

Now, That Is Gross!

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If you hang around kids or dogs in Russia, or happen to have some of your own, very early on you're going to hear the word **бьяка**, which means something that is filthy, gross or yucky. The first time your toddler picks up a dirt-encrusted stick and aims it toward his mouth, you shout: **Фу! Бьяка!** (Ew! That's yucky!)

Dictionaries tell you that the word is imitation baby talk, and I suppose it's possible that some kids in the babbling stage of language acquisition spit out **ка-ка** (ca-ca) or **бьяка**. But it's a funny word — very expressive yet used almost exclusively by adults when trying to impress the rudiments of hygiene on children or pets.

Of course, it can be used jokingly among adults in various contexts, but it always has that whisper of baby talk. **Если обнаружится какая-то бьяка, придётся лечиться антибиотиками** (If they find some kind of crud, you'll need to take antibiotics). **Деньги, он мне сказал, бьяка** (Money, he told me, is yucky).

Бука is another great Russian word. It is a bogeyman, a scary creature used to frighten

children in the days when terrorizing kids was considered a sound child-raising philosophy. Бука is right up with милиционер — or today полицейский (policeman) — in the category of external threats invoked by parents. Ешь кашу, а то бука тебя возьмёт! (Eat your porridge or the bogeyman will get you!).

Бука can also be any unsociable, gloomy person, a definition that is obvious the first time you say the word. Try it: бука (stress on the first syllable). Your lower lip sticks out in a dour pout like, well, бука.

Together бяка-бука (also бяка бук, бяка и бука) is a double whammy of yucky. Работа доставила мне большое удовольствие, а теперь мы узнали, какие мы бяки и буки (I really enjoyed my work, only now it turns out that we were cruddy sleazebags).

Russian has other marvelously onomatopoetic words to describe all things cruddy. Пакость is something either literally or figuratively disgusting, filthy or nasty. Будто пауки по мне ползают — какая пакость! (It was like spiders crawling all over me — disgusting!) Пойдём, нечего на такую пакость смотреть. Ты же православный. (Let's go. You shouldn't watch that filth. You're an Orthodox Christian.)

Мерзость is also something abominable, nasty or immoral. Убери со стола эту мерзость! (Take that filth off the table!) До какой мерзости могут опуститься люди! (People can sink to such nastiness!)

You can combine the мерзость and пакость to get the colloquial мерзопакость, which is something really and truly disgusting. Какое сегодня количество мерзопакостей выплёскивается из телевидения! (The amount of disgusting filth that pours out of the television today is unbelievable!)

When confronted with something revolting, you can go with the more classic Фу! Гадость! (Ew! Yuck!), which is pronounced almost as if it were one word: фугадость. Or you might use the expressive тошнотворность, something that creates (творить) pausea (тошнота) and its related adjective тошнотворный or adverb тошнотворно. Мысль о том, что придётся спускаться в метро и толкаться там, была непереносима, тошнотворна (The thought that I had to go down into the metro and be jostled was unbearable and sick-making). От бомжа исходило тошнотворное зловоние, сочетание несмытого пота и застарелой мочи (The bum exuded a stomach-turning stench that was a combination of unwashed sweat and old urine).

Now that's what I call бяка.

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