

Words of the Year 2022

It was a grim yearful of grim words.

[Michele A. Berdy's The Word's Worth](#)

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Maxim Slutsky / TASS

Слово года 2022: Word of the year, 2022

Every year a group of Russian word-watchers track all the words and expressions that seem to capture the spirit — or obsessions — of the year coming to an end. The group, headed by linguist and professor of Russian language and literature Mikhail Epstein, is made up of several thousand Russian speakers who share their observations over the course of the year. The long, shaggy list they produce is culled down to manageable number, and then everyone votes on three or four categories.

A thousand years from now some researcher will find these Words of the Year and use them to write a New History of the Russian Lands in the Early Third Millennium. In 2007, the first year it was held, the Word of the Year was гламур — the mix of bling, luxury and exorbitant prices that epitomized the era of New Russian wealth accumulation. But that was quickly followed in the next years by кризис (crisis) and перезагрузка (reset). Then for the next decade Russia and the Russian language bounced along from climate and political crises to resets with words of the years like жара (the heatwave and peat fires of 2010); Крымнаш (“Crimea is ours”); Болотная (Bolotny [Square], venue for demonstrations); Новичок (Novichok); протест (protest); обнуление (zeroing out [of presidential terms by Vladimir Putin in order to be “re-elected” again]); and вакцина (vaccine), which topped the list in the Covid-heavy year of 2021.

In 2022 Covid is mostly gone from Russian speech (if not gone from Russia and Russians). This year the entire list is about war. The three top Words of the Year capture this year’s plague: война, военный (war, military); мобилизация (mobilization) and релокация (relocation). Together these words are three snapshots of 2022: first the war began, then soldiers were mobilized and sent to the front lines, and then others relocated abroad as soon as they could buy air tickets.

It is an interesting sign of the times that the mostly men who fled the country in the first and second rounds of мобилизация were not called эмигранты (emigrants) but rather the new borrowed word релоканты (relocated people). Релоканты are people moved by or for their

businesses, without the vibes of dissidence and permanence that эмигранты has. It's easier to leave the country when you aren't using the verb эмигрировать (emigrate). You call yourself релокант and use the verb перебираться (move, cross over), which might be used again when you перебираться home again.

Other Words of the Year include беженцы (refugees); санкции (sanctions); оккупация (occupation); the letters Z and V; and the grim portmanteaux могилизация (a play on grave and mobilization) and Рашизм (a play on Russia and fascism).

In the category of выражение года (expression of the year), this year's winner is специальная военная операция (special military operation) — what the Russian government wants everyone to call its war (see above). In second place is the protest phrase нет войне (“no to war”). In third place is the accusatory question: Где вы были 8 лет? (Where have you been for the last 8 years?), that is, since Russia annexed Crimea.

Another question on the list of expressions is А что случилось? (So what happened?), used to mock Russians who were not interested in politics until they discovered IKEA was closing. The list also includes the phrase нет вобле (“no to the Caspian roach,” a salt-dried fish popular in beer halls) which conveniently has some of the same letters as нет войне. Protesters hold up signs with a lot of asterisks — Нет в***е — and claim they are simply against this salted fish.

The third category is “anti-language — the language of propaganda, lies, aggression and repression,” words the group “хотелось бы поставить в кавычки, как выражение чужой точки зрения” (would like to put in parentheses as representing a different point of view). It is the largest category this year, which is no wonder.

The top three phrases are дискредитация армии (discrediting the army); денацификация и демилитаризация (denazification and demilitarization); and иностранный агент (foreign agent). In actuality, they describe the opposite of what they say. Дискредитация армии is actually “telling the truth about what the army is doing”; денацификация и демилитаризация are actually “killing people who are not Nazis and taking away weapons from people trying to protect themselves from an unprovoked and brutal invasion”; and иностранный агент is “someone whose opinions the Russian government does not like.” Недружественные страны (unfriendly countries), another phrase on the list, are really “countries that object to Russia's unprovoked war with Ukraine.” Не всё так однозначно (there isn't just one side to this story) really means “your version of reality is correct, but we don't like it.”

For me, the weirdest word in this list is англосаксы (Anglo-Saxons), a word that in both Russian and English refers to the mix of Germanic tribes and indigeneous Britons that lived in what is now the U.K. from about 450 to 1000 A.D. So when Russian presidential spokesperson Dmitry Peskov announces that "в целом англосаксы изрядно накачивают напряженность на европейском континенте" (overall the Anglo-Saxons are really stirring up tension on the European continent) it is like saying that the Khazars or Golden Horde is interfering in the Council of Europe. Or when Ministry of Foreign Affairs spokesperson Maria Zakharova angrily asserts Не вам сейчас, представляя англосаксонский мир, считать, сколько у нас армия, где находятся вооруженные силы и куда они перемещаются (It's not up to you, representing the Anglo-Saxon world, to

count up the size of our army, where our armed forces are and where they are being deployed), you wonder how 1500-year-olds are still making policy decisions.

Another expression of the year was Нравится, не нравится — терпи, моя красавица (Like it or not, put up with it, my beauty) said by Vladimir Putin just before the invasion of Ukraine in a discussion with French President Emmanuel Macron. Putin used this quote to mean that Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky had to abide by all the Minsk Agreements, whether he liked them or not. The origin of the quote itself is hotly debated, but seems to be part of an obscene punk rock song, which urged a “beauty” to “put up with it.” Perhaps this involved Anglo-Saxons? It’s hard to say.

This year the group did not propose their own witty invented words or phrases. And rightly so. This is not a year for jokes.

We can only hope that next year will have a better group of words. And no war.

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