

Two positions for Russian conditional clauses*

Daniar Kasenov, Daria Paramonova

mortypines@gmail.com ; dashparamonova@yandex.ru

June 3, 2024

Abstract

This paper discusses the role of the optional particle *to* in the distribution of conditionals in Russian. The main claim is that the particle *to* signals a higher adjunction site of the conditional clause in the clausal structure of the main clause. We cover the known contrasts involving the particle *to* (focus particles, ellipsis, variable binding) and argue that they follow from the main syntactic claim. Finally, we discuss our analysis in relation to a line of influential proposals regarding the position and semantics of conditional clauses ([Haegeman 1984](#); [Haegeman 2003](#); [Haegeman & Schönenberger 2023](#)) and suggest that the semantic distinctions proposed by that line of work have no effect on the presence/absence of the particle *to*, suggesting the non-universal character of their syntactic underpinnings.

1 Introduction

Russian language employs an optional particle *to* in its conditional constructions, as exemplified below in (1). As is the case with similar particles in other languages (for example, the particle *then* in English), the semantic role of the particle *to* is not obvious (although some works have attempted to characterize it, see [Pekelis 2015](#); [Pekelis 2016](#) for an attempt).

*Acknowledgements to be added.

- (1) *Esli Vasja ne durak, (to) smožet obmanut' policejskogo.*
 if V. NEG moron, PTCL.TO be.able.FUT fool police.officer
 'If Vasja is not a moron, he will be able to fool the police officer.'

Although the distribution English particle *then* has been given an influential semantic analysis ([Iatridou 1993](#)), the Russian particle *to* cannot be treated in a similar way: conditional clauses that do not have an effect on the truth of the main clause (John/Vasja looks bad regardless of whether the speaker is honest or is allowed to be honest), while infelicitous with *then* (2a), are perfectly fine with Russian *to* (2b).

- (2) a. # If I may be frank, then John is not looking good today. ([Iatridou 1993](#): 171)
 b. *Esli čestno, to Vasja vygljadit užasno.*
 if honest PTCL.TO Vasja looks awful
 'If I am being honest, Vasja looks awful.'

The purpose of this paper is to approach the distribution of the particle *to* from a syntactic point of view, rather than to focus on the interpretational properties of the particle *to* in conditionals. Our core claim is that the conditional clauses in Russian may occupy distinct positions in the main clause depending on the presence of the particle *to*: the conditional clause is higher in the clausal structure when the particle *to* is present. For the purposes of this paper, we do not take a position on the nature of the particle *to* itself: we take it to be a reflex of the position of the conditional clause, one way or another.

The evidence for our claim, discussed in section 2, comes primarily from the interaction between the presence of the particle *to* and clausal ellipsis (namely, sluicing, fragment ellipsis, and polarity ellipsis): clausal ellipsis (ellipsis of TP; see [van Craenenbroeck & Merchant 2013](#) for an overview of ellipsis types) makes the particle *to* obligatory. We then supplement the ellipsis data with the data which shows that the subject cannot bind a variable in the conditional clause when the particle *to* is present, suggesting that the subject does not c-command the conditional clause ([Reinhart 1976](#); see [Bhatt & Pancheva 2017](#) for this diagnostic in condi-

tionals). Finally, we suggest that the analysis is also supported by the co-occurrence restrictions on conditionals: two conditionals adjoined to the left of the same clause appear to be possible only if the particle *to* is present in the sentence, suggesting that regular conditional clauses and conditional clauses with the particle *to* do not ‘compete’ for the same structural position.

Building on the idea of two structural positions for Russian conditionals, we then reassess the data regarding the effect of on the particle *to* on the interaction between conditional clauses and focus operators (Podlesskaya 1997; Pekelis 2015). In section 3, we suggest that the incompatibility of the particle *to* with focus operators scoping over the conditional clause follows from our analysis and argue against an alternative approach based on the properties of information structure (see Iatridou & Embick 1994 for such an account for English inverted conditionals; see Biezma 2011 for a refutation, which we adapt in section 3.1). Apparent exceptions with the focus operator *daže* ‘even’ are argued in the section 3.2 to involve low scope of *daže* ‘even’ and are thus argued to be unproblematic for the main generalization.

Finally, section 4 discusses the relation between our argument and the influential approach that maps semantic sub-types of conditionals onto a cartography of clausal structure (Haegeman 1984; Haegeman 2003; Haegeman & Schönenberger 2023 among many others). Although some of the data our analysis builds upon has parallels in that line of research, we argue against employing such analysis for Russian conditionals with and without the particle *to* because the semantic differences, on which such accounts are based, are not distributed in any clear manner across the Russian conditionals with and without the particle *to*.

The conclusion, evidently, is that while Russian data supports the idea that there are distinct positions for adverbial clauses, it does not support the idea that these positions are mapped to semantic properties in a language-independent fashion.

2 Syntactic data in favor of two positions

2.1 Ellipsis data

The core observation behind this paper is that the ellipsis of the clause in the context of a *wh*-question is only compatible with a conditional clause when the particle *to* is present (as shown in the example 3a). Crucially, it is not the property of a *wh*-question itself that makes the particle *to* obligatory: the particle *to* is optional without ellipsis (as shown in the example 3b).

- (3) a. The particle *to* is obligatory with sluicing.

*Esli kto-to uže doma, *(to) kto?*
if someone already home, TO.PTCL who
'If someone is already home, who?'

- b. The particle *to* is optional in *wh*-questions.

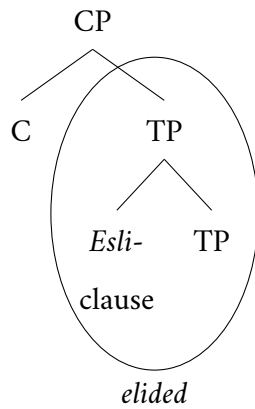
Esli kto-to uže doma, (to) počemu mne nikto ne pozvonil?
if someone already home, TO.PTCL why to.me no.one NEG called
'If someone is already home, why didn't anyone call me?'

Unlike previous works (Pekelis 2015), however, we aim to derive the pattern structurally: our claim is that when the particle *to* is present, conditional clauses are positioned too high in the structure to be in the site of clausal ellipsis. The particle *to* is then obligatory because the conditional clause would not be pronounced otherwise.

The idea is shown schematically in (4), assuming for clarity that the particle *to* is its own head: if there are two positions for conditional clauses in Russian, the higher of which requires presence of *to* in the main clause, it can be the case that the higher position does not find itself in the ellipsis site, while the lower position does.

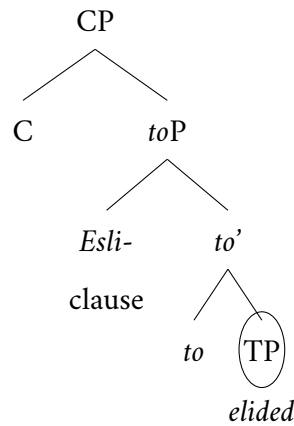
(4) Clausal ellipsis without *to*:

esli-clause is elided



Clausal ellipsis with *to*:

esli-clause survives



Should the explanation be on the right track, we predict similar patterns to occur with other types of clausal ellipsis in Russian, namely, fragment answer ellipsis (argued to be clausal ellipsis by Merchant 2004 and much subsequent work) and polarity ellipsis (see Gribanova 2017 for discussion), exemplified in (5) below: fragment ellipsis is usually found as an answer to a *wh*-question, explicit or implicit, while polarity ellipsis is found as an answer to a polar question, explicit or implicit.

(5) Fragment ellipsis and polarity ellipsis in Russian

a. Polarity ellipsis in matrix and embedded clauses

A: *Vasja pojdet domoj?* B: *Net / Vasja govorit, čto net.*

Vasja goes home No Vasja says that no.

A: 'Is Vasja going home?'. B: 'No / Vasja says no.'

b. Fragment ellipsis

A: *Kto doma?* B: *Vasja.*

who home Vasja

A: 'Who is home?'. B: 'Vasja.'

The data regarding fragment answer ellipsis is not novel (Pekelis 2015) and involves no com-

plications: the fragment answer only can include the conditional clause if there is the particle *to* in the main clause. As was the case with sluicing, the lack of ellipsis makes the particle *to* optional.

(6) Fragment ellipsis requires the particle *to*.

a. *Esli on i vspominaet o nej, *(to) nečasto.*

if he ADD remembers about her, PTCL.TO rarely

‘Even if he thinks about her, he does so rarely.’

b. *Esli on i vspominaet o nej, (to) delaet eto nečasto.*

if he ADD remembers about her, PTCL.TO does this rarely

‘Even if he thinks about her, he does so rarely.’

The data regarding polarity ellipsis is more tricky, however. In the embedded environments, the contrast observed with sluicing and fragment ellipsis holds, as shown by the examples in (7) below: the particle *to* is obligatory in the context of polarity ellipsis, while optional otherwise.

(7) Embedded polarity ellipsis requires the particle *to*

a. *A: Vasja pojdet na rabotu? B: On skazal, čto esli ty ne pojdeš, *(to) net.*

Vasja goes to work he said that if you not go then no

A: ‘Is Vasja going to work?’. B: ‘He said that if you do not go, he will not go too.’

b. *A: Vasja pojdet na rabotu? B: Vasja skazal, čto esli ty ne pojdeš, (to) i on*

Vasja goes to work he said that if you not go then ADD he

ne pojdet.

not go

A: ‘Is Vasja going to work?’. B: ‘He said that if you do not go, he will not go too.’

When the clause is not embedded, however, it appears that there is no contrast, at least when looking at the sentences as strings. The situation changes, once we take prosody into account: those consultants who accept (8a), only accept it with a prosodic break (we refer to a break

via the | symbol) between the two clauses. While we lack a proper analysis of this pattern, we suggest that the prosodic break indicates syntactic disjointness (as done for parentheticals, see [Nespor & Vogel 1986](#); [Giorgi 2014](#)).

(8) Matrix polarity ellipsis requires the particle *to* when prosody is taken into account

a. A: *Vasja pojdet na rabotu?* B: *Esli ty ne pojdeš, *(| / to) net.*

Vasja goes to work if you not go then no

A: 'Is Vasja going to work?' B: 'If you do not go, he will not go too.'

b. A: *Vasja pojdet na rabotu?* B: *Esli ty ne pojdeš, (to) i on ne pojdet.*

Vasja goes to work if you not go then ADD he not go

A: 'Is Vasja going to work?' B: 'If you do not go, he will not go too.'

Taking stock, it appears that three types of clausal ellipsis in Russian make the particle *to* obligatory when they occur in conditional constructions. As demonstrated in the structures in (4), we take the ellipsis data to indicate structural position: the particle *to* is necessary for the conditional clause to occur together with clausal ellipsis because, otherwise, the conditional clause would be positioned in the elided constituent and would be, thus, left unpronounced.

A possible issue for our account of the ellipsis data comes from linear order of the conditional clause with respect to *wh*-words in questions without ellipsis (see the example 3b). If we assume that clausal ellipsis has no effect on the position of the *wh*-word, examples like (3b) seem to suggest that conditional clauses can be positioned higher than *wh*-words even without the particle *to* (assuming standard connection between linear order and c-command).

However, given that Russian conditional clauses with and without the particle *to* cannot precede the complementizer *čto* and are thus below C (and are thus below the attachment site of Russian *wh*-movement; see [Scott 2012](#)), we preliminarily suggest that the sentence-initial position of conditional clauses should be attributed to non-syntactic factors.

(9) Russian conditional clauses are below C

a. *Mama skazala, čto esli ty prideš pjanyj, (to) tebja vygonjat iz doma*
mom said that if you come.home drunk PTCL.TO you kick.out out house
'Mom said that if you come home drunk, you will be kicked out.'

b.**Mama skazala, esli ty prideš pjanyj, (to) čto tebja vygonjat iz doma*
mom said if you come.home drunk PTCL.TO that you kick.out out house
Int.: 'Mom said that if you come home drunk, you will be kicked out.'

To conclude this subsection, we have established that clausal ellipsis requires the particle *to* to co-occur with overt conditional clauses. Our analysis of this generalization involves positing two distinct positions for conditional clauses depending on the presence of the particle *to*. The next subsection discusses additional evidence in favor of the syntactic approach.

2.2 Additional evidence

Circumstantial support for the approach to the ellipsis data outlined in the previous subsection comes from the behavior of variable binding with conditional structures (see [Bhatt & Pancheva 2017](#) for the application of this diagnostic to conditionals; see [Weisser 2019](#) for a possible concern regarding its application). For Russian, the core observation is that the particle *to* makes the quantifier subject of the main clause unable to bind pronouns in the conditional clause.

(10) Variable binding into the conditional clause is blocked by the particle *to*.

a. *Esli ego_i mama rugaetsja, (*to) každyj mal'čik_i plačet.*
if his mom scolds PTCL.TO every boy cries
'Every boy_i cries if his_i mom scolds anyone.'

b. *Esli ež_i syn xuliganit, (*to) každaja matj_i rasstraivaetsja.*
if her son misbehaves PTCL.TO every mother get.upset
'Every mother_i gets upset if her_i son misbehaves.'

The possibility of cataphoric variable binding is usually taken to indicate that the conditional clause has moved from a VP-internal position to a clause-peripheral one (Bhatt & Pancheva 2017). Since the diagnostic fails when the particle *to* is present, we are able to conclude that conditional clauses do not undergo movement from a position below the quantifier subject. Strictly speaking, this contrast is thus not enough to support the analysis proposed based on ellipsis data, but it does seem to establish a difference between the two types of conditional clauses in their morphosyntactic behavior.

The final piece of evidence for our proposal is purely distributional in nature. One finds naturally occurring examples of the two types of conditional clauses being adjoined to the left of the same clause (11). Importantly, such examples become degraded in the absence of the particle *to*.

(11) Left-adjoined conditionals can be stacked only if the particle *to* is present

- a. *esli človek skončalsja v mesjace Adar, *(to) esli sledujuščij god visokosnyj,*
 if person dies in month adar PTCL.TO if next year leap.year
godovščina budet togo že čisla v pervyj mesjac Adar.
 anniversary will.be same day in first month adar

‘If a person died in the month of Adar and if the next year is a leap year, the anniversary will be on the same date in the first month of Adar.’ ([link](#))

- b. *esli slegka kapnut’ na kožu obyčnoj vody i nemnogo podoždat’, *(to)*
 if slightly drip on leather ordinary water and a.little wait PTCL.TO
esli koža natural’naja, ona vpitaet ètu vodu v sebja.
 if weather natural she absorbs this water into herself

‘If you lightly drip ordinary water onto the leather and wait a little and if the leather is natural, it will absorb this water.’ ([link](#))

c. *Esli u igroka est' 4 tuza, *(to) esli on vzjal vzjatku i posle ètogo*
 if PREP player be 4 aces, PTCL.TO if he took bribe and after that
zaxodit s tuza, emu dobavljaetsja 200 oèkov.
 goes with ace, to.him adds 200 points

'If a player has 4 aces and if he takes a trick and then enters with an ace, 200 points are added to him.' ([link](#))

We take this data to indicate that left-adjoined conditional clauses without the particle *to* are found in one position, while the presence of the particle *to* indicates that the conditional clause is found in the other position.

To sum up, we believe that the syntactic data supports the idea that the core difference indicated by the presence of the particle *to* is structural: when *to* is present, the conditional clause occupies a higher, clause-peripheral position. In the next section, it is shown that the proposal provides novel insight into the interaction between Russian conditionals and focus operators.

3 Interaction with focus operators

[Podlesskaya \(1997\)](#) claims that the particle *to* cannot be used if there is a focus operator in the conditional clause (in this section, we mainly discuss *tol'ko* 'only' and *daže* 'even'). For example, the focus operator *tol'ko* 'only' is incompatible with the particle *to* when it is linearly adjoined to the conditional clause.

(12) Focus particle *tol'ko* 'only' disallows the particle *to* ([Pekelis 2015: 69](#)).

*Tol'ko esli sous budet nedostatoèno ostrym, *(to) možno dobavit' krasnyj molotyj*
 only if sause will.be not.enough spicy PTCL.TO can add red ground
perec
 pepper.

'Only if the sauce is not spicy enough, one can add more ground red pepper.'

However, the data appears to be more complicated once we take the focus operator *daže* into account: it can occur right before the conditional clause with the particle *to* present (13a), although not all such examples appear felicitous (13b). While these sentences appear to be counterevidence to Podlesskaya’s claim, our goal is to rephrase the claim and analyse such examples in way which is non-problematic for our version of the generalization.¹

(13) Sometimes, the focus particle *daže* is felicitous with the particle *to*.

a. *daže esli Maša pridet na kontrol’nuju posle bessonnoj noči, (to) my ee*
 even if Masha comes to test after sleepless night PTCL.TO we her
kak-nibud’ vzbodrim.
 somehow wake.up

‘Even if Masha comes to the test after a sleepless night, we will wake her up somehow.’

b. *daže esli Maša pridet na kontrol’nuju posle bessonnoj noči, (#to) ona*
 even if Masha comes to test after sleepless night PTCL.TO she
prekrasno vse otvetit.
 brilliantly everything answer

‘Even if Masha comes to the test after a sleepless night, she will give a brilliant answer to everything.’

As stated earlier, we are going pursue the hypothesis that all examples where focus operators are infelicitous with the particle *to* are construed in such a way that the conditional clauses must be in the scope of a focus operator in the matrix clause (our claim is thus weaker than Podlesskaya’s). To substantiate the hypothesis, we aim to: (a) link the hypothesis with the structural role of the particle *to* argued for in the previous section; (b) show that examples where *daže* ‘even’ is felicitous on the left of the conditional clause with the particle *to* present do not exemplify a focus operator in the main clause scoping over the conditional clause.

¹We thank Daria Sidorkina for these examples, taken from an unpublished seminar talk.

3.1 Focus operators are lower than *to*-conditionals

Assuming with the most contemporary research that focus operators are propositional despite their variable linear position (see [Hirsch 2017](#); [Bassi, Hirsch & Trinh 2022](#); [Branan & Erlewine 2023](#) among others), it is clear that the infelicity of *tol'ko* 'only' with the particle *to* can be attributed to syntactic structure (if our hypothesis defended in the previous section is correct).

Before we flesh out that line of thought, however, it is necessary to rule out a possible information-structure-based account, which may attribute the incompatibility of *tol'ko esli* 'only if' with the particle *to* to obligatory givenness / topicality of the conditional clause, for example. Such an idea (proposed for the incompatibility of English conditional inversion with focus operators by [Iatridou & Embick 1994](#)) is easily tested by the question-answer pair test (as was done by [Biezma 2011](#)). The catch, of course, is that the *to*-conditional cannot be used as a fragment answer (for prosodic reasons: the proclitic *to* needs a host). However, we take the possibility to use *to*-conditionals as an answer to indicate that an obvious information-structural account does not work.

- (14) A: *Pri kakix obstojatel'stvax Maša pridet na našu svad'bu?* B: *Esli vy ne*
under which circumstances Masha comes on our wedding if you not
pozovete Petju, to ona, možet, i zajavitsja.
invite Petja PTCL.TO she maybe ADD come

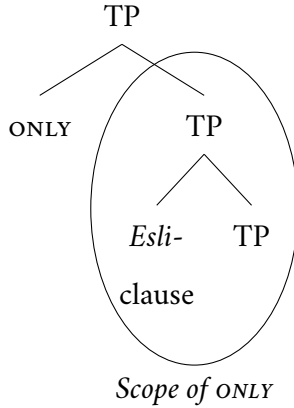
A: 'Under which circumstances will Masha come to our wedding?'

B: 'If you do not invite Petja, she may come.'

Since the immediate hypothesis seems to make wrong predictions, we suggest to pursue a connection between structural effect of the presence of the particle *to* and the incompatibility of the particle *to* with focus operators. One way to formalize the connection is to argue that conditional clauses in the presence of the particle *to* necessarily lie outside the scope of a propositional focus operator like *tol'ko* 'only' and hence they (and their constituents) cannot act as the focus associate of *tol'ko* 'only' and other focus operators, assuming a tight connection between scope and c-command ([May 1985](#)).

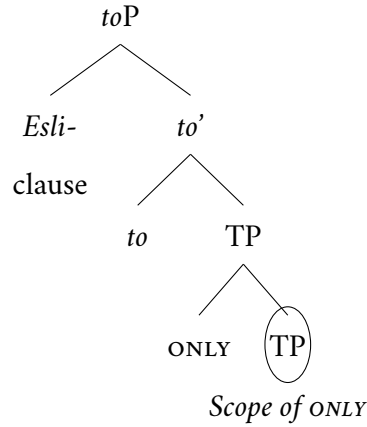
(15) Focus operators without *to*:

esli-clause is in scope of ONLY



Focus operators with *to*:

esli-clause is not in scope of ONLY



The structures above make the following prediction: in the presence of *to*, alternatives excluded by ONLY are not conditional sentences (assuming that ONLY presupposes its prejacent and negates all of its innocently excludable alternatives; see Alxatib 2013; Alxatib 2020 for an overview). However, the issue is that it is rather unclear whether this prediction can even be tested. For the assertion, the structures in (15) give the (simplified) formulae in (16). The structure (a) in (15) is translated to the following: for all innocently excludable alternatives q' of the conditional consequent q , it is false that if the conditional prejacent p is true, q' is true as well. The structure (b) in (15) is translated to the following: if conditional prejacent p is true, all innocently excludable alternatives q' of the conditional consequent q are false.

(16) Semantic formulae for (15).

a. $\forall q' \in ALT_{IE}(q): \neg [p \Box \rightarrow q']$

b. $p \Box \rightarrow [\forall q' \in ALT_{IE}(q): \neg q']$

The issue in testing the difference between the two formulae lies in the Conditional Excluded Middle (CEM; Stalnaker 1981; von Stechow 1997; Alxatib 2020 among many others): $p \Box \rightarrow q \vee p \Box \rightarrow \neg q$. Given CEM, the formulae above become equivalent: both formulae in (17) are true iff the most similar p -worlds are such that $\neg q'$ for all q' which are innocently excludable alternatives of q .

(17) Semantic formulae for (15), given CEM.

a. $\forall q' \in ALT_{IE}(q): [p \Box \rightarrow \neg q']$

b. $p \Box \rightarrow [\forall q' \in ALT_{IE}(q): \neg q']$

A similar issue arises when we focus on the presupposition of ONLY: while the structure (a) in (15) is predicted to introduce a conditional presupposition via ONLY, the structure (b) appears not to, since ONLY does not scope over the conditional clause. However, the structure in (b) may introduce a conditional presupposition due to general considerations of presupposition projection from conditional sentences (Karttunen 1973 and much subsequent work). It thus appears that presuppositions of ONLY are not useful in verifying that the conditional clause lies outside the scope of ONLY as well.

(18) Presuppositions of (15).

a. ONLY($p \Box \rightarrow q$) presupposes $p \Box \rightarrow q$.

b. i. ONLY(q) presupposes q

ii. if q presupposes r , then $p \Box \rightarrow q$ presupposes $p \Box \rightarrow r$

iii. $p \Box \rightarrow$ ONLY(q) presupposes $p \Box \rightarrow q$.

To sum up, there is a clear way to implement the incompatibility of the particle *to* with the main clause focus operator *tol'ko* 'only' scoping over the conditional clause via the commonly assumed connection between c-command and scope. However, for now, we lack any independent positive evidence in favor of this particular approach: the clear predictions of our account have been argued to be empirically untestable due to independently motivated properties of conditionals (conditional excluded middle and presupposition projection from conditionals).

The only argument we have presented is negative and its claim is that the incompatibility of the particle *to* with main clause focus operators cannot be attributed to information structure. It appears to us that if conditional clauses can be focused in the presence of *to*, the account of their incompatibility with focus operators should posit that (for some reason) they cannot be in their scope. Because to be associated with a focus operator is to be (a) focused; (b) in its

scope. If (a) is possible for conditional clauses when the particle *to* is present, impossibility of (b) appears to be the only analytical option, which we have linked to the previously established structural properties associated with the particle *to*.

While *tol'ko* 'only' does not provide contrasts that show its inability to scope over the conditional clause, the next subsection presents an argument that there is positive evidence in favor of the inability of *daže* 'even' to scope over the conditional clause: we argue that the examples where *daže* 'even' appears to be adjoined to the conditional clause are only compatible with the low scope of *daže* 'even', showing that it cannot scope over the whole conditional construction, which we take as a confirmation of our general approach.

3.2 Particle *to* is only compatible with low even

As we have argued, particle *to* can never appear in contexts with focus operators. However, this is not entirely the case, as shown by the behavior of *daže* 'even'. One even finds examples where the focus particle *daže* 'even' is adjoined to the conditional clause in the context of clausal ellipsis in the main clause (which requires the particle *to*). It is thus clear that *daže* 'even' is possible with conditionals in the presence of the particle *to*.

(19) Even is possible in contexts where the particle *to* is obligatory (Pekelis 2015: 93)

daže esli pogibnu, to ne zrja.
even if I.die PTCL.TO not in.vain
'Even if I die, it will not be in vain.'

We suggest that the contrast in (13), repeated in (20, presents the motivation for an analysis in which the operator *daže* 'even' does not take scope over the main clause when it is attested with the particle *to*. Assuming that *even* and its kin presuppose the low probability of its prejacent compared to its alternatives (Karttunen & Peters 1979; Crnič 2011), the difference between (20a) and (20b) lies in which proposition is presupposed to be unlikely: the conditional antecedent (as in 20a) or the conditional as a whole (as in 20b).

(20) The core contrast for *daže* ‘even’

a. *daže esli Maša pridet na kontrol’nuju posle bessonnoj noči, (to) my ee*
even if Masha comes to test after sleepless night PTCL.TO we her
kak-nibud’ vzbodrim.
somehow wake.up

‘Even if Masha comes to the test after a sleepless night, we will wake her up somehow.’

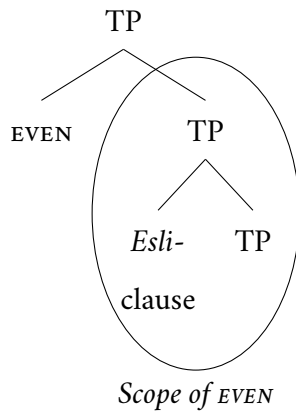
b. *daže esli Maša pridet na kontrol’nuju posle bessonnoj noči, (#to) ona*
even if Masha comes to test after sleepless night PTCL.TO she
prekrasno vse otvetit.
brilliantly everything answer

‘Even if Masha comes to the test after a sleepless night, she will give a brilliant answer to everything.’

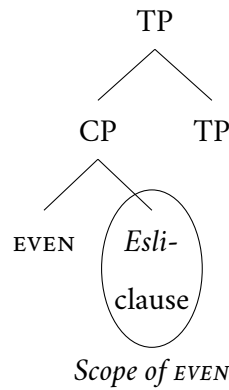
The intuition is that the sentence in (20a) presupposes that Masha is unlikely to come to the test after a sleepless night. Moreover, it is not the case that it is unlikely that the speakers will wake Masha up after a sleepless night. On the other hand, the sentence in (20b) seems to presuppose that it is unlikely that Masha will give a brilliant answer to questions on the exam after a sleepless night. The question is, then, how one would implement the perceived difference between (20a) and (20b) compositionally to account for the incompatibility of (20b) with the particle *to*.

Clearly, the issue seems to concern scope: it seems that our account requires there to be two scope sites for *daže* ‘even’. The first scope site is positioned above the whole conditional (as in 21a) while the second scope site is positioned just above the conditional antecedent (as in 21b).

(21) Low probability of the whole conditional construction



Low probability of just the conditional antecedent



Given our conjecture that focus operators cannot scope over whole conditionals when the particle *to* is present, we expect the particle *to* to enforce a low scope of *daže*. Provided that conditional antecedents are a downward entailing environment, there is a way to test the prediction.

First, consider the contrast in (22). When a strong focus associate (i.e., the one that entails its alternatives) is embedded under a downward entailing operator, *EVEN* should scope below the downward entailing operator (as in 22a and not as in 22b). Note that the sentences in (22) are given with an implied scale ⟨open, read, understand⟩.

(22) Pragmatically strong focus associates embedded in a DE environment force low scope of *EVEN* (Crnič 2011:147)

- a. I doubt that John *EVEN* UNDERSTOOD the book.
- b. # I *EVEN* doubt that John UNDERSTOOD the book.

The reason for that is that the downward entailing operator makes a pragmatically strong alternative weak (if p entails q , doubting q entails doubting p ; *I doubt that John ate a bird* entails *I doubt that John ate a chicken*) and thus the generated scalar inference clashes with the context: it is inferred that a pragmatically weak alternative is the least likely (which is contradictory assuming that p cannot be less likely as q if p entails q , see Crnič 2011:15)

Given that our goal is to test the predicted unavailability of a high scope configuration, we

should test whether a pragmatically weak focus associate is incompatible with *daže esli* ‘even if’ + the particle *to*: if pragmatically strong elements require low scope EVEN, pragmatically weak elements require high scope of EVEN. Thus if the high scope construal is unavailable for structural reasons, the sentence is predicted to be infelicitous.

The sentence in (23) confirms the prediction. The focus associate is *to get the last place*, which is the weakest alternative assuming a set of alternatives *to get the N place* where N is the number of place. As predicted, the sentence is incompatible with the particle *to*, which we attribute to the fact that (a) the context requires high scope of EVEN; (b) the structure with the particle *to* blocks high scope of EVEN.

(23) The particle *to* is incompatible with a pragmatically weak associate of *daže* ‘even’.

a. Context: Vasja is a bad swimmer who got to the city championship.

daže esli Vasja zajmet poslednee mesto, (#to) ego vse budut xvalit’.
 even if Vasja gets last place PTCL.TO him everyone will celebrate
 ‘Even if Vasja gets the last place, everyone will celebrate him.’

b. Context: Vasja is a chess player who drinks almost everyday.

daže esli Vasja pjanyj, (#to) on obygraet tebja v šamxaty..
 even if Vasja drunk PTCL.TO he outplay you in chess
 ‘Even if Vasja is drunk, he will outplay you in chess.’

Therefore, *daže* ‘even’ cannot take scope over the entire conditional when the particle *to* is present: otherwise the examples in (23) would be felicitous. In the absence of an alternative approach to this observation, we suggest that it follows from the syntactic position of conditional clauses in the presence of the particle *to*: they are too high in the clausal structure to be in the scope of any focus operator.

To conclude, this section has argued that conditional clauses cannot be in the scope of focus operators when the particle *to* is present due to their syntactic position. Apparent exceptions concerning *daže* ‘even’ have been dealt with in this subsection. We thus consider the case for

two syntactic positions for conditional clauses in Russian to be strong. In the next section, we position our findings in the larger context of the studies of external syntax of adverbial clauses, conditionals in particular.

4 On previous work on external syntax of conditionals

The idea that conditional clauses may occupy different positions in the clausal spine is not new and has been fruitfully entertained by a large body of work (see, among others, [Haegeman 1984](#); [Iatridou 1991](#); [Haegeman 2003](#); see [Haegeman & Schönenberger 2023](#) for an overview). In this section, we wish to highlight that, despite similar ideas regarding the structure, the generalizations about the mapping between the semantic-pragmatic properties of conditional clauses and their syntactic position do not hold for Russian, assuming the structural approach to Russian conditionals with and without the particle *to* presented in this paper.

4.1 A short summary of the previous work

First of all, it is necessary to establish which semantic-pragmatic properties have been previously argued to be related to the structural position. This subsection draws heavily from the insightful review in [Haegeman & Schönenberger 2023](#).

Much of the previous work aims to establish a structural basis for the three-way distinction in the domain of conditional constructions: event conditionals, factual conditionals (also called relevance conditionals by [Iatridou 1991](#) and premise conditionals by [Haegeman 2003](#)), and speech-event conditionals (also called biscuit conditionals, see [Ebert, Endriss & Hinterwimmer 2008](#) among other works), see the examples in (24). Event conditionals express the conditions needed for the eventuality described in the main clause to occur, factual conditionals establish a discourse background for the assertion, while speech-event conditionals encode a condition on the realization of the speech act.

(24) The three-way distinction in the domain of conditionals

- a. If your back-supporting muscles tire, you will be at increased risk of lower-back pain. (Event conditional, [Haegeman & Schönenberger 2023](#): 276)
- b. When Simenon was asked how the Maigret novels differed from his other books – his romans durs – he described them as 'sketches' [...] If the books are sketches, they are the sketches of an old master. (Factual conditional, [Haegeman & Schönenberger 2023](#): 276)
- c. David Davis even said he had been a personal friend of Mr. Clarke for 30 years. He had just faced his greatest test. If I may say so, I commend how he has personally responded to, and risen to that occasion. (Speech-event conditional, [Haegeman & Schönenberger 2023](#):276)

[Haegeman & Schönenberger 2023](#) present a number of diagnostics that show the relevance of the three-way distinction for grammar: VP anaphora, VP ellipsis, scope of TP level operators, and others. Purely morphosyntactic phenomena seem to be sensitive to the distinction as well: [Weisser 2019](#) shows that German event-conditionals occupy the prefield position while speech-event conditionals do not (in other words, event-conditionals count for V2 while speech-event conditionals do not). Similar facts obtain for Dutch V2 as well ([Haegeman & Schönenberger 2023](#)).

(25) German prefields and conditionals ([Weisser 2019](#):ff.1)

- a. Speech-event conditionals do not occupy the prefield

Wenn du Durst hast, da ist noch Bier im Kühlschrank.

if you thirst have there is still beer in fridge

'If you are thirsty, there is still some beer in the fridge.'

- b. Event-conditionals occupy the prefield

*Wenn du Durst hast, (*nachher) gehe ich (nachher) noch einkaufen*

If you thirst have, later go I later still grocery.shop

'If you are thirsty, I will later go grocery shopping.'

The current iteration of such proposals about conditionals seem to argue in favor of identifying the type of the conditional to its morphosyntactic position: the logic is that a certain conditional has certain interpretation properties *due to* its syntactic position (Frey 2023).

4.2 Against syntactic grounding of pragmatic distinctions

To recap, previous work has argued for a syntactic grounding for the three-way semantic-pragmatic distinction in the domain of conditional clauses. Our position is that the distinction between Russian conditionals in presence/absence of the particle *to* present a novel testing ground for the theory that draws a principled connection between the external syntax of the conditional clause and its interpretation.

First of all, the binding data (see 10) has established that conditional clauses do not originate in the VP when the particle *to* is present. Given the position outlined in Haegeman & Schönenberger 2023, one expects event conditionals to be incompatible with the particle *to*. This prediction is not borne out. The conditional in (26) is an event-conditional: the addressee will not be expelled if they pass the exam, meaning that the eventuality described in the conditional clause is a condition on the realization of the eventuality described by the main clause.

(26) *esli ty ne sdaš etot ekzamen, to tebja otčisljat.*
if you not pass this exam PTCL.TO you expelled
'If you do not pass this exam, you will be expelled.'

Secondly, let us consider the factual conditionals. Russian presents a fruitful ground to test any claims regarding factual conditionals due to there being a special conditional clause marker *raz*, which plays the morphosyntactic role of *esli* but also introduces a presupposition that the proposition expressed by the conditional clause is true, as evidenced by the example (27). If any type of conditionals in Russian should be characterized as 'factual', it is the class of conditionals headed by *raz*.

(27) *ja ne znaju, pjet=li Vasja, no esli/ #raz on pjet, pust' pjet xorošij alkohol.*
 I not know drink=Q Vasja but if since he drinks let.him drink good alcohol
 'I do not know whether Vasja drinks or not. But if he does, let him drink good alcohol.'

If there is a relation between the event- / factual- split presented by [Haegeman & Schönenberger 2023](#) and the structural differences between Russian conditionals with and without *to*, we predict there to be a relation between *raz* and *to*, which is nowhere to be found: conditionals headed by *raz* neither require nor block the presence of the particle *to*.

(28) *raz ty takoj lenivyj, (to) ne postupiš v universitet.*
 since you such lazy PTCL.TO not get.into into university
 'Since you are so lazy, you will not get into any university.'

Finally, let us consider speech-event conditionals. A biscuit-like conditional in (29) neither requires nor blocks the presence of the particle *to*.

(29) *Esli ty goloden, (to) na plite est' sup.*
 if you hungry PTCL.TO on stovetop is soup
 'If you are hungry, there is soup on the stovetop.'

Summing up, there is no direct connection between the event/factual/speech-event distinction of [Haegeman & Schönenberger 2023](#) and the structural height effect of the particle *to* argued for in this paper. While it is not necessarily the case that any structural distinction in the domain of conditionals should map onto the three-way distinction drawn by previous work, the resulting state of affairs (especially the availability of event-conditional readings when the particle *to* is present) certainly does not support the notion that there is universal syntactic grounding behind the three readings of conditional clauses.

5 Conclusions and outlook

This paper has argued in favor of a syntactic approach for the distinction between Russian conditionals with and without particle *to*. Based on the data of ellipsis, binding, non-finite clauses, and scope of focus operators, it has been suggested that conditional clauses occupy a higher position when the particle *to* is present.

This work, then, adds to the research tradition that established that conditional clauses can have different external syntax, depending on a number of factors. However, the connection between different external syntax of conditional clauses and their interpretation, argued to hold for a number of Germanic languages by Haegeman 1984, Haegeman 2003, Haegeman & Schönenberger 2023 has been argued not to hold for the distinction between Russian conditionals with and without the particle *to*.

The blind spot of this paper is the nature of the particle *to* itself. As it currently stands, we cannot provide any syntactic or semantic insight into its nature. While it is true that the particle *to* is homophonous with the 3.N.SG form of the demonstrative pronoun *tot* ‘that’, it is unclear whether the connection can be fleshed out into an insightful analysis. The semantic input of the particle is also left unclear especially given that all the prominent contrasts involving *to* have been argued to follow from the structural position of the conditional clause indicated by the particle *to*.

In any case, the positive input of this paper is that Russian conditional clauses can be positioned in different syntactic positions, as diagnosed by ellipsis, binding, and focus particles.

References

- Alxatib, Sam. 2013. *Only'and association with negative antonyms*. Ph. D. thesis, MIT dissertation.
- Alxatib, Sam. 2020. *Focus, evaluativity, and antonymy*. Springer.
- Bassi, Itai, Aron Hirsch & Tue Trinh. 2022. Pre-dp only is a propositional operator at lf: a new argument from ellipsis. In *Semantics and linguistic theory*, 814–830.

- Bhatt, Rajesh & Roumyana Pancheva. 2017. Conditionals. *The Wiley Blackwell Companion to Syntax, Second Edition*. 1–48.
- Biezma, María. 2011. Conditional inversion and givenness. In *Semantics and linguistic theory*, 552–571.
- Branan, Kenyon & Michael Yoshitaka Erlewine. 2023. Anti-pied-piping. *Language* 99(3). 603–653.
- van Craenenbroeck, Jeroen & Jason Merchant. 2013. Ellipsis phenomena. In Marcel den Dikken (ed.), *Cambridge handbook of generative syntax*. Cambridge University Press.
- Crnič, Luka. 2011. *Getting even*. Massachusetts Institute of Technology dissertation.
- Ebert, Christian, Cornelia Endriss & Stefan Hinterwimmer. 2008. A unified analysis of indicative and biscuit conditionals as topics. In *Semantics and linguistic theory*, 266–283.
- von Stechow, Kai. 1997. Bare plurals, bare conditionals, and only. *Journal of Semantics* 14(1). 1–56.
- Frey, Werner. 2023. On the categorial status of different dependent clauses. In Jutta M Hartmann & Angelika Wöllstein (eds.), *Propositionale argumente im sprachvergleich/propositional arguments in cross-linguistic research: theorie und empirie/theoretical and empirical issues*. Narr Francke Attempto Verlag.
- Giorgi, Alessandra. 2014. Prosodic signals as syntactic formatives in the left periphery. In *On peripheries: exploring clause initial and clause final positions*, 161–188. Hituzi Syobo Press.
- Gribanova, Vera. 2017. Head movement and ellipsis in the expression of russian polarity focus. *Natural Language & Linguistic Theory* 35. 1079–1121.
- Haegeman, Liliane. 1984. Pragmatic conditionals in english.
- Haegeman, Liliane. 2003. Conditional clauses: external and internal syntax. *Mind & Language* 18(4). 317–339.
- Haegeman, Liliane & Manuela Schönenberger. 2023. The external syntax of conditional clauses. In *Conditionals: logic, linguistics and psychology*, 275–319. Springer.
- Hirsch, Aron. 2017. *An inflexible semantics for cross-categorial operators*. Massachusetts Institute of Technology dissertation.

- Iatridou, Sabine. 1991. *Topics in conditionals*. Massachusetts Institute of Technology dissertation.
- Iatridou, Sabine. 1993. On the contribution of conditional then. *Natural Language Semantics* 2. 171–199.
- Iatridou, Sabine & David Embick. 1994. Conditional inversion. In *North east linguistics society*, vol. 24, 14.
- Karttunen, Lauri. 1973. Presuppositions of compound sentences. *Linguistic inquiry* 4(2). 169–193.
- Karttunen, Lauri & Stanley Peters. 1979. Conventional Implicature. In *Presupposition*, 1–56. Brill.
- May, Robert. 1985. *Logical form: its structure and derivation*. Vol. 12. MIT press.
- Merchant, Jason. 2004. Fragments and ellipsis. *Linguistics and philosophy* 27. 661–738.
- Nespor, Marina & Irene Vogel. 1986. *Prosodic phonology: with a new foreword*. Vol. 28. Walter de Gruyter.
- Pekelis, Olga. 2015. Pokazatel' to kak sredstvo akcentuacii implikativnogo otnošenija (na primere sojuza esli... to). *Voprosy jazykoznanija* (2). 55–96.
- Pekelis, Olga. 2016. Correlative markers, contrastiveness and grammaticalization: a comparative study of conditional correlatives in russian and italian. *Italian Journal of Linguistics* 28(2). 143–180.
- Podlesskaya, Vera. 1997. Syntax and semantics of resumption: some evidence from russian conditional conjuncts. *Russian linguistics* 21(2). 125–155.
- Reinhart, Tanya Miriam. 1976. *The syntactic domain of anaphora*. Massachusetts Institute of Technology dissertation.
- Scott, Tatiana. 2012. *Whoever doesn't hop must be superior: the russian left-periphery and the emergence of superiority*. Stony Brook University dissertation.
- Stalnaker, Robert C. 1981. A defense of conditional excluded middle. In *Ifs: conditionals, belief, decision, chance and time*, 87–104. Springer.
- Weisser, Philipp. 2019. Equal rights for all conditionals. *Linguistics Vanguard* 5(s3). 20190008.