The Moscow Times
30 YEARS
INDEPENDENT NEWS FROM RUSSIA

Those Nosy Russians

The Word's Worth

Michele A. Berdy's The Word's Worth

August 07, 2019



Pixabay

Embed:

На носу: coming right up

New idea for a dissertation: The role of the nose in the Russian imagination.

Actually, someone has surely already written about нос (nose) because as soon as you begin to read Russian literature or talk to Russians, the theme is под носом (right under your nose). I'm sure students suggest it when the deadline for announcing projects is на носу (right around the corner, just about to happen). And when you are talking to your academic advisor нос к носу (face to face, literally "nose to nose"), you have to do more than just stand there ковыряя в носу (picking your nose). Even if people tell you that your нос не дорос (you're

still green, literally “your nose hasn’t grown all the way yet”), and even if you have a tendency под нос бубнить (to mutter under your breath, literally “under your nose”), you can’t just показывать нос (thumb your nose) at the Academy. You must уткнуть нос в книги (bury your nose in books) and not клевать носом (nod off, literally “to peck with your nose”) or someone will grab your scholarship из-под носа (right out from under your nose). And then your friends will тыкать тебя носом (rub your nose in it).

Get the idea? This is a serious nose country. There was even a man who woke up one morning to discover his nose was missing. And that nose was off leading its own life. Amazing place, this Russia.

In any case, you really have to learn some good nose expressions — not only because they are used constantly, and without them you might not know what’s going on, but also because they are, well, magnificent.

Let’s begin with the precept that size matters. С гулькин нос is more literally “с голубиный нос” (the size of a pigeon’s nose, i.e., beak), with гулькин the adjectival form of гулька, a synonym for голубь (pigeon). You might use this expression talking about your office mates: У него и руководящего опыта с гулькин нос (He’s got a thimbleful of management experience).

On the other side of the size-o-meter, there is нос картошкой (literally “nose like a potato”) — a big and bulbous nose. Here you need to be a bit careful in English, since a potato nose refers to an actual medical condition, not just a big and round schnoz.

There are other kinds of noses: нос крючком (hooked nose); курносый нос (turned-up nose); нос с горбинкой (Aquiline or Roman nose). As far as I can tell, what kind of nose appeals is дело вкуса (a matter of taste).

And then there are all these lovely nosy expressions. If you are down in the dumps, you hang your nose down — вешать нос. You will be told not to: Ладно, не вешай нос! Всё будет хорошо! (Come on, cheer up! Everything will be fine!)

If you don’t like something, you twirl your nose at it. How do you twirl your nose? I have no idea, despite several minutes of intense facial gesticulation at the mirror. In English, we look down our nose or turn our nose up. I suppose you could do both, but that would be more like a Pilates exercise. Воротить нос means to disdain something or someone, to have nothing to do with them. Старая Европа воротила нос от Польши (Old Europe looks down its nose at Poland.) Крутить носом is to find something unappealing, beneath you, the way some aristo St. Petersburgians sometimes react to Moscow: Коренные питерцы, голубая кровь, крутили носами, иронически поглядывая вокруг (The native blue-blood St. Petersburgians looked around with irony and turned their noses up.)

And if you are snobbish, you basically walk around with your nose up in the air. But you shouldn’t: Общительный, весёлый… в пять минут так расположит к себе собеседника. В общем, не задирает нос. Хотя мог бы, поскольку он ⊠ из числа золотой молодёжи! (He’s outgoing, good-natured… and he makes you feel at home in five minutes. Basically, he doesn’t act like a bigshot. Although he could since he’s part of the rich kid crowd.)

And then people can get in your face and futz around with your nose. Водить за нос means to lead someone around by the nose. We all know people who like to do that. Они стали замечать, что их просто водят за нос и обманывают (They started to notice that they were being led by the nose and cheated.) And once they lead you around, they can leave you high and dry — оставить с носом (to leave them with nothing, that is, just their noses. Here's an example from many years ago, but the technique described hasn't changed: И не беда, что по каким-то причинам выставки каждый раз откладывались ◙ как только возникла угроза митинга, все силы были мобилизованы, картины выставлены, а политические противники мэра оставлены с носом (It didn't matter that for some reason the exhibitions were put off every time. As soon as there was a threat of a demonstration, everyone was mobilized, the paintings were hung, and the mayor's political opponents were left holding the bag.)

Amazing.

But moving right along... you can deceive someone in a nosey way. Russians say "pull his nose" — натянуть ему нос — but English speakers say "pull one over on him." Шнур и его банда пустоголовых натянули нос всей постсоветской литературе (Shnur and his band of dimwits pulled one over on all of post-Soviet literature.) I'm sure that's Very Bad, but I have to say — I'm impressed.

And while we're on the subject of literature, here's what one author said about the delights of rubbing someone's nose in something: Всегда приятно утереть нос французу по части бессодержательной трескотни (It's always a delight to rub a Frenchman's nose in meaningless blather.)

You can even get very nose-specific: the phrase не по ноздре (literally "not by my nostril") means "I don't like it" — maybe from the notion of something smelling bad.

Короче (to cut a long story short): Если кто-то суёт нос в ваши дела и пытается водить вас за нос и даже оставить с носом, то встретившись с ним нос к носу, скажите ему: "Мне это не по ноздре!" (If someone sticks his nose in your business and tries to lead you around by the nose or leave you holding the bag, meet with him face and face and say: "I don't like it!")

Original url: https://www.themoscowtimes.com/2019/08/07/wordsworth-2-a66748