Pronunciation

Letters. Alphabet and Names of Sounds.

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| Letters | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Latin Alphabet Letters | a | b | c | | d | e | f | g | h | i | j | k | l | m | n | | o | p | q | r | s | t | u | v | w | x | y | z |
| Czech Letters: Consonants |  |  | č | | ď |  |  |  | ch |  |  |  |  |  | ň | |  |  |  | ř | š | ť |  |  |  |  |  | ž |
| Czech Letters: Vowels | á |  |  | |  | éě |  |  |  | í |  |  |  |  |  | | ó |  |  |  |  |  | úů |  |  |  | ý |  |
| Alphabet and Names of Sounds | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| a – a á – dlouhé a b – be c – ce č – če d – de ď – dě e – e é – dlouhé e ě – e s háčkem f – ef g – ge h – ha ch – cha | | | | i – krátké měkké i í – dlouhé měkké i j – je k – ka l – el m – em n – en ň – eň o – o ó – dlouhé o p – pe q – kve r – er ř – eř | | | | | | | | | | | | s – es š – eš t – te ť – tě u – u ú – dlouhé u ů – u s kroužkem v – ve w – dvojité ve x – iks y – ypsilon, tvrdé i ý – dlouhé tvrdé i z – zet ž – žet | | | | | | | | | | | | |

In the case of misunderstanding, the name or surname is usually not spelled as individual speech sounds, but it is repeated as it is written by a syllable after syllable. In some cases, a more detailed explanation is necessary. Then, it can be done by naming sounds.

Diacritical Marks

Diacritical marks used in Czech are called:ˇ háček, ´ čárka, o kroužek

Speech Sounds

Vowels

The vowels can be divided into short a, e, i, y, o, u and long á, é, í, ý, ó, ú/ů. Long vowels are pronounced about 1.75 times longer than their short counterparts. In Czech, there are also three diphthongs: ou, au, eu.

The vowels i and y (or í and ý) are pronounced in the same way.

The vowels ú and ů are pronounced in the same way. Their written forms just reflect the difference which existed between them in past.

In some Czech words, there are groups of vowels ie, ia, ii, io, iu. They are read as follows: ia [ija] – fialový, ie [ije] – Itálie, ii [iji] – v Anglii, io [ijo] – rádio, iu [iju] – v rádiu.

Consonants

The Czech consonants can be divided into hard (h, ch, k, r, g, d, t, n), soft (ž, š, č, ř, ď, ť, ň, c, j) and ambiguous (b, f, l, m, p, s, v, z).

The letter ch which represents one sound has its place after letter h in the Czech alphabet.

The sounds p, t, k are pronounced without aspiration (without added air flow).

How are ď, ť, ň pronounced?  
To pronounce correctly ď, ť and ň, imitate sounds of your teacher to touch the front of the alveolar arch with the front part of your tongue, the tip of which should be under the upper front teeth in the same time. In this way, you can pronounce similar sounds like d, t, n , only softer ones.

When are ď, ť, ň pronounced?  
If the letters ď, ť, ň appear in words like: ďábel, ťukat, Plzeň.  
If the letters d, t, n + ě appear in words like: děkuju, těžký, někdo.  
If the letters d, t, n + i/í appear in words like: divadlo, dítě, tisk, tíseň, nikdo, nízký.

So-called "international words" borrowed from other languages are an exception, for example: tenis [tenys], diktát [dyktát], tip [typ].

How are the syllables bě, pě, vě, mě pronounced?  
Bě, pě, vě, mě are read [b´ie, p´ie, v´ie, mn´ie] as in words like: oběd, jít pěšky, člověk, město.

Assimilation and Consonant Devoicing

In Czech, there is a phenomenon called assimilation. To understand assimilation rules, it is necessary to know the difference between the voiced and voiceless consonants. Compare voiced - voiceless consonants: b – p, v – f, d – t, ď – ť, z – s, ž – š, g – k, h – ch.

Consonant Assimilation

If two consonants in a word follow one after another, the second consonant changes the voicing of the preceding consonant, for example: vklad [fklat], tužka [tuška], kdo [gdo], sbírat [zbírat].

Note: The assimilation also occurs in some prepositions, such as v kanceláři [fkanceláři], z České republiky [sčeské republiki]. If after a voiced preposition, a word beginning in a vowel follows, this consonant (at the end of the preposition) is pronounced as a voiceless consonant with so-called glottal stop, such as z Anglie [s´anglije], z Itálie [s´itálie].

In this rule, there are regional differencies, for example the greeting na shledanou is pronounced [naschledanou] in Bohemian area and [nazhledanou] in Moravian area.

Consonant Devoicing

The voiced consonants at the end of the word are pronounced as their voiceless counterparts: b > p, d > t, ď > ť, g > k, h > ch, v > f, z > s, ž > š. For example: Jakub [Jakup], oběd [obět], tedˇ [teť], Oleg [Olek], břeh [břech], Václav [Václaf], kvíz [kvís], když [gdyš].

Czech Accent

The majority of Czech words have an accent on the first syllable, for example náměstí, situace, analýza. The only exceptions are a handful of unstressed words occupying the second logical position in the sentence.Prepositions take the stress, not the word that follows them, for example ve škole.

One-Letter Preposition Extending

One-letter prepositions are extended because of the pronunciation when the following word begins in two or more consonants, in the same sound (as the end of preposition) or its voiced/voiceless counterpart. For example:  
k > ke: ke škole, ke kamarádovi, ke galerii  
v > ve: ve středu, ve škole, ve vlaku, ve Francii  
s > se: se školou, se sestrou, se zahradou  
z > ze: ze školy, ze zahrady, ze stadionu

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