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A Gathering of Witches, Dues, Herbs and Classmates

Michele A. Berdy's The Word's Worth

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Сборище: a crowd, a gang

Are there many words in Russian that have one meaning in the singular and another in the plural? In most cases the plural just means a lot of the singular. And that's sometimes true with сбор/сборы. Sometimes сборы are a lot of сбор, as it were. But there are a few cases when the singular and plural nouns have very different meanings.

Сбор and сборы are related to the verb pair собирать/собрать. The verbs mean some form of gathering, from gathering together people, crops or things to gathering together pieces of a puzzle and turning them into a picture. The nouns сбор and сборы have to do with gathering or taking in, too, although in rather specific ways.

Let's look at the singular сбор first.

Сбор is the gathering of a harvest: Сейчас они обсуждают сбор урожая, необходимость покупки трактора (Now they're discussing harvesting the crops, and the need to buy a tractor). This might also be foraging in the wild: Сбор трав осуществляется в высокогорных, экологически чистых районах (Foraging for herbs is done in ecologically pure highlands).

You can gather more than edible products: В школе предполагает практику в музее: знакомство с экспонатами, изучение музейного дела, сбор предметов старины для музея (The school offers internships in the museum to get to know the exhibits, learn how museums are run, and bring in antique objects for the museum). Сбор оперативной информации продолжается и в случае появления новых данных расследование возобновит (Operational information is continuing to be collected and if new data appears, they'll reopen the investigation). В ближайшие дни должен начаться сбор подписей среди депутатов (In the next few days they should start gathering signatures from deputies).

Сбор can also be the collection of money — dues, donations, tariffs and fees. Редакция газеты объявляет сбор пожертвований на приобретение домов для беженцев (The newspaper has announced a collection of donations to purchase houses for refugees).

It can refer to tax collection, whether it goes well or badly: Сбор всех налогов в первом полугодии шёл крайне туго, и налоговое ведомство не справлялось с планом (Tax collection in the first half of the year went very badly and the tax agency could not meet its goals). Meanwhile: Таможенный сбор — это обязательный платеж за обработку таможенной декларации (A customs tariff is a payment for handling a customs declaration).

This is one of the cases when the word can be used in singular and plural with the same meaning. One payment for an item at the customs office is сбор (tariff) and a bunch of payments is сборы (tariffs).

Another case where singular and plural match up is травяной сбор (herbal blend): Травяной сбор кипятится в течении 10-15 минут в трёх литрах воды (This herbal tea is boiled for 10-15 minutes in three liters of water). Назначается специализированная диета, антибиотики и различные травяные сборы (A specialized diet, antibiotics and various herbal teas are prescribed).

Сбор is also a gathering of people, like a reunion of any kind: сбор всей семьи (a family reunion); традиционный ежегодный сбор выпускников (the traditional annual class reunion); or even сбор сотрудников и ветеранов милиции специального назначения (a reunion of staff and veterans of the special forces police).

The gathering can be more official: Сбор всех частей назначен в 6 часов (All units are commanded to muster at 6 a.m.) Or less official: Сбор демонстрантов в шесть вечера возле автобусной остановки (All the protesters should meet at 6 p.m. by the bus stop).

Finally, when everyone is all there, you say Все в сборе! (All here!)

There are two meanings of the plural сборы that are unique. One is the complement to the statement все в сборе (all here): сборы means the process of packing up. На сборы в эту

поездку ушло двое суток (It took two full days to pack for the trip).

Another unique сборы describes income taken in: Его фильмы имеют высокие кассовые сборы (His films do great at the box office).

Сборка is another unique variant. The most common meaning is the gathering of parts to assemble something: Производство осуществляется на заводах и сборка завершёна в течение короткого времени (Production is done at factories and assembly is carried out very quickly).

But it has another meaning from the world of fashion — it refers to ruching — tiny pleats gathered on seams. Основной упор дизайнеры сделали на платья с боковой сборкой — именно эта модель и стала основным трендом весны (Designers concentrated on dresses with ruching along the sides — this design became the main trend for spring).

I will certainly keep that in mind.

And then there is one more gathering: сборище. As you recall, the ending -ище (added to masculine and neuter words) and -ища (added to feminine words) can attach the meaning of something grand or big. So сборище is generally a crowd: Он не хотел отмечать его в Москве, так как вообще не любит пышных сборищ (He didn't want to celebrate in Moscow since he can't stand big fancy gatherings).

Or maybe he doesn't like a big, scary group: Ковен — это сборище ведьм, особенно группой из тринадцати (A coven is an assembly of witches, especially a group of 13).

Put them in ruched dresses and they'll be unstoppable.

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