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Lithuanian and the syntactic structure of pseudo-clefts

<https://doi.org/10.1515/stuf-2026-2004>

Abstract: The article deals with the pseudo-cleft construction (also known as *wh*-cleft) in Lithuanian, a Baltic language. It focuses on the syntactic and morpho-syntactic changes that have set the Lithuanian pseudo-cleft apart from its source construction, the specificational copular construction. It is argued that this pseudo-cleft has become monoclausal as a result of a process in which the kernel component of the pseudo-cleft construction (consisting of relative pronoun, relative-clause verb and copula/focus marker) became non-compositional and started occupying a slot corresponding to that of the simple-clause verb. This process may have been driven by the morphosyntactic marking assigned by the relative-clause verb being copied onto the focus noun phrase and subsequently being reanalysed as governed by the pseudo-cleft kernel component as a whole. As a result of these processes, the Lithuanian pseudo-cleft is superficially still similar to the original specificational construction from which it derives, but certain morphosyntactic and syntactic features betray it as being monoclausal. The Lithuanian pseudo-cleft is further considered against a cross-linguistic background to point out that it represents a non-trivial and typologically interesting instantiation of the more general process of development of clefts and pseudo-clefts into monoclausal structures.

Keywords: cleft construction; pseudo-cleft construction; reanalysis; constructionalisation; Lithuanian

1 Introduction¹

The article deals with pseudo-clefts in Lithuanian, one of the two living representatives of Baltic, a branch of the Indo-European languages showing close genealogical and areal relations with the Slavonic branch. Both Baltic and Slavonic belong to the languages for which Jespersen (1937: 85) already noted they lack cleft constructions

¹ I wish to thank an anonymous reviewer for constructive comments, and Rolandas Mikulskas for discussion. For all remaining shortcomings of the article, I am solely responsible.

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or make less extensive use of them because their word order is relatively free and can be used for the marking of information structure, which is the purpose of clefts. Both Lithuanian and Latvian lack counterparts to the English *it*-cleft. There is, however, a difference between the two languages as far as pseudo-clefts are concerned: Lithuanian has them whereas they are absent from Latvian. While contrasting the lack of *it*-clefts in Lithuanian with their frequent use in Germanic languages, Griškevičienė (2002) notes the existence of the Lithuanian pseudo-cleft without discussing it in detail. In Latvian linguistics, the topic seems to be non-existent, though *it*-clefts are attested in older varieties of written Latvian.²

As in other languages, the Lithuanian pseudo-cleft originates as a specificational copular construction (as first described by Higgins 1979) in which the preverbal argument is expressed by a free relative clause.³ In English grammar, this latter feature is taken to be defining for the pseudo-cleft. As the borderline between the two constructions is drawn in Huddleston and Pullum (2002), (1) would be a specificational copular construction whereas (2) would be an instance of a particular subtype of the specificational copular construction, viz. the *wh*-cleft or pseudo-cleft (examples from Huddleston and Pullum 2002: 1423):

- (1) *The thing that impressed me was her wit.*
 (2) *What impressed me was her wit.*

As I will argue in Section 2, the Lithuanian pseudo-cleft shows unmistakable signs of constructionalisation that set it clearly apart from the source construction, the specificational copular construction. This means that, unlike their English

² Literary Latvian used to have *it*-clefts under the influence of German. They can be found in literary works as late as the first half of the 20th century, but seem to have largely gone out of use now.

<i>Viņu</i>	<i>milzu</i>	<i>bagātība</i>	<i>ir</i>	<i>tā,</i>	<i>kas</i>
they.GEN.PL	immense	wealth.NOM.SG	be.PRS.3	DEM.NOM.SG.F	REL.NOM
<i>saceļ</i>	<i>naida</i>	<i>garu.</i>			
stir.up.PRS.3	hatred.GEN.SG	spirit.ACC.SG			

'It is their immense wealth that stirs up the spirit of hatred.' (Augusts Deglavs, 1911)

In this Latvian variety of the cleft construction, the influence of German can be seen in the fact that the focus NP is fronted and followed by the copula and the *it*-word, as is frequently the case in German (cf. German *Ihr riesiger Reichtum ist es, der den Geist des Hasses schürt*). How widespread such *it*-clefts were in the written language of the relevant period has not been investigated.

³ Pseudo-clefts are themselves sometimes classified into specificational and predicational ones, as illustrated by *What she did was call the police* as against *What she did was nasty* (e.g., Iatridou and Varlakosta 1998, following Akmajian 1970), but most authors reserve the term 'pseudo-cleft' for the specificational type. The type sometimes referred to as the predicational pseudo-cleft does not exist in Lithuanian; its Lithuanian counterpart would be a construction with a pronominal antecedent, of the type *That which she did was nasty*.

counterpart, Lithuanian pseudo-clefts cannot be considered a subtype of specificational. That pseudo-clefts may show signs of constructionalisation has already been pointed out by Lambrechts (2001), but standard English, for instance, does not provide any evidence of this. The question whether pseudo-clefts are to be set apart from the specificational construction or not can probably be answered only for every language individually; for some discussion see also Malcher Moreno (2023: 8–13). Creissels (2021: 5) introduces the useful distinction between “plain clefts” and “grammaticalised clefts” (both also including pseudo-clefts), the difference being that the former are a universally available strategy for focus marking whereas the latter show construction-specific features.

The formal features of the Lithuanian pseudo-cleft constitute the subject of the present article. I will discuss the three distinguishing features of the pseudo-cleft one by one, and I will go on to argue that these features, taken together, can be coherently explained on the assumption that the pseudo-cleft has undergone a process of monoclausalisation. Such a process is not unheard of: as Lambrechts (2001: 468) points out, in a cleft construction (and this holds for both *it*-clefts and pseudo-clefts), “the matrix and the relative express a logically simple proposition, which can also be expressed in the form of a single clause.” Processes of monoclausalisation of clefts have been discussed in the literature (see Section 4 below), but the exact mechanism of monoclausalisation found in Lithuanian appears to be unique and thus of typological interest. This is my motive for presenting the Lithuanian facts to a broader readership; I hope thereby to contribute to cross-linguistic research on morpho-syntactic and syntactic processes in clefts and pseudo-clefts, and on clausal union in general.

Little has been written about Lithuanian pseudo-clefts; the only discussion in the literature can be found in Mikulskas (2017), who considers the pseudo-cleft in the broader context of the Lithuanian specificational copular construction. Pseudo-clefts are, however, but a sideline in his book, the rich data of the corpora are not used, and of the three formal features I will here discuss only one is mentioned.

The data used for the present article are mainly from the Lithuanian Web Corpus 2021 (henceforth: ItTenTen21), accessible through Sketch Engine, but the Kaunas Corpus of the Contemporary Lithuanian Language (henceforth: CCLL) has also been consulted. The data have not been quantified, but a quantitative analysis will be necessary in the future in order to establish the mutual relationship and the exact extent of interaction between the two constructions involved, the pseudo-cleft and its specificational source construction. My aim in this article was to produce a coherent explanation for the morphosyntactic and syntactic features observed in the pseudo-cleft, and for this purpose no quantitative data were needed.

The structure of the article is as follows: after a discussion of the formal features of the Lithuanian pseudo-cleft in Section 2, a coherent account for the observed facts

will be offered in Section 3. Section 4 will then offer a broader comparative outlook, and conclusions will be formulated in Section 5.

2 The distinguishing features of Lithuanian pseudo-clefts

The distinguishing formal features of the Lithuanian pseudo-cleft on which my discussion will hinge are three: (1) the assimilation in case form or prepositional marking of the focus noun phrase to the marking pattern required by the verb (and also marked on the relative pronoun); (2) the occurrence, in sentence-initial position, of quasi-antecedents lacking full nominal properties and also morphosyntactically assimilated to the marking pattern required by the verb (and marked on the relative pronoun); and (3) the fronting of adverbials and occasionally also arguments (subjects) that strictly belong to the relative clause and should therefore be expected to occur after the relative pronoun. I will now discuss these features one by one.

2.1 The morphosyntactic marking of the focus noun phrase

An example of a Lithuanian pseudo-cleft is given in (3). Its first part is a free relative clause with the interrogative-relative pronoun *kas* ‘what’, the second part is, at least in origin, a copular construction. Though Lithuanian mainly uses the verb *būti* ‘be’ as a copula, this role may also be performed by *tai*, originally a neuter demonstrative meaning ‘this’ or ‘it’ (Mikulskas 2017: 121). This *tai* is consistently used in the pseudo-cleft construction, and I gloss it COP throughout in this article:

- (3) Lithuanian (livejournal.com, ltTenTen14)
Atleiskite, bet ko jau nemėgstu, tai
 pardon.IMP.2PL but REL.GEN PCLE NEG.like.PRS.1SG COP
emigrantų, pamokančių likusius
 emigrant.GEN.PL lecture.PTCP.PRS.ACT.GEN.PL remain.PTCP.PST.ACT.ACC.PL.M
tėvynėje [...]
 home.country.LOC.SG
 ‘Sorry, but what I decidedly don’t like is emigrants lecturing those who have remained in the home country.’

Probably the most striking formal feature of the Lithuanian pseudo-cleft construction is the assimilation in case form, or, more generally, morphosyntactic marking, of the focus NP to the morphosyntactic government of the relative-clause verb, also

marked, of course, on the relative pronoun. This is illustrated in (3), where the postcopular noun *emigrantų* ‘emigrants’ is in the genitive case required by the negated verb *nemėgti*, a case also assumed by the relative pronoun *ko* ‘what’. This contrasts with the canonical Lithuanian specificational copular construction, where both the precopular and the postcopular noun phrase will be in the nominative, as shown in (4):

- (4) Lithuanian (kauno.diena.lt, ltTenTen21)
Pagrindinis dalykas, kuris man yra labai svarbus, yra objektyvumas.
 main.NOM.SG.M thing.NOM.SG REL.NOM me.DAT be.PRS.3 very important.NOM.SG.M be.PRS.3 objectivity.NOM.SG
 ‘The main thing that is of great importance to me is objectivity.’

This assimilation in morphosyntactic marking is therefore an important feature allowing the pseudo-cleft to be set apart from its source construction. It cannot be invoked in every case because there are also varieties in which the postcopular focus constituent is a non-finite verb phrase (5) or a full clause (6):

- (5) Lithuanian (vilkauskietis.lt, ltTenTen21)
Ką patarčiau tai daugiau maudytis karštosse voniose, nestresuoti kiek įmanoma.
 REL.ACC recommend.IRR.1SG COP more bathe.INF hot.LOC.PL.F bath.LOC.PL NEG.be.stressed.INF as.much.as possible.NOM.SG.N
 ‘What I would recommend is to take more hot baths and to avoid stress as much as possible.’
- (6) Lithuanian (vmreitingai.lt, ltTenTen21)
Ką aš padariau, tai tiesiog perskaičiau KET du kartus ir pasprendžiau Regitros KET testus [...] vieną parą.
 what.ACC 1.SG.NOM do.PST.1SG COP simply read.PST.1SG KET two.ACC time.ACC.PL and solve.PST.1SG Regitra.GEN KET test.ACC.PL one.ACC.SG day.ACC.SG
 ‘What I did was I simply read KET [the Road Traffic Rules] two times and spent one day solving Regitra’s road traffic rules tests.’

There is thus inevitably a grey zone where we cannot decide whether to include a construction into the category of pseudo-clefts or whether it is an instance of the source construction, the specificational. The latter interpretation will, of course, have to be applied to constructions where the postcopular noun is in the nominative, as we expect in a specificational copular construction:

- (7) Lithuanian (investologija.lt, ltTenTen21)

Su kuo nesutinku tai komisiniu dydzio
 with REL.INS NEG.agree.PRS.1SG COP commission.GEN.PL amount.GEN.SG
ivertinimas perkant ETF'us.
 valuation.NOM.SG buy.CVB ETF.ACC.PL

‘What I don’t agree with is the valuation of commission fees in buying ETFs.’

In what follows I will not be concerned with doubtful cases like (5) and (6), as my aim is not to propose a watertight criterion enabling us to draw a sharp boundary between the pseudo-cleft and its source construction. Rather, my concern will be to explain the morphosyntactic features of the unambiguous instances of the pseudo-cleft.

This assimilation in morphosyntactic marking is undoubtedly a sign of constructional change. As Lambrechts (2001) argues, clefts and pseudo-clefts must be dealt with as constructions, recognising their (at least partly) non-compositional nature and allowing for morphosyntactic features motivated within the construction only and not necessarily conforming to more general structural patterns attested elsewhere. In his analysis of clefts and pseudo-clefts, Lambrechts assumes a rearrangement of syntactic, morphosyntactic and semantic relations between the constitutive elements: the free relative clause, the copula and the focus noun phrase. This rearrangement is driven by the strategy consisting in using a biclausal cleft structure to encode a simple (monopredicative) propositional content, with two predicative nuclei reduced to one. From a marker of predication, the copula becomes a focus marker; the focus noun, which is assigned no thematic role in the original copular construction, now “receives its thematic role in an indirect way, from the RC (= relative clause) predicator” (Lambrechts 2001: 468–470). This results in what Creissels (2021: 9–11) calls “flagging of the cleft constituent”, here illustrated by a Spanish pseudo-cleft:

- (8) Colloquial Peninsular Spanish (from Creissels 2021: 10)

De la que te hablé fue
 of the.one.F that 2SG.DAT speak.PRET.1SG be.PRET.3SG
de María.
 of María

lit. ‘Of whom I spoke to you was of María.’

This Romance parallel is undoubtedly relevant to a discussion of the Lithuanian facts described above, but the notion of “flagging of the cleft constituent” raises as many questions as it answers. Can we say that the relative-clause verb governs, at the same time, the morphosyntactic marking of the relative pronoun and that of the focus noun? I will argue further on that the morphosyntactic makeup of the focus noun

may indeed have been reanalysed as a canonical instance of flagging, but the full significance of the Lithuanian facts can be appreciated only when they are considered in conjunction with the facts to be discussed in Subsections 2.2 and 2.3.

2.2 Antecedents and pseudo-antecedents

In Lithuanian, as in other languages, the pseudo-cleft has a free relative clause as its first component. We find, however, a variety with an apparent antecedent but identifiable as a pseudo-cleft on the basis of a case assimilation similar to that discussed in 2.1. It is illustrated in (9), (10) and (11):

- (9) Lithuanian (gameris.lt, ltTenTen21)
Vienintelio dalyko ko nėra, tai lietuviškos
 only.GEN.SG.M thing.GEN.SG REL.GEN NEG.be.PRS.3 COP Lithuanian.GEN.SG.F
produkcijos, kas manęs visiškai nedomina.
 production.GEN.SG REL.NOM me.GEN completely NEG.interest.PRS.3
 ‘The only thing they do not have is Lithuanian productions, something I haven’t the slightest interest in.’
- (10) Lithuanian (music.lt, ltTenTen21)
O vienintelio ko aš netoleruoju, tai
 but only.GEN.SG.M REL.GEN 1SG.NOM NEG.tolerate.PRS.1SG COP
braškių.
 strawberry.GEN.PL
 ‘But the only thing I don’t tolerate is strawberries.’
- (11) Lithuanian (sveikata.lt, ltTenTen21)
Vieno ko pasiūlgstu – tai minkšto, burnoje
 one.GEN.SG.N REL.GEN miss.PRS.1SG COP soft.GEN.SG.M mouth.LOC.SG
tirpstančio torto gabalėlio [...]
 melt.PTCP.ACT.GEN.SG.M cake.GEN.SG piece.GEN.SG
 ‘One thing I miss is a delicate piece of cake that melts in your mouth.’

The presence of an apparent antecedent makes these constructions similar to a canonical specificational copular construction. What stands in the way of such an interpretation is the case form of the apparent antecedent. In the specificational copular construction, the pre-copular noun phrase is in the nominative, as is the postcopular noun phrase. This is illustrated by (12):

- (12) Lithuanian (*Verslo žinios* 2008-12-12, CCLL)
Pats sako – vienintelis dalykas, kurio
 self.NOM.SG.M say.PRS.3 only.GEN.SG.M thing.GEN.SG REL.GEN.SG.M
siekia, yra lygios galimybės –
 strive.PRS.3 be.PRS.3 equal.NOM.PL.F chance.NOM.PL
 [visi žmonės turi turėti galimybių gyventi taip, kaip nori.]
 ‘As he says himself, the only thing he strives for is equal chances – [all people must have the chances to live as they want.]’

This example also illustrates another feature setting apart the apparent antecedent in (9) from standard nominal antecedents. When the antecedent of a relative clause is a noun, only the relative pronoun *kuris* ‘which’ can be used to the exclusion of the interrogative-relative pronoun *kas* ‘who, what’, as shown in constructed example (13):

- (13) Lithuanian (constructed)
*vienintelės problemos, kurios /*kas mane*
 only.NOM.PL.F problem.NOM.PL REL.NOM.PL.F/REL.NOM me.ACC
domina
 interest.PRS.3
 ‘the only problems that interest me’

The interrogative-relative pronoun *kas* can be used with various determiners as antecedents (as in *viskas, kas...* ‘everything that...’), but not with nouns. This means that while *dalykas* ‘thing’ behaves as a fully-fledged noun in the specificational construction in (13), it does not do so in (9). The apparent antecedent in (9), though containing the noun *dalykas* ‘thing’, is therefore not a typical nominal antecedent.

It must furthermore be added that the list of items that can function as apparent antecedents in the pseudo-cleft contains just a few restrictive scope expressions with meanings like ‘the one thing, the only thing, the main thing’, and the noun appearing in them is apparently (always?) *dalykas* ‘thing’. The expressions *vieno dalyko* ‘the one thing’, *vienintelio dalyko* ‘the only thing’ and *pagrindinio dalyko* ‘the main thing’ occur alongside the neuter adjectival forms *vieno, vienintelio*,⁴ and they seem to have adopted their syntactic behaviour, combining with relative pronouns that do not normally take nouns as their antecedents. All the expressions listed here do not seem to be used as referential noun phrases; rather, they appear to be quantifying

⁴ Adjectives in *-is* like *vienintelis* ‘sole, only’ are generally considered to have no neuter forms (Ambrasas 2006: 135), and it is certainly true that they have no neuter nominative-accusative forms. A case could be made, however, for describing *vienintelio* in (10) as a neuter genitive, as its distribution coincides with that of the genitive *vieno*, which stands alongside a neuter nominative-accusative form *viena*. Sticking to tradition, however, I gloss the form *vienintelio* as masculine.

expressions restricting the scope of the variable expressed by the free relative clause. I will have more to say on this in Section 2.3.

As far as the case form is concerned, case attraction between an antecedent and a relative pronoun is attested in some languages; it can be found in Latin and Classical Greek, where it goes under the name of inverse relative attraction. The following example is from Latin:

- (14) Latin (Virgil, *Aeneid* 1.573)
urbem quam statuo vestra est
 city.ACC.SG REL.ACC.SG.F erect.PRS.1SG your.NOM.SG.F be.PRS.3SG
 ‘The city which I erect is yours.’

As noted for Greek (van Emde Boas et al. 2019: 570), the case overwritten with the case of the relative pronoun may only be nominative or accusative. These are the cases highest in the case hierarchy (on which see Blake 2001: 89–90, 155–160). In the more general context of the typology of relative clauses there are thus parallels for the use of the genitive in (9), (10) and (11); and the Lithuanian construction does not contradict known restrictions connected with the case hierarchy. However, this attraction would be an *ad hoc* explanation. The assimilation in case cannot be dissociated from the parallel assimilation in morphosyntactic marking between the relative pronoun and the focus noun phrase. Both will be discussed in close conjunction in Section 3. Be it just mentioned, for the sake of completeness, that while the two types of morphosyntactic assimilation usually co-occur, as in (9), (10) and (11), the ‘attraction’ of the pseudo-antecedent may also occur on its own, viz. in cases where there is a verb phrase rather than a noun phrase in focus position, as in (15):

- (15) Lithuanian (<https://ref.lt/birzu-parapija/378-ne-dirbu-o-gyvenu-savo-darba>, accessed 13.08.2025)
Vienintelio, ko nenorėčiau, – tai gyventi bute.
 only.GEN.SG.M REL.GEN NEG.Want.IRR.1SG COP live.INF flat.LOC.SG
 ‘The only thing I wouldn’t like is live in a flat.’

In this case, it is the attraction of the pseudo-antecedent that allows the construction to be identified as a pseudo-cleft rather than a canonical specificational.

2.3 Fronted modifiers and arguments

The scope-restricting expressions discussed in 2.2 can be described as antecedents of sorts. In spite of their deviant morphosyntactic behaviour, they are still nominals. But the sentence-initial position in which they occur (preceding the relative pronoun) can also host expressions of a different kind. These are, first of all, degree

adverbials which, as modifiers of the verb in the free relative clause, we would expect to occur in that clause, in the close vicinity of the verb, and which we should therefore describe as fronted out of the relative clause:

- (16) Lithuanian (wordpress.com, ltTenTen21)

Labiausiai ko pasilgstu, tai būtent tokio
 most REL.GEN miss.PRS.1SG COP precisely such.GEN.SG.M
šviežio maisto.
 fresh.GEN.SG.M food.GEN.SG
 ‘What I miss most of all is precisely this kind of fresh food.’

- (17) Lithuanian (topwarez.lt, ltTenTen21)

Dabar mažiausiai ko norėsis tai kitų
 now least REL.GEN be.wished.FUT.3 COP other.GEN.PL
žmonių draugijos ar patarimų!
 people.GEN.PL friendship.GEN.SG or advice.GEN.PL
 ‘What one will wish least of all (or: at the very least) now is other people’s sympathy or advice.’⁵

In addition to such adverbials, the subject of the relative-clause verb may also be fronted. This may be a canonical nominative subject as in (18), or an oblique quasi-subject as with *reikia* ‘need’ in (19):

- (18) Lithuanian (https://www.efoto.lt/forumas/minusai_nuotraukai_reikia_grazinti, accessed 17-09-2025)

Aš ko nesuprantu, tai žmonių kurie
 I.NOM REL.GEN NEG.understand.PRS.1SG COP people.GEN.PL REL.NOM.PL.M
skiria laiko tam kas jiems nepatinka.
 devote.PRS.3 time.GEN that.DAT REL.NOM them.DAT.PL.M NEG.please.PRS.3
 ‘What I don’t understand is people giving their time to things they don’t like.’

- (19) Lithuanian (tiesos.lt, ltTenTen21)

Mano nuomone, seneliams dabar mažiausiai ko reikia,
 my opinion.INS.SG senior.DAT.PL now least REL.GEN be.needed.PRS.3
tai visokių geranorių patarimų iš šalies [...]
 COP various.GEN.PL well-wisher.GEN.PL advice.GEN.PL from side.GEN.SG
 ‘In my opinion, what the seniors need least of all (or: at the very least) now is various well-wishers’ advice from the sidelines.’

5 Whether *mažiausiai* should be understood as a degree adverbial with the verb (‘wish least of all’) or a scopal or scalar adverbial with its object (‘at least some advice’) would normally be indicated by its position (preverbal or prenominal), but due to the fronting it becomes ambiguous and the meaning may only be inferred from the context. The same ambiguity is observed in (19).

The degree adverbials in (16) and (17) are somewhat similar in function to the pseudo-antecedents in (9)–(11) in that they restrict the scope of the variable introduced by the free relative clause. One wonders if the availability of a syntactic position preceding the relative pronoun could not in some way have been inherited from the source construction, the specificational copular construction. This position, originally reserved for fully-fledged nominal antecedents, could then have become available for scope-restricting quasi-nominals like ‘the one thing’, ‘the only thing’, and finally for degree adverbials. But this explanation does not help us any further for subjects in sentences like (18), (19). The question arises whether these are fronted because they act as a kind of contrastive topics (on this notion cf. Lambrechts 1994: 183) or for some other reason. I will return to this question in Section 3.

3 Discussion

In the preceding section, I have discussed three somewhat puzzling morphosyntactic and syntactic features setting apart the Lithuanian pseudo-cleft from its source construction, the specificational copular construction. These features were: the assimilation in the case form (or prepositional marking) of the focus noun phrase to the morphosyntactic government of the relative-clause verb, which is also marked on the relative pronoun; the occurrence of apparent antecedents also assimilated in case form to the relative pronoun (and therefore, concomitantly, with the focus noun phrase); and the occurrence, in the same position as the apparent antecedent, of elements syntactically and semantically belonging to the verb of the free relative clause and therefore expected to appear in its immediate vicinity after the relative pronoun.

The connection between these three features is not immediately obvious, but considered together, they produce an interesting pattern that cannot be purely fortuitous. This pattern is illustrated in examples (20)–(22), which contain pseudo-cleft constructions (the a-sentences) paired for comparison with basic, non-cleft simple clauses that would correspond to them (the b-sentences). The corresponding sequences in the pseudo-cleft constructions and the corresponding simple clauses are given in square brackets:

- (20a) Lithuanian (paburk.lt, ltTenTen21)
- | | | | | |
|-----------------------|-------------|-------------------|--------------|--------------------|
| <i>Drugelis</i> | [<i>ko</i> | <i>nemėgsta</i> | <i>tai</i>] | <i>apsikrauti</i> |
| butterfly.NOM.SG | REL.GEN | NEG.like.PRS.3 | COP | burden.oneself.INF |
| <i>nereikalingais</i> | | <i>svoriais</i> . | | |
| unnecessary.INS.PL.M | | weight.INS.PL | | |
- ‘What a butterfly dislikes is to burden itself with unnecessary weights.’

- (20b) Lithuanian (cconstructed)
Drugelis [nemėgsta] apsikrauti nereikalingais
 butterfly.NOM.SG NEG.like.PRS.3 burden.oneself.INF unnecessary.INS.PL.M
svoriais.
 weight.INS.PL
 ‘A butterfly does not like to burden itself with unnecessary weights.’
- (21a) Lithuanian (geopolitika.lt, ItTenTen21)
[Ko nemėgstu,] tai nesąžiningumo.
 REL.GEN NEG.like.PRS.1SG COP dishonesty.GEN
 ‘What I don’t like is dishonesty.’
- (21b) Lithuanian (constructed)
[Nemėgstu] nesąžiningumo.
 NEG.like.PRS.1SG dishonesty.GEN
 ‘I don’t like dishonesty.’
- (22a) Lithuanian (cconstructed)
Vienintelio [ko nevalgome tai] saliero.
 only.GEN.SG.M REL.GEN NEG.eat.PRS.1PL COP celery.GEN.SG
 ‘The only thing we don’t eat is celery.’
- (22b) Lithuanian (constructed)
Vienintelio [nevalgome] saliero.
 only.GEN.SG.M NEG.eat.PRS.1PL celery.GEN.SG
 ‘Only celery we don’t eat.’

As can be seen, in these sentences the basic elements peculiar to the pseudo-cleft construction, viz. the relative marker, the relative-clause verb and the copula, become adjacent to each other. They constitute one sequence occupying the slot reserved, in the corresponding simple clause, for the verb. A rule generating the pseudo-cleft construction on the basis of the simple clause would thus be

$$(23) \quad V_{\text{case}} \rightarrow \text{Rel}_{\text{case}} V \text{ tai},$$

where the subscript CASE represents the morphosyntactic government of the verb (a case form or prepositional construction) realised on the focus noun phrase and copied onto the relative pronoun. What results from this operation is the canonical variety of the pseudo-cleft.

The three features discussed above as deviating from the specificational copular source construction cannot always manifest themselves at the same time. The assimilation in case form of the focus component cannot manifest itself in (20a) because, here, a verb phrase is in focus; fronting cannot manifest itself in (21a)

because there is no additional lexical material here apart from the relative pronoun and the relative-clause verb; and assimilation in case form of a pseudo-antecedent can be seen only in (22a) because the nominal preceding the relative pronoun in (20a) is not a pseudo-antecedent but a fronted relative-clause subject. When considered together, however, the effects of these three features converge. What leaps to the eye in these constructions is that the kernel of the pseudo-cleft construction, consisting of the relative pronoun, the relative-clause verb and the copula *tai* (for the sake of brevity, I will refer to it as the kernel component), has exactly the same morpho-syntactic and syntactic distribution as the main verb (that is, the verb originally occurring in the free relative clause, which is the main verb in the corresponding simple clause). Syntactically, in that both occupy the same slot; morphosyntactically, in that the whole pseudo-cleft kernel component has the same morphosyntactic government as the verb. This verbal government is reflected mainly in the morphosyntactic makeup of the focus noun phrase. Additionally, it may be replicated, in the basic simple sentence, in a secondary predicate (object complement), as in (22b), and in the pseudo-cleft variety it then appears as an oblique pseudo-antecedent. As alternative explanations (invoking, for instance, case attraction) do not seem to be quite adequate, we might risk the assumption that it is the pseudo-cleft kernel component appearing in the verbal slot that actually directly governs the focus noun phrase and, indirectly, may govern the case of the pseudo-antecedent, which can be interpreted as a secondary predicate (object complement) controlled by the focus noun and receiving its case from it. The fact that the pseudo-cleft kernel component inherits the slot reserved for the verb in the simple clause lends plausibility to the idea that it also inherits its morphosyntactic government. This explanation requires the assumption that the kernel component becomes non-compositional and may assign case marking as a whole. On the same assumption, the nominative subject in (18) and the oblique quasi-subject in (19) are no longer fronted (the only possible interpretation as long as we have a fully compositional relative clause) but now appear in their canonical subject position clause-initially.

Objections may, of course, be raised against this idea. There are many instances where the syntactic distribution of the main verb and the pseudo-cleft kernel constituent does not exactly coincide. In many cases, for instance, degree adverbials are not fronted but occur, so to speak, *in situ*, next to the verb, as in (24), which contrasts with (16) and (17) above:

- (24) Lithuanian (blogas.lt, ltTenTen21)
 [Kuo labiausiai džiaugiuosi, tai] kelionėmis.
 REL.INS most enjoy.PRS.1SG COP travel.INS.PL
 ‘What I enjoy most is travelling.’

- (25) Lithuanian (constructed)
Labiausiai [džiaugiuosi] kelionėmis.
 most enjoy.PRS.1SG travel.INS.PL
 ‘I enjoy travelling most.’

For constructions like these, the explanation just suggested, with the pseudo-cleft core component assuming both the slot and the morphosyntactic government of the simple-cause verb, is not adequate. But this does not invalidate the explanation. While the pseudo-cleft has arisen from the specificational copular construction and emancipated itself from it through a series of morphosyntactic and syntactic changes, it has also acted back on its source construction, which has led to the rise of large numbers of hybrid constructions combining the features of canonical specificationals and canonical pseudo-clefts. The following is a sentence that can be identified as a specificational in that the relative pronoun is *kuris* rather than the interrogative-relative *kas* that would be required in free relative clauses; the antecedent (a real antecedent judging by the choice of the relative pronoun) has, however, undergone assimilation to the government of the relative-clause verb (genitive because of the negation), and so has the focus noun:

- (26) Lithuanian (investologija.lt, ItTenTen21)
Vienintelio dalyko, kurio mes negalime jums
 only.GEN.SG.M thing.GEN.SG REL.GEN WE.NOM NEG.be.able.PRS.1PL you(PL).DAT
suteikti – tai patirties.
 bestow.INF COP experience.GEN.SG
 ‘The only thing we cannot bestow on you is experience.’

Another configuration of features can be seen in (27): there is a pseudo-antecedent combining with the interrogative-relative pronoun *kas*, as is observed in pseudo-clefts, but this pseudo-antecedent is in the nominative, as in the specificational construction; all other features are congruent with the pseudo-cleft construction: the focus noun phrase is assimilated in morphosyntactic marking – it is embedded in a prepositional phrase with *dėl* ‘because of’, reproducing the construction *būti dėl* ‘be caused by’ in the free relative clause:

- (27) Lithuanian (rls.lt forumas, ItTenTen21)
Arba dar vienas dalykas dėl ko gali
 or yet one.NOM.SG.M thing.NOM.SG because.of REL.GEN may.PRS.3
būti kaip ir man buvo, tai dėl netvarkingų
 be.INF as also me.DAT be.PST.3 COP because.of faulty.GEN.PL
vaizdo plokštės draiverių.
 image.GEN.SG card.GEN.SG driver.GEN.PL
 ‘Or yet another thing that may cause what happened to me as well is faulty video card drivers.’

Many more configurations constituting a mix of features of the specificational and the pseudo-cleft construction can be found. At first sight, this situation could suggest that the pseudo-cleft has not become completely emancipated from its source construction, and that the formation of a stable pseudo-cleft with regular syntactic and morphosyntactic features has not yet been achieved. But it is equally admissible to hypothesise that the process of emancipation of the pseudo-cleft from the specificational construction has run its full course and the oscillations we now observe result from the interaction between two constructions that, after all, perform similar or, at least, overlapping functions while differing in form. It was what is here described as the canonical variety, with the pseudo-cleft kernel in the slot of the simple-clause verb, that created the conditions for the fronting of syntactic material from the original relative clause, and it is perfectly consonant with the assimilation in morphosyntactic marking of the focus noun phrase to the government of the original relative-clause verb. Until a better explanation becomes available for the morphosyntactic changes giving the pseudo-cleft its distinctive shape, there is a certain attractiveness in an account that does not regard the co-occurrence of the three features discussed in Section 2 as a coincidence but establishes a causal link between them.

4 Broader outlook

The Lithuanian pseudo-cleft is an interesting development in the context of the changes affecting the pseudo-cleft construction as a construction in many ways intermediate between complex and simple clauses. The pseudo-cleft (like the cleft) construction starts out as a biclausal structure. Even in early Transformational-Generative Grammar, where the temptation was strong to account for it as a transform of a simple clause, this assumption was far from universal. Various transformational analyses were considered in an oft-cited manuscript paper by Peters and Bach (1968), but Akmajian (1970) remains agnostic with regard to the derived status of the pseudo-cleft (as is known, he suggests deriving the *it*-cleft from the pseudo-cleft), and Higgins (1979) rejects it. But while rejecting the derivational analysis, one may accept that pseudo-clefts are a biclausal strategy for marking information structure in the propositional content of a corresponding simple clause.

The principal factor leading to opacity and decay of complex sentence structure seems to be loss of structural elements. For African languages, Heine and Reh (1984: 178–179) describe a typical scenario involving loss of the relative pronoun and/or loss of the copula, which renders the complex nature of the sentence opaque, followed by rearrangement of word order bringing it into conformity with that of the typical

simple clause. Loss of the relative pronoun in a pseudo-cleft can be seen in examples cited by Lambrechts (2001) from Brazilian Portuguese (Lambrechts' glosses retained):

- (28) Brazilian Portuguese (Lambrechts 2001: 471)
- a. *O que eu visitei foi Atibaia.*
 the that 1.SG visited (it-)was Atibaia
 'What I visited was Atibaia.'
- b. *Eu visitei foi Atibaia.*
 1.SG visited (it-)was Atibaia
 'What I visited was Atibaia.'

Loss of the relative pronoun in an *it*-cleft is illustrated in constructions from colloquial English:

- (29) Colloquial English (Lambrechts 2001: 470)
It was your husband paid for that.

Loss of the copula rather than the relativiser is observed in Breton (as described by Harris and Campbell 1995: 155–157), which causes the original relative pronoun *a* to be reanalysed as a focus marker and the whole sentence to become monoclausal; again, it is an *it*-cleft that is involved here (Harris and Campbell's glosses are retained):

- (30) Breton (Harris and Campbell 1995: 155–157)
Ar vugale eo a lenne al levrioù.
 the children is that read the books
 'It is the children that read the books.'
- (31) *Ar vugale a lenne levrioù.*
 the children that read books
 'The children read books.'

With regard to African languages, Heine and Reh (1984: 181) point out that reanalysis of the copula as a focus marker rather than its loss is involved in the shift from cleft to monoclausal, and they also claim the cleft constructions contain no trace of relativisation. However, if the underlying cleft constructions are in any way comparable to those of the European languages, it is hard to resist the assumption of zero-marked relativisation (duly taken into account by Harris and Campbell 1995: 153), so that the cleft-to-focus shift as attested in Somali and other African languages must probably have involved the erasure of a (not lexically marked) clausal boundary anyway; and this erasure must have led to the shift from copula to focus marker, a development similar to that in English example (29). So it is mostly loss of predication markers and erasure of clausal boundaries that reduce complex cleft sentences to simple-clause

structures containing traces of the original pseudo-cleft in the form of focus markers. The rise of focus particles from reduction of original cleft constructions is a cross-linguistically well-studied phenomenon, cf., e.g., Harris and Campbell (1995: 151–168), Kouteva et al. (2019: 125–126) about the development “COPULA > FOCUS MARKER” (or “DEMONSTRATIVE > COPULA > FOCUS MARKER”). Actually the Lithuanian quasi-copula *tai* is also used as a focus marker, as in (36):

- (32) Lithuanian (alkas.lt, ltTenTen21)
Tai mes tave išvadavom, todėl dabar
 FOC WE.NOM YOU.ACC liberate.PST.1PL therefore now
tu – mūsų...
 YOU.NOM ours
 ‘It’s we who liberated you, so you’re ours now.’

This is probably a trace of a cleft construction as well, as in so many other languages. The Lithuanian pseudo-cleft is, however, different. Against the background just outlined, it seems to illustrate an altogether different and perhaps unique path of development.

As to the Lithuanian pseudo-cleft, what is characteristic of its development is that it does not involve loss of constitutive elements of the biclausal pseudo-cleft. The relative pronoun is never dropped, and while one occasionally finds instances where the quasi-copula *tai* is dropped, this is something that may happen in copular constructions of all kind. All the main constitutive elements are retained, and there is no process of decay through loss of constitutive elements and reduction of others to the status of segmental focus markers.

Part of the developments in the Lithuanian pseudo-cleft appear to be unique. One of them, however, has parallels in other languages, viz. the morphosyntactic assimilation of the focus noun to the government of the relative-clause verb, described by Creissels as ‘flagging of the cleft constituent’. As this change is cross-linguistically well attested, we might venture that it was the point of departure of the whole chain of constructional changes that occurred in Lithuanian. The further steps could then be reconstructed as follows. The morphosyntactic marking of the focus noun phrase was reanalysed as being not so much copied onto the focus noun phrase as directly governed by the extended predicative unit constituted by the sequence ‘relative pronoun + relative-clause verb + focus marker *tai*’. This sequence having established itself as a non-compositional constructional unit, it had to become internally contiguous, causing the fronting of all elements that would normally have intervened between the relative pronoun and the relative-clause verb. The syntactic position created by this fronting process could now become available also for pseudo-antecedents, actually scope-restricting quasi-nominal expressions whose morphosyntactic marking is also controlled by the predicative kernel ‘Rel V *tai*’.

5 Concluding remarks

In this article, I have identified a set of constructional changes affecting the biclausal specificational construction of Lithuanian and leading to a process of constructionalisation, viz. the rise of a monoclausal pseudo-cleft construction (on the notions invoked here cf. Traugott and Trousdale 2013). The changes are both syntactic and morphosyntactic. A characteristic feature of the Lithuanian pseudo-cleft is that it superficially still looks like a biclausal structure in the sense that all the lexical material from the biclausal structure is still present. What betrays the monoclausal structure of the pseudo-cleft is

- (a) its morphosyntax, viz. the assimilation in morphosyntactic marking of the focus noun phrase as well as of optional pseudo-antecedents to the morphosyntactic government of the simple-clause verb; and
- (b) its word order, viz. the fronting of lexical material from the pseudo-cleft relative clause to sentence-initial position ensuring the adjacency of the kernel components – relative pronoun, relative-clause verb and copula/focus marker *tai*.

These features, considered together, betray that the pseudo-cleft kernel ‘relative pronoun + verb + *tai*’ has taken over the slot of the simple-clause verb and inherited its morphosyntactic government. The pseudo-cleft kernel is now non-compositional, and the whole structure is monoclausal. Because of its superficial similarity to a complex sentence we could establish a multiple inheritance relation (cf. Goldberg 1995: 67) motivating the pseudo-cleft: its features are partly inherited from the original biclausal specificational construction and partly from the simple clause. This dual licencing relation accounts for the ambiguity of the pseudo-cleft between compound and simple sentence.

The typological interest of the Lithuanian pseudo-cleft consists in that it appears to represent a pathway for monoclausalisation of cleft sentences that has not been explored in the literature. The instances hitherto discussed basically involve decay of the biclausal structure through loss of constitutive elements, with remaining constitutive elements being reanalysed as segmental focus markers. If the diachronic reconstruction offered in Section 4 is correct, the point of departure for the processes affecting the Lithuanian pseudo-cleft might have been morphosyntactic. The morphosyntactic makeup of the focus noun phrase, originally an instance of ‘co-flagging’ (the marking assigned by the relative-clause verb being copied onto the focus noun phrase), became an instance of canonical flagging: it was reanalysed as being directly governed. The governing syntactic entity then had to be identified; several options were open but in Lithuanian it was apparently the pseudo-cleft kernel ‘Rel V *tai*’ that was identified as such. If this reconstruction is correct, then it is worth while investigating the morphosyntactic and syntactic implications of the ‘flagging of the

cleft constituent' in other languages as well. Whatever the correct explanation for the constructional changes in the Lithuanian pseudo-cleft may be, they should, in my view, contribute to a renewed interest in the syntactic and morphosyntactic mechanisms involved in the monoclausalisation of clefts and pseudo-clefts.

Abbreviations

1	first person
2	second person
3	third person
ACC	accusative
ACT	active
COP	copula
CVB	converb
DAT	dative
DEM	demonstrative
F	feminine
FOC	focus marker
FUT	future
GEN	genitive
IMP	imperative
INF	infinitive
INS	instrumental
IRR	irrealis
LOC	locative
M	masculine
N	neuter
NEG	negation
NOM	nominative
PCL	particle
PL	plural
PRET	preterite
PRS	present
PST	past
PTCP	participle
REL	relative pronoun
SG	singular
V	verb

Online sources

CCLL – Corpus of the Contemporary Lithuanian Language at <http://tekstynas.vdu.lt/tekstynas/>.

ltTenTen21 – Lithuanian Web Corpus 2021 at https://app.sketchengine.eu/#dashboard?corpname=preloaded%2Flttenten21_hm1.

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