

## The purpose of this talk is not to ...

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- bore you to death with any linguistic analysis
- teach you Czech
- frighten you

## The purpose of this talk is to ...

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- give you the basic overview and the feel of Czech
- show you that the foreign languages you study are actually easy
- hopefully, be fun!

## Basic facts about Czech

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- Indo-European language
- Slavic language (western type)
- Similar to: Slovak, Polish
- Less similar to: Russian, Serbian
- More than 1000 years old, but still developing.

# Vocabulary

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- Parts of speech (nouns, verbs, ...) like English
- It's an **inflective** language
- Not only word suffixes change, but sometimes also parts of the stem
- A lot of flexion types and irregularities
- Seven cases of nouns, expressed by word form, not only by prepositions: **ty** (you), **bez tebe** (without you), **k tobě** (towards you), **s tebou** (with you), ...
- Every noun has its gender: male, female or neutral (like German der, die, das)

# Verbs

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- Subject to flexion, like, for example, in Spanish, German, French, ...
- Gender changes the verb form – **on měl**, **ona měla**, **ono mělo** (he had, she had, it had)
- Past, present and future tense, present conditional
- Past perfect and past conditional – more or less historical, not widely used
- No continuous tense, completive and imperfective verbs instead – **skočit** (jump) and **skákat** (be jumping)

## Some devilish examples of richness of Czech

No phrasal verbs, prefixes instead:

- **jít** (go)
- **najít** (find)
- **předejít** (precede)
- **předejít** (anticipate)
- **pojít** (die)
- **vzejít** (arise)
- **sejít** (meet)
- **vyjít** (come true)
- **dojít** (run short)
- ...

## Some devilish examples of richness of Czech

This can happen not only to verbs:

- **národ** (nation)
- **porod** (childbirth)
- **příroda** (nature)
- **zárodek** (germ)
- **rodina** (family)
- **úroda** (crop)
- **urozený** (noble)
- **přirozené číslo** (integer)

# Symbols

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- Orthography is phonetic (write as you speak, unlike English)
- Uses Latin alphabet, but with accents:  
A Á B C Č D Ď E É Ě F G H I Í J K L M N Ň  
O Ó P Q R Ř S Š T Ť U Ú Ů V W X Y Ý Z Ž
- Q and X used only for foreign words
- Beware, accents can make a difference: **plast** (plastic) ≠ **plást** (honeycomb) ≠ **plášť** (cloak)
- ... but usually not written on computers
- Digraph 'ch', ordered between H and I (!)  
**hod** < **chod** < **iont**
- But not always: “**na-nic-hod-ný**”!
- Unsortable by computer due to semantical rules... but no one really cares :-)



# Pronunciation (1)

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- Almost never contextual
- Word stress at first syllable
- Vowels usually make syllables. . . not always
- A **dumb**            I **lit**                    U **cuckoo**  
E **men**                O **pot**
- Other vowels: Y Ā Ę Ī Ō Ū Ÿ Ů Ě
- Ů=Ū (historic)
- Ě is quite tricky: DĚ [ĎE], TĚ [ŤE], NĚ [ŇE],  
but VĚ [VJE] (everywhere else)
- I=Y, exploited by nasty teachers
- but sometimes make a difference:  
**typ** (type) ≠ **tip** (bet)

## Pronunciation (2)

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B **bit**

C **Ritz**

Č **chair**

D **dot**

Ď ?

F **fair**

G **globe**

H **hard**

Ch **loch**

J **yard**

K **kid**

L **low**

M **move**

N **not**

Ñ Spanish **ñ**

P **pick**

R (as in **rip**, but harder)

Ř ? (a nightmare)

S **set**

Š **shoe**

T **tea**

Ť ?

V **very**

Z **zone**

Ž **treasure**

## Jawbreakers – “jazykolamy”

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- Nenaolejuju-li je já, naolejuje je Julia.
- Bratře Petře, nepřepepři toho vepře!
- Strč prst skrz krk.
- Prd krt skrz drn, prv zhlť hrst zrn.
- Smrž pln skvrn zvlhl z mlh.

## Other interesting things

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- **čtvrthrst** (a quarter handful),  
**scvrnkls** (you flipped off)
- **nejneobhospodařovatelnější**  
(the least cultivatable)
- **nejvykryštalizovanější** (the most crystalizing)

### Palindromes:

- **nepotopen** (unsunken), **nezasazen** (not hit)
- **Do chladu si mísu dal Chod.**  
(A Chod put his bowl into a cool place).
- **Kdy mohou splatiti ti ti tiší hoši dluh?**  
(When can those quiet boys pay you the debt?)

## English words of Czech origin

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- **pistol**

from 15th century, a handgun **píšťala** (pipe, whistle)

- **robot**

1920, Karel Čapek's play "R.U.R."

(Rossum's Universal Robots)

derived from **robota** (slavery work)

- and, maybe surprisingly. . . **dollar!**

16th century, coins originally made in silver mines in Joachimsthal in Bohemia, later spread to Austria-Hungary, Prussia, brought to America by the Spanish **Joachimthaler** → **thaler** → **tolar** → **dollar**