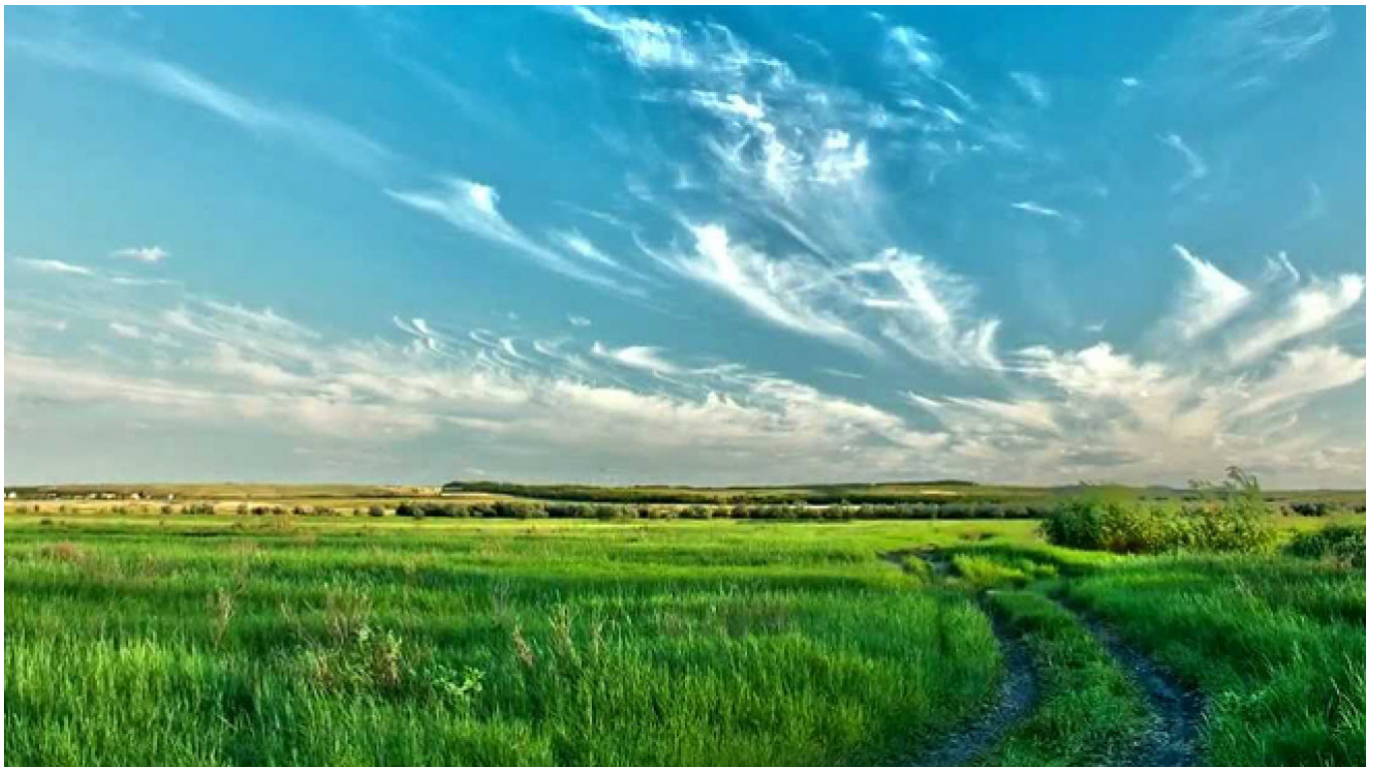


Russians to World: Gimme Some Elbow Room

By [Michele A. Berdy](#)

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Προστόρ: expanse, abundance

In the world of linguistics, the notion that perception is shaped by language and language is shaped by environment is not entirely well-regarded. It turns out that Eskimos don't have 589 words for snow and Arabs do have a word for it, even if they've never seen it. And it turns

out that humans can understand an alien concept so well that they steal it, like English speakers did with *schadenfreude*.

But ... in Russia there are bigger, emptier, vaster spaces than almost anywhere else in the world, and in Russian there are words to describe those vast spaces that are packed with emotional and cultural meaning. No connection? Phooey.

My favorite word of vastness is *простор*, which combines both the meaning of abundance and space. When used in the sense of a broad open expanse, the word is often in the plural: *Едем по просторам нашей необъятной родины, смотрим в окно* (We drive through the vast expanse of our boundless homeland, looking out the window.) These vast spaces are often watery: *В холодный апрельский вечер просторы Атлантики бороздит огромный пассажирский лайнер* (On a cold April evening an enormous passenger liner plows through the vast expanse of the Atlantic Ocean.)

Most of the time, the adjective *просторный* (spacious) refers to this kind of physical vastness. *Мы купили просторную квартиру* (We bought a spacious apartment.)

Простор can also be a kind of metaphorical space: *Мы должны умирать для того, чтобы другой человек мог дышать свободно, найти простор в своей жизни* (We must die so that another human being can breathe freely and find some space in his own life.) In fact, it can be very metaphorical: *Её голос свободно гулял по просторам широких напевов русских песен* (Her voice freely danced along the vast range of the sweeping refrains in Russian songs.)

The adjective *просторный* can also be stretched: *Вот-вот начнётся новая, просторная и счастливая жизнь* (A new bountiful and happy life was about to begin).

In the figurative sense, *простор* is connected to freedom, unencumbered thought or movement. *Душа на простор просится!* (The soul yearns for space!) *Нет ему простора, а он бы развернулся* (He feels penned in, but if he weren't, he could show what he is capable of.)

You need *простор* to fulfill your creative potential: *Эти несколько идей, возможно, откроют перед вами широкие просторы для творчества* (Perhaps those few ideas will give free rein to your creativity.) But this kind of freedom means that sometimes there's room for a different creativity: *Фирмы располагают широким простором для злоупотреблений со стороны лиц, причастных к составлению финансовой отчётности* (Companies have more room for abuse by the people doing their financial statements.)

It might be freedom to excel: *Близость к властям даёт широкий простор для карьерного роста* (There's lots of room for career advancement close to the people in power.)

In some cases you might need boundaries: *Простор и ребят балует, а народ на грех наводит* (Giving young men too much room spoils them and it leads folks into sin.)

But you need the wide open spaces for your heart: *Просторы земли отзывались в людях — свободолобием, душевным размахом, независимостью* (Those wide open spaces

resonate in people as a love of freedom, wide-open hearts, and independence.)

Don't fence us in.

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