

The English Speaking Competence of Czech Native Speakers (age group: under 30)

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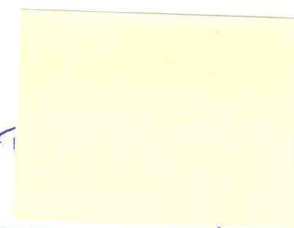
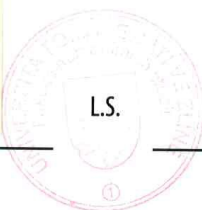
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ABSTRAKT

Cílem této bakalářské práce je zjistit kompetenci v mluvení v angličtině u českých rodilých mluvčích. Tato práce je rozdělena na dvě části. Teoretická část se zabývá charakteristikou dané komunikační kompetence spolu s faktory, které ji ovlivňují. Praktická část je založena na analýze dotazníkového šetření a analýze nahrávek anglického ústního projevu participantů. Zjištění vyplývající z těchto analýz jsou shrnuta v závěru práce.

Klíčová slova: anglická kompetence, zručnost mluvení, analýza, dotazník, test

ABSTRACT

The aim of this bachelor thesis is to find out the English speaking competence of Czech native speakers. The thesis is divided into two parts. The theoretical part deals with the characteristics of English speaking competence along with factors that influence it. The practical part is based on the analysis of the questionnaire results and the analysis of the recorded English utterances of the participants. The findings of these analyses are summarized in the conclusions.

Keywords: English competence, speaking skill, analysis, questionnaire, test

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INTRODUCTION

This bachelor thesis deals with the English communication competence of Czech native speakers. In particular, it focuses on people who were born after the year 1990.

Speaking is a very important role if a speaker wants to perform a conversation in order to convey a message. Since assessing speakers based on their spoken performance plays a big part, it is important to break down the different criteria that will be assessed in this thesis. Nevertheless, there is a large number of factors that influence speakers' spoken performance. Furthermore, to understand the speaking competence of Czech native speakers fully, the development of the English language in the Czech school education needs to be taken into account.

The thesis is divided into theoretical and practical parts. Firstly, the theoretical part will give background information into assessment speaking and well as causes that influence the spoken performance. And secondly, the practical part is based on questionnaire results as well as speaking results where correlations between these two parts are mentioned.

The aim of this thesis is to give an inside look into the English competence of Czech native speakers using assessment methods to determine the spoken ability among these participants to form an overall vision about Czech speakers.

I. THEORY

1 SPEAKING COMPETENCE

1.1 Communicative Competence

Gondová (2013) states that students are expected to acquire not only English knowledge but also the competence to live in a modern and digitalized society. Gondová (2013) also claims that to achieve communicative competence, the speaker must have the knowledge of language use as well as language usage in order to know how to use words and structures. Apart from this, fluency of the language and accuracy are both steps in order to achieve communicative competence. According to Brown (2001), a speaker should pay attention to communicative competence as it is one of the most important principles for learning foreign languages.

Gondová (2013) says that the current approaches for learning foreign languages point out the importance of interactions not only between the teachers and students but also between students among each themselves. Gondová (2013) also adds that if the speaker only acquires the linguistic competence and not the communicative competence, they then have problems forming sentences.

According to Common European Framework of References for Languages (CEFR, 2001), communicative competence consists of linguistic, sociolinguistic, and pragmatic components but also speaking and discourse competence.

1.1.1 Speaking Competence

Speaking plays a significant role in second language learning, as it is the most crucial part in order to perform a conversation. Many people who study English as a foreign language (EFL) measure their language ability based on their speaking skills. This means that they measure it based on their ability to carry a conversation in the second language. But speaking is not only saying the words. It is a process that is about delivering a message (Leong and Ahmadi, 2017).

Richards and Rodgers (1986) say that nowadays, speaking is not represented in school as much. Teachers' main focus shifts to other aspects, such as listening and writing, and therefore speaking is ignored. Černá et al. (2016) claim that teaching in Czech school is more grammar-oriented and textbook-based whereas speaking along with pronunciation do not have the same importance. As a result, this can lead to the inability of EFL learners to speak properly and understandably. Therefore, EFL students need to be more active and focus on listening and repeating. Being active is essential for people who want to develop

their English speaking skills further (Leong and Ahmadi, 2017). It is crucial for EFL learners to gradually acquire their language habits as they automatically form sentences without thinking about the rules (Gondová, 2013). Pronunciation, grammar, vocabulary, and fluency are the main parts that English speakers ought to control in order to communicate effectively with other English speakers (Leong and Ahmadi, 2017).

Gondová (2013, 37–38) lists abilities that an English speaker should acquire during their English-teaching period in order to be a competent English speaker:

- being able to communicate for transactional purposes (e.g. casual conversations in a shop or a bank) and interactional purposes (e.g. personal conversations with people),
- being able to produce long and short answers based on different situations,
- being able to take turns in a conversation (turn-taking ability),
- being able to initiate and maintain a conversation on various topics and at the same time, being able to react and respond to another speaker in the conversation,
- being able to use colloquial, neutral, and formal language,
- being able to communicate in different social environments (e.g. formal or informal social gatherings, telephone calls),
- being able to master strategies that are needed to overcome various communication problems (e.g. overcoming problems that are related to communication failure),
- being able to keep a conversation flowing, avoid long pauses or unnecessary hesitations,
- being able to use a wide range of language functions.

1.1.2 Linguistic Competence

As stated in CEFR (2001), linguistic competence includes lexical, phonological, and syntactical knowledge that is independent on sociolinguistic variations of a language and pragmatic functions of its realization. These components relate not only to the range and quality of knowledge (e.g. the range and precision of knowledge) but also to the cognitive organization and how the knowledge is stored. This competence differs depending on where the speaker's learning was located. Gondová (2013) comments that the speaker does not know how to apply this knowledge in different communicative situations and is therefore unable to acquire other competencies that are essential to be able to perform a conversation.

1.1.3 Sociolinguistic Competence

Sociolinguistic competence relates to the sociocultural conditions of language usage. It affects the speaker's language communication if the speaker performs a conversation with another speaker of a different culture. It is affected by social conventions (e.g. sex, different social groups, and generations). Despite its importance, the speakers may not always realize its influence (CEFR 2001).

Gondová (2013) advises speakers to be knowledgeable with linguistic markers (e.g. selection and usage of appropriate greetings, usage of idioms) in order to perform a successful conversation.

1.1.4 Pragmatic Competence

CEFR (2001) states that pragmatic competence relates to the use of linguistic resources (production of language functions, speech acts) functionally in an interactive conversation. It is also related to the knowledge of discourse, cohesion, and coherence, the identification of text types and forms, irony, and parody. Gondová (2013) divides pragmatic competence into discourse competence (the ability of a speaker to produce and understand texts of different lengths that are organized, structured, and in alignment with the rules of English discourse) and functional competence (the ability of a speaker to use language structures in order to express the speaker's different communication meanings or functions (e.g. to give and advice, suggestion, ask for a piece of information)).

1.1.5 Discourse Competence

Celce et al. (1995) explain discourse competence as the ability to select, combine, and arrange words, structures, sentences, and utterances to form a cohesive and coherent speech. They also established areas that contribute discourse competence that help, for example, the turn-taking system in a conversation. Such areas are for example cohesion, deixis, coherence, generic structure, and conversational structure. Celce et al. (1995) define these categories and describe them. Cohesion is closely connected to linguistic competence. Having a spoken performance that is cohesive means having sentences connected in a logical way, they follow one after another. It also helps to make the speech to have no additional repetitions. Deixis consists of words that connect situational context with the discourse. Therefore, they can be used to point to people, places, time, etc. – e.g. they, there, then. To have a coherent spoken performance is to have sentences that are logical and consistent. Generic structure refers to the structures of different kinds of speech and how sentence elements are arranged in order to convey a message. Lastly, the

conversational structure is connected to conversations where turn-taking takes place. Turn-taking is connected to how a conversation is opened, reopened, closed, how the topic is established and changed. It can also be connected to backchannelling (giving the other speaker a “permission” to continue).

1.2 Structure of Speaking Competence

Fluency and accuracy are both critical in communication. That is why speakers’ activities should be based on these. Speakers should acquire these through classroom practices in order to develop communicative competence (Leong and Ahmadi, 2017).

1.2.1 Fluency

Hedge (2000) explains fluency as one of the speakers’ characteristics in terms of speaker performance. Fluency is related to language production. To be fluent is to be capable of answering properly by linking the words and phrases. Hughes (2002) comments on the importance of pronouncing the sounds clearly, using stress and intonation appropriately, and without any interruptions to not lose the listeners’ interest. Teachers have always taken fluency seriously and made it their priority in teaching speaking skills.

An average speaker’s vocabulary that they use on their daily basis contains 100-200 words. The speaker only uses these words to form sentences. This causes them to be less fluent and, therefore, less confident. A fluent speaker’s vocabulary that they use on their daily basis is much more comprehensive as they use approximately 1,000 words. This means that this speaker is more fluent and confident, allowing them to talk about any topic in a detailed way. In order to achieve proper speaking fluency, the speaker must enrich their vocabulary (Gupta, 2019).

1.2.2 Accuracy

Housen et al. (2009) explain accuracy as something that gives the speaker the ability to create a speech without any errors. An error means to deviate from a norm by an L2 learner’s performance. Kumar (2013) claims that accuracy is closely related to fluency, and both are needed in order to achieve successful communication. Kumar (2013) then supports that statement by saying that while fluency counts the number of people who understand what the speaker says, accuracy counts how correct the speaker uses their grammar. Speaker may form a sentence in English and appear fluent. This sentence can be analysed by a teacher or a native speaker and it might contain some grammatical errors.

This means that if the speaker's pronunciation is not as good as their grammar or vocabulary, they might be misunderstood despite forming the sentence in the correct way.

1.2.3 Grammar

Thornbury (2005) says that grammar is the use of grammatical structures in an appropriate way by the speaker. According to Luoma (2004), the speech can be either planned or unplanned. In a planned speech, the presentation is prepared in advance, causing the grammar to be accurate – without any errors (or only a few). On the contrary, during an unplanned speech, the speaker has no time to think about the grammar, causing the speaker to react at the moment. Sentences during unplanned speech are usually short so that the listener understands clearly. Luoma (2004) then continues by saying that these two types of speeches are related to the level of formality. If the speech is planned, it is usually formal. On the other hand, if the speech is unplanned, it can be both formal and informal. Formal speech has usually more complex sentences whereas informal speech may contain vague language. Thornbury (2005) says that vague language serves as a filler for pauses and also to reduce the assertiveness of statements. Thornbury (2005) then comments on features of spoken grammar and says these features are performance effects and distribution of items. Performance effects include hesitations (e.g. uh, um, ehm), repeats, and false starts. Distribution of items such as pronouns and determiners (e.g. I, you, our) is much more common in spoken grammar rather than in written grammar.

1.2.4 Vocabulary

Vocabulary is a set of words used by the speaker. The vocabulary that the speaker uses on daily basis is around 5,000 words. According to Leong and Ahmadi (2017), a word or an expression can be used in different contexts and does not necessarily mean the same or similar thing. Therefore, if the speaker uses the vocabulary appropriately in the context, it means that the speaker achieved accuracy.

1.2.5 Pronunciation

Pronunciation is a way in which a speaker pronounces words. According to Thornbury (2005), speakers pay the least attention to pronunciation as it is something they do unconsciously. But, of course, the speaker may change their pronunciation depending on the social context. In order for the speakers to have an accurate pronunciation, they need to understand the phonological rules. This means that they should have the knowledge of stress, intonation, and pitch as well as different sounds and their articulation. When a word

in English has two or more syllables, one syllable is more emphasized than the other. The emphasized syllable is pronounced a bit louder, the consonants are pronounced clearly, and the vowel is held for a slightly longer period of time (Kenworthy, 1987). Intonation uses pitch to convey its meaning (Roach, 2009) whereas pitch is the degree of voice. Tone can be described as either low or high. As Roach (2009) says, it is almost impossible for a speaker to speak with a fixed, unchanging pitch during a spoken performance. That is because the pitch of any speaker is constantly changing.

The English language also has very noticeable features in terms of pronunciation: strong and weak syllables. The difference between strong and weak syllables is that the vowel in a weak syllable is pronounced quieter, shortly, and the quality is also different. Roach (2009) also points some other ways of differentiating strong and weak syllables. He says they are connected to stress because strong syllables are stressed, and weak syllables are unstressed.

1.2.6 Intelligibility

Intelligibility is closely connected to pronunciation. Kenworthy (1987) describes it as understandability. If a speaker changes one word for another (with a similar meaning), it may create a totally new meaning. The same can be done with sounds – e.g. when a little kid cannot properly pronounce the “r” sound in the word “roof.” If a speaker (mostly non-native speaker) does not make the same sound or does not use stress properly in a word, a listener can still connect the intended meaning of the speaker. A speaker can be therefore called intelligible if a listener can identify their words or sounds without any errors. Even if a speaker makes an error but the whole word is understood, they are still intelligible. A speaker is called unintelligible if a listener cannot identify their words or sounds and they hear some different words or sounds. Kenworthy (1987) also mentions that these errors are often caused by hesitations as the speaker may find it hard to continue their speech after that.

1.3 Types of Speaking

Brown (2004, 141–142) lists and explains five different categories of speaking performance assessment tasks in the following way:

1.3.1 Imitative Speaking

Imitative speaking is the ability of a speaker to repeat (imitate) a word, a phrase, or a sentence. In this type of speaking, the pronunciation of a speaker is assessed. Neither the

ability to understand something nor the ability to participate in an interactive conversation is assessed.

1.3.2 Intensive Speaking

Intensive speaking is being assessed while producing short stretches of oral language. Examples of tasks that are used to assess the speaker are direct response tasks, reading aloud, sentence and dialogue completion, and limited picture-cued tasks that include simple sequences.

1.3.3 Responsive Speaking

Responsive speaking tasks include interaction and text comprehension that are being used on a lower level in a very short conversation, standard greetings and small talks, simple requests, and comments.

1.3.4 Interactive Speaking

Interactive speaking is similar to responsive speaking. The only difference is that the interactive speaking differs in its complexity and length of the interaction, which also includes multiple exchanges and possibly multiple participants. The interaction can either be in a form of transactional language (the speakers use it in order to exchange a specific piece of information – e.g. asking what the time is) or in a form of interpersonal exchanges (the speakers use it in order to keep social relationships – e.g. asking the listener about their mood). In interpersonal exchanges, the language can become pragmatically complex as there is the need to use colloquial language, ellipsis, slang, and humour.

1.3.5 Extensive Speaking

Extensive speaking tasks include speeches, oral presentations, and storytelling. The interaction on the side of the listener is either limited (the listener used nonverbal responses) or omitted completely. This is why extensive speaking can be also described as a monologue. The language is usually more thought out (due to the fact that planning is involved) and formal for extensive tasks. This does not mean that informal language is not used as it might be used in a casual speech (e.g. a monologue of the speaker's experiences from a vacation).

1.4 Assessing of Speaking Skills

Luoma (2004) also states that speaking is the most difficult skill to assess reliably because as Brown and Yule (1983) say, the assessor (usually the teacher) must pay attention to

a wide range of aspects of the speaker (e.g. grammar, vocabulary, pronunciation, fluency) during an assessment. The speaker's speech is assessed orally in a form of an interview, where the assessor asks the speaker either some questions or asks the speaker to talk on a certain topic which may be prepared beforehand. However, according to Gondová (2013), the speaker's performance may be unpredictable as they use the English structures that they have at their disposal. Gondová (2013) also adds that the questions the assessor asks should not be in a form of "yes or no" questions (e.g. Did you eat breakfast yesterday?) but rather they should ask questions that make the speaker create a story (e.g. What did you do yesterday throughout the day?). Such questions help the assessor assess the speaker more accurately because the speaker creates more complex responses. Gondová (2013) says that if the assessment is done in a group of two, then the whole conversation (from word to word) between these speakers cannot be repeated again. Therefore, the assessor needs to be careful while assessing them.

According to Luoma (2004), the speaker must have the knowledge of the sound system of a given language, the ability to instantly use the correct vocabulary in a conversation, and to form sentences without any hesitation. Furthermore, the speaker must understand other speakers and be able to give a proper response.

Luoma (2004) points out that the speaker is creating an image to the listener by using a different speed of speech and pausing, variations in pitch, volume, and intonation. These components also support the speech so that the speaker can be understood and therefore the sound of the speaker's speech is important during the speaking assessment.

Additionally, Gondová (2013) says that the assessment should be valid as well as reliable. This means that if the assessor wants to know assess the speaker's speaking skills, the assessor needs to give them an assignment that allows the speaker to produce language spontaneously and without any preparation. This also allows the speaker to express their own opinions on the topic they were asked to talk about. Furthermore, Gondová (2013) points to the fact that if the assessor asks the speaker to perform a monologue on a topic they prepared in advance, then the assessing is no longer about their speaking skills but rather about their knowledge of the language. Gondová (2013) explains on an example that if the assessor wants the speaker to retell them a story that they heard in a recording (that is used for the assessment), then the assessor needs to realize that the speaker is focusing on two things – listening and speaking. This means that the speaker's performance is heavily influenced whether they can or cannot understand the recording. Therefore, it is necessary

for the assessor to carefully think about the objective of their evaluation and what they actually want to assess.

1.5 Factors of Speaking Competence

According to Vadivel and Genesan (2020), the speaker may encounter many barriers during speaking situations (e.g. lack of exposure, vocabulary and regular practice, shyness, mispronunciation). These barriers are based on the speaker's cultural background, social interactions, and family setup. Brown (2001) lists some characteristics that influence the speaker's speaking performance in both positive and negative ways. This can be affected by clustering (the speaker uses phrasal speech, not word by word), redundancy (the ability of the speaker to make their meaning understandable), reduced forms (e.g. colloquial contractions – they make the speaker's speaking performance sound bookish), performance variables (the speaker uses fillers in moments of hesitations, and pauses – e.g. uh, um, well, you know), colloquial language (the ability of the speaker to have a knowledge of idioms, words, and phrases of colloquial language), rate of delivery (the speaker's speed of their verbal delivery), stress, rhythm, and intonation (influence the speaker's pronunciation), and interaction.

1.5.1 Native Language

According to Brown (2001), the native language is the factor that influences the speaker's pronunciation the most. Additionally, Kenworthy (1987) states that the bigger the differences that are between the native language and L2 of a speaker, the bigger the struggles are for the speaker. Kenworthy (1987) also agrees with the existence of less and more favoured languages. On the other hand, this does not mean that people whose language is less favoured, cannot acquire a native-like acquisition. This means that people who have different language backgrounds can achieve native-like pronunciation.

1.5.2 Age Factor

Brown (2007) states that age makes a difference in the speaker's performance. Brown (2007) mentions that one of the factors that influence the speaker's performance is language ego. Ego does not pose any threat of embarrassment for children under the age of puberty. These young children are less knowledgeable about the language forms and therefore make more mistakes and therefore are less scared to make mistakes. On the other hand, young adult and adult speakers are more defensive and protective about their ego and

hence, are more scared of making mistakes. It takes the necessary ego to overcome this situation and become a successful speaker.

Additionally, Brown (2001) says that children under the age of puberty have a higher probability of sounding native-like. Brown (2007) also adds that if the speaker is past the age of puberty, then the speaker has no significant advantages, meaning the age does not play any role past this point – e.g. a fifty-year-old speaker can be as successful as an eighteen-year-old speaker if all other factors are the same between those two speakers. Brown (2007), therefore, disproves the “the younger the student, the better” myth.

In addition, Kenworthy (1987) clears some misconceptions about the speaker’s pronunciation. She stated that if the speaker’s L2 performance sounds native-like, it does not necessarily mean that they acquired this skill as a child. Furthermore, Kenworthy (1987) pointed out that the speaker’s accent can be native-like despite not starting to learn English in their childhood, meaning that even adult speakers can achieve a native-like accent. Singleton and Ryan (2004) also support the claim that neither the younger L2 speakers are more efficient and successful than the older L2 speaker nor that the older L2 speakers are more efficient and successful than the younger L2 speakers as the evidence provided is inconsistent.

1.5.3 Exposure

Kenworthy (1987) claims that the speaker’s pronunciation is different based on how much exposure to the L2 language the speaker receives. Kenworthy (1987) also adds that if the speaker is living in a foreign country, then the speaker is exposed to the L2 language much more consistently. Additionally, Brown (2001) points out that despite living in a foreign country, the speaker may not be in contact with other speakers that much. Brown (2001, 285) supports this claim by saying “research seems to support the notion that the quality and intensity of exposure are more important than the mere length of time.” Connected to this, Kenworthy (1987) says that even though many of these speakers live in a foreign county, they might not necessarily spend most of their time in an environment where they are exposed to the L2 language. Kenworthy (1987) then mentions that many studies prove that the difference in terms of pronunciation accuracy between speakers living in an English-speaking country and speakers living in a non-English-speaking country, is very small. Although exposure to English is a helpful factor, it is not the factor for the development of pronunciation skills.

1.5.4 Phonetic Ability

Phonetic ability is described by Brown (2001) as an “ear for language”. Kenworthy (1987) points out research data that show that some speakers are able to distinguish some sounds more accurately than other speakers. Some speakers may have an advantage from pronunciation drills. Pronunciation drill is a technique where the speaker listens to certain words/sentences and tries to repeat them over and over again. On the other hand, some speakers may not gain from pronunciation drills as others, causing them to not reach an accurate pronunciation of some sounds.

1.5.5 Identity

Kenworthy (1987) explains that a speaker’s identity is important in order to achieve accurate pronunciation. Some speakers may be reluctant to adapt their pronunciation or vocabulary to other speakers in different countries, the others change their speech production almost immediately. These speakers who are willing to change their speech performance and adapt to the environment they are in, change it for many reasons. One of them might be the fact that they are just trying to be polite and friendly, trying to not put a focus on the differences of the speaker that is not native to the given environment or country. Young children (before the age of puberty) are more likely to adapt their verbal performance to the environment they are in as they try to acquire the likeability of the people around them.

1.5.6 Motivation and Concern for Good Pronunciation

Dörnyei (2001) explains motivation as a willingness to do a certain task. Simply put, if a speaker is motivated, then the speaker is committed. However, if a speaker is not motivated, then the speaker is unwilling to elaborate. Dörnyei (2001) then explains motivation as “why people decide to do something, how hard they are going to pursue it, and how long they are willing to sustain the activity.”

Brown (2001) says that some speakers are more concerned about their pronunciation than others. Brown (2001) then claims that if both motivation and concern are at a high level, then the effort in pursuing a goal is expended. Kenworthy (1987) comments that the concern is then expressed by the speaker in many situations (e.g. when the speaker asks another speaker to correct their pronunciation) which might cause that the speaker refuses to speak unless they pronounce given words or sentences correctly. Consequently, the speaker may not be motivated in doing certain tasks if he/she does not see the value in it. Kenworthy (1987) also points out that if the speaker is unconcerned, it may be due to the

lack of awareness about their speech production. Their speech may be causing difficulty, irritation, and misunderstanding for other listeners.

1.5.7 Learner Anxiety

Lightbown and Spada (2013) explain learner anxiety as a feeling of nervousness and stress that many speakers come into contact with when they are learning a second language. They deny that anxiety is a permanent feature of a speaker's personality and claim that anxiety may be only temporary and may differ in different situations. Therefore, a speaker may not get anxious when communicating with their peers in group work, but they do get anxious giving an oral presentation in front of the whole class. A speaker may also be more anxious and less willing to speak when they are trying to avoid a conversation on certain topics or with certain people.

Despite the fact that many researchers have a negative connotation about anxiety, Lightbown and Spada (2013) consider it as a neutral term because anxiety can also have a positive effect. For example, when a speaker is expecting a major event to happen (e.g. an exam or interview), the combination of anxiety and motivation can boost them and help them to succeed.

1.5.8 Self-esteem, Risk-taking, and Self-efficacy

Brown (2007) makes a claim that if a speaker wants to gain success, they need to have self-esteem, self-confidence, and self-efficacy to some extent. That is – if a speaker believes in their abilities, they will be able to perform an activity (e.g. spoken performance) successfully. The overall lack of self-esteem in speakers' spoken performance may cause bad results and potentially even failure. These can therefore cause overall demotivation and mistrust of their abilities.

Brown (2001) says that if a speaker is willing to risk in attempts to use language (either productively or receptively) and can recognize their ego fragility then it gives them the confidence and belief to overcome their anxiety of speaking. They will be then able to participate in a conversation and interact with other speakers. Brown (2001) also calls speakers a “successful language learner” if they can become “gamblers” and realize their language ego and overcome the risks to perform or partake in a conversation.

Self-efficacy is described by Brown (2007) as a sense of speaker's determination to perform a task (e.g. a conversation) successfully. This means that a speaker devotes some effort to this task. When a task is not successful, it might be caused by the speaker's low self-efficacy – not enough effort put into it. Speakers like this then might make an excuse

(some external factors) to explain why their task was not successful. It is then necessary for speakers to believe in their ability to perform a task in order to succeed.

1.5.9 Extroversion and Introversion

Both extroversion and introversion are said to be important factors in terms of oral communicative competence (Brown, 2007). Brown (2007) confirms that both of these terms are however stereotypes in terms of communicative competence. This is due to the fact that people think that extroverts are lively and willing to engage in a conversation and therefore have better communicative competence. On the other hand, it is expected from an introverted speaker to be shy and quiet and therefore to not be on the same level as extroverts in terms of communicative competence. Brown (2007) gives an example of this bias – teachers in their classes are highly favouring those students who are active by being talkative and willing to engage in conversations. This gives the teachers the idea that introverts (the people not being as active in their classes) are not as smart as extroverts. Brown (2007) proves this thinking as wrong and encourages teachers to put their bias aside when assessing one's speaking.

II. ANALYSIS

2 METHODOLOGY

This chapter includes the methods used in the practical part of the thesis. It gives information on the participants, instruments and procedures, and overall objectives of the whole research about the speaking competence among Czech native speakers.

2.1 Participants

This particular research seeks to find out the level of the English speaking competence of Czech speakers under 30 years of age. A total number of 10 Czech native speakers participated in this research. They are divided into two groups. The first group (group A) consists of 5 Czech speakers that do not have a university education. This means that these speakers have only an apprenticeship certificate or a Maturita certificate. The second group (group B) consists of 5 Czech speakers that have a university education. This means that speakers from this group are currently university students or have at least a bachelor's degree. Group A consists of 4 females and 1 male. Group B consists of 3 females and 2 males. All the participants stated that they started studying English in the third grade of primary school as it was a standard set for pupils after the Velvet revolution (Najvar, 2010).

2.2 Test

The first step of this research was to record an English monologue of each of the participants. They were asked to talk about themselves (e.g. about their family or hobbies). This speech was spontaneous and not prepared beforehand. The length of these recordings was ranging from 1 minute to 2 minutes. In order to assess a speaker with the most efficiency, it is important to set different categories for the assessor to focus on. The assessment in this research includes the following categories (Kaye, 2009):

1. Grammar,
2. Vocabulary,
3. Pronunciation,
4. Fluency.

For each one of these categories, the speakers were given points in a descending Likert scale ranging from 1 to 5 (Cohen et al., 2007), and therefore, a speaker could achieve up to 20 points. These points were then added together to create an overall overview of the speaking competence of Czech native speakers. The points system which was used in this research is based on the criteria used in Gondová (2010) Table 1.

Table 1 Evaluation criteria

GRAMMAR	
5	Accuracy of grammatical structures and combination of words.
4	Generally accurate grammatical structures, structures of word, and word-order. Occasional errors.
3	Frequent errors of grammatical structures, structures of words, and word-order which occasionally obscure meaning.
2	Virtually incorrect grammatical structures, structure, and combination of words.
1	Very little response with difficulty to understand.
VOCABULARY	
5	Recognizes, defines, and produces words appropriately throughout the oral production.
4	Minor words recognition, definition, and production problems. Vocabulary generally appropriate.
3	Words recognition, definition, and production quite often inaccurate. Occasional correct words.
2	Recognition, definition, and production errors make conversation virtually incomprehensible.
1	Very little response of the participant.
PRONUNCIATION	
5	Accurate pronunciation, intonation, and stress patterns throughout the speaking situation.
4	Occasional pronunciation, intonation, and stress errors but generally well comprehensible.
3	Frequent pronunciation, intonation, and stress errors. Sometimes difficult to understand.
2	Pronunciation, intonation, and stress problems make speech virtually unintelligible.
1	Very little response of the participant.

FLUENCY	
5	Speech speed, pauses, and sentence length are excellent. Speech is natural and continuous.
4	Speech speed, pauses, rhythm, and sentence length are affected by slight errors.
3	Often errors affect speech speed, pauses, rhythm, and sentence length.
2	Long pauses, unfinished utterances, and fragmentary speech make communication almost impossible.
1	Very little response of the participant.

2.3 Questionnaire

In the next step, the participants were asked to fill in the questionnaire. The questionnaire was provided to the participants digitally. The purpose of this instrument was to find out the relevant data about the participants (the self-evaluation of their English speaking quality, their self-perceived strengths, and weaknesses concerning their English speech, the amount and circumstances of their English communication). These questions helped to support the assessment of their monologue by dividing the participants into groups based on their experience and skills. The questionnaire contained 6 questions in total:

1. How would you grade your spoken performance in English?

Mark only one.

- 5 = excellent
- 4 = good
- 3 = okay
- 2 = poor
- 1 = very poor

2. What are your strengths in terms of your spoken performance?

Tick all that apply.

- Grammar
- Vocabulary
- Fluency
- Pronunciation
- Other:

3. What are your weaknesses in terms of your spoken performance?

Tick all that apply.

- Grammar

- Vocabulary
 - Fluency
 - Pronunciation
 - Other:
4. What has helped you the most to improve your spoken performance in English?
Tick all that apply.
- School/University
 - Movies/TV shows
 - Self-studying
 - Games
 - Talking to other English speakers
 - Other:
5. How often do you communicate in English?
Mark only one.
- Every day
 - Every week
 - Every month
 - Few times a year
 - Other:
6. For what occasion do you communicate in English?
Tick all that apply.
- School/University
 - Self-studying
 - Games
 - Talking to other English speakers
 - Vacations
 - Other:

The questionnaire items provided qualitative data (except item n. 1) which were related to the quantitative results obtained by the test. In this context, one research hypothesis and one research question were formulated:

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

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

3 RESULTS

The following chapter looks into both the questionnaire and test results and forms an analysis of the speaking competence of Czech native speakers.

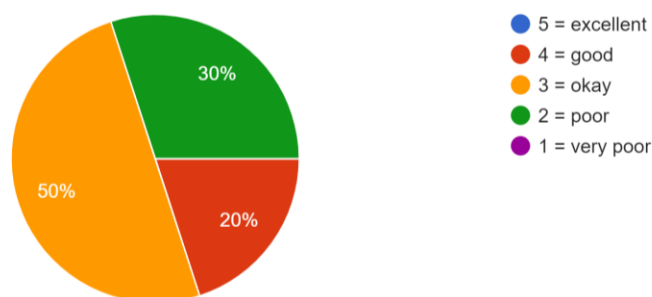
3.1 Questionnaire Results

The following chapter will analyse the questionnaire items that further on help to support the analysis of the participants' spoken performance. These responses support the analysis in the way that it gives us the overall look into how the respondents feel about their spoken performance in English. Then, the results will be related and interpreted.

3.1.1 Question 1 – How would you grade your spoken performance in English?

As Figure 1 shows, none of the participants voted for the options 5 = *excellent* or 1 = *very poor*. However, 50% of respondents voted for option 3 = *okay*, 30% of respondents for option 2 = *poor*, and 20% of respondents for option 4 = *good*. The majority of people from group A (60%) graded their spoken performance as 2 = *poor* and the majority of participants from group B (60%) graded their spoken performance as 3 = *okay*. This means that participants without university education graded themselves lower than participants with university education.

Figure 1 Self-evaluation



As shown in Table 2, 30% of participants from group A self-evaluated themselves with a mark 2 (poor) and 20% of participants with a mark 3 (okay). The mean of the self-evaluation in group A is 2.4. This number shows that the participants rated themselves as “below average” as the average is 3.

In comparison with group B, 30% of participants self-evaluated themselves with a mark 3 (okay) and 20% with a mark 4 (good). The mean of the self-evaluation in group B is 3.4. This number shows that the participants rate themselves as “above average” as the average is 3.

The average self-evaluation score of all participants was 2.9, which indicates that the participants assess their speaking competence as “good”.

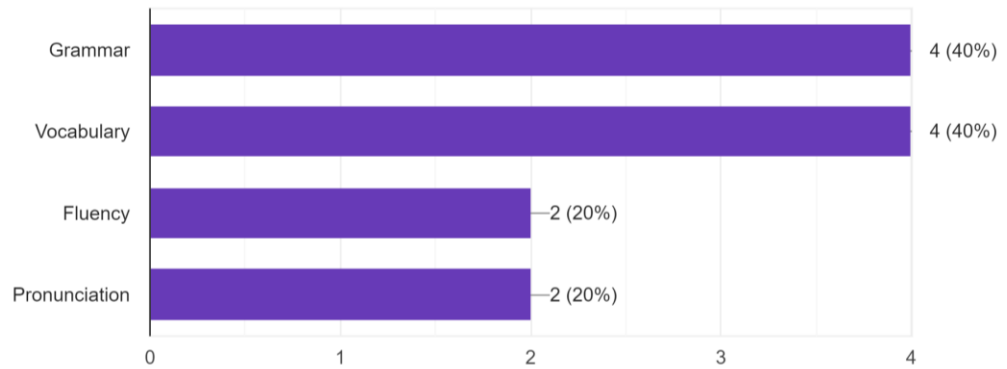
Table 2 Self-evaluation of speaking competence

Participant	Group	Self-evaluation	Group means
1	A	2	2.4
2	A	2	
3	A	3	
4	A	3	
5	A	2	
6	B	3	3.4
7	B	3	
8	B	4	
9	B	3	
10	B	4	
Mean		2.9	

3.1.2 Question 2 – What are your strengths in terms of your spoken performance in English?

Figure 2 shows the strengths in participants’ spoken performance. The majority of respondents opted only for 1 option, but some chose multiple options. The majority of respondents considered *grammar* and *vocabulary* as their *strength* – both categories received 40% of votes each. On the other hand, only a few of the participants considered *fluency* and *pronunciation* as their strengths as both of these categories received 20% of votes each. The majority of participants from group A (60%) voted for *vocabulary* and participants from group B voted for *grammar*, *fluency*, and *pronunciation* (all three earning 2 votes) therefore it is expected that participants will receive a high score from these categories during the assessment.

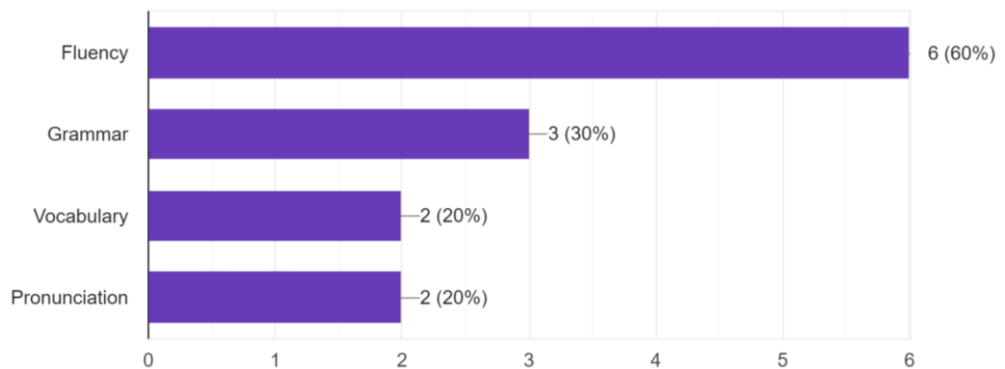
Figure 2 Participant’s strengths



3.1.3 Question 3 – What are your weaknesses in terms of your spoken performance in English?

Figure 3 points out the weaknesses in participants’ spoken performance. The majority of respondents opted only for 1 option, but some chose multiple options. Overall, 60% of participants chose *fluency* as their weakness, 30% of participants chose *grammar*. *Vocabulary* along with *pronunciation* was voted the least, with only 20% of votes per each category. *Fluency* was voted the most among participants in group A, whereas in group B, participants voted for *vocabulary* and *pronunciation*, with 20% of votes per each category. It is therefore expected that participants will receive a lower score from these categories during the assessment.

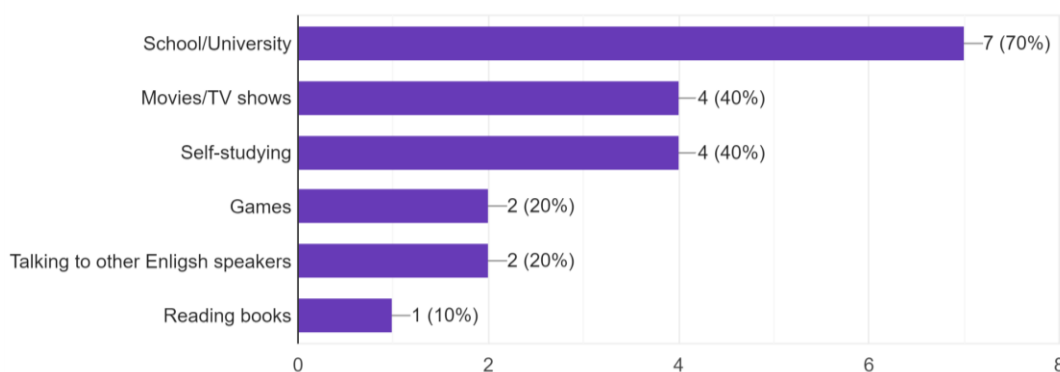
Figure 3 Participant’s weaknesses



3.1.4 Question 4 – What has helped you the most to improve your spoken performance in English?

Figure 4 shows all the factors that have improved the participants' spoken performance so far. The majority of participants picked multiple choices, some only 1. *School/University* is the most picked option with 70% of overall votes from the participants, *movies/TV shows* along with *self-studying* have 40% of votes per each category, *games* and *talking to other English speakers* has 20% of votes per each category, and *reading books* has only 10% of votes. The option *school/university* was the most picked option (60% of votes) among participants in group A whereas *school/university* along with *self-studying* were the most picked options (80% of votes) among participants in group B. We can conclude that exposure to English language was the most noticeable in schools and/or universities among these 10 participants. However, many participants also chose the options, where only participants' motivation is key to improve their English performance – e.g. *movies/TV shows* and *self-studying*.

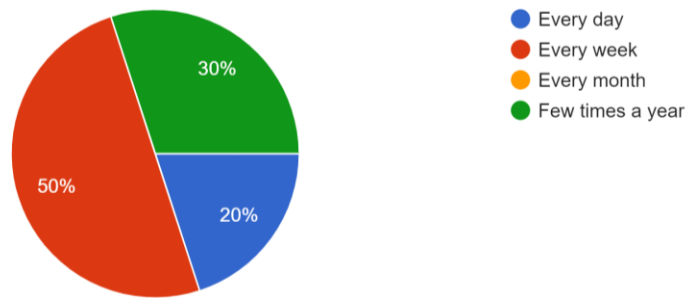
Figure 4 Factors improving spoken performance



3.1.5 Question 5 – How often do you communicate in English?

Figure 5 shows how often the participants communicate in English. From the overall 10 participants, 50% of them communicate *every week* in English, 30% of them *few times a year*, and only 20% of participants communicate in English *every day*. All votes on *few times a year* are from respondents from group A, the other respondents (20%) voted *every week*. The other votes (30%) on *every week* were from respondents from group B along with 20% votes on *every day*. We can therefore expect group B to have overall better spoken performance than participants from group A as they speak more frequently.

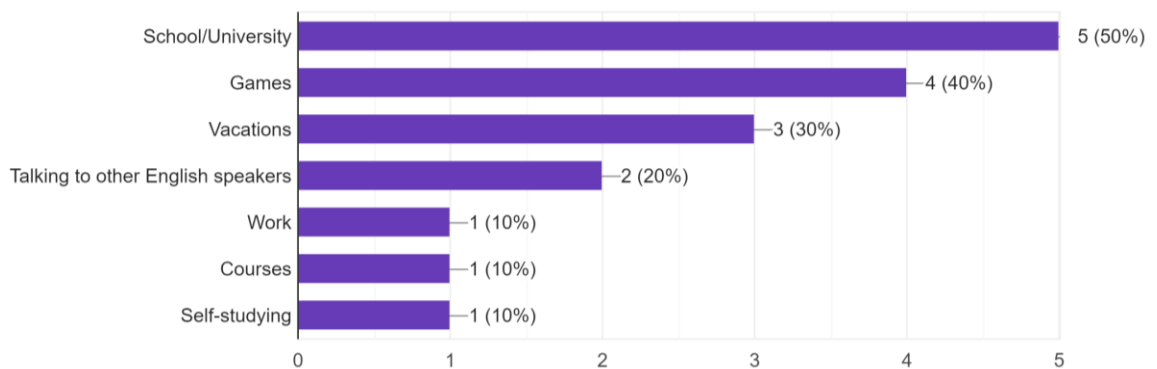
Figure 5 Communication frequency



3.1.6 Question 6 – For what occasion do you communicate in English?

Figure 6 shows the different occasions where the participants have used to communicate in English. The majority of respondents voted for multiple options, only a few voted for only 1. Exactly a half of participants voted for the option *school/university*, 40% participants voted for *games*, 30% for *vacations*, 20% for *talking to other English speakers*, and 30% of participants voted for the *work, courses, self-studying* where each category has 1 vote. The majority of respondents from group A voted for *vacations, games* where each category had 3 votes. All of the respondents from group B voted for the option *school/university* as they are still students. Since we expect group B participants to have better spoken performance than group A – due to the previous question – this question also supports that claim as they use their English on a higher level as they attend schools/universities.

Figure 6 Communication purpose



3.2 Test Results

The following chapter will deal with the speaking test results focusing on four sub-components of speaking competence – grammar, vocabulary, pronunciation, and fluency.

Table 3 Evaluation – Group A

Participant	Grammar	Vocabulary	Pronunciation	Fluency	TOTAL
1	3	3	2	2	10
2	3	2	3	4	12
3	4	4	5	4	17
4	3	2	2	1	8
5	4	3	4	5	16
Mean	3.4	2.8	3.2	3.2	12.6

Table 4 Evaluation – Group B

Participant	Grammar	Vocabulary	Pronunciation	Fluency	TOTAL
6	2	3	2	2	9
7	3	4	3	4	14
8	3	3	4	3	13
9	3	3	4	3	13
10	4	3	4	3	14
Mean	3.0	3.2	3.4	3.0	12.6

Table 5 Evaluation – Both groups

Participant	Grammar	Vocabulary	Pronunciation	Fluency	TOTAL
1	3	3	2	2	10
2	3	2	3	4	12
3	4	4	5	4	17
4	3	2	2	1	8
5	4	3	4	5	16
6	2	3	2	2	9
7	3	4	3	4	14
8	3	3	4	3	13
9	3	3	4	3	13
10	4	3	4	3	14
Mean	3.2	3.0	3.3	3.1	12.6

3.2.1 Grammar

As Table 3 shows, in Group A, 60% of participants received 3 points from the section grammar in the assessment, 40% of participants received 4 points. The mean of this section is 3.4 which puts the participants slightly above the average. *Participants 1* and *5* stated in the questionnaire that their weakness is grammar. However, as seen in this table, *Participant 1* received 3 points which is corresponding as more frequent errors appeared in their grammatical structures, structures of word, and word-order and unlike *Participant 5*, who received 4 points for their spoken performance in this category, this participant underestimated their grammar knowledge as their grammatical structures and word combination was mostly accurate.

According to Table 4, in Group B, 60% of participants received 3 points from the grammar section, 20% received only 2 points, and 20% received 4 points. The mean of this section is 3.0 which is an average mark. *Participant 6* self-evaluated that their strength is grammar, which was then proven wrong as, during the assessment, they had major problems with combining words and grammatical structures.

We can see that none of the participants from both groups A or B received the lowest (1) and the highest (5) mark possible from the category grammar. However, in Table 5, 60% of participants received 3 points, 30% received 4 points, and only 10% received 2 points. Since the overall mean of these ten participants in this category was 3.2 points which can be rounded to 3, we can assume that more frequent errors appear in grammatical structures, structures of word, and word-order among Czech native speakers' performance.

3.2.2 Vocabulary

In Table 3, the numbers show that 40% of participants in Group A received 3 points from the section vocabulary in the speaking assessment, 40% received 2 points, and 20% received 4 points. The mean of this section is 2.8 which puts the participants slightly below the average. *Participants 1, 3, and 5* stated that vocabulary is their strength in the questionnaire. However, only *Participant 3* received 4 points from the speaking assessment – only minor errors in word production appeared during their monologue. *Participants 1* and *5* overestimated their vocabulary knowledge as, during their monologue, their speech had more frequent errors in word production. On the other hand, none of the participants chose vocabulary as their weakness. Nonetheless, *Participants 2* and *4* received only 2 points from the speaking assessment in this category. Their speech

had major word production issues and therefore, they overestimated their vocabulary knowledge.

80% of participants in Group B received 3 points from the vocabulary section during their speaking assessment and only 20% received 4 points. The mean of this table for this section is 3.2 which puts the participants slightly above the average. *Participant 7* chose vocabulary as their strength in the questionnaire. This self-evaluation corresponds with their spoken performance as they received 4 points – only minor errors in word production appeared during their monologue. On the contrary, *Participants 6* and *10* chose that vocabulary is their weakness. However, their spoken performance was average (their speech had more frequent errors in word production) but no major mistakes appeared.

None of the participants from both groups A or B received the lowest (1) and the highest (5) mark possible from the vocabulary category. However, Table 5 shows that 60% of participants received 3 points, 20% received 4 points, and 20% received 2 points from the speaking assessment. The overall mean in this category was 3.0 points. Since 3.0 is an average score, we can assume that frequent errors in word production appear in Czech native speakers' performance.

3.2.3 Pronunciation

The numbers show that 40% of participants in Group A received 2 points from the section pronunciation in the speaking assessment, 20% received 5 points, and 20% received 4 points, and 20% received 3 points. The mean of this section is 3.2 which puts the participants slightly above the average. None of the participants from group A picked pronunciation as their strength in the questionnaire. However, *Participant 3* received 5 points from the speaking assessment – their pronunciation, intonation, and stress patterns were accurate throughout their speech and along with *Participant 4* who received 4 points (minor errors appeared in their pronunciation, intonation, and stress patterns), they both underestimated their pronunciation skills. Only *Participant 1* chose pronunciation as their weakness in the questionnaire and together with *Participant 4*, they both scored 2 points – their pronunciation, intonation, and stress patterns have major errors. This means that they underestimated their pronunciation skills.

60% of participants in Group B received 4 points from the pronunciation section during their speaking assessment and 40% received 3 points. The mean of this table for this section is 3.6 which puts the participants above the average. *Participants 8* and *10* chose pronunciation as their strength in the questionnaire and along with *Participant 9*, they

received 4 points for their spoken performance in this category – minor errors appeared in their pronunciation, intonation, and stress patterns. On the contrary, *Participant 6* chose pronunciation as their weakness in the questionnaire. This is proven right by their spoken performance as they had major errors in their pronunciation, intonation, and stress patterns during the monologue.

None of the participants from both groups A or B received the lowest (1) mark possible from the pronunciation category. However, Table 5 shows that 40% of participants received 4 points, 30% received 2 points, 20% received 3 points, and only 10% received 5 points from the speaking assessment. The overall mean in this category was 3.3 points which can be rounded to 3 points. We can therefore assume that errors in pronunciation, intonation, and stress patterns that are more frequent, appear in Czech native speakers' performance.

3.2.4 Fluency

Table 3 shows that 40% of participants in Group A received 4 points from the section fluency in the speaking assessment, 20% received 5 points, 20% received 2 points, and 20% received 1 point. The mean of this section is 3.2 which puts the participants slightly above the average. None of the participants from group A picked fluency as their strength in the questionnaire. However, *Participant 5* received 5 points from the speaking assessment – their speech speed, pauses, and sentence length were natural and continuous throughout their speech. Along with *Participants 2* and *3* who received 4 points (slight errors which affected their speech speed, pauses, rhythm, and sentence length), all three of these participants underestimated their fluency by not mentioning it as their strength. *Participants 1, 2, 3,* and *4* chose fluency as their weakness in the questionnaire. *Participant 1* received 2 points from the speaking part (their speech had long pauses and was fragmented) and *Participant 4* received only 1 point (very little response of the participant) which is below the average and it corresponds with their chosen weakness.

In Group B, 60% of participants received 3 points from the fluency section during their speaking assessment, 20% received 4, and 20% received 2 points. The mean of this table for this section is 3.0 which is the average. *Participants 9* and *10* chose fluency as their strength in the questionnaire. Nonetheless, they only received only 3 points as their speech speed, pauses, rhythm, and sentence length contained errors that were more frequent. On the contrary, fluency was not chosen as a weakness by *Participant 6*.

However, they received only 2 points. This means that this participant overestimated their fluency in English by not mentioning it as their weakness.

Table 5 shows that 30% of participants received 4 points, 30% received 3 points, 20% received 2 points, 10% received 5 points, and 10% received 1 point from the speaking assessment. The overall mean in this category was 3.1 points which can be rounded to 3 points. We can therefore assume that errors in speech speed, pauses, rhythm, and sentence length that are more frequent, appear in Czech native speakers' performance.

3.3 Correlation

The correlations between the results obtained by the speaking test and the questionnaire were submitted to a correlation analysis (Table 6) using Spearman's Rank Correlation Coefficients (R) where:

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

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

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

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

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

Statistically significant correlation was detected only between the self-evaluation and pronunciation ($R = 0.3269$), which means that the participants primarily evaluated their speaking competence according to the level of their pronunciation.

Table 6 Correlation

Participant	Self-evaluation	Total	Grammar	Vocabulary	Pronunciation	Fluency
1	2	10	3	3	2	2
2	2	12	3	2	3	4
3	3	17	4	4	5	4
4	3	8	3	2	2	1
5	2	16	4	3	4	5
6	3	9	2	3	2	2
7	3	14	3	4	3	4
8	4	13	3	3	4	3
9	3	13	3	3	4	3
10	4	14	4	3	4	3
R		0.0827	0.0476	0.2259	0.3269	-0.2390

CONCLUSION

The aim of this thesis was to provide an in-depth look into the English speaking competence of Czech native speakers under the age of 30. This competence was assessed among 10 Czech speakers.

To answer the research question: *What are the self-perceived strengths and weaknesses of participants' speaking competence?*, two questionnaire items were analysed. Grammar and vocabulary were reported as the self-perceived strengths in speaking performance by most participants and fluency as the most frequent weakness.

According to the questionnaire results, it was expected that the participants would score quite high in grammar and vocabulary and rather low in fluency. However, the expectations were not met, as the scores were nearly identical in all four sub-components of the speaking test (grammar, vocabulary, pronunciation, and fluency).

Similarly, the difference in the speaking test between the groups (A – without university education, and B – with university education) was not significant either – both groups achieved identical total scores (12.6).

The hypothesis: *There is a significant correlation between the speaking test assessment and the self-evaluation of speaking competence* was not proved as there was a significant correlation only between self-evaluation score and pronunciation sub-component of the test.

The participants further stated that it was the school that helped them improve their English speaking performance the most and it is the school where they communicate in English most frequently, most of them once a week on average.

Additionally, since the mean of both groups is 12.6, it can be summarized that the English speaking competence of these speakers is on an *okay* level in terms of grammar, vocabulary, pronunciation, and fluency.

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

- L1 First language
L2 Second language
EFL English as foreign language

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