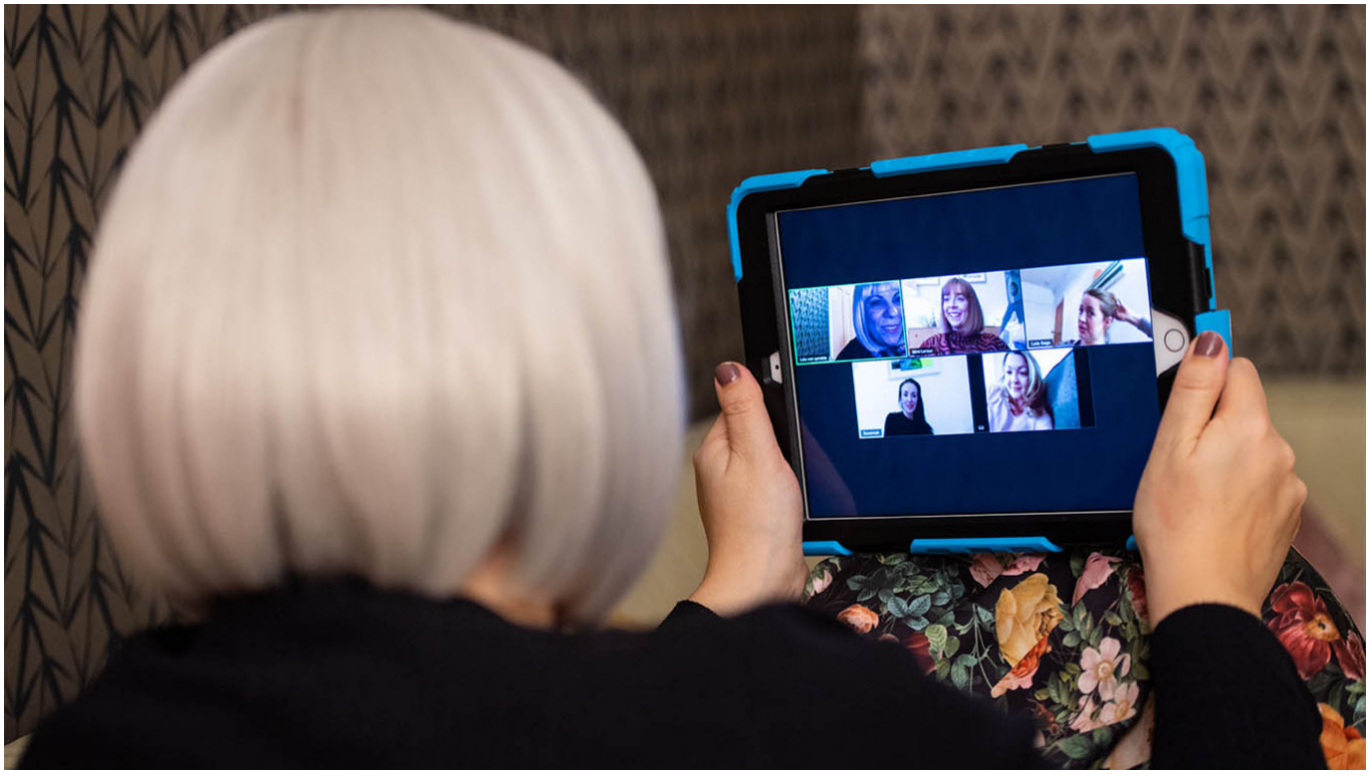
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Shall We Zoom? I Zoom, Do You?

The Word's Worth

Michele A. Berdy's The Word's Worth

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Dominic Lipinski / PA / TASS

Зумить: to use Zoom

Now that we're into week whatever of the self-isolation, lock-down, work-at-home, no-contact, QR-code-carrying coronavirus crisis, I thought it was time for a quick update on the Russian lexicon to describe our new reality. Some of these new words and phrases are jokes, some are not, and many probably won't stay beyond the quarantine. But in the year 2087, when some graduate student somewhere is looking for material on the Great Pandemic Linguistic Shift of 2020, maybe this will come in handy.

We'll start with a problem. In Russian there is a word for quarantine — карантин — but no word for someone in quarantine. Nature abhors a vacuum, so Russian wordsmiths have filled it with several options: карантинец, карантинер, карантинщик, or карантирант. I personally like карантинщик best. But all are better than English, in which quarantiner can

mean both the one doing the quarantining or the one quarantined, and quarantinee sounds like a teeny tiny period of quarantine. Sheesh.

There is, however, a lovely neologism for what we are on right now: карантикулы — карантин + каникулы (vacation), which in English is coronacation. This is also коронакризис (coronacrisis).

The world outside your quarantined inside is now called наружа (from the adjective наружный — outside, external). Наружа сегодня ветреная (The outside is windy today).

To become infected is подцепить or подхватить корону (to catch corona). Once you've got it, docs will refer to you as ковидный (infected with Covid), as in: Теперь ковидных – 25. (Now we've got 25 people with Covid.)

Some of these infected people are described in English with the adjective asymptomatic, but in Russian they get their own noun: бессимптомники (no-symptom-patients). Some Russian specialists think they are useful. One said "бессимптомники приносят пользу обществу... сами не болеют, но переносят вирус и заражают окружающих. Они распространяют вирус и, по сути, делают то, что должна делать вакцина: идёт коллективная иммунизация (Asymptomatic patients are beneficial to society. They don't get sick themselves, but they pass on the virus and infect the people around them. They spread the virus and essentially do what a vaccine should do — it's collective immunization.") Hey, I thought a vaccine gave you immunity without getting you sick, but what do I know, right?

Moving right along to another kind of person: короноскептик (coronaskeptic). Короноскептки считают, что им можно, им повезёт, их пронесёт, это их не касается (Coronaskeptics think that they can do what they want, they'll be lucky, it'll pass them by, it doesn't concern them.) These folks can cause as much trouble as the бессимтомники, but at least the latter don't know the damage they are doing.

In Russian we are experiencing пандемия коронавируса (the coronavirus pandemic), but there is another kind of epidemic making the rounds: инфодемия (infodemic): Мир накрыла невиданная прежде инфодемия (The world has been blanketed by a infodemic, the likes of which we've never seen before). The result — all those короноскептики. You can recognize them very easily. Their favorite phrase is Фигня какая! (What a load of crap!)

Meanwhile the lockdown is easing up for some, but toughening up for all of us in one way: the introduction of масочный и перчаточный режимы, aka масочно-перчаточный режим (mask and glove regimen). Wits are having fun: Они бросили нам перчатки. (They threw down the rubber gauntlets to us.)

The political and economic response to the pandemic has also gotten its share of slang. My favorite is упрощёнка ("simplified regime," something like the ease-up, the let-up, or just "tax relief") — the measures to ease up tax payments in various ways.

Russians also talk about вертолётные деньги (helicopter money), a phrase coined by Milton Friedman to describe money that is rained down on people. It is supposedly not useful to the economy, which might be true, although it is extremely useful to the people who buy, say,

food with it.

You might also find the term цифровой пропуск (digital pass) as in: Что такое цифровой пропуск и когда он нужен? (What's a digital pass and when it is needed?) Answer to the first question: It's a QR-code you get online. Answer to the second question: Any time you even think of getting into any means of transportation in Moscow. In fact: Never leave home without it.

And then there is the nut-case side of the pandemic as captured by the words чипирование (chip implantment); чип (chip); чипизация (chipization), and причипнутый (chip-nutty). If you missed it, on television, film director Nikita Mikhalkov aired the theory that the coronavirus was invented and let loose on the world by Bill Gates who would then produce the vaccine to cure it, which would somehow involve having a chip implanted in everyone. Somewhere in there was 5G and population control, as well as taking over the world and making lots of money, but I lost the thread and can't check because the broadcast was pulled for being fake coronavirus news. And for once I agree.

Finally, there is our новая нормальность (new normal), when everything is done бесконтакно (no-contact) or, better yet, through a screen. So, there is теледоктор (teledoctor); телемедицина (telemedicine); and телездравоохранение (telehealthcare). How to you visit your теледоктор? Well, perhaps: зумить or more often зумиться (to do a conference call on Zoom). Interestingly, Russian has the verb "to zoom" while boring old English is all about teleconferencing. In Russia it is practiced in virtually — get it? "virtually practiced"? — in every school in the country. Ну как, мы сегодня будем зумиться или нет занятия? (So are we going to Zoom today or is there no lesson?)

As usual, Россия впереди планеты всей (Russia is ahead of the whole world). Let's hope it's only in zooming, not coronarvirusing.

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