

One Russian Adjective, Many Crowning Moments

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June 17, 2016



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Корóнный: trademark

I am going to close my mind to the horrors of the past few days — and my increasing desperation about the world — and cast my gaze on the far more benign sphere of Russian adjectives. Because adjectives are good. They show how you feel about things, and can be used

on social media to make clear what you think about that stupid, ignorant, bigoted...

Sorry. You get the idea. The world revolves around well-chosen adjectives.

The tricky part in Russian is to choose well. You need to know which adjective goes with which noun. And it helps to pronounce them right. For example, I like the adjective коронный (crown or crowning) a word that I mix up with коренной (root, native) by getting the stress wrong. Humiliating. Коронный (stress on middle syllable) is from the word корона (crown). Коренной (stress on last syllable) is from the word корень (root). People don't put roots on their head.

Коронный is not used much today in the sense of "pertaining to the crown," except when translating British legal documents. But when referring to Russian judges in the past, it was used to make a distinction between non-governmental juries and the governmentally employed guys on the bench: Хотя присяжные заседатели решали втрое больше дел, чем коронные судьи, они мало уступали последним в постоянстве взглядов на те или иные преступления (Although jury members decided twice as many cases than the judges, they weren't much different than judges in their rigid attitudes about certain crimes.)

Most of the time коронный is used to mean "crowning" in the figurative sense: someone's best, most recognizable, and most renowned skill. You hear it in the theater: Это была его коронная роль (That was his star turn.) Or in restaurants: Её коронным блюдом является оленина (Her signature dish is venison.) Or in the circus: Каждый раз этот коронный номер моего кумира потрясал нас всех зрителей (Every time my idol performed, his trademark act thrilled all of us in the audience.) Or on the sports field: Коронная дистанция Юрия Борзаковского — 800 метров (Yury Borzakovsky's best event is the 800-meter race.)

Another word for this is фирменный (brand-name), which can be used almost in the same way as коронный, except it refers to a company rather than a monarchy. So фирменный магазин is a company store: Коллекция представлена в фирменном бутике (The collection is sold in brand boutiques.) But more often фирменный means a trademark in the broadest sense: Главная фирменная черта журнала профессиональная, хладнокровная критика (The hallmark of the magazine is its professional, unbiased criticism.) But note: You can't really say фирменная роль.

All of these trademark behaviors can also be свойственные (typical, intrinsic), from свой (one's own). Ему свойственны общительность, быстрота и оперативность в работе (He is typically outgoing, quick and efficient at work.) Со свойственной ей активностью она устроила собрание (She set up the meeting with her usual energy.)

Or they can be неизменный (unchanging). Он всегда выступал со своим неизменным портфелем (He always performed with his trademark briefcase.)

So if you have a great schtick, it's фирменный or коронный. If you always behave a certain way, it's свойственный. And if you're sure you won't change, you're неизменный.

Go on, don't be shy — this is your crowning moment.

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Original url:

<https://www.themoscowtimes.com/2016/06/17/one-russian-adjective-many-crowning-moments-a5331>