Ladies or Gentlemen?

You are passing through a street in Prague, the capital of the Czech Republic, and you have absolutely no idea how to get to the Old Town Square. What are you supposed to do? You have no data left, so internet maps are not an option. You have to ask someone. But how to address that young lady passing you? Or this gentleman in a hat?

Let’s say you see a woman. *Prosím, paní?* Or do you call her *slečno*? How can you know? What’s the difference? *Paní* is often called a woman, who is married and *slečna* is basically a single woman. However, people assume it mostly by age. Younger women are referred to as *slečny* and more mature women are often called *paní*.

But what does a polite way of addressing a woman look like? Based on the etiquette, you shall always use *paní*, no matter what. You should also meet the woman’s requirements, if she asks you to refer to her otherwise.

When addressing more people, you can come across saying dámy, which is used mostly in a very formal and set phrase. It is also a parallel to English Ladies and gentlemen – *dámy a* *pánové*. Apart from the use of plural form *dámy* you can come across its use in singular. *Mladá dámo, kam si myslíš, že jdeš? (Young lady, where do you think that you are going?)* When used informally, the addressing can become very pejorative.

Sometimes, when people want to be nice and even flattering, the term *mladá* *paní* can be used. You can hear it especially in shops or in places people want to flatter you, make you feel great and therefore they want to appear best in your eyes. It can even sometimes make you smile when a shop assistant calls a mature lady in her eighties *mladá* *paní*.

It is a lot easier with men. The most common way to address a gentleman is by pane, which is universal and doesn’t matter whether he is married or not or what his age is. Simple as that.

Nevertheless you can sometimes hear: „*Mladý muži, prosím, kolik je hodin?*“ (*Young man, please, what time is it?)* The phrase is mostly used in singular and the meaning could seem the same as the feminine *mladá dámo* or *mladá paní*, but it is not. In the masculine form it is used only for young men, mostly in their teens or twenties and there is no pejorative tint to it. In Czech you can also say *mladíku,* which has very similar meaning and use as *mladý muži.*

Let’s go back to the beginning. You are lost in Prague and see a woman passing you. How is it? *„Paní, prosím vás, jak se dostanu na Staroměstské náměstí?“* *(Lady, please, how can I get to the Old Town Square?)* Great job! You know now how to address people in Czech.