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Odd as They Come

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Неадекватный: inappropriate, strange, nutty

Неадекватный (inappropriate) has become one of those ubiquitous buzzwords that you seem to hear every day in relation to just about everything. It's a tricky word for us foreigners, partially because of the false-friend factor.

If we look at the root words, both the Russian адекватный and English adequate come from the Latin adaequatus (equalized). In English, the word got the sense of being equal to what is required: sufficient. In Russian, the notion of "equalized" morphed to the sense of corresponding, matching or fitting. So if in English an adequate response is a response that is sufficient or good enough, in Russian адекватный ответ is a response that is appropriate or fits the circumstances.

With the negative forms of the adjective, inadequate means insufficient or not enough; неадекватный means inappropriate, not befitting or not corresponding to something. Here

there's a problem when you are translating from English to Russian. "I felt inadequate" means "I felt unequal to the job at hand." In Russian, this as неуверенность (not confident, unsure) or as чувство неполноценности (a feeling of inferiority).

That's definitely not неадекватный. In Russian psychological terms, неадекватный человек (literally, an "inadequate person") is someone whose thoughts, behavior or emotions are inappropriate to the situation or are out of touch with reality. This covers a lot of ground and apparently confuses some native Russian speakers. On one grammar blog, people offered their definitions of неадекватный, which ranged from the pseudoscientific человек, который поступает вопреки законам логики и здравого смысла (someone who acts in contradiction to the rules of logic and common sense) to the slangy псих (psycho).

Неадекватный or the adverb неадекватно can refer to a socially unacceptable behavior: Пренебрегать традициями — значит быть неадекватным в глазах сообщества (Not observing traditions is inappropriate in the eyes of the community). Or odd behavior: Иван стал вести себя неадекватно: подозвал официанта и заказал кофе и мороженое, а затем отказался от них (Ivan began to behave strangely, calling over the waiter to order coffee with ice cream and then refusing them). Or losing your cool: Я была неправа, неадекватно отреагировав (I was wrong to overreact). Or just plain old losing it: Мужики за рулём часто реагируют неадекватно, не пропускают, высовываются из окон и орут. (Men often go crazy behind the wheel. They don't give anyone the right of way, they lean out the window and scream.)

It can mean being weird: У меня была неадекватная учительница (I had a nutty teacher). Or being delusional: У сестры учительница была клинически неадекватная (My sister's teacher was certifiably wacko).

Russians have slangified неадекватный down to неадекват. This can refer to a person: автор неадекват, которому срочно нужно найти какие-то другие интересы в жизни (the blogger is a crackpot who should find some other life interests ASAP). But it can also refer to the inappropriate behavior itself. For example, on a blog a pregnant woman complains of неадекват и депрессия (inappropriate feelings and depression), while someone else complained that Дима продемонстрировал полный неадекват (Dima acted totally crazy). When someone loses it, he is said "to fall into lunacy" (впасть or провалиться в неадекват).

This was illustrated by a witty little rhyme about Moscow's former mayor: Когда под кепкою квадрат, нетрудно впасть в неадекват (When under a cap is a nitwit, it's easy to totally lose it).

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