

Unit 1: First Sounds & First Words

Dobrý den! Welcome back, language adventurers! In our introduction, you got a taste of Czech sounds and even learned your very first words. Now, it's time to build on that foundation and start having some real mini-conversations. By the end of this unit, you'll be able to greet people, introduce yourself, say where you're from, be polite, and give basic yes/no answers. Ready? Pojd'me na to! (Let's go!)

Chapter 1: Ahoj! Greetings & Goodbyes

Let's start by expanding our greeting repertoire beyond just "Ahoj" and "Dobrý den." The Czechs are generally quite polite, and using the correct greeting for the time of day or formality level goes a long way.

Examples in Action:

Imagine you've just arrived in Prague and are meeting different people throughout the day:

Scenario 1: Meeting a new friend at a cafe (informal) **You:** Ahoj, Anno! /a-HOY, A-noh/ (*Hi, Anna!*) **Anna:** Ahoj, Petro! /a-HOY, PE-tro/ (*Hi, Peter!*)

Scenario 2: Entering a shop in the morning (formal) **You:** Dobré ráno! /DO-bray RAA-no/ (*Good morning!*) **Shopkeeper:** Dobré ráno! /DO-bray RAA-no/ (*Good morning!*)

Scenario 3: Saying goodbye to a colleague after work (formal) **You:** Na shledanou! /na SHLE-da-noh/ (*Goodbye!*) **Colleague:** Na shledanou! /na SHLE-da-noh/ (*Goodbye!*)

Scenario 4: Saying goodnight to your host family (informal) **You:** Dobrou noc, mami, tati! /DO-broh NOTS, MA-mi, TA-ti/ (*Good night, mom, dad!*)

Vocabulary Table: Greetings & Goodbyes

| Czech Phrase | Phonetic Transcription | English Meaning | Notes |
|--------------|------------------------|---------------------------|---|
| Ahoj! | /a-HOY/ | Hi! / Hello! / Bye! | Informal. Use with friends, family, young people, or people you know well. It works for both hello and goodbye, like "Salut!" in French. |
| Dobrý den! | /DO-bree DEN/ | Good day! / Hello! | Formal. Use with strangers, in shops, with older people, in professional settings. This is your safe default when in doubt. |
| Dobré ráno! | /DO-bray RAA-no/ | Good morning! | Formal. Use from early morning until noon. |
| Dobrý večer! | /DO-bree VE-cher/ | Good evening! | Formal. Use from late afternoon/early evening onwards. |
| Dobrou noc! | /DO-broh NOTS/ | Good night! | Formal/Informal. Used before going to bed. |

| Czech Phrase | Phonetic Transcription | English Meaning | Notes |
|---------------|------------------------|---------------------|--|
| Na shledanou! | /na SHLE-da-noh/ | Goodbye! (formal) | Formal. Your general polite goodbye. It literally means "until we meet again." |
| Na viděnou! | /na VI-dyen-oh/ | See you! (informal) | Slightly less formal than <i>Na shledanou</i> , for people you expect to see again soon. Not as common as <i>Ahoj</i> for informal goodbyes. |

Grammar Breakdown: Formal vs. Informal Greetings

You might have noticed that a core distinction in Czech (just like in French with *tu* vs. *vous*) is between **formal** and **informal** address.

- **Informal (Ahoj!):** This is used with people you know well, like friends, family members, children, and people your own age or younger with whom you've established a casual relationship. Think of it like "Salut!"
- **Formal (Dobrý den!, Dobré ráno!, Dobrý večer!, Na shledanou!):** This is your go-to for pretty much everyone else: shopkeepers, waiters, teachers, colleagues you don't know well, and especially older people or anyone you're addressing out of respect. When in doubt, always use the formal option! It's better to be too polite than not polite enough.

Cultural Note: The Czech Handshake and Personal Space

When meeting someone formally in the Czech Republic, a handshake is standard.

- **Handshake:** It's usually a firm, brief handshake, often accompanied by direct eye contact. Men typically shake hands with men, and women with women. Men usually wait for a woman to offer her hand first.
- **Personal Space:** Czechs generally appreciate a reasonable amount of personal space. While not as distant as some cultures, they also aren't as close-talking as, say, some Southern European cultures. Generally, maintain a comfortable arm's length distance when conversing with someone you don't know well.

Chapter 2: Who Are You? Introducing Yourself

Now that you can say hello and goodbye, let's learn how to tell people who you are and ask for their name. This is fundamental for making those first connections!

Examples in Action:

Imagine you're at a gathering, meeting new people:

Dialogue 1: Meeting a new acquaintance (formal) **Filip:** Dobrý den. Já jsem Filip. Jak se jmenujete? /DO-bree DEN. YAA ysem FI-lip. YAK se YME-nu-ye-te/ (*Good day. I am Filip. What is your name?*) **You:** Dobrý den, Filipe. Já jsem Marie. /DO-bree DEN, FI-li-pe. YAA ysem MA-ri-ye/ (*Good day, Filip. I am Marie.*)

Dialogue 2: Meeting someone your age (informal) **Tereza:** Ahoj! Jmenuji se Tereza. /a-HOY! YME-nu-yi se TE-re-za/ (*Hi! My name is Tereza.*) **You:** Ahoj, Terezo. Já jsem Petr. /a-HOY, TE-re-zo. YAA ysem PETR/ (*Hi, Tereza. My name is Petr.*)

Notice the little changes in Filip's and Tereza's names when you address them directly? Don't worry about that for now, it's a special Czech grammar thing called the Vocative case that we'll cover much later. For now, just focus on the core phrases!

Vocabulary Table: Introducing Yourself

| Czech Phrase / Word | Phonetic Transcription | English Meaning | Notes |
|---------------------|------------------------|--------------------------------|---|
| Jsem... | /ysem/ | I am... | The most basic way to introduce yourself. |
| Jmenuji se... | /yme-NU-yi se/ | My name is... / I am called... | Literally "I call myself...". This is very common. The "se" is a reflexive particle and is part of the verb. Think of it like "Je m'appelle" in French. |
| Jak se jmenujete? | /yak se YME-nu-ye-te/ | What is your name? (formal) | For addressing one person formally, or multiple people (formal or informal). |
| Jak se jmenuješ? | /yak se YME-nu-yesh/ | What is your name? (informal) | For addressing one person informally. |

Grammar Breakdown: "Jsem..." (I am) and Personal Pronouns

The verb "**být**" (to be) is super important, and you've just learned its first form: **jsem** (I am). For now, just focus on this one.

When you say "Já jsem...", the "já" (I) is usually optional because the "jsem" already tells you "I am." So, both "Já jsem Marie" and "Jsem Marie" are perfectly correct and natural.

Now, let's meet our first set of **personal pronouns** (the words that replace names, like "I," "you," "he," "she," etc.). Just like French has *tu* and *vous*, Czech has *ty* and *vy*, and it's essential to use them correctly.

| Czech Pronoun | Phonetic Transcription | English Meaning | French Equivalent | Notes |
|---------------|------------------------|-------------------------|-------------------|---|
| já | /yaa/ | I | je | |
| ty | /ti/ | you (informal singular) | tu | Use with friends, family, children. |
| on | /on/ | he | il | |
| ona | /o-na/ | she | elle | |
| ono | /o-no/ | it | il/elle (neuter) | For neuter nouns (which Czech has, like French <i>genre</i> but for more words). Don't worry too much about this yet. |

| Czech Pronoun | Phonetic Transcription | English Meaning | French Equivalent | Notes |
|---------------|------------------------|--|-------------------|--|
| my | /mi/ | we | nous | |
| vy | /vi/ | you (formal singular / plural) | vous | Crucial distinction! Use for one person formally, or for two or more people (either formally or informally). When speaking to a group of friends, you'd use vy. |
| oni | /o-ni/ | they (masculine animate) | ils | For a group that includes at least one man, or only men. |
| ony | /o-ni/ | they (feminine / masculine inanimate / neuter) | elles | For a group of only women, or a group of things/animals (non-human masculine animate nouns like 'dog'). Again, don't sweat the details now, just recognize them. |

Cultural Note: Meeting someone new at a café

Cafés in the Czech Republic are popular places for meeting friends, informal business discussions, or just relaxing. When meeting someone for the first time in a casual setting like this, it's common to use formal greetings initially and then transition to informal *Ahoj* and *ty* if the other person initiates it or if the conversation becomes clearly friendly and informal. Follow their lead!

Chapter 3: Where Are You From? Talking About Origins

Once you've introduced yourselves, the next natural question is often, "Where are you from?" Let's learn how to answer that in Czech.

Examples in Action:

Dialogue 1: Meeting a Czech person Martina: Dobrý den! Jsem Martina. Odkud jste? /DO-bree DEN! Ysem MAR-ti-na. OT-kut STE/ (Good day! I am Martina. Where are you from?) **You:** Dobrý den, Martino! Já jsem Pierre. Jsem z Francie. /DO-bree DEN, MAR-ti-noh! YAA ysem PYER. Ysem z FRAN-tsi-ye/ (Good day, Martina! I am Pierre. I am from France.)

Dialogue 2: Talking about nationalities Jana: Ahoj! Jsi Francouzka? /a-HOY! Si FRAN-tsohz-ka/ (Hi! Are you French [woman]?) **You:** Ano, jsem Francouzka. A ty jsi Angličan? /A-no, ysem FRAN-tsohz-ka. A ti si AN-glichan/ (Yes, I am a French woman. And are you an Englishman?) **Jana:** Ne, nejsem Angličanka. Jsem Češka. /Ne, NEY-sem AN-gli-chan-ka. Ysem CHESH-ka/ (No, I am not an English woman. I am a Czech woman.)

Vocabulary Table: Talking About Origins

| Czech Word / Phrase | Phonetic Transcription | English Meaning | Notes |
|---------------------|------------------------|-----------------|-------|
|---------------------|------------------------|-----------------|-------|

| Czech Word / Phrase | Phonetic Transcription | English Meaning | Notes |
|---------------------|-------------------------|--------------------------------|--|
| Odkud jste? | /OT-kut STE/ | Where are you from? (formal) | "Jste" is the formal/plural form of "to be." |
| Odkud jsi? | /OT-kut SI/ | Where are you from? (informal) | "Jsi" is the informal singular form of "to be." |
| Jsem z... | /ysem z/ | I am from... | The "z" changes the case of the following word, but we'll learn about cases later! |
| Francie | /FRAN-tsi-ye/ | France | |
| Anglie | /AN-gli-ye/ | England | |
| Česká republika | /CHES-kaa re-PU-bli-ka/ | Czech Republic | |
| Francouz | /FRAN-tsohz/ | Frenchman | Masculine noun. |
| Francouzka | /FRAN-tsohz-ka/ | Frenchwoman | Feminine noun. |
| Angličan | /AN-gli-chan/ | Englishman | Masculine noun. |
| Angličanka | /AN-gli-chan-ka/ | Englishwoman | Feminine noun. |
| Čech | /check/ | Czech man | Masculine noun. |
| Češka | /chesh-ka/ | Czech woman | Feminine noun. |

Grammar Breakdown: "Jsem z..." and Nationalities

The phrase "**Jsem z...**" is your go-to for stating your country of origin. The preposition "**z**" means "from" or "out of."

- **Comparison to French/English:** This is very similar to "Je suis de..." in French or "I am from..." in English.

What's really interesting with nationalities in Czech is that they have **masculine and feminine forms**, just like in French!

- If you are a man from France, you say: **Jsem Francouz.**
- If you are a woman from France, you say: **Jsem Francouzka.**

It's similar for English:

- Man from England: **Jsem Angličan.**
- Woman from England: **Jsem Angličanka.**

And of course, for locals:

- Man from the Czech Republic: **Jsem Čech.**

- Woman from the Czech Republic: **Jsem Češka.**

For now, just focus on these common ones. You'll pick up more as we go!

Chapter 4: Saying Thanks & Being Polite

We touched upon "Děkuji" and "Prosím" in the Introduction, but let's make sure you're super comfortable with these two magic words and how to respond.

Examples in Action:

Scenario 1: In a shop Shopkeeper: Tady je váš chléb. /TA-di ye VAASH HLEB/ (*Here is your bread.*) **You:** Děkuji! /DYE-ku-yi/ (*Thank you!*) **Shopkeeper:** Prosím. /PRO-seem/ (*You're welcome.*)

Scenario 2: Asking for help You: Promiňte, prosím, kde je náměstí? /PRO-min-tye, PRO-seem, GDE ye NAAM-nyes-tyee/ (*Excuse me, please, where is the square?*) **Local:** Tudy! /TU-di/ (*This way!*) **You:** Děkuji moc! /DYE-ku-yi MOTS/ (*Thank you very much!*) **Local:** Není zač. /NE-nyi ZATCH/ (*You're welcome. / No problem.*)

Vocabulary Table: Thanks & Politeness

| Czech Phrase | Phonetic Transcription | English Meaning | Notes |
|--------------|------------------------|--|--|
| Děkuji! | /DYE-ku-yi/ | Thank you! | Your standard "thank you." |
| Děkuji moc! | /DYE-ku-yi MOTS/ | Thank you very much! | "Moc" means "much" or "very." |
| Prosím. | /PRO-seem/ | Please. / You're welcome. / Pardon? / Here you go. | This is an incredibly versatile word. Context is key! It's your default "you're welcome" and a polite way to ask for something ("can I have...?"), or to ask someone to repeat what they said. It can also mean "here you go" when handing something over. |
| Není zač. | /NE-nyi ZATCH/ | You're welcome. / No problem. | This literally means "It's nothing" or "No need." It's a common and slightly more casual way to respond to "Děkuji." Often preferred over <i>Prosím</i> by younger generations or in less formal situations, though both are fine. |
| Promiňte. | /PRO-min-tye/ | Excuse me. / Pardon me. | Use this to get someone's attention or to apologize. |

Cultural Note: Czech politeness is often subtle

Czech politeness can be more understated than what you might be used to in France or other Western European countries. While they are very polite, it might not always come with as many overt smiles or effusive

gestures. A simple "Děkuji" and "Prosím" are highly valued and sufficient. Direct eye contact when speaking is also a sign of respect. Don't be surprised if conversations are direct and to the point; it's generally not considered rude.

Chapter 5: Yes, No, and Maybe: Basic Responses

Sometimes, a simple "yes" or "no" is all you need! Let's master these basic responses and learn how to make a sentence negative.

Examples in Action:

Dialogue 1: A simple question Czech friend: Jsi z Francie? /Si z FRAN-tsi-ye/ (*Are you from France?*) **You:** Ano, jsem z Francie. /A-no, ysem z FRAN-tsi-ye/ (*Yes, I am from France.*)

Dialogue 2: A negative answer Czech friend: Mluvíš německy? /MLU-veesh NYE-mets-ki/ (*Do you speak German?*) **You:** Ne, nemluvíم německy. /Ne, NE-mlu-veem NYE-mets-ki/ (*No, I don't speak German.*)

Dialogue 3: Uncertainty Colleague: Pojedeme zítra do Prahy? /PO-ye-de-me ZEE-tra do PRA-hi/ (*Are we going to Prague tomorrow?*) **You:** Možná. /MOZH-naa/ (*Maybe.*)

Vocabulary Table: Basic Responses

| Czech Word | Phonetic Transcription | English Meaning | Notes |
|------------|------------------------|-----------------|-----------------------------------|
| Ano | /A-no/ | Yes | Your standard "yes." |
| Ne | /Ne/ | No | Your standard "no." |
| Možná | /MOZH-naa/ | Maybe | Handy for expressing uncertainty. |
| Jíst | /yeest/ | to eat | Example verb. |
| Spát | /spaat/ | to sleep | Example verb. |
| Mluvit | /mluvit/ | to speak | Example verb. |

Grammar Breakdown: Forming Simple Negative Sentences with "ne-"

This is really straightforward in Czech! To make a verb negative, you simply add the prefix **"ne-"** directly in front of it. There's no separate word like "pas" in French or "not" in English.

Look at these simple examples using the verb "mluvit" (to speak):

- **mluvím** /mlu-veem/ (I speak)
- **nemluvíм** /ne-mlu-veem/ (I do not speak / I don't speak)

And for our "to be" verb:

- **jsem** (I am)
- **nejsem** (I am not)

It's that simple! This "ne-" prefix attaches directly to the verb.

Comparison: The versatility of "ne" in Czech vs. "no" in French

In French, "no" is *non*, and negation in sentences uses *ne...pas*. In Czech, *Ne* is directly "no." But for verbs, it's just *ne-* directly attached, which is much simpler than the two-part negation in French.

- French: *Je **ne** parle **pas**.*
- Czech: *Já **nemluvím**.* (or just *Nemluvím.*)

Exercises & Practice

Time to consolidate what you've learned!

Exercise 1: Choose the Right Greeting Fill in the blank with the appropriate Czech greeting (Ahoj or Dobrý den).

1. You meet your Czech teacher in the hallway: ____
2. You see your friend Tereza at the market: ____
3. You enter a restaurant in the evening: ____
4. You say goodbye to a child: ____

Exercise 2: Introduce Yourself! Translate these sentences into Czech. Remember to use formal or informal where appropriate.

1. Hello (formal)! My name is Sophie. I am from France. (Sophie is a woman) ____, ____, ____.
2. Hi (informal)! I am Paul. Are you from England? (Paul is a man, asking a male friend) ____! ____, ____, ____?

Exercise 3: Say Thanks & Respond Complete the mini-dialogues.

1. Someone hands you a map: Děkuji! You: _____. (You're welcome)
2. You apologize for bumping into someone: Promiňte! They say: _____. (No problem)

Exercise 4: Yes, No, or Maybe? Translate these responses into Czech.

1. Yes, I am. (responding to "Are you French?") ____, ____.
2. No, I am not. (responding to "Are you from England?") ____, ____.
3. Maybe. ____.

Answer Key

Exercise 1: Choose the Right Greeting

1. You meet your Czech teacher in the hallway: **Dobrý den**
2. You see your friend Tereza at the market: **Ahoj**
3. You enter a restaurant in the evening: **Dobrý večer**
4. You say goodbye to a child: **Ahoj**

Exercise 2: Introduce Yourself!

1. Hello (formal)! My name is Sophie. I am from France. (Sophie is a woman) **Dobrý den, jmenuji se Sophie. Jsem Francouzka.**

2. Hi (informal)! I am Paul. Are you from England? (Paul is a man, asking a male friend) **Ahoj! Jsem Pavel. Jsi Angličan?**

Exercise 3: Say Thanks & Respond

1. Someone hands you a map: Děkuji! You: **Prosím.** (or **Není zač.**)
2. You apologize for bumping into someone: Promiňte! They say: **Není zač.** (or **Prosím.**)

Exercise 4: Yes, No, or Maybe?

1. Yes, I am. (responding to "Are you French?") **Ano, jsem.**
 2. No, I am not. (responding to "Are you from England?") **Ne, nejsem.**
 3. Maybe. **Možná.**
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What You Learned

Bravo! You've accomplished a huge amount in this unit! You can now confidently initiate basic conversations in Czech.

Here's a recap of your new skills:

- **Greeting Mastery:** You can say hello and goodbye at any time of day, both formally and informally.
- **Self-Introduction:** You can tell people your name (using both *Jsem...* and *Jmenuji se...*) and ask them theirs.
- **Talking About Origins:** You can state your country of origin using *Jsem z...* and correctly identify yourself as French, English, or Czech (man or woman!).
- **Politeness Power:** You've mastered *Děkuji* and *Prosím*, and know how to respond to thanks.
- **Basic Responses:** You can say "yes," "no," and "maybe," and even form simple negative sentences with the handy "ne-" prefix.
- **Cultural Awareness:** You understand the crucial difference between formal (*Vy*) and informal (*Ty*) address, and learned about Czech handshake customs and personal space.

You're off to a fantastic start! Keep reviewing these basic phrases and don't hesitate to try them out. In our next unit, we'll start identifying objects and diving into some exciting verb conjugations! See you soon! Na shledanou!