

Most Common Pronunciation Problems of Czech Speakers of English

- 1) Why do native and non-native speakers sound different? Can we/do we need to achieve native-like pronunciation? What does it mean "correct pronunciation"? What does a "pronunciation mistake" mean? Pronunciation standards.
- 2) Perception/production; phonological sieve; redundancy
- 3) Occasional errors/systematic mistakes; lack of knowledge / faulty articulation; prepared/unprepared speech
- 4) Articulation basis; different sets of phonemes
- 5) Segmental/Suprasegmental variables
 - Segmental: pronunciation of the basic segments of speech (phonemes/allophones)
 - Suprasegmental: stress, gradation (weak forms), elision, rhythm, linking, assimilation, intonation

Segmental phonetics

Differences in phonemic systems

Sounds that do not exist in Czech

Consonants

[θ] *think, athlete, cloth*

[ð] *this, without, with*

- replacing the sounds with similar Czech ones f, s for θ
d, dz for ð
- wrong pronunciation (interdental)
- confusing θ and ð
- in rapid sequences confusing θ or ð with s: *this is sad* *[ðɪθ ɪθ θæd]

Sounds functioning differently in Czech and in English

[ŋ] *anchor, swimming*

- in Czech only before [k], [g]; in English also final or prevocalic - difficult to pronounce. Consequently, the difference between e.g. *ran* and *rang* may get lost: [ræn]
- final spelled G is, incorrectly, pronounced: *ring* *[rɪŋg, rɪŋk]
- on the other hand, spelled G that should be pronounced gets lost: *finger* *[fɪŋə]

[w] *well*

- confusing v and w: *very well* *[veri vel, weri vel, weri wel]

[r] *rock, vèry, park, door*

- in RP only in prevocalic positions; Czech speakers pronounce it also in final and preconsonantal positions: *[pɑ:rk, dɔ:ɾ]
- in fact spelled R only lengthens the preceding vowel
- inappropriately dark colouring of the preceding vowel: *girl, bird*

[h] *heart*

- in English a voiceless sound, especially in initial positions
- mute in some words: *heir, hour*, etc.

Similarly, some other consonantal graphemes become mute:

b in tautosyllabic *mb*: *bomb, lamb* x *combine*

b in tautosyllabic *bt*: *doubt, debt* x *obtain*

d: *Wednesday*

k, g in initial *kn, gn*: *knock, knee, gnaw, gnome*

w: *answer*

w in initial *wr*: *wrong*

p in initial *ps*: *psychology*

n in tautosyllabic *mn*: *damn* x *gymnastic*

l sometimes lengthens the preceding vowel: *calm, talk* x *bulb*

[b, d, g, v, ð, z, ʒ, dʒ]

- in Czech final consonants become voiceless; in English they preserve their voicing, but, more importantly, lengthen the preceding vowel; their pronunciation is not fully realized
- Czech speakers either pronounce the voiceless counterpart or, in an effort to emphasise the voicing, incorrectly add [ə]: *buzz* [bʌs, bʌzə] which corresponds to: *bus, buzzer*

[b,d,g] x [p,t,k] in initial position are virtually voiceless

- the difference is in aspiration, not so much in voicing. Syllable-initial [p,t,k] are aspirated, while [b,d,g] are not:

bit pit [bit p^hɪt]

dip tip [dɪp t^hɪp]

gap cap [gæp k^hæp]

- Czechs pronounce initial [b,d,g] as excessively voiced, while omitting or exaggerating the aspiration of [p,t,k]. Aspiration does not mean pronouncing an additional [h]; it is a friction noise created by rapidly escaping air.
- aspiration does not take place after [s]:

cool x *school* [k^hu:l] [sku:l] *[sk^hu:l]

top x *stop* [t^hɒp] [stɒp] *[st^hɒp]

car x *scar* [k^hɑ:] [ska:] *[sk^hɑ:]

[r, l, j, w] although normally voiced lose voicing after [p,t,k], but not after [sp, st, sk]; Czech speakers are often not sensitive to this, see **assimilation**.

ray pray spray [reɪ] [preɪ] [spreɪ]

lay play splay [leɪ] [pleɪ] [spleɪ]

Vowels

Constant vowel quality / variable quantity (length)

"short" "long"

[ɪ] [i:]

[e] [e:]

[ʌ] [ɑ:]

[ɒ] [ɔ:]

[ʊ] [u:]

[æ]

[ə]

- Czech speakers do not discriminate the quality of vowels:

He's in bed x *It's bad* [hɪz ɪn *bæd its *bed]

peel x *pill* [*pɪ:l pɪl]

- "short" vowels are only shorter than "long" ones in comparable contexts, all vowels and diphthongs become shorter before a voiceless consonant and longer before a voiced one:
 - [ɪ] in *bit* is shorter than [i:] in *beat* but there is little, if any, difference in length between [ɪ] in *bid* and [i:] in *beat*; it is the quality that is different
- in order to simplify we might consider three different vowel lengths:
 - "short" vowel + voiceless consonant: *bit*
 - "short" vowel + voiced consonant: or "long" vowel + voiceless consonant: *bid, beat*
 - "long" vowel + voiced consonant: *bead*

Diphthongs

They undergo the same variation in length as simple vowels before voiced and voiceless consonants.

closing		centring
[aɪ]	[aʊ]	[ɪə]
[eɪ]	[əʊ]	[eə]
[ɔɪ]		[ʊə]

- although the second element of the diphthong is weaker and shorter than the first, Czech speakers exaggerate it. In closing diphthongs it is usually enough just to close the mouth: *how, high, boy*, etc. Czechs often pronounce [haw] *[ha:j, bo:j].
- [əʊ] tends to be pronounced rather like *[oʊ]: *go, no, etc.*

"Triphthongs"

[aʊə, aɪə] *hour, fire*

- the central element is very weak and must not be pronounced as a consonant.
fire *[fajə, fajr]

Suprasegmental phonetics

Pronunciation of "difficult" words

Although there are pronunciation rules in English, their application is difficult and there are many exceptions. It is therefore hard to predict how exactly a new, so far unknown word, will be pronounced if we only know its spelling. Analogy may fail even with fairly advanced non-native speakers. This is especially true about proper nouns. The only possibility usually is to check the pronunciation in a pronunciation dictionary. Sometimes you may find alternative pronunciations.

Examples of phoneme-grapheme correspondence:

[u:] *food, prove, rule, group, shoe, true, juice, chew, manoeuvre, neutral, beautiful, view, queue*

A: [ɑ:] *far*, [æ] *bad*, [eɪ] *name*, [eə] *care*, [ɒ] *what*, [ɔ:] *all*, [e] *many*, [ə] *about*, [ɪ] *image*

Stress

Stress placement in English does not just mean emphasizing a particular syllable, but also significant changes in the pronunciation of the syllable in question and eventually the word as a whole. Vowels are pronounced differently in voiced and voiceless syllables: stressed syllables may contain any vowel or diphthong as the syllabic centre with the exception of [ə]; unstressed syllables can usually only contain [ə, i, u, əʊ] or a syllabic consonant.

Vowel graphemes in stressed open and closed syllables (graphically) are pronounced differently. Unfortunately, even this pronunciation is not as regular as the following examples might suggest:

GRAPHEME	CLOSED	OPEN
<i>i y</i>	[ɪ] <i>bit</i>	[aɪ] <i>bite</i>
<i>e</i>	[e] <i>pet</i>	[i:] <i>Pete</i>
<i>a</i>	[æ] <i>rap</i>	[eɪ] <i>rape</i>
<i>o</i>	[ɒ] <i>hop</i>	[əʊ] <i>hope</i>
<i>u</i>	[ʌ ʊ] <i>tub put</i>	[u: ju:] <i>rule tube</i>

Stress placement in words is difficult to predict: the rules are complex and not very reliable.

even x *event* [i:vn] [ɪ'vent]

Moreover, the position of the stress may change in derivation.

event *eventually* [ɪ'vent ɪ'ventʃuəli]

able *ability* [eɪbl ə'bɪləti]

Stress placement alone indicates parts of speech in a few pairs of words:

	N/A	V
<i>object</i>	[ˈɒbdʒɪkt]	[əb'dʒekt]
<i>permit</i>	[ˈpɜ:mɪt]	[pə'mɪt]
<i>present</i>	[ˈpreznt]	[prɪ'zent]
BUT	N/V	
<i>offer</i>	[ˈɒfə]	

The safest way seems learning the stress properly while learning new words.

Gradation (weak forms)

Most words in English (lexical, meaning words) carry at least one stress. On the other hand, certain words in English are virtually always unstressed (auxiliary words): auxiliary verbs, prepositions, articles, pronouns, etc. These words have two forms: weak (unstressed) and strong (stressed).

	S	W
<i>the</i>	[ˈði:]	[ðə ði]
<i>there</i>	[ˈðeə]	[ðə]
<i>from</i>	[ˈfrɒm]	[frəm]
<i>must</i>	[ˈmʌst]	[məst məs]
<i>was</i>	[ˈwɒz]	[wəz]
<i>were</i>	[ˈwɜ:]	[wə]

The weak form is far more common: Unfortunately, Czech speaker often pronounce these words as stressed, which in reality happens only when the word receives a special emphasis. Correct using of weak forms makes the speech more natural and economical.

Elision

In rapid speech some phonemes that would normally be pronounced may get lost, especially consonants in complex consonant clusters:

some of them ['sʌm ə ðəm]

acts [æks]

scripts [skripts]

next day [neks deɪ]

But even in standard pronunciation English treats consonant clusters differently from Czech. Clusters of plosives usually have only one closure phase, the length of which depends on the number of phonemes realized; the middle consonant cannot be heard at all:

whip cream *whipped cream* ['wɪp_ 'kri:m] ['wɪp___ 'kri:m]

hop back *hopped back* ['hɒp_ bæk] ['hɒp___ 'bæk]

Linking

Words are not pronounced separately but rather in a continuous string with prominent peaks on stressed syllables. Word boundaries are virtually imperceptible. Some connections are difficult to make, especially vowel + vowel. Therefore a consonant (usually final R) that would normally disappear is pronounced (linking R).

door out ['dɔ:raʊt]

for all [fɔ:'ɔ:l]

On the other hand, some speakers insert R even in situations where it is not present in spelling, which is not standard (intrusive R).

drama on stage ['dræmə r ɒn 'steɪdʒ]

Assimilation

Assimilation (change of a phoneme under the influence of another) works differently in English than in Czech.

[p, t, k, s, ʃ, tʃ] (voiceless pair consonants) do not change into voiced in a voiced neighbourhood. Czech speakers sometimes do so under the influence of their mother tongue:

black dog [blæk dɒg] *[blæg dɒg]

since then [sɪns ðen] *[sɪnz ðen]

this one [ðɪs wʌn] *[ðɪz wʌn]

On the other hand, assimilation of place of articulation is quite common:

this shoe [ðɪs 'ʃu:] [ðɪʃ 'ʃu:]

those yards [ðəʊz 'jɑ:dz] [ðəʊz 'jɑ:dz]

what you do ['wɒt ju 'du:] ['wɒtʃu 'du:]

Rhythm

English has a more regular rhythm than Czech. This means that the intervals between stressed syllables are approximately the same length regardless of the number of unstressed intervening syllables. This means that the more unstressed syllables there are, the more reduced they have to be (*cf* **Stress, Weak Forms**).

Walk down the road to the end of the canal.

PRACTICE SHEET

Ajvnot gejšn let it hej
ebat fil ma čejn
e wejn mou tu mel tu spí
a fel tu blek gou tu má fil
Bejby, aj lav jú jú wónt mí
wejt wen aj wónt jú
wejt then wí šud bí...

How do you pronounce the following words?

ringing	bomb
younger	bombing
anger	asthma
hangar	isthmus
hanger	indebted
hunger	thumbs
Hungary	gnat
longing	kneel
longer	sword
strongest	honour
angle	honesty
thick	heritage
those	condemn
within	yolk
clothe	gaol
cloth	butcher
colonel	conquer
author	burial
brother	wrestle
drought	draught
thistle	whistle
derby	gauge
giddy	echo
cook	buoy
ceramics	hiccoughs
giant	gigantic
model	modal
heath	heather
hotel	idol
plait	possess
pulley	receipt
quay	rifle
scone	siren
scythe	sieve
soup	sour
supreme	unique
trough	vicar
weird	wolf
xerox	yacht

Place word stress in the following words:

politician	committee
policy	competition
political	competitor
deliver	apology
hypothesis	kilometre
umbrella	monotonous
advantage	advantageous

Identify weak forms and transcribe them:

There were a number of people outside but I could only see a few there.
She took her uncle for a ride.
There's still some milk left but some of the rolls are stale.

Linking consonants:

there aren't	there can't
these are ours	these are mine
you were out	you were there

What is the difference between:

peace talks x peas stalks
that's tough x that stuff
might rain x my train
keep sticking x keeps ticking

What is the difference between:?

- a)
A: Ex ↘ cuse me. please.
B: ↘ Yes.
- b)
A: Ex ↗ cuse me. please.
B: ↗ Yes.
- c)
↘ Where did you see it?
- d)
↗ Where did you see it?
- e)
I ↘ ↗ liked the book.
- f)
I ↗ ↘ liked the book.

ANSWER SHEET

How do you pronounce the following words?

ringing	'rɪŋɪŋ	bomb	bɒm
younger	'jʌŋgə	bombing	'bɒmɪŋ
anger	'æŋgə	asthma	'æsmə
hangar	'hæŋgə	isthmus	'ɪsməs
hanger	'hæŋə	indebted	ɪn'detɪd
hunger	'hʌŋgə	thumbs	θʌmz
Hungary	'hʌŋgəri	gnat	næt
longing	'lɒŋɪŋ	kneel	ni:l
longer	'lɒŋgə	sword	sɔ:d
strongest	'strɒŋgɪst	honour	'ɒnə
angle	'æŋɡl	honesty	'ɒnəsti
thick	θɪk	heritage	'herɪtɪdʒ
those	ðəʊz	condemn	kən'dem
within	wɪð'ɪn	yolk	jəʊk
clothe	kləʊð	gaol	dʒeɪl
cloth	klɒθ	butcher	'bʊtʃə
colonel	'kɔ:nl	conquer	'kɒŋkə
author	'ɔ:θə	burial	'berɪəl
brother	'brʌðə	wrestle	'resl
drought	draʊt	draught	dra:ft
thistle	'θɪsl	whistle	'wɪsl
derby	'dɑ:bi	gauge	geɪdʒ
giddy	'ɡɪdi	echo	'ekəʊ
cook	kʊk	buoy	bɔɪ
ceramic	sə'reɪmɪk	hiccoughs	'hɪkʌps
giant	'dʒaɪənt	gigantic	dʒaɪ'ɡæntɪk
model	'mɒdl	modal	'məʊdl
heath	hi:θ	heather	'heðə
hotel	həʊ'tel	idol	'aɪdl
plait	plæt	possess	pə'zes
pulley	'pʊli	receipt	rɪ'si:t
quay	ki:	rifle	'raɪfl
scone	skɒn	siren	'saɪrən
scythe	saið	sieve	sɪv
soup	sʊ:p	sour	sauə
supreme	sju:'prɪ:m	unique	ju'ni:k
trough	trɒf	vicar	'vɪkə
weird	wɪəd	wolf	wʊlf
xerox	'ziərəks	yacht	jɔ:t

Place word stress in the following words:

politician	ˌpɒlɪˈtɪʃn	committee	kəˈmɪti
policy	ˈpɒləsi	competition	ˌkɒmpəˈtɪʃn
political	pəˈlɪtɪkəl	competitor	kəmˈpetɪtə
deliver	dɪˈlɪvə	apology	əˈpɒlədʒi
hypothesis	həˈpɒθəsɪs	kilometre	ˈkɪləmi:tə kɪˈlɒmɪtə
umbrella	ʌmˈbrelə	monotonous	məˈnɒtənəs
advantage	ədˈvɑːntɪdʒ	advantageous	ˌædvənˈteɪdʒəs

Identify weak forms and transcribe them:

There were a number of people outside but I could only see a few there.

ðə wərə ˈnʌmbər ə(v) ˈpiːpl ɔtˈsaɪd bət aɪ kəd ˈəʊnli ˈsiː ə ˈfjuː ˈðeə

She took her uncle for a ride.

ʃi ˈtʊk ə ˈʌŋkl fər ə ˈraɪd

There's still some milk left but some of the rolls are stale.

ðəz ˈstɪl səm ˈmɪlk ˈleft bət ˈsʌm ə(v) ðə ˈrəʊlz ə ˈsteɪl

Linking consonants:

there aren't ðər ˈɑːnt

there can't

ðə ˈkɑːnt

these are ours ˈðiːz ə ˈaʊəz

these are mine

ˈðiːz ə ˈmaɪn

you were out ju wər ˈaʊt

you were there

ju wə ˈðeə

What is the difference between:

peace talks x peas stalks

ˈpiːs ˈtɔːks

ˈpiː ˈstɔːks

that's tough x that stuff

ˈðæt s ˈtʰʌf

ˈðæt ˈstʌf

might rain x my train

ˈmaɪt ˈreɪn

ˈmaɪ ˈtʀeɪn

keep sticking x keeps ticking

ˈkiːp ˈstɪkɪŋ

ˈkiːps ˈtɪkɪŋ

What is the difference between:?

a)

A: Ex ↘ cuse me. please.

request for apology

B: ↘ Yes.

b)

A: Ex ↗ cuse me. please.

initiation of interaction

B: ↗ Yes.

c)

↘ Where did you see it?

neutral question

d)

↗ Where did you see it?

marked question (surprise, disbelief, etc.)

e)

I ↘ ↗ liked the book.

partially true (I liked it, but not quite)

f)

I ↗ ↘ liked the book.

emphatic statement (of course I liked it)