

Happily Suffering While Worrying and Ignoring Insults

The Word's Worth

[Michele A. Berdy's The Word's Worth](#)

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Пережиток: relic

I love my mailbag. Sometimes what seem like simple questions turn out to be fascinating problems.

Take this question about the verb pair переживать/пережить. My first reaction was: what's tough about them? But after about three minutes, I remembered. There are several meanings tucked away in there, and it can be difficult to figure out which one is meant.

In fact, you can really start out on the wrong foot here. You think: the prefix пере- (again) and the root жить (to live). So, it means “to live again,” right?

Nope.

Actually, the prefix пере- has about a dozen meanings. In the perfective verb пережить, пере- has the sense of doing something completely, all the way through. So, one sense of пережить is to live through something, from start to finish. Его бабушка пережила всю блокаду в Ленинграде (His grandmother lived through the entire blockade in Leningrad.) Мы решили остаться на даче и там пережить зиму (We decided to stay at the dacha and spend the whole winter there.)

The second meaning of пережить is to outlive someone or something. This is similar to other “out-do” verbs like перекричать (to shout louder, to shout over someone). Most of the time this is sad: Моя соседка пережила всех своих друзей и близких (My neighbor has outlived all of her friends and relatives.) But sometimes it is more figurative than literal: Абрамович не только благополучно пережил Ельцина, но при Путине заметно расширил свою империю, придав ей алюминиевый блеск (Abramovich not only successfully outlived Yeltsin, under Putin he noticeably expanded his empire, adding some aluminum shine to it.)

This meaning has given us the noun пережиток, a thing that has outlived something or someone, that is, a relic, vestige or holdover. If you hang around Russia and the former Soviet Union, when you hear this word the first thing that comes to mind is phrases like “преодоление пережитков капитализма в экономике” (overcoming the vestiges of capitalism in the economy). But you might hear phrases like this, too: Всем давно件ятно, что бесплатная медицина стала пережитком прошлого и долго не просуществует (Everyone has known for a long time now that free medical care is a holdover from the past and won’t last for long.)

The third meaning of пережить is to endure or experience some event or hardship. Because it’s the perfective form of the verb, the sense is that the person got through it and came out on the other side. This can be the universal lament-celebration of parents when their kids reach adulthood: Худший период подросткового возраста мы, похоже, уже пережили (It looks like we’ve gotten through the worst period of adolescence.) But usually it’s about getting through something terrible: Мы с его постоянной поддержкой и пережили наводнение (With his constant support we got through a flood, too.)

This is a good word for those tough times everyone goes through: И это переживём (We’ll get through this, too.) If that doesn’t sound convincing, you can try the companion phrase: И это пройдёт (This, too, shall pass.)

Most of the time what is experienced is a hardship or pain, but sometimes it’s a good thing: А еще через пару часов моя группа встретила друзей, которые не знали, что наши родители нашлись, и мы вместе снова пережили радость спасения (After a couple of hours my group met some friends who didn’t know that our parents had been found, and together we experienced the joy of their rescue anew.)

Finally, пережить is what you do with insults and bad behavior: you just ignore them. Or rather, this is what you do unless you are a certain president or a Twitter freak. Он не смог

пережить обиды. (He couldn't let the insults go.)

I think part of the confusion with this verb pair is that the perfective and imperfective meanings are quite different and consequently translated quite differently, so it almost seems like separate verbs. But this is just a cool and vivid example of how aspect (вид) works. If the perfective version пережить is about getting through something, the imperfective version переживать is about being in the midst of something, as it were. So a phrase like “я так переживаю” means that you haven't gotten through a hardship — you're experiencing it. It means “I'm so upset!”

You can also be upset for someone else, that is, worry about them. So when your teens go off on a camping trip and the weather turns wet and cold, you moan: Переживаю за ребят! (I'm worried about the kids!)

And like the perfective form, переживать can occasionally be about experiencing something good: Прекрасное, весёлое кино, которое не стыдно пересматривать по множеству раз и переживать ощущения заново (It's a wonderful, funny movie that I'm not ashamed of watching many times so that I can enjoy the experience again and again.)

And finally, the imperfective verb has given us the noun переживание, which is any kind of stress, trial, tribulation, angst, or strong emotional reaction. When times are tough and you are upset all the time, it messes up your psyche and your health: Не курить не получается: переживания за всё, что происходит, каждую минуту портят нервы (I can't quit smoking. The stress over everything going on wreaks havoc with my nerves every second!)

To sum up, пережить and переживать mean to get through, outlive, endure, suffer, experience, enjoy, worry, freak out, and put up with. Now, what was the problem again?

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