

# An emerging veridical complementizer *to čto* in Russian

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## 1 A new complementizer

This squib<sup>1</sup> explores an innovation in the complementizer system of Modern Russian: a form *to čto*. The new form is illustrated in (1), which contrasts with the standard *čto* in (2) by the presence of the *to* element.

- (1) mne govor'-at, **to čto** eto zakrytyj jamajskij kvartal v centre  
I.DAT say-PRS.3PL **to čto** this closed Jamaican neighbourhood in centre  
"they tell me that this is a closed Jamaican neighbourhood in the center"  
Pharaoh in an interview to Yurij Dud', 5:54<sup>2</sup>

- (2) esli im nrav-it-s'a, govor'-at, **čto** nnavyts'a  
if they.DAT please-3SG-REFL say-PRS.3PL **čto** please-3SG-REFL  
"if they like it, they say that they like it" Pharaoh in an interview to Yurij Dud', 31:06

Complementizer *to čto* is string identical to a construction involving a demonstrative introducing a subordinate clause. Specifically, the new complementizer is homographous with a combination of a demonstrative pronoun *to* "that" and a standard complementizer *čto* "what", as in (3).<sup>3</sup>

- (3) Menya udiv-ilo (to), [čto ey bylo vsego dva god-a]  
I.ACC surprise-PST.3SG that COMP she.DAT was only two year-GEN.PL  
"I was surprised that she was only two years old." lit. "That she was only two years old surprised me."<sup>4</sup>

<sup>1</sup>This is a small token of deep gratitude for the inspiration Liliane gives on the academic, professional, personal, aesthetic, and joie de vivre level.

<sup>2</sup><https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VXK12Uaxt9M>

<sup>3</sup>This also may be precisely the construction that gave rise to the new complementizer.

<sup>4</sup>The use of a demonstrative with free relatives in Russian is contingent on contrastive inter-

Similar constructions seem to be found in German and English, as (4) illustrates.

- (4) Wir bedauern **es, dass** die Schwimmer nicht bereit sind, die  
We regret it that the swimmers neg willing are the  
konzeptionellen Dinge mitzutragen.  
conceptual.issues share  
“We regret it that the swimmers are not willing to share the conceptual  
issues.”

Schwabe (2016: 212)

In this squib we summarize what is already known about the new phenomenon and make some novel observations based on the analysis of recent interviews and speaker judgements. We also sketch a way to approach its analysis, arguing that the new complementizer signals the truth of the embedded proposition with respect to the beliefs of one of the speech act participants or of a third-party.

## 2 Not a demonstrative *to* followed by a complementizer *čto*

The distribution of *to čto* as a complementizer only begins to be studied as the innovation seems to have emerged during the last decade. In the literature, the claim that we are witnessing the emergence of a new complementizer was first made by Korotaev (2016), who observed that *to* and *čto* in this case form an international unity and that *to čto* can combine with a wider class of matrix predicates than a demonstrative followed by *čto*.

As noticed by Korotaev (2016), another hallmark of *to čto* that sets it apart from demonstratives with subordinate clauses is the insensitivity of *to* in *to čto* to the selectional properties of the main predicate. While in (5), which features a new complementizer, the form *to* stays invariable, in (6) *to* is a demonstrative obligatorily introduced by a preposition and taking a prepositional case, as required for non-propositional arguments by the predicate *uveren* (“sure”).

- (5) ya uveren **to čto** Timur rukovodstvov-al-sya tvorčesk-imi  
I sure to čto Timur direct-PST-REFL creative-INSTR.PL

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pretation: for a felicitous use of a demonstrative, the proposition denoted by the free relative should be part of a set of contextually relevant alternatives (Kobozeva 2013). For instance, a natural continuation for (3) can be the following: (I was surprised that she was only two years old) not that she could sing so well.

zadač-ami

goal-INSTR.PL

"I am sure that Timur was motivated by creative goals."

Yuriy Dud' in an

interview with BadComedian, 28:19<sup>5</sup>

- (6) Ya uveren v **tom**, **čto** Timur rukovodstvov-al-sya tvorčesk-imi  
I sure in that.PREP COMP Timur direct-PST-REFL creative-INSTR  
zadač-ami.  
goal-INSTR.PL  
"I am sure that Timur was motivated by creative goals."

We notice that the two constructions contrast with respect to a number of other properties as well. In particular, unlike the new complementizer, demonstratives introducing subordinate clauses are syntactically mobile and can occur before the main predicate, as (7) shows.

- (7) (**To**), [čto ey bylo vsego dva god-a], menya udiv-ilo  
that COMP she.DAT was only two year-GEN.PL I.ACC surprise-PST.3SG  
"I was surprised that she was only two years old." lit. "That she was only two years old surprised me."

In contrast, the complementizer in question, just as the standard complementizer *čto*, has to be postverbal. Consider the ungrammatical (8) (cf. (1)).<sup>6</sup>

- (8) \***to čto** eto zakrytyj jamajskij kvartal v centre mne govor'-at  
to čto this closed Jamaican neighbourhood in centre I.DAT say-PRS.3PL  
Intended: "they tell me that this is a closed Jamaican neighbourhood in the center"

Another striking illustration of the complementizer function of *to čto* are cases where it appears in a clause introduced by an unrelated demonstrative pronoun, as in (9).

- (9) vse uveren-y v **tom**, **to čto** my pobed-im?  
everybody sure-PL in that.PREP to čto we win-FUT.1PL  
"Is everyone sure that we are going to win?" From "Vozrast nesoglasija" episode 4,  
10:19<sup>7</sup>

<sup>5</sup><https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bag-0-KrswA>

<sup>6</sup>We are very thankful to Anton Simonenko for his help with grammaticality judgements.

<sup>7</sup><https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=emDTVNd4e8M>

### 3 Not an equivalent to the complementizer *čto* either

Although we fully agree with Korotaev (2016) that *to čto* should be analyzed as a complementizer, we argue that this is not a full parallel to the standard *čto*.

First, unlike *čto*, *to čto* can be used to embed partial questions, as in (10), where *to čto* combines with *počemu* “why”.

- (10) i vot on vyš-el i mne govor-yat **to čto počemu**  
 and here it come.out-PST.3SG and I.DAT say-PRS.3PL to čto why  
 oni pohoži?  
 they similar  
 “and here it [the album] comes out and they tell me why are they similar?”  
 Pharaoh in an interview to Yuriy Dud’,  
 25:30

This is completely out for the standard *čto*, (11).

- (11) i vot on vyš-el i mne govor-yat, **(\*čto) počemu**  
 and here it come.out-PST.3SG and I.DAT say-PRS.3PL COMP why  
 oni pohoži?  
 they similar  
 “and here it [the album] comes out and they tell me why are they similar?”

Second, not all matrix predicates that embed clauses headed by the standard *čto*, are compatible with *to čto*. For instance, *to čto* is unacceptable with *mečtat’* (“to dream”), (12), *pridumat’* “make up, invent”, (13), *spasibo* “thank you (that)”, (14), *orat’* (“to yell”), (15), *razočarovat’* (“to be disappointed”), (16).

- (12) ya konečno mečt-al, **(\*to) čto** mama kogda-nibud’ menya  
 I of.course dream-PST to čto mom some.time I.ACC  
 voz’m-et, otved-et v futbol’n-uyu škol-u  
 take-FUT.3SG lead-FUT.3SG in football-PREP school-PREP  
 “I of course dreamt that my mom will take me to a football school”. Yuriy  
 Dud’ in “Večerniy Urgant”, 3:48<sup>8</sup>

<sup>8</sup><https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VBXGvCvECIg>. The grammaticality judgement for *to čto* is added by our consultant.

- (13) Ja pridum-al (**\*to**) čto u mašin-y bud-et gibridnaya korobka.  
I invent-PST to čto at car-ACC will-3SG hybrid transmission  
"I made up that the car will have a hybrid transmission."
- (14) spasibo tebe bol'shoe (**\*to**) čto ty ne vzj-al menya v sportivnyj  
thank you big to čto you not take-PST I.ACC in sport  
perekur  
smoking.pause  
"A big thanks to you that you did not hire me for the "Sport break". Yuriy  
Dud' in "Večerniy Urgant", 14:41<sup>9</sup>
- (15) ona ora-la (**\*to**) čto pol tol'ko čto pokrasi-l-i.  
she yell-past to čto floor just paint-PST-PL  
"She yelled that the floor has just been painted."
- (16) ya razočarov-an (**\*to**) čto lekciju otmeni-l-i  
I disappointed to čto class cancel-PST-PL  
"I am disappointed that the class has been cancelled."
- (17) Danil požalova-l-sja (**\*to**) čto ya pro nego zab-yl  
Danil complain-PST-REFL to čto I about him forget-PST  
"Danil complained that I forgot about him."

The distribution of the two complementizers with respect to a sample of matrix predicates is summarized in table 1.

<sup>9</sup><https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VBXGvCvECIg>. The grammaticality judgement for *to čto* is added by my consultant.

	<i>to čto</i>	<i>čto</i>			
bojat'sja "to be afraid"	✓	✓	ponraviti'sja "to be pleased"	✓	✓
dumat' "to think"	✓	✓	pridumat' "to invent"	✗	✓
videt' "to see"	✓	✓	rad "glad"	✓	✓
volnovat'sja "to worry"	✓	✓	razočarovan "to be disappointed"	✗	✓
govorit' "to say"	✓	✓	skazat' "to say"	✓	✓
žalet' "to be sorry"	✓	✓	sluhi "rumours"	✓	✓
znat' "to know"	✓	✓	snit'sja "to see dreams (that)"	✓	✓
kazat'sja "to seem"	✓	✓	sovrat' "to lie"	✓	✓
mečtat' "to dream"	✗	✓	soglasen "to agree"	✓	✓
orat' "to yell"	✗	✓	spasibo "thank you (that)"	✗	✓
požalovat'sya "to complain"	✗	✓	telegramma "a telegram"	✓	✓
ponimat' "to understand"	✓	✓	uveren "to be sure"	✓	✓

Table 1: Distribution of *to čto* vs. *čto*

## 4 A relative veridicality marker

We make the following descriptive generalizations about the use of *to čto* based on table 1. First, *to čto* is not used with predicates which do not attribute the embedded proposition to anyone's beliefs. Such are *orat'* ("to yell") and *spasibo* ("thank you that"). Second, it is not used with predicates of creation (of propositional content or possible worlds), such as *mečtat'* ("to dream") and *pridumat'* ("to invent"). Third, it is out with emotive predicates which appear to trigger a presupposition that the proposition denoted by the subordinate clause is part of the common ground and asserts an emotional attitude towards that proposition, such as *razočarovan* "to be disappointed" and *požalovat'sya* "to complain".

In view of these generalizations, we suggest that *čto* signals veridicality, where veridicality is understood as in (18).

- (18) A propositional operator  $F$  is veridical iff from the truth of  $Fp$  we can infer that  $p$  is true according to some individual  $x$  (i.e. in some individual  $x$ 's epistemic model). Giannakidou (2009: 188g)

Specifically, we propose that *to čto* signals that the proposition denoted by the complement clause is entailed by the belief worlds of a contextually determined belief source (not necessarily identical to the agent of the main predicate). This means that its use requires that it be contextually possible that there is an epis-

temic source relative to the proposition in question. This condition is violated by predicates of mental creation, in which case propositions are “generated” by an epistemic source rather than being entailed by belief worlds. This also explains the incompatibility of *to čto* with strongly factive emotive predicates *razočarovat* “to be disappointed” and *požalovat’sya* “to complain”. Factivity, understood as veridicality relative to the belief’s of the speaker and the hearer at the same time, is arguably more relevant than veridicality relative to a given epistemic source. Therefore marking the latter with factive predicates is infelicitous, as its use may trigger an implicature that factivity does not hold.

In future work we hope to link these observation with the structural and semantic typology of complementizer types (Baunaz 2018) as well as to position *to čto* in a bigger picture of Russian complementizers (Hansen et al. 2016).

## References

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