1.3 - Noun Gender

In this lesson you are going to learn about noun gender. Nouns are words that refer to people, places, things, ideas, etc. **All nouns have a gender in Czech.**

We are somewhat familiar with this concept from English, e.g. - we have words like *waiter* and *waitress*, *actor* and *actress*, etc. Knowing the gender of these nouns is easy and comes quite naturally and it is because of this that we call this **natural gender**. Similar forms exist in Czech (though they are much more widespread than in English[[1]](#footnote-0)). In Czech, the most common way of differentiating between a masculine and a feminine form is the suffix *-ka*, which is added to make many nouns feminine.

| **masculine** | **feminine** | **meaning** |
| --- | --- | --- |
| student | studentka | ‘student (male and female)’ |
| profesor | profesorka | ‘professor (male and female)’ |
| prezident | prezidentka | ‘president (male and female)’ |
| spisovatel | spisovatelka | ‘writer (male and female)’ |

**Grammatical Gende**r

In Czech, all nouns have gender, regardless of whether they refer to a human. For example, *stůl* ‘table’ is masculine, while *tužka* ‘pencil’ is feminine. There is very little rhyme or reason to this, and it is something that we just have to learn as we commit new words to memory. In Czech, the grammatical gender of a noun is virtually always the same as its natural gender, as in the case of the words listed above. For example, *muž* (m.), or *žena* (f.) are predictable by the meaning of the word. Czech nouns will be either masculine, feminine, or neuter, and you have to learn the gender of nouns as you go in order to use it properly. Take for example the following nouns:

*muž* (m.) - man

*počítač* (m.) - computer

*žena* (f.) - woman

*tužka* (f.) - pencil

*dítě* (n.) - child

*pivo* (n.) - beer

The good thing is, the gender of nouns in Czech is usually easy to predict just based on the way the word ends, see the chart below[[2]](#footnote-1):

| **masculine** | **feminine** | **neuter** |
| --- | --- | --- |
| ends in a **consonant**  *stůl, počítač, kluk, muž* | ends in **-a**  *kniha, žena, křída, lampa* | ends in **-o**  *pivo, město* |
| ends in **-e**  *tabule, učebnice*  some nouns ending in a consonant  *kolej* | ends in **-e**  *pole, moře*  ends in **-í**  *cvičení* |

This is almost the complete picture, however, we need to make one more distinction --

Masculine Nouns: Animacy

Masculine nouns are divided into two groups - animate and inanimate. Masculine animate nouns refer to living, sentient beings. So this includes people and animals, but does not include things like plants. With all of this taken into consideration, we will be working with charts that distinguish four genders in Czech:

| **masculine animate** | **masculine inanimate** | **feminine** | **neuter** |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **ends in a consonant and refers to living being**  *student*  *učitel*  *muž* | ends in a **consonant**  *stůl, počítač* | ends in **-a**  *kniha, žena, křída, lampa* | ends in **-o**  *pivo, město* |
| ends in **-e**  *tabule, učebnice*  some nouns ending in a consonant  *kolej* | ends in **-e**  *pole, moře*  ends in **-í**  *cvičení* |

1. However, we often use the same word for both genders in English as well, e.g. writer can be both a male or a female. [↑](#footnote-ref-0)
2. For the most part, if you apply these rules, you will know the gender of a noun. However, in a few cases it is not possible to predict with 100% accuracy. The table above indicates that both feminine nouns and neuter nouns can end in **-e**. However, as a general rule **if you see a noun that ends in *-e*, it is best to predict that it is feminine**. In fact, there are only a few dozen neuter words in the entire Czech language that end in *-e*, and most of those are pretty uncommon. On the other hand, there are quite literally hundreds of feminine nouns in Czech that end in -e. **When in doubt about a word ending in -e, guess that it is feminine.** Neuter nouns ending in *-e* will always be marked in your vocabulary lists.

   There are also some nouns that end in a consonant, but are nevertheless feminine. You have already encountered one of these nouns (kolej). It is difficult to predict that these nouns will be feminine, so they will also always be marked in vocabulary lists. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)