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"Take My President - Please!"

By Michele A. Berdy

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Избирать: to elect

It turns out that this whole election business is kind of tricky. You think that after 240 years you have it down pat, but then one day you wake up and turn on the TV and see that you haven't figured it out at all.

In Russian, verbs for choosing are based on the root for taking (брать), which makes sense: you take what you choose.

The verb pair of choice on everyone's lips this week is избирать/избрать (to elect). Мы избрали нового президента (We elected a new president.) We call voters избиратели and their ballots — избирательные бюллетени.

But another verb pair,
выбирать/выбрать (to choose) is also used in elections. In fact,
elections are выборы (literally choices), since an election is just a big batch of individual choices. And so we say: Избиратели сделали свой выбор (The voters made their choice.) The next people to do their job are
выборщики (electors), the folks who are in коллегия
выборщиков (electoral college). That takes place later.

Today President Vladimir Putin made a speech of congratulation that shows how
выбирать
and избирать get used when talking about what happened on November 8.
Завершились
президентские выборы (The presidential elections are over), he said.
Хочу поздравить
американский народ с завершением избирательного цикла, а господина Дональда Трампа - с
победой на этих выборах (I want to congratulate the American people with the conclusion of the electoral cycle and Mr. Donald Trump with victory in these elections.)

Then there's
подбирать/подобрать (to select, to pick), which you use when you picking,
say, the most beautiful painting or most succulent apple. Or, you know, the right people to do the job: На такую ответственную работу подбирать надо лучших людей (You have to pick the best people for work with this kind of responsibility.) Or the right words to describe them: Слов необходимых и точных я
подобрать не мог (I couldn't find the right words.)

If you like someone, you might pick them out of a line-up using the verb pair
отбирать/отобрать: Нам даже доверяют отбирать лучших из кандидатов для участия в
выборах (We are even entrusted with picking out the best candidates to run for office.)
Or if
you don't like someone, you can take them out of the line-up:
Мы хотели отобрать всех
неквалифицированных кандидатов (We wanted to take out all the unqualified candidates.)

You might even want to use the verb pair
убирать/убрать, which means to take something
away, or make someone go away. Like, you know, Soprano style:
Надо их убрать (You got to
get rid of them.) Although most of the time, unless you are a mafia hitman, you use the verb pair to describe cleaning up — taking things off the chairs and floor and putting them where they belong. Мы убрали игрушки в детскую комнату (We put the toys away in the nursery.)

If you are not doing a deep clean but just neatening things up, use
прибирать/прибрать:

Мы
быстро прибрали гостиную (We quickly tidied up the living room.)

If you want to get to the bottom of something, you use
разбирать/разобрать, which means
to take something apart, literally or figuratively.
Теперь надо разбирать ошибки
общественного правосознания (Now we have to figure out the errors in the public's sense of justice.)

But no matter how much analysis you do, after you make a choice, you get what you choose.

At least until 2020.

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The views expressed in opinion pieces do not necessarily reflect the position of The Moscow Times.

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