

Grammar 21—Dates

In English there are a few different ways of reading dates. Take this date for example:

July 28, 1914

We might read it like this:

July twenty eight, nineteen fourteen

But, in a governor's proclamation or other official document it might be written out in words like this:

the twentieth eight of July of the year of our Lord one thousand nine hundred fourteen

With the exception of the “of our Lord” part, this is the way you should read dates out loud in Russian. For example if you see:

28 июля 1914 г.

You should say:

двадцать восьмое июля тысяча десять сот четырнадцатого года

Notice the following important points:

- The day of the month is expressed as an ordinal number. Since ordinal numbers are adjectives, they must match the gender of the noun which they modify. There is no noun here, but it is understood to be “число” which is neuter (and means “number”). Adjectives also have cases. Here it is in the nominative case, but that will likely change when we put this date in a sentence.
- The month (июль) is in the genitive case. That is because the date is the 28th of July. It will remain in this case even when we put the date in a sentence. Note also that the month name is not capitalized.
- The year is also expressed as an ordinal number (remember, years are counted not measured, that is why there is no zero year). It is in the genitive case because we mean July of 1914. The year will also remain in the genitive case when we put this date into a sentence.
- The word “год” (which means “year”) is written and pronounced. It is generally abbreviated as shown. It is in the genitive case because it is part of the phrase “of the 1914th year”. It also will remain in the genitive case when we put this date into a sentence.

As stated above, the day of the month must be declined to reflect the role of the date in the sentence. For example:

Первая мировая война шла с двадцать восьмого июля тысяча девять сот четырнадцатого года по ноябрь тысяча девять сот восемнадцатого года.

The First World War ran from the twenty eight of July of the one thousand nine hundred fourteenth year to November of the one thousand nine hundred eighteenth year.

When we used imprecise dates such as “November 1918” in the example above, the most precise remaining part is what we decline to fit the sentence. For example:

Русский класс шёл с октября две тысячи тринадцатого года по февраль две тысячи четырнадцатого года.

The Russian class ran from October of the year two thousand thirteen to February of the year two thousand fourteen.

Or if only the year is stated:

Первая мировая война шла с тысяча девять сот четырнадцатого года по тысяча девять сот восемнадцатый год.

The First World War ran from the one thousand nine hundred fourteenth year to the one thousand nine hundred eighteenth year.