A review of *World Talk (Intermediate): Learn Czech*

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One problem with studying a less commonly taught language is that not only are materials scarce, but what little is available is oftentimes dry, uninteresting and, ultimately, unconducive to advancement beyond the first few steps. Fortunately, EuroTalk now makes educational software for as many as 80 languages, including Czech, for which the intermediate level just came out last December.

Although *World Talk Czech* requires 64 megabytes of free disk space, once it painlessly installs itself, it is ready to use. The startup screen opens up with the following main options: 1) go to the lesson menu, 2) play a two-player quiz game, 3) view student records, 4) get help, and 5) change the language settings. On this screen only, a few buttons are labeled in English while most are marked with easy-to-understand icons. Just in case, though, the help button provides explanations in any of the 63 languages it supports.

Inside the main program, the lesson menu presents 10 choices of theme-driven, point-based games, which may be played in any order. Each game focuses on an essential topic such as street directions or personal descriptions, and most follow a similar format. The learner usually listens to a two-line dialogue while looking at a series of pictures from which he or she must choose the appropriate one in as few tries as possible. A correct choice earns 10 points and an incorrect one loses 5. In either case, however, there is never any translation, though the learner has the options of adjusting the volume, hearing the directions again, having the function buttons glossed in another language, requesting a hint, or returning to the previous menu.

There are a few notable exceptions to this standard format, however. Some games contain written as well as audio prompts and may require the learner not only to demonstrate comprehension but also simulate production. For example, one has the learner read and listen to the first half of a two-part situational dialogue and then choose the appropriate response from among three written options, the correct one of which will play an audio file when it is clicked. Another asks the learner to unscramble one half of a two-part dialogue after listening to the whole thing.

For learners who desire more substantial written input, the main menu also branches to a story comprehension and a dialogue practice module. The first of these presents a selection of six amusing stories that recycle much of the vocabulary the learner should already have started to master. For each story, there is a choice of listening to the whole thing at once or one part at a time, repeating or skipping a segment, adjusting the speed or volume, or printing out the script. The latter option also provides several comprehension questions, the answers to which are written upside-down at the bottom of the page.

The dialogue practice module, on the other hand, offers a menu of 12 short two-person exchanges, the parts of which the learner can hear by clicking on them one at a time. Alternatively, he or she may record and listen to his or her own voice.

As a means of review and evaluation, there is also an exciting quiz game, which challenges the learner to choose the correct responses to a series of picture-based questions before his or her computerized opponent can. (A two-player version, mentioned above, is available from the startup menu.) Finally, there is an overall progress check, which bases its assessment on the number of points the learner has accumulated across his or her most recent scores on the 10 lesson games plus the review and issues various certificates of achievement for totals above 75% of the program maximum.

In summary, *World Talk Czech* uses a heavy dose of game-like audiolingual drills, mostly to develop reading and listening comprehension. As such, it is insufficient for production practice or grammar study and certainly unworthy of claiming intermediate level status. Nevertheless,

it is undeniably engaging and highly effective at what it does and, thus, would make a valuable addition to any self-directed and / or beginning level course. ◆

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