

The Most-Liked Words of 2011

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Слова года 2011: Words of the Year 2011

Every year since 2007, the Expert Council of the Center for the Development of the Russian Language — a group made up of linguists, writers, philosophers, cultural specialists and other smart folks — vote for слова года (words of the year). Their list, divided into several categories, is a kind of snapshot of the year gone by. Aptly, their selection for 2011 is pretty much all politics with a few techie and social-networking loan words from English. With their list and a bit of Googling, any journalist could come up with a decent Year in Review.

The top three individual words are полиция (police), рокировка (castling, job swap at the top) and альфа-самец (alpha male). These three words could produce a lazy journalist's year-end wrap up: "In 2011, the ruling tandem agreed to change places, and the year ended with a dramatic battle for power among the country's alpha males. Troops from the Interior Ministry, formerly called the militia and now renamed the police, were at the ready, but did not interfere."

Battle plans are announced via Твиттер (Twitter) and Фейсбук (Facebook), which hold first and second place in the category of loan words. Foot soldiers indicate their preferences with the verb лайкать (to like, in the Facebook sense) on their айфон (iPhone), айпад (iPad) or other гаджет (gadget).

Other forms of public discontent are registered in the category of jargon. At the top of the list is РосПил, the name of the web site run by alpha male, anti-corruption activist Alexei Navalny. Пилить is to saw, but in slang, money is sawed off from the state budget and then conveniently falls into a bureaucrat's pocket or bank account. Рос here is an abbreviation of Россия and indicates that this is a national pastime among bureaucrats.

Second in the category of jargon is здравохоронение, a mix of здравоохранение (health care) and хоронить (to bury) or похороны (burial) — which gives you a good idea about the state of the health care system and the poor souls who pass through it.

Third in this category is a response to massive state corruption and a dying health care system: валить. In slang, this means "to get out, to leave a place," as in Пора валить! (Time to get the heck out of here!). People who do this are called another bit of award-winning jargon: понаехавшие. This is a play on понаехавшие (invaders, people who have overrun us) and means "people who left in droves." Apparently they looked around and thought: Не лайкали (We didn't "like" it).

Other things on the list that might not be to the liking of folks with packed suitcases: Брежневизация (Brezhevization) and the unique post of премьерзидент (premiersident), presumably a temporary position that will end in March.

The top three word combinations for 2011 are Партия жуликов и воров (party of crooks and thieves), Арабская весна (Arab Spring), and Народный фронт (Popular Front). I think the third is supposed to help the first avoid the second.

First place in the category of phrases is Наш дурдом голосует за Путина (Our nuthouse votes for Putin). This is either the title of a viral video or a prediction for March.

But I'd like to close with another of the top phrases: Лет ми спик фром май харт! It's been a wild year. I can't wait to see what happens next. С Новым годом!

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