

Title: An alternative presentation of the declension of Czech nouns
Author: Lída Holá, Accent International House, Prague.

This contribution deals with the possibility of an alternative presentation paradigm for the declension of Czech nouns. It arises from the fact that most teaching materials in the field of Czech as a foreign language prefer the so-called horizontal presentation (i.e. gradual introduction) of cases. This approach is certainly beneficial from the point of view of meanings of the cases, of course, on the other hand, it confuses to a certain extent the division of the declensions into the so-called hard and soft nouns, which stand out better in the framework of a vertical presentation of the case system.

The suggested alternative presentation paradigm for the declension of Czech nouns is used in the Czech Step by Step 2 textbook (expected publication date – January 2009) which is based on the traditional primary division of nouns into hard and soft. This arises from the empirical, and consequently easily recognizable, division of nouns according to their ending in the nominative singular into majority nouns (ending in a consonant, -a, -o) and minority (the others). On the basis of this primary division, nouns are further divided into three declension groups: I, II and III.

The division of nouns into three declension groups is especially important particularly from the point of view of dividing up teaching. If we take into consideration that the so-called majority nouns form the majority of all nouns, it makes sense to focus the first phase of learning (e.g. levels A1 and A2 according to the CERF) on mastering and making automatic the endings of declension group I. At the same time, students may become aware of the existence of groups II and III passively during this phase. In later phases of learning students then concentrate on mastering and making automatic the endings of declension groups II and III.