

The Sound of Silence

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Немногословный: a person of few words

I think it's fair to say that Russians are good talkers. They like a good conversation, and they value people who are open and forthcoming. But всё хорошо в меру (everything in moderation). A good conversationalist is one thing; chatterboxes and blabbermouths are something else.

Russians are equally divided on quiet folks. On the one hand, the guy who sits in the corner without saying a word is viewed with a bit of disdain, not to mention suspicion. On the other hand, the guy who talks only when he has something to say is regarded as admirable.

Someone who doesn't talk much is молчаливый (taciturn). Почему Нина отдала предпочтение молчаливому, стареющему холостяку, она до сих пор сама себе объяснить не могла (Why Nina favored a taciturn old bachelor is something she couldn't explain even to herself).

This kind of person can also be called **неразговорчивый** (reticent) or **несловоохотливый** (not prone to talking). These qualities might be good, especially in men — the strong, silent type. There are lots of them in Russian, and especially Soviet, literature. **Рабочий был сдержан и несловоохотлив** (The worker was reserved and not quick to speak).

Немногословный мужчина (a man of few words) can be a very good catch. Она вдруг увидела в нём массу достоинств: **немногословный, честный, трудяга**, а главное — **мужик** (She suddenly saw a great number of good qualities in him: He was a man of few words, honest, a hard worker and most of all — a real man).

Тихий, especially when used to describe women or children, is often an admirable trait. Я впервые увидел мою дочку: **тихую, черноглазую и чернобровую**, с тонкими чертами лица (I saw my daughter for the first time: quiet, with dark eyes and brows and delicate features).

But another adjective signifying reticence — **замкнутый** (reserved) — is more often a negative characteristic. Он был человеком **мощным, с замкнутым, мрачным** характером (He was a powerful man with an unsociable, dour personality).

You can call an uncommunicative person **молчун, молчунья**, or less commonly today — **безмолвник**. **Тихоня** is a quiet, meek person — a mouse. These terms shouldn't be confused with **молчок**, which means to keep silent. Она меня спрашивала про мужа, а я **молчок** (She asked me about her husband, but I kept my lips zipped).

Someone who is uncommunicative is **скупой на слова** (literally tight with words): **Сосед, хотя и крепкий мужчина, совсем не походил на жену. Он скупой на слова.** (My neighbor was a strong guy, but he wasn't like his wife at all. He was totally undemonstrative.) You can say of this kind of person: **слова не добьёшься** or **слова не вытянешь** (you can't get a word out of him).

If you want to be more expressive — and more disgusting — you can say: **слова надо клещами вытягивать** (literally, you have to pull words out of him with pliers). **Мой муж всем хорош, вот только ласковые слова из него надо клещами вытягивать** (My husband is great in every way, only you need to pry affectionate words out of him with a crowbar).

If a usually talkative person suddenly shuts up, you can say **как будто язык проглотил** (as if he swallowed his tongue). Ну, что молчишь? **Язык проглотил, что ли?** (Well, why don't you say something? Cat got your tongue?)

So in Russia the rule is: **Слово — серебро, а молчание — золото** (speech is silver, but silence is golden). Except when it's the other way around.

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