The Moscow Times
30 YEARS
INDEPENDENT NEWS FROM RUSSIA

And Yet It's Nevertheless All the Same, After All

Michele A. Berdy's The Word's Worth

July 28, 2023



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Всё-таки: nevertheless, in the end, all the same, really, finally...

Little words, little words... It is my life's work — or at least my summer challenge — to sort out some confusion experienced by readers and translators when one word has dozens of meanings and almost an endless number of possible translations.

This is particularly true with a word like таки, which is a particle. A particle isn't just something small — although most Russian particles are quite small — it's a word that (almost) has no meaning of its own and cannot stand alone (with very few exceptions). It is added to other words to create new emotional or semantic shades of meaning.

That may sound complicated, but you know and use them all the time. For example, the particle ли, which is used to form a question or indicate that something is not certain: Знаете

ли вы художника Татлина? (Do you know the artist Tatlin?) Пока неизвестно, будет ли конкурс ежегодным (Right now it's not clear whether the contest will be annual or not). Просьба сообщить, был ли доклад утверждён правительством (We request that you inform us if the paper has been approved by the government).

Or the particle бы (sometimes just б), which indicates something hypothetical or conditional. This is the would-have-could-have particle: Был бы телефон, я бы позвонила (If I'd had a phone I would have called). Or the "I'd like" particle: Хотелось бы большей поддержки властей (I'd like more support from the government). And the polite "don't want" particle: Мне не хотелось бы занимать ваше время (I don't want to waste your time).

Dictionaries tell you that the particle таки is tacked on to words to indicate some kind of intensification, and that it is a loose synonym of the phrases всё же (after all, be that as it may); однако же (nevertheless, and yet); тем не менее (all the same) — so it can be more of the same, the same but more intensely, or something different.

Have I mentioned how slippery these little words are? Just when you're about to clamp down on one, it slithers away.

The таки phrase you are probably most familiar with is всё-таки, which can be translated in many different ways depending on the context.

Для ребёнка всё-таки это сильный стресс (This is really very stressful for a child).

Шумно? Неудивительно — столица всё-таки (It's noisy? That's no surprise. What did you expect? It's the capital!)

Большинство здесь уже закончили школу, а некоторые уже и университет. Где всё-таки лучше? (Most of you here have already graduated from school and some have already graduated from a university. So come on, now: Which was better?)

Услышав моё предположение, дедушка засмеялся, но я всё-таки попросил его быть настороже (When he heard my suggestion my grandfather laughed, but all the same I still asked him to be on the lookout).

Многие могут задаться вопросом, как же всё-таки удавалось ему так ускользать? (Many people might ask how on earth he managed to slip away.)

Хорошо, что всё-таки не потратил денег — фильм того совершенно не стоил (It's good that in the end you didn't spend any money, since the film wasn't worth it).

Я ещё подумала: ну его к чёрту, пусть звонит, не до него, но в последний момент, на каком-то десятом гудке всё-таки взяла трубку (I thought: the hell with him, let him call, I don't have time for him, but at the last minute, on about the tenth ring, I broke down and grabbed the phone after all).

Некоторые сомнения всё-таки закрадывались в мою голову (Some doubts still lingered in the back of my mind).

Now that your head is bursting with всё-таки examples, I will further complicate matters.

Таки can be attached to other words, also more or less acting as a kind of intensifier. It is hyphenated to the word it is added to when that word is an adverb, verb, or another particle (not very common). Here are some adverb combos:

Конечно, опять-таки, здесь речь идёт о незаключённом договоре (Of course, here again, we're talking about an unsigned agreement).

Премьер Черномырдин, обидевшись на выступление "Известий", просто-таки развалил эту газету (Prime Minister Chernomyrdin, who had been offended by a statement in Izvestiya, just up and destroyed the newspaper).

And some verb combos:

Я только вчера решил сесть и разобраться-таки как решаются эти грёбаные задачи (Just yesterday I decided to sit down and finally figure out how to solve those damn problems).

Говорят, что он показал-таки эти цифры президенту (They say that he finally did show the president those figures).

Уже и ждать перестал, но поздно вечером пришёл-таки Егор (I had already stopped waiting, but late in the evening Yegor finally did come over).

But — there's always a but — таки is not hyphenated when it is "added to" and intensifying a noun.

Точно, засуха таки была долгой (Yes, that's it. The drought really did go on for a long time).

Испытав много трудностей, она таки научилась водить машину (She had a really hard time, but in the end she somehow managed to learn how to drive).

And it is sometimes handy for describing the peculiarities of other languages:

Оказалось, что если сказать просто и буквально "друг показал мне фотографии", это по-японски будет означать, что "я не слишком-то хотел их смотреть, но друг таки их показал" (It turns out that if you simply and literally say "my friend showed me photographs" in Japanese that would mean "I didn't really want to look at them, but my friend insisted on showing them to me anyway").

I'll stick with one problematic language at a time, thank you very much.

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