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Starting Anew or Again or Freshly Baked

New is often not new at all in Russian.

Michele A. Berdy's The Word's Worth

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Andrea Piacquadio / pexels

Новый: new (more or less)

И снова я... (It's me again), still thinking in February about новый год (new year) — and of course старый новый год (old new year, i.e., by the old Julian calendar) — and how things новый that happen снова are often not new at all.

In fact, снова (literally "anew") generally doesn't describe an action that is truly new. Most of the time it means "again": "Служебный роман" ◙ один из тех фильмов, которые хочется смотреть снова и снова ("An Office Affair" is one of those films you want to watch again and again). Мы совершаем одни те же ошибки, снова и снова (We make the same mistakes over and over again).

Only here, perhaps, does it have the sense of beginning a new phase of life: Они снова

начали совместную жизнь, и у них родились еще два сына (They began family life anew, and they had two more sons).

When you think about it, often the adjective новый (new) also describes things that are not new at all. Just consider новый год (new year). It's not a new year — with, say, 17 months of varying lengths and a new set of names. It's the same old January with the same old days from one to 31. It's just the next year that replaces the one that existed until midnight on Dec. 31. It's the same with новое поколение (the new generation), which could also be called очередное поколение (the latest generation) or следующее поколение (the next generation).

Sometimes, however, a new generation can be new and improved: Выросло новое поколение, уровень образованности которого намного превосходит характерный для их родителей (A new generation has grown up with a level of education that is much higher than what was typical of their parents).

And sometimes what might be old news to one person is new news to another: Он меня учит, и я вижу, что ему страшно приятно, что он может открыть для меня что-то новое (He is teaching me, and I can see that he is terribly pleased to introduce something new to me).

Another kind of new is something you invented or borrowed or copied to replace something you already had, like новые законы (new laws) or новое расписание (a new schedule). Or maybe the new cinema bad guy is an improvement on the old cinema bad guy: Новая разновидность вампиров выглядит впечатляюще (The new variety of vampires is impressive).

Of course, sometimes what is called новый is truly новый: Рождается новый жанр, которого не знала византийская литература (A new genre is born, one that had previously not existed in Byzantine literature).

Новый might describe a sea change in international relations or a governmental system. Это новый этап в строительстве наших межгосударственных связей (This is a new stage in building our interstate relations). Это точно Новый Век в отношениях (This is truly a New Age in relations).

Or it might be something new in a field that you never thought could be filled with discoveries: А не проходит и года, чтобы кактусовый мир не потрясла новая находка, порой сенсационная (Not a year goes by without the cactus world being floored by a new discovery, often sensational).

I'm definitely in the wrong line of work.

In English, things that are incomplete or partially done are said to be half-baked. In Russian, things that are newly created, elected, arrived, opened or whatever-ed are said to be свежеиспечённый (freshly baked) or новоиспечённый (newly baked). In a few cases these words do describe something hot out of the oven: От неё шёл потрясающе вкусный запах свежеиспечённого хлеба (The incredibly delicious smell of freshly baked bread radiated from her).

But anything and anyone can be hot out of the oven: После института, новоиспечённый экономист встал перед проблемой выбора (Fresh out of the institute, the new economist faced a choice). Новоиспечённым родителям часто кажется, что всё вокруг рушится (New parents often feel like everything is falling down around them).

Even freedom can be fresh off the griddle: Они не знают, как распорядиться своей новоиспечённой свободой ⊠ они не привыкли к свободе! (They don't know how to handle their new-found freedom — they aren't used to it!)

If you don't like your freedom or educational degree baked, feel free to pop the prefixes ново- or свежо- on a wide variety of adjectives to get, for example, новоизбранный (newly elected); новоприбывший (newly arrived); новоприобретённый (newly invented); or свежевозникший (newly emerged).

С иголочки (с иголки) — literally "off the needle" — can mean both newly made (i.e., something the tailor just finished sewing) or fancy, well-made clothing (i.e. handmade). Китель на нём — новый, с иголочки (He was wearing a brand spanking new tunic). Just about anything can be с иголки, although when translating into English they are usually fashioned in other ways: У неё опять был новый, с иголочки, план (Once again she had a newly hatched plan). Весьма приятный полёт: новый, с иголочки, самолет (It was a truly great flight — the plane was fresh off the assembly line).

And if things are really new, they are said to be новейший (the newest). Very new things are often confusing to rather old humans: Он подбирался к прилавку, робко указывал продавцу на новейшие игрушки и спрашивал: "А это что?" (He made his way to the counter, shyly pointed out the state-of-the-art toys to the salesman and asked, "What is that?")

You hope the salesman will push a button and we'll see that it's just a new version of an old-fashioned wind-up toy. Because sometimes, just sometimes, новое — это хорошо забытое старое (There is nothing new under the sun).

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