

Hard and Soft Consonants

Why do we need to classify consonants as “hard” or “soft”?

Which consonants are “soft”?

Which consonants can be either “hard” or “soft”?

In Czech, **some consonants are classified as “hard” and others as “soft”**. Since declensional patterns split into so-called “hard” and “soft” varieties, it is necessary to remember which consonants count as “soft”.

Almost all the soft consonants are written with a diacritic mark — called a *háček* — over them. The *háček* consonants are: **Č č, Ř ř, Š š, Ž ž, Ň ň, Ď ě, Ť ě**. The other two consonants that count as “soft” are **c and j**. From a naïve English perspective, then, **the “soft” consonants are the funny consonants (plus c and j)**.

All other consonants are classified as “hard”. There are, however, **some consonants that can be ambiguous with regard to hardness or softness — that is, they are mostly “hard”, but they can be “soft” in certain words**. Some of the most common consonants that can be “soft” are **l** (almost always soft when part of the agentive suffix *-tel*: *učitel, podnikatel*) and **s** (as an ending in a proper name: *Klaus, Gates*).

Summary of consonants

“Soft”: č, ř, š, ž, ň, ě, ť, c, j

Sometimes “soft”: l, s