

# Russian *èto*-focus and *to*-topic sentences as elliptical question-answer pairs

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## 1 Introduction

Specificational pseudoclefts (SPCs) as a means to express focus are well-known in English. In such sentences, the focused constituent (XP; new information) is accompanied by the *wh*-clause (old information); the XP can (subject to speaker variation) be contained in a full clause (1).

- (1) a. What he likes **is** syntax.  
b. %What he likes **is** he likes syntax.  
c. When John arrived **is** on Monday.  
d. %When John arrived **is** John arrived on Monday.

As noted by Den Dikken, Meinunger and Wilder (2000), these constructions<sup>1</sup> strikingly resemble question-answer pairs (QAPs) involving two interlocutors; compare, for instance, SPCs in (1) and the corresponding question-answer pairs in (2).

- (2) a. Q: What does he like? A: (He likes) syntax.  
b. Q: When did John arrive? A: (John arrived) on Monday.

Den Dikken, Meinunger and Wilder (2000) propose that the SPCs similar to those in (1) syntactically represent QAPs: the *wh*-clause is a question and the postcopular constituent – a full finite IP, usually reduced by ellipsis – is an answer. The structure is given in (3), where the copula spells out the head Top whose specifier houses the question-CP and whose complement is the answer-IP.

- (3) [<sub>TopP</sub> [<sub>CP</sub> What<sub>i</sub> he likes t<sub>i</sub>] [<sub>Top'</sub> **is** [<sub>IP</sub> (he likes) [<sub>XP</sub> syntax]]]]

Although English allows SPCs with a variety of *wh*-operators, it strictly prohibits them with yes/no (*whether*) questions: \**Whether he likes syntax is {yes/he likes syntax/he does}*. Thus, a question arises if this restriction is language-specific or universal. In this paper we argue that UG does not prohibit self-answering reduced question-answer pairs of the yes/no-type and that those are, in fact, attested in Russian.

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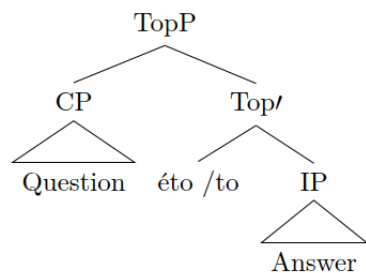
1 Den Dikken, Meinunger and Wilder (2000) call specificational pseudo-clefts of the ‘self-answering question’ kind Type A SPCs. Type B SPCs include a focused XP that is not reduced from IP by ellipsis but is the subject of a copular sentence whose predicate is the *wh*-clause; similarly to specificational copular sentences with two nominal terms, such SPCs typically allow word order alternation XP > *be* > *wh*-clause vs. *wh*-clause > *be* > XP. Type B SPCs are not attested in Russian (i).

(i) \*Karandaš byl čem / kotorym Petja risoval.  
pencil.NOM was what.INST which.INST Petja.NOM drew  
Intended: ‘A pencil was what Petja drew with.’

To fill in the gap in the typology of clefts we juxtapose Russian *èto* focus clefts, illustrated in (4a) and (4b), and *to* topic constructions (4c).

- (4) a. Čem Petja risoval,(tak) èto karandašom.<sup>2</sup>  
 what.INST Petja.NOM draw PTCL this pencil.INST  
 ‘What Petja draw with was a pencil.’
- b. Èto karandašom Petja risoval.  
 this pencil.INST Petja.NOM draw  
 ‘It was a pencil that Petja draw with.’
- c. Karandašom to Petja risoval.  
 pencil.INST that Petja.NOM draw  
 ‘As for the pencil, Petja draw with it.’

We argue that the two kinds of *èto* clefts and the *to* topic constructions are bi-clausal and should be analyzed as QAPs similar to SPCs in English (5). The invariant demonstrative – the proximal *èto* ‘this’ or the distal *to* ‘that’ – spells out the Top head. The *wh*-clause – the question part – that linearly precedes the demonstrative is base-generated in Spec,TopP, while the IP that follows *èto/to* is the answer part merged in Comp,TopP.



(5)

As schematized in (6), in Russian QAPs both the question part and the answer part can be reduced depending on the particular type of the cleft. We further show that sentences with *to* topics include a yes/no question, thus presenting the type of self-answering QAPs that is missing in English.

- (6) a. [<sub>TopP</sub> [<sub>CP</sub> Čem Petja risoval] [<sub>Top'</sub> èto [<sub>IP</sub> Petja risoval karandašom]]].
- b. [<sub>TopP</sub> [<sub>CP</sub> Čem Petja risoval] [<sub>Top'</sub> èto [<sub>IP</sub> karandašom<sub>k</sub> Petja risoval t<sub>k</sub>]]].
- c. [<sub>TopP</sub> [<sub>CP</sub> Karandašom Petja risoval t<sub>i</sub>] [<sub>Top'</sub> to [<sub>IP</sub> karandašom<sub>k</sub> Petja risoval t<sub>k</sub>]]].

The data contribute to the discussion of SPCs as focus/topic constructions across the world’s languages. The syntax of TopP-contained QAPs not only sheds light on Russian information-structurally marked constructions but, in turn, is illuminated by these examples, regarding both the spell-out of Top and the distribution of *wh*- and yes/no questions.

The rest of the paper is structured as follows. Section 2 describes the better-known focus SPCs of the QAP-type in Russian. Section 2.1 considers SPCs with a reduced answer part, while Section 2.2 presents SPCs with a reduced *wh*-question part. Section 3 focuses on *to* topic constructions and provides argumentation for analyzing them as self-answering QAPs with a partially reduced yes/no question and a partially reduced answer. Section 4 examines the correlation between the type of the question and the choice of the demonstrative

2 Glossing abbreviations: ACC = accusative, DAT = dative, INF = infinitive, INST = instrumental, M = masculine, NEG = negation, NOM = nominative, PST = past, PTCL = particle, SG = singular.

manifesting the Top head. Finally, Section 5 addresses the question of whether the focused remnant in clefts of various types undergoes A-bar movement.

## 2 SPCs in Russian: focus clefts

### 2.1 Focus SPCs with a reduced answer part

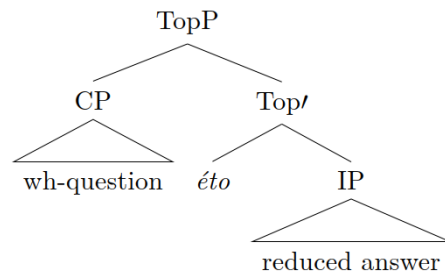
Russian has specificational pseudoclefts (SPCs) with a focused XP of the following two types: (i) with a reduced answer, and (ii) with a reduced *wh*-question. Let us begin by considering the former, since, on the surface, they are parallel to their well-known English counterparts. In this section, we follow the line of argumentation proposed by Den Dikken, Meinunger and Wilder (2000) and mostly expand the analysis outlined by Markman (2008).

Russian SPCs of the first type express identificational focus. They contain a focused XP preceded by an interrogative *wh*-clause; the invariant demonstrative *èto* ‘this’ must be placed between the two and, other than that, no constituent or functional material can intervene. The dialogue question-answer pairs corresponding to the examples in (7) are given in (8).

- (7) a. Čto Petja kupil, (tak) èto kuklu.  
 what.ACC Petja bought PTCL this doll.ACC  
 ‘What Petja bought was a doll.’
- b. Kogda Maša prijexala, (tak) èto v sredu.  
 when Maša arrived PTCL this in Wednesday  
 ‘When Maša arrived was on Wednesday.’
- (8) a. Q: Čto Petja kupil? A: (Petja kupil) kuklu.  
 what Petja bought Petja bought doll.ACC  
 ‘What did Petja buy? (Petja bought) a doll.’
- b. Q: Kogda Maša prijexala?  
 when Maša arrived  
 A: (Maša prijexala) v sredu.  
 Maša arrived in Wednesday  
 ‘When did Maša arrive? (Maša arrived) on Wednesday.’

Similarly to their English counterparts, *èto* SPCs under consideration represent question-answer pairs with a reduced answer part. The *wh*-clause preceding *èto* is a question, located in Spec,TopP, and the focused constituent following *èto* is a part of the reduced answer clause, merged in the complement position of Top (9).<sup>3</sup> We follow Den Dikken (2005; 2006) in analyzing Top as a relator, a functional head that mediates the predication relation established between the question CP (the subject) and the answer IP (the predicate). The difference between English and Russian SPCs is mainly in the manifestation of the Top head: a copula in English vs. a demonstrative pronoun in Russian. The proposed structure derives the correct information structure: the focus on the ‘answer’ phrase is expected, assuming that the portion preceding *èto* is in the spec of TopP (Markman 2008).

3 At this point we follow Den Dikken et al. (2000) and assume that the focused XP is in situ. We address the question of whether it is fronted to the edge of the answer clause in Section 5.



- (9) a.  
 b.  $[_{TopP} [_{CP} \check{C}to \text{ Petja kupil} ] [_{Top'} \grave{e}to [_{IP} \text{ Petja kupil kuklu} ] ] ] ]$

For Russian sentences such as those in (7), it is clearer than it is for their English prose translation that they should be analyzed as self-answering questions. That the *wh*-clause is a question part is evident, first, because of the presence of an unambiguously interrogative pronoun. For instance, the pronoun *kto* ‘who’ is available in SPCs and questions (10a, 10b), but it is not used in relative clauses (10c).

- (10) a. Kto            prijaxal,        (tak) èto    Petja.  
 who.NOM        arrived        PTCL    this    Petja.NOM  
 ‘The person who arrived was Petja.’
- b. Kto            prijaxal?  
 who.NOM        arrived  
 ‘Who arrived?’
- c. Čelovek,        kotoryj / \*kto        prijaxal,    byl    Petja.  
 person.NOM    which        who.NOM    arrived    was    Petja  
 ‘The person who arrived was Petja.’

Second, *èto* SPCs, similarly to questions, allow multiple *wh*-operators, while relative clauses with multiple pronouns are prohibited.

- (11) a. Čto            gde    Petja    kupil, (tak) èto    kuklu  
 what.ACC        where Petja    bought PTCL    this    doll.ACC  
 v        magazine.  
 in        shop  
 ‘What Petja bought where was a doll in a shop.’
- b. Čto            gde    Petja    kupil?  
 what.ACC        where Petja    bought  
 ‘What did Petja buy where?’
- c. \*Podarok,        čto    gde    Petja    kupil,  
 gift    what    where Petja    bought  
 byl    kukla (v        magazine).  
 was    doll    in        shop  
 Intended: ‘The gift that where Petja bought was a doll in a shop.’

Under the assumption that the question CP and the answer IP are combined within a TopP with the head Top serving as a relator (Den Dikken et al. 2000; Markman 2008), we can further explain why no copula or negation can be inserted between the *wh*-clause and the

focused XP. Since predication, in general, is local, Top (*èto*) can be the only functional head between the question part (the subject) and the answer part (the predicate).

- (12) a. \*Čto Petja kupil (tak) èto byla / jest' kuklu / kukla.  
 what.ACC Petja bought PTCL this was / be doll.ACC doll.NOM  
 Intended: 'What Petja bought was a doll.'
- b. \*Kogda Maša prijexala, ne èto v sredu.  
 when Maša arrived NEG this in Wednesday  
 Intended: 'When Maša arrived was not on Wednesday.'

That the focused XP is a part of the answer syntactically parallel to the question is supported by the following empirical observations. First, the nominal XP in an *èto* SPC must always have the same case as the question word, thus exhibiting case connectivity (7a). This entails that the XP is structurally linked to the appropriate case assigner in a syntactic environment similar to that of the question clause.

Second, Den Dikken et al. (2000) notice that extraction from the focused XP in English SPCs is prohibited: \**What<sub>i</sub> do you think that [what John doesn't have] is [any pictures of t<sub>i</sub>].* They explain the restriction in terms of the ungrammaticality of 'incomplete' answers with an unbound variable. This is also true for the Russian *èto* clefts under consideration; note that, as demonstrated in (13a), left branch extraction is allowed in Russian, thus the ungrammaticality of (13b) cannot be due to an illicit movement out of a DP.

- (13) a. Kakuju<sub>i</sub> Petja kupil [ t<sub>i</sub> kuklu]?  
 which.ACC Petja bought doll.ACC  
 'Which doll did Petja buy?'
- b. \*Kakuju<sub>i</sub> [čto Petja kupil èto [ t<sub>i</sub> kuklu]]?  
 which.ACC what.ACC Petja bought this doll.ACC  
 Intended: 'Which doll was what Petja bought?'

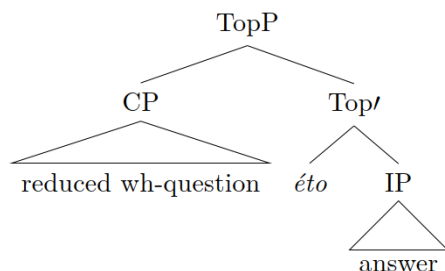
With these considerations in mind, we can conclude that Russian has SPCs of the QAP type. In particular, English-type pseudoclefts are attested where the question part is a *wh*-clause and the answer part is reduced with only the focused XP being spelled out. Let us proceed by expanding the data-set and considering the more unusual kinds of SPCs.

## 2.2 Focus SPCs with a reduced question part

In Russian focus SPCs the *wh*-question portion can be wholly elided when it is unambiguously recoverable from the context. Wholesale ellipsis of the *wh*-question results in an SPC of the second type, where *èto* is sentence-initial (14). The answer clause following *èto* typically spells out in full, with the focused XP located in its left periphery (Spec,FocP, following Dyakonova 2009), hence to the immediate right of *èto*.

- (14) a. Èto kuklu Petja kupil.  
 this doll.ACC Petja bought  
 'It was a doll that Petja bought.'
- b. Èto v sredu Maša prijexala.  
 this in Wednesday Maša arrived  
 'It was on Wednesday when Maša arrived.'

We follow Geist and Błaszczak (2000) and Markman (2008) and argue that these clefts are bi-clausal question-answer pairs with an underlying structure (15a) identical to that in (9a) but with a wholly elided *wh*-question part.<sup>4</sup>



(15) a.

b. [TopP [CP ~~Čto Petja kupil~~] [Top' **ěto** [IP kuklu<sub>k</sub> Petja kupil t<sub>k</sub> ]]]

Considering the “invisible” question part of such clefts, to demonstrate that it is structurally present, we examine sentences with several focused XPs. Even though multiple foci in principle are available (for instance, in answers to a question with multiple *wh*-operators), there can only be one *ěto*. This is straightforwardly accounted for under the proposed analysis: there is a single Top head spelled out as a demonstrative pronoun that connects a (multiple) *wh*-question and an answer together.

(16) a. Kto kogo poceloval? Literally: ‘Who whom kissed?’

**Ěto** Petja (\***ěto**) Mašu poceloval.

this Petja.NOM this Maša.ACC kissed

‘It was Petja and Maša who kissed.’ (‘Petja kissed Maša.’)

b. [TopP [CP ~~Kto kogo poceloval~~] [Top' **ěto** [IP Petja Mašu poceloval]]]

The proposed analysis brings together *ěto* clefts of both types and allows us to account for them in a uniform way.

### 3 Russian *to* topic clefts

The third kind of self-answering QAPs that we would like to consider and, perhaps, the most interesting one from a typological perspective, are the so-called *to* topic constructions. On the surface, sentences with a *to* topic resemble clauses with an ordinary left dislocated topic (YP), the only difference being the invariant demonstrative *to* ‘that’<sup>5</sup> that immediately follows the topicalized constituent.

(17) a. Krasivuju kuklu **to** Petja kupil.  
 beautiful doll.ACC that Petja bought  
 ‘As for the beautiful doll, Petja bought it.’

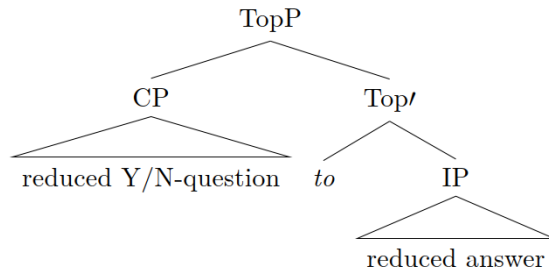
4 Several existing analyses of *ěto* clauses that are under discussion in this section are based on the assumption that they are monoclausal constructions with a left-edge focus (King 1993; Junghanns 1997, i.a). Such an approach is challenged by the data presented in (16); at the same time, no evidence has been presented in support for it, that would undermine the bi-clausal analysis.

5 *To* is identical to the nominative N.SG form of the distal demonstrative *tot* ‘that’. Although pronominal demonstratives in Russian exhibit full concord with the modified noun (*to boloto* ‘that.N.SG lake.N.SG’ but *tot dom* ‘that.M.SG house.M.SG’), in topic constructions *to* is invariable and never agrees with the head of the topicalized phrase; see Scott (2012) arguing that the invariant *to* is a grammaticalized particle in Modern Russian.

- b. Krasivuju kuklu Petja kupil.  
 beautiful doll.ACC Petja bought  
 ‘The beautiful doll, Petja bought it.’

*To* topics are usually analyzed together with left-edge topicalization/focalization as A-bar movement of a phrase within a single clause (McCoy 2002; Arregi 2003; Scott 2012, i.a.). This is partially justified as both types of constructions have similar information structures and obligatorily exhibit case connectivity (17a), which may result from the topicalized YP being base-generated within the clause to the left of it.

However, we argue that sentences with a *to* topic are bi-clausal and should be analyzed as involving a Question-Answer Pair with a yes/no question, in parallel with focus SPCs in Russian and in English and in striking contrast with monoclausal topic/focus constructions.



- (18) a.  
 b. [<sub>TopP</sub> [<sub>CP</sub> Kuklu Petja kupil t<sub>i</sub>] [<sub>Top'</sub> to [<sub>IP</sub> kuklu<sub>k</sub> Petja kupil t<sub>k</sub> ]]]

- (19) Q: Petja kupil kuklu? A: Da, Petja kupil kuklu.  
 Petja bought doll.ACC yes Petja bought doll.ACC  
 ‘Did Petja buy a doll? Yes, Petja bought a doll.’

Let us discuss the empirical differences between monoclausal topics and *to* topics and demonstrate how they can be accounted for by the proposed bi-clausal analysis for the latter. Firstly, there can be only one *to* topic in a clause, although, in general, multiple topics are allowed. This is expected under the assumption that in clefts of the QAP-type a single Top head manifested as the *to* demonstrative relating the question part to the answer part.

- (20) a. Maše to kuklu (\*to) Petja kupil.  
 Maša.DAT that doll.ACC that Petja bought  
 ‘As for Maša, as for a doll, Petja bought it to her.’  
 b. Maše kuklu Petja kupil.  
 Maša.DAT doll.ACC Petja bought  
 ‘To Maša, a doll, Petja bought it to her.’

Secondly, *to* topics must always be at the very left edge of a sentence, preceding foci and unmarked topics. Aside from the topic YP, the rest of the question CP is elided. As for the answer IP, it may contain foci and unmarked topics at the left periphery; however, we follow Den Dikken et al. (2000) and assume that there is no structure above the “main” TopP (with the *to* Top head) where those constituents could move to.

- (21) a. Maše to KUKLU Petja kupil.  
 Maša.DAT that doll.ACC Petja bought  
 ‘As for Maša, it was A DOLL that Petja bought her.’

- b. \*KUKLU Maše to Petja kupil.  
 doll.ACC Maša.DAT that Petja bought  
 Intended: ‘As for Maša, it was A DOLL that Petja bought her.’

Thus, these properties are accounted for under assumption that the topicalized constituent in front of *to* is a part of a reduced question clause merged in Spec,TopP, while the rest of the sentence is a reduced answer clause in the complement of the Top head.

The analysis further provides an explanation for the peculiar behavior of *libo* and *by to ni bylo* ‘wh-ever’ indefinite pronouns. These pronouns are negative polarity items that are as a rule illicit in affirmative clauses (22) (Pereltsvaig 2000, i.a.).

- (22) a. \*Čto-libo Petja kupil.  
 something.ACC Petja bought  
 Intended: ‘Petja bought something.’
- b. \*Kakuju by to ni bylo mašinu Petja kupil.  
 whichever car.ACC Petja bought  
 Intended: ‘Some car, Petja bought.’
- c. \*Petja kupil kakuju by to ni bylo mašinu.  
 Petja bought whichever car.ACC  
 Intended: ‘Petja bought some car.’

However, they are acceptable in questions (23) and as *to* topics (24).

- (23) a. ?Čto-libo Petja kupil?  
 something.ACC Petja bought  
 ‘Did Petja buy anything?’
- b. Kakuju by to ni bylo mašinu Petja kupil?  
 whichever car.ACC Petja bought  
 ‘Did Petja buy any car?’
- (24) a. ?Čto-libo to Petja kupil.  
 something.ACC that Petja bought  
 ‘Indeed, Petja bought something.’
- b. Kakuju by to ni bylo mašinu to Petja kupil.  
 whichever car.ACC that Petja bought  
 ‘Indeed, Petja bought some car.’

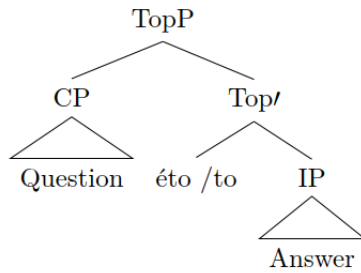
The patterning of *to* topics with questions regarding the distribution of these NPIs is expected if the topic preceding *to* is merged in an interrogative clause. Thus, these data support the proposed bi-clausal analysis, whereby topic XPs accompanied with *to* are located within the question part of the cleft sentence.

#### 4 The Top head: The choice of the demonstrative

##### 4.1 Correlation between the question and the demonstrative

The analysis proposed in this paper allows us to approach *èto* foci and *to* topics in a unified way. All the constructions under consideration uniformly involve juxtapositions of a question and an answer (25), with ellipsis reducing either or both of the constituent clauses.





(25)

While similar analyses for focus clefts in Slavic languages as QAPs have been proposed by Geist and Błaszczak (2000) and Markman (2008), the QAP approach to *to* topic constructions outlined in this paper differs from commonly accepted monoclausal analyses in terms of A-bar topicalization. As we have demonstrated, the bi-clausal approach provides a uniform description for all “non-canonical” topic and focus constructions in Russian and accounts for the differences between them and regular left-edge topics/foci. From a broader perspective, analyzing *to* topic constructions as specificational pseudo-clefts of the answer-question type provides the necessary support for the idea that “self-answering questions” are not restricted to *wh*-interrogatives, since *to* topics involve “self-answering questions” of the yes/no type, and allows us to fill in an existing gap in the typology of clefts.

The key variables in such self-answering QAPs are the nature of the question (*wh*- vs. yes/no-question) and, concomitantly, the choice of demonstrative (*èto* ‘this’ vs. *to* ‘that’) inserted in Top (26).

(26)

	Spec, TopP	Top <sup>0</sup>	Comp, TopP
English SPCs	<i>wh</i> -question	<i>be</i> copula	maximally reduced answer
<i>èto</i> clefts, Type I	<i>wh</i> -question	<i>èto</i> ‘this’	maximally reduced answer
<i>èto</i> clefts, Type II	maximally reduced <i>wh</i> -question	<i>èto</i> ‘this’	complete answer
<i>to</i> topics	reduced yes/no question	<i>to</i> ‘that’	reduced answer

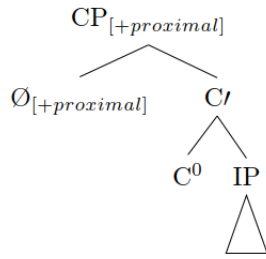
The distribution of *èto* and *to* in SPCs in Russian is tied to the nature of the question in the QAP. Selection of the distal demonstrative (*to*) correlates with the presence of a yes/no question in Spec,TopP. The proximal demonstrative (*èto*) is selected in the presence of a *wh*-question. In what follows we will examine this correlation and present a formal explanation for it in terms of feature specification of the question CP, the answer IP, and the demonstrative.

#### 4.2 The Top head is determined by the question part

We argue that the choice of the demonstrative depends on the location of the feature [+proximal] in the QAP, as follows. We propose that, while *wh*-questions are not marked for proximality, yes/no questions are [+proximal]. To be more precise, it is the silent operator in Spec,CP in yes/no questions that is specified as [+proximal]. Here, we draw a parallel between Russian and English. The overt y/n-question operator of English, *whether*, is the [+wh] form of *either*, which occurs on the first member of disjunctions. In the unmarked case,

coordination of two demonstratives with opposite values for [+proximal] involves the proximal demonstrative as the first member and the distal one as the second: *either this or that*, not *#either that or this*.<sup>6</sup> Because *either* (and, by extension, *whether* and its null allomorph) in coordinations of demonstratives accompanies a proximal element, we hypothesize that it itself is specified as [+proximal]. We further assume that this is true for yes/no questions cross-linguistically.

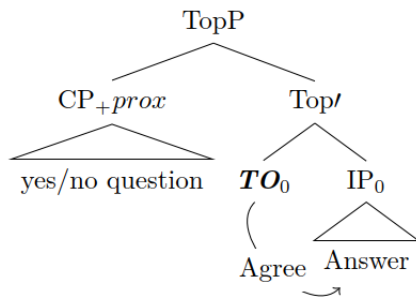
With the y/n-operator occupying Spec,CP and entertaining a Spec-Head relation with C, the [+proximal] feature propagates to the yes/no-CP as a whole via head-to-phrase percolation.



(27)

That yes/no questions are [+proximal] is further supported by the fact that, unlike *wh*-questions (which typically concern a previously established context), yes/no questions are often discourse-new: when a new entity is introduced into the discourse it can be accompanied by a proximal demonstrative, not by a distal one (*This/\*that topic I'm going to tell you about will fascinate you*).

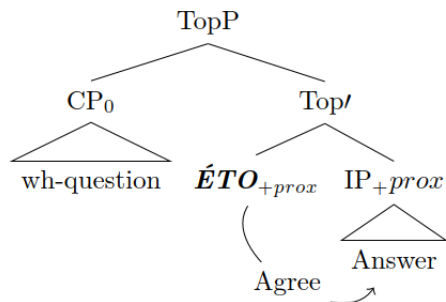
We argue that QAPs are oppositive with respect to the feature [proximal]: whatever the specification of the question clause for this feature, the answer clause will have the opposite value for it. Of the two clauses in Spec,TopP and the complement of Top, only one can be marked [+proximal]. In topic clefts, where Spec,TopP is occupied by a [+proximal] yes/no-question, the answer clause is NOT specified as [+proximal], and hence the agreeing Top<sup>0</sup> will be the distal *to* 'that': we assume that the demonstrative in Top<sup>0</sup> entertains a downward-Agree relation with its complement (the answer clause) and bears the same feature.



(28)

By contrast, in focus SPCs, when Spec,TopP is occupied by a non-proximal *wh*-question, the answer clause and the agreeing Top<sup>0</sup> must – given that questions and their answers have the opposite specifications for proximity – be [+proximal]; thus, the proximal demonstrative *èto* 'this' is selected.

6 Notice that, although the sequence *either that or this* can be used if accompanied by ostension it is the marked option, unlikely to lead to grammaticalization. It is not related to the SPCs under discussion, where the demonstratives are not used deictically.



(29)

## 5 Movement of the remnant or string ellipsis?

The proposal presented in this paper heavily relies on the assumption that in SPCs of the question-answer pair type a part of the question and/or the answer can be elided. Thus, the question remains of the nature of such deletion: Is this constituent “move-and-delete” ellipsis or non-constituent “string” ellipsis with the XP/YP staying in-situ? As will be demonstrated in this section, the three kinds of reduced self-answering QAPs attested in Russian behave differently in this respect; in what follows, we will discuss them briefly one after another.

Let us begin by considering *èto* focus SPCs with a reduced answer. We argue that, in these constructions, the focused XP in the answer IP is not fronted and stays in situ, with the rest of the clause being deleted via string ellipsis (for in situ analyses of ellipsis cf. Morgan 1973; Napoli 1982; Wilder 1997, and recent works by Bruening (2015), Abe (2016), Ott and Struckmeier (2018)). Support for this comes from the behavior of focused VPs. Left-edge movement of a VP with an internal argument is generally prohibited in Russian (30); although a detailed examination of the problem lies beyond the limits of this paper, this empirical observation can help us to identify those constructions that obligatorily involve A-bar movement.

- (30) \**[Kupil knigu]<sub>i</sub> Petja t<sub>i</sub>.*  
 bought book.ACC Petja  
 ‘Petja bought a book.’

*Èto* SPCs under consideration are not restricted and allow focusing a VP (31), similarly to fragment answers (32). This suggests that in such pseudoclefts the focused XP does not undergo A-bar fronting but stays in its original position. Since movement of the focused remnant would be required for the purpose of constituent ellipsis and since left-edge movement of a VP containing an internal argument is prohibited in Russian, we conclude that Russian *èto* SPCs with a reduced answer clause involve string ellipsis.

- (31) a. Čto Petja sdelal <sup>?</sup>(tak) èto pročital knigu.  
 what Petja did PTCL this read.PST book.ACC  
 ‘What Peter did was read a book.’
- b. [[Čto Petja sdelal] [(tak) èto [ ~~Petja pročital~~ knigu]]]
- (32) Q: Čto Petja sdelal? A: Pročital knigu.  
 what Petja did read.PST book.ACC  
 ‘What did Petja do? He read a book.’

In contrast, in *èto* focus SPCs with a reduced question the XP exhibits properties of a fronted constituent (King 1993; Junghanns 1997; Geist and Błaszczak 2000; Markman 2008; Reeve 2012). We follow Dyakonova (2009) and assume that it undergoes A-bar movement to a

dedicated focus projection on top of IP in the answer clause. Firstly, case connectivity is obligatory; consider ungrammatical (33). This indicates that the focused DP is located, at some point in the derivation, in the case-assigning domain and remains linked to it via a trace.

- (33) \***Èto** kukla Petja kupil.  
 this doll.NOM Petja.NOM bought  
 Intended: ‘It was a doll that Petja bought.’

Secondly, only constituents that can undergo A-bar movement appear in such SPCs; thus, the *èto* clefts under consideration (in stark contrast to *èto* clefts with a reduced answer) cannot involve a focused transitive VP.

- (34) \***Èto** pročital knigu Petja.  
 this read.PST book.ACC Petja.NOM  
 Intended: ‘What Petja did was read a book.’

- (35) \*[[~~Èto Petja sdelal~~] [ **èto** [ {pročital knigu}<sub>i</sub> Petja t<sub>i</sub>]]]

Thirdly, Weak Crossover effects are present in *èto* clefts with a reduced question part and in monoclausal constructions with focus-fronting, which implies that in both cases the focused XP constituent moves over the pronoun (36).

- (36) a. \***Èto** Petju<sub>i</sub> ego<sub>i</sub> vrač priglasil t<sub>i</sub>.  
 this Petja.ACC his doctor invited  
 Intended: ‘It was Petja who was invited by his doctor.’  
 b. \*Petju<sub>i</sub> ego<sub>i</sub> vrač priglasil t<sub>i</sub>.  
 Petja.ACC his doctor invited  
 Intended: ‘It was Petja who was invited by his doctor.’

The two kinds of focus SPCs are parallel to the two types of complete answers to *wh*-questions, which suggests that there is a general tendency regulated by some pragmatic or semantic factors. *Èto* clefts with a reduced answer are usually identificational (informative); in contrast, *èto* clefts with a reduced question often express contrastive focus.<sup>7</sup> The word order in an informative answer to a *wh*-question is the neutral one: *Petja kupil kuklu* (37). However, if there is a set of alternatives and the answer is contrastive, the preferred order is the one involving left dislocation of the focused XP (38).

- (37) A: (I do not know) what Petja bought.  
 B: Petja kupil kuklu. / #Kuklu Petja kupil.  
 Petja bought doll.ACC doll.ACC Petja bought  
 ‘Petja bought a doll.’

<sup>7</sup> *Èto* SPCs without an overt question part can also appear in presentational contexts; in this case, the whole constituent that follows *èto* is focused and the cleft has no contrast. We tentatively suggest that, structure-wise, suchthetic clefts are identical to contrastive *èto* clefts with the elided question being ‘What happened?’ (i); however, see an alternative analysis by Kimmelman (2009), who argues that inthetic sentences *èto* is an anaphoric pronoun referring to a previously described situation.

- (i) a. Cto slučilos? **Èto** Petja prišel.  
 what happened this Petja came  
 ‘What happened? Petja came.’  
 b. [<sub>TopP</sub> [<sub>CP</sub> ~~Èto slučilos~~] [<sub>Top'</sub> **èto** [<sub>IP</sub> Petja prišel]]]

- (38) Kuklu Petja kupil(, a ne knigu).  
 doll.ACC Petja bought and not book.ACC  
 ‘Petja bought a doll, but not a book.’

Turning our attention to *to* topic clefts, we argue that topic YPs also undergo A-bar movement, characteristic of aboutness/contrastive topics. Firstly, *to* topics are restricted with regard to transitive VPs.

- (39) a. \*Kupil jabloki **to** Petja (kupil).  
 bought apples.ACC that Petja bought  
 Intended: ‘As for buying apples, Petja did that.’  
 b. \*Kupil jabloki **to** Petja (kupil jabloki / ix / nemnogo).  
 bought apples.ACC that Petja bought apples.ACC them some.ACC  
 Intended: ‘As for buying apples, Petja did that.’

Secondly, *to* topics appear to be sensitive to syntactic islands.

- (40) a. \*Masinu<sub>i</sub> **to** ja znaju [čeloveka, [kotoryj kupil t<sub>i</sub>]].  
 car.ACC that I know man which bought  
 Intended: ‘As for a car, I know a man who bought it/one.’  
 b. \*Mašinu<sub>i</sub> **to** Petja prišel, [čtoby kupit’ t<sub>i</sub>].  
 car.ACC that Petja came so.that buy.INF  
 Intended: ‘As for a car, Petja came to buy it/one.’

Taking these restrictions into account, one may conclude that the topic YP is fronted in the question and/or the answer part of the sentence. The three options are schematized in (41). In the first case (41a) the topic YP moves to an A-bar position both in the question part and in the answer part. The question is then reduced by a constituent ellipsis while the answer is subject to topic drop, independently attested in Russian (Franks 1995). In the second case (41b) the YP is fronted only in the question part, while in the third case (41c) the YP is fronted only in the answer part, the question part being presumably reduced by string ellipsis.

- (41) a. [<sub>TopP</sub> [<sub>CP</sub> Kuklu<sub>i</sub> Petja kupil t<sub>i</sub>]] [<sub>Top</sub> **to** [<sub>IP</sub> kuklu<sub>k</sub> Petja kupil t<sub>k</sub>]]]  
 b. [<sub>TopP</sub> [<sub>CP</sub> Kuklu<sub>i</sub> Petja kupil t<sub>i</sub>]] [<sub>Top</sub> **to** [<sub>IP</sub> Petja kupil kuklu]]]  
 c. [<sub>TopP</sub> [<sub>CP</sub> Petja kupil kuklu]] [<sub>Top</sub> **to** [<sub>IP</sub> kuklu<sub>k</sub> Petja kupil t<sub>k</sub>]]]

At this point we do not have enough evidence to support one of these analyses over the other two and we leave this issue to be examined by future research, although we find the “parallel fronting” approach (41a) the most plausible from a theoretical point of view.

## 6 Conclusion

In this paper, we joined the discussion of specificational pseudoclefts across the world’s languages and addressed the question of whether those are universally restricted to *wh*-clauses and can never involve a polar interrogative. We examined the so called *to* topic constructions in Russian comparing them, on the one hand, to *èto* focus clefts and, on the other hand, to monoclausal left-edge topics. We demonstrated that both *èto* foci and *to* topics should be analyzed in terms of bi-clausal structures, more specifically, as self-answering reduced question-answer pairs, along the lines of Den Dikken, Meinunger and Wilder 2000. Crucially,

while *èto* focus sentences involve a *wh*-question, *to* topic sentences contain a (partially) elided yes/no question, thus filling the final gap in the typology of reduced self-answering questions.

Though many questions remain to be answered, we believe that the Russian data considered here contribute significantly to the general study of pseudoclefts by presenting the kind of clefts that has not yet been discovered. One possible direction for future research is to explore whether there are other languages allowing for similar yes/no-type constructions. For instance, so-called clausal question-answer pairs produced by the same speaker that involve a *wh*- or yes/no question are attested in several sign languages (42); see, for example, Davidson, Caponigro and Mayberry 2008 on ASL and Kimmelman 2014, Kimmelman and Vink 2017 on Sign Language of the Netherlands.

(42) *Question-answer pairs forming a complex sentences in ASL*

MARY THINK [I LAUGH, YES/NO].

‘Mary thinks I {was / was not} laughing.’

Although it seems plausible to analyze the bracketed portion of such constructions as a self-answering QAP (cf. Petronio 1991; Wilbur 1994; Grolla 2004), many researchers argue that the availability of polar questions distinguishes the clausal QAPs significantly from pseudoclefts in such languages as English and use this as an argument against such an approach. The novel Russian data may provide a valuable comparison and motivate more thorough re-examination of examples similar to (42).

As noted by Den Dikken (2017), a possible reason for why English, for instance, prohibits yes/no type SPCs may be that the interrogative clause in an SPC blends the properties of root and embedded questions, and that English polar interrogatives are not suitable for such a mixed behavior, being either unambiguously root or unambiguously non-root. In Russian, in contrast, the difference between root and embedded questions is much less profound. From this point of view, the fact that Russian but not English allows self-answering QAPs of the yes/no type becomes understandable. Future research should look into the question of whether the (un)availability of self-answering QAPs is generally correlated with the presence/absence of a robust root/non-root distinction in questions.

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