

There's a Sucker Born Every Minute in Moscow

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Лохануться: to make a stupid mistake, slang

I haven't checked The Word's Worth mailbox in a few weeks ... let's see ... lots of questions about language and current events. For example, "If France can outlaw English words, why can't Russia?" signed by Ivan Francophile.

So, how's that working out for France, Ivan? Why don't you get back to me after le weekend. And here's a good question: "Can you say 'hashtag' in Russian?" Answer: Yes. Oh, and another topical question: "Why should we say в Украине (in Ukraine)?" Answer: Why not? What have you got against Ukrainians?

Now here's an interesting question: What does лохануться mean? This is a word I have some acquaintance with, mostly because it has been used in reference to my behavior.

I'm kind of a naive jerk, which is the meaning of the root of this word: лох. Лох is a dupe, mark, sucker, patsy — often a trusting soul from the provinces who is tricked out of his or her

money or belongings in the big city. Лох first produced the word лохотрон — a kind of game, lottery, or contest in which the лох can never win.

Лохануться has the meaning of getting caught in one of those games, or being hoodwinked in some way. For example, if you are thinking of buying a car, as soon as you check out offerings on Internet, you will see helpful articles like: Как купить машину и не лохануться (How to buy a car without getting scammed.)

Лохануться can also mean to goof up, to make a stupid mistake: Сам лоханулся. Расслабился, а с вами расслабляться нельзя (I slipped up. I let my guard down, and no one should do that with you.)

Another question in my mailbag is about the slang meaning of сливать, which in literary Russian means to pour out, dump, or empty. In nonliterary Russian, i.e., slang, it has more or less the same meaning, only it is applied to people instead of liquid: to dump someone. Usually it has the sense of betrayal: Давно было понятно, что юго-восточных сепаратистов Путин сливает (It's been obvious for a while that Putin is selling out the separatists in the southeast.)

Another slang meaning of сливать is to leak information, what politicians and disloyal employees do: Сливать информацию в конкурирующую компанию за деньги согласилось 20 процентов опрошенных (Twenty percent of respondents said they would agree to leak information to a company that is a competitor.)

The toughest question in my mailbox concerned the phrase подвести под статью, which means to maliciously interpret someone's actions so it seems that they are illegal and fall under an article (статья) of the criminal code. It's like a trumped up charge, but based on something that might be interpreted as illegal. The tricky part is figuring out a concise way of translating the phrase in a headline: Немцова пытаются подвести под статью об экстремизме. The best I can come up with is "Attempts are being made to build a case of extremism against Nemtsov."

That's pretty lame and in any case would not pass muster at this newspaper, where we like to cite the agent of action, i.e., who exactly is building the case. But that would require слив информации от прокурора (a leak from the prosecutor's office,) which would mean that сотрудник решил сливать коллег (a staffer decided to sell out his colleagues.) And the colleagues would moan: Мы ему доверяли! Мы лоханулись! (We trusted him. We blew it.)

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