this research.

Both Project textbooks (Project 3 and Project 4) that were investigated, are divided into units (1-6) that present various topics (e.g. family, health, travelling, etc.). In each topic a piece of grammar is discussed besides corresponding vocabulary, phrases, and cultural knowledge information. When investigating what features of pronunciation are included in the textbooks and workbooks, the following data arose: two out of the eighty-seven pages of the whole textbook are dedicated strictly to explicit instruction developing and practicing correct articulating of specific phonemes, namely short vowels, long vowels, diphthongs, consonants, silent letters, voiced and unvoiced consonants, phonemes /tʃ/ and /ʃ/, pronunciation of negative auxiliaries (Project 3) and syllables, intonation of question tags, sentence stress when agreeing, or the word stress in verbs (Project 4). These two pages are located at the end of the textbook. To see an example, see Figure 9.

Figure 9

Pronunciation exercises in textbook (lower secondary level)

Pronunciation

Unit 1

1 Short vowels

a (1.1.1) These are short vowel sounds. Listen and repeat. Close your left hand each time.

/ɪ/ rich	/æ/ bad
/e/ clock	/ə/ centre
/ʊ/ bud	/ʌ/ mum
/ʊ/ book	

b Write two more words for each vowel sound.

2 Long vowels

a (1.1.2) These are long vowel sounds. Listen and repeat. Open your left hand each time.

/eɪ/ me	/aɪ/ far
/eɪ/ deer	/aɪ/ two
/eɪ/ best	

b Say the words. Write the vowel sounds.

1 pick /æ/	part /ɑː/
2 shot /ɒ/	short /ɔː/
3 this /ɪ/	these /iː/
4 pull /ʊ/	pool /uː/
5 had /ʌ/	hard /ɑː/
6 fox /ɒ/	forks /ɔː/
7 live /ɪ/	leave /iː/
8 food /uː/	heard /ɜː/

c (1.1.3) Listen. Which word in each pair do you hear? If it has a long vowel, open your left hand. If it has a short vowel, close your left hand.

Unit 2

1 Diphthongs

a (1.2.1) Some English vowel sounds have two parts. We call these diphthongs. Listen and repeat.

let /leɪ/	make /meɪ/	down /daʊn/	go /ɡoʊ/
let /leɪ/	make /meɪ/	down /daʊn/	go /ɡoʊ/
let /leɪ/	make /meɪ/	down /daʊn/	go /ɡoʊ/

b Write two more words for each sound.

Unit 3

1 Consonants

a Most consonants in the phonetic alphabet are the same as normal letters. Look.

p = /p/	t = /t/	k = /k/
b = /b/	d = /d/	g = /g/

b Find the words. Use the list of vowel sounds in the phonetic alphabet on page 79.

1 /bʌs/	6 /ʃeɪtəˈnəm/
2 /kɪkəp/	7 /ʃneɪkən/
3 /bæd/	8 /fɪvənˈteɪkəl/
4 /dɒm/	9 /ʃneɪkəl/
5 /gæʃ/	10 /təʊnəl/

c (1.3.2) Listen, check and repeat.

Unit 4

1 Silent letters

a The phonetic alphabet only shows the sounds. Silent letters are not shown. Look at these words. Which letters are silent?

1 write	2 two	3 when	4 friend
5 know	6 please	7 under	8 walk

b Write the words.

1 buy	4 mix	7 new
2 narrow	5 travel	8 vacuum
3 letter	6 push	9 field

c (1.4.10) Listen, check and repeat.

Unit 5

1 Special consonant symbols

a (1.5.1) Some consonant sounds have special phonetic symbols. Listen and underline the sound in the word. Then listen again and repeat.

1 /θ/ theatre	5 /dʒ/ bridge
2 /v/ mother	6 /ʃ/ you
3 /ʃ/ shop	7 /tʃ/ sing
4 /tʃ/ beach	8 /z/ usually

b Write the words.

1 /tʃ/	4 /rɪp/	7 /θrɪ/
2 /dʒ/	5 /brʌʃ/	8 /tʃelɪnɪʃ/
3 /vɪʃ/	6 /jʌʃ/	9 /tʃ/

c (1.5.5) Listen, check and repeat.

Unit 6

1 Negative auxiliaries

a (1.6.1) Listen, repeat and clap. Clap once for one syllable, twice for two. Which auxiliary verbs have two syllables in the negative?

1 does	2 have	3 can	4 did	5 should
6 don't	7 haven't	8 can't	9 aren't	10 shouldn't

b Write the negative auxiliaries in the correct column.

One syllable	Two syllables
can't	doesn't

2 Phonetics revision

Sweet Sue has sent Smart Alec a secret message. Can you work it out?

(a) Help Joe find out! Do you mean 'beef', do you mean 'beef'?

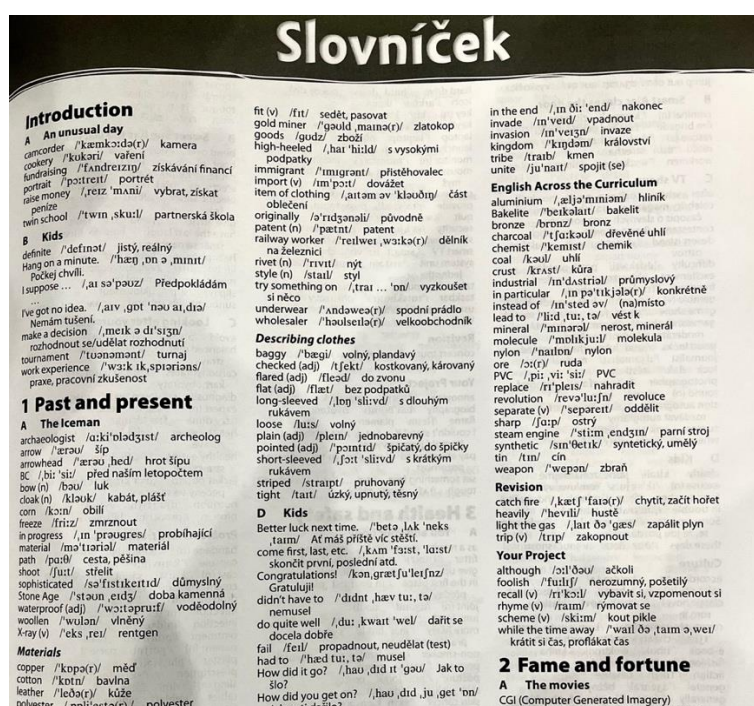
(b) Help Joe find out! Do you mean 'beef', do you mean 'beef'?

(c) Help Joe find out! Do you mean 'beef', do you mean 'beef'?

Even though there are only two pages focused on explicit pronunciation instructions, there are other methods of that could be used to teach, learn, and acquire pronunciation in these textbooks: each unit includes ample exercises that pupils are to listen to and repeat, listen to and read, listen to and choose, listen to and match, listen to and find information, listen to and complete. Similar exercises can be found in the workbooks. In addition to these exercises, a grammar summary and a wordlist can be found at the end of the workbooks. The wordlists comprise sections of units (1-6) and smaller subsections of each unit (A, B, C, D, Culture, English across the curriculum, Revision, Your project). All words (lexemes) are translated into the native language (in this case Czech) and are complemented with phonemic transcription of the given words. In most of the words, the word stress is marked as well (Figure 10).

Figure 10

A wordlist in textbook (lower secondary level)



Should the pupils struggle with the phonemic symbols, a guide through the symbols is provided at the end of the workbooks, comprising all symbols, as well as examples of words that contain these symbols, see Figure 11.

Figure 11

A list of phonetic symbols in textbook (lower secondary level)

PHONETIC SYMBOLS					
i:	as in see /si:/	ʒ	as in vision /'viʒn/	dʒ	as in June /dʒu:n/
ɜ:	as in fur /fɜ:(r)/	ɑ:	as in arm /ɑ:m/	ŋ	as in sing /sɪŋ/
p	as in pen /pen/	aɪ	as in five /faɪv/	u:	as in too /tu:/
s	as in so /səʊ/	k	as in cat /kæt/	eə	as in hair /heə(r)/
ɪ	as in sit /sɪt/	h	as in how /haʊ/	f	as in fall /fɔ:l/
i	as in happy /'hæpi/	ɒ	as in got /gɒt/	l	as in leg /leg/
ə	as in ago /ə'gəʊ/	aʊ	as in now /naʊ/	ʌ	as in cup /kʌp/
b	as in bad /bæd/	g	as in got /gɒt/	ʊə	as in pure /pjuə(r)/
z	as in zoo /zu:/	m	as in man /mæn/	v	as in voice /vɔɪs/
e	as in ten /ten/	ɔ:	as in saw /sɔ:/	r	as in red /red/
eɪ	as in page /peɪdʒ/	ɔɪ	as in join /dʒɔɪn/	θ	as in thin /θɪn/
t	as in tea /ti:/	tʃ	as in chin /tʃɪn/	j	as in yes /jes/
ʃ	as in she /ʃi:/	n	as in no /nəʊ/	ð	as in then /ðen/
æ	as in hat /hæt/	ʊ	as in put /pʊt/	w	as in wet /wet/
əʊ	as in home /həʊm/	ɪə	as in near /nɪə(r)/		
d	as in did /dɪd/				

Even though phonemic transcription and features of pronunciation seem to be included in materials used in the lessons, there are not any materials used for evaluating it. According to my research, each unit in each class is concluded with a written unit test made by Oxford University Press, which focuses on pupils' comprehension and reading skills, grammar, and vocabulary, nevertheless, neither part of the test deals with theoretical nor practical knowledge of pronunciation.

To sum this chapter up, primary, and lower secondary English textbooks in a specific Czech school were evaluated for their effectiveness in teaching pronunciation. At the primary level, SPN's textbook is compared with Klett's counterpart, and the absence/presence of phonemic symbols were discussed. At the lower secondary level, the research describes the presence of phonemic symbols, and that Oxford's Project textbooks offer minimal explicit pronunciation instructions, favouring listening and repetition exercises.

3.5.2 Interviews

3.5.2.1 Headmistress and primary school teacher

Having an interview with the headmistress of the observed school brought some interesting data to the research which were used to understand how the institution works as a unit, how do the teachers and the management operate and what effect their choices might have on teaching pronunciation as such. Interview with the primary school teacher provided insight into the challenges associated with the teaching of pronunciation.

As explained by the headmistress, English is the second language taught at this school and it is taught from the second grade onward with an hour allocation of one lesson per week.

In other grades (from 3rd to 9th) the hour allocation is four forty-five-minute lessons per week. Until last school year (2022/2023), the maximum limit of pupils was twenty-four pupils in one ESL (English as a second language) class, and due to economic reasons, this limit was (almost every time) reached. Since the school year 2023/2024, the headteacher has decided to decrease the limit to a maximum of 18 pupils per class which was done to improve the conditions of education and provide enough space to increase students' talking time (STT) as much as possible.

As indicated by the headteacher, the primary school is well equipped with interactive whiteboards allocated in each classroom which are regularly used in ESL lessons, in contrast to the lower secondary school where only three of them are allocated. Here teachers must rely on other technical equipment, such as projectors, speakers, CD players, tablets, computers, or a classroom equipped with headphones with microphones.

When asked about pronunciation, much attention has been drawn to the extra activities the school provides. Pupils (and teachers) have many opportunities where to hear and practice their second language in a natural environment and in its natural form. For this purpose, pupils can participate in one-day trips, like to Christmas Vienna, or take part in an exchange program (8th and 9th graders visit Britain for a week, and owing to the participation in Erasmus+, pupils can now annually travel to Germany for a one-week exchange trip). To listen to English in its most natural form, collaboration with a native speaker from Australia was established who visits 7th, 8th, and 9th graders and leads lessons with a focus on conversation. As the headmistress stated in the interview, sometime in the near future she would love to offer additional English conversation classes to enhance the school's curriculum.

When asked about criteria that need to be met when applying for a job as an English teacher, the headmistress was very clear: a finished or an ongoing degree in education in English is required. Especially at the primary school, this criterion was not met by several teachers who had been working at the school for over 30 years and who needed to undergo pieces of training and courses in English in order to keep their position at the school. Even though they all passed the courses and improved their English, according to the headmistress, not each teacher at the primary school level has the required level of pronunciation skills, vocabulary, and grammar, and dares to teach older and more advanced pupils (4th and 5th graders). To solve this issue, the headmistress is considering using the lower secondary teachers to teach at the primary level. Based on this data a question arises: "To what extent do teachers without a degree in English help pupils acquire the correct pronunciation and articulation skills? According to Cox et.al. (2019), teachers' insufficient knowledge of segmental and suprasegmental features of language

causes a deficiency of pronunciation in lessons and might lead to hindering pupils' ability to develop accurate pronunciation and articulation skills. This fact is also supported by Emily, the primary school teacher: "I teach in 5.C. In this class there was a teacher in 3rd grade, then there was another in 4th grade and now I am their teacher, and I can see some entrenched errors (in pronunciation) that are challenging to unlearn." As an example, she mentions /ð/ and /θ/ sounds which are, based on her experience, often replaced by /f/, /t/, /s/, or /dz/ sounds (instead of /ðeə/ (there) pupils end up saying /dzer/, and instead of /ˈθɜːˈtiːn/ (thirteen) they say /trtiːn⁵/). This was also the case of the primary school pupil's pronunciation in the recording analysis, see p. 65. The constant change of teachers teaching in specific classes is according to Emily impractical; it is very difficult to unlearn the errors that were taught by self-learners who are often "two pages ahead of their pupils." She thinks a teacher should have a class as long as possible to know the pupils and teach them the foundations of pronunciation. If they do not have the foundations, the curriculum must be taught and solidified again, and again, and again.

As mentioned in the previous chapters, teachers at the primary level currently work with two types of textbooks, workbooks, and supplementary materials. According to Emily, 2nd and 3rd grade is all about listening and getting familiar with the spoken form of language. Writing and reading are added later in the 4th and 5th grade. She further comments: "2nd and 3rd grades are all about pronunciation, repeating and drilling. A very limited amount of writing is included, which, to me, seems like not enough. I believe that copying and transcribing are quite important, as they solidify the form of the word. I think there should be more of that in the material, but so far, there is not much."

To ensure the pupils get familiar with the system of sounds of English, appropriate methods and activities and implemented: the lessons start and end with songs, chants, suitable warm-up activities are included, pupils listen to recordings, match words to pictures based on recordings, they also interact with the interactive whiteboards which offer visual enhancements for audio recordings, other activities include listening and repeating words, phrases, and collocation.

To ensure all pupils have enough STT, Emily lets them practice their pronunciation in pairs and groups. To keep them motivated to speak, pairs are usually made of pupils who are friends, or they are made of one more and one less advanced pupil. Besides that, the new textbooks include QR codes that enable the pupils to practice their listening skills and

⁵ Emily declared that pupils are not the only ones who struggle with pronunciation of these two phonemes. She witnessed other primary school teachers who mispronounced them at the trainings and courses.

pronunciation skills at home; they scan the QR code, listen to recordings and based on the recordings they repeat the words, fill in missing pieces of information, write numbers, initial letters of words, etc. This feature can prove useful to parents who help their children learn English but who can't speak it. Emily comments: "The new textbooks lack the symbols of phonemic transcription. We were used to emphasizing the importance of correct pronunciation and referring to these symbols at the parent-teacher meetings, but now they are not there (in the new textbooks), and it can lead to a loss of clarity." Symbols of the phonemic transcription are broadly used in the older textbooks and pupils (especially the 4th and 5th graders) should be able to identify them easily. In the new ones, however, the symbols can't be found, and so the responsibility to teach pupils the symbols rests on them. The headmistress explains: "To what extent the pronunciation is incorporated in the ESL lessons is entirely at the discretion of the teacher. The attention to pronunciation varies, depending on the teacher, each teacher is responsible for monitoring the pronunciation individually." Based on an interview, Emily pays attention to pronunciation during the aforementioned parts of the lessons (beginning and end) through songs, rhymes, warm-ups. Pronunciation of new vocabulary is primarily addressed at the beginning of a new unit, where pupils transcribe words into their vocabulary notebooks and repeat the pronunciation after the teacher. Whether pronunciation is further addressed depends on factors such as whether the topic is new or previously covered, whether the pupils have mastered it or not, or whether they have enough time to practice it. The assessment of pronunciation is not done through grading, instead, Emily involves providing feedback and correcting their pronunciation.

In conclusion, this chapter reveals insights into the teaching of pronunciation at the observed school, specifically at the primary level. The headmistress emphasizes the importance of appropriate English education, which not all primary level teachers possess. Furthermore, she mentions her effort to create conditions, where pupils can practice English (especially at the lower secondary level). Challenges arising from teacher turnovers impacting the quality of pupils' pronunciation skills were discussed. It was explained that the absence of phonemic symbols in new textbooks might pose a potential barrier to accurate pronunciation instructions. Methods used to teach pronunciation in ESL lesson were presented, and the individual responsibility of each teacher's approach toward pronunciation was emphasized. Finally, the importance that the primary school teacher attributes to teaching pronunciation was discussed.

3.5.2.2 Lower secondary teachers

One of the main source of the information needed to provide an insight into this case study, were the semi-structured interviews conducted with the lower secondary teachers (Eleanor, Emma, and Erin). Based on the gathered material, each teacher assigns different importance to pronunciation. Two out of these three teachers mastered English studies, however, “each of them has sufficient experience and is fluent in English” (Headmistress). To understand what importance is attributed to pronunciation in their lesson, they were asked about features of English they pay attention to, and methods usually employed. While all teachers mention grammar as one of the main features they teach, Erin’s focus lies especially on teaching vocabulary and phrases, and gaining skills to implement learned grammar into conversation. Emma further tries to implement as many activities as possible that help build reading and listening skills. Eleanor adds: although she knows, pupils should be taught (and acquire) L2 and all its aspects (speaking, reading, writing, listening and grammar) as kids acquire their mother tongue, she is sceptical about feasibility of achieving this goal in the conditions they have. Nevertheless, she tries to focus on improving pupils’ reading, speaking, and writing skills using all kinds of methods (warm-ups, drills, discussions, reading texts, working with videos, listening exercises.)

When it comes to pronunciation, respondents’ opinions on it vary; while Erin and Eleanor address it in their lessons, Emma, does not pay much attention to it. According to her, pronunciation is not generally priority in the school system and is not emphasized enough. In her lessons, she covers the pronunciation only if pupils struggle with it (in that case, she usually writes the word on the board and pronounces it). Even though, she does not provide any explicit instructions regarding articulation, she tries to rely on the recordings of texts, exercises and songs that should help the pupils acquire the correct pronunciation and help them imitate it when speaking (ability and skill to speak is in her opinion more important than articulation). In case of the other two teachers, it is taught mostly at the beginnings of units – Eleanor and Erin usually go through the list of words, read them, and let the pupils repeat. Should the pupils struggle with some words, they practice them (as a class, in pairs, or individually) as long as it takes to pronounce them correctly. Eleanor also includes activities that should help the pupils become aware of the differences between sounds in English (minimal pairs) or to practice articulation of phonemes (tongue twisters). To understand the process of correct articulation and to be able to provide the pupils correct and explicit instructions is, from Eleanor’s point of view, crucial to master the pronunciation and intelligibility: “It is essential to possess

knowledge of phonetics and phonology, to be familiar with transcription, and to have the capacity to explain how sounds, diphthongs, and articulation work, specifically the process of how it works. Proficiency in pronunciation should be as important as vocabulary.” She also adds: “It is necessary to show them (pupils) the physical process of articulating the phonemes.” If this process is omitted in ESL lessons, incorrect pronunciation of words and phonemes stemmed from their previous education or lack of explicit instructions can result in fossilization in the learner’s language (Yakut, 2020). Yakut (2020) further comments: “It seems essential to find out problematic sounds for them (pupils) and develop teaching techniques and materials that could guide them to remedy fossilized mispronunciation of the sounds” (p. 112-113). To raise the awareness of the correct pronunciation of the phonemes, teachers have at their disposal two pages dedicated to pronunciation, nevertheless, the deputy headmistress (Eleanor) expresses her doubts when asked whether the teachers incorporate these two pages into their lessons.

As complex as the pronunciation is, teachers pinpoint similar sets of phonemes their pupils mispronounce the most. Most commonly it involves substituting “th” sounds (/ð/ and /θ/) with /dz/, /t/ or /f/, Eleanor further mentions incorrect pronunciation of phonemes /æ/ and velar n /ŋ/. Besides that, pupils often pronounce silent letters (e.g. /k/ in knight), struggle with word stress, accent, and have a particular problem with longer words (3 and more syllables) in which their tongues get tangled. Another feature of language the pupils usually struggle with is the intonation in language and being able to understand the connected speech. As Erin mentions, pupils, especially foreigners and those with special educational needs (SEN) or specific learning disabilities (SLD), face challenges with pronunciation in her classes.

In one of the questions in the interview, teachers were asked whether they use symbols of phonemic transcription in their lessons. In contrast to Emma who does not mention the phonemic symbols in her lessons, Erin and Eleanor use the symbols to teach pronunciation. Erin emphasizes the symbols especially when teaching new vocabulary (usually at the beginning of a unit). In her lessons, all pupils are familiar with the symbols and should be able to recognize their pronunciation, except to those with SLD (when pronunciation is explained or needed to be noted down, these pupils usually write words as they hear them, i.e. instead of /prɪs'krɪpʃn/ they write /prɪskrɪpʃn/). In Eleanor’s lessons, pupils are familiar with the symbols as well. Despite not knowing all of them, only the problematic ones (e.g. open a, schwa, th sounds), they are able to guess the word based on its phonemic transcription.

When it comes to evaluation of pronunciation, the respondents have a similar belief: they do not evaluate the pronunciation, instead of that, they provide feedback and if necessary,

they correct it. It was not always like that, though: “I used to evaluate and assess the pronunciation (when pupils were reading a text), however, I realised there are not any clear criteria I can follow to stay objective and fair when assessing pronunciation. It is different compared to grammar, writing, or reading” says Eleanor. Emma, on the other hand, uses reading a text for evaluating pupil’s pronunciation, however, the final grade serves generally as a motivation – pupils do not have to read perfectly in order to receive a good grade; one of the criteria for a positive assessment is fluency or correct intonation.

During the research, a common theme emerged in each interview with the teachers, namely the impact of social media on pupils’ abilities to speak English and pronounce correctly. They all mention the positive impact of the media and they highlight the fact that pupils’ engagement with English in their free time (watching movies, series, spending time on social media) facilitates their work, as pupils learn a lot there (especially the vocabulary and pronunciation). Erin comments: “I believe the kids learn a lot from it. In terms of pronunciation, it is absolutely amazing, it was not common when I was your age. But they pick up American English.” The effects of exposure to English in medias from an early age were studied by Alghonaim (2020) who says that the exposure can be an essential tool for acquiring accurate pronunciation. He also claims that the exposure through media can be “crucial as it allows a child in a non-English speaking environment and country to cultivate accurate pronunciation skills. The early initiation of language learning reduces obstacles for the child, taking advantage of the optimal age for language acquisition, and the engaging content provided enhances the learning process” (p. 65).

In conclusion, it can be said that pronunciation (as a feature of a language) is taught more in ESL classes of some interviewed teachers than others. Pronunciation is mentioned in ESL classes during specific occasions, especially at the beginning of a new unit or when pupils struggle with articulation of some words. Only one out of three teachers proactively teaches pronunciation of specific phonemes and uses suitable methods and activities to do so (e.g. tongue twisters, minimal pairs). Unfortunately, from the interviews it is not clear whether the other two teachers do not pay more attention to teaching pronunciation due to insufficient knowledge or other reasons. Interviewed respondents confirmed they use symbols of phonemic alphabet and claim their pupils understand the symbols. All of them try to provide feedback on the pronunciation instead of evaluating it. Finally, they all emphasize the positive effect of the media on pupils’ vocabulary and pronunciation skills.

3.5.2.3 Lower secondary pupils

To understand what importance is attributed to pronunciation in ESL lessons, not only teachers were approached, but also pupils were asked to share their point of view. Same as in the interviews with the teachers, pupils were asked to describe what aspects of language are most frequently covered in the lessons. They all agree that most of the lessons focus on learning grammar. Anthony says that in their lessons they listen to recordings a lot and practice their speaking frequently. Amelia mentions that in their lessons they also frequently read texts and listen to recording, these activities are often followed by doing exercises in the workbook or translating sentences in their exercise books. Even though Alice perceives grammar as crucial feature of learning language, she considers it more important to be able to communicate effectively than to know all the grammar rules. To be able to communicate in the lessons is sometimes challenging, according to her: “there are many people in the groups, sometimes we do not get to speak during the whole lessons which is a shame.”

Regarding pronunciation in the ESL lessons, pupils have different experience. In Amelia’s case, they do not pay much attention to it in the lessons. According to her words, explicit pronunciation instructions are hardly mentioned in the lessons. The teacher corrects pupil’s pronunciation when mispronounced by writing the word on the board, pronouncing it correctly, repeating it once and then continuing with the lesson. According to Amelia, pupils in the class hardly ever repeat after the teacher when practising the pronunciation, they repeat only after the recordings. Alice has slightly different experience; in their lessons they pay attention to explicit pronunciation instructions and pronunciation as such at the beginnings of new units when the teacher explains the pronunciation of words from the wordlist in the workbooks and lets the pupils repeat. In the lessons, pronunciation is not usually corrected, teacher usually corrects pupils’ uttered incorrect syntax and grammar. Besides that, they do not pay much attention to pronunciation and, as she says, it would be appreciated if it was to change, since according to Alice, some of her classmates lack sufficient practice on how to pronounce longer words (three and more syllables). Much difference can be seen in lessons Anthony is part of. Based on his words, they pay attention to pronunciation in one lesson in a week/in two weeks. In these lessons, they practice the articulation in many ways, e.g. they repeat after the teacher when she reads the words from the wordlist in the workbook, they practice it in pairs or in groups, they practice it on computers on websites like wordwall.com or umimeto.org (they listen to a word and write what they hear or they try

to imitate the pronunciation of a word), they learn to say tongue twisters, if the words are too hard to articulate they practice until they know how to say them.

Only one respondent mentions difficulties when asked about challenges they face in pronunciation. Alice talks about how she struggles when articulating voiced and unvoiced th sounds /ð/ and /θ/ but admits, she improves her skills in articulating them as she gets older. Despite claiming to have difficulties in the articulation of mentioned phonemes, they were both articulated correctly in the analysed recordings (see chapter 3.5.3 Recordings). Another challenge she faces is that words may be sometimes harder to articulate when in context in contrast to when isolated. To overcome this challenge, she needs time to recall the exact process of articulating the word.

In order to be able to pronounce the words and phonemes correctly, respondents sometimes read phonemic transcription that can be found in their workbooks. Each of them encountered the symbols of phonemic transcription at the primary school level and in the sixth grade at the lower secondary level, but since then, Alice's and Amelia's teachers did not pay much attention to it, and they say they might have forgotten meaning of some symbols. Even though the girls do not know all the symbols, they sometimes try to read them when dealing with complicated words, e.g. Alice tries to guess the correct articulation based on the phonemes as a last resort. Anthony's teacher tries to implement the symbols into the lessons and practice them with her pupils regularly, what Anthony perceives positively as it particularly helps him to learn the pronunciation of longer words.

What proved to be a more effective method of acquiring correct articulation of phonemes and words, has been the exposure to English during their free time. All three respondents outlined their process of learning English and learning the correct pronunciation in the interviews, and in each case, they emphasize the significant influence of movies, series, songs, games, and social media on their language acquisition and correct pronunciation. They all intentionally engage with content solely in English, sometimes supplemented with English subtitles (movies, series), aiming to maximize their exposure to the English language. Not only do they passively listen to the English, but they also actively engage with the English; they try to deduce the meaning of specific words from the context in the movies/series (Anthony), repeat the pronunciation of words heard in the movies/series (Alice), and continually work on their pronunciation (Amelia) in that she repeats the heard words in her head repeatedly or practice them in conversations with their family members.

As for evaluation of the pronunciation, pupil respondents confirm the words of the teacher respondents; the articulation and pronunciation are not evaluated, they are given

feedback and are corrected. In Amelia's case, the teacher does not conduct oral pronunciation assessment, however, she sometimes uses this type of assessment as a tool to threat pupils when they misbehave. In lessons Alice attends, pronunciation is not usually an objective that is evaluated, instead of that, grammar and spelling are assessed. In order to pass the tests, pupils study only the spelling of words, not the way they are pronounced.

In summary, it can be concluded that teachers vary in their emphasis on pronunciation in their lessons. Pupils generally highlight grammar as the primary focus in the lessons. In some lessons, pupils are given specific and explicit pronunciation instructions, however, these lessons are not as frequent as desired by some pupils. Pupils recognize challenges in pronunciation, especially with voiced and unvoiced "th" sounds or longer words in context. To overcome the challenges, they sometimes look for support in the phonemic transcription of words, even though they are not familiar with all symbols. A significant finding is pupils' belief in the effectiveness of exposure to English through media and its positive effect on pronunciation acquisition and improvement. Finally, pupils confirm that pronunciation is not evaluated; instead, a feedback is provided, while grammar and spelling are prioritized in tests.

3.5.3 Recordings

One of the goals of this thesis is to find the answer to research question "How skilled are pupils at pronunciation?" As method of a qualitative research, an analysis of pupils' recording of reading a list of minimal pairs and short sentences (primary school level) or a short text (lower secondary school level) was conducted. Even though some respondents were nervous during the recording, this fact did not affect the quality of the recordings. The process of analysis and the findings are closely described in the following chapters.

3.5.3.1 Primary school respondent

According to the research, teacher of the respondent from the primary school (who did not participate in this research) did not study English at university, however, holds a certificate from a teacher training course which is, as the headmistress stated, "recognized by the Ministry of Education as sufficient qualification." Even though she did not study the language, she lived and worked in England for several years before she started to work at this specific school. Here,

she teaches at the primary level and leads English after school activities. Based on my off-record interviews with her, she pays attention to pronunciation regularly⁶ and seems to have the practical knowledge of correct articulation of phonemes⁷.

Arising from the analysis of the SED, FEP, textbooks used in the lessons, interview with one of the primary school teachers and my personal experience with the pupil's teacher, the respondent should have come across some elementary features of correct, and intelligible pronunciation, e.g. articulation of phonemes *th* /θ/, *t* /t/, *a* /æ/.

In the following table (Table 12) you can see the list of phonemes the research was focused on and the primary level respondent's way of articulation. W1, W2 stand for the words of minimal pair used in the research, P1 and P2 represent respondent's pronunciation of the observed phonemes (Ph). Out of fourteen phonemes, the respondent pronounced correctly nine: /f/, /t/, /ʃ/, /dʒ/, /d/, /ʌ/, /eə/, /s/, /f/. The five mispronounced phonemes uttered in words: *they*, *bat*, *her*, *mouth*, *three* which comprise observed phonemes: /ð/, /æ/, /ɜ:/, and /θ/.

Table 12

Uttered minimal pairs (primary level pupil)

W1	<u>f</u> ree	<u>c</u> heap	<u>d</u> ay	ba t	ha <u>i</u> r	mo <u>u</u> se	th ree
P1	/f/	/ʃ/	/d/	/e/	/eə/	/s/	/t/
W2	t <u>r</u> ee	J <u>e</u> ep	th ey	b <u>u</u> t	h er	mo u <u>th</u>	<u>f</u> ree
P2	/t/	/dʒ/	/d/	/ʌ/	/ɪə/	/t/	/f/
Ph	f t	ʃ dʒ	d ð	æ ʌ	eə ɜ:	s θ	θ f

Similar utterances can be observed in the analysis of pronounced words in the context (Table 13). Out of fourteen observed phonemes, the respondent articulated ten correctly: /f/, /t/, /ʃ/, /dʒ/, /d/, /ʌ/, /ə/, /s/, /θ/ /f/. Difficulties arose when it came to words: *brother*, *happy*, *hair*, *mouth*, which contain phonemes /ð/, /æ/, /eə/, and /θ/.

⁶We went on a business trip together and we spent a lot of time discussing pronunciation. Last time we spoke she emphasized the difference in the articulation of phonemes /w/ and /v/ in one of her classes.

⁷ This cannot be supported by any data collection; I rely only on the discussions we led and my impression of her English I witnessed as she spoke with native speakers.

Table 13*Uttered words in context (primary level pupil)*

W1	<u>f</u> ree	<u>c</u> heap	<u>d</u> og	h appy	h air	mouse <u>e</u>	<u>th</u> ree
P1	/f/	/tʃ/	/d/	/e/	/aɪ/	/s/	/ θ /
W2	<u>t</u> ree	<u>J</u> ane	bro ther	<u>b</u> ut	<u>h</u> er	m outh	<u>f</u> riend
P2	/t/	/dʒ/	/d/	/ʌ/	/ə/	/t/	/f/
Ph	f t	tʃ dʒ	d ð	æ ʌ	eə ɜ:. ⁸	s θ	θ f

Gathered data from these tables show us that the respondent is (to some extent) familiar with the articulation and pronunciation of the observed words. We can say that the respondent correctly articulates phonemes that occur also in his mother tongue (Czech), which are: /f/, /t/, /tʃ/, /dʒ/, /d/, /ʌ/, /s/. Correctly articulated in only one of the recordings were the phoneme /eə/ in minimal pairs, and phonemes /ə/ɜ:/ and /θ/ in the sentences. We encounter incorrect pronunciation of phonemes in both recordings that are not a part of the Czech language system: /ð/, /æ/.

3.5.3.2 Lower secondary school pupils

A similar process of gathering and analysing data was conducted at the lower secondary level. As in the previous case, respondents were asked to record themselves on a recording device while reading a list of ten minimal pairs. Later on, they were asked to read a short passage of a story which can be found on page 47. Each recording was in good quality, so it became very easy to catch the in/correct articulation of given words, and so the phonemes.

The first table in this chapter (Table 14) displays the articulation of the observed phonemes in minimal pairs. Here again, W1 and W2 represent words of minimal pairs, P1 and P2 stand for uttered respondent's phonemes and Ph represents the observed phonemes that should be uttered in the pronunciation of the words. Words in bold demonstrate incorrectly articulated phonemes. This definition applies to all tables in this chapter.

Despite Amelia's claim in the interview that she is not aware of any mistakes in her pronunciation, there were some observed in the recording of minimal pairs. Out of twenty observed words she pronounced correctly seventeen, the incorrect pronunciation uttered in

⁸ Due to the connected speech and weak forms of words, the correct articulation of the phoneme could be /ə/, which the respondent uttered.

words: pan, books, and dies which should comprise phonemes /æ/, /ʊ/, and /z/. Instead of that, phonemes /e:/, /ʊ:/, and /s/ were heard in the recording. What needs to be mentioned is the fact, that the respondent seemed aware of the phoneme open a /æ/ (and the process of its articulation) and tried to add more stress to it, however, ended up saying /e:/.

Table 14

Amelia's uttered minimal pairs

W1	F <u>o</u> ur	T <u>e</u> n	P <u>e</u> n	S <u>h</u> ee <u>p</u>	B <u>o</u> x	Ch <u>e</u> ss	D <u>i</u> ce	<u>T</u> hin	<u>D</u> are	<u>A</u> nother
P1	/ɔ:/	/e/	/e/	/i:/	/ʊ/	/e/	/s/	/θ/	/d/	/ə/
W2	F <u>u</u> r	T <u>u</u> rn	P<u>a</u>n	S <u>h</u> ip	B<u>o</u>oks	Ch <u>a</u> se	D<u>i</u>e<u>s</u>	<u>F</u> in	<u>T</u> here	<u>O</u> ther
P2	/ɜ:/	/ɜ:/	/e:/	/ɪ/	/ʊ:/	/eɪ/	/s/	/f/	/ð/	/ʌ/
Ph	ɔ: ɜ:	e ɜ:	e æ	i: ɪ	ʊ ʊ	e eɪ	s z	θ f	d ð	ə ʌ

Phonemes /æ/, and /z/ posed a problem not only in the minimal pairs but also in the recording of the text. Here they were replaced in words that and miles by phonemes /e/ and /s/. In addition to that, three more incorrectly pronounced words were observed, namely worst, brother, and done. Here the phonemes /ɜ:/, /ð/, and /ʌ/ were replaced by phonemes /ʊ/, /d/, and /ə/. Despite being incorrectly uttered in the minimal pairs, the phoneme /ʊ/ was correctly pronounced in the recording.

Table 15

Amelia's uttered words in context

W1	<u>l</u> aw	<u>e</u> ver	<u>v</u> ery	<u>s</u> ee	<u>p</u> ossible	<u>f</u> riend	<u>s</u> ometimes	<u>t</u> hink	<u>d</u> rive	<u>a</u>
P1	/ɔ:/	/e/	/e/	/i:/	/ʊ/	/e/	/s/	/θ/	/d/	/ə/
W2	<u>j</u> ourney	w<u>o</u>rst	th<u>a</u>t	b <u>i</u> t	wh <u>o</u>	tr <u>a</u> in	m<u>i</u>l<u>e</u>s	<u>f</u> rom	br<u>o</u>th<u>e</u>r	d<u>o</u>n<u>e</u>
P2	/ɜ:/	/ʊ/	/e/	/ɪ/	/ʊ/	/eɪ/	/s/	/f/	/d/	/ə/
Ph	ɔ: ɜ:	e ɜ:	e æ	i: ɪ	ʊ ʊ	e eɪ	s z	θ f	d ð	ə ʌ

The analysis of Anthony's recording provided similar results to Amelia's. Anthony mentioned in the interview that the articulation of phonemes /ð/ and /θ/ can be tricky, and sometimes he is not able to pronounce them correctly. Despite this claim, Anthony pronounced both phonemes correctly in both recordings. Phonemes he did not articulate correctly were the same ones as in Amelia's case: /æ/, /ʊ/ and /z/. Instead of these, phonemes /e:/, /ʊ:/, and /s/ were

heard in the recording. Same problem with the articulation of phoneme /æ/ uttered: the respondent tried to articulate it differently than just an ordinary /a/, however, ended up saying /e:/ as well. All other words in Anthony's recording of minimal pairs were uttered correctly (see Table 16).

Table 16

Anthony's uttered minimal pairs

W1	<u>F</u> our	T <u>e</u> n	P <u>e</u> n	Sh <u>ee</u> p	B <u>o</u> x	Ch <u>e</u> ss	D <u>i</u> ce	<u>T</u> hin	<u>D</u> are	<u>A</u> nother
P1	/ɔ:/	/e/	/e/	/i:/	/ʊ/	/e/	/s/	/θ/	/d/	/ə/
W2	F <u>u</u> r	T <u>u</u> rn	P<u>a</u>n	Sh <u>i</u> p	B<u>o</u>oks	Ch <u>a</u> se	D<u>i</u>es	<u>F</u> in	<u>T</u> here	<u>O</u> ther
P2	/ɜ:/	/ɜ:/	/e:/	/ɪ/	/ʊ:/	/eɪ/	/s/	/f/	/ð/	/ʌ/
Ph	ɔ: ɜ:	e ɜ:	e æ	i: ɪ	ʊ ʊ	e eɪ	s z	θ f	d ð	ə ʌ

Compared to Amelia's recording of the text where five mistakes occurred, Anthony's recording involved three out of five same mistakes. Words mispronounced were following: worst, that, miles, and who in which the phonemes /ɜ:/, /æ/, /ʊ/, and /z/ were replaced by /ʊ/, /e/, /ʊ:/, and /s/.

Table 17

Anthony's uttered words in context

W1	<u>l</u> aw	<u>e</u> ver	<u>v</u> ery	<u>s</u> ee	<u>p</u> ossible	<u>f</u> riend	<u>s</u> ometimes	<u>t</u> hink	<u>d</u> rive	<u>a</u>
P1	/ɔ:/	/e/	/e/	/i:/	/ʊ/	/e/	/s/	/θ/	/d/	/ə/
W2	j <u>o</u> urney	w<u>o</u>rst	th<u>a</u>t	b <u>i</u> t	wh<u>o</u>	tr <u>a</u> in	m<u>i</u>les	<u>f</u> rom	broth <u>e</u> r	<u>d</u> one
P2	/ɜ:/	/ʊ/	/e/	/ɪ/	/ʊ:/	/eɪ/	/s/	/f/	/ð/	/ʌ/
Ph	ɔ: ɜ:	e ɜ:	e æ	i: ɪ	ʊ ʊ	e eɪ	s z	θ f	d ð	ə ʌ

Similar mistakes as in Anthony's and Amelia's recording appeared in Alice's recording, however the proficiency in this recording was higher than in the prior ones. Alice pronounced correctly eighteen out of twenty observed phonemes. The mispronounced phonemes appeared in words pan and dies, where phonemes /æ/ and /z/ were replaced by /e:/ and /s/.

Table 18*Alice's uttered minimal pairs*

W1	<u>F</u> our	T <u>e</u> n	P <u>e</u> n	Sh <u>ee</u> p	B <u>o</u> x	Ch <u>e</u> ss	D <u>i</u> ce	<u>T</u> hin	<u>D</u> are	<u>A</u> nother
P1	/ɔ:/	/e/	/e/	/i:/	/ɒ/	/e/	/s/	/θ/	/d/	/ə/
W2	<u>F</u> ur	T <u>u</u> rn	P<u>a</u>n	Sh <u>i</u> p	B <u>o</u> oks	Ch <u>a</u> se	D<u>i</u>e<u>s</u>	<u>F</u> in	<u>T</u> here	<u>O</u> ther
P2	/ɜ:/	/ɜ:/	/e:/	/ɪ/	/ʊ/	/eɪ/	/s/	/f/	/ð/	/ʌ/
Ph	ɔ: ɜ:	e ɜ:	e æ	i: ɪ	ɒ ʊ	e eɪ	s z	θ f	d ð	ə ʌ

In the recording of the words in context, only one mistake in pronunciation uttered: phoneme /s/ was uttered instead of phoneme /z/ in word miles. The other observed words were articulated with great precision and correctly.

Table 19*Alice's uttered words in context*

W1	<u>l</u> aw	<u>e</u> ver	<u>v</u> ery	<u>s</u> ee	<u>p</u> ossible	<u>f</u> riend	<u>s</u> ometimes	<u>t</u> hink	<u>d</u> rive	<u>a</u>
P1	/ɔ:/	/e/	/e/	/i:/	/ɒ/	/e/	/s/	/θ/	/d/	/ə/
W2	<u>j</u> ourney	<u>w</u> orst	<u>t</u> hat	<u>b</u> it	<u>w</u> ho	<u>t</u> rain	<u>m</u>iles	<u>f</u> rom	<u>b</u> ro <u>t</u> her	<u>d</u> one
P2	/ɜ:/	/ɜ:/	/æ/	/ɪ/	/ʊ/	/eɪ/	/s/	/f/	/ð/	/ʌ/
Ph	ɔ: ɜ:	e ɜ:	e æ	i: ɪ	ɒ ʊ	e eɪ	s z	θ f	d ð	ə ʌ

From the data described in the tables above it can be concluded that pupils have some information and knowledge on how to articulate phonemes in English correctly and are skilled in the articulation of specific phonemes to some extent. They do not struggle with phonemes that can be found in their mother tongue (Czech), e.g. /d/, /e/, /ɪ/, /e/. What they struggled most with (based on this research), is the phoneme /z/ incorrectly pronounced as /s/ in position after voiced vowels, both in the minimal pairs and in the text. Another phoneme that seems to be particularly tough for pupils to articulate is the phoneme /æ/, again, in minimal pairs as well as in the text. What proved unexpected, was that two out of three respondents (Alice and Anthony) perfectly pronounced phonemes /ð/ and /θ/ which have peculiar articulation. They pronounced it correctly in each recording, Amelia struggled with the phoneme /ð/ only in the recording of the text.

4 Conclusion

As Olson (2014) and Hannahs (2007) have stated, pronunciation is generally believed to be overlooked in traditional teaching. The aim of this thesis was to explore the importance attributed to pronunciation by specific lower-secondary school teachers and to find out how skilled are their pupils at pronunciation. To assess the situation at this particular lower-secondary school, three qualitative research methods were opted for: semi-structured interview, analysis of pupils' pronunciation and analysis of documents.

The analysis of Framework Education Program and School Education Program shows that segmental and suprasegmental features of pronunciation should be included and taught in English lessons, both at primary and at lower-secondary level, however, textbooks used at this school seem not to provide enough material for this purpose. At the primary level, the older textbooks by SPN incorporate phonemic symbols and pupils are taught to recognize these symbols regularly, whereas the new one by Klett does not include phonemic symbols at all. At the secondary level, symbols of phonemic alphabet are included in the wordlists at the end of the workbook. The textbook includes little material (one chapter) focused on practice of segmental and suprasegmental features of pronunciation and on explicit pronunciation instructions; what is more, as the research data shows, teachers do not pay much attention to it and this chapter is frequently omitted in English teaching. At neither level do the teachers have standardized assessment criteria to assess pupils' pronunciation.

As the data gathered from interviews shows, there are usually 24 pupils in ESL classes at the lower-secondary level. Teachers of these classes must be qualified with degree in English; however, this criterion is not met by several primary level teachers. This fact raised a question to what extent do teachers without a degree in English help pupils acquire the correct pronunciation and articulation skills? Based on the gathered data, one of the primary level teachers mentions that the negative impact of incorrect and insufficient explicit pronunciation instruction is already observable among some primary level pupils. To address this deficit, some teachers opt for teaching methods in which correct pronunciation is acquired e.g. through listening to songs, stories and words from recordings, however, to what extent the pronunciation is truly taught, covered and assessed in ESL lessons depends solely on the teachers.

At the lower-secondary level, all teachers are qualified in English, however not all teachers attribute the same importance to pronunciation in their lessons. While some teachers address the explicit pronunciation instruction regularly and practice possibly problematic pronunciation features of English for Czech speakers (e.g. dental fricatives /ð/, /θ/, schwa, velar

n, open a /æ/, silent letters, intonation etc.), others seem to pay more attention to teaching grammar. Based on the research, teachers pay more attention to pronunciation especially at the beginning of units, when new vocabulary is introduced, and correct articulation is practised. Two out of three teacher respondents mention phonemic symbols in their lessons, however, only one out of them uses activities like tongue twisters and minimal pairs to raise pupils' awareness of correct articulation of these specific phonemes. Assessment of pronunciation is done mostly through providing feedback as there are not any standardized criteria teachers might follow when assessing pronunciation at this school.

Data gathered from interviews with pupils confirms that teachers pay most attention to teaching grammar. In the lessons, teachers also focus on listening activities, reading assignments, translating, and completing exercises in workbooks and textbooks. The approaches to pronunciation in lessons vary: according to one pupil, one teacher does not mention explicit pronunciation instructions at all, practice of pronunciation done through repeating after the teacher or a recording is seldomly realized. Other pupil has experience with practising the pronunciation at the beginning of new units, but not much attention is given to it in other parts of lessons. Only one pupil testifies that pronunciation is practised at least once a week, or two weeks and various methods are opted for this aim. Only one pupil respondent mentions difficult phonemes to articulate, i.e. /ð/ and /θ/. Other than that, pupils do not mention sounds that might be difficult to articulate.

Retrieved data from the analysis of pupils' recording shows that dental fricatives /ð/ and /θ/ cause trouble to primary as well as lower-secondary level pupils. Besides that, primary level pupil erred in pronunciation of phonemes /æ/, /eə/ (in minimal pairs) and phoneme /æ/ (in words in context). Lower-secondary pupils erred in minimal pairs mostly in articulation of phonemes /æ/, /ʊ/ and in the voicing of /s/ and /z/ at the end of words. Uttered words in context **included** errors in articulation of phonemes /æ/, /ɜ:/, /ð/, /ʊ/ and /ʌ/. Voicing of /z/ at the end of the words posed a problem in words in context as well.

Surprising information gathered from the research represents the positive impact of social media and network mentioned by both teachers and pupils. Through increased exposure to English pupils can acquire (among other features) its correct pronunciation more easily. All three pupil respondents emphasize the positive influence of social media, watching movies and series in English, listening to songs in English, playing games in English. They also mention that conversations in English with their family members have great positive impact on their pronunciation.

The limit of this work lies in low number of recordings and observed phonemes. To map the situation at this school, more pupil respondents could have been approached. Since this case study did not include a research method of direct observation, we cannot compare respondents' testimonies to reality. To provide more objective results, the recordings could be analysed by more than one researcher. Further research could delve more closely into the reasons behind the importance that teachers attribute to pronunciation.

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Appendices

Appendix A - Interview questions (lower-secondary teachers)

1. Could you please introduce yourself? (career, experience)
2. What elements of language do you teach the most (Skills, systems: reading, writing, speaking, listening, grammar, vocabulary, pronunciation)? How and how often do you do that?
3. In your opinion, is teaching pronunciation generally overlooked?
4. What stress do you lay on teaching pronunciation?
5. Are you familiar with the system of pronunciation in English?
6. What activities and methods do you use to teach pronunciation?
7. Does the textbook provide you enough support to teach pronunciation or do you use your own materials?
8. How do your pupils perceive the importance of pronunciation learning?
9. What challenges do you and your pupils face when it comes to pronunciation? How do you overcome them?
10. How do you assess your pupils' pronunciation?
11. Is there anything you would like to add?

Appendix B - Interview questions (headteacher)

1. What criteria must an English teacher meet to be hired? (Does this include correct pronunciation?)
2. Are teachers further educated in languages?
3. What should the ideal English lessons contain according to the management?
4. What does the management focus on during observations? Does this include correct pronunciation?
5. What does the Czech School Inspectorate focus on during observations in English lessons?
6. What representation does correct pronunciation have in the School Educational Programme (ŠVP)?
7. Does the school have any specialized materials, books, or technologies available for teaching pronunciation?

Appendix C - Interview questions (primary teacher)

1. Could I please ask you to introduce yourself? Career, experience, education...
2. Which language elements do you most often teach? (skills, reading, writing, listening, grammar, vocabulary, pronunciation. How and how often do you do this?
3. What portion of the class time do you dedicate to pronunciation?
4. Do students know phonetic transcription symbols?
5. In your opinion, is pronunciation teaching generally overlooked?
6. What emphasis do you place on pronunciation teaching?
7. What activities and methods do you use for pronunciation teaching?
8. How do you approach assessing pronunciation?
9. Does the textbook you use offer enough space and material for pronunciation teaching?
If not, do you use your own materials?
10. How do your students perceive the importance of learning pronunciation?
11. What challenges do you and your students face when it comes to pronunciation? Is there something they really struggle with?
12. Is there anything else you would like to add?

Appendix D - Interview questions (lower-secondary pupils)

1. Could you introduce yourself first (age, grade, favourite subjects...)?
2. Which elements of English do you enjoy the most? Speaking, writing, listening, grammar, pronunciation...
3. Have you ever discussed the pronunciation system in English at school?
4. Does phonetic transcription help you understand pronunciation better?
5. Is there anything in pronunciation that you find challenging? (words/sounds/phonemes)
6. How often do you focus on pronunciation in English lessons?
7. How does pronunciation teaching proceed?
8. How do you practice pronunciation?
9. How do you learn correct pronunciation yourself?
10. How do you perceive the importance of correct pronunciation?
11. What helps you learn correct pronunciation?
12. Which variant of English do you prefer more? American or British, and why?
13. Is there anything you would like to say in conclusion?