

Russian èto in wh-questions

ALDAN YERBALANOV¹ AND TATIANA PHILIPPOVA²

¹*Independent researcher*

²*The Hebrew University of Jerusalem*

ABSTRACT

This paper deals with the semantic and syntactic analysis of the particle-like element *èto* in wh-questions, which occurs either preceding the fronted wh-pronoun or following it, the two options being available under slightly different pragmatic conditions, although resulting in similar interpretations. We compare these instances of *èto* to those occurring in cleft-like sentences, which have received most of the attention in the generative literature, and conclude that they are essentially the same creature, namely, an adverb adjoining to a clausal projection above the TP. Our analysis is informed by the interpretation of the relevant sentences in Russian and by parallels existing between *èto* and other focus-sensitive particles in Russian, Czech, and Polish.

KEYWORDS wh-questions · clefts · non-standard questions · focus particles

1 INTRODUCTION

The element *èto* in Russian is quite versatile, as has been known at least since Paducheva (1982). It is originally the nominative/accusative form of the neuter proximal demonstrative pronoun and is still used as such, as shown in (1):

- (1) Uberi èto otsjuda!
 remove this.NOM/ACC from.here
 ‘Put it away from here!’

Furthermore, it appears as a pseudo-copula in identificational (binominative) sentences, as in (2):

- (2) Romaška èto polevoj cvetok
 daisy ÈTO field.ADJ flower
 ‘Daisy is a field flower.’

It is also found in cleft-like structures of several types. These include what Kimmelman (2009) calls **focus pseudoclefts** (3)–(4) and **thetic pseudoclefts** (5), and also what Burukina & den Dikken (2020) call “specificational pseudoclefts with a reduced answer part” (6).

- (3) Skaži, što èto menja ty xočeš v mužja.
 Say COMP ÈTO me you want in husbands
 ‘Tell them it’s me you want for a husband.’
 (adapted from Vilenskaja’s translation of Martin (2002))
- (4) A: Opjat’ čašku razbila?!
 again cup broke
 ‘You broke a cup again?’
 B: Èto Katja čašku razbila(, a ne ja).
 ÈTO Katya cup broke but NEG I
 ‘It’s Katya who broke the cup(, not me).’

- (5) A: Čto slučilos?
 what happened
 ‘What just happened?’
 B: Èto Katja uronila čašku.
 ÈTO Katya dropped cup
 ‘Katya dropped a cup.’
- (6) Kogda Maša priexala, (tak) èto v sredu.
 when Masha arrived so ÈTO in Wednesday
 ‘It was on Wednesday that Masha arrived.’

At least two languages unrelated to Russian have originally purely demonstrative elements that have evolved a similar set of functions: the Chinese copula *shi* (Murphy 2014), which used to be a demonstrative in Old Chinese (Li & Thompson 1977), and the Hebrew demonstrative/copula *zeh* (Kagan 2016)¹. The development from a demonstrative to a copula on the one hand (Rutkowski 2006) and from a copula to a focus marker on the other (Heine & Reh 1984) is cross-linguistically well-attested.

The general question is then what these uses of *èto* have in common and whether the status (category and syntactic position) of at least some of these instances is the same. A more specific issue that we explore here is the category and syntactic position of *èto* in wh-questions which we dub the wh-*èto*. As illustrated in (7) and (8), wh-*èto* is adjacent to the wh-element, either following or preceding it:

- (7) Kuda èto Lena ušla?
 where ÈTO Lena went.away
 ‘Where did Lena go (I wonder)?’²
- (8) Èto kuda Lena ušla?
 ÈTO where Lena went.away
 ‘Where did Lena go (I don’t believe you/I am surprised by what you just said)?’

An important treatment of wh-*èto* is given by Pekelis (2019). In particular, she distinguishes between the **postpositive** and the **prepositive** wh-*èto*, as seen in (7) and (8) respectively; we follow her terminology.

The two may optionally co-occur, although, as Pekelis demonstrates, the conditions for the prepositive wh-*èto* are stricter (we return to this later).

- (9) Èto kuda èto Lena ušla?
 ÈTO where Lena ÈTO went.away
 ‘Where did Lena go (I don’t believe you/I am surprised by what you just said)?’

The claim we make in this paper is that the postpositive wh-*èto* is a focus particle: moreover, it is the same particle *èto* as the focus cleft *èto* (Kimmelman 2009). This is by no means a novel claim: it has been entertained by Kimmelman himself (Kimmelman 2013: p.331) and explicitly made by Pekelis (2019). Furthermore, Šimík (2009: p.3) makes a similar suggestion for the Czech *to*. However, a comprehensive formal analysis such as the one we put forward here has not been proposed before.

The remainder of the paper is organized as follows: §2 deals with the syntactic and semantic properties of the wh-*èto*; §3 describes the distribution and interpretation of the focus cleft *èto* and lays out our syntactic analysis, and §4 presents a summary of the study and questions for further research.

¹Although Kagan entertains the hypothesis that the development of the Modern Hebrew *zeh* was influenced by contact with Slavic languages.

²See Huehnergard & Pat-El (2007) for a discussion of similar constructions in Biblical Hebrew and Classical Arabic.

2 THE WH-ÈTO

2.1 THE POSTPOSITIVE WH-ÈTO AND THE PREPOSITIVE WH-ÈTO

Pekelis (2019) describes the differences between the postpositive and the prepositive *wh-èto*. First, the postpositive *wh-èto* can be uttered ‘out-of-the-blue’:

- (10) Čego èto on na obed ne prišël?
 what ÈTO he on lunch NEG came
 (Context: the speaker’s son usually has lunch at her place, but he didn’t come today.) ‘Why didn’t he come over for lunch, I wonder?’

Importantly, this question may even be uttered by the speaker to themselves or as an inner monologue; it does not require a distinct addressee.

On the other hand, the prepositive *èto* requires an explicit antecedent in the discourse (compare (11) and (12)) or in the immediate “here and now” (see (13)):

- (11) A: Ja včera vernulsja iz Kazani
 I yesterday returned from Kazan
 ‘I came back from Kazan yesterday’
 B: (*Èto) kak tebe tam ponravilos’?
 ÈTO how you there appealed
 ‘How did you like it?’ (Pekelis 2019: p.4)
- (12) A: Mne očen’ ponravilas’ Kazan.
 me very appealed Kazan
 ‘I liked Kazan a lot.’
 B: Èto čem ona tebe ponravilas’?
 ÈTO what it you appealed
 ‘And just what did you like about it?’ (Pekelis 2019: p.4)
- (13) Èto sejčas kogo zvali?
 ÈTO now who called
 ‘Who did they just call for?’

As can also be seen from (13), the prepositive *wh-èto* can be separated from the *wh*-word by certain adverbs. The postpositive *wh-èto* cannot:

- (14) Kogo èto ty sejčas pozval?
 who ÈTO you now called
 ‘Who did you just call for?’
- (15) Kogo ty sejčas (*èto) pozval?
 who you now ÈTO called
 ‘Who did you just call for?’

The pronoun *ty* ‘you’ and other monosyllabic personal pronouns, as well as the emphatic particle *že* (Valova & Slioussar 2017), can intervene between the *wh*-word and *èto*, but this is likely due to prosodic reasons. A subject that is phonologically heavy cannot do the same:

- (16) Kogo ty èto sejčas pozval?
 who you ÈTO now called
 ‘Who did you just call for?’
- (17) Kogo že èto ty sejčas pozval?
 who EMPH ÈTO you now called
 ‘Who did you just call for?’
- (18) *Kogo Anton èto sejčas pozval?
 who Anton ÈTO now called

‘Who did Anton just call for?’

The prepositive *wh-èto*, unlike the postpositive *wh-èto*, is restricted to matrix clauses:

- (19) Prezident Yel'tsin sprosil ego, počemu èto prestupnost' vozrosła.
 president Yeltsin asked him why ÈTO crime increased
 ‘The President Yeltsin asked him why the crime rate had increased.’
 (adapted from a Russian National Corpus example, cited by Pekelis 2019, p.5)
- (20) *Prezident Yel'tsin sprosil ego, èto počemu prestupnost' vozrosła.
 president Yeltsin asked him ÈTO why crime increased
 ‘The President Yeltsin asked him why the crime rate had increased.’ (ibid.)

This distinguishes the prepositive *wh-èto* from *èto* in focus, (21), andthetic pseudoclefts (22), which can be embedded freely:

- (21) Skaži, čto èto menja ty xočeš v mužja.
 Say COMP ÈTO me you want in husbands
 ‘Tell them it’s me you want for a husband.’
 (adapted from Vilenskaja’s translation of Martin 2002)
- (22) Vasja dumal, čto èto prišla mat'.
 Vasya thought COMP ÈTO came mother
 ‘Vasya thought that it (e.g. the sound) was his mother arriving.’

2.2 THE SEMANTICS OF THE WH-ÈTO

Obenauer (2004) in his study of *wh*-questions in Pagotto, a Northern Italian idiom, introduces three types of ‘non-standard questions’: ‘surprise-disapproval questions’, ‘can’t-find-the-value-of-*x* questions’ and ‘rhetorical questions’, or SDQs, CFVQs and RQs respectively. We find that the *wh-èto* is in fact used in SDQs, CFVQs and RQs. Standard questions, whose function is merely to ask for information, do not admit it. Compare the infelicitous questions with *èto* in (23)–(24), (26) and (29) to the felicitous (25), (27)–(28) and (30)–(31), respectively.

- (23) Kto (#èto) izобрèl telefon?
 who ÈTO invented telephone
 ‘Who invented the telephone?’
- (24) Kogda (#èto) izobreli telefon?
 when ÈTO invented telephone
 ‘When was the telephone invented?’
- (25) Kogda èto izobreli mašinu vremeni?
 when ÈTO invented machine time
 (Context: A. said she has met Alexander Graham Bell. I know that Bell died long before A. was born. I’m asking her:) ‘Hey, when did they invent the time machine? (There is no time machine).’
- (26) Čto (#èto) vy vidite?
 what ÈTO you.PL see
 (Context: for example, a vision test.) ‘What do you see?’
- (27) Čto èto vy vidite?
 what ÈTO you.PL see
 ‘What do you see?’ (Something I cannot see and I’m frightened or perplexed)
- (28) Èto čto vy takoe uvideli?
 ÈTO what you.PL such saw
 ‘What did you just see that was so unusual?’

- (29) S kem (#èto) ty v poslednij raz perepisyvalsja?
with who ÈTO you in last time corresponded
(I am simply interested in the answer) ‘Whom did you text last?’
- (30) S kem èto ty v poslednij raz perepisyvalsja?
with who ÈTO you in last time corresponded
‘Whom did you text last?’ (Somehow I know that you sent them some confidential information you were not supposed to disclose, or I’ve seen something that makes me suspect you are cheating)
- (31) Èto ty sečas s kem perepisyvalsja?
ÈTO you now with who corresponded
‘Whom did you just text?’ (Somehow I know that you sent them some confidential information you were not supposed to disclose, or I’ve seen something that makes me suspect you are cheating)

2.2.1 SURPRISE AND DISAPPROVAL

Wh-èto is felicitous in surprise/disapproval questions, see the following examples:

- (32) Kuda (#èto) edem?
where ÈTO drive
(Context: the speaker is a taxi driver, the addressee is their client.) ‘So where are we going?’
- (33) Kuda (èto) my edem?
where ÈTO we drive
(Context: the taxi client is now the speaker. They see that the driver is taking a weird route, which does not seem to be correct.) ‘Hey, where are we going?’

The two questions differ in how they are expected to be answered. In (32), the speaker expects an answer in the spirit of ‘(We’re going to) Times Square’, in (33), however, the speaker expects something like ‘Sorry, wrong route’.

Some questions of this type seem to emphasize denial:

- (34) {Počemu / gde } èto ja plaču?
why where ÈTO I cry
(Context: someone said that Masha is crying. Masha responds:) ‘Me? Crying?’

2.2.2 CAN’T-FIND-THE-VALUE-OF-X QUESTIONS

The examples of CFVQs given in Obenauer (2004) and Bayer & Obenauer (2011) translate naturally into Russian wh-èto questions.

The wh-èto would normally be ruled out in examples like (35) (humans usually have names and this is usually not surprising, perplexing or disapproval-inducing):

- (35) Kak (#èto) eë zovut?
how ÈTO her call
‘What’s her name?’ (lit. How do they call her?)

But there are contexts that make it acceptable:

- (36) Kak èto eë zovut?
how ÈTO her call
(I can’t remember her name. Maša, Tanja, Sveta, Lena? No, something different but I can’t recall it.) ‘What’s her name?’ (adapted from Obenauer 2004: p.369)
- (37) Èto kak tebja zovut tak, što nikto ne mozet zapomnit’?
ÈTO how you call so that nobody NEG can remember

‘So what is your name that no one can remember?’
(adapted from Obenauer 2004: p.369)

Compare and contrast also (38) and (39):

- (38) Kuda (#èto) vy položili očki?
where ÈTO you put glasses
(A standard question. Context: the speaker is an inspector questioning a witness.) ‘Where did you put your glasses?’
- (39) Kuda èto ja položila očki?
where ÈTO I put glasses
(A CFVQ): ‘Where did I put my glasses (I’ve been looking for them everywhere)?’
(adapted from Bayer & Obenauer 2011: p.468)

2.2.3 RHETORICAL QUESTIONS

Consider the following situation. An MA student has been working closely with professors A, B and C. She has a good relationship with A and B, but a strained one with C to the point that it is almost impossible for her to talk to them. There is a PhD program of note that requires three letters of recommendation. She can only get them from A, B and C. Now she is speaking to a friend of hers.

- (40) Da, možet, ja podamsja v tu aspiranturu
yes maybe I apply in that PhD.program
‘Yes, maybe I will apply for that PhD program.’

Her friend says sarcastically:

- (41) I kak èto ty podašsja?
and how ÈTO you apply
‘And how, I wonder, are you going to apply for it?’

The friend expects the answer “Well, I’ll ask C for a recommendation”, knowing very well that the student is not willing to interact with C.

Example (25) repeated here as (42) also falls in this group.

- (42) Kogda èto izobreli mašinu vremeni?
who ÈTO invented machine time
(Context: A. said she has met Alexander Graham Bell. I know that Bell died long before A. was born. I’m asking her:) ‘Hey, when did they invent the time machine? (There is no time machine).’

3 THE FOCUS CLEFT ÈTO

In this section, we will analyze the properties of the focus cleft *èto*:

- (43) Èto Katja razbila čašku!
ÈTO Katya broke cup
‘It was Katya who broke the cup (not me!)’

Interestingly, in Neeleman & Titov (2009) it is noted that contrastive focus and new information focus are not compatible in Russian:

- (44) *JAZZ-PIANISTA ja slušala v KONCERTNOM ZALE
jazz-pianist I listened.to in concert hall
‘I listened to the jazz pianist in the concert hall (and not the jazz-guitarist)
(Neeleman & Titov 2009: p.38)

However, they can be compatible, if one uses *èto*:

- (45) Èto JAZZ-PIANISTA ja slušala v KONCERTNOM ZALE
 èTO jazz-pianist I listened.to in concert hall
 ‘I listened to the jazz pianist in the concert hall (and not the jazz-guitarist)
 (Neeleman & Titov 2009: p.38)

The focus *èto* has received considerable attention: King (1993), Junghanns (1997), Reeve (2012), Kimmelman (2009), Burukina & den Dikken (2020).

King (1993) and Junghanns (1997) analyze *èto*-clefts as monoclausal. They argue that the DP associated with *èto* is focus-fronted and *èto* itself is the specifier of a focus head (King) or an adjunct to TP (Junghanns). Kimmelman (2009) argues, mostly on semantic grounds, that *èto* is a focus particle. Reeve (2012) presents a hybrid analysis: *èto*-clefts are monoclausal, but their similarity to English biclausal clefts is explained by the presence of two T heads. Between them is the so-called E(qualizer) head, of which *èto* is a specifier (Reeve 2012: p.185): its function is to link *èto* and its associate, e.g. *Katja* in (43).

3.0.1 BURUKINA AND DEN DIKKEN’S SYNTACTIC ANALYSIS

Burukina & den Dikken (2020) propose that *èto*-clefts and *to*-sentences (*to* is a demonstrative pronoun and topic marker) are TopPs: *èto* spells out a Top head. The specifier of TopP contains a question clause and the complement of Top contains the answer clause.

This is how Burukina and den Dikken derive *èto*-clefts. Alternatively, the material in the answer clause may be deleted, yielding the pseudocleft:

- (46) Čto Petja kupil èto kuklu ~~Petja kupil.~~
 what Petya bought èTO doll Petya bought
 ‘What Petya bought is a/the doll.’ (Burukina & den Dikken 2020)

It is unclear under this analysis how to explain the differences between *èto*-clefts and pseudoclefts with respect to clause type. Pseudoclefts are licit only in declaratives, whereas *èto*-clefts are licit in imperatives (as already noted by Reeve 2012 and Kimmelman 2013), in yes/no questions and even in wh-questions in which the particle attaches to a constituent other than the wh-phrase, as shown in (47), (49), and (51), respectively.

- (47) A: Molči!
 be.silent
 ‘Be silent!’
 B: Net, èto TY molči!
 no èTO you be.silent
 ‘YOU be silent!’ (Reeve 2012: p.139)
- (48) *Kto molči tak eto ty.
 who be.silent.IMP.2SG so èTO you
 (Intended:) ‘The one who should be silent is you.’
- (49) Èto kuklu Petja kupil?
 èTO doll Petya bought
 ‘Was it a doll that Petya bought?’
- (50) *Čto Petja kupil èto kuklu?
 what Petya bought èTO doll
 (Intended:) ‘Was it a doll that Petya bought?’
- (51) A: Čto s toboj?
 what with you
 ‘What’s wrong with you?’

- B: Èto s toboj čto?
 ÈTO with you what
 'No, what's wrong with YOU?'

Finally, the biclausal analysis does not explain the presence of the yes/no question marker *li*:

- (52) Èto ne tebja li ja segodnja videl?
 ÈTO NEG Q you I today saw
 'Hey, it was you I saw today, wasn't it?'
- (53) Ne tebja li èto ja segodnja videl?
 NEG ÈTO Q you I today saw
 'It was you I saw today, wasn't it?'

Since *li* spells out the C head (Shlomina 2014), these sentences are single CPs, contrary to Burukina & den Dikken's claims.

3.0.2 KIMMELMAN'S SEMANTIC ANALYSIS

The semantics Kimmelman (2009) gives for *èto*-clefts is that of **contrast**: it also includes presuppositions of existence and uniqueness.

- (54) A: Vasja segodnja dežurnyj.
 Vasya today on.duty
 'Vasya is on class duty today'
- B: Net, èto Petja segodnja dežurnyj.
 no ÈTO Petya today on.duty
 'No, it's Petya who is on class duty today' (Kimmelman 2009: p.4)
- (55) A: Vasja razbil okno?
 Vasya broke window
 'Was it Vasya who broke the window?'
- B: *Net, èto nikto ne razbival okna.
 no ÈTO nobody NEG broke windows
 (Intended:) 'No, nobody broke any windows' (Kimmelman 2009: p.4-5)

(54) demonstrates contrast and (55) demonstrates the presupposition of existence.

- (56) *Èto každyj razbil okno
 ÈTO every broke window
 (Intended:) 'It's EVERYONE that broke the window.' (Kimmelman 2009: p.5)

That (56) is banned demonstrates the uniqueness presupposition. Kimmelman also notes that there are usages of the focus *èto* that do not fall under contrast:

- (57) Voobščè-to on Tolja Ivanov. Èto on učil menja kurit' v pervom klasse.
 In.fact he Tolya Ivanov ÈTO he taught me smoke in first grade
 'In fact he is Tolya Ivanov. He is the one who taught me to smoke in the first grade.'
 (Kimmelman 2009: p.7)

3.1 ŠIMÍK AND TAJSNER'S WORK ON THE CZECH AND POLISH TO

Šimík (2009) describes the Czech focus particle *to*, of which both Russian *to* and *èto* are cognates.

- (58) SVĚHO BÝVALÉHO PŘÍTELE to Marie pozvala
 Her ex boyfriend to Marie invited
 'It's her ex-boyfriend that Marie invited.' (Šimík 2009: p.7)

The Czech particle *to*, as Šimík puts it, has two components in its meaning. The first is a factive presupposition that there is a unique correct answer to the question (Šimík 2009: p.7) and the second, importantly for us, is the restrictor that says that possible answers, whatever they are, have a certain contextually determined property. Notably, the evidence for the factive presupposition includes the observation that Czech *to* is explicitly banned in RQs (Šimík 2009: p.8).

In (58), he argues, the property is 'being surprising' (Šimík 2009: p.7), but he claims that other properties can satisfy the requirement (Šimík 2009: p.10). Unfortunately, this proposal is somewhat vague: apparently, the contextually determined property can be *anything* (Šimík 2009: p.11) although Šimík describes the relevant examples as '**crazy**' and '**potentially causing problems**' (ibid). Furthermore, it is not explained how this property is relevant in declaratives.

He notes that *to* has a peculiar interpretation in *wh*-questions.

- (59) Koho to Marie pozvala?
 Who to Marie invited?
 'Who did Marie invite? (I've heard that she invited someone no one had expected, but who is it?)' (Šimík 2009: p.7)

Tajsner (2018) expands greatly on Šimík's work and proposes an analysis for both Czech and Polish *to* based on den Dikken's (2006) notion of Relator.

Here are the Polish examples of *to*.

- (60) To PRZEZ AMAZON Piotr zamówił tę książkę.
 to via Amazon Piotr ordered this book
 'It was via Amazon that Peter ordered the book.' (Tajsner 2018: p.560)
- (61) Tę książkę, to Piotr zamówił PRZEZ AMAZON, nie przez Allegro.
 this book to Piotr ordered via Amazon not via Allegro
 'As for the book, Peter ordered it via Amazon, not via Allegro.'
 (Tajsner 2018: p.560)
- (62) Piotr, to tę książkę zamówił PRZEZ AMAZON, nie przez Allegro.
 Piotr to this book ordered via Amazon not via Allegro
 'As for Peter, he ordered this book via Amazon, not via Allegro.'
 (Tajsner 2018: p.560)

He argues that *to* is a Relator head that needs to agree with a focal phrase and then derives all three orders (Tajsner 2018: p.565). Unfortunately, this analysis does not seem to be applicable to Russian, if only for the reason that the topic marker *to* and the focus marker *ëto* are distinct in this language.

3.2 TOWARDS A SEMANTIC ANALYSIS OF THE FOCUS CLEFT ÈTO

We find that *ëto*-clefts can be divided into several categories.

3.2.1 CORRECTIVE ÈTO-CLEFTS

Corrective, or contrastive *ëto*-clefts are the type analyzed in Kimmelman (2009). For a review of the notion of 'contrastivity' in clefts, see Destruel et al. (2019): in this paper it is also argued that this contrastivity should be seen as a "conflict between interlocutors' expectations".

- (63) Èto JA zdes' načal'nik!
ÈTO I here boss
'(Maybe you have forgotten who is the boss here?) I am the boss!'
- (64) Kakoj bred! Èto VODKU pit' nelzja.
What nonsense! ÈTO vodka drink not.allowed
'What nonsense! It's vodka that you shouldn't ever drink. (Someone has earlier said that all alcohol is very dangerous: beer, wine, cider, sake, vodka... You want to know what alcohol is dangerous to drink? Vodka!)

This is, however, far from the only use of *èto*-clefts in Russian.

3.2.2 "MEET-X-THEY-DID-Y" CLEFTS

We repeat Kimmelman's example:

- (65) Voobšče-to on Tolja Ivanov. Èto on učil menja kurit' v pervom klasse.
In.fact he Tolya Ivanov ÈTO he taught me smoke in first grade
'In fact he is Tolya Ivanov. He taught me to smoke in the first grade.'
(Kimmelman 2009: p.7)

In sentences like (65), *èto* connects the entities just introduced and previously unknown to the addressee(s) with a certain background situation. So in (65), the speaker introduces Tolya Ivanov; the addressee(s) must know that the speaker was introduced to smoking in first grade, otherwise this sentence is infelicitous.

- (66) Èto Marina. Ona umnaja. Èto ona ekzamen na sto sdala.
ÈTO Marina she smart ÈTO she exam on hundred gave.out
'This is Marina. She's smart. It was her who got 100 on the exam.'

Judging by examples like (66), we can say that the part of the sentence that follows *èto* answers a question of the sort "So what?/Why?". "This is Marina. She's smart. Why am I calling her that? Well, you remember we heard that some girl got 100 on the exam? It's her." Interestingly, the focused entity does not have to have been unknown previously:

- (67) Da, ja umnaja. Èto ja ekzamen na sto sdala.
Yes I smart ÈTO I exam on hundred gave.out
'I AM smart! After all, it was me who got 100 on the exam.'

We do not aim here for a precise classification: one could argue that *èto* in (67) actually shows contrast.

Finally, this type of clefts seems to be used for calling someone out:

- (68) Borec za npravstvennost' našëlsja! Èto ne tebja videli včera v
fighter for morality found.REFL ÈTO NEG you saw yesterday in
narkopritone?
drug.house
'Look, a moral crusader! Wasn't it you who was spotted in a drug house yesterday?'
- (69) Borec za npravstvennost' našëlsja! Ne tebja li èto videli včera v
fighter for morality found.REFL NEG you Q ÈTO saw yesterday in
narkopritone?
drug.house
(The same as (68).)

3.2.3 “EUREKA” CLEFTS

This type of *èto*-clefts appears to have been overlooked. Here *èto* introduces a presupposition that the speaker has found the answer to a question.

- (70) Ja našel eë! Èto ona košelëk ukrala!
I found her ÈTO she purse stole
'I've found her! It's her who stole the purse!'

Eureka-clefts are compatible with the 'vot+wh-word' construction:

- (71) A!... Èto vot kto žužžit!
aha ÈTO here who buzz
'Aha! Here's who's been buzzing!' (Tkačenko 2012)

We also tentatively place here examples like (72):

- (72) Privet! Èto ty drakona ubila?
hello ÈTO you dragon killed
'Hi! Was it you who killed the dragon?'

The presupposition is that the speaker has finally found the previously unknown answer, so this type of clefts is speaker-oriented. Consider, however, this example:

- (73) Ja xoču tebe priznat'sja. Èto ja vzjal togda den'gi
I want to.you confess ÈTO I took then money
[Context: a year ago, A was believed to have stolen money. But it was actually B, and now he confesses this to C.] 'I want to confess something. It was me who stole the money back then.'

Here the component 'something that was unknown' is addressee-oriented, so it is presently unclear how to classify such clefts.

3.2.4 “ADMIRATIVE” CLEFTS

The term 'admirative' is used here in an informal fashion. In the study of tense-aspect-mood systems, 'admirative' means “P, and the speaker did not expect P” (Plungian 2001: p.355).

This type of *èto*-clefts was first noticed in Paducheva (1982):

- (74) Lovko èto ona vas obmanula!
Cunningly ÈTO she you.PL deceived
'How cunningly she tricked you!' (I did not expect that/I am amazed!)
(Paducheva 1982: p.78)
- (75) Ugorazdilo èto vas tuda zabrat'sja!
managed ÈTO you.PL there scramble
'Amazing how you got there!' (this can be said, for example, ironically to someone who got up a tree and now cannot climb down) (Paducheva 1982: p.78)
- (76) Davno èto ty načala kurit'?!
Long.ago ÈTO you started smoke
'And when did you start smoking? (I heavily disapprove of your smoking/I didn't expect you would start smoking at all!)

It can also be used with negative quantifiers for emphasis:

- (77) Nikuda èto ty ne poedeš!
Nowhere ÈTO you NEG depart
'You are not going anywhere!'

An immediately obvious syntactic property of this type of clefts is the linear order. This is explained by the focused constituent moving to Spec,CP, as it behaves like an operator and so in a sense like a wh-phrase. Note that in (76), *davno* “long ago” can be replaced with *kogda* “when”:

- (78) Kogda èto ty načala kurit’?!
 when ÈTO you started smoke
 ‘And when did you start smoking? (I heavily disapprove of your smoking/I didn’t expect you would start smoking at all!’)

Examples like (75) with a fronted verb are probably different: we tentatively propose that they involve head-movement to C.

3.3 TOWARDS A SYNTACTIC ANALYSIS FOR ÈTO-CLEFTS

In §3.0.1 we showed that *èto*-clefts are single CPs. We now analyze their composition in more detail.

In declaratives *èto* is below C; focus fronting of the type seen in *èto*-clefts requires the presence of *èto*:

- (79) Skaži, čto *(èto) menja ty xočeš v mužja.
 Say COMP ÈTO me you want in husbands
 ‘Tell them it’s me you want for husband’
 (adapted from Vilenskaja’s translation of Martin (2002))

We treat focus particles as adverbs in the vein of Zanon (2018), Struckmeier (2014), Erlewine (2014) and many others.

In interrogatives, *èto* can surface in a higher position (in (80), as compared to (81)); the focused constituent then is in Spec,CP:

- (80) Èto ne tebja li ja segodnja videl?
 ÈTO NEG you Q I today saw
 ‘Hey, it was you I saw today, wasn’t it?’
- (81) Ne tebja li èto ja segodnja videl?
 NEG you Q ÈTO I today saw
 ‘It was you I saw today, wasn’t it?’

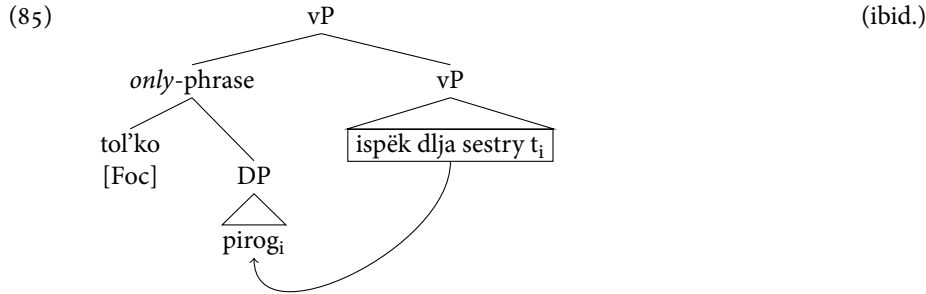
(81) can be a part of an inner monologue, whereas (80) requires a conversation.

The clauses with higher *èto* cannot be embedded:

- (82) Ja sprosíl u nego, ne ego li èto ja segodnja videl
 I asked at him NEG him Q ÈTO I today saw
 ‘I asked him if it was him I had seen earlier that day’
- (83) *Ja sprosíl u nego, èto ne ego li ja segodnja videl
 I asked at him ÈTO NEG him Q I today saw
 Intended: same as (82).

We now must determine the positions of the lower and the higher *èto*. Zanon (2018) analyzes the focus particle *tol’ko* “only”. She argues that the focused constituent right-adjoins to *tol’ko* to check its strong [Foc] feature and the resulting phrase can adjoin to CP, vP or DP. For brevity, we only include the vP case:

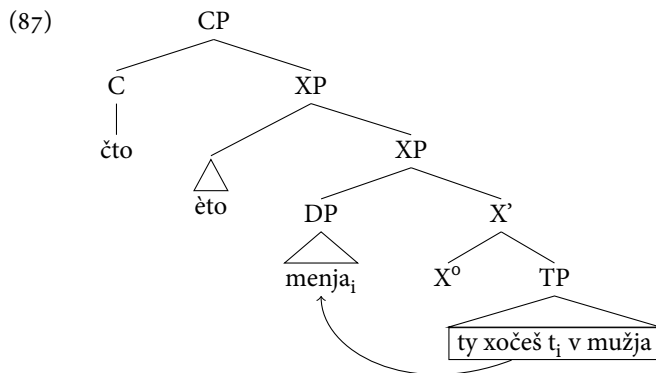
- (84) Andrej tol’ko [PIROG]_F ispèk dlja sestry.
 Andrey only pie baked for sister
 ‘Andrey only baked [A PIE]_F for his sister.’ (Zanon 2018: p.420)



However, this analysis is not tenable for the lower *èto*. If the focused constituent right-adjoins to *èto*, then it cannot raise further to Spec,CP, assuming that the focus fronting always occurs when *èto* is present.

One resolution is to distinguish focus fronting in most declarative *èto*-clefts (except the ‘admirative’ variety) and raising to Spec,CP: the former would then be explained as right-adjunction in the same fashion as in Zanon (2018). Another is to propose an analysis in the vein of King (1993). The lower *èto* adjoins to a projection that is lower than C but higher than T. We cautiously label it as XP, not something like ContrastP.³ We opt for the latter analysis which allows the focused constituent to always move to Spec,XP.

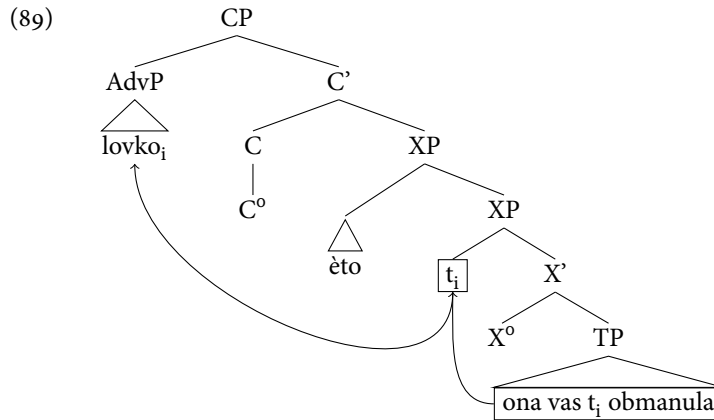
- (86) ... čto èto menja ty xočeš v mužja.
 COMP ÈTO me you want in husband.PL
 ‘Tell them it’s me you want for a husband.’
 (adapted from Vilenskaja’s translation of Martin (2002))



In ‘admirative’ clefts, the focused constituent then moves to Spec,CP.

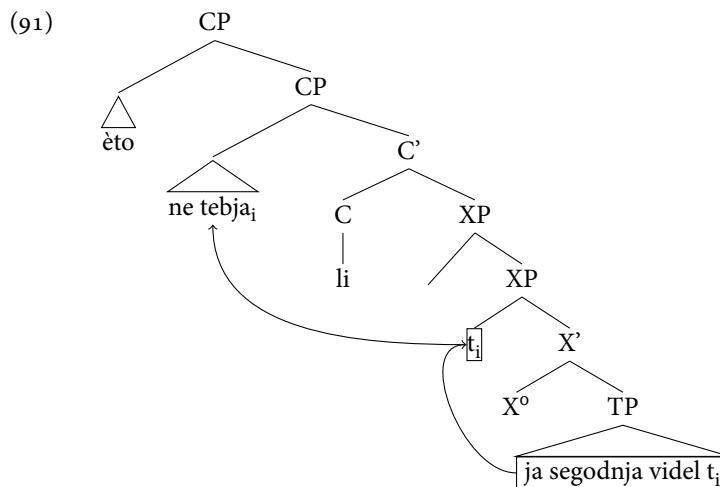
- (88) Lovko èto ona vas obmanula!
 Cunningly ÈTO she you.PL deceived
 ‘How cunningly she tricked you!’ (Paducheva 1982: p.78)

³One could, of course, argue that for all intents and purposes this is a cartographic-like Foc/Contrast head, an approach criticized in e.g. Neeleman et al. (2009: p.41), among many other works. That said, we choose to stay neutral on the cartographic/anti-cartographic debate.



The high *èto* is above Spec,CP: we are again cautious to stipulate any additional structure. Interestingly, in cases like (90) one could argue that *èto* is not base-generated as an adjunct, but basically moves together with the focused constituent. If this is the case, the analysis, as it currently stands, cannot explain the motivation.

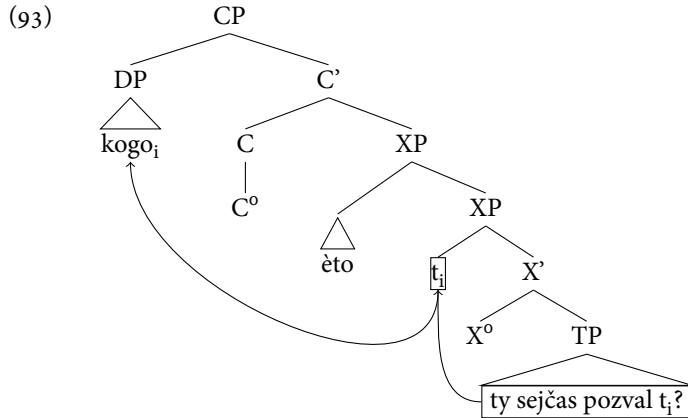
- (90) Èto ne tebja li ja segodnja videl?
 ÈTO NEG you Q I today saw
 'Hey, it was you I saw today, wasn't it?'



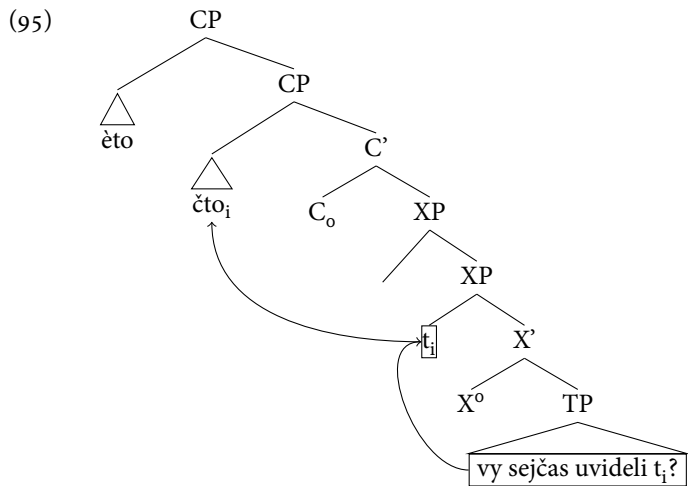
3.4 THE CLEFT ÈTO AND THE POSTPOSITIVE WH-ÈTO

The low and high focus cleft *èto* map elegantly onto the postpositive and the prepositive wh-*èto*.

- (92) Kogo èto ty sečas pozval?
 who ÈTO you now called
 'Who did you just call for?'



- (94) Èto čto vy sečas uvideli?
 ÈTO what you.PL now saw
 'What did you just see that was so unusual?'



Semantically, the closest thing to wh-*èto* is the *èto* in 'eureka' clefts. The question then arises immediately: how is the meaning derived?

The presupposition of 'eureka'-clefts is that the speaker has been looking for the answer. But in wh-questions, the speaker cannot obviously express that they have found it. This gives us the CFVQ meaning. The presupposition can be further augmented with the speaker's attitude, giving us the SDQ and the RQ meanings.

The precise mechanism by which the speaker's attitude arises in wh-questions with focus particles remains unclear. However, the phenomenon is well-documented for Russian.

Russian *tol'ko* 'only' can occur in wh-questions with a special meaning as well.

- (96) Kogo tol'ko ja tam ne videla!
 who only I there NEG saw
 'I saw basically everyone there!' (And I am amazed/I disapprove of the fact.)

Here the wh-phrase actually introduces a negative existential meaning: there is no X that I didn't see X: cf. Han (2002).

Without negation, the meaning is different:

- (97) Kto tol'ko vas streljat' učil?
 who only you shoot taught
 'What kind of idiot taught you all to shoot?' (You all are very bad at shooting)

(97) is a rhetorical question with the flavor of strong disapproval on the part of the speaker.

Eščë ‘as well/also/else’ also has an interpretation of disapproval. This was already noted by Pekelis (2019: p.7-8). She notes that it can combine with *wh-èto*, but makes the incorrect claim that this combination only occurs in single-argument clauses. This is not the case, as our native speaker intuition suggests, supported by abundant examples on the Internet, such as the following:

- (98) Kogo èto ty eščë mne našël?
 who èto you also me found
 ‘Who the hell is it that you found for me?’ (Ladygina Moj oxrannik – volk)

4 CONCLUSIONS

In this paper we have provided a semantic and syntactic analysis of Russian constructions with the word *èto* in *wh*-questions. The word *èto* was analyzed as a focus particle identical to the one found in focus clefts.

We have identified two possible positions for the focus cleft *èto* in the clause, one between C and T and the other, specific to interrogatives, above Spec,CP. The higher cleft *èto* is licit only in matrix clauses and requires a discourse antecedent or a referent in the “here and now”.

We have identified the meanings of the particle *èto* and derived its interpretation in *wh*-questions from one of them. Several questions now can be raised. Most importantly, what is the semantic formula that unites the meanings of focus *èto*? Why is the higher *èto* restricted to main clauses?

Under what conditions is (99) acceptable and why does it apparently not show *wh*-movement?

- (99) A: Čto s toboj?
 what with you
 ‘What’s wrong with you?’
 B: Èto s toboj čto?
 ÈTO with you what
 ‘No, what’s wrong with YOU?’

What is the syntactic position of the focus *èto* in imperatives, as in (100)? This, of course, requires one to subscribe to a theory of imperatives. The only thing that seems to be clear is that the focus *èto* can only take as its associate the subject of the imperative clause, as seen from (101):

- (100) A: Molči!
 be.silent
 ‘Be silent!’
 B: Net, èto TY molči!
 no ÈTO you be.silent
 ‘YOU be silent!’ (Reeve 2012: p.139)
- (101) *Èto na Franciju stav’
 ÈTO on France bet
 ‘Bet on France!’ (not on Argentina, Brazil etc.)

Finally, it remains an interesting possibility to link nonstandard questions to modality (for example, to link ‘disapproval’ to deontic modality and surprise to epistemic). Notably, Obenauer himself uses the word ‘modality’, albeit in scare quotes (Obenauer 2004: p.359).

ABBREVIATIONS

ACC	accusative	NOM	nominative
ADJ	adjective	PL	plural
COMP	complementizer	PREP	prepositional case
DAT	dative	PRT	particle
GEN	genitive	Q	question particle
INF	infinitive	REFL	reflexive
INS	instrumental	SG	singular
NEG	negation	SUBJ	subjunctive

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

We thank Aleksey Kozlov for his helpful suggestions and comments. Any shortcomings and errors are the authors' own responsibility.

CONTACT

TATIANA PHILIPPOVA — philippo@post.bgu.ac.il
 ALDAN YERBALANOV — audiblecinnabar@yandex.ru

REFERENCES

- Bayer, Josef & Hans-Georg Obenauer. 2011. Discourse particles, clause structure, and question types. *The linguistic review* 28(4).
- Burukina, Irina & Marcel den Dikken. 2020. Russian èto-focus and to-topic sentences as elliptical question-answer pairs. In Tae Sik Kim & Sae-Youn Cho (eds.), *Proceedings of the 22nd Seoul international conference on generative grammar*, 63–79. Seoul: The Korean Generative Grammar Circle.
- Destruel, Emilie, David I Beaver & Elizabeth Coppock. 2019. It's not what you expected! The surprising nature of cleft alternatives in French and English. *Frontiers in psychology* 10. 1400.
- den Dikken, Marcel. 2006. *Relators and linkers: The syntax of predication, predicate inversion, and copulas*. Cambridge: MIT Press.
- Erlewine, Michael Yoshitaka. 2014. *Movement out of focus*. Cambridge, MA: Massachusetts Institute of Technology dissertation.
- Han, Chung-hye. 2002. Interpreting interrogatives as rhetorical questions. *Lingua* 112(3). 201–229.
- Heine, Bernd & Mechthild Reh. 1984. *Grammaticalization and reanalysis in African languages*. Hamburg: Buske.
- Huehnergard, John & Na'ama Pat-El. 2007. Some aspects of the cleft in Semitic languages. In Tali Bar & Eran Cohen (eds.), *Studies in Semitic and general linguistics in honor of Gideon Goldenberg*, 325–342. Münster: Ugarit Verlag.
- Junghanns, Uwe. 1997. On the so-called èto-cleft construction. In Martina Lindseth & Steven Franks (eds.), *Proceedings of the sixth annual workshop on Formal Approaches to Slavic Linguistics: The Connecticut meeting*, Ann Arbor: Michigan Slavic Publications.
- Kagan, Olga. 2016. Predicate nominal sentences with the Hebrew ze and its Russian counterpart èto. In *Language contact and the development of Modern Hebrew*, 36–48. Leiden: Brill.

- Kimmelman, Vadim. 2009. On the interpretation of èto in so-called èto-clefts. In Gerhild Zybatow, Denisa Lenertová, Uwe Junghanns & Petr Biskup (eds.), *Studies in formal Slavic phonology, morphology, syntax, semantics and information structure: Proceedings of FDSL 7, Leipzig 2007*, 319–329. Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang.
- Kimmelman, Vadim. 2013. Maththew Reeve. Clefts and their relatives (review). *Journal of Slavic linguistics* 21(2). 317–340.
- King, Tracy Holloway. 1993. *Configuring topic and focus in Russian*. Stanford: Stanford University dissertation.
- Ladygina, Natalia. Moj oxrannik – volk. [My bodyguard is a wolf]. [Online; accessed 25-July-2023]. <https://litvek.com/br/540037?p=38>.
- Li, Charles & Sandra Thompson. 1977. 9. A Mechanism for the development of copula morphemes. In *Mechanisms of syntactic change*, 419–444. Austin: University of Texas Press.
- Martin, George RR. 2002. *Burja mečej [A storm of swords], translated into Russian by Natalia I. Vilenskaja*. Moscow: AST.
- Murphy, Andrew. 2014. *The syntax of shi: A focus movement account of sluicing in Mandarin Chinese*: Master's thesis, Humboldt-Universität zu Berlin, Germany dissertation.
- Neeleman, Ad & Elena Titov. 2009. Focus, contrast, and stress in Russian. *Linguistic inquiry* 40(3). 514–524.
- Neeleman, Ad, Elena Titov, Hans Van de Koot & Reiko Vermeulen. 2009. A syntactic typology of topic, focus and contrast. In Jeroen van Craenenbroeck (ed.), *Alternatives to cartography*, 15–52. Berlin: De Gruyter Mouton.
- Obenauer, Hans-Georg. 2004. Nonstandard wh-questions and alternative checkers in Pagotto. In *The syntax and semantics of left periphery*, Berlin: Walter de Gruyter.
- Paducheva, Elena. V. 1982. Značenie i sintaksičeskie funkicii slova èto [The meaning and syntactic functions of the word èto]. *Problemy strukturnoj lingvistiki 1980 [Issues in structural linguistics 1980]* 92–98.
- Pekelis, Olga E. 2019. Slovo èto v častnom voprose: o priznakax, otličajuščix časticu ot mestoimenija [The word eto in a wh-question: on the differences between a pronoun and a particle]. Published in the proceedings of *The Dialogue International Computational Linguistics Conference*, 484–496, Moscow. <http://www.dialog-21.ru/media/4618/pekeli-soe-014.pdf>.
- Plungian, Vladimir A. 2001. The place of evidentiality within the universal grammatical space. *Journal of pragmatics* 33(3). 349–357.
- Reeve, Matthew. 2012. *Clefts and their relatives*, vol. 185. Amsterdam: John Benjamins.
- Rutkowski, Paweł. 2006. From demonstratives to copulas: A cross-linguistic perspective and the case of Polish. *Journal of universal language* 7(2). 147–175.
- Shlomina, Anna. 2014. Ellipsis v kosvennom obshchem voprose (na materiale russkogo jazyka). [Ellipsis in embedded polar questions in Russian]. *Russian State University of Humanities MA Thesis*. Moscow .
- Šimík, Radek. 2009. The syntax, semantics, and pragmatics of the focus particle *to* in Czech. In *Studies in formal Slavic phonology, morphology, syntax, semantics and information structure: Proceedings of FDSL 7*, Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang.

- Struckmeier, Volker. 2014. Ja doch wohl C? Modal particles in German as C-related elements. *Studia linguistica* 68(1). 16–48.
- Tajsner, Przemysław. 2018. On left-peripheral particle *to* in Polish and Czech: A focus, a topic head, or neither? *Poznań studies in contemporary linguistics* 54(4). 541–572.
- Tkačenko, Alfira. 2012. Kto žužžit? [Who's buzzing?]. <https://proza.ru/2012/07/22/483>. [Online; accessed 12-April-2023].
- Valova, Evdokia & Natalia Slioussar. 2017. Syntactic properties of the Russian enclitic *že*: Corpus-based and experimental approaches. *Voprosy jazykoznanija* 2017(2). 33–48.
- Zanon, Ksenia. 2018. Focus association with *only* in Russian. In Vera Gribanova, Sabrina Grimberg, Erika Petersen, Eva Portelance & Brandon Waldon (eds.), *Formal Approaches to Slavic Linguistics (FASL) 27: The Stanford meeting*, 4–6. Ann Arbor, MI: Michigan Slavic Publications.