

Lawmakers Need to Brush Up on Their Russian

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Законопроект: draft law

My heart did a little dance of joy last week when I read the text of proposed changes to the Russian law on state language that had, by one count, 26 grammatical and other errors. See, it is a difficult language!

As it's always helpful to learn from others' mistakes, I've put together a little Friday quiz. Note that my translations do not reflect the mistakes in the text.

1. How many mistakes are in this sentence?

В Федеральном законе «О государственном языке РФ», в которую данным законопроектом предлагается внести изменение, отсутствует норма, в которой было

бы прописана обязанность иностранных граждан, лиц без гражданства и граждан РФ при исполнении должностных обязанностей и на рабочем месте употреблять и общаться исключительно на государственном языке или на официальных языках субъектов РФ (In the Federal law "On the state language of Russia," which this draft law is proposed to amend, there is no stipulation that would mandate the responsibility of foreign citizens, people without citizenship and Russian citizens to use and communicate exclusively in the state language or the official languages of the constituent parts of Russia while conducting business in the workplace).

- a) None. Sounds OK to me.
- b) Three, if you mean just grammatical errors.
- c) Ten, if you're taking off for style.

Answer: (b)

There is incorrect agreement between закон and в которую. It should be была бы прописана обязанность. And you can't употреблять на государственном языке.

2. What's the most egregious mistake in the following sentence?

В настоящее время иностранные граждане и лица без гражданства работающие в России по договору подчастую не владеют знанием русского языка, т.е. официального языка на территории которой они работают (At present, foreign citizens and people without citizenship working on contract in Russia sometimes don't have knowledge of the Russian language, i.e., the official language on the territory where they are working).

- a) No comma before работающие
- b) The nonexistent word подчастую
- c) The lack of agreement after т.е.

It's a trick question; egregiousness is subjective. But I'd vote for (b). Also, put in a comma and change the last bit to: официальным языком территории, на которой они работают.

3. What's the source of the typo below?

Аналогичные законодательные акты на протяжении многих лет существуют в ряде стран Европы и в США. Эти страны зачищают свою родную речь и своих граждан приняв аналогичный закон (Over the course of many years, analogous legislation has existed in a number of European countries and the U.S. These countries clean up their native tongue and citizens by ratifying an analogous law).

- a) A data base of wacky info about the U.S. used in drafting laws and filing stories on state television.
- b) Someone's hyperactive imagination

c) A slip of the wrist that turned защищать (to protect) into зачищать (to clean up)

Answer: All of the above.

In addition to fixing the typo, stick a comma before приняв and ditch the repetitiveness.

I'm happy to say that the amendment was edited — down to a paragraph with just one grammatical mistake — and changed to allow, say, hotel clerks to speak French to guests.

Meanwhile, I'm going to keep looking for that database.

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