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Pulling Strings for Fun and Profit

Michele A. Berdy's The Word's Worth

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Заблуждение: misperception

Everyone talks about фейковые новости (fake news) these days, but there are plenty of ways to sway the masses without out-and-out lies and photoshopped images. And Russian has plenty of ways to describe how to mislead, misdirect and manipulate. You might not notice when it's happening, but at least later you'll know what to call it.

Manipulation in Russian might sound a bit scientific: дезориентировать (to disorient). Их цель — дезориентировать население страны и армию (Their goal is to confuse the population of the country and the army.)

Or it can sound unpleasant but rather polite. For example: создать ложное впечатление (to

create a false impression). Sometimes this is unintentional: Подчас начинает казаться, что директор перестал интересоваться нашей лабораторией. Но это ложное впечатление (At times it might seem that the director is no longer interested in our laboratory. But it only seems that way.) At other times, it's policy: Своими выступлениями они пытаются создать ложное впечатление о том, что правительство и церковь заботятся о народе (In their speeches they try to create the false impression that the state and church are concerned about the population.)

Or people might simply try to influence others: влиять (to influence); влияние (influence): Конечной целью рекламы, как и PR, является влияние на общественное мнение (The end goal of advertising and PR is to influence public opinion.) This is also called воздействовать (to affect) and воздействие (impact). Действительно есть люди, которые сильно и негативно воздействуют на других (There really are people who affect people strongly and negatively.)

All that is out in the open.

Much worse is misleading people intentionally and covertly. This might be doing something в свою пользу (for one's own benefit), like: Он устроил народные праздники, просто чтобы повлиять на умы и души избирателей в свою пользу (He organized open festivals just to influence the hearts and minds of the voters for his benefit.)

Or it might be doing something умело. This means skillfully, but in certain contexts it means doing something so shrewdly and nefariously that it's actually a kind of manipulation. Создаётся впечатление, что действиями силовых структур умело кто-то дирижирует (You get the impression that someone is cannily manipulating the actions of the security structures.) Бабья ревность ◙ великая сила. Если её умело использовать (Women's jealousy is a formidable power. If you know how to manipulate it.) От того, кто более умело (или более цинично) сыграет на настроениях россиян, во многом и будет зависеть ход политической борьбы (The course of the political battle depends on whoever can more shrewdly – or cynically – play on the mood of Russians.)

There are lots of ways to manipulate elections. As above, you can just skillfully direct them: Кандидат от партии власти очень умело управлял ходом выборов (The candidate from the ruling party steered the elections.) Or you might control them: Пользуясь своими административными ресурсами губернатор контролирует ход голосования (The governor is using his administrative resources to control the voting process.) Or you can work on the voters: Его команда обрабатывает избирателей, лапшу на уши вешает по поводу роста пенсий (His team is pushing the buttons of the voters and filling their heads with nonsense about raising pensions) This is literally "hanging a noodle on their ears" — one of Russian's most colorful ways to dupe people.

If all that fails, you can move on to outright fraudulent activity, conveyed by the verb pair подтасовывать/подтасовать (to fake, fudge, tinker with). This is what you do to facts and figures. Как было отмечено Верховным судом, эти выборы были подтасованы (As the Supreme Court noted, those elections were rigged.)

And then you might as well throw in the towel of covert activity and называть вещи своими именами (call a spade a spade). Девушка была очень хитрой, манипулировала людьми,

играя на их жалости (The young woman was very cagey, manipulating people by playing on their pity.) Он вводит в заблуждение общественное мнение (He is leading public opinion down the garden path — literally "into misperception.")

Worst of all is the кукловод (puppet master). Here people aren't just manipulated or influenced, they lose all their power of independent thought and action. Puppet-masters can lead you by the nose: Его долго водили за нос кремлевские кукловоды в 1992-1993 гг (The Kremlin puppet masters led him around by the nose in 1992-93.) And even if nothing is happening, the puppet is on guard: Знают: чуть что ◙ кукловод дёрнет за веревочку (They know that the puppet master will pull on the strings at the drop of a hat.)

But relax — manipulation is not always a matter of politics and power. In the old days — and probably today for some people — it's just a tactic in the battle of the sexes where the main weapon is your eyes. Если кто-то захочет вам пустить пыль в глаза —то есть, составить о себе ложное впечатление (If someone wants to make a big impression — literally, "throw dust in your eyes"— i.e., create a false impression) или замазывать вам глаза — то есть, обманывать (or pull the wool over your eyes — i.e., deceive you) то не надо хлопать глазами — то есть, бездействовать (you shouldn't just stand there blinking dumbly —i.e., doing nothing).

Whew. Got to go practice making eyes at someone.

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