

## Scope of focus determines size of movement: on two derivations for Russian split nominals

**Introduction:** Russian and many other Slavic languages are known for optionally permitting split nominal constructions (also termed *left branch extraction*). Canonical split nominals involve fronting of an adjective or other nominal modifier, which bears narrow contrastive focus and distinct prosody, shown graphically in small-caps (1). I refer to such splits as ‘contrastive’. Less explored are splits in full-NP focus and wide/sentential focus contexts (together termed ‘wider’ focus), shown in (2).

- |  |  |
|--|--|
| (1) <i>What kind of dog did you see?</i><br>Ja BELUJU uvidel sobaku.<br>I white.ACC saw dog.ACC<br>‘I saw a WHITE dog (not a black one)’ | (2) <i>What did you see? / What happened?</i><br>Ja beluju uvidel sobaku.<br>I white.ACC saw dog.ACC<br>‘I saw a white dog.’ |
|--|--|

Two primary accounts of Slavic splits have been proposed, largely independently of information structure (IS). The *subextraction* approach (Bošković 2005, Talić 2017 a.o.) involves moving the modifier out of the nominal and stranding the rest of the nominal downstairs, whereas *scattered deletion* (Fanselow and Ćavar 2002, Pereltsvaig 2008, Bondarenko and Davis 2023, a.o.) moves the entire nominal and pronounces complementary parts of its higher and lower copies. Focus is often assumed to license splitting or complementary linearisation on each of these accounts, but most studies have examined only narrow-focus splits. I show that both subextraction and scattered deletion derivations exist in Russian, crucially corresponding to different focus contexts.

**Structural asymmetries based on IS:** I present three arguments that contrastive splits as in (1) are derived via subextraction, while focus of any larger constituent containing the nominal licenses movement of the whole nominal. First, scope of focus determines the availability of splitting across islands. Weak islands (wh-, factive and negative islands) may be violated under wider focus but not by contrastive splits (3). This follows if narrow-focus splits trigger movement of a non-argument, namely a subconstituent of the nominal, whereas wider focus involves movement of the whole argument across the weak island.

- (3) a. Ja k moemu/\*MOEMU pokazal emu, kak projti (k) kabinetu.  
I to my.DAT showed him.DAT how go.INF to office.DAT  
‘I showed him how to get to my/\*MY office.’
- b. Ja nesvežuju/\*NESVEŽUJU žalju, što s’jel ikru.  
I not.fresh.ACC regret that ate caviar.ACC  
‘I regret that I ate the unfresh caviar.’  
\*‘I regret eating the UNFRESH caviar (but not the fresh one).’ (based on Pereltsvaig 2008: 11)
- c. Ja v ètot/??ÈTOT ne budu zaxodit’ (v) magazin.  
I into this.ACC NEG will enter.INF into store.ACC  
‘I will not go into this store’  
\*‘I won’t go into THIS store (but I will into another one)’ (based on Pereltsvaig 2008: 11)

Second, splitting is sensitive to adjective height. Very low modifiers such as relational and ethnic adjectives are generally inert to movement within or out of the NP in Russian (cf. Fábregas 2007). Notably, relational adjectives fail to split under narrow focus, but allow splitting under wider focus (4).

- (4) # *What kind of doctor did you see yesterday?*  
OK: *Who did you see yesterday/What happened yesterday?*  
Ja zubnogo uvidel vrača.  
I tooth.ADJ.ACC/ADJ.ACC saw doctor.ACC  
‘I saw a dentist (lit: tooth doctor).’

Third, splitting out of a PP may optionally permit preposition doubling. Only light and morphologically simplex prepositions may be doubled, regardless of IS (Gouskova 2019, Radkevich 2010), but

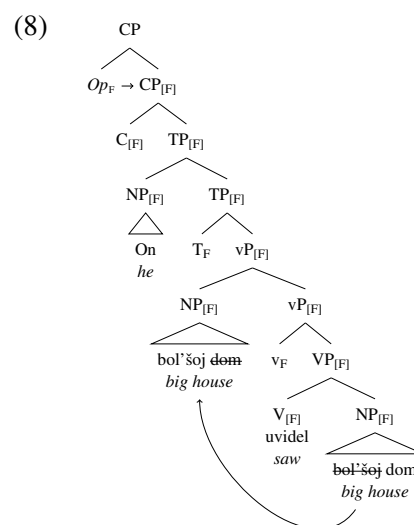
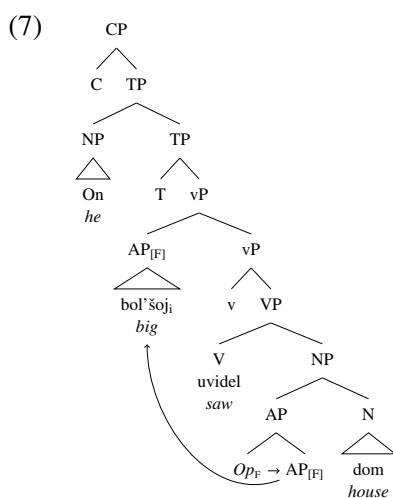
crucially doubling is permitted only under wider focus (5a) and is ungrammatical in contrastive splits (5b; cf. Goncharov 2015). I take this to show that wider IS allows for movement of more material, but linearisation of each copy of this material is phonologically constrained.

- (5) a. Ja iz / iz-za moego vyšel (iz)/(\*iz-za) doma.  
 I from from-behind my.GEN went.out from/from-behind house.GEN  
 ‘I went out of my house / I came out from behind my house.’ (Context: *What happened?*)
- b. Ja iz / iz-za MOEGO vyšel (\*iz)/(\*iz-za) doma.  
 I from from-behind my.GEN went.out from/from-behind house.GEN  
 ‘I went out of/from behind MY house (and not someone else’s)’

The scope of focus thus affects the syntactic structure of a split. Focus is also *necessary* for splitting to obtain. Splits are licensed under sentential/polarity focus, where the entire proposition is in focus (6a), but not when the verb (6b) or another constituent is narrowly focused to the exclusion of the nominal.

- (6) a. Ty limonnyj ispëk pirog?  
 you lemon.ACC baked pie.ACC  
 ‘Did you bake the lemon pie? (as I asked you to do)’
- b. \*Ty limonnyj ISPËK pirog?  
 you lemon.ACC baked pie.ACC  
 ‘Did you BAKE the lemon pie? (or buy it at the store?)’

**Analysis:** We have seen that narrow-focus splits pattern with subextraction, whereas splits under wider focus suggest movement of a larger constituent. I propose that constituents that partake in splitting are marked syntactically by an operator  $Op_F$  which delimits its c-command domain as focal. Narrow focus corresponds to low adjunction of  $Op_F$ ; wider focus – to higher adjunction (e.g. NP/DP and CP), schematised in (7)/(8).



I posit that splits land in Spec,vP based on their unmarked landing site below the subject, as in the examples above (with the potential to later move to an even higher position). Splitting itself is driven by an optional probe on  $v^0$ , which seeks a constituent bearing both [F] and a specified category feature (e.g. [N] or [A]). Per standard Minimality restrictions, the probe agrees with the highest matching node, i.e. either the adjective under narrow focus or the whole NP/DP under wider focus. Movement of constituents of different sizes follows straightforwardly. Thus, the uniform patterning of wider foci and the coexistence of subextraction and scattered deletion both emerge as an epiphenomenon of a more general mechanism for focus movement.

**Extensions:** This analysis provides support for implementations of focus as driven by dedicated scope-marking in the syntax (Hedding 2022), and for existing scope/operator-driven implementations of splitting specifically (cf. Murphy and Wilson 2025). Further fine-grained comparison is needed with languages where wider-focus splits have been said to be unavailable (e.g. Serbo-Croatian, Georgian).

**References:** **Bondarenko, T., & Davis, C.** (2023). Concealed pied-piping in Russian: On left-branch extraction, parasitic gaps, and the nature of discontinuous nominal phrases. *Syntax*, 26(1), 1-40. // **Bošković, Ž.** (2005). On the locality of left branch extraction and the structure of NP. *Studia Linguistica*, 59(1), 1-45. // **Fábregas, A.** (2007). The internal syntactic structure of relational adjectives. *Probus: International Journal of Latin & Romance Linguistics*, 19(1). // **Fanselow, G., & Ćavar, D.** (2003). Distributed deletion. In *Theoretical approaches to universals* (pp. 65-107). John Benjamins Publishing Company. // **Goncharov, J.** (2015). P-doubling in split PPs and information structure. *Linguistic Inquiry*, 46(4), 731-742. // **Gouskova, M.** (2019). Phonological words in the syntax and in the lexicon: A study of Russian prepositions. *Journal of Slavic Linguistics*, 27(2), 161-212. // **Hedding, A. A.** (2022). *How to move a focus: The syntax of alternative particles*. University of California, Santa Cruz. // **Murphy, A., & Wilson, B.** (2025). Discontinuous noun phrases in Iquito. *Natural Language & Linguistic Theory*, 43(2), 771-825. // **Pereltsvaig, A.** (2008). Split phrases in colloquial Russian. *Studia Linguistica*, 62(1), 5-38. // **Radkevich, N. V.** (2010). *On location: The structure of case and adpositions*. University of Connecticut. // **Talić, A.** (2017). *From A to N and back: Functional and bare projections in the domain of N and A*. University of Connecticut.