

Hats Off to All Things Disgusting and Dull

By [Michele A. Berdy](#)

June 21, 2012

The  **Moscow Times**

Шляпа: hat; something bad, unpleasant, disgusting, worthless (slang)

It's Friday and time for our weekly language pop quiz: What do the Russian words for hat and dullness have in common? No idea? Let me put it another way: Have you talked to a teenager lately?

If you have, you've definitely heard шляпа (hat) and тупо (dully) a lot. But you might have been confused. In standard literary Russian — that is, the Russian that is described in dictionaries — hats do not usually appear on plates and dully is generally not used four times in a sentence before every verb.

Welcome to the new crop of slang.

Let's start with hats. Шляпа is any kind of brimmed hat. Снимать шляпу (to take off your

hat) is what you do metaphorically before someone you admire. Дело в шляпе (it's in the bag) is what you say when you clinch a deal. If you are an older or bookish sort of person, you might use шляпа to describe a weak-willed and slow-moving person.

Today, шляпа is used to describe a variety of situations and things that are unpleasant or not worthy of attention. When you place a plate of fried liver in front of your child, she might announce: Я не буду есть эту шляпу! (I'm not going to eat that yucky stuff; literally "I'm not going to eat that hat").

When you leave a movie theater, your teen might say derisively: Это не кино, а шляпа какая-то (What a waste of money!)

When your teen borrows his father's camera without permission and drops it, he might exclaim: Вот это шляпа! (Now I'm in trouble!).

Or when the smartphone he saved up for turns out to be defective, he might growl: Ну и шляпа (What a piece of crap!)

In literary Russian, the noun тупость, adjective тупой and adverb тупо describe something that is dull or someone who is dim-witted — someone who is not the sharpest knife in the drawer.

You might use тупой to describe a cutting edge that has dulled, like тупая пила (dull saw) or the noncutting edge of something, like тупая сторона ножа (the spine of a knife).

When applied to people and their actions, it is a particularly contemptuous accusation of stupidity. До чего он тупой (Can you believe how dumb he is?)

You might use тупой or тупо to describe some action that is done without comprehension: Он тупо смотрел на разбитую вазу (He stared dumbly at the broken vase).

Or to mean something done mechanically, unthinkingly: Она тупо перевела дословно (She mechanically translated it word for word).

Or you might use it to describe total submission, something done seemingly without individual will: Он её тупо любил (He loved her blindly).

Today everything is тупо. Sometimes it is used as a synonym for просто (simply): Я тупо хотел есть (I just wanted something to eat). Тупо позвони ему (Just call him). But most of the time, it's just another one of those parasitic words that occasionally sweep in and take over Russian. It doesn't seem to be an intensifier or qualifier. It's just a verbal tick. Мне тупо нечего делать (I, like, don't have anything to do.) Мы тупо пошли в кино (We, like, went to the movies.) Тупо блин! (Real bad!)

All I can say is: Какая шляпа!

Michele A. Berdy, a Moscow-based translator and interpreter, is author of "The Russian Word's Worth" (Glas), a collection of her columns.

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Original url:

<https://www.themoscowtimes.com/2012/06/21/hats-off-to-all-things-disgusting-and-dull-a15635>