

"I'm Shocked, Just Shocked!" in Three Russian Letters

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Опа!: Uh-oh!; Ta da!

Little Russian words are trouble. All those two-, three- and sometimes four-letter words like вот, на, ух, ах, ну, ага, угу, etc. have dozens of different meanings depending on the context, speaker, tone of voice and their combination with other little words. If you hear them being used and see the situation they are used in, you know what they mean. But if you read them or have to translate them you will find yourself muttering syllables to your computer in different tones of voice, trying to pry out the meaning.

Today we're going to master how to blurt out surprise in Russian. First up:

Опа! — almost

always printed with an exclamation mark.

Опа! is what you say when something goes

wrong suddenly and unexpectedly: Вдруг лампочка в люстре начала мигать и через

минуту погасла. ✕ Опа! ✕ сказал Антон в темноте (Suddenly the lightbulb in the lamp

began to blink, and a minute later it went out. “Uh-oh,” Anton said in the darkness.)

If you are a teenager or an adult joking around, you can use the form **опаньки** (or sometimes **опачки**): **Опаньки!** Тут у меня вышла лажа. (Crapola! I screwed something up.)

But little words are tricky, and **опа** is not always used to exclaim over an unexpected problem. It can be used for any surprise, including a pleasant one: **Внук рыбака закидывает в воду удочку и вдруг опа!** Тут же клюнула рыба! (The fisherman’s grandson throws his line into the water and suddenly — Ta da! A fish took the bait.)

It can also be used as something like the sound effect for almost any sudden movement. **А toddler takes a couple of steps and plops down on her bottom. Her parents say: Опа!** (Whoops a daisy!) In the park, a dog jumps out from behind a tree and starts a game of doggie tag. The dogs’ owners say: **Опа!** (Surprise!)

Another three-letter word that can be used to show surprise is **эге**. This should not be confused with **ЕГЭ** — pronounced ye-ge — which is the abbreviation of the **единый государственный экзамен** (uniform state exam). **Эге** is a slightly lower key version of **опа** and can be used to exclaim over bad and good surprises.

Даже вздрогнул от неожиданности. Эге! А ты чего тут делаешь? (I was so surprised I jumped. “Whoa! What are you doing here?”) **Тренер сказал: “Эге, да ты чемпионом будешь!”** (His trainer said, “Oho! You’ll be a champ some day!”)

If you like an exclamation with a bit more meat on it, I can offer you: **Вот тебе на!** You say these words — translated literally as the incomprehensible “here you are take it” — when you are shocked or surprised and very annoyed. This is what you say when you do a bit too much celebrating on Friday night and wake up Saturday morning hungover. Really hungover. How hungover? **Вот тебе на, проснулся неизвестно где** (What the hell? I woke up and had no idea where I was.) Or when you convince yourself that your neighbor was a nice guy who was just nosy, but then you discover he was professionally nosy: **Вот тебе на! Значит, он точно эфэсбешник...** (Damn! It turns out he was from the FSB...)

My personal favorite exclamation of dismay is **поди ты**, which I like because it’s almost the perfect equivalent of “get out of here.” Your friend calls you up and tells you a mutual

acquaintance got married over the weekend. You say:

Поди ж ты! (Get out of here!) And

she's marrying your ex-husband? Поди ж! (Shut the front door!)

Of course you can use all of them together when you're truly shocked.

Россия имеет

компромат на Трампа... (Russia has compromising material on Trump....)

Опаньки! Вот

тебе на! Эге, ну поди ж ты...

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