

Keep Your Mouth Shut!

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Лишний рот: extra mouth to feed

Every once in a while I like to do a linguistic survey of various body parts. Don't get excited. Nothing illegal or immoral — just a review of Russian expressions that include, say, a hand or foot.

Or a mouth (рот). If it's on the face of a 4-month-old child, it's the diminutive ротик: Я попытался втолкнуть соску ему в ротик. (I tried to stick the pacifier in his sweet little mouth.) If it's in a poem or dramatic prose, it's уста: Слышу проклятие из уст твоих — и падаю под бременем отчаяния! (I hear a curse from your lips, and I fall under the weight of despair!)

If it's the jaws of a monster or monstrous person, it's пасть: Пасть твою порву! (I'll rip your friggin' mouth off.) And if it's an extra mouth at the table, it's лишний рот: Для кого-то ребёнок — это лишний рот, а для кого-то — источник радости. (For some people a baby

is just an extra mouth to feed, but for others it's a source of joy).

But the interesting bit about mouths is what they mean figuratively. For example, a wide-open mouth can express several emotions, usually happiness. Рот до ушей (literally, "mouth to the ears") means a smile from ear to ear. Она ему улыбается — рот до ушей. (She smiles at him, grinning from ear to ear.)

You can also combine the phrase во весь рот (literally, "the whole mouth") with the verbs смеяться (to laugh), улыбаться (to smile), and зевать (to yawn) to indicate an extreme version of the action. Он зевал во весь рот, и я поняла, что пора укладывать его спать. (He gave a huge yawn and I realized it was time to put him to bed.)

When someone is с открытым ртом (with an open mouth) it usually means they are fascinated or amazed. О первых московских впечатлениях подробно рассказывать не буду: ходил с открытым ртом. (I won't go into detail about my first impressions of Moscow — I walked along with my mouth hanging open.)

Рот разевать (to open your mouth) can mean opening your mouth to talk or in astonishment, but it also can mean letting your mouth hang open when you are preoccupied. Смотри куда идёшь! Ты вечно рот разеваешь! (Look where you're going! You're always spacing out.)

Someone might боится рот открыть (literally, "is afraid to open his mouth") or to the contrary, говорит, не закрывая рот (literally, "speaks without closing his mouth"). The latter non-stop talker may need some harsh treatment: затыкать/заткнуть рот (literally, "to plug up someone's mouth"). Пятьдесят тысяч рублей — это не те деньги, чтобы ими заткнуть рот нашему другу. (Fifty thousand rubles isn't the kind of money that would keep our friend from talking.)

This person might держать рот на замке (literally, "to put a lock on his mouth"). В России всегда было много Моник Левински, но все они держат свой рот на замке. (In Russia there have always been a lot of Monica Lewinskis, but their lips are sealed.) Or they might набрать воды в рот (literally, "fill their mouth with water"). Главный подозреваемый как в рот воды набрал — он отказывается давать показания. (The main suspect zipped his lip and refuses to give testimony.)

No spitting allowed.

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