

**Filozofická fakulta
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Bakalářská práce

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**Účinnost výuky prozodických rysů angličtiny
u českých dětí**

*Effectiveness of teaching English prosodic features
in Czech children*

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Prohlášení

Prohlašuji, že jsem bakalářskou práci vypracoval/a samostatně, že jsem řádně citoval/a všechny použité prameny a literaturu a že práce nebyla využita v rámci jiného vysokoškolského studia či k získání jiného nebo stejného titulu.

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Abstrakt a klíčová slova

Hlavním cílem této práce je zjistit, zda si mohou děti osvojit prozodické rysy angličtiny po absolvování výuky, která je na tyto jevy částečně zaměřená. Teoretická část se nejdříve zaměřuje na prozodii a její význam v komunikaci. Následně jsou představeny dvě z jejich nejdůležitějších složek: intonace a rytmus, které byly také cílovými jevy pro analýzu v empirické části. Oba tyto aspekty prozodie jsou představeny nejen co se týče jejich hlavních charakteristik, ale také s ohledem na jejich význam pro dosažení srozumitelnosti v projevu mluvčího. Práce dále pojednává o důležitosti zahrnutí výuky prozodie do hodin angličtiny a zdůrazňuje specifika práce s mladšími žáky. Jelikož se většina výzkumů zaměřující se na efektivitu výuky prozodie doposud zabývala především dospělými, empirická část popisuje studii provedenou s dvěma skupinami dětí, experimentální a kontrolní. Část metodologie popisuje formu výuky a poté i povahu nahrávek. Tyto nahrávky byly analyzovány za účelem zjistit, zda žáci v experimentální skupině udělaly v rámci prozodie během roku nějaký pokrok. Následně byly také porovnány obě skupiny, aby bylo možné vyvodit závěr, zda měla výuka prozodických rysů nějaký vliv na jejich osvojení dětmi. Vzhledem k specifčnosti práce s dětmi jsou výsledky prezentovány spíše formou případové studie jednotlivých výkonů žáků. Z výzkumu vyplynulo, že děti z experimentální skupiny ve většině případů udělaly pokrok v jedné z následujících oblastí: zvětšení intonačního rozpětí, melodické potlačení schwa a u některých dětí, i když zřídka, i v oblasti temporální redukce. Rytmické charakteristiky byly porovnatelné v obou skupinách. Možné důvody pro tyto výsledky jsou následně uvedeny v části Diskuze.

Klíčová slova: prozodie, intonace, rytmus, učení jazyka, děti

Abstract and key words

The main objective of this paper is to discover if children can acquire prosodic features of English after involving prosody-oriented instruction in the curriculum. The theoretical part of the work at first concentrates on description of prosody, its definition and significance for communication. It then introduces two of its main components: intonation and rhythm, which were also the target phenomena of the analysis in the empirical part. Both of these prosodic aspects are introduced not only in terms of their main characteristics but also in terms of their significance for reaching intelligibility and comprehensibility in the discourse. The work further elaborates upon the importance of involving prosody instruction in English lessons and emphasizes particularities of working with young learners. Since most of the research into the effectiveness of prosody instruction done so far has focused on adults, the empirical part presents a study carried out with two groups of primary school children, an experimental and a control group. The methodology part discusses the design of the lessons as well as the makeup of the recording sessions. The recordings were analysed to see if any progress was made with individual speakers in the course of the school year and then the results of both groups are compared to determine if the instruction had any effects on the acquisition of the suprasegmental features of English. With regards to the specific nature of working with children, the research presents rather a case study of individual performances of the young learners. The children from the experimental group usually made progress in one of the following areas: extension of pitch range, melodic suppression of schwa and, rarely, also its temporal reduction. The rhythmical characteristics proved to be comparable with both groups. The possible reasons for this are presented in the Discussion part.

Key words: prosody, intonation, rhythm, language teaching, children

Table of contents

1. Introduction	7
2. English prosody	8
2.1. Intonation	12
2.2. Rhythm	16
3. Significance of teaching English prosodic features in EFL learners	23
4. Particularity of teaching EFL in children	28
5. Research questions and hypotheses	33
6. Design of the individual lessons	34
6.1. An example of a typical lesson	35
7. Method	38
7.1. Material	38
7.2. Design	38
7.3. Results	40
7.3.1. Melody	40
7.3.2. Fluency	41
7.3.3. Results – curiosities	43
7.4. Discussion	43
7.5. Conclusion.....	45
8. References	46
9. Resumé	48

1. Introduction

The prosody instruction in English classes has long been neglected. Nowadays, when the general trend of pronunciation teaching tends to sway towards the principle of intelligibility, it is of huge importance to focus not only on pronunciation of segments in classes, but also on prosody. It has been proved that the suprasegmental features have a considerable influence on the understanding of the speaker. Apart from introducing the key pillars of prosody, intonation and rhythm, this work also discusses their importance for the use of the English language in a day-to-day communication. Although there have been more and more studies concentrating on this very aspect of language teaching, there are only few which would take children, who only start to learn, and their prosody acquisition as the subject of their interest.

Therefore, the empirical part of this work presents a study carried out in the last two years. Two groups of children, one of which was exposed to a prosody-focused instruction, were involved in the study. The principal assumption was that the experimental group would make progress in terms of developing a more considerable amount of sensitivity towards the prosodic features of the English language in the course of the school year. A control group was included so that the possible positive effects of prosody instruction could be better identified. The first chapter concentrates on prosody and its role in language. Afterwards, intonation and rhythm are discussed in individual chapters. In the following section (3), the importance of prosodic focus in language classes is presented. The particularity of teaching children is the subject of section 4 with focus on significant supportive measures the teachers should implement in the lessons. In the empirical part of this work, the whole study is presented. The first sections (6 and 7) are dedicated to method, material and design of both the lessons and the consequent recording sessions. The results are then presented in subchapter 7.3 followed by a section 7.4, which offers a discussion not only of these results, but also of challenges of working with children and their effect on the study itself.

2. English prosody

Prosody plays an immense role in language. When people communicate, their utterances are made of individual sentences which are formed by applying rules the speakers have learned. However, face to face communication stretches further, beyond the grammatical rules of a language. Regardless of the country people live in and language they speak, certain types of linguistic behaviour might be adopted in course of a conversation. According to J. C. Wells, “it is probably true of all human societies that the speakers speed up when they are excited or impatient and slow down when they are being thoughtful or weighty. We all speak more quietly than normal when we do not wish to be overheard.” (Wells, 1982, p. 3) These traits of human communication come under the term language prosody.

Prosody is a complex system for which no unified definition exists. For some phoneticians, prosody involves intonation, rhythm, pitch loudness or even duration, in other words all the suprasegmental features of language, for some only rhythm is a part of prosody while intonation is used to refer specifically to melody or pitch patterns (Gilbert, 2008, p. 2) and for others only intonation and rhythm are relevant when speaking about prosody. There is no ideal definition of prosody which would cover all the elements participating in prosodic structure. As Mennen suggests, the most common definition to capture prosody is to say it determines the suprasegmental properties of utterances (Cutler, 1987, cited in Mennen, de Leeuw, 2014, p. 185). For the needs of this paper it is sufficient to look mainly at intonation and rhythm profoundly. As Gilbert mentions in her work on prosodic pyramid, both these aspects are vitally linked and work together (Gilbert, 2008, p. 2) while speaking. Specifically, together they are used by the speaker to guide the listener through the conversation and properly express the message he or she tries to convey. To get a more specific picture of what prosody actually means, Mennen and de Leeuw claim that prosody is “not what you say, it is how you say it” (Mennen, de Leeuw, 2014, p. 184). In any language, prosody is inseparable from language itself. It has several functions for the participants of the discourse and therefore its position in communication is crucial.

Firstly, thanks to prosody the listener is able to distinguish sentence types, specifically if the utterance is meant to be a question or a direct statement as in the following example: “You have a new T-shirt.” With rising pitch at the end of the sentence, the speaker indicates a question and demands an answer, whereas falling pitch would imply that the speaker noticed the new T-shirt, knows that it is new and he or she is not doubtful about it. As we might notice, the speaker’s intention is not hinted by the syntactical order of the sentence, as the arrangement can in some cases stay the same in both the question and the direct statement. In this case, the intonation clearly contributes to decoding the meaning of the utterance.

Another function of prosody is to make important information stand out (Mennen, de Leeuw, 2014, p. 185). This function is used mainly when the speaker needs to make an emphasis on the most significant word in the sentence (the emphasized word is written in italics): “London is a *financial* centre.” In this example, the emphasis implies that London is a financial centre, not, for instance, a cultural one. One makes use especially of pitch, length and loudness when emphasizing a word (Mennen, de Leeuw, 2014, p. 185). The prominent syllable of such a word is then perceived as higher, longer and louder (Mennen, de Leeuw, 2014, p. 185). Even though these are not the only cues used in prosody to mark a word in a sentence so that it stands out, they are the most significant ones.

Apart from making a word stand out and distinguishing a grammatical function of an utterance, prosody might also help the listeners distinguish lexical meanings of words. In certain situations, a word has the same form in two categories: for example, it might be a noun as well as a verb. Relying on the placement of stress, it might help the listener to tell what category the word fits into. Therefore, making use of loudness, pitch and length of the particular syllable is crucial for being able to not only classify the word itself, but also resolve the meaning of the whole utterance (“FORbear” as a noun X “forBEAR” as a verb, Mennen, de Leeuw, 2014, p. 185).

Last but not least, one of the most important functions of prosody is the speaker’s ability to divide their utterances into individual parts. This so-called

prosodic phrasing is very important to guide the listener clearly through the speech and make the purpose of his utterance and its content comprehensible (Mennen, de Leeuw, 2014, p. 186). Unclear prosodic patterns in a sentence might lead to misunderstandings or ambiguity. We might explain this layer more in depth in the following sample sentence which is put together on the basis of an example given by Mennen and de Leeuw (Mennen, de Leeuw, 2014, p. 186): *When you examine the topic gradually you will understand it.* There are two ways of dividing the sentence both of which lead to a different understanding. The first option would be dividing it into the chunks *When you examine the topic* and *gradually you will understand it*, the second option would be *When you examine the topic gradually* and *you will understand it*. It is this division into chunks that is the decisive factor influencing the general understanding of the sentence. The first option implies that when we examine a topic we will gradually start to understand it, whereas in the second case the division suggests that we will understand the topic when we examine it gradually, step by step. According to Mennen and de Leeuw, the speaker might make use of a pause between the chunks, lengthening of the final syllable at the end of the phrase, change in pitch or any combination of those to indicate which meaning is the appropriate one (Mennen, de Leeuw, 2014, p. 186).

Looking at the English prosody, there are arrangements which might shed light on the structure of an English sentence. This particular system is called *the prosody pyramid* (Gilbert 2008, p. 10). It is now going to be described in accordance with Gilbert's interpretation which is depicted in fig.1 below.

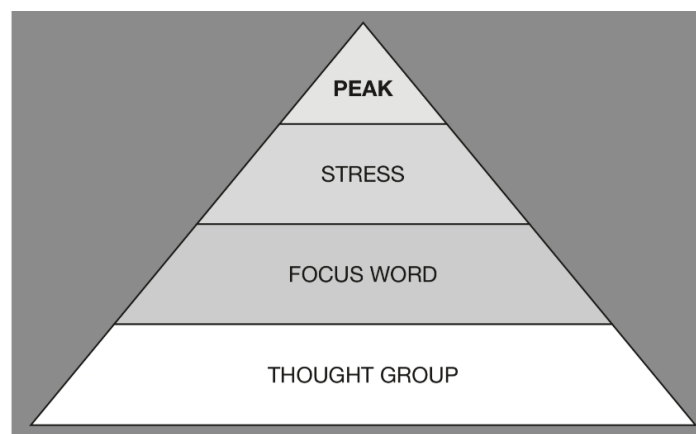


Fig.1 The Prosody pyramid (Gilbert, 2008, p.10)

The very basic element of this pyramid is the thought group. The thought group is a semantic unit which might be represented by an utterance, a sentence but it also might be only a short phrase too. Even though it might seem so when listening to a speaker, speech is not a completely fluent flow of words without any bumps or individual chunks. Prosodic phrasing, dividing one's speech into separate thought groups, is highly important for better processing of the information included (Gilbert, 2008, p. 11). It is usually easier to separate thought groups in the written texts when we are guided by punctuation, but it is much more difficult in a spoken discourse.

There are several ways to help the listeners distinguish individual thought groups and reach well-structured and understandable utterance. These include a) inserting a pause to mark the end of a thought group b) using intonation movements like dropping and raising to mark the end of a thought group c) lengthening of the last syllable of the thought group (Gilbert, 2008, p. 11). These signals may be and most commonly are combined with each other. Their combination makes it clear in the discourse that the speaker has finished a thought group and will continue with the next one or that he or she creates space for their partner to react. Of course, in some situations one element stands out more than the others, for example in rapid speech there is not much time for pauses, therefore pitch drops will be more efficient and striking (Gilbert, 2008, p. 11). By using a slight drop only, the speaker indicates the end of a thought group but he or she will most likely continue with their speech while using a bigger drop usually suggests the end of the sentence or utterance. The pitch drop goes hand in hand with lengthening of the last syllable. It gives the proper space and time for the pitch drop so the speaker has enough space to indicate the end of a thought group or their whole utterance. In any case, it is important to realize that the presence of a pause is not necessary to mark the boundary of a thought group.

Thought groups can further be divided into smaller units, the most important of them being a focus word. That word carries the meaning and it is therefore the most prominent word of the thought group. Part of the focus word is a syllable

which carries the main stress. As Gilbert states, this syllable functions as the peak of information within the thought group (Gilbert, 2008, p. 10). It appears clear that this part of the utterance, the focus word with the syllable carrying the main stress, needs to be emphasized in order to ensure comprehensible transmission of information. For this purpose, intonation is the main tool which makes use of contrast, emphasis and de-emphasis in the utterance (Gilbert, 2008, p. 10). Intonation as such is going to be discussed in the next section.

2.1. Intonation

Intonation is an essential part of the spoken form of language. It is always present, only its extent is variable and changes according to the speaker's intention. Tone languages, such as for example Chinese or some African languages, use intonation for denoting meaning of the word. Specifically, if two words in these languages have the same segmental make-up, the difference in meaning is achieved by varying intonation. In non-tone languages, intonation does not play any role in the meaning of individual words, but it is essential for making the speaker's intention clear, in other words, it helps the speaker deliver his or her message. Some of non-tone languages are more "flat" when it comes to their intonational range, and some, such as English, expand the range much more, sometimes even on a single word. Despite the differences between languages, intonation is one of the most universal semiotic resources available in human communication (Verdugo, 2009, p. 141). It is also one of the first phonetic features of language that is acquired and recognized by infants, much earlier than any grammar or vocabulary, which was proven by various studies in the past: "Early on in the babbling stage, children start to produce 'utterances' that have the characteristic prosodic melodies of the language the child is exposed to." (Schreiber, 2009, p. 159). As Verdugo mentions in her paper, once children gain more language competence, intonation becomes automatic and intrinsic to the message and therefore the speakers are then mostly unaware of it (Verdugo, 2009, p. 141). Consequently, it might seem much more difficult for learners to acquire than any segmental feature of language.

According to Roach, there is no definition that would describe intonation satisfactorily, but all definitions must address pitch which is an essential component of intonation (Roach, 2009, p. 119). By differences in pitch, the tone is being realized. There are several types of tones in English: rise, level, fall, fall-rise and rise-fall (Wells, 1982, p. 3). Unlike tone languages, English uses tone not for lexical differences in meaning between individual words, but for intonation, to express speaker's attitude and convey the message of the utterance so that the listener understands its meaning properly.

Primarily, in order to make the utterance understandable, speakers divide it into individual chunks. This process is called tonality and the chunks are referred to not only as thought groups, term used above, but also as intonation phrases, intonation groups, word groups or tone groups. In this chapter, the term 'intonation phrases' is going to be used following the terminology of J. C. Wells. Generally, speakers make each clause an individual intonation phrase (IP) (Wells, 1982, p. 6), but there are no generally applicable rules for dividing sentences into intonation phrases. In some cases, the same utterance might be a single intonation phrase, or it might be divided into several intonation phrases, depending on how the speaker decides. Such speaker's decision is closely tied to tonicity.

Tonicity is the pattern of the utterance which determines what word becomes the focus word. Working with tonicity enables the speaker to draw hearer's attention to the significant part of the utterance by foregrounding the focus word. Its emphasis is reached by pitch prominence which is added to the rhythmic prominence that a stressed syllable bears (Wells, 1982, p. 7).

The intonation phrase might be divided into onset, nucleus and tail. Not all of them must be realized in the intonation phrase; if the nucleus stands at the beginning of the phrase with no other accented syllables before, there is no onset, and if there are no syllables following the nucleus in the particular IP, there is no tail. Nucleus is the most important accent of the whole intonation phrase, the core of speaker's attention. It also bears the last accent of the intonation phrase and marks the place where the pitch movement begins (Wells, 1982, p. 7). It is important

to emphasize that the boundaries of onset, nucleus and tail do not necessarily need to coincide with word boundaries, however, they always coincide with syllable boundaries (Wells, 1982, p. 7).

The third process resides in deciding what tone to use in individual intonation phrases. As mentioned above, the tone can rise, fall, rise-fall, fall-rise or stay level, all depending on what attitude the speaker has towards the message he articulates, whether he or she is stating a fact, asking, expressing doubts and so on. Generally, falling pitch usually expresses definiteness whereas rising leaves space for further conversation or argumentation. However, Gilbert points out the observation that sometimes it is not necessary for the listener to define what pitch movement corresponds to the speaker's intention: "In intonation languages such as English (in which pitch does not distinguish lexical items, as it does in tone languages), the direction of the pitch change is seldom crucial to understanding. For example, if a pitch movement is used to signal focus on a word, it may matter little to a listener if the movement is upward or downward as long as it is salient and detectable." (Gilbert cites Patel, 2008, p. 19).

Pitch range spreads from low to high and it is different with each speaker. Generally, one might speak with higher pitch level than someone else, it depends on that person's voice or even physical structure (Roach, 2009, p. 119). In other words, it is a very individual matter. However, it is possible to influence and change the sound of our voice and so it applies to the pitch as well; speakers can change their pitch so that they speak higher than usual (Roach, 2009, p. 120). Intonation in English has a crucial role in the meaning of an utterance and each intonational move is used for a specific reason. There are various ways to mark an intonational shift during speaking in written materials, Roach uses marks before the syllable for which the intonational shift applies (Roach, 2009, p. 121), as for example in: "\yes" (falling pitch) or "/yes" (rising pitch; commonly expressing doubts, questioning). English intonational range is wide to such an extent that flat intonation might even sound unnatural. Roach explains this phenomenon using two most common one-syllable utterances "yes" and "no": "The word we use for the overall behaviour of

the pitch in these examples is tone; a one-syllable word can be said with either a level tone or a moving tone. If you try saying ‘yes’ or ‘no’ with a level tone (...), you may find the result does not sound natural, and indeed English speakers do not use level tones on one-syllable utterances very frequently. Moving tones are more common.” (Roach, 2009, p. 121) By moving tones Roach points to falling and rising of the speaker’s pitch on a particular syllable. By using falling pitch on short utterances as “yes” or “no” the speaker indicates definiteness and finality typical for declarative sentences. On the contrary, rising pitch corresponds to the speaker’s intention to ask a question or express doubt. Of course, these are idealized examples. Sometimes even these very short utterances are said with a small or no intonational shift at all, it all depends on the situation in which the words are spoken and on the speakers themselves.

In comparison with English, Czech intonation tends to be much flatter. Czech language has a rather free word order which enables the speakers to give prominence to certain words by moving them in the sentence. Since the English syntax is not so flexible, it relies rather on melodic cues when expressing prominence (Skarnitzl, Rumlová, 2019). This difference might be noted in the following sentences: He dug a HOLE in the garden. *Vykopal na zahradě jámu.* X He dug a hole in the GARDEN. *Vykopal jámu na zahradě.* (Dušková et. al., el. mluvnice 14.31). Czech speakers may therefore struggle with widening their pitch range to sound natural to a native speaker of English. Volín, Poesová and Weingartová (2015) carried out a study in which they compared Czech and British radio broadcasters. According to the results, the pitch range was 2 semitones narrower in L1 Czech than in L1 English. Afterwards, native Czech and English non-professional speakers read the same sentences in English. While the British speakers’ pitch range was similar in both parts of the experiment, it was by over 1 semitone narrower in the L2 speakers of English than in L1 Czech newsreaders. The authors imply that there are other factors influencing the outcome than a simple transfer, such as anxiety of the L2 speakers.

2.2. Rhythm

The world itself exists in rhythmical motions. In nature, there are patterns which repetitively happen, be it for example changing of day and night or seasons. There is a natural rhythm in plants, animals and humans as well which helps to prevent chaos and preserve system and structure in the world. May rhythm also be found in speech itself? It is extremely important to emphasize that “rhythm is not a property of the acoustic signal but a perceptual phenomenon.” (Volín 2010, p. 4) In fact, it is very subjective and there is no scientific proof to give whether speech rhythm exists or not. “Experiments have shown that we tend to hear speech as more rhythmical than it actually is.” (Roach, 2009, p. 110) Studies have shown, however, that as well as the melody of our speech, rhythm too is acquired by babies long before they are able to produce language. As mentioned above in the previous section, they have no difficulties recognizing the specific melody of speech typical for their mother tongue and this also applies to rhythm. By the time they reach the age of one, the rhythmical structures of their mother tongue are deeply familiar to them and they will unconsciously apply them to any L2 that they learn (Aoyama et al., 2007, cited in Gilbert, 2008, p. 3). Furthermore, children’s pleasure in nursery rhymes also suggests that there is some kind of inborn inclination towards rhythmicity (Volín, 2010, p. 1).

These days, scholars’ opinions on rhythm in speech tend to differ, it is therefore quite complicated to establish whether there is any kind of rhythm at all and, if yes, to sum up how it actually behaves in individual languages. The general widely used distinction of languages based on their rhythmical patterns which prevailed mainly in the past is as follows: stress-timing, syllable-timing and mora-timing. While in syllable-timed languages the relatively regular intervals are said to be found between individual syllables (regardless of whether they are stressed or unstressed), English is said to belong to the group of stress-timed languages, which “implies that stressed syllables tend to occur at relatively regular intervals whether they are separated by unstressed syllables or not.” (Roach, 2009, p. 107) This

distinction was based on the work of Kenneth Pike and Clifford Prator which offered a simple and teachable model of rhythm used widely by most EFL textbook writers and teachers (Dickerson, 2016, p. 40). The traditional view on rhythm assumed regularity as one of the pillars when teaching English, since English has always been regarded as a rhythmical language. Dickerson offers a brief explanation of three supporting pillars of Pike and Prator’s work, first of which is stress alternation. As mentioned earlier in this section, this pillar also describes sentence rhythm as being formed by alternate stressed and unstressed syllables and the alternate high and low pitches. The second pillar concerns the interstress interval between the heavy stresses, which is a contribution of Pike, who is remembered best for naming this pillar the stress-timed rhythm. The third one determines where these heavy stresses occur in phrases and it is, in this traditional view, on every content word (Dickerson, 2016, p. 40).

English rhythmic system often works with the so called ‘foot’ or ‘stress group’. It is a portion of speech which begins with a stressed syllable and ends with the last unstressed syllable before the next stressed. An utterance might comprise one or more feet and in the second case, one foot might be stronger than the other. Roach uses diagrams to demonstrate this on an utterance ‘twenty places’ (Roach, 2009, p. 108), as shown in Figure 1 and Figure 2 below. Both of these words have the same rhythmical structure in which the stress falls on the first syllable, therefore it is strong, and the second is weak. Each word is an individual foot, which means there are two feet in the utterance ‘twenty places’:

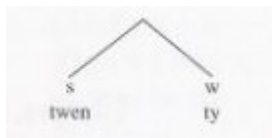


fig.1, Rhythmical profile of the word *twenty* (Roach, 2009, p. 108)

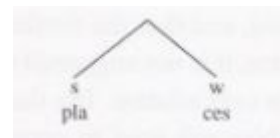


fig.2 Rhythmical profile of the word *places* (Roach, 2009, p. 108)

The diagram in the fig. 3 shows that although the words are pronounced similarly in terms of rhythm when they are separate, when put together as a phrase ‘twenty places’, the second word, ‘places’, “normally carries stronger amount of stress than

‘twenty’ (i.e. is rhythmically stronger)” (Roach, 2009, p. 108).

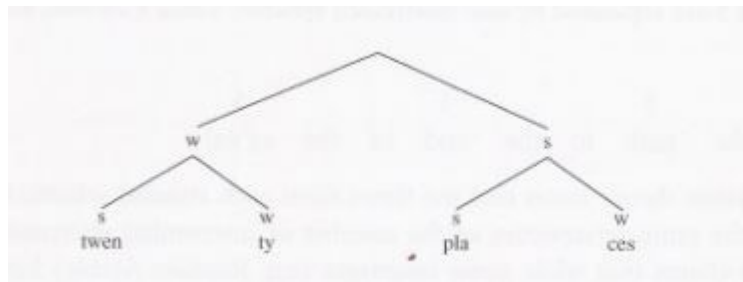


fig.3, the rhythmical profile of the phrase *twenty places* (Roach, 2009, p. 108)

It would be possible to prolong the utterance, add other words and the diagram and its tree-like structure would grow in a similar manner, which means that there would be other weak and strong feet comprising weak and strong syllables. Of course, one must take into consideration that this is an idealisation of how it works in languages. So, while ‘places’ would be stronger than ‘twenty’ when spoken individually, Roach emphasizes that in a longer spoken utterance, e.g. “twenty places further back’ the listener would be prone to perceive ‘twenty’ as more prominent than ‘places’ (Roach, 2009, p. 109). Furthermore, the rhythm of our speech also varies depending on the situation; whether we are nervous, in hustle, whether we speak publicly or with friends and so on (Roach, 2009, p. 109).

The traditional grouping of languages into stress-timed and syllable-timed might be convenient, but linguists have started diverting their attention from it. Nowadays, it is perceived more as a tendency than a strict division because more and more evidence shows that this is not how it usually works in everyday language use. Today, rhythm in English is generally regarded as alternation of stronger and weaker elements (Nolan, Jeon, 2014, p. 2) rather than an isochronic phenomenon. Regardless of the definition, what we know for sure is that somewhat regular rhythmic patterning contributes greatly to our understanding during a discourse.

In everyday speech, it is not always possible to squeeze the language into monotonous rhythmic chains because our speech behaviour is guided by the requirements of the content of our message, which is far more important than “neat ornamentation of the form” (Volín, 2010, p. 2). According to some studies in the

past, as for example the study of Huggins (1979), natural rhythmic patterns had a positive influence on intelligibility while distorted ones did the opposite (Volín 2010, p. 3). Also, a study of Buxton (1973) shows that “the reaction times in tasks with natural rhythm were shorter than tasks performed on speech with manipulated temporal structure” (Volín, 2010, p. 3). However, although rhythm in speech is a significant guiding element for the listener, it does not need to be strictly regular to ensure the receiver of the message will understand. “Our brains need regular onsets of important (stressed) syllables to work effortlessly and the mixture of trochaic and iambic words, which is typical of everyday speech, should not unsettle them.” (Volín, 2010, p. 3) If the speaker somehow produces a steady flow of words with regular onsets, the listener should not have trouble understanding. The sustainability during a discourse is therefore more important for intelligibility than a regular rhythm itself, so generally, “a speaker who produces predictable rhythmic configurations in speech is less demanding to listen to than an arrhythmic one.” (Volín, 2010, p. 4)

Even despite the shift in linguists’ views on rhythmic patterns and the progress made in the field so far, some scholars still go even further and approach the definition of rhythm in other, alternative ways. Some claim that spoken English only has two rhythmical peaks; the onset and nucleus. Linguists usually claim that these accents do not even occur at regular intervals (Dickerson, 2016, p. 44), which is one of the opinions opposed to the traditional division of language when it comes to rhythmical patterning in speech. According to other scholars, speech as such is in fact very antirhythmic. These scholars work with the notion of rhythm as such an individual matter that it cannot be formulated using any kind of strictly set and rigid rules: “The widespread hunt for rhythm in speech does not, of course, prove that speech is rhythmic (...) we then argue that the nature of language promotes arrhythmicity in speech.” (Nolan, Jeon, 2014, p. 1).

Nevertheless, questions whether this type of view is not too extreme may arise. Even though it might be agreed on that rhythm is a perceptual phenomenon, it might be hard to believe that speech is completely arrhythmic, Several studies

both with babies and adults were carried out which attempted to prove the existence of rhythmicity in language: “A series of experiments with babies between birth and five months old as well as adults demonstrated that they could discriminate rhythmically different languages even with low-pass filtered speech lacking phonemic and phonotactic information or resynthesized speech which does not include any segmental and intonational information.” (Nolan, Jeon, 2014, p. 4) If no other information is included, it should be possible to assume that it is viable to ascribe some typical rhythmical features to individual languages. Nolan and Jeon stress that rhythmicity of speech is dependent on many more factors than these studies usually consider though; in all languages, there is at least some variation between the prominence of successive syllables, prominence meaning high values in duration, intensity or pitch movements (Nolan, Jeon, 2014, p. 4). These phenomena are given a different amount of weight in different languages and these differences make the listener distinguish them. In other words, the problem with the traditional view of speech rhythm consists in the fact that it cannot be regarded as a purely temporal phenomenon. It is important to consider other particularities now, through which the impression of rhythmicity is realized, and which contribute to a fluent connected speech.

Such an important component of rhythm is linking, which connects the neighbouring words in an utterance. Even though it might seem trivial, linking hugely supports fluency during speaking. In some cases, when a word ends in a consonant and the following word starts with a vowel, linking is realized through connecting these sounds together without inserting a glottal stop: /ə'raɪvɪn/. In other cases, additional sounds might occur in the words: transient 'j' and 'w', intrusive and linking 'r'. This is especially the case when a word ends in a vowel and the following one starts with a vowel too, although each sound appears in a different context. Transient 'j' normally appears after words ending in 'i' sounds (/ɪ/, /i:/, /ɔɪ/, /aɪ/, /eɪ/) as for example in 'three inches' /θri: ˈɪntʃɪz/ or 'lay eggs' /leɪ ˈɛgz/. Transient 'w', on the contrary, usually emerges when a word ends in a 'u' sound (/ʊ/, /u:/, /aʊ/, /əʊ/) and the following one starts with a vowel, as in 'you are'

/ju: wɑ:/. Linking 'r' is typical only for non-rhotic accents of English, as for example British English. In such varieties, 'r' sound at the end of words is usually not pronounced, as in 'four' /fɔ:/. However, once the word ends with a vowel and is followed by another one starting with a vowel, as in 'four apples' /fɔ:ræplz/, the 'r' sound appears. Likewise, intrusive r sound is also more common in British English and appears under similar circumstances, except it is an entirely newly added consonant, it was never a part of any of the two words: 'media attention' /'mi:diərə'tenʃn/. There are also other phenomena contributing to rhythmicity, such as elision ('grandparent' /'grænpɛərənt/), coalescence ('would you' /wʊdʒu:/) and processes of assimilation of place ('in bed' /ɪm bed/) and manner ('in the' /ɪnə/).

Regardless of whether we accept the traditional perspective or not, the essence of temporal patterning of English resides mainly in the contrast between prominence and reduction. Generally, the unstressed grammatical words and unstressed syllables are reduced both temporally and qualitatively which allows the stressed syllables to be emphasized. In this respect, English is much different from the Czech language which does not work with any of these processes. According to research summarized by Skarnitzl and Rumlová (2019), Czech speakers link grammatical words like and, a, in, of much less than native speakers and they also do not elide so often (e.g. [h] in have/has). The authors also mention studies whose results show that if linking takes place in Czech speakers at all, the consonant-to-vowel type is most frequent (Skarnitzl, Rumlová, 2019). It is also important to state that learners are sometimes not aware that some segmental aspects of language are rather a matter of the suprasegmental level, which might hinder the process of learning, as in the case of schwa. Its role in the spoken language might seem difficult to explain when it is understood as a mere segment on the same level with other segments. In fact, "schwa is not a stand-alone vowel; it's part of larger system" (Dickerson, 2010, p. 12). In this case, unlike other vowels, schwa is a by-product of rhythm (Dickerson, 2010, p. 11). It is therefore necessary to perceive language as a system to understand why schwa is so common and occurs three times more frequently in speech than any other vowel (Dickerson, 2010, p. 12). Its function in

the rhythmical patterning of English might be observed in the following example from a study by Poesová (2015): the word “Japan” /dʒə'pæn/ has an accent on the second syllable, whereas in “Japanese” /dʒæpə'nɪ:z/ the stress moves to the third syllable. Simultaneously, the vowel quality changes (/æ/ to /ə/) and schwa moves to a different position in the adjectival word; it transforms into a fully produced vowel in the first syllable and carries now the secondary stress. Schwa therefore contributes immensely to making important parts of the sentence stand out, which is especially important for creating contrast necessary for smoother message decoding (Poesová, 2015, p. 32).

Disrupting one aspect of language (e.g. only intonation or only rhythm) during a discourse might not cause trouble in communication, nevertheless, when more unfamiliar patterns occur at once, the intelligibility may be hindered. Therefore, as established in the following section, focusing on rhythmical (as well as intonational) aspects of a language during acquisition might help the learners when it comes to both intelligible production of the language and understanding native speakers in a conversation.

3. Significance of teaching English prosodic features in EFL learners

Teaching pronunciation to learners of foreign languages has been a topic of debates for several decades. Is it necessary? Is it useful? How to manage? With the increasingly important role that English plays in the international communication and the status of a lingua franca, there are more non-native speakers of English nowadays than native ones (Crystal, 2003, p. 10). It is a natural consequence that the range of teachers and instructors of English across the world is also wide. Some of them are native speakers but the clear majority comprises people for whom English is only a second or foreign language. Although instructors may put emphasis on different areas of the target language and the quality of their teaching may vary, overall it seems difficult for most teachers across the world to grasp the task of teaching pronunciation appropriately. Usually, they are not able to find time in classrooms to engage in pronunciation training (Gilbert, 2008, p. 1) but even if they were, they often report to be hesitant to systematically approach this aspect of English instruction (Derwing, Munro, 2015, p. 78). In some cases, they might not feel qualified and confident enough to handle the topic sufficiently. Pronunciation is a field which draws on from psycholinguistics, sociolinguistics and speech sciences as well as from pedagogy, which makes it interdisciplinary (Isaacs, Trofimovich, 2016, p. 4). It is therefore understandable that it seems quite difficult for the instructors to grasp this topic appropriately.

This is not surprising given the fact that for a long time, pronunciation instruction was considered to be a Cinderella of language teaching; “kept behind the doors and out of sight” (Celce-Murcia, Brinton and Goodwin, 1996, cited in Levis, 2019, p. 7). Sometimes, mainly with the beginnings of Communicative Language Teaching method, pronunciation training was neglected since it was perceived as an area which could be mastered through communication (Levis, 2019, p. 10). However, it is still important to bear in mind that the field never disappeared entirely, although it was rather ignored. The discussions about the importance of pronunciation have been stirring the waters still more and more now. Not only

articles and books considering pronunciation teaching are on the rise, but also new conferences, journals and various verified evidence-based websites which are useful and easy to access are being founded (Levis, 2019, p. 11). Still, even though pronunciation instruction has been the subject of a vast number of studies in the recent past, it is fairly difficult to ascertain its overall effects, let alone determine to what extent various factors moderate them (Lee et al., 2015, p. 345). Since no unified and congruent result data come out of the research, the implications for pedagogical approaches, especially concerning the transfer of research results into language teaching materials and textbooks, are very limited, which contributes to the overall insecurity in teaching. As a result, pronunciation instruction is still underdeveloped in comparison with other aspects of language teaching in classes, such as grammatical rules or vocabulary. The difference might be seen especially when it comes to teaching suprasegmental features.

In the past, if there was any attention focused on pronunciation in the foreign language classes at all, it used to be centred on the goal of reaching the so called ‘native-like pronunciation’. The idea that learners will acquire the language to such an extent that they will sound like a native speaker was considered to be the greatest achievement in language acquisition, because then the learner will sound most natural to native speakers of English. However, in the course of time people started to question whether sounding native-like is an indispensable requirement for foreign language learners.

Firstly, not always is it possible. According to some researchers, the age of the learners is a significant aspect for the degree of foreign accent detectable in one’s speech. Even though several explanations have been proposed concerning the connection between age and accentedness, it is clear that the sooner learners start with language acquisition, the less likely they are to maintain a foreign accent. One of these explanations, Critical Period Hypothesis (CPH), claims that there are stages in one’s life during which it is easier or more difficult to acquire a foreign language. Once the learner reaches an end of a certain period most suitable for acquisition, the so-called critical period, it becomes more difficult to learn a language and reach

native-like pronunciation. The general idea adopted by proponents of CPH says that accent is not present in language as long as the learning process starts before reaching the age of six, it will most likely be present if the language is being adopted after the age of twelve, and there is variable success between age six to twelve (Flege, 1999, p. 101). Secondly, in the recent past, also an opinion has been accepted that native-like pronunciation is not a necessary precondition for being a well-articulate foreign language speaker. Consequently, questions occurred regarding new ways of teaching the pronunciation of foreign languages.

Primarily, concerns have arisen if people who are not English native speakers should teach a language at all. Will such an instructor guide the learners towards intelligibility, if it is not a native-like example? Derwing and Munro emphasize that “teachers who have learned the language themselves are generally excellent models” (Derwing, Munro, 2015, p. 81) when it comes to teaching pronunciation, exactly because they themselves had to find the most suitable approach to pronunciation learning, which they can later use when teaching others. What is more, the authors also try to invalidate the generally rooted assumption that it is wrong to have an L2 accent (Derwing, Munro, 2015, p. 81). The understanding of language teaching has shifted to such an extent that whether the instructor is native or non-native is considered largely irrelevant (Levis, 2019, p. 12). In the end, an opinion prevailing today is that intelligibility is the most crucial aspect for communication and therefore, it is also what learners should strive for.

Secondly, if the ‘native-like’ pronunciation is not the primary goal the speakers strive to achieve, is there any point in involving pronunciation instruction in language classes at all? Despite respecting the fact that speaking with a foreign accent is a natural part of the process of language learning, teaching pronunciation should be included in classes anyway, since it has been made clear that pronunciation impacts on both comprehensibility and intelligibility. As summarized by Derwing and Munro (2015), comprehensibility is the amount of effort that must be exerted in order to understand an utterance, which means it is rather a matter of subjective perception, while intelligibility describes whether the message was

received as intended. In the past, the emphasis in classes of foreign language learners was put primarily on segmental features because these were thought to be most important and crucial for being able to reach native-like pronunciation or at least a decent comprehensibility. Recently, however, the prosodic features have been recognized as more contributive to intelligibility than segments.

It is however significant to realize that both segmental features and suprasegmentals play a role in reaching an understandable discourse. They are hugely intertwined, and one should not be taught without the other. In classes, contextual teaching, i.e. connecting segmental and suprasegmental level for the students instead of teaching it separately, might help the learners understand the relations between these two layers of language and why these relations are important. We saw the importance of such teaching in the previous subchapter about rhythm (2.2); In the case of schwa, it is especially important to not only address it as a segment, but also to notice its significance for the rhythmical patterning of English. Making students aware of its function might lead to their better understanding of how the rhythmical patterns in the English language work. It is important to realize that not all languages work with reduction of syllables, and Czech is one of them. That is also one of the reasons why understanding the role of schwa, for example, might be difficult. Since the Czech system lacks the schwa sound, Czech learners, often not aware of its meaning in rhythm, have a natural tendency to replace it with a different, full vowel /i, e, a, o, u/ that appears as similar, as in ‘ago,’ with the first vowel pronounced as /e/ instead of /ə/ (Poesová, 2015, p. 32).

Apart from insufficient reduction, Czech speakers of English also struggle with prominence of stressed syllables. Since in the Czech language they do not stick out at all, the negative transfer leads to smoothing out of the differences between syllables and consequently to monotonous expression (Poesová, 2015, p. 32). Even though it is not usually fatal enough to cause a communication breakdown, the processing might worsen since the spoken language is suddenly different from the expectations. Not only Czech speakers, but also speakers of different languages

which phonemic systems lack the schwa sound might experience difficulties not only speaking English, when schwa is often replaced with full vowels, but also understanding the native speakers, when the frequent occurrence of schwa might hinder listener's understanding of the natural rhythmical flow of the speech (Poesová, 2015, p. 33). Where there is no reduction of unstressed syllables, there is little or no prominence contrast which might be confusing for both the native speakers and the learners during a conversation.

When the teachers perceive language as a complex system, it might be difficult for them to decide what to teach first if they want to teach in context. Dickerson describes teaching without context and associations as a so-called "jam"; every time we try to explain a phenomenon in phonology, we encounter another problem or phenomenon closely connected with it which has not yet been introduced and that creates a jam (Dickerson, 2010, p. 2). This illustrates that English phonology cannot be perceived as linear (Dickerson, 2010, p. 15) even though teachers would wish so.

As one can see, teaching segmental features in the context of suprasegmental features might be not only beneficial, but even desirable. All the segments in an utterance might be pronounced properly, but once the intonation, rate or rhythm are unnatural, the comprehensibility might be hindered: "Indeed, several studies suggest that non-native prosody does affect the comprehension of the native listener." (Derwing, Rossiter, 2003, p. 2). As noted in the previous section, prosodic features are especially important road signs for conversation which help the listener to follow (Gilbert, 2008, p. 2). Therefore, it can be deduced that once the learners focus in classes on prosody more than they have up until now, not only will they be able to understand better in a native-like conversation, but they will also be more likely to communicate more effectively.

4. Particularity of teaching EFL in children

Teaching comes in many shapes and forms. Working with a group of learners is always a difficult task since there are many aspects that need to be taken into consideration; the dynamics of the group, individual needs of the learners, the age span, their level of proficiency and many more. A teacher or lecturer can greatly and positively contribute to students' advancement in language acquisition, but they can as well slow the whole process down (for example by lack of support).

According to Piaget's approach, a child is an active learner. What this means is that the child always learns by encountering a certain situation for which he or she has to find a solution. Through the action taken, the child acquires a certain skill, experience. The knowledge that results from such an action is not imitated or in-born, but is actively constructed by the child (Cameron, 2001, p. 3). At first, children learn when they work with objects, but they quickly move on to apply similar processes in their mind when thinking about a problem to solve. In general, in Piaget's terms, learning takes place through action and interaction with the world around. The knowledge progressively builds up in individual stages of development until the child reaches a final stage of logical thinking (Cameron, 2001, p. 3). This also applies in the language classrooms. It is important to create such an environment which offers the children a sufficient amount of stimulation for their learning to take place.

In comparison with Piaget, Vygotsky ascribes much bigger importance to language in the process. Once the child learns to use it, it becomes a meaningful tool for communication with the world. The difference lies in the fact that in the case of Vygotsky, children are active learners in a world full of people who bring objects to their attention, play with them, read to them and so on, they are mediators (Cameron, 2001, p. 6). During their development, the children encounter tasks that might be too difficult for them to carry out, but they will manage once a little help is provided. Thanks to that, they learn another important skill. That means that the action was within the child's zone of proximal development (ZPD), a term coming from Vygotsky's terminology. Skilful and mindful teachers should also work with

ZPD in class, however, not all the students have the same one, on the contrary, each learner needs different type and amount of support during learning. It is of primary importance to observe how much help each child needs, when he or she needs it and then offer it. This assistance is called scaffolding; each learner is assisted by a more skilled language user. His competence grows and the scaffolding is gradually removed, until the learner is able to work and use the language autonomously.

The most significant feature of working with a group of learners, let alone young children, is their individuality. It is necessary to take into account all the learner's variables that enter the class altogether with the children themselves. These are not only age or their proficiency, but also cultural background, suitable learning strategy, motivation and many more. A class is never a homogenous entity, it is a group of individuals with specific needs and qualities. A majority of these variables may have a considerable effect on children's learning; some of them might, for example, come from poor homes where parents are too busy to support their education, which might affect their attitude to schooling in general and language learning in particular (Moon, 2000, p. 27). Once we decide to step into the process of teaching children, we should constantly bear in our minds that every child learns at its own pace, needs different kind of support and encouragement and that all needs should be equally satiated. Cameron (2001) demonstrates this on a common situation in classroom, when a question "Do you like swimming?" is asked and the children are encouraged to form a similar one. Some children will be able to repeat it, some will be able to modify it and ask "Do you like dancing?" and some will need other examples to understand the system before they manage to produce language (Cameron, 2001, p. 7). Every child has different abilities and needs different amount of time to understand the associations, we say that each of them has different ZPD in which he or she needs help of a more skilled learner. In a class of twenty or more children this is hard to manage, therefore some teachers consider working with classes of mixed ability one of their main problems (Moon, 2000, p. 26).

However, despite processes which are beneficial for learning to take place and the teacher can use them to support children from a young age, the question when to start teaching English as a foreign language to children, meaning how early, has been topical. Across the world, mainly with English becoming a lingua franca, the enthusiasm for early language learning has been unquestionable, but the topic remains controversial (Rich, 2014, preface, xi). As soon as English gained the status of an internationally spoken language important for global communication and success on a world labour market, parents started to expend their financial resources to ensure their children will have opportunities to engage with English as soon as possible (Rich, 2014, p. 2). But consequently, after the first wave of enthusiasm, questions have arisen. When is it good to start? How young is too young? Who exactly is a young learner? Which strategies should be used to ensure that the child will be making steady progress? Will the child that starts at a young age have an advantage over those who start later? And many more.

The general perception in society seems to sway towards the assumption that the sooner children start, the faster they learn and the better speakers they eventually become. Vast majority of research studies have shown, however, that older learners, those who engage in language learning at the age of 10 or 11 or later, are able to make more rapid progress than those who start earlier (Marinova-Todd et al., 2000, cited in Rich, 2014, p. 4) thanks to more developed cognitive skills or longer attention span. Since many variables enter the learning process, it is precarious to generalize the benefits of starting early. Moreover, even though there are many different linguistic environments in which children learn English around the globe (for example if they are a part of a linguistic minority in an English-speaking country), majority of children learn English as a school subject with few opportunities to use it outside the classroom (Rich, 2014, p. 2). Therefore, the exposure is usually too small to bring significantly different and better results.

On the other hand, there are still factors supporting the assumption that starting early might be beneficial for learners. They are usually enthusiastic, curious, and open to new experiences (Read, 2003, cited in Rich, 2014, p. 5). Unless

the children have negative experience with English, they are open-minded in the process and their attitude is overall positive. Older learners might have already formed prejudices and yielded to stereotypes which can decrease their motivation to study the language. It has also been proved that regular use of two languages supports children's cognitive development, creativity, flexible thinking and enhanced communication skills (Caccavale, 2007, cited in Rich, 2014, p. 5). However, since so many variables exist which need to be taken into consideration, no study has offered satisfactory answers to the questions. As some researchers suggest, it is of vital importance to direct the attention away from looking for the optimal age for learning to start towards an emphasis on identifying the optimum conditions that are necessary to maximize the potential offered by this early start (Rich, 2014, p. 6).

How can teachers accomplish that? There are several aspects in teaching that need to be stressed. The first variable is exposure. Sufficient amount of exposure can establish a solid ground for further development of language skills. Foreign curricula for young children recognize this fact and emphasize that an environment conducive to learning through exposure to spoken language should be key with a focus on encouraging development of oral skills (Campfield, Murphy, 2014, p. 209). If children come in contact with English only in class, then it is desirable to reduce communication in L1 to a minimum in order to maximize the amount of exposure so that children have a chance to observe how the language works not only on the level of segments, but also on the level of suprasegmental features. As studies show though, this is often not the case; instead, the focus is usually put on lexical items presented on their own and only later combined into sentences, while rhythm-salient, continuous speech is rather rare (Campfield, Murphy, 2014, p. 209).

Apart from exposure, additional constant observing of children's progress is needed. Each child should be provided with appropriate scaffolding in their ZPD so that their potential is fully used. In addition, it is important to realize that working with young learners is difficult and sometimes even tricky. The teacher's

meaningful task is to keep the children motivated and cultivate their positive attitude towards learning. Their attention span is much shorter than with adults, they can get bored very easily. It is therefore better to work with short-time, quick activities which will keep the children interested and focused. Methods like total physical response (TPR) are very useful because connecting speech with body movement is recognized as one of crucial preconditions for language development even with L1. Also using flashcards, listening to stories or playing games should be included to ensure a rich repertoire of activities beneficial for the children. Since we cannot be certain to what extent starting with learning English early brings positive effects, we should strive for making the lessons enjoyable and make the learners acquainted with how the language works so that they have a good foundation for further learning. While doing that, we should try to implement prosody focused instruction in the lessons too, to make the children used to different rhythmical patterns and intonational cues in fluent speech. Being accustomed to different, non-native prosody might, as established in the previous sections, greatly contribute to their comprehensibility and intelligibility in communication. The effects of focusing on prosody with young learners is a field not much investigated and it is a subject of our study described in the following chapter.

5. Research questions and hypotheses

The empirical part of this thesis was presented at the English Pronunciation: Issues and Practices Conference in Skopje, North Macedonia (Vonzová, Skarnitzl, 2019).

As we learned in the previous section, pronunciation is still regarded a “Cinderella” in teaching a foreign language (Underhill, 2013; though see Levis, 2019), and experts remark upon a continuing rift between scientific findings and pedagogical practice (Levis, 2016). Studies which have addressed the teaching of pronunciation and its effectiveness (see Thomson & Derwing, 2015 for a review) have mostly focused on adult students, whether in a naturalistic (immigrant) or educational context. Only very few studies dealt with the acquisition of pronunciation in little children, who are only just beginning to learn a foreign language.

The aim of this study is to find how children in the first grade of primary school (in other words, children who cannot yet read) will acquire the prosodic features of English. Nowadays, the emphasis in EFL classes is usually put on speaking and writing without grammatical errors, but not as much on helping children to acquire the aspects of prosody such as rhythm and intonation. Taking into account the natural inclination towards rhythmical nursery rhymes and songs usually used in classes, it is clear that these two aspects are especially appropriate target phenomena for such young learners. In addition, prosodic features have been shown to be of greatest importance for communication (Derwing & Rossiter, 2003). More specifically, focusing on prosodic features in class helps learners to follow more easily not only the natural melody of speech of native speakers but also their intentions, as well as connections between speaker’s ideas (Gilbert, 2008). For this reason, in this research we decided to focus on a group of young learners. In the experiment, two groups, an experimental and a control one, were involved. We expected the experimental group would develop a more salient sensitivity towards intonational and rhythmical patterns of English and therefore improve in both perception and their production of language in terms of prosody.

6. Design of the individual lessons

The English lessons were part of the children's regular curriculum at a private primary school. Considering the special makeup of the teaching plan, the English lessons were held once a week, and the whole teaching day was dedicated to English (such a day included four 45-minute long teaching lessons). Apart from grammar instruction and acquisition of vocabulary, the lessons for the experimental group were partly focused on acquisition of key English prosodic features, too. It is important to mention that the children, aged from 6 to 7 years old, could not read or write during the course. This means that they acquired the language mainly through listening and speaking activities.

Regularly, the listening activities comprised short stories, songs and chants produced by native speakers of English. Most of the chants were both rhythmic and had varied intonation, which supports the development of sensitivity towards the prosodic aspects of English. Especially during the first weeks, I deliberately introduced a lot of them in the lessons so that the children got used to hearing rhythmically and intonationally varied language. Some of the chants and songs were presented along with body movement, which is, as mentioned in part 4, one of the efficient methods of teaching and learning.

As for the stories, in the beginning of the course, children usually only listened to them and followed their visual representation in the form of pictures in the textbook. They were usually asked to notice how the voice changes in terms of intonation (if it is high, low, if it rises or falls). During the next month, they usually tried to repeat individual words or short phrases in the same manner as they heard them from the speaker in the recording. Moreover, children played theatre in regular intervals, which is said to be beneficial for language progress (Galante, Thomson, 2017). During the first months, they usually listened to a story a few times and then acted it out while listening to it. When they were able to produce the language themselves, they tried to act it out while speaking to it. In these activities, children were asked to focus not only on what the native speakers on the record say, but also how they say their lines and try to replicate it.

Children were gradually acquainted with vocabulary and phrases which they first heard from the native speakers on the recordings and then used for the communication during classes, for example “Who’s/what’s this?” “It’s a (cat).” I put the emphasis on saying these phrases with a similar intonation and rhythm every time they were pronounced to support children’s acquisition of suprasegmental features. Some of these phrases were also later used during the recording sessions (see section 7.2).

6.1. An example of a typical lesson

The following subchapter is illustrative and does not cover all activities and games the children were engaged in during the school year since it was changing according to the current topic, and also the dynamics of the group. However, it demonstrates what a typical lesson usually looked like, as regards the types of activities implemented.

In the morning, we usually started the lesson with a TPR activity to invigorate the children’s senses. These were often connected with a song or a chant, some of which were taken from the textbook, but some were not. Such an activity usually aimed at listening comprehension in the early stages and at independent production later when the children felt confident to speak. We played “Mr. Stork lost his hat” or “point to the (window)”, which should help the children revise the vocabulary they learned. Another activity which focused on maximizing the exposure by involving instruction phrases useful for communication was “Simon says”. During this game, they would hear instructions like “sit down, stand up, jump, clap, smile” etc.

That was usually followed by a game or activity which would help the children remember what they learned in the previous lessons. Here is an example of an activity we did based on a chant the children were acquainted with: One of the children goes behind the door and knocks. Another child asks a question he or she knows from a chant: “Who’s this?” The third child answers with the next line: “Let’s see!” Then they open the door and say the rest of the chant: “It’s (name).” and the child from behind the door answers: “It’s me!”. Since the learners knew the

chant, they were also asked to say it in a similar manner as in the original recording. When we played a game based on a chant, we practised it beforehand. During this practice we also included clapping to the rhythm of the chant.

Afterwards, we played the so-called “echo game”. It was introduced quite often in various forms since it is a quick activity not lasting more than a few minutes. I said a word or a phrase (for example “a ball” or “It’s a T-shirt”) and the children were asked to repeat it in the same manner they heard it. The intensity and loudness, duration and pitch were changed with each new word or phrase. Since the learners enjoyed this game, they took turns in making up words or phrases with variations in the aspects named above.

Later during the day, the children listened to a story from the textbook. These stories were usually put together from phrases and vocabulary the children already knew, only with a few new words for them to learn. Normally, we played the story twice and then I asked the children simple questions. At the beginning of the course, some of them were asked in Czech to ensure the children understood the story, but later in the school year the exposure grew, and more and more questions were asked only in English. After a short discussion the children were given flashcards with the same story made into individual pictures and they were asked to put them into the right order. Afterwards, they were divided into groups and acted the story out. As mentioned in the previous section, during the first months the children only acted while listening to the recording, later they both acted and spoke at the same time.

The children also worked individually with printed materials. I explained the task and during the time they were engaged in it, I devoted my attention gradually to each child to make sure he or she understood new vocabulary or grammar. We also practised together what was most difficult for them during the lesson. During this individual work I also asked them the well-known question “What’s this?”, which was later used in the recordings, and pointed to pictures on the paper. The children answered: “It’s a (pencil).” By doing this, not only did we practice language, but they were also partly prepared for the task during the

recording sessions since I intentionally always used similar intonational movements. Some of the printed materials were also accompanied by a listening activity, so the children were asked to choose the right picture based on what they heard or colour it with the corresponding pencil.

The last part of the day was usually devoted to revision of the new in the form of games, concentrating on practising grammar and lightly the prosodic features too, or activities with flash cards depicting the newly acquired vocabulary.

7. Method

7.1. Material

An experimental group of 13 children in the ages of 6-7 was recorded three times during the school year (in October, February, and May). The targeted instruction in prosody focused on both perception and production. In their production, the children attempted to imitate the pronunciation and specifically melodic and temporal patterning of the language material as closely as possible. In the three test recordings, the children were asked to replicate the prosodic patterns of the chants they had learned, and also to do an elicited imitation (Campfield & Murphy, 2014) session.

In addition to the experimental group, a control group was also involved in the experiment. In their classes, the same text book was used which ensured a very similar design of teaching as far as vocabulary and grammar are concerned, but the prosodic focus was left out from the lessons. Likewise, they were recorded in the same intervals as the experimental group, i.e. in October, February and May. Afterwards, the recordings were analysed and compared both separately with individual speakers to determine if any kind of progress was made, and between the two groups to draw a conclusion whether the prosody instruction in the experimental group brought any results.

7.2. Design

The first recording made in October was only diagnostic. Children had a row of six cards in front of them with pictures of family members from the textbook. They were asked the following question: “Who’s this?”, whereupon they named the individual cards: “It’s (Jack).” Since the children were not able to produce stretches of language long enough to make it possible to analyse intonational or rhythmical patterns (it did not involve for example any grammatical words that could be reduced at that time), this recording was not involved in the analysis and evaluation process. Its main purpose and contribution was to make the young learners acquainted with the task and make them comfortable during the recording session.

The second recording in February was done in a form of elicited imitation. Children had a row of six flash cards in front of them with pictures of individual pieces of clothes, which they knew from class. I pointed to each card and said: “What’s this? It’s a (skirt).” After a short interval, I asked them again “What’s this?” and pointed to the same card. The children were asked to replicate my answer.

The last recording was done in a form of independent production. It was based on a chant they learned in class from the textbook *Happy House* we were working with. Again, the children were looking at a row of the same six flash cards as in February, only now instead of repeating after me they were asked to say the whole chant by themselves and add an adjective of colour to their answer (based on what colour they saw on the card). Altogether, the children were supposed to produce six short sentences as demonstrated here:

What’s this? Let’s see. It’s a blue skirt.
What’s this? Let’s see. It’s a blue T-shirt.
What’s this? Let’s see. It’s a red hat.
What’s this? Let’s see. It’s a yellow sock.
What’s this? Let’s see. It’s a red shoe.
What’s this? Let’s see. It’s a green jumper.

The aim of the independent production was to see whether the learners are able to a) say the chant on their own while following its intonational and rhythmical patterns b) accommodate the rhythmical pattern when the adjective of colour is added. For the evaluation, we used Praat (Boersma, Weenink, 2019) to create spectrograms and to extract smoothed fundamental frequency (f_0) contours to observe the intonational patterns with individual speakers. Autocorrelation was used to extract f_0 values. During the analysis, we focused on individual performances of the learners in the area of intonation and rhythm. As for the intonation, we were looking at melody of their speech. In terms of rhythm, our focus was centred around temporal reduction of the indefinite article and the presence or absence of linking. Afterwards, we compared the performances of children in the experimental group with those in the control group to demonstrate possible positive effects of prosody instruction.

7.3. Results

Given the nature of the obtained material (see part 7.4 for discussion), it is not possible to present the results in the form of tables and graphs which would prove or refute the improvement of prosodic aspects. Therefore, I selected representative examples of individual types of production that appeared, and these will be described and discussed in the following part.

7.3.1. Melody

As far as melody is concerned, there was usually an improvement made between the February and May recording in most cases with the experimental group. In the first recording, children's intonation mostly rises in the course of the phrase; the second syllable, including schwa, is higher than the first one, which is typical for Czech intonation. In May, their pitch range expands and the speakers' intonation falls instead of rises on 'a'. The indefinite article is therefore usually melodically suppressed and lower than the surrounding syllables in the latter case, as we can compare in the spectrograms in fig. 4 below. The first spectrogram depicts the intonational pattern from February, the one on the right represents the May recording in terms of melody (in both cases marked with a blue line). In February, [ə] is 1.7 ST higher than [ɪ] in 'it's', but in May, [ə] is 0.75 ST lower than [ɪ].

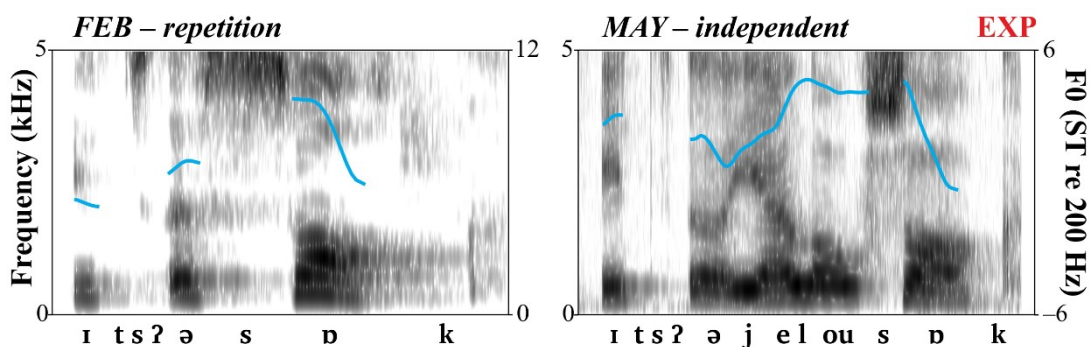


Fig.4 melodic pattern of speaker 1 (experimental group)

In fig. 5 below, a similar tendency can be noticed with another speaker, when schwa is melodically suppressed. In the February recording, [ə] is 2.18 ST higher than [ɪ] compared to the May recording, where [ə] is 2.83 ST lower than [ɪ].

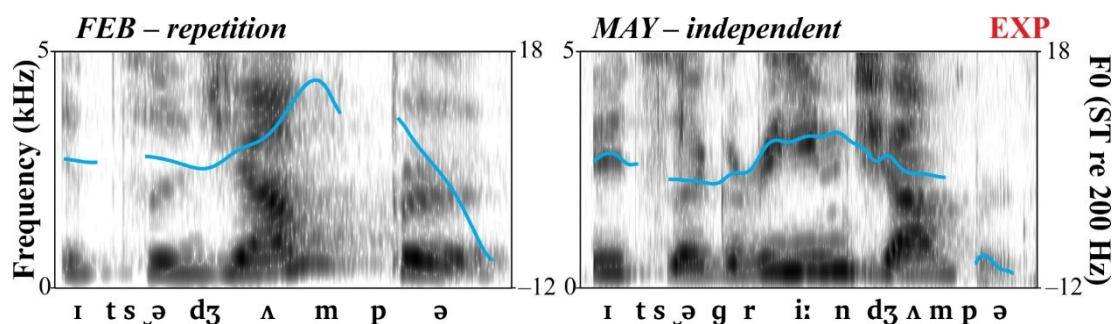


Fig.5 melodic pattern of speaker 2 (experimental group)

To the contrary, the control group made very little or no improvement whatsoever in terms of melody. In fig. 6, the very flat intonation of a speaker from the control group is highlighted in blue colour. The indefinite article is usually much more level in comparison to the surrounding syllables than with the experimental group.

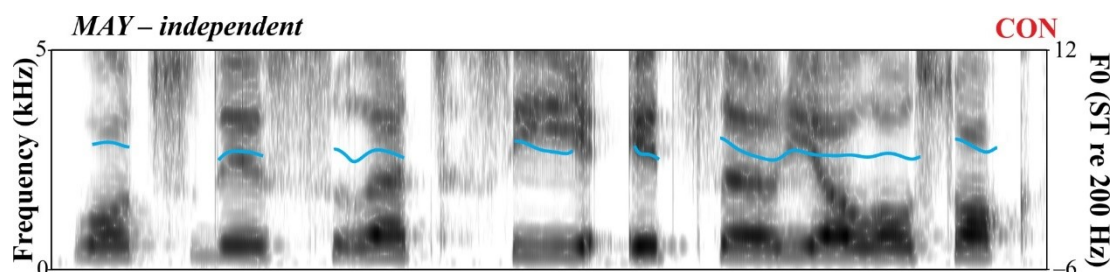


Fig.6 melodic pattern of speaker 3 in the sentence
What's this? Let's see! It's a yellow sock. (control group)

Percentile pitch range, which includes f0 values between the 10th and the 90th percentile, is only 1,71 ST for the entire utterance.

7.3.2. Fluency

Unlike the intonational patterns, rhythmical aspects of the speakers' performances were more comparable between the groups. As was stated in the previous section, in the melodic aspect, the schwa sound was usually suppressed and lower than the surrounding syllables with the experimental group.

However, only rarely did it undergo temporal reduction as well. Usually, the learners did not reduce the indefinite article very much and the differences in duration of schwa in February and May were small. One of the few examples of temporal reduction might be seen in fig. 7 below, however, even in this case the difference was rather minor; in February, [ɪ] = 77 ms and [ə] = 74 ms, so schwa is 3 ms shorter than the preceding vowel, it forms 96 % of the duration of [ɪ] sound. In May, [ɪ] = 118 ms and [ə] = 106 ms. Schwa is 12 ms shorter, which is 89 %. That proves that the difference is present, even though it is rather negligible.

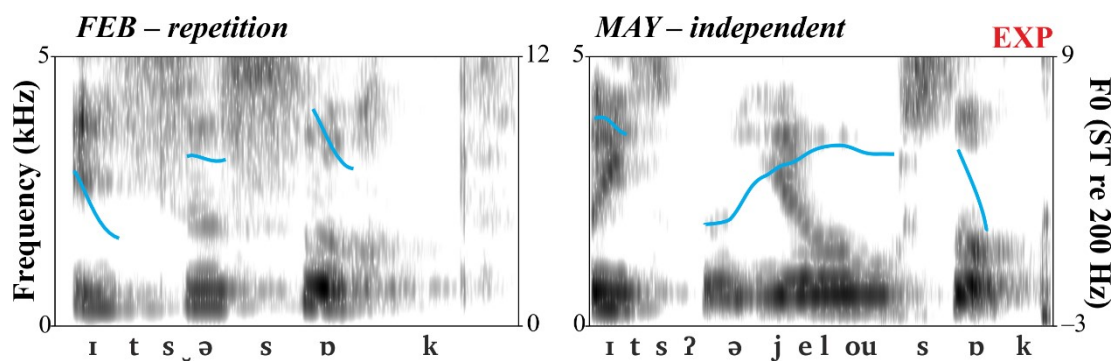


fig.7 temporal reduction of schwa

Since the results in terms of temporal reduction were not significant, we looked at other aspects of rhythmical speech, mainly at linking. It was quite well acquired with both the experimental and the control group. In fig. 8 there is an example of linking carried out in both recordings of a speaker from the experimental group.

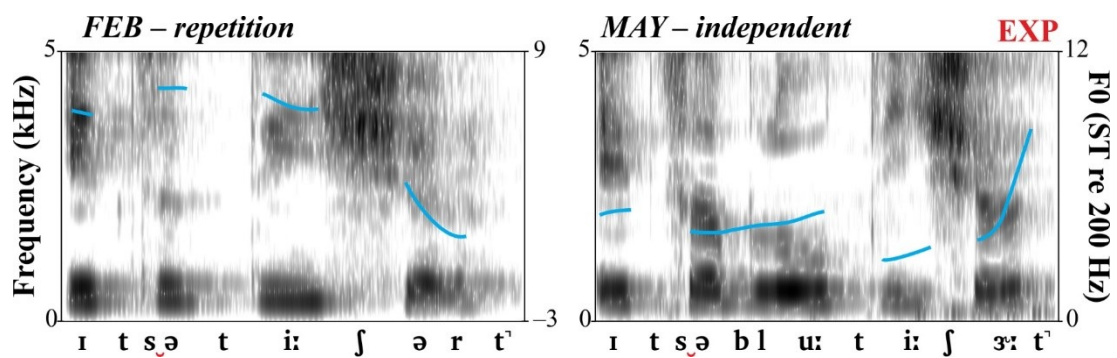


Fig.8 linking

7.3.3. Results – curiosities

Some of the results were not representative enough to support the contribution and positive effects of prosody instruction, however, they demonstrated well the children's awareness of the prosodic properties of the English language. In some recordings, children from the experimental group accommodated the content of the chant to its rhythmical needs; for example, they left out some words as in this case: "What's this, let's see, red hat" The monosyllabic words were spoken in twos to maintain a regular rhythm. Other times, a speaker's pronunciation was not intelligible, but his or her prosody was very well maintained. It is important to mention that such an example is not what the primary goal of the prosody instruction was, but it demonstrates that the children were well aware of the suprasegmental characteristics of English and they became natural to them to a certain extent. It also corresponds to how children acquire their L1. A similar example occurred when one of the speakers prolonged the last syllable of a word so that he or she could link it with the following one without glottalization: "It'ssssss_a blue T-shirt."

7.4. Discussion

Generally speaking, there has been a noticeable improvement with the experimental group in one of the following areas: melodic suppression of schwa, rarely also its temporal reduction, linking or the intonational range. This progress was made despite the independent production which was the design of the May recordings and which meant that the children had no example they could follow. This might suggest that the learners acquired skills in these areas well enough to a) produce the language on their own while implementing the prosodic features in it and b) accommodate them to newly set up conditions (adjustment of the rhythmical pattern when a word was added to the chant). In terms of melody, children from the experimental group were able to suppress 'a' and fall with their intonation on the indefinite article. Also, their intonational range got wider in May in comparison with February, when their intonation was usually rising on the second syllable with

schwa and so it rather followed the Czech intonational patterns. The performances of the control group were in a majority of cases much more level. Similarly, the experimental group made somewhat greater progress in temporal reduction of unstressed syllables, even though the difference was not very significant. It might be concluded that the experimental group outperformed the control group in these respects.

Overall, linking was present with both groups, although it was more frequently realized in February than in May recordings. This result might have been influenced by the fact that children were repeating what they heard in the first session. On the contrary, in May they had no example to follow and therefore it was easier for them to tend to glottalize the beginning of the words, which is typical of Czech speakers of English. The balanced results in both groups in terms of rhythmical patterning might be understood as a consequence of children's natural inclination towards rhymes, chants and songs. Rhythmicity is a key phenomenon typical for most young learners which could be seen during the recording sessions as well. Mainly in the experimental group, the majority of the children were inaudibly clapping, tapping their foot or bouncing when saying the chant which helped them be rhythmically consistent during their performance.

It is important to add that working with children proved to be challenging; their attention span is shorter and their self-control and discipline is smaller than with adults. Some of the children were not even able to produce the whole chant on their own during the "independent production" in May, some of them, mainly in the control group, were sometimes very shy to speak. Even though they normally experienced no difficulties saying the chant in class, sitting in front of a recorder made them feel nervous which sometimes affected their performance. In other words, sometimes their behaviour was a little bit unpredictable which had effect on the results, too. Therefore, it was impossible to draw a rigorous comparison between the two recordings with the whole group and then convert it to percentages expressing a degree of improvement.

7.5. Conclusion

In this research, I attempted to carry out a study focused on how instruction impacts children's acquisition of main prosodic features of English, namely intonation and rhythm. For the study, two groups of primary school children aged 6-7 years were used. None of the children were able to read or write during the experiment, so all the input was based on listening and language production activities. In the theoretical part, at first, I outlined what prosody is and what it encompasses. I further elaborated mainly on intonation and rhythm which were the target prosodic aspects the research focused on. Apart from describing how intonational and rhythmical patterning works in the English language, I also compared both prosodic aspects of English to the Czech system and pointed out differences between these two. Later in that part, the paper concentrates on the importance of prosody and its significance in EFL teaching since it is clear from recent research now that prosodic cues are one of the key factors that contribute to both comprehensibility and intelligibility of the speakers in the discourse. Furthermore, particularities of working with learners and especially children were outlined, including desirable pedagogical interventions during the process of language acquisition. Methodological part described the whole procedure including the material chosen (7.1) and the design of recording sessions (7.2). The results (7.3) were depicted in spectrograms and commented upon as well. They showed that the experimental group outperformed the control group in terms of melody, which was a part of intonation focus, and also in terms of temporal reduction of schwa. On the other hand, the groups' results proved to be quite balanced and equal regarding the temporal patterning. The possible reasons and causes for this outcome were later elaborated upon in the discussion part (7.4).

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9. Resumé

Tato práce se zabývá výukou prozodických rysů angličtiny u českých dětí, zejména se zaměřuje na intonaci a rytmus jakožto stěžejní složky suprasegmentální úrovně jazyka. Cílem tohoto výzkumu bylo zjistit, zda má výuka těchto rysů pozitivní vliv na jejich osvojení dětmi. V teoretické části je nejprve rozebrána prozodie v obecné rovině: zejména co tento pojem zahrnuje a jaký význam hraje v lidské komunikaci. Kromě funkcí, jakou je například rozlišení větných typů, zdůraznění důležité informace či rozlišení slovních druhů (v případě angličtiny), je důležitou rolí prozodie v jazyce frázování výpovědi. Díky ní je možné smysluplně dělit výpověď na menší celky tak, aby posluchač dokázal sledovat tok myšlenek mluvčího a pochopil význam jeho sdělení. V případě nejasného dělení promluvy může docházet k nedorozuměním a dvojsmyslnosti. Mluvčí může členit svou výpověď pomocí pauz mezi jednotlivými myšlenkovými celky, intonačního poklesu nebo růstu na konci myšlenkového celku nebo prodloužení jeho poslední slabiky. Kromě významu prozodie v komunikaci je dále uveden a popsán model věty podle Judy Gilbert – od myšlenkového celku až k slabice nesoucí přízvuk, která je podle Gilbertové považována za jádro informace ve větě.

Po prozodii obecně je část práce věnována intonaci, zejména popisu jejího významu pro účastníky hovoru. Intonaci na rozdíl od tónových jazyků angličtina nepoužívá pro rozlišení lexikálního významu, ale pro jasné zformulování obsahu výroku a vyjádření postoje mluvčího. Výpověď je většinou intonačně členěná na jednotlivé fráze, z nichž mluvčí může pomocí rytmických a intonačních změn zdůraznit nejdůležitější slovo a přitáhnout k němu posluchačovu pozornost. V této části je dále porovnána intonace angličtiny a češtiny, přičemž je zdůrazněno, že anglická intonace je mnohem pestřejší než česká. K intonačnímu pohybu (melodému) velmi často dochází i na jednotlivých slovech. V porovnání s angličtinou je česká intonace plošší, což je způsobeno mimo jiné i její syntaxí. Čeština může slovo zdůraznit tím, že ho ve větě přesune více dozadu do rématické části výpovědi. Anglická syntax není tak flexibilní, a proto k tomuto účelu využívá

právě intonace. Kromě té existují také další důležité složky prozodie, jako například rytmus.

Práce se zabývá popisem posunu ve vnímání rytmu v jazyce mnohými lingvisty. Podle dřívějšího pojetí se předpokládalo, že existují dvě hlavní skupiny jazyků: taktově izochronní a slabičně izochronní. Tento přístup k dělení jazyků nabídl i jednoduchý model učitelům pro výuku anglického jazyka. Často se v něm pracuje s jednotlivými rytmickými stopami, což je úsek promluvy, který začíná přízvučnou slabikou a končí poslední nepřízvučnou před další přízvučnou. Promluva může obsahovat několik takových stop, které se střídají ve své přízvučnosti a tvoří ideální strukturu jazyka. Taková struktura je ovšem idealizovanou verzí toho, jak to ve skutečnosti v jazyce funguje. Pravidelný rytmus v řeči podle mnohých lingvistů nelze prokázat, naopak je pravděpodobné, že máme tendenci slyšet ji rytmičtější, než ve skutečnosti je. Je zdůrazněno, že se dnes mnoho jazykovědců přiklání k vysvětlení rytmu spíše jako fenoménu, ve kterém dochází ke střídání silnějších, tedy přízvučných, a slabších, tedy nepřízvučných, elementů než jako jevu definovanému striktně z časového hlediska.

V práci je dále diskutováno, že víceméně pravidelné rytmické vzorce výrazně přispívají ke srozumitelnosti v komunikaci. Dále je věnována pozornost důležitosti začlenění výuky suprasegmentálních prvků jazyka do hodin angličtiny. Mnoho let výuce výslovnosti nebyla věnována dostatečná pozornost a pokud ano, cílem bylo dosáhnout v ní úrovně rodilého mluvčího. Tato představa o ideálním mluvčím, i díky teoriím jako například Hypotéza kritického období (Critical Period Hypothesis, CPH), se v poslední době začíná měnit a starší pojetí vystřídal obraz mluvčího se srozumitelnou výslovností. Je obecně předpokládáno, že srozumitelnost je nejdůležitějším aspektem komunikace, ke kterému by měli žáci směřovat. I proto je stále důležité věnovat se v hodinách výuce nejen segmentů, ale i prozodických rysů, u kterých bylo dokázáno, že ke srozumitelnosti značně přispívají.

Jelikož specifickým případem výuky je učení mladých žáků, práce se v krátkosti zaměřuje i na tuto oblast. Krátce je zde vysvětlen rozdíl v chápání vztahu

dítěte k okolí v procesu učení u Piageta a Vygotského. Dále je věnován prostor možnostem, jak dítě v procesu podpořit: například pracovat se zónou nejbližšího vývoje a poskytovat tzv. „scaffolding“, tedy oporu během učení, než je žák schopen užívat jazyk zcela samostatně. Do procesu učení ovšem vstupuje spousta proměnných, které ho ovlivňují a které musejí být brány v potaz, jako například věk, míra jazykových dovedností, vhodné metody učení, motivace a mnoho dalších. Skupina žáků je vždy heterogenní a je tedy potřeba k jednotlivcům přistupovat individuálně a respektovat jejich tempo, obzvlášť pokud se jedná o děti. Otázky, jak brzy je vhodné začít s výukou angličtiny u dětí, jsou velmi kontroverzním tématem. Navzdory všeobecnému dojmu „čím dříve, tím lépe“ nebyla efektivnost brzkého začátku žádnými studiemi prokázána. Existuje mnoho pro i proti, důležité tedy je, co nejvíce zvětšit vystavení žáků kvalitnímu jazykovému vstupu tak, aby se podpořil jejich proces učení, a nadále je v něm podporovat metodou „scaffoldingu“ a prací se zónami nejbližšího vývoje. Mimoto je důležité zahrnout do výuky i prozodické rysy angličtiny například formou jednoduchých her. Kromě množství nových materiálů, časopisů či konferencí se zaměřením na tuto oblast výuky jazyka vznikají i studie zkoumající efektivitu výuky suprasegmentálních aspektů. Jen málo z nich se ovšem zaměřuje na děti, což je důvod, proč jsme si je vybrali jako cílovou skupinu našeho výzkumu.

V tomto výzkumu jsme měli k dispozici experimentální a kontrolní skupinu. Jeho cílem bylo zjistit, do jaké míry si mohou děti na prvním stupni základní školy osvojit prozodické rysy angličtiny, když do jejich hodin budou zahrnuty instrukce na danou jazykovou oblast. Práce poskytuje popis typické hodiny angličtiny experimentální skupiny (6), následně materiál (7.1) a metodu výzkumu (7.2). V následující části jsou shrnuty výsledky, které s ohledem na získaná data nejsou prezentovány formou tabulek a grafů s přesnými čísly a procenty, ale formou demonstrace jednotlivých jevů, u jednotlivých mluvčích. V případě intonace byla sledována melodie, v případě rytmických vzorců plynulost projevu (redukce schwa) a vázání. Výsledky ukázaly, že experimentální skupina byla v poslední, květnové nahrávce schopná melodicky potlačit schwa, jinými slovy došlo ke zlepšení v

případě melodie. V některých případech došlo také k temporální redukci schwa. V obou těchto ohledech předčila experimentální skupina skupinu kontrolní. Co se týče rytmických rysů jazyka, výsledky obou skupin byly téměř vyrovnané: vázání bylo většinou přítomné v obou případech. V sekci Diskuze (7.4) jsou uvedeny možné důvody. Poslední část nabízí také krátké zamyšlení nad specifiky práce s dětmi, které svým způsobem mohly mít vliv na podobu výsledků. Poznatky z výzkumu jsou nakonec shrnuty v sekci 7.5.