

**CHARLES UNIVERSITY IN PRAGUE**

**FACULTY OF EDUCATION**

Department of English Language and Literature

**Problems in Intercultural Communication Caused by  
Differences in Czech and English**

Problémy v interkulturní komunikaci způsobené odlišností  
angličtiny a češtiny

PRAGUE 2011

**Vedoucí práce: PhDr. Radek Vít**

**Autor: Hana Macasová**

Pohořany 85, Žitenice

Obor studia Aj-Nj, prezenční

## **Poděkování**

Chtěla bych touto cestou poděkovat vedoucímu bakalářské práce PhDr. Radku Vítovi za odborné vedení práce, ochotu, poskytování cenných rad a podporu při tvorbě této práce.

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V Praze dne 20.3. 2011

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Hana Macasová

## **Abstrakt**

### **Problémy v interkulturní komunikaci způsobené odlišností angličtiny a češtiny**

Tato práce pojednává o interkulturní komunikaci a problémech, jež s sebou přináší. Autorka se zde zabývá historií a definicí interkulturní komunikace a problémy, které mohou vzniknout při komunikaci dvou různých kultur, velkou pozornost poté věnuje komunikaci Angličanů a Čechů, kde se zabývá nejen odlišností jazyků, ale také rozdílností v povaze těchto dvou kultur. Na základě výzkumu dotazníkovou metodou poté v praktické části porovnává dva různé vzorky českých vysokoškolských studentů angličtiny.

### **Klíčová slova**

interkulturní komunikace, kultura, jazyk, komunikace, anglický jazyk, český jazyk, stereotypy, překážky, problémy

## **Abstract**

### **Problems in Intercultural Communication Caused by Differences in Czech and English**

This thesis deals with intercultural communication and with the problems which it yields. The author is concerned with the history of intercultural communication and its definition, as well as with problems that may occur when two different cultures communicate. In addition, great attention is paid to communication between English and Czech people, where the author deals not only with the differences in languages, but also with the diverse nature of these two cultures. On the basis of a research made with help of a questionnaire, the author confronts two different samples of Czech university students of English.

### **Key words**

intercultural communication, culture, language, communication, English language, Czech language, stereotypes, obstacles, problems

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## **1. Introduction**

In the 21st century, it is becoming more and more important to be able to understand people from different cultural backgrounds. Trade has got over state boundaries, immigration is increasing and we find ourselves communicating with people who are different. They may speak various languages, have different habits, profess sundry religion, and hold diverse opinions. We might meet these people every day and if we want to preclude misunderstanding, we need to know how to manage these differences effectively.

This thesis will pay special attention to problems in communication between Czech and English people. In fact, it appears that here can be two main sources of problems. The first one is foreign language itself and the diversity between the mother tongue and foreign language; the second one is culture, affecting the communication. The thesis will focus on both of them.

The aim of this thesis is to find problematic areas in the English and Czech language that could bring about misunderstandings and to discover which of these areas causes Czech students the most serious problems in communication.

This thesis is divided into a theoretical and a practical part. The theoretical part will deal with intercultural communication, its definition and obstacles, with the nature of the English and Czech language as well as with communication between Czech and English people. The end of the theoretical part will imply a brief description of the main areas of the languages that could lead to misunderstandings or problems during communication and during learning English as a foreign language.

The practical part shows with the help of a questionnaire which area evokes most problems to the students of the English



language at the Pedagogical faculty, Charles University, Prague and to the students of the faculty of International Relations, the University of Economics, Prague.

It is evident that there exist many publications on the topic Intercultural communication that provide more information, but this thesis tries to bring something new. It introduces clear and brief description of intercultural communication but what is more important, it compares two languages and cultures from the intercultural point of view and pays special attention to practical usage and problems in this kind of communication. This may be useful for Czech students, because there exist not many publications comparing exactly these two languages and cultures.

## **2. Theoretical part**

### **2.1 Intercultural Communication in general**

This chapter will be concerned with intercultural communication in general: its definition, its history and some interesting facts about this topic that should be mentioned and known about.

#### **2.1.1 Definition**

Before introducing some of the existing definitions of intercultural communication, it is important to understand the meaning of the word culture, which is tightly connected with intercultural communication and influences it to a great extent. Pinto defines culture as “an evolving system of rules of interaction and communication codes. In a group of people who feel part of the group, culture is passed down from generation to generation and culture is, in this way, internalized. People in a group are often unconsciously guided by their culture in their behaviour and in their view of the world” (34). Samovar et al. adds that culture is not only language, customs and etiquette, as it is often said to be by intercultural training programs, but also values, beliefs and assumptions; this shapes the visible cultural manifestation (*Intercultural* 5). Culture manifests itself in language, thought and also in behaviour.

From the intercultural point of view, culture “provides the rules for playing the game of life. The rules will differ from culture to culture, and to function and be effective in a particular culture, you need to know how to apply the rules” (Samovar et al., *Intercultural* 10). The author adds that the rules are stored in people’s subconscious and help them to react to familiar

situations without thinking. When they meet a different culture, the problems arise (10).

As Pinto points out, “people do not only know that they belong to a particular culture, but they also want to belong to that culture. They are proud of it. Within the various cultures, certain patterns can be identified because every culture contains guidelines for behaviour” (33).

Having defined the term culture and having highlighted that every culture may be different, it is obvious that this fact must influence communication between cultures.

“By nature, communication is a system of behaviour. And because different cultures often demand very different behaviours, intercultural communication is more complex than communication between persons of the same culture” (Novinger 4). As a matter of fact, every communication is influenced by many factors that make it unique and different when it is perceived by people from other countries.

Intercultural communication is “communication between people from different national cultures” (Gudykunst 163). The borders of intercultural communication do not resemble the borders of the state. There can be many cultures within one state, or one culture can cross the state boundaries and affect many nations.

According to Průcha, intercultural communication has two layers. The first one is connected with language in which the communication proceeds; the second one is connected with conventions and rituals that accompany social contact. The second layer can be marked as communicational decorum. Problems occur when the participants of the communication are familiar with the language, but do not know or do not respect the rules of the communicational decorum of their partner (42).

For clarifying intercultural communication it is essential to mention the theory of linguistic reality, often referred to as the Sapir-Whorf hypothesis, which was developed by Eduard Sapir and Benjamin L. Whorf in the 20's and 30's of the last century. Mark Rosenfelder points out in his article *What Is the Sapir-Whorf hypothesis?* that “according to the Sapir-Whorf hypothesis, language determines the categories and much of the content of thought“. Průcha states that “the essence of this hypothesis is made by two basic principles. Thinking, perception and comprehension of the surrounding world are determined by the nature of the language we use. Hence differences between languages are reflected in the different interpretation of the world, including the apprehension of other people, by the speakers of the particular language (22) (translated by H.M.). Provided this theory was really valid, it could answer many questions about problems in intercultural communication. Speakers of different cultures will never understand one another absolutely, because their apprehension of the world is determined by their languages, so as a matter of fact it is more or less different. However, this theory has not been confirmed by any sufficient research and has been refuted not only by the existence of intercultural communication, but also by many treaties between different nations that would never be signed if there were not a complete understanding.

In connection with intercultural communication, the term cross-cultural communication is often mentioned. Many authors use these two terms as synonyms (for example Průcha 17), nevertheless, certain authors distinguish between these two words, one of them being William B. Gudykunst. According to him, intercultural communication is “communication between people from different cultures”, while cross-cultural communication “involves comparisons of communication across

culture” (1). In other words, intercultural communication is a face-to-face interaction between people from different national cultures, whereas cross-cultural communication is an area of research within intercultural communication. Gudykunst mentions as an example of cross-cultural communication a comparison of speech convergence in initial interactions in Japan and the United States (vii).

### **2.1.2 History**

Intercultural communication is frequently considered as a relatively new concept within communication. Its roots stretch to the long-ago, but started to be described and explored only recently.

According to Gudykunst, the origins of the term are traced to Edward T. Hall’s book *The Silent Language* (1959) (viii), yet Průcha states that it was a bit earlier, in the book *Culture as Communication* (1954), written by the same author (19).

With reference to Průcha, historical researches and historical linguistics show how people in the ancient communities differed considering varied languages and diverse prejudices towards other ethnics and their languages (14). It is evident that intercultural communication is a quite old phenomenon; nonetheless, it was not described and named by anybody up to the twentieth century.

Průcha states that the scientific researches of intercultural communication were evoked by practical reasons after the Second World War, when the great expansion of the USA to other states and continents began. There were many contacts between Americans and members of different cultures, especially with Japanese or between Germans and members of other European states. It was necessary to inform language teachers, diplomats or businessmen about the particularity of culture and language of

other countries. Also the War in Vietnam (1964-1973) contributed to the importance of the intercultural communication with its needs to train specialists as translators.

### **2.1.3 Obstacles**

In intercultural communication may appear obstacles that influence it. There exist three problematic areas: perception, verbal processes and nonverbal processes. Verbal processes seem to be the most important, but people should pay attention to all of these areas, since any of them may cause misunderstanding.

#### *2.1.3.1 Of perception*

Communication with other people is affected by perception. "Perception is the means by which you make sense of your physical and social world. It gives meaning to external forces by allowing you to interpret, categorise and organise those stimuli that you chose to monitor" (Samovar et al., *Communication* 185).

People use commonly known stereotypes about nations to communicate with them and they are often not prepared to change their behaviour when they find out that their communicative partners are different from what they expected. In fact, commonly known characteristics of cultures affect perception.

People tend to perceive other people in comparison with their own culture and not all of them realise fully that their perception may not be objective.

#### *2.1.3.2 In verbal processes*

Obstacles in verbal processes occur frequently and are the most visible. The most serious obstacle in intercultural communication in verbal processes is not knowing the language used for the communication.

Regarding language, Tracy Novinger states some principal areas in which obstacles arise. The following ones are selected from Novinger's list as believed to be the most considerable.

*Competency* – “People tend to avoid communicating with persons whom they know or anticipate will not have adequate command of a language common to both parties to permit ease of communication. It is uncomfortable and embarrassing not to understand what a person is saying or not to have them understand you” (Novinger 49). People often prefer to communicate with foreigners not in their mother tongue (if the foreigner is able to speak it), but in another language, foreign for both parts. The reason is visible. When there is a great diversity between the capabilities of one language, there is a chance of misapprehension; however, when the speakers speak a language which is not a mother tongue for any of them, the level is often more or less similar and thus the chance of misapprehension is lower.

*Connotation* – Connotative meaning is connected with culture. When people learn vocabulary in foreign language, it is hard to learn and understand the proper meaning as it is understood by the native speaker. Some words may have the same meaning, but all the meanings do not evoke the same feeling. Some are considered to be impolite, some positive and the person who is learning a foreign language may not feel this difference, since the connotative meaning is difficult to learn. Novinger states as an example English words *lie* and *fib*. Both words may be used synonymously, but to say that somebody *lied* is perceived to be more pejorative as to say that somebody *fibbed*. (50)

*Idiom* – “When communicating in any language with a non-native speaker, the avoidance of idioms, slang, and a large number of metaphors will greatly increase comprehension”

(Novinger 50). The simpler the language is, the more probable is the understanding.

#### *2.1.3.3 In nonverbal processes*

It seems that communication depends only on the language, but the opposite is the truth. “Communication specialists estimate that from two-thirds to three-fourths of our communication takes place nonverbally through behaviour. All behaviour is communication, and since we cannot *not* behave, we cannot *not* communicate” (Novinger ix). Nonverbal communication often shows the relation between the communicating parties and is extremely difficult to control. It expresses the context of the communication.

Not only verbal, but also nonverbal communication is influenced by culture and is learned. The differences in nonverbal communication may cause misapprehension. A person may just infract a personal zone of their partner, which could be different in each culture, and consequently might be perceived as an aggressor (Kocourková 7).

In the context of nonverbal communication we distinguish so-called low context (explicit) and high context (implicit) cultures. According to Bočánková, in low context cultures communication is formal, everything is said directly and explicitly, while high context cultures use nonverbal messages and communication may be also informal. In low context cultures it is important what is said and only a verbally expressed message is relevant, while in high context cultures it is important how it is said. The British culture is low context and the Czech culture is high context. (45)

The problems may occur when these two types of culture communicate. Czech people may then be considered to be insincere and their communication may be seen as not



transparent, while English people may be seen as not diplomatic enough. Communicative partners from Britain have problems to decode and interpret signals which form an essential part of Czech communication.

## **2.2. English and Czech**

Every culture is different and the same holds true for Czech and English cultures. There are naturally not so many differences as there could be if both countries were not situated in Europe, but yet there is a visible variety both in the nature and in the conventions.

Not knowing the etiquette may bring about misunderstanding, as well as misapprehension and embarrassment. On the other hand, knowing basic conventions may facilitate intercultural communication and help it to be effective. Being aware of the nature of the people from the other countries may ease communication, prevent misapprehension and may help us to understand them. In the following chapters basic information about both cultures will be presented. Nevertheless, it is essential to realize that even though there exist some typical features for certain culture, people within one culture may not fit into these characteristics, so the information written below should not be generalized.

### **2.2.1 Cultural and conventional differences**

The aim of this chapter is to clarify the term *etiquette*. “Etiquette in the relation to a nation or an ethnic is a totality of rules of behaviour, which are considered to be correct for the certain nation” (Kocourková 6), (translated by H.M.). Some of the most visible differences are the following.

Czech people strictly use academic titles when they want to address someone. Yet English people do not use the titles and they do not apprehend it as impolite.

English culture is monochronic, which means that they perceive and use time in a sequential and linear way. They consider it important to set specific appointments in advance and they keep them and the deadlines are regarded urgent. On the other hand, Czech culture is polychronic. Czechs tend to give priority to individuals rather than to a well fixed programme. Punctuality is relative and they do not mind slight lateness. In this respect, British people often regard Czechs as impolite and unreliable yet English people are considered by Czechs to be punctual, rude, careless as far as personal relations are concerned (Bočánková 27).

Nevertheless, it is crucial to bear in mind that each culture perceives differently what is punctual. Even though English culture is monochronic, they feel that coming on time is impolite. John Mole points out that they just come to every appointment 10 minutes later. The author accounts that when they arrange the meeting between 7:30 and 8:00, the person is expected to come not after 7:50, but not before 7:40 (117).

### **2.2.2 Differences in nature**

When people know that the nature of their communicative partners may be different, it helps them to communicate effectively. The term *stereotype* should be defined before introducing the differences in the nature of Czech and English people. Stereotype is “a positive or negative set of beliefs held by an individual about the characteristics of a group of people. It varies in its accuracy, the extent to which it captures the degree to which the stereotyped group members possess these traits, and the extent to which the set of beliefs is shared by others” (Jones

170). Stereotypes are commonly known characteristics of nations, often not based on individual experience. It is useful to know the characteristics of a nation the person is going to meet, but it is important to be aware of the fact that the stereotypes may not be true and may not characterise all the people of the nation.

According to Kocourková, English people control themselves and are reserved. They love animals, so they will speak affectionately to and of their dogs and horses, which is more than they will do concerning their friends and family.

Moreover, they keep their traditions. This can be seen on their right-side-driving, which was common in the first half of the nineteenth century in the whole Europe but gradually changed to the left-side. They do not like if someone interferes in their privacy or if their habits are affected (322). They may be considered to be formal and boring, but John Mole claims that the contrary is the case. They feel dislike to serious things. It is essential to be entertaining every time and everywhere. The only person who does not have to be amusing is the queen (118).

By contrast, Czech people are rebellious and inventive. They dislike authority and the discipline of politics (Kocourková 192). There may be added a quality of enviousness, sense of humour and the persuasion what is Czech, is the best, to common characteristics of Czech people.

These universal characteristics should only help people to be aware of the differences and the possibility that the communication may be different, nonetheless it should not be conclusive by communication and apprehension.

More information about the nature of Czech and English people will be presented in the practical part of the thesis, where one of the tasks in the questionnaire was to write a characteristic of Czech and English people, either according to personal experience or commonly known stereotypes.

## **2.3 Language Typology**

Both English and Czech are Indo-European languages, but this is the only feature they have in common. As for other aspects, these two languages are as diverse as they could be.

### **2.3.1 Characteristics of the English language**

English is a representative of an analytical language. The typical feature of this type of language is that “sentences are composed of words in the form of ready-made blocks that do not need to be shaped further“ (Smolka 33).

Smolka adds that English is easier to be learned in comparison with Czech, but when the speaker wants to convey the same meaning through English and Czech, it often requires a completely different structure of the sentence, which is also connected with a diverse way of thinking in and about the language (33).

### **2.3.2 Characteristics of the Czech language**

The Czech language is a representative of a synthetic language. “In Czech, the role of words in the sentence can only be revealed from affixes attached to their roots or stems. The system of affixes is rather complicated, irregular, and each affix may be multifunctional, i.e. a single verbal ending may simultaneously convey the categories of person, number, gender, tense, aspect and mode, which stretches the learner’s memory to the limit, and often beyond“ (Smolka 33).

Resulting from the above-mentioned information, it appears that for Czech people to learn the English language is easier than to learn Czech for English people.

## **2.4 Linguistic aspects of intercultural communication**

Different systems in the native language force the speakers to use expressions which are characteristic of their mother tongue, but which cannot be used in another language. The following subchapters, for lucidity divided into linguistic disciplines, will show how the Czech language affects and complicates learning and speaking English and how the differences in the system of these two languages make the communication easier or more difficult. This chapter does not attempt to be an entire list of problematic areas, but only a brief selection of the most visible differences.

### **2.4.1 Phonological aspect**

According to Smolka, one of the most difficult aspects of the English language from the point of view of Czech students appears to be pronunciation, even made worse by almost no relationship with the spelling (34). In the Czech language, every sound has its own graphic sign. In English a combination of signs has different pronunciation and vice versa, one sound can be written by different graphic signs. The incorrect pronunciation of some word may change the meaning of the sentence and bring about misunderstanding.

As Smolka adds, English is a stress-timed language, where unstressed syllables are compressed, whereas Czech is a syllable-timed language, where all the syllables have the same length (35). This causes the fact that Czech students often say that English speakers do not pronounce properly.

A difficult area in the pronunciation is the existence of sounds that do not exist in Czech, especially [θ] and [ð].

#### **2.4.2 Morphological aspect**

From the point of view of morphology, English is simpler and easier than Czech. The gender is precisely distinct and there exists almost no inflection. Nonetheless, in this area occur problematic issues, one of them being the number of grammatical tenses. There appear only three grammatical tenses in the Czech language. It is obvious that they can never fully correspond to twelve tenses in English, thus it is difficult for Czech people to use them correctly.

#### **2.4.3 Syntactical aspect**

First of all, word order ought to be mentioned. While Czech has not any strict rules for the word order and the role of each word is signalled by its inflection, rather than by the position within the sentence, the English word order has strict rules. Not adhering to the rules of English word order may be the cause of the fact that the sentence is ambiguous or has a totally different meaning from what the speaker intended.

Secondly, using the negative questions in Czech is a signal of a polite request, but used in English, it is perceived as showing surprise, rudeness or criticism. This slight difference in meaning may cause misunderstandings and completely change the sense of a clause, as well as a wrong sequence of words in the sentence.

#### **2.4.4 Lexical aspect**

It is apparent that it is impossible to talk without words. When students learn foreign languages, they must learn vocabulary, which is sometimes very treacherous, because a learner can never feel a slight difference in the meaning that a native speaker does.

Many English words are international and understood everywhere, nevertheless some of them just seem to be of this

kind. The term *false friends* should be mentioned here, although there are not many words of this nature in English and Czech. False friends are words that look and sound similar, but do not have the same meaning in both languages. Thus using some of these words may lead to problems. Smolka uses as an example word *eventually*, meaning *in the end* as opposite to the Czech word *eventuálně*, which means *possibly* (38).

When Czech people use English, they may often sound impolite, since in English the word *please* is used more frequently.

Another problem concerning the word stock are the words that do not have an acceptable equivalent in the other language. These words often complicate translating and understanding. That is why it is better not to learn individual lexical items separately, but in the context of a sentence.

Last but not least, it is important to remind of the existence of idioms and phraseology, which has already been mentioned in chapter 2.1.3.2. Smolka states that possibly owing to the lack of contact of the two languages, the meaning of English idioms can rarely be translated into Czech literally and vice versa (38). Thus, Czech students may often face problems in understanding or even guessing the meaning of some idioms.

### **3. Practical part**

The aim of this part of the thesis is to prove or refute some of the findings described in chapter 2.4. These findings are believed to complicate intercultural communication between English and Czech people, but there has not been found any sufficient research which would prove the validity.

Truth of the matter, there has not also been found any research that would confront the English and Czech language, either focusing on the differences that affect communication or targeting students and their perception of the diversity between these two languages.

The research was carried out using the quantitative type of research – a questionnaire.

#### **3.1 Goal of the research**

The goal of the research is to find out which areas are the most problematic for Czech university students when they learn and speak English and to establish some influences of the Czech language on the English language learning and speaking.

The questionnaire was sent to students of two different universities. Then the gained data were compared.

#### **3.2 Hypotheses**

Hypothesis 1:

Czech students have problems with the same aspects of the English language that were described in chapter 2.4.

Hypothesis 2:

Czech language affects the English language learning and speaking negatively, because there is almost no similarity between these two languages.



### **3.3 Research procedure**

In the questionnaire, there were eight questions, some of them being half-closed. In fact, the respondents were expected to choose their answer and to write why they had chosen it. Also, there was one question which expected evaluation of chosen parts of English language learning and speaking and then there were two open questions concerning stereotypes and the awareness of the existence of intercultural communication.

The questionnaire was anonymous and was sent to the respondents by email.

### **3.4 Description of the examined sample**

The questionnaire was sent to two groups of people. In the first group there were students of the English language at Charles University, Faculty of Education, Prague. All the students should be at advanced level, since most of them have been studying English for more than twelve years. Many of them study English because they want to teach it. They have approximately eight to ten forty-five-minute-long lessons in English per a week.

In the second group, there were students from the Faculty of International Relations at the University of Economics, Prague. These students are at upper-intermediate level and most of them have been studying English for more than ten years. They study English for special purposes; attention is paid mainly to word stock concerning economy. Students at this faculty must study English and minimally one more foreign language. They have approximately 2 forty-five-minute-long lessons in English per a week.

The first group was chosen because these students study the English language and should know it both practically and theoretically. The students from the second group are expected to

know the language only practically, however, they should be able to compare it with another foreign language. Nevertheless, also some students from Charles University should be able to compare it with another language, since many of them study the English language and another foreign language, most frequently German, Russian and French.

Giving the questionnaire to students that study English from different points of view and for different purposes was believed to bring more objective results than when sending it to one specific group of students.

It was expected that the questionnaire sent to such different groups would show interesting information and diversity in the opinion about learning and speaking English.

### **3.5 Gained data and their interpretation**

The questionnaire was sent by email to approximately 60 students of the University of Economics and to approximately 100 students of Charles University. 25 replies from the first university and 41 from the second one came back.

The first part of the questionnaire concerned languages. The respondents were asked to write which foreign languages they learn and whether their knowledge of the languages helps them in learning and speaking English.

77% of the respondents answered that learning another language makes learning English easier. The fact is that most of them learn the German language, which is, as the respondents claimed, similar to English either owing to the resemblance in grammar, or to the word stock.

The second part of the questionnaire dealt with the influences of the Czech language on the English-language learning and its problematical aspects.

51% of the respondents answered that the Czech language influences the English learning and speaking negatively. The rest chose the I-do-not-know answer and only 8% stated that it has a positive effect. The hypothesis 2 was confirmed.

Differences in a syntactical construction of sentences and the diversity of grammar were presented to have a negative effect, while the fact that the respondents can see the differences, which enables a comparison of the languages and consequently better remembrance was perceived to have a positive effect.

In addition, the respondents were asked to evaluate different aspects of learning English from easy – grade 1; to very difficult - grade 5. The aspects included: writing, listening, speaking, reading, word stock, grammar, pronunciation and word-order. For the students of Charles University, English grammar with the average grade 2.3 appeared the most difficult while the easiest was pronunciation with the average grade 1.5. The reason for pronunciation being the easiest for them is that they study a subject Phonetics and Phonology for two semesters. Students of the University of Economics perceived listening as the most difficult with the average grade 2.9 and pronunciation with the average grade 2.6. The easiest for them is word-order and speaking with the average grade 1.8. The utmost diversity between the two research samples occurred in the area of pronunciation, which was explained above and then in the area of word stock, which may be caused by the fact that the students of the University of Economics learn mainly vocabulary from the economical field and because more attention is paid to the word stock than at Charles University.

After figuring up all the grades which the students gave to all the aspects of the language, the resulting grade was for the students of Charles University 1.9, while for the students of the University of Economics the grade was 2.2. This shows that the students of Faculty of Education are a little bit more confident in English than the students of the Faculty of International Relations, which might be caused by the fact that Charles University students study English as the main subject and have more lessons in English than the students of the University of Economics.

The most problematic area of English grammar for both groups appeared to be tenses, clause structure and articles.

The most problematic area of English pronunciation appeared to be intonation, words of foreign origin and pronunciation of words beginning with a th-sound.

These findings confirmed that the problematic areas described in chapter 2.4 are indeed troubling.

The third part was devoted to stereotypes. The respondents were asked to write some characteristics of Czech and English people and to clarify whether the characteristics of the English people are based on personal experience or on commonly known information.

The frequently used stereotypical characteristics of the English people were: gentleman, high-principled, restrained, dryasdust and conservative, while the characteristics based on personal experience were completely different. The most common words characterising them included: friendly, industrious, fair, perfectionist and helpful.

It is obvious that the commonly known stereotypes are often not true and describe the reality worse than it is.

On the other hand, the characteristics of Czech people, although based on personal experience, were mostly negative. The most common words comprised: sly, calculating, envious and dissatisfied. Positive qualities included: friendliness and cleverness.

Last but not least, there was one open voluntary question. The informants were required to write whether they have ever faced some misunderstanding caused by the differences in their culture or in their language during their communication with English people.

Most misunderstandings were brought about by word confusion, either connotative meaning such as *hot* (in English sexy, in Czech it was misunderstood by the respondent as homosexual) or *bird*, in English having a connotative meaning *nice girl* but in Czech having only the original, denotative meaning. The other source of problem is a transfer of Czech meaning of some word as *notebook* (in Czech meaning laptop).

Other aspects that led to misunderstandings were intonation, which fetched along different perception than was intended (the respondent wanted to say something ironically, but using Czech intonation caused that it was understood as being meant seriously), idioms and wrong sentence structures that are acceptable in Czech but not understandable or have a different meaning in English. There was also mentioned translating Czech idiom into English, which brought about not only misunderstanding, but also long interpreting of what the respondent wanted to say. As the example of this was mentioned Czech idiom translated into English and believed to be understood - *I don't feel in my own skin today*. There was almost no diversity in answers between the two groups of respondents.

The aim of the last question concerning intercultural communication was to discover whether Czech students are aware of its existence.

The students of the University of Economics were familiar with the importance of intercultural communication and knew what it meant, because their university offers subject Intercultural communication. On the other hand, not all the students of Charles University knew what it stood for.

### **3.6 Summary**

The findings resulting from the questionnaire revealed that Czech students of the English language have problems mainly with grammar and with listening to and understanding English-speaking people. This seems to be caused by the great diversity in the language structure.

The research proved that the problematical areas found in bibliographical sources and mentioned in the theoretical part are dubious for Czech students, especially pronunciation of sounds that do not exist in Czech or using words that would be acceptable in Czech but having slightly different meaning in English. The stated hypotheses were confirmed by the research.

It would be extremely helpful if all students knew about the importance of intercultural communication and about the diversity in cultures, not only about basic differences between their own language and the foreign language they study, because only then their communication is effective and without redundant misunderstandings.

## **4. Conclusion**

This thesis dealt with problems in intercultural communication that Czech students of the English language often have to face. The aim of this thesis was to describe some problematic areas in this kind of communication and to find most visible differences between the English and Czech culture and between the languages. This was realised in the theoretical part.

The findings in the theoretical part show that there exist three groups of obstructions during intercultural communication-of perception, in verbal processes and in non-verbal processes.

There were also mentioned linguistic aspects of English and Czech as grammar or different structure of sentences that may complicate communication, pronunciation or word stock, and these findings were to be proved in the practical part.

The practical part was devoted especially to the languages in praxis, to the effects they possibly have on each other, to difficult areas of the English language for Czech students and to stereotypes.

The results of a questionnaire, which was used as a research method, showed that the Czech language influences the English-language learning and speaking negatively. The hypothesis concerning negative effects of the Czech language appeared to be valid.

There were stated different aspects of the English language that may cause problems and misunderstandings in the theoretical part and the research showed that the most problematic area of the English language is for Czech students grammar and pronunciation.

It is important for students of foreign languages to realise that only learning a foreign language is not the only task that a person must do to communicate effectively. There exist many other factors that influence the communication. The most important and affecting is probably culture. When people learn English, it is not definite that they will be able to communicate without problems when they are not conscious about the fact that their English-speaking communicative partners may think in a different way – in the way affected by their culture, which is different to the Czech one.



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## 6. Appendix

### DOTAZNÍK

Věk, Škola:

1. Jakými cizími jazyky se umíte domluvit?
2. Kolik let se učíte anglicky?
3. Jak ovlivňuje znalost jiných cizích jazyků vaši komunikaci v angličtině?  
-kladně-proč?  
-záporně-proč?  
-nevím
4. Jaký si myslíte že má čeština vliv na vaši komunikaci v angličtině?  
-kladný - proč?  
-záporný - proč?  
-nevím
5. Co vám při studiu angličtiny dělá největší problémy?  
(uved'te stupeň obtížnosti 1-5. 1-nečiní mi to žádné problémy, 5-činí mi to značné problémy)  
-poslech  
-psaní  
-mluvení  
-čtení  
-slovní zásoba  
-slovosled  
  
(u následujících uveďte také stupeň obtížnosti + konkrétní případ z uvedené oblasti, který vám činí problémy, př. Gramatika- 3 – určitý a neurčitý člen)  
  
- gramatika  
- výslovnost
6. charakterizujte třemi přídavnými jmény typického Angličana a Čecha.  
Je tato charakteristika založena na vaší vlastní zkušenosti, nebo na všeobecně známých informacích?
7. Došlo někdy při vaší komunikaci s rodilým mluvčím k nedorozumění, ovlivněnému vašim mateřským jazykem či kulturou?  
-ano-k jakému?  
-ne  
-nevzpomínám si
8. Co si představujete pod pojmem *interkulturní komunikace*?