

Food Sanctions, Really?

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Ведь: indeed, after all, really, since

I've always thought of the word *ведь* as the verbal equivalent of a fist hitting the table, a word you use to emphasize your message and pound it home. As an intensifier it's a great little word to spit out in phrases like: *Ведь я тебе говорила!* (I told you so!)

But *ведь*, like all little Russian words, is more than just an intensifier. It can show cause and effect. It can show juxtaposition. In a question, it can indicate doubt.

That is, it is one of the Russian language's multipurpose words, with a meaning that shifts dramatically with context and intonation, giving us hapless foreigners myriad opportunities to misuse, misunderstand or mistranslate it.

Much of the time it does intensify the sense of a phrase. Because English doesn't have an equivalent little word, you need to be creative to convey the message of *ведь*. *Ведь это*

совсем не трудно! (Come on — it's not hard at all!) Ведь это правда! (It really is the truth!) Мы должны ей помочь подготовиться к переезду, ведь она не справится одна (We have to help her get ready for the move; she certainly can't handle it by herself). Но ведь я же не буду этого делать, я же себя знаю, свой характер (I'm just not going to do it — that's for sure. I know myself and my character.)

Sometimes *ведь* draws attention to a particular word in a sentence. Конечно, я ей помогу. Ведь она мне жена. (Of course, I'll help her. She's my wife, after all.) Ведь это он! (That's him!) Это ведь та самая книга, которую я три часа ищу! (That's the very book I've spent the last three hours looking for!) Ведь это ты хотел пойти в кино, а не я (You were the one who wanted to go to the movies, not me). Ведь ожидание, как и сам праздник, является самым чудесным временем (It's the anticipation as much as the holiday itself that's so marvelous).

In other contexts, *ведь* brings together two contrasting ideas: Он так хорошо выступал! А ведь он совсем не опытный (He performed brilliantly despite being totally inexperienced). Вы что — уже приехали? А ведь мы вас сегодня не ждали. (Are you already here! But we weren't expecting you today!)

In other contexts, it can be translated as "since": Всем проще подсчитывать неудачи, ведь у каждой организации есть виновники! (It's easier for everyone to tally up their failures, since every organization has people who have made mistakes.) Or as "but then again": Трудно с ним работать, но ведь я привыкла работать с сложными людьми (It was quite hard to work with him, but then I'm used to working with difficult personalities).

The grammar books say that in some contexts *ведь* is a conjunction that indicates the reason for the preceding assertion. Got that? I didn't, but it makes more sense in this example: Переведи письмо. Ведь ты знаешь английский! (Translate the letter. You can do it — you know English!)

But the strange thing about *ведь* is how all the intensity disappears when it is used in a question. Here it expresses doubt, not certainty: Ведь это неправда? (That's not true, is it?) Ты ведь хочешь ехать на дачу? (You do want to go to the dacha, don't you?)

А ты ведь хочешь забыть про *ведь*? (You do want to forget all about *ведь*, don't you?)

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