CULTURE SHOCK

Good manners are good manners. That’s what Miranda Ingram, who is English, thought, until she married Alexander, who is Russian. When I first met Alexander and he said to me, in Russian? Nalei mnye chai -‘pour me some tea’, I got angry and answered, ‘Pour it yourself’. Translated into English, without a ‘Could you...?’ and a ‘please’, it sounded really rude to me. But in Russian it was fine –you don’t have to add any polite words.

However, when I took Alexander home to meet my parents in the UK, I had to give him an intensive course in pleases and thank yous (which he thought were completely unnecessary), and to teach him to say sorry if someone else stepped on his toes, and to smile, smile, smile. Another thing that Alexander just couldn’t understand was why people said things like, ‘Would you mind passing me the salt, please?’ He said, ‘It’s only the salt, for goodness sake! What do you say in English if you want a real favour?’ He also watched in amazement when, at a dinner party in England, we swallowed some really disgusting food and I said, ‘Mmm...delicious’. In Russia, people are much more direct. The first time Alexander’s mother came to our house for dinner in Moscow, she told me that my soup needed more flavouring. Afterwards when we argued about it my husband said, ‘Do you prefer your dinner guests to lie?’

Alexander complained that it England he felt ‘like the village idiot’ because in Russia if you smile all the time people think that you are mad. In fact, this is exactly what my husband’s friends thought of me the first time I went to Russia because I smiled at everyone, and translated every ‘please’ and ‘thank you’ form English into Russian. If we’re speaking Russian, he can say ‘Pour me some tea’, and just make a noise like a grunt when I give it to him. But when we’re speaking English, he has to add a ‘please’, a ‘thank you’, and a smile.

1. Miranda got angry because her husband asked her to make the tea. F/T
2. Miranda had to teach him to say sorry when something wasn’t his fault. F/T
3. Her husband thinks English people are too polite. F/T
4. Alexander wasn’t surprised when people said they liked the food at the dinner party. F/T
5. The food was delicious. F/T
6. Miranda didn’t mind when her mother-in-law criticized her cooking. F/T
7. Alexander thought his mother was right. F/T
8. In Russia it isn’t normal to smile all the time when you speak to someone. F/T
9. His Russian friends thought Miranda was very friendly because she smiled a lot. F/T
10. Alexander never says thank you for his tea when he and Miranda are speaking in Russian. F/T

KEY

**(1) F (2) T (3) T (4) F (5) F**

**(6) F (7) T (8) T (9) F (10) T**