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Just Between Us, the Russian Way

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Честно говоря: frankly speaking

In my file▣drawer of doctoral dissertations I will never write is one entitled: "Choice▣and Frequency of Parasitical Word Use Among Non-Native Speakers of Russian."▣That one is about how we foreigners pick up a word and phrase and stick it in▣every conversation, whether it fits or not. One of my friends often says Вот!▣(That's it.) Another non-Russian friend loves the phrase в общем (by and large). ▣
Пойдёшь в кино сегодня? (Are▣you going
to the movies today?) В общем — да. (For all intents and purposes — yes.)

My▣hypothesis is that we master a word or phrase and then use it as a kind of▣verbal place holder while we sort out the grammar of whatever else we want to▣say.

My personal▣parasite phrase is
честно говоря (to be honest), which I use▣so much that one

of my Russian friends started to counter automatically: А если не честно? (And if you aren't honest?)

But these phrases with
говоря (speaking) aren't just for hitting the pause button. They set
up and draw attention to your next phrase. Think of them as signal clauses.
Честно говоря
(frankly) signals: Right now I'm going to be very candid and say something that perhaps I shouldn't. Sometimes it's to say something bad about a person, place or event: Никогда не был в этом городе и, честно говоря, не тянет (I've never visited that city and, to be honest, it doesn't appeal to me.) Other times it's to admit a personal failing, like to your teenager who is complaining about an exam:
Честно говоря, я сам не знаю ответа на
этот вопрос (I have to admit that I don't know the answer to that question.)

Next up is вообще говоря (generally speaking), which signals a good, old-fashioned sweeping generalization: Вообще говоря, любая война недопустима (Generally speaking, any war is inadmissible.) But sometimes it's a way of describing an overall mood:
Вообще
говоря, расставаться не хотелось (Basically I just didn't feel like saying good-bye.)

That's different from
иначе говоря (to put it another way), which is a verbal signpost that
means clarification is coming. В Питере теперь можно получить всё, что хочешь, не выходя из дома. Иначе говоря — появился Интернет-магазин (Now in Petersburg you can get anything you want without leaving your home. In other words, online shopping has appeared.)

Попросту говоря (to put it simply) is good for cutting to the chase and calling a spade a spade: Попросту говоря, условия жизни для них
были невыносимо тяжёлыми (To be blunt, their living conditions were unbearably hard.)

But между нами говоря (just between us) signals that gossip is about to be shared: Между нами говоря, бульон
очень жидкий и прозрачный, как вода (Just between us, her
bouillon was really thin and clear, like water.)

Or you can keep it short with
короче говоря. Have you ever noticed that people say
короче
говоря (to make a long story short) when they are in the middle of an endless tale?
Короче
говоря, непривычная к вину, я опьянела быстро, и мне стало очень плохо (To make a long story short, since I wasn't used to drinking wine, I got drunk quickly and felt horrible.)

You can shorten this to
короче, which sounds slangy and to the point:
Короче, очень
советую (In short, I highly recommend this.) Really.

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