

Medvedev Is So Duly Diligent

By [Michele A. Berdy](#)

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As I watched President Dmitry Medvedev's news conference and then pored over the transcript, looking for linguistic signs of his future and the future of the country, I found it hard to keep my pseudo-Kremlinologist hat on. I kept turning into a mother hen, muttering: Must you always sound so tentative? Do you know that you said я считаю (I think) 37 times?

It was all pretty bland. No sensational revelations of rifts in the tandem, no announcement of candidacy and a lot of platitudes like this: Большие цели заключаются в том, чтобы изменить жизнь, изменить нашу жизнь к лучшему, чтобы люди себя лучше чувствовали, чтобы уровень доходов поднимался, чтобы социальные программы выполнялись (Our major goals consist of improving life, changing life for the better, so that people feel better, their incomes rise and social programs are carried out).

True, some of the journalists were a kick. I liked the chutzpa of the fellow who wanted

the president's parking space: Я знаю, что у Вашей супруги есть два машиноместа, а мне машину поставить негде. Не сдадите ли случаем машиноместо в аренду? (I know that your wife has two parking spaces, but I don't have any place to park. Would you mind renting me one of your spaces?)

Sometimes Medvedev spoke without hemming and hawing, like his response to a question about the possible threat that former Yukos CEO Mikhail Khodorkovsky posed to society: Вопрос короткий и ответ тоже короткий — абсолютно ничем не опасен (The question was to the point and so is the answer: He poses absolutely no danger).

And he certainly peppered his speech with interesting loanwords and professional slang, like инвестклимат (investment climate), айпад (iPad) and the spectacular дью-дилидженс (due diligence). When asked about using filler words, he joked: Знаете, я когда думал, что сказать, решил, что скажу, что есть, конкретно, типа, такие слова, которые мне мешают жить, и совершенно очевидно, я от них буду избавляться (You know, when I thought about what to say, I decided that I'd say there is, for sure, like, these words that mess up my life and it's absolutely obvious that I'm going to get rid of them).

But all the same he defended good speaking habits: Очень важно, чтобы все мы старались использовать грамотную и очень красивую российскую речь (It's very important that we all try to use literate and very eloquent Russian speech). This should clearly be done with дью-дилидженс.

But the president's directness broke down every time he talked about his plans for re-election (or not). You don't have to be a Freudian to pick up on the convoluted replies filled with clauses and pauses: "Такого рода решения должны делаться именно в тот момент, когда уже созрели для этого все предпосылки, когда это будет иметь окончательный политический эффект" (This kind of decision should be made at exactly the moment when all the preconditions for it have been met, when it will have an ultimate political effect).

Say again?

"Ещё раз подчёркиваю: Всё это должно подчиняться определённому, вполне разумному сценарию" (I'd like to stress again that everything must go according to a specific, rational script).

What does this mean exactly? "Если я определюсь сделать такое заявление, я его сделаю." (If I determine to make such an announcement, then I'll do it.)

And when might that be? "Уже осталось ждать не так много" (There isn't that long to wait).

Ждём-с (We're waiting).

Michele A. Berdy, a Moscow-based translator and interpreter, is author of "The Russian Word's Worth" (Glas), a collection of her columns.

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