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Expletives in a Null Subject Language and Criteria for Expletiveness: Evidence from Russian¹

Abstract

The paper presents an analysis of three pronouns used to refer to a right-peripheral complement clause in Russian. It is demonstrated that two of them exhibit properties associated with expletives, which is unexpected at first sight, Russian being a (partial) null subject language. However, these pronouns are shown to have a discourse-related function rather than a syntactic one. The third pronoun under discussion, though used in the same grammatical context, turns out to be referential. The paper offers an account for this fact and proposes that the parameters that have proved to be relevant for differentiating expletives and non-expletives in Russian should be regarded as general criteria for expletiveness.

Keywords

expletive, null subject, Russian, complement clause, referential pronoun

1. Introduction

In a number of European languages, the pronoun that refers to a right-peripheral complement clause is assumed to be an expletive (cf. the English “extraposition *it*”, the German *es*, the French *il* etc.). This view is commonly associated with the fact that these languages hardly allow subjectless sentences (Roberts and Holmberg 2010 among others). In Russian, at least three pronouns can be

¹ This research has been supported by the Russian Foundation for Humanitarian Research (grant no. 17-04-00517(a)). I am thankful to the anonymous SPL reviewers, who have provided numerous helpful comments and corrections. All errors are mine.

used in such construction. These are the pronouns *èto* ('it, this'), *ono* ('it') and *tak* ('so'), exemplified in (1a-c) from the Russian National Corpus (RNC).²

- (1) a. *Èto* *horošo*, *čto* *ty* *takoj* *umnyj* *i* *rassuditel'nyj*.
 it good-PRED that you so smart and sober-minded
 'It is good that you are so smart and sober-minded.'
- b. *Ono* *horošo*, *čto* *tak* *proizošlo*.
 it good-PRED that so happen-PST.SG.N
 'It's good that it happened.'
- c. *Tak* *slučilos'*, *čto* *papa* *umer* *nakanune*.
 so happen-PST.SG.N that dad die-PST.SG.M day.before
 '[It] so happened that [my] dad died the day before.'

In the typology proposed in Roberts and Holmberg (2010: 10), Russian is a partial null subject language. This means that null subjects are admissible in Russian, although the conditions under which they are used are more restricted than those in consistent null subject languages. It appears, nevertheless, that two of the three pronouns used to refer to a complement clause in Russian, *èto* and *ono*, display a number of properties characteristic of an expletive in (at least) English and German. By contrast, the third pronoun, *tak*, though apparently similar, turns out to have referential uses only.

The objective of the present paper is to propose an answer to the questions that the existence of three different pronouns in structures with a right-peripheral complement clause in a language raises:

- Why cannot *tak* be an expletive, while *èto* and *ono* can? More generally, what are the factors that may influence the expletive vs. referential status of a pronoun referring to the right-peripheral embedded clause?
- What is the function of *èto* and *ono*? Presumably, it is not the function of filling the subject position, normally associated with expletives, Russian being a (partial) null subject language.
- Can the properties by which *èto* and *ono* differ from *tak* be generalized as criteria for expletiveness?

Although this research is based mainly on the results of the work done on expletives within the generative grammar, as my own framework is basically the functionalism, I will focus here on the semantic nature of expletiveness first of all, namely the assumption that expletives are semantically vacuous or at least semantically impoverished and bear no semantic role (Svenonius 2002; Biberauer and van der Wal 2012, a.o.). As for the structural issues, in

² The abbreviations used here are: 1 = first person; 3 = third person; ACC = accusative; CNV = converb; DAT = dative; FUT = future; GEN = genitive; INF = infinitive; INST = instrumental; N = neuter; NOM = nominative; PL = plural; PRED = predicative; PRS = present; PST = past; PTCL = particle; SG = singular.

particular, the question of what the structural relation is between the pronoun and the right-peripheral embedded clause, they remain beyond the scope of the present study.

The rest of the paper is organized as follows. I present the empirical data on *èto*, *ono* and *tak* in section 2. I propose an answer to the question as to why *tak* is not an expletive in section 3. In section 4, I discuss the function *èto* and *ono* have when they are used as expletives. I summarize the criteria for expletiveness in section 5. Section 6 concludes.

2. The empirical data

I start with the parameters according to which *èto* and *ono* can be qualified as expletives in section 2.1.³ I go on to analyze *tak* with respect to the same parameters in section 2.2.

2.1. *Èto* and *ono*

Genetically, the pronoun *èto* is the SG.N.NOM/ACC. form of the demonstrative pronoun *ètot* ('this'). *Ono* derives from the nominative form of the 3SG.N personal pronoun ('it'). While *èto* is a rather neutral item stylistically and grammatically, *ono* is stylistically and distributionally marked.

Firstly, in the contemporary Russian *ono* sounds rather archaic. Secondly, *ono*, contrary to *èto*, is not inflected for case. Though formally *ono* appears to be in nominative, this is a fixed form rather than the nominative proper, since *ono* cannot be used in other case forms. Thus, in (2a) *èto* stands in the direct object position and it is marked for accusative. *Ono* cannot be used here, either as *ono* or as *ego*, which would be the accusative form of the personal pronoun *ono* (2b):

- (2) a. *Èto vse znajut, čto naš papa*
 it-ACC all know-PRS.3.PL that our daddy
v komandirovke. (RNC)
 in business.trip
 'Everybody knows (lit.: it) that our father is on a business trip.'

- b. **Ono/*Ego vse znajut, čto naš papa v komandirovke.*

Note that though the form *èto* is syncretic between nominative and accusative, in (2) it is the direct object of the transitive verb *znat'* ('know'), hence, it can be claimed to be accusative. There is, however, a class of predicates that give

³ With respect to *èto*, some of these parameters have been discussed in detail in Pekelis (2018).

less evidence for differentiation between the nominative and the accusative *èto*. These are the so-called predicatives, non-agreeing predicates that do not take full noun phrase arguments marked for nominative or accusative, thus providing no distributional “pattern” for distinguishing between two forms of *èto* (see more on predicatives in section 2.1.4).⁴

Thirdly, *ono* is used with a small set of matrix predicates. Importantly, these predicates combine with *èto* as well, i.e. the set of predicates combinable with *ono* is a proper subset of the set of predicates combinable with *èto*. A rough list of such predicates compiled based on RNC includes the following: *horošo* ‘good’, *pravda* ‘true’, *jasno* ‘clear’, *vidno* ‘clear’, *ladno* ‘okay’, *izvestno* ‘known’, *ponjatno* ‘obvious’, *verno* ‘true’, *stranno* ‘strange’, *dosadno* ‘disappointing’, *točno* ‘sure’, *nado* ‘needed’, *nelovko* ‘uncomfortable’, *prijatno* ‘pleasant’, *legče* ‘easier’, *spokojnee* ‘easier’, *sdelat'sja* ‘occur’, *vyhodit'* ‘turn out’, *byt'* ‘be’, *polučat'sja* ‘turn out’. In sections 2.1.1–2.1.5, I sketch the distributional traits that *èto* and *ono* have in common, which are associated with expletives in at least some European languages.

2.1.1. New vs. given postcedent

Both *èto* and *ono* can cataphorically relate to new information. This is evidenced in (3a) and (3b) by the fact that the falling accent IK-1 (in the terminology of Bryzgunova (1980)), associated with focus, can be realized inside the complement clause.⁵ A proposition that is given, i.e. mentioned in the previous discourse, would be expected to bear what is usually called tail intonation.

- (3) a. *Èto horošo, što ty takoj umnyj i rassuditel'nyj*. (RNC)
 it good-PRED that you so smart and sober-minded
 ‘It is good that you are so smart and sober-minded.’

- b. *Ono, konečno, neploho, što žizni prizyvnik a budet
 it of.course not.bad that life-DAT conscript-GEN be-FUT.3.SG
 grozit' tol'ko kulak pjanogo “deda” \, a ne pulja*. (RNC)
 threaten-INF only fist-NOM drunk-GEN bully-GEN and not bullet-NOM
 ‘It is of course not bad that the life of a conscript will be threatened only by the fist of a drunk bully and not by a bullet.’

Importantly, it has been argued in the literature that both the referential English *it* (see e.g. Birner and Ward 2004) and the German *es* (Schwabe et al. 2016, a.o.), linked to a right-peripheral complement clause, differ from the corresponding expletives exactly in that *only the latter* can relate cataphorically to new information.

⁴ In examples below, *èto* is glossed for case only if it co-occurs with a conjugated verb.

⁵ Here and below, the characters ‘\’ and ‘/’ are used to denote the focus and the topic accent-bearer, respectively.

2.1.2. Linear order of the pronoun and the clause

As the examples in (4) and (5) from (Vikner 1995: 239) show, both *it* and *es* can only refer to a postposed embedded clause. A preposed embedded clause can only be referred to by a demonstrative referential pronoun (*that* in English, *das* in German).

(4) *That you came, that /*it annoys me.*

(5) a. **Dass du gekommen bist, ärgert es mich.*
 that you come be-2SG annoy-PRS.3.SG it me
 Intended meaning: 'That you came, that annoys me.'

b. ^{OK}*Dass du gekommen bist, das ärgert mich.*
 that you come be-2SG that annoy-PRS.3.SG me
 'That you came, that annoys me.'

This link between expletiveness and the linear position is maintained by *èto* and *ono*, too. *Ono* can only precede the embedded clause: while (6a) is perfectly acceptable, (6b) is ill-formed.

(6) a. *Ono horošo, čto tak proizošlo.* (RNC)
 it good-PRED that so happen-PST.SG.N
 'It's good that it happened.' (RNC)

b. ^{??}*Čto tak proizošlo, ono horošo.*
 that so happen-PST.SG.N it good-PRED
 Intended meaning: 'That it happened, that is good.'

Èto, as the examples in (7) shows, is positionally free:

(7) a. *Èto horošo, čto tak proizošlo.*
 it good-PRED that so happen-PST.SG.N
 'It's good that it happened.'

b. *Čto tak proizošlo, èto horošo.*
 that so happen-PST.SG.N it good-PRED
 'That it happened, that is good.'

However, *èto* displays a number of traits associated with expletiveness only when it precedes the embedded clause. Two such traits are discussed in sections 2.1.3 and 2.1.4.

2.1.3. Nominative vs. oblique case

Cross-linguistically, expletives tend to be subjects (Biberauer and van der Wal 2012). The following observation concerning *èto* seems to be in line with this fact: in case *èto* precedes the embedded clause, it is more likely to be marked for nominative than for an oblique case. Accordingly, example (8a), in which *èto* is marked for genitive, is infelicitous, while (8c), with a nominative *èto*, is

well-formed. Note also that (8b), in which a genitive *èto* follows the embedded clause, is perfectly acceptable.

- (8) a. ^{??}*Ja ètogo ne znal, čto ty takoj*
 I-NOM it-GEN not know-PST.SG.M that you so
umnyj i rassuditel'nyj.
 smart and sober-minded
 'I did not know (lit.: this) that you are so smart and sober-minded.'
- b. ^{OK}*Čto ty takoj umnyj i rassuditel'nyj, ètogo ja*
 that you so smart and sober-minded it-GEN I-NOM
ne znal.
 not know-PST.SG.M
 'That you are so smart and sober-minded, I did not know that.'
- c. *Èto raduet, čto ty takoj umnyj*
 it-NOM make.happy-PRS.3.SG that you so smart
i rassuditel'nyj.
 and sober-minded
 'It makes [me] happy that you are so smart and sober-minded.'

However, *èto* marked for an oblique case can precede the embedded clause if it is clear from the context that the embedded proposition is given. This is the case in example (9): the piece of information 'they were happy' figures in the pre-text.

- (9) *Nu, estestvenno! Obradovalis'.*
 well of.course be.happy-PST.PL
 – *Net, ètogo ne pišet, čto obradovalis'.* (RNC)
 no it-GEN not write-PRS.3.SG that be.happy-PST.PL
 'Well, of course! [They] were happy. – No, [the author] did not write (lit.: it) that [they] were happy.'

According to my assumption, the referential *èto* differs from the expletive one in that the former can only refer to a prementioned state of affairs. Hence, the data suggest that *èto* marked for an oblique case can only be referential. This, by turn, fits the tendency for expletives to be subjects.

2.1.4. Matrix predicate: impersonal vs. personal

When the nominative *èto* precedes the embedded clause, it combines almost exclusively with impersonal matrix predicates or predicates that can be used impersonally. By the latter, I mean predicates that at least in some of their uses lack a slot for a canonical subject, namely for a full noun phrase marked with nominative case (see a similar definition of impersonality with a special focus on Russian in Letučij 2011). Most typically, *èto* preceding the embedded clause co-occurs with a predicative, i.e. a non-agreeing nominal predicate.

Predicatives are impersonal according to the above definition since they never combine with a full nominative noun phrase (though they do combine with nominative pronouns like *èto*). By contrast, when *èto* follows the embedded clause, it co-occurs more often with personal verbs (that is, verbs that cannot be used without a nominal nominative subject). This correlation is based on the analysis of a sample retrieved from the RNC; the statistics can be found in Pekelis (2018). For illustration, see the contrasting examples in (10), which show that the personal matrix verb *zaključat'* 'contain' is quite felicitous when it follows the embedded clause, as in (10a), but is infelicitous when it precedes the clause, as in (10b). That *zaključat'* is personal in the intended sense is manifested by the fact that the clause embedded under *zaključat'* cannot be the only filler of the subject position, so that both (10a) and (10b) are ungrammatical in case *èto* is omitted. This contrasts with the optionality of *èto* when it co-occurs with a predicative, as in (11) below.

- (10) a. *Čto oni byli sčastlivy svoeju ljubov'ju,*
 that they be-PST.3.PL happy their love
èto zaključalo v sebe neprijatnyj namjok. (RNC)
 it-NOM contain-PST.SG.N in oneself unpleasant allusion
 'That they were happy with their love, this contained an unpleasant allusion.'

- b. *Èto zaključalo v sebe neprijatnyj*
 it-NOM contain-PST.SG.N in oneself unpleasant
namjok, čto oni byli sčastlivy svoej ljubov'ju.
 allusion that they be-PST.PL happy their love
 Intended meaning: 'It contained an unpleasant allusion that they were happy with their love.'

As suggested in section 2.1.2, the position of *èto* before the embedded clause is associated with expletiveness. Given that in many languages constructions considered to be impersonal make use of expletives or non-fully referential subjects (Malchukov and Siewerska 2011: 2), the contrast in (10) can be explained as follows. In (10a), *èto* is referential, hence it does not need an impersonal predicate to combine with. In (10b), however, there is a contradiction between the position of *èto*, which suggests its expletive status, and the personal status of the verb, which suggests *èto* is referential.⁶

Ono, as mentioned in section 2.1.2, can only precede embedded clauses. Importantly, according to the data in RNC, the matrix predicates compatible with *ono* are only predicates that can be used impersonally, the absolute

⁶ In fact, personal verbs are compatible with *èto* that precedes an embedded clause in case the embedded proposition is given. This can be accounted for by the assumption that *èto* referring to a given proposition (but not the one related to a new proposition) can be assumed to be referential (cf. section 2.1.1). Note that the givenness of the embedded proposition is also a condition that licenses a non-nominative *èto* in the position before the clause (section 2.1.3).

majority of them being predicatives (see the list of the predicates in section 2.1). So, both *èto* that precedes the embedded clause and *ono* tend to combine with impersonal predicates, which is a further trait associated with expletiveness.⁷

It is worth noting, however, that in full accordance with the fact that Russian allows subjectless sentences, neither *èto* nor *ono* are obligatory in the impersonal constructions, cf. (11a,b). In this respect, they differ from the English expletive *it*, cf. (11c). Note that *èto* is expletive in (11b) according to the three parameters discussed above: it precedes the embedded clause, it is not marked for an oblique case, and it co-occurs with a predicative.

- (11) a. ^{OK}(*Ono*) *horošo, što tak proizošlo.* (RNC)
 it good-PRED that so happen-PST.SG.N
 ‘It’s good that it happened.’
- b. ^{OK}(*Èto*) *horošo, što tak proizošlo.*
 it good-PRED that so happen-PST.SG.N
 ‘It’s good that it happened.’
- c. [?](*It*) *is good that it happened.*

2.1.5. Contrastiveness

Ono can be neither focused nor contrasted, as is typical of an expletive (Greco et al. 2017: 70). In (12), *èto* cannot be substituted with *ono*, since it is contrasted by means of the particles *vot* and *i*.

- (12) – *Mne ne bol’no, babuška, govorju ja. –Vot*
 I-DAT not hurt-PRED grandmother say-PRS.1.SG I PTCL
èto i ploho, što ne bol’no. (RNC)
 it PTCL bad-PRED that not hurt-PRED
 ‘– It does not hurt me, grandmother, I say. – This is what is bad, that it does not hurt you.’

Èto, as evidenced by (12), can be contrasted, but according to the data in RNC, in this case it can only refer to a prementioned state of affairs (the state of affairs ‘it doesn’t hurt you’ in (12)). This suggests that it is the referential *èto* that can be contrasted and not the expletive one.

⁷ An anonymous SPL reviewer points out that neither *èto* nor *ono* are admissible in other types of impersonal constructions in Russian (those that do not involve a right-peripheral complement clause). By itself, this fact should not come as a surprise, since expletives do not form a homogeneous class and languages may restrict the use of a particular expletive by a specific syntactic context (see Biberauer and van der Wal 2012 for a typological overview). The question remains, however, as to why a demonstrative (*èto*) and a personal pronoun (*ono*) in Russian came to be used as extraposition expletives without developing other expletive functions.

2.1.6. *Èto* and *ono*: interim summary

The main conclusion that emerges from the presented data seems to be the following. *Èto* and *ono* are expletives or expletive-like items of the same functional type: they are used in the subject position, they combine with impersonal predicates and they are linked to a right-peripheral embedded clause. They do not represent different types of expletives, as do, for example, the English expletives *it* and *there* (Svenonius 2002: 4).

The main differences between *èto* and *ono* can be generalized as follows.

- *Ono* referring to a right-peripheral complement clause can be used only as an expletive, while *èto* has both expletive and referential uses.
- *Ono* is stylistically marked and restricted in use, while *èto* is stylistically neutral.

However, these differences don't contradict the assumption that *èto* and *ono* are expletives of the same functional type.

The parameters symptomatic of the expletive status of *èto* and *ono* are summarized below (the value associated with expletiveness is italicized).

- A. *New* vs. given postcedent (section 2.1.1)
- B. Pronoun *precedes* vs. follows the clause (section 2.1.2)
- C. *Nominative* vs. oblique case (section 2.1.3)
- D. Type of the predicate (*impersonal* vs. personal) (section 2.1.4)
- E. Contrastiveness/focusability (yes vs. *no*) (section 2.1.5)

According to the parameter A, both *ono* and the expletive *èto* can, though must not, relate cataphorically to new information, while the referential *èto* can only refer to given information. According to the parameter B, both expletives can only precede the embedded clause, while the referential *èto* can follow it. According to the parameter C, neither expletive can be marked for an oblique case. According to the parameter D, both expletives only co-occur with impersonal predicates (or predicates that can be used impersonally). According to the parameter E, neither expletive can be contrasted.

As, contrary to *ono*, *èto* can be both expletive and referential, the above parameters can serve to distinguish between two types of *èto*. Namely, *èto* is guaranteed to be an expletive if it is expletive according to *all* five parameters from A to E. When the postcedent of *èto* is given (the “referential value” of parameter A), the status of *èto* is unclear without further investigation. Finally, if *èto* displays at least one of the referential values from B to E, this is a sure symptom that *èto* is referential.⁸

⁸ As is clear from this definition of the expletive *èto*, different parameters interact with each other when determining the status of *èto* (referential vs. expletive). See Pekelis (2018) for a detailed discussion.

2.2. The empirical data: *tak*

According to the parameters from B to E, introduced in the previous section, *tak* can only be used as a referential pronoun. Indeed, *tak* can both precede the embedded clause (13a) and follow it (13b), and in neither case does it display features associated with expletiveness (parameter B).

- (13) a. *Mnogie tak dumajut, što Kostjakov*
 many.people so think-PRS.3.PL that Kostjakov
ot Boga otkupaetsja. (RNC)
 from God pay.off-PRS.3.SG
 ‘Many people think (lit.: so) that Kostjakov pays God off.’
- b. *Što Kostjakov ot Boga otkupaetsja, tak*
 that Kostjakov from God pay.off-PRS.3.SG so
mnogie dumajut.
 many.people think-PRS.3.PL
 ‘That Kostjakov pays God off, so many people think.’

Genetically, *tak* is an adverbial proform meaning ‘so’. Consequently, *tak* is not marked for case, so the parameter C is not relevant for it. Furthermore, *tak* doesn’t tend to combine with impersonal predicates, and in particular, it doesn’t combine with predicatives (parameter D). Instead, *tak* is compatible with personal predicates such as *dumat’* ‘think’ and *skazat’* ‘say’, as shown in (13) and (14) respectively.

- (14) *Ja tak skažu, što po mentalitetu ja ruskij čelovek.* (RNC)
 I so say-FUT.1.SG that by mentality I Russian man
 ‘I will say (lit.: so) that I’m a Russian by the mentality.’

Finally, *tak* can be contrasted (parameter E). In (15), *tak* is in the scope of the focus particle *daže* (‘even’).

- (15) *Daže tak polučilos’, što èto ona\ so mnoj*
 even so happen-PST.SG.N that PTCL she-NOM with I-INST
rasstalas’. (RNC)
 separate-PST.SG.F
 ‘[It] even so happened that it was she who separated from me.’

However, example (15) is contradictory. It shows that *tak*, being contrasted, can at the same time cataphorically refer to new information, which is a symptom of an expletive, according to the parameter A. Indeed, example (15) is naturally pronounced with the focus accent within the complement clause, and its broader context in RNC suggests as well that the piece of information ‘it was she who separated from me’ is assumed to be new by the speaker. A solution to this contradiction is suggested in section 3.

3. Why is *tak* not an expletive?

As shown above, four of five parameters characterize *tak* as a referential pronoun, and this is, I suggest, the correct analysis for *tak*. The fact that *tak* behaves differently from other referential pronouns (cf. parameter A) is presumably due to the status of an adverbial that *tak* has. This status, as I show below, is also linked to the fact that *tak* is not an expletive.

Indeed, even in case *tak* refers to a complement proposition, it doesn't assume the role of a complement, but remains an adverbial. One of the arguments in favor of this analysis is that *tak* can combine with *èto* or *ono* within the same clause and refer to one and the same sentential complement. This is the case in (16). Both *tak* and *èto* refer here to the sentential complement of the verb *byvat'* 'happen from time to time'. Note that the antecedent in (16) is not a clause embedded under the matrix predicate (as was the case in all examples considered hitherto), but an independent sentence. Consequently, both proforms in (16) from RNC can a priori be assumed to take up the predicate's theta-role and, hence, to be referential.

- (16) *V drugih slučajah [revnost' javljaetsja tol'ko*
 in other case-PL jealousy-NOM be-PRS.3.SG only
simptomom osnovnoj bolezni]_p tak_i èto_i
 symptom-INST underlying-GEN disease-GEN so it-NOM
byvaet pri isterii, paranoje,
 happen.sometimes-PRS.3.SG with hysteria paranoia
progressivnom paraliče i proč.
 progressive paralysis and so.on
 'In other cases, jealousy is only a symptom of the underlying disease, as (lit.: so it) sometimes happens with hysteria, paranoia, progressive paralysis, and so on.'

If, however, both *èto* and *tak* were referential complement proforms in (16), this would violate the general assumption that each semantic role is assigned to one and only one argument (Dowty 1991, a.o.). Now, it is hardly possible that *tak* is an adverbial in cases like (16), but a complement when referring to the right-peripheral complement clause. Its relation to the matrix predicate seems to be identical in these two cases.

Importantly, *èto* and *ono*, being both truly complement proforms, cannot combine with each other. This is evidenced by example (17), which is ungrammatical:

- (17) **Èto_i ono_i byvaet pri isterii,*
 it-NOM it happen-PRS.3.SG with hysteria
paranoje, progressivnom paraliče i proč.
 paranoia progressive paralysis and so.on
 Intended meaning: 'This happens with hysteria, paranoia, progressive paralysis, and so on.'

How can the adverbial status of *tak* be linked to its referential status? If it is a complement proform that refers to a right-peripheral embedded clause, as *èto* in (18a), its meaning adds nothing new to the meaning of the sentence, since the argument proposition is provided by the clause. This creates the conditions for the proform to be semantically empty. However, if it is an adverbial proform, as *tak* in (18b), the adverbial meaning it provides is expressed by no other item in the sentence, since the clause itself is a complement and not an adverbial. Hence, no similar conditions for semantic emptiness arise.⁹ Note that this idea, namely, that semantic factors might be at play in determining the expletiveness of a pronoun, is congruent with the fact that Russian has little, if any, syntactic need for an expletive.

- (18) a. *Èto byvaet, čto ženščiny*
 it-NOM happen.sometimes-PRS.3.SG that woman-NOM.PL
spokojnee mužčin. (RNC)
 calmer man-GEN.PL
 'It happens that women are calmer than men.'
- b. *Tak byvaet, čto ženščiny spokojnee*
 so happen.sometimes-PRS.3.SG that woman-NOM.PL calmer
mužčin.
 man-GEN.PL
 'It (lit.: so) happens sometimes that women are calmer than men.'

The linkage between the adverbial status of *tak* and its capacity to cataphorically refer to new information seems to be essentially the same: *tak* can refer to new information because it has a meaning component that is not expressed by any other item in the sentence.

It is well-known that for referential pronouns, intrasentential cataphora is generally restricted to contexts where it appears from the left-peripheral subordinate clause, as in example (19) from Cann and McPherson (1999) (see also Quirk et al. 1985: 351; Trnavac and Taboada 2016). Here, a pitch accent (indicated by uppercase) on the NP *Fred* serves to signal that this NP has not yet been mentioned. Hence, this is the case of true cataphora.

- (19) *If she_i meets him_j, Mary_i will give FRED_j a book.*

As for the right-peripheral embedded clause, it cannot be usually referred to as a matter of true cataphora, so the referential *it*, *es* and *èto* mainly refer to a prementioned state of affairs. Thus, in example (20) from Bolinger (1977: 68) the referential *it* in the object position is permissible, since the verb *swallow* is

⁹ This does not mean, of course, that a pronoun that is an adverb synchronically or diachronically cannot be an expletive. The English expletive *there* would be a possible counterexample to such a generalization.

factive, while it cannot be used in example (21), which features the verb *guess* (Bolinger 1977: 70).

(20) *He can't swallow it that you dislike him.*

(21) *I guess (*it) that you will win.*

Crucially, it can be assumed that the ban on true cataphora holds only in case the pronoun and the postcedent are *referentially identical*, namely, denote one and the same referent. Only in this case the resulting relation is a true coreference. Note that expletives or expletive-like items, being semantically impoverished, do not meet this condition on true coreference and, predictably, are capable to refer cataphorically to a right-peripheral embedded clause that expresses new information.

Now, since *tak* is an adverbial and the corresponding right-peripheral clause is a complement, for them (just like for expletives) *no referential identity* emerges. Consequently, *tak* can cataphorically refer to new information *without violating* the ban on true cataphora.

4. The function of *èto* and *ono*

As mentioned in section 2.1.4, both *èto* and *ono* are usually optional as expletives. This means that they do not serve to fill the subject position, namely, to fulfill the syntactic function associated with expletives. The question that arises is what function *èto* and *ono* have and I suggest here that both *èto* and *ono* convey a *discourse-related* meaning. They signal to the addressee that the embedded proposition they refer to is, *at least partly, given*, i.e. mentioned in the pre-text.

A comment is due concerning the word “partly” above. I have assumed so far that the expletive *èto* and *ono* differ from the referential *èto* in that they can relate to new information (section 2.1.1). However, in the light of examples like (22) below, it rather seems that the proposition *èto* and *ono* refer to – though it may, indeed, be partly new – must, however, be also partly given.

In (22), the embedded clause referred to by *èto* is a speaker's interpretation concerning the relations between the commander and the sailors. This interpretation is by itself *new*. Not surprisingly, the focal (falling) accent must be realized within the embedded clause. However, this interpretation is prompted by what was narrated by the addressee immediately before. In this respect, the embedded proposition can be said to be *given*. For this strictly pragmatic reason, the presence of *èto* in (22) is preferred with respect to its absence. If *èto* were absent, the embedded proposition would be perceived as completely new, i.e. not prompted by the pre-text, which is not the case here.

- (22) *Ja rasskazal emu, kak matrosy rugajut*
 I-NOM tell-PST.SG.M he-DAT how sailor-NOM scold-PRS.3.PL
svoego komandujuščego. Vasiliev, vyslušav menja,
 their-ACC commander-ACC Vasiliev-NOM listen-CNV I-ACC
zagovoril vozbuždenno. — ?(Èto) ploho, što on ni
 speak-PST.SG.M excitedly It bad-PRED that he-NOM not
u kogo ne sumel zavoevat' k sebe
 with anyone not manage-PST.SG.M win-INF to himself
doverija i sredi oficerov ne pol'zuetsja avtoritetom\.(RNC)
 confidence and among officer not enjoy-PRS.3.SG credibility
 'I told him how the sailors scolded their commander. After he had listened to me, Vasiliev spoke excitedly: – It's bad that he failed to win anyone's confidence and that he doesn't enjoy credibility among the officers.'

More generally, the presence of *èto* or *ono* can be expected to be obligatory in case all five expletive features from A to E, including the (partial) newness of the postcedent (see section 2.1.6), are at play. If, however, the embedded proposition is completely given, as, for instance, in (11), the use of *ono* or *èto* (the one which is expletive according to the parameters from B to E) is optional since in this case, the signal that *ono* and expletive *èto* are assumed to transmit is clear enough from the embedded proposition itself. But even then, the presence of *ono* or *èto* seems to emphasize the givenness of the proposition they relate to. In particular, this seems to be a very subtle difference between (11a) with and without *ono* and between (11b) with and without *èto*.

Accordingly, both the expletive *èto* and *ono* can be expected to be inappropriate in case the embedded proposition is completely new. This prediction is borne out. Firstly, neither *èto* nor *ono* can be used if the embedded clause is prompted by a *wh*-question, which signals that the embedded proposition is completely unknown to the addressee. In example (23), the proposition *Anya uežžæet* 'Anya leaves' is unknown since it provides the answer to the *wh*-word in the preceding question. Neither *èto* nor *ono* is admissible here.

- (23) *Vsjo horošo, krome odnogo.*
 everything fine-PRED except one.thing
 'Everything is fine, except for one thing.'
 – A što ploho? – (*Èto/ *Ono) ploho, što Anya uežžæet.
 and what bad-PRED it it bad-PRED that Anya leave-PRS.3.SG
 'And what is not fine? It is bad that Anya is leaving.'

Secondly, the same effect manifests itself when the matrix predicate is modified by the adverb *osobenno* 'particularly'. When *osobenno* and the predicate precede the embedded clause, being in the topic position, the clause itself introduces a piece of information that is not prompted by the pre-text, hence, completely new. This trait of *osobenno* is evidenced by the prosodic constraints *osobenno* imposes on the embedded clause. In the presence of *osobenno* (24a),

the embedded clause cannot be prosodically marked as a tail; it must obligatorily contain the focal (falling) accent. On the contrary, in case *osobenno* is absent, the embedded clause can get the tail intonation (24b).

- (24) a. *Osobenno obidno/, što menja obmanuli\.*
 particularly offensive-PRED that I-ACC deceive-PST.PL
 'It is particularly offensive that I was deceived.' (RNC)
- b. *Obidno\, što menja obmanuli.*
 offensive-PRED that I-ACC deceive-PST.PL
 'It is offensive that I was deceived.'

As can be expected, neither *èto* nor *ono* can combine with *osobenno*. Thus, example (25a), with *osobenno*, is infelicitous with both *èto* and *ono* (25b), while example (25c), in which *osobenno* is omitted, is well-formed with either *èto* or *ono*:

- (25) a. *Osobenno ploho, što ne hočetsja pisat'.* (RNC)
 particularly bad-PRED that not want-PRS.3.SG
 write-INF
 'It is particularly bad that [I] do not want to write.'
- b. (^{?Èto/?Ono}) *Osobenno ploho, što ne hočetsja pisat'.*
- c. ^{OKÈto / OKOno} *Osobenno ploho, što ne hočetsja pisat'.*

Note that the pragmatic interpretation proposed for *èto* and *ono* suggests that they are *not* completely devoid of pronominal semantics, since they transmit a piece of information concerning the embedded proposition. However, this is far from having the fully-fledged pronominal semantics associated with the referential *èto*, which is characterized by the referential identity between the pronoun and its postcedent (according to what was suggested in section 3).

Importantly, both being discourse-oriented and to some extent contentful are not peculiar to Russian expletives alone. The English weather *it*, for instance, has been claimed to have some contentful features, too (Bolinger 1977 a.o.) and expletives with discourse-related functions have been reported for Dominican Spanish and Vietnamese (Greco et al. 2017).

5. Summarizing the criteria for expletiveness

In section 2.1.6, five parameters have been suggested, which have served to differentiate the expletive *èto* and *ono* from the referential *tak*. To what extent can these parameters be considered to be the general criteria for expletiveness in the construction with a right-peripheral embedded clause?

As alluded above, the majority of parameters, if not all of them, are also relevant, in one way or another, for the English *it* and the German *es*. Since

Russian differs significantly from English and German with respect to subject omission, this suggests that these parameters are far from being language-specific, although, naturally, this assumption needs further investigation.

However, the parameters under discussion turn out to be revealing primarily when a pronoun behaves uniformly according to all five of them. This is exactly the case of *èto* and *ono*. Otherwise, as with all the syntactic diagnostics, individual parameter values can be due to the properties of the pronoun that are not linked to its expletive vs. referential status. This is the case of *tak*, which can refer to new information (parameter A) being a referential pronoun.

6. Conclusions

The following conclusions emerge from the presented data.

- Russian is among languages that both allow null subjects and make use of expletives or expletive-like elements.
- In the construction with a right-peripheral complement clause, Russian features two expletive pronouns of the same functional type, which differ mainly stylistically. They are both optional devices and convey a discourse-related meaning.
- A careful analysis is needed to uncover whether or not a pronoun has a referential meaning, since the elements that at first sight seem functionally similar may turn out to differ significantly. This is the case of *èto* and *ono*, on the one hand, and *tak*, on the other. What seems to be responsible for the referentiality of *tak* is the *a priori* absence of referential identity between *tak* and its postcedent, which, in turn, is due to the adverbiality of *tak*.
- The traits of the Russian expletives *èto* and *ono* may be considered to be general, non-language-specific criteria for expletiveness, since they are also relevant for English and German, languages that are commonly assumed to differ from Russian with respect to expletives.

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