

Everyday Rage, Nastiness, Spite and Malice

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Злободневный вопрос: the question of the hour

I'm always fascinated by Russian words that come from the same root and are very similar in meaning. That is, I find these words incredibly confusing, frustrating and annoying, and my misuse of them clearly gives me away as being *нездешняя* (not from around here).

Well, that and my accent and my other mistakes in Russian grammar.

In any case, lately I've been a bit obsessed with *злость* and *злоба*, which both originally come from *зло* (evil) and can both be defined as malice, spite, rage, malevolence or animosity.

According to a highly unscientific poll of Russian speakers, *злость* is the lesser evil. *Злость* is nastiness in the form of rage, and native speakers see it as an emotion that can come and go, often quickly, rather than a state of being. *Прихожу я домой: жена ругается, а меня злость*

берёт (So I come home and my wife starts yelling at me, and it makes me furious).

Злость can even be a positive emotion in the context of a competition. Dmitry Medvedev once told the United Russia leadership, "Злость — вот, что нужно, но в разумных пределах, спортивная злость, позволяющая достигать результатов" (Zeal — that's what you need, but within reason: a passion to win that will produce results).

But the adjective злостный often has the sense of persistent bad behavior. Злостный неплательщик is someone who consistently doesn't pay his bills. Злостный нарушитель закона is what Americans used to call a scofflaw and now call a repeat offender.

But злостный sometimes means particularly malevolent in some way: злостное банкротство (fraudulent bankruptcy); злостная клевета (malicious slander).

Злоба, according to my respondents, is spitefulness that is more a state of being than a fleeting emotion. Злобный человек is a nasty, spiteful, ill-natured person. Питать злобу is a slightly old-fashioned way of bearing a grudge against someone: Она созналась, что разбила окно дома умышленно, питая злобу к хозяину (She admitted that she broke the window in the house on purpose since she bore a grudge against the owner).

But злоба дня is not, as you might think, "malice of the day." Today, it means the hot topic, the latest news, the issues that most concern society. The phrase has even been turned into the adjective злободневный, as in злободневные вопросы (burning issues) or злободневная книга (topical book). Here there isn't much sense of wickedness or evil, except in the sense that the latest news or hottest topics are most likely to be about some problem or catastrophe. So where does this expression come from?

The Bible: Matthew 6:34. In old translations it reads: Довлеет дневи злоба его (Sufficient unto the day is the evil thereof), but it's clearer in more recent translations: Довольно для каждого дня его заботы (Each day has enough trouble of its own.) As far as I can tell, translators have disagreed over the intensity of the original Greek word, which in various languages and at various times has been rendered as evil, cares or trouble. And then the "cares of the day" evolved to be the most topical and urgent issues.

Today, one of these phrases is usually in the first question at a news conference: Я задам вопрос на самую, пожалуй, злободневную тему (I'll ask a question about perhaps the most urgent topic of the day.)

The answer, of course, depends on the злоба дня.

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