

# A trip back through the history of the Czech language

## Výlet do historie češtiny

The following historical changes were very important in the development of the Czech language. They have influenced the present day language to a large extent.

### 1. the development of -ů-

Historically, the vowel **-ů-** developed like this: **ó — uo — ů**.

#### Observe:

dóm — duóm — dům

A present day consequence: **-ů-** in the middle of some words changes to **-o-** in declension (stůl — stolu, dům — domu, kůň — koně...)

### 2. mobile (fleeting, movable) -e-

A) Old Czech had two vowels, **ь** and **ѣ** (soft and hard “yer”) which changed according to certain rules: counting from the end of a word, every odd one ceased to exist and every even one changed to **-e-**.

#### Observe:

dьnъ, sьnъ — den, sen

vъ dьne, vъ sьnu — ve dne, ve snu

A present day consequence: the mobile **-e-** that often disappears in declension.

B) The vowel **-e-** is also used to facilitate pronunciation (before or in a cluster of consonants, or before an identical letter):

— with the prepositions **v, z, k, s** (ve vlaku, ze stromu, ke klukovi, se sestrou)

— in some forms of the genitive plural (sester, kaváren)

### 3. softening of consonants before -i and -e

Very simply, we can say that hard consonants **h, ch, k, r, g, d, t, n** often “cannot stand” the endings **-e** and **-i**. Historically, the reason behind this had to do with pronunciation. These sounds soften in front of these endings like this:

hard cons.	h	ch	k	r	g	d	t	n
softened:	z, ž	š	c, č	ř	z	d'	t'	ň

In the present day language this has resulted in the softening of consonants:

- in the nominative plural of **Ma** nouns, e. g. doktor — doktoři, kluk — kluci, hroch — hroši (see page 94)
- in **F** nouns in the locative sg. and dative sg., e. g. Barbora — Barboře, matka — matce (see pages 145 and 175)
- in the comparison of adverbs and adjectives, e. g. lehký — lehčí, drahý — dražší (see page 164)
- in **F** forms of possessive adjectives, e. g. Barbora — Barbořin, matka — matčin (see page 225)
- in stems of some verbs