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SPEAK **RUSSIAN** IN 5 WORDS!

How to be perfectly understood in Russian in 15 minutes...

SPEAK RUSSIAN IN 5 WORDS!

with CLAROCADA RUSSIA

INTRODUCTION



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A friend of mine recently went to Russia on business without speaking a word of the language. He is a conscientious kind of person, so by way of preparation, he asked me if I might be able to teach him a few useful phrases.

He is also a very busy man, and when I asked him how many phrases he wanted, he said he thought five should just about do it.

I have a number of books, ranging from Russian in two weeks, through Russian in five days, to Russian in the bath.

But I had never come across Russian in five words...

SAYING YOU'RE SORRY...

My first choice went to **ИЗВИНИТЕ**.

Pronounced izvineetye, it is one of the ways of saying 'excuse me' in Russian. That is not all, however: the key to izvineetye is the facial expression that goes with it, and with the correct expression, its uses are limitless.

Anyone who has ever been to Sheremetevo Airport in Moscow will know of the problems: your luggage appearing on the carousel that claims to come from Bahrain, trolleys rented for roubles only, with not a rouble exchange office in sight, and so on. These are, regrettably, difficulties beyond the scope of the foreigner with five words of Russian. But not so with passport control and customs. Here, if you are asked any awkward questions, you should find that izvineetye, with a blank expression and shake of the head, will see you safely through.

Likewise, when a native accosts you in the street or metro, izvineetye with a shrug of the shoulders should say 'I'm trying, but I'm a stupid foreigner and really don't have a clue what you are on about'. Another important use of izvineetye, this time with a slightly foolish, questioning look, should convey 'Could you repeat that please, and if possible, a little more slowly and clearly?' A slightly more brusque and determined izvineetye, preferably accompanied by a scowl, is useful when you find yourself rammed up against the opposite side of a metro train with your stop fast approaching. Finally, an apologetic izvineetye is a good catch-all whenever you get the feeling that you have said the wrong thing, or that you are not quite where you are supposed to be.

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GREETING YOUR BUSINESS PARTNER

The next phrase I taught my friend was **очень приятно**. Pronounced ochin preeyatna it means 'very pleasant', and is the simplest way of saying 'pleased to meet you' in Russian.

I would recommend it over the Russian for 'how do you do', not least because it is easier to pronounce. The ritual for using ochin preeyatna is, at least initially, quite straightforward. When you meet a Russian, both of you will say your own names as you shake hands; you will then say ochin preeyatna. This, however, is only the first stage in what is the thoroughly murky business for Russian forms of address.

Russians - indeed, the vast majority of citizens of the former Soviet Union - have three names: a Christian name, a patronymic (indicating the name of their father) and a surname. From the point of view of the foreigner, there are two broad problems with this system; first, how to remember all three names at once, and secondly, which of the names to use. Not so long ago, you could safely 'tovarisch' (comrade) it about the place, but this is now highly inadvisable. The problem is that, as with many things in life, the Russians have yet to come up with a post-soviet alternative. If you want to accost a stranger on the street, you can shout out 'man', 'woman', 'young man' etc. But this is not recommended for high-level business negotiations.

The key to what to call a Russian really depends on how good you are at remembering names. You will probably only get one chance to hear all three names at once; this will be when introductions are made...

GREETING YOUR BUSINESS PARTNER

|(continued)

...Of course, armed with your izvineetye you should now, at least, manage to get the name repeated. If you think you can only remember one name, then go for the surname. You should then address the Russian as Gaspadin or Gaspazha So-and-so (Mr or Mrs So-and-so). This form of address is how Russians will address you, and is entirely acceptable from foreigners who don't know better.

Gaspadin So-and-so is not, however, ideal. The proper way to address a Russian with whom you have a fairly formal relationship is by their first two names, the Christian name and patronymic. So if, when introduced to a Russian, you think you have the capacity to remember two names, go for the first two and forget about the surname. The use of the Christian name and patronymic is the single best way to make a good impression in a business - or indeed any other - situation in Russia.

It is not just a question of being polite and correct. By using this form of address, you will show that you have some understanding of the way in which Russians do things. But remember: either the Christian name, or the patronymic on its own, is useless. One final tip on ochin preeyatna: if you ever hear a Russian say it to you, it is probably a good policy to say it back.

MINDING YOUR P'S AND Q'S

The third and fourth words I chose to teach my friend came as a pair: **спасиво** and **пожалуйста**.

Спасиво (pronounced spasiba) means 'thank you', and there is no harm in sprinkling it liberally through any conversation with a Russian.

Пожалуйста (pronounced puzhalsta - the u as in the English up) is a little more tricky. Its basic meaning is 'please', to be used when making requests. It does, however, have two other uses. First, you say puzhalsta when you are offering something to someone (a sort 'here you are' or 'have one of these'). Secondly, you should say puzhalsta after someone has said spasiba to you: a kind of 'not at all'.

All of which can lead to the perfectly respectable Russian exchange of puzhalsta - spasiba - puzhalsta.

VODKA ETIQUETTE

Anyone who has ever been to Russia will know about the Russians' love of drinking and, particularly, of making toasts. It would seem inevitable, therefore, that Russian in five words should include a toast.

A British diplomat once described how he went to the Caucasus to meet some local bigwigs. At the welcoming feast, held high up the winding roads in the mountains, a large number of toasts were made. After the glasses had been filled for the fourteenth time, the diplomat finally felt the time had come for him to make his toast. A message was sent to the large figure at the head of the table. He held up his hand. *“Enough...”* he said, *“I’m driving”*.

For the unsuspecting foreigner, one of the problems with Russian toasts is that the ritual involves raising your glass, clinking it with anyone else's within reach and then downing it in one. Taking a sip is not really acceptable. What is acceptable, however, is to make sure that your glass does not get filled every time.

For this reason, the fifth phrase I gave my friend was **чуть-чуть**, pronounced choot-choot. This means 'just a little, please'. I consider choot-choot to be absolutely essential: better to down a half-empty glass than to sip from a full one.

Choot-choot has the additional advantage of being applicable to food as well as drink. It is a perfectly polite way of ensuring that you are able to move from your chair at the end of a Russian dinner, without having offended your host by turning his/her food down.

A FINAL TOAST

Of course, I knew that my friend would not allow me to send him off to Russia without a toast in his armoury, so I managed to persuade him to learn a sixth phrase. “But keep it short,” he said...

For a Russian, there is no such thing as a short toast. With a Russian toast, rather like an English wedding speech, the actual raising of the glasses tends to be preceded by a lot of self-indulgent verbiage. Clearly this is not an option for the Five-Word Wonder.

The shortest toast I know, therefore, is **za vas**, meaning, 'to you!'.

This can be used on its own; or if you feel obliged to match the Russians for eloquence, it is a good polite way to round off a speech translated through an interpreter.

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Ask Clarocada Russia to assist with your language requirements now.

You can learn Russian, or learn about Russians at your office, or at the Russian Communications Language School in Edinburgh, or through trusted and tested partners based in London, Barcelona and in Russia.

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REVISION SHEET

1. *Izvineetye*
2. *Ochin preeyatna*
3. *Spasiba*
4. *Puzhalsta*
5. *Choot-choot*
6. *Za vas!*



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MAKE WORDS MAKE SENSE

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