

How Do You Collude in Russian? You Don't!

By [Michele A. Berdy](#)

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Вступить в тайный сговор: to collude

With all this talk in the U.S. about collusion and Russians, I wondered: How do you collude in Russian? After all, if you want to indulge in a bit of aiding and abetting, you need to know what it's called so you can ask for it — or deny it.

I poked around my dictionaries, looking for a verb or phrase to describe Donald Trump Jr.'s meeting with Natalia Veselnitskaya to get compromising material on Hillary Clinton. I settled on: *вступить в тайный сговор* (to collude, literally “to enter into a secret deal”). This is the phrase used in many similar situations: *Они вступили в тайный сговор с коррумпированными депутатами* (They colluded with corrupt deputies.) You could also leave out the secret bit: *Они были в сговоре, встречались, обменивались данными* (They were in collusion — they met to exchange information.)

In Trump Jr.'s case, the offer, acceptance and reason for the meeting were all very clearly stated. But sometimes collusion isn't spelled out — it's done with a wink and a nod. That could be формально не зафиксированный стовор (tacit collusion, literally “a deal that was not formally articulated”). This could also be негласная договорённость (unstated agreement).

If Veselnitskaya had delivered the goods and Trump Jr. had agreed to lobby against the Magnitsky Act, that would have been совершение согласованных действий (carrying out coordinated actions).

Now I was curious to find out what verbs and phrases were used in the Russian media. So I did what I always do: I put some words in a search engine and waited for dozens of Russian news stories to come up filled with Russian versions of collusion.

And I got... nothing.

Because, of course, Russian news stories do not even tiptoe close to any word even remotely associated with the notion of collusion.

So forget that language lesson. What you can learn from Russian news stories about Donald Trump, Jr. and his meeting with Russians is the word якобы (allegedly), the версия (version) of The New York Times, and the snide use of quotation marks.

In most Russian periodicals, the meeting, the news reports, and all the discussion in the U.S. about Trump Jr.'s and other meetings are nothing more than the search for “русский след” (the Russian trail). In these articles, quotation marks are key. News stories in the U.S. are said to be about “вмешательство Кремля” в президентские выборы (the “Kremlin's interference” into the presidential elections); “русские хакеры”, которые якобы похитили корреспонденцию демократов и опубликовали в интернете (“the Russian hackers” who allegedly stole the Democrats' correspondence and published it on Internet); the “русские связи” Трампа (Trump's “Russian connections,” and “связи сына Трампа с русскими” (“the Russian connections of Trump's son.”)

All of those quotation marks might be translated as “so-called,” “ridiculous assertions of” and “can you believe how stupid this is?”

The actual facts contained in the U.S. news reports are largely not mentioned. In fact, there was not even any mention of Senate hearings. Instead, readers are told that The New York Times готовит новую “разоблачающую” публикацию (is preparing a new “expose”) that shows гигантские усилия, которые уже второй год прилагает американский истеблишмент и “глубинное государство” для сбора любой порочащей информации (the gigantic efforts that the American establishment and the “deep state” have been exerting for over a year to gather any unsavory information). A quote from The New York Times is preceded by the phrase “по версии газеты” (according to the newspaper's version), as if it were all just a fable.

Finally, you will read that in any case it doesn't matter if the younger Trump sought compromising material on his father's competitor from a foreign source because: Это делают все участники президентских выборов в США (that's done by all

the participants in U.S. presidential elections).

Where have I heard that line before?

At the end of one article, the author predicts dire consequences: Сложившаяся абсурдная ситуация не вечна. Скоро всё рухнет (The current absurd situation can't last forever. Soon it will all collapse.)

Now that's something I agree with.

Michele A. Berdy is a Moscow-based translator and interpreter, author of "The Russian Word's Worth," a collection of her columns. Follow her on Twitter @MicheleBerdy.

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