FACULTY institute OF MECHANICAL of foreign ENGINEERING languages

Teaching a comparative writing course

Czech and English in parallel

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WRITING FINAL THESES:
A COMPARATIVE COURSE IN CZECH AND ENGLISH

ORIGINAL AIMS

- to offer a course for more students than only those intending to write their bachelor's or master's thesis in English
- for bachelor-degree students, to give input on writing the first long academic text (no writing classes at university level)
- felt necessity to include both English and Czech as most literary sources in technology are in English

OUTCOMES

- The comparative study yielded outcomes that help build skills in both languages. It created a mental contrastive web of linguistic concepts, rather than treated each language separately and glued them together like a double-sided copy.

SCIENCE WRITING STYLE THEN AND NOW

- Typical feature of Czech academic writing style: EVASIVENESS

  - Possible causes:
    - 16th-century Ramism
    - historical influence German writing style
    - distrust of the rhetorical pathos of both the East and the West
    - secondary-school "composition" traditionally based on artistic genres X nowadays Maturita exam including more practical genres

  - All resulting in a lack of specific instruction on writing and style

- A change in academic writing, especially STEM writing

  - resulting in the demands of the Anglo-Saxon writing style being applied to Czech academic texts (especially being straightforward, to the point)

MEASURES TAKEN TO ALLEVIATE EVASIVENESS

- Struggling with emphasizing individual contribution – omitting directly specifying the aims and the outcomes of the work, tendency to describe the form rather than the content, not venturing into interpretation of results or directly stating their value

  The main focus of the bachelor's thesis is to explore different semantic segmentation methods of off-road terrain images. In the theoretical survey *are described* the basic principles of semantic segmentation, multiple approaches to the problem, the methods of semantic segmentation and different datasets. […] The attained results *are compared* to the results from the theoretical survey and the next steps for improving the accuracy of the models *are proposed*.

- Teaching based on the discussion of less skillful examples followed by the more skillful ones

  On a daily basis we listen to issues associated with energy prices constantly increasing, nonrenewable resources running out and challenges to utilize every joule of energy possible. These issues can be addressed by waste heat recovery which has become the main topic of this thesis. […] The main focus was on calculation of waste heat from multiple laundry dryers located in an industrial laundry facility as well as its economic evaluation. It was found that the recovery of this waste heat can bring up to 89 kW of heat output in this case study…

MEASURES TAKEN TO ALLEVIATE EVASIVENESS

- Teaching rhetorical functions on text examples
- Compiling an extensive list of rhetorical functions. Although an essential feature of any English textbook, such lists in Czech do not exist.

Popis vizuální informace (grafy, tabulky, obrázky)	Describing visual information (graphs, tables, figures)

• Graf na obr. 1 znázorňuje / ilustruje/ poukazuje na / demonstruje/ odráží skutečnost, že... / poskytuje informace o... / rozděluje X na... / představuje / popisuje...
• Hodnota X je / se ustálila na 68.
• Popis trendů:
   o X vzrostlo / se zvedlo / zvýšilo se o 25 %
   o X kleslo/snížilo se ze 200 na 155.
   o X zaznamenalo nárůst / se zvýšilo / se zvedlo.
   o Byl zaznamenán pokles o 25 % / 25% pokles.
• Přídavná jména (a příslovce) modifikující „růst" a „pokles":
   o mírný/mírně
   o plynulý/plynule
   o pozvolný/pozvolně
   o výrazný/výrazně
   o významný/významně
   o zásadní/zásadně
   o náhlý/náhle
   o prudký/prudce
	• The graph in Fig. 1 shows / illustrates / indicates / demonstrates / reflects / gives information about ... / gives a breakdown of X into ... / presents / describes ...
	• The value of X is/stands at 68.
	• Describing trends (past trends in past simple, present trends in present continuous):
	   o X increased / grew / rose / went up by 25% (25 %).
	   o X decreased / fell /declined / went down from 200 to 155.
	   o There was an increase/growth/rise in X.
	   o There was a decrease/fall/decline by 25%.
	• Adjectives and adverbs modifying "increase" and "decrease":
	   o slight/slightly
	   o steady/steadily
	   o gradual/gradually
	   o dramatic/dramatically
	   o significant/significantly
	   o radical/radically
	   o sharp/sharply
	   o steep/steeply

Příčina → následek • X způsobuje Y. • X se podílí na Y. • X vede k Y. • X je odpovědné za Y.	**Cause → Effect** • X causes Y. • X accounts for Y. • X leads to Y. • X results in Y.

MEASURES TAKEN TO ALLEVIATE LANGUAGE TRANSFER

- Students who effortlessly read in English have a tendency to transfer English constructions into their Czech writing and also when they do not follow the pattern of English written papers, they have a tendency to use Czech constructions in English. The result is a Czenglish hybrid that is not stylistically correct in either language (passive in Czech and "we" constructions in English).

- thematic progression exercise – analysis followed by translation

MEASURES TAKEN TO ALLEVIATE LANGUAGE TRANSFER
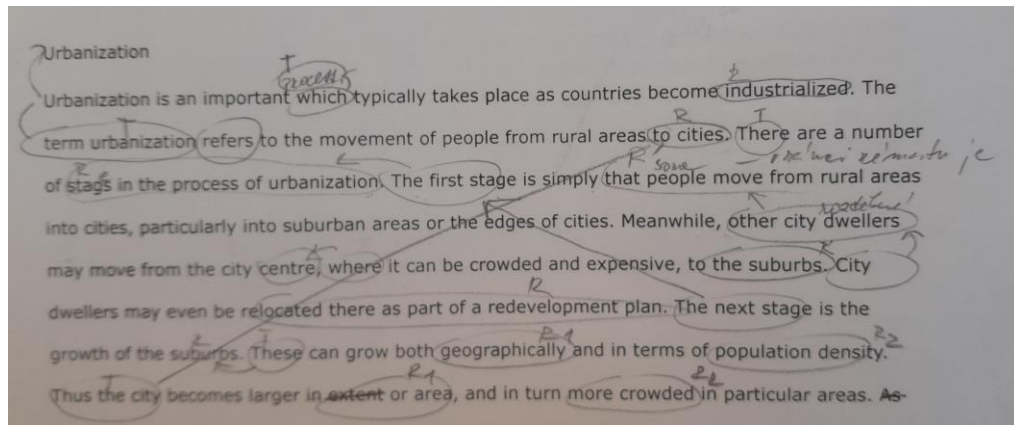
- language transfer in formal style: too many Latin-based words in Czech and too few Latin-based words in English

  - Transter into English:
    - It *turned out* that the modified equation was more precise.
    - Increased workload and stress *show themselves* in a *whole range* of symptoms.
  - Transfer into Czech:
    - Výsledky výzkumu *byly komunikovány prostřednictvím* zprávy.
    - Tato teorie je *fundamentálním* základem …

- brief historical input in order to cancel out the easy word-for-word translation strategy

- a variety of online resources (dictionaries, thesauri, frequency software, AI) and searching strategies (corpus search, picture check):
  - One rule: Never rely on one resource; double-check and compare.
  - super-tangled web of languages: Slovaks studying a Czech program and writing in English

HOPEFULLY ACHIEVED GOAL

- "complicating" the study of languages for students in order to make them create a mental web of relations rather than a direct transfer from one language to another

- Students' feedback:
    1. + a variety of online resources to avoid errors, look up collocations and example sentences, double-check meaning → a web of language
    2. - more on how to improve AI response
    3. + examples for real students' writing → practical examples, nobody's perfect
    4. + input on the structure of thesis parts → cookbook fighting evasiveness
    5. - detailed text analysis (mostly the FSP exercises) too demanding for technology students

THANK YOU
FOR YOUR ATTENTION

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