

CZECH

THE NORMAL WAY

Let's get good in the Czech language

by DAVID BUREŠ

I would like to thank my sister Lucy, my parents, reviewers and school, without whom this textbook would have been completed years sooner

The last mention goes to my significant other, because, had she existed, I would never find the time or motivation to write this textbook

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INTRODUCTION

We should get to know each other and Czech before getting into the book itself

WHAT IS THIS BOOK?

It is both a textbook and a workbook that should help you learn and practice the intricacies of Czech.

WHO ARE YOU, AUTHOR?

My name is David Bureš. I am pissed at the current state of language teaching both in the Czech Republic and in countries speaking English, and this is why I wrote this book the way it is. Oh, I also am interpreter, translator and proofreader of Czech, English and Japanese.

WHAT IS CZECH?

It's a language.

NO, FOR REAL, WHAT IS CZECH?

Czech is a West Slavic language, the same as Slovak and Polish. If you know Czech, you should also understand these two at... varying levels of success. Don't look at me like that, the name of this textbook is Czech from Nothing, not The Complete Introduction to the West Slavic Language Family.

WHY SHOULD I LEARN CZECH?

You are asking this question AFTER buying the textbook?

DOES CZECH AND ENGLISH HAVE A LOT OF SIMILAR WORDS?

Unfortunately not. While there are some English words of Czech origin (for example "robot") and vice versa (for example "víkend"), the vast majority of words are completely different.

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CZECH PRONUNCIATION

English is famous for its tough-as-nails pronunciation. Hell, I've been fluent in English for years and I still sound like a foreigner. Luckily, Czech is much simpler.

THE SOUNDS OF CZECH

Czech 32 distinct sounds; five of these are vowels, and the rest are consonants. All consonants have a longer version, but I'm not counting them, because they aren't their own separate sounds.

DON'T STRESS OVER STRESS

Stress is something native speakers of any language don't pay any attention to, but it's very important if you don't want to sound weird. In a nutshell, it's **saying one syllable in a word more intensely than other syllables**. English, holding true to its disaster of a pronunciation, doesn't have set stress; any syllable may be stressed.

Czech, on the other hand, has it figured out. Czech stress is **always on the first syllable**.

Pretty easy, isn't it?

SAYING THE VOWELS

There five vowels: **A, I, U, E** and **O**. Don't worry, they're always the same. Let's have a look at them:

| Sound | Closest English equivalent | Examples |
|-------|--------------------------------------|--|
| A | u in luck o in wow | A (cs. and) Ananas (cs. pineapple) |
| I, Y | i in bill e in be | Sešit (cs. notebook) Pivo (cs. beer) |
| U | oo in moo o in lose | Muset (cs. to have to) U (cs. next to) |
| E | e in bed e in let | Pero (cs. pen) Venek (cs. the outdoors) |
| O | a in was oo in door | Oko (cs. eye) Oni (cs. they) |

English vowels are said in a different way than in Czech, so some equivalents are not perfect.

SAYING THE CONSONANTS

Czech has a lot of consonants; 27 of them, to be exact. They are on the next two pages.

| Sound | Closest English equivalent | Examples |
|-------|---|---|
| B | b in beer | A (cs. and) |
| | b in birch | Ananas (cs. pineapple) |
| C | ts in tits | Cákat (cs. to splash) |
| | ts in cats | Cit (cs. feeling) |
| Č | ch in check | Často (cs. often) |
| | cz in czech | Čirý (cs. clear) |
| D | d in Dick (short for Richard, of course) | Dost (cs. enough) |
| | d in doll | Dát (cs. to give) |
| Ď | No equivalent | Odpověď (cs. reponse) Ďolík (cs. small hole) |
| F | ph in physics | Film (cs. movie) |
| | f in fuck | Fyzika (cs. physics) |
| G | g in great | Gauč (cs. couch) |
| | g in gift | Gepard (cs. cheetah) |
| H | h in behind | Hospoda (cs. pub) |
| | h in hide | Hodně (cs. a lot) |
| Ch | No equivalent | Chtít (cs. to want) Chrápat (cs. to snore) |
| J | y in yes | Jídlo (cs. food) |
| | y in why | Jít (cs. to go) |
| K | k in kit | Kost (cs. bone) |
| | ch in chaos | Kráva (cs. cow) |
| L | l in lick | Líbit se (cs. to be liked) |
| | l in leave | Ležet (cs. to lie down) |
| M | m in mom | Máma (cs. mom) |
| | m in mill | Mít (cs. to have) |
| N | n in night | Ne (cs. no) |
| | n in never | Noha (cs. leg) |

| | | |
|---|------------------------------|---|
| Ň | No equivalent | Ňadro (cs. boob) Kůň (cs. horse) |
| P | p in strip p in dip | Pajzl (cs. crappy pub) Prát se (cs. to have a fistfight) |
| R | No equivalent | Ruka (cs. hand) Rád (cs. to like sth., male) |
| Ř | No equivalent | Řeka (cs. river) Přát (cs. to wish) |
| S | s in smell s in see | Smrad (cs. foul smell) Sít (cs. to sieve) |
| Š | sh in shut up sh in shirt | Šít (cs. to sew) Šrák (cs. suspender) |
| T | t in tick t in tough | Ten (cs. that one, male) Ta (cs. that one, female) |
| Ť | No equivalent | Doesn't appear as a separate letter |
| V | v in vent | Vidět (cs. to see) Vím (cs. I know) |
| Z | z in zoo se in close | Znát (cs. to know) Zed' (cs. wall) |
| Ž | No equivalent | Žít (cs. to live) Žid (cs. Jew) |

404: EQUIVALENTS NOT FOUND

Some sounds in the chart above have a daunting "No equivalent" in the English column. **These may be hard to say and remember at first, because you're not used to them, but don't worry, you'll get better each time you say them, so don't give up!** If you end up giving up, feel free to send me a strongly-worded letter.

Now we'll go over the sounds with no friends in English. **All of them will have their "phonetic description" (the scary-looking words) under them, so you can look up proper pronunciations.** Just look up this "phonetic description" and you should find plenty of spoken examples. **DON'T TRY TO MEMORIZE THESE DESCRIPTIONS, THEY ARE USELESS UNLES YOU'RE INTO LINGUISTICS.** But before we get to them...

WHAT'S THE DEAL WITH THE CZECH CHECK?

But wait! The chart below is full softening! "What does this 'softening' mean?". Well, it's not something really present in English. **Try to pronounce "sit" and "shit". Now try it again but pay attention to what the tip of your tongue does.** When saying "sit", the very tip of your tongue should be close to roof of your mouth. And when you say "shit", the tip of your tongue should be pointing towards outside, the area a bit further behind the tip should be closer to the roof of your mouth, and your tongue should want to be raised a bit more. This is okay, let your tongue do what it wants.

This is the weird "softening". **It's a fancy word for saying that you should point the tip of your tongue towards the outside and let the area behind the tip get closer towards the roof of your mouth.**

This may be confusing at first, but when you're not sure what to do with your tongue when softening remember the "sit" x "shit" example. Alright, now let's see the chart!

Ď

Softened D

Voiced palatal stop

Ch

You may sound like you're choking when first trying to say this sound.

Voiceless velar fricative

Start by saying "uuuh". Stop making any sound, keep your mouth in that position. Now raise the middle of your tongue halfway up your mouth. Now start blowing air out. It should go over your tongue and produce a quiet sound. Give the air more force to make it louder.

Ň

Softened N

Palatal nasal

R

Tapped R

Alveolar trill/tap

Ř

Voiced/unvoiced alveolar fricative trill

Czech is the only language in the world where this sound appears! Now you can impress girls by saying your tongue can do something they've never seen before (unless they're Czech, of course). And I'd spent a really long time trying to explain this, so just hop onto Youtube and find examples on your own (my Youtube channel is <https://goo.gl/iHZ5pf>, just saying...)

ř

Softened T

Voiceless palatal stop

ž

Softened Z

Voiced postalveolar fricative

CZECH THE LINE (AND THE CHECK)

Alright, I'll stop making this bad pun now.

You need to pay attention to small strokes on the side of some letters. These are called “diacritical marks” (you don’t have to remember the name), and Czech has two: The **Line** (‘) and the **Check** (ˇ).

Line (‘)

The Line makes the sound last a bit **longer**.
Think saying the “A” in “cAt” for twice as long.

You can write the line on top of any vowel

Check (ˇ)

The Check “softens” the sound.

You can write the check on top of C, D, R, S,
T, N and Z

Don’t worry, it’s no big deal if you mess this up; you may just accidentally call this adorable **Wheatear bird** on the right (bělořit) a **white-ass** (bělořitř).



CZECH WRITING AND READING

You know how English has this crazy way of saying stuff, and an even crazier way of writing it all down? Well you're in luck, Czech is one of the sane languages in this regard.

WRITING

Czech uses the Latin alphabet, same as English, German and Tswana. Be careful though, English uses the alphabet in a really weird way, and it is not the same as Czech.

You write everything you hear. It's as simple as that. There are no additional vowels just for the sake of it and no writing one sound as five possible letters. **On its own, every sound has a different letter, and only that one letter.** (Notice how I said **ON ITS OWN**. More on that in the "Reading" chapter) All you have to remember is that **every sound, no matter where, is always written the same way.** You're not getting the O in cOn and the A in Aw written differently, but pronounced the same. Once again, more on that in the "Reading" chapter very soon. One exception to this are two letters, **i** and **y**, pronounced the same, but written differently. Another weird exception are the letters **s** and **z**, pronounced differently, but, when written at the **beginning of a word**, are written according to some weird rules. Both of these are a chapter on their own and we'll talk about them later.

The complete Czech alphabet looks like this:

A Á B C Č D ě E ě Ě F G H Ch I J K L M N Ň O Ó P Q R Ř S Š T Ť U Ú Ů V W X Y Z Ž

The alphabet has a few letters not covered before. These are Q, Ů, W, X and Y. Let's have a look at them now:

Q

This letter doesn't appear at all, and never used to. It is only used for writing words of foreign origin, and there's like four of them, anyway.

Ů

This one is the exact same thing as ú. "Well", you might ask, "why is it used then? Isn't one letter enough?", and I agree with you. This letter actually used to be two letters, "uo", and they did the same thing: they represented the long "u". **Over time, the "u" killed the "o" and started wearing its skin, becoming the "ů".** There is a simple rule when to write the ů instead of ú: **Ů is written at the beginning of words, Ů everywhere else**

W

This letter used to stand for the modern Czech V, but it is never used now. Apart from, you guessed it...

words of foreign origin.

X Another letter only used for writing foreign words. Not as useless as Q, but still pretty useless.

Y Oh boy are we gonna have a long talk about this one. It's pronounced the same as **i**, and there is a long list of words where Y should be used instead of i. Stay tuned for that chapter.

READING

Well that didn't take long, did it? Now reading is a bit more tricky. While everything that is written is read, combinations of some letters may change the reading a bit. Let's have a look at these combinations:

| Written | Literal writing | Example |
|---------|-----------------|------------------------------------|
| DI | ĎI | Díky (cs. thanks, informal) |
| TI | ŤI | Tihle (cs. those, male) |
| NI | ŇI | Nic (cs. nothing) |

It's not that bad, is it? **Be careful, this type of written softening doesn't apply to any other letters beside these three!** Writing "CI" doesn't make it sound like "ČI" (like in the word "chčij", cs. piss!)

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NUMBERS

I hate numbers.

WHY DO YOU HATE NUMBERS?

Okay, I don't *really* hate numbers. I'm just better with words.

| | | |
|----|---------|-------|
| 1 | Jedna | One |
| 2 | Dva | Two |
| 3 | Tři | Three |
| 4 | Čtyři | Four |
| 5 | Pět | Five |
| 6 | Šest | Six |
| 7 | Sed(u)m | Seven |
| 8 | Os(u)m | Eight |
| 9 | Devět | Nine |
| 10 | Deset | Ten |

Now let's step it up a bit and go over 10, all the way up to 100! Don't worry, the whole thing is easy to remember, all thanks to this **ONE SIMPLE TRICK (Number one will shock you)**.

| Number | Pattern | Weirdness |
|--------|----------------------------------|--|
| 11-19 | (1-9) + ... náct | 11 is jedenáct , not jednáct 14 is čtrnáct , not čtyřináct 15 is patnáct , not pětnáct 19 is devatenáct , not devětnáct |
| 20-40 | (2-4) + ... cet + (1-9) | None! |
| 50-90 | (5-9) + ... desát + (1-9) | 50 is padesát , not pětdesát 60 is šedesát , not šestdesát 90 is devadesát , not devětdesát |

100

Sto

No exception if it's only one thing

So now you know how to say the numbers you'll probably describe your age with. Let's kick it up a notch and get into the high hundreds!

| Number | Pattern | Weirdness |
|---------------|---------------------------------|------------------|
| 200 | Dvě stě + (1-99) | None |
| 300 | (3-4) + ... sta + (1-99) | None |
| 400 | | |
| 500-900 | (5-9) + ... set + (1-99) | None |
| 1000 | Tisíc | None |

With the hundreds out of the way, we can move up to the thousands. The average monthly pay is in this bracket, so pay attention!

| Number | Pattern | Weirdness |
|------------------|------------------------|---------------------|
| 2000 - 4000 | (2-4) + tisíce | None! |
| 5000 - 900000 | (5-900) + tisíc | That's a big range! |

The average salary is 23000 crowns, by the way

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DAYS OF THE WEEK AND MONTHS

Now that you know numbers, it would be useful to learn the days of the Czech week and months on top of that. We can make it, we are no losers.

DAYS OF THE WEEK

I'll be honest with you, I've been using English professionally for many years, and I still don't know the days of the week by heart. I need to go from Sunday and count on my fingers.

| | |
|-----------|---------|
| Monday | Pondělí |
| Tuesday | Úterý |
| Wednesday | Středa |
| Thursday | Čtvrtek |
| Friday | Pátek |
| Saturday | Sobota |
| Sunday | Neděle |

Our weeks begin with Monday, so watch out for that!

MONTHS OF THE YEAR

| | |
|-----------|----------|
| January | Leden |
| February | Únor |
| March | Březen |
| April | Duben |
| May | Květen |
| June | Červen |
| July | Červenec |
| August | Srpen |
| September | Září |
| October | Říjen |

November

Listopad

December

Prosinec

I can't give you any jokes to help with learning these, feel free to send me a strongly-worded letter.

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INTRODUCING YOURSELF

Now it's finally time to learn some useful Czech! Introductions are a great way to meet new people (besides drinking beer), so let's begin with that.

HI, GOOD MORNING! WANT TO HAVE SOME BEER?

"Hi" is the most often used greeting in both English and Czech. You greet your friends and family this way. The Czech version of this one is "**Ahoj**". Be careful to use the right pronunciation! If you need a refresh, feel free to look at the first chapter.

"**Good morning**" is the more formal friend of "hi". You greet your boss and the people you meet for the first time or hate like this. Czech uses the phrase "**Dobrý den**" (lit. Good day). Pay attention to tapping these Rs!

WHO AM I?

So you broke the ice; great job! But now you have to introduce yourself to the other person. Let's begin with saying your name. "**My name is XY**" would be "Jmenuji se XY". But only robots sound like this; real Czechs use "**(Já) jsem XY**" (lit. I am XY).

Next you should probably ask them how their life is going. Just to seem interested. "**How's it going?**" is used when you don't want to know how someone is doing. This phrase is "**Jak se daří?**" (lit. How is it coming along?) in Czech. **Be careful though. If you ask this, the other person will ACTUALLY tell you how they are doing!**

TRICKY OR OBSCURE GREETINGS

The greetings we went over are a safe bet. You can use them anywhere you want, and you should be fine. Czech also has some greetings which may not be this way; if used incorrectly, they could get you either in trouble, looked down upon or the worst possible: making you an obvious foreigner. So, without further ado, let's have a look at them:

| Czech | English | When to use |
|----------------|-----------|---|
| Zdar Nazdar | Aye | If you're a guy, always use this instead of "Ahoj". Using it as a girl might make you sound flirtatious. Or like a little bit of a whore. Depends on how little clothing you're wearing |
| Čus | What's up | If you are a guy between the ages of 13 and 16, you should use it always, all the time. If you're older, only say this to your closest male friends |

| | | |
|------|------------|---|
| Zduř | 'Sup | If you're a teenage guy below 13, a gipsy, want to sound like a lame wannabe gangster or a huge ass |
| Hoj | | |
| Pyčo | You fucker | This obscure greeting is only used in Ostrava. You should never use it |

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WHO AM I? WHERE DID I COME FROM?

Now we can get into the real stuff.

We all popped out of our moms (or at least I hope you and I did). Now it's time to learn how to talk not only about you, but about your family as well.

| | |
|------------------------|------------|
| NOUNS | |
| Me / I | Já |
| You (informal) | Ty |
| You (formal / a group) | Vy |
| Family | Rodina |
| Mom | Máma |
| Dad | Táta |
| House (building) | Dům |
| Toilet | Záchod |
| ADJECTIVES | |
| | |
| VERBS | |
| To be | Být |
| To like | Mít rád(a) |
| To sleep | Spát |
| To write | Psát |

WHO AM I, AGAIN?

Wow, this is a *déjà vu*, isn't it? I used the exact same headline in the previous chapter where we talked about introducing yourself. As you may remember, the phrase "My name is [your name]" would be "Jmenuji se [your name]". Now it's time to have a deeper look at the way you tell the world your name to uncover the intricacies of our beloved language.

SENTENCE STRUCTURE

As you surely know, the typical English sentence goes like this: "I like women.", "I wanna sleep", "I will get drunk". You first say who you are talking about, then what they are doing, and then what will be affected by that thing they're doing. The right sentence structure is very important in English, where saying "I like women" and "Women like me" makes a true sentence into something that only happens in my dreams.

Now let's talk a bit about Czech. Czech relies heavily on something English doesn't really have: declension. Don't worry, it's as scary as it sounds. It basically means that a word can change itself based on the rest of the sentence. You know how the word "I" has a different

form, "me"? Well, get ready, because every noun (milk), adjective (white), pronoun (me), number (four) and verb (write) has, like, 20 different forms. The advantage of this clusterfuck is that you can, theoretically, rearrange a sentence however you'd like, and it'd still mean the same thing (although it may sound really weird). A major downside is, well, every noun, adjective, pronoun, number and verb has 20 different forms (there are rules, don't worry!).

XY

SOUNDING NORMAL

Whoa, slow down my dude!, you might say. Didn't we already go through Czech pronunciation? Why are you bringing this up again?, you might ask.
Buckle up, I'll tell you exactly why.

WELL, GET TO IT!

Alright, take it easy. While you can get through the day with the pronunciation we went over before, trying to sound all correct will start to be pretty taxing on your vocal cords. Words like "čtyři" and "jsem" are just two examples of what I mean; just try saying them ten times over.

SHOW ME SOME EXAMPLES

Alright, here you go:

| Original | | Becomes |
|----------|----|---------|
| Čtyři | -> | Štyry |
| Čtvrtek | -> | Štvrtek |
| Jsem | -> | Sem |
| I | -> | Aj |

XY2

SWEARING

Fuck you!

FUCK YOU TOO, AUTHOR!

See, you know how to swear. Before we start learning the swears, I'd like to mention an interesting bit: **Many swears come from the names of castrated males for guys (hňup, vůl), and from the names of animal females for girls (kráva, koza, slípka).**

Now let's learn how to make expressing yourself more colorful in Czech by, of course, swearing like a sailor (Which is, by the way "**Nadávání jako dlaždič**", cs. "Swearing like a paver"). I'll rank these swears by how rude they are, from the least to the most rude. First up we have some swears you might say when something doesn't go your way.

| Czech | English |
|-----------------------------------|---------|
| Sakra! | Damn! |
| Do řiti! (lit. Into an ass) | Crap! |
| Kurva! (lit. Whore) | Fuck! |
| Do prdele! (lit. Into an asshole) | |
| Do piče! (lit. Into a cunt) | |

Next, we have some you might say to someone you hate.

| Czech | English |
|---------|------------|
| Debile! | You idiot! |
| Hajzle! | Fucker! |
| Kundo! | Cunt! |
| Pičo! | |