

2.5 - Reflexive se and si and 2nd position

In this unit there are several verbs with the reflexive pronoun *se* (*mít se* 'to be doing, feeling', *učít se* 'to learn, study', *jmenovat se* 'to be called'), as well as with the reflexive pronoun *si* (*myslet si* 'to think, have an opinion'). This lesson deals with the meaning of these words in Czech and how they are used in a sentence.

Meaning of reflexive se/si

Both *se* and *si* mean '-self' in Czech, as in 'myself', 'yourself', 'himself', etc.

se	si
<i>se</i> is the object of the verb in the sentence. It's easiest to see this meaning with a few other verbs (we haven't learned these yet, but they are useful for illustration), such as <i>vidět</i> 'to see' or <i>holit</i> 'shave': <i>vidím se (v zrcadle)</i> -- 'I see myself (in the mirror).' <i>holíš se?</i> -- 'Are you shaving (yourself)?' The verb <i>učít se</i> means to learn and is actually comprised of the verb <i>učít</i> - 'to teach' and reflexive <i>se</i>. In other words, 'to learn/study' is actually 'to teach yourself'.. The verb <i>jmenovat</i> means 'to name, or call' and from this we get <i>jmenovat se</i> 'to call oneself'. <i>Jmenuju se</i> is really 'I call myself...', i.e. 'My name is...'. Here, <i>se</i> functions as the direct object of these verbs (i.e. accusative case).	On the other hand, <i>si</i> means 'to or for oneself (myself, yourself, etc.)'. Take a look at the following examples: <i>Vařím si čaj.</i> I'm making myself tea (lit. cooking for myself). <i>Dělám si salát.</i> I'm making (for) myself a salad. You can also find <i>si</i> with the verb <i>myslet</i> 'to think'. <i>Myslet si</i> literally means 'to think to oneself', and more generally means to think or have an opinion about something. <i>Myslím si, že to je dobrý film.</i> I think (my opinion is), that that's a good movie. We'll eventually learn more verbs with <i>si</i>.

The verb *mít se*, lit. 'to have oneself', is best understood idiomatically as part of the question *jak se máš?* 'how are you doing?' and the corresponding answer *mám se dobře, špatně* 'I'm doing well/badly.' We will continue to learn verbs where the presence of *se* is best memorized, with verbs such as *snažit se* 'to try' or *bát se* 'to be afraid'. You will find these in later chapters of *Reality Czech*.

2nd Position with se/si

We also will need to learn about the position of *se/si* in a sentence. It occupies what is known as **2nd position**. The reflexive pronouns *se/si* will always be the 2nd element of a sentence, cf. the following:

Jak se máš? -- How are you doing?
Mám se dobře. -- I'm doing well.

Jak se jmenujete? -- What's your name?
Jmenuju se Lenka. -- My name is Lenka.

Myslím si, že ta nová učebnice je dobrá. -- I think that the new textbook is good.
Co si o tom myslíš? -- What do you think about it? [i.e. what's your opinion?]

Note that 2nd position is not the same as being the 2nd word in a sentence. In the sentences below, reflexive *se* is the 3rd or 4th word in the sentence:

Naše děti se mají dobře. -- Our children are doing well.
Můj nový kamarád se jmenuje Pavel. -- My friend's name is [My friend calls himself] Pavel.

In these sentences *Naše děti* and *Můj nový kamarád* are each considered a single unit, words describing the subject, since it wouldn't make sense to divide them up.