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Focused responses

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In English, it is possible, in a positive response to a yes/no question, to repeat certain constituents of the question:

- (1) a. Did everyone kiss Anson?
b. yes, everyone

An obvious approach would be to treat these in a parallel fashion to the similar responses discussed by McCloskey (1991) for Irish: they involve some kind of phrasal ellipsis, leaving behind just the verb in Irish, and the subject in English.

Unfortunately, a name usually makes a bad response irrespective of its syntactic position:

- (2) a. Did Kyle kiss Anson?
b. #yes, Kyle
c. #yes, Anson

In fact, a name (or a simple existential) *can* appear in a response, but only when the corresponding constituent in the question is in (contrastive) focus. The constituent in the response then has a particular reading, depending on what kind of a DP it is. Once again this reading is focal (specific or contrastive):

- (3) a. Did Anson kiss SOMEONE/KYLE at the party?
b. yes, someone (only specific) / Kyle (and no one else)
(small caps represents focal stress)

The answers to clefted yes/no questions are revealing, and again show that the constituent picked up in the response is in focus in the question:

- (4) a. Was it Anson that kissed everyone at the party?
b. yes, Anson
c. #yes, everyone

It seems that what can appear in the positive response is either a quantifier or a DP in focus. It would be interesting to investigate whether a unified characterization of the element in the response can be given.

Reference

McCloskey, J. (1991) "Clause structure, ellipsis and proper government in Irish." *Lingua* 85: 259-302.