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Modulating Meaning: The Landscape of Russian Verbs of Musical Production

Valentina Zhukova

Department of Language and Culture, UiT The Arctic University of Norway

valentina.a.zhukova@uit.no

Elmira Zhamaletdinova

Institute for Slavic Philology, Ludwig-Maximilians-Universität München

e.zhamaletdinova@lmu.de

Abstract

This article investigates thirteen Russian verbs of musical sound production within a cognitive-linguistic framework, focusing on agentivity, event construal, metaphor, and metonymy. Based on corpus data from the Russian National Corpus, we show that Russian musical verbs form a structured semantic domain organized along two cross-cutting dimensions: orientation (performance-oriented vs. sound-oriented) and degree of agentivity (high vs. low). These dimensions yield four recurrent construal types ranging from intentional musical performance to non-agentive auditory perception. The analysis demonstrates that agentivity is systematically redistributed through metonymic shifts from performer to instrument or musical work. In addition, Russian musical verbs connected to such neighboring semantic domains as non-musical sound, communication, speech, emotion, movement, and staged performance. The study contributes to research on auditory semantics by showing how linguistic meaning emerges through systematic shifts in perspective and construal.

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1. Introduction

In this contribution to Festschrift, we investigate a semantic domain that is both central to human experience and personally resonant with Tore's own musical practice: verbs describing musical sound production.

Music is both a physical phenomenon and a socially embedded practice. This article investigates thirteen Russian verbs of musical production ranging from highly general predicates such as *играть (на альте)* to specialized verbs that encode manner (*бренчать, пиликать*), performance type (*концертировать*), or perceptual outcome (*звучать*).

Within the semantic domain of Russian verbs of sound (*глаголы звука* or *глаголы звучания*), existing scholarship typically distinguishes two major subdomains: (1) verbs that denote sounds produced primarily by inanimate objects (e.g., *скрипеть*, *греметь*, *журчать*), and (2) verbs that denote sounds produced by animate beings, primarily animals (e.g., *хрюкать*, *мяукать*) and, more rarely, humans (Šeljakin 1962; Sidorova 1978).

While previous work on Russian sound verbs has focused primarily on inanimate sound sources (Stojnova 2002) or animal vocalizations (Raxilina 2010; Rakhilina et al. 2017), verbs denoting human musical activity have rarely been treated as a unified domain. Musical verbs are typically described in dictionaries as individual lexemes (e.g., Kuznecov 2000). In other words, the music domain with internal structure, usage patterns, or derivational behavior as a whole is not addressed in the scholarship yet. The present study addresses this gap by offering an empirical qualitative analysis of verbs describing musical sound production in Russian based on corpus examples. Adopting a cognitive-linguistic framework, the article asks:

1. How do different verbs construe events of musical production?
2. What are the regular semantic shifts employed in the verbs of music production? What role do metaphor and metonymy play in these shifts?
3. Which neighboring semantic domains are systematically connected to musical production?

In this article we show that Russian verbs of musical production form a coherent semantic domain structured by two cross-cutting dimensions: orientation (performance- vs. sound-oriented) and degree of agentivity (high vs. low). These dimensions yield four recurring construal types, ranging from intentional musical performance to non-agentive auditory perception. Agentivity is systematically redistributed through metonymic shifts from performer to instrument or to the musical work itself. Beyond music, the same verbs occur in neighboring domains such as non-musical sound, communication, speech and emotion. This does not imply a directional process of semantic development; instead, it reflects semantic proximity between related experiential domains in which the same lexical items are conventionally used.

2. Theoretical framework: event construal and agentivity

Music is a part of reality that is both performative and perceptional depending on the speaker's perspective. Talmy (2000) unifies perception and conception under the gradient notion of ception. Talmy distinguishes thirteen parameters, among them ostension, which plays a central role in both visual and auditory modalities. Following Talmy (2000), events can be linguistically construed in different ways depending on which components (agent, process, result, perception) are foregrounded.

Langacker has also proposed a system of broad classes of construal phenomena, such as specificity, focusing, prominence or profiling and perspective (2008: 55-89). These construal phenomena contribute to shifting the listener's attention to particular aspects of a situation or an event.

The event construal of visual perception based on English data was studied by Divjak et al. (2019: 67) who found that "construal affects the spontaneous visual perception of a scene by affecting the order in which the components of a scene are accessed or by modulating the distribution of attention over the components, making them more or less interesting and salient". Similarly, in the situation of playing music within auditory modality, various aspects of the situation can be foregrounded: agent (musician/performer), instrument (piano, viola), piece of music (waltz, song), voice or a combination of them.

Music-related events can be described in different ways in language depending on what the speaker chooses to highlight and where attention is directed. A central parameter in this process is agentivity, defined as the degree to which an event is construed as intentional, controlled, and initiated by a volitional agent (Langacker 2008: 385). In the domain of musical sound production, agentivity interacts systematically with construal choices, shaping whether an event is presented as an action performed by a musician, a process unfolding over time, or a perceptual experience available to a listener.

This framework makes it possible to model musical verbs not as a separate lexicographic description of each verb but as a structured semantic domain in which differences in control, intentionality, and perceptual anchoring play a decisive role.

3. Data and methods

The first step of the study consisted in compiling the list of verbs that, among other things, denote musical sound production in Russian, based on existing lexicographic descriptions (Babenko 1999)[1] and the authors' intuitions. The point of departure was the verb *играть* in its specialized meaning 'to play a musical instrument'. This verb served

[1] Babenko (1999) lists twenty-three verbs of sound production and musical performance. We included the ten most frequent verbs from this list, along with *дудеть*, *музицировать*, and *пиликать*, which are not listed there but are relevant for the present study.

as a central node for identifying a set of related verbs, or "quasi-synonyms", which in actual usage, compete with *играть*, refine its meaning, or describe closely related aspects of musical activity. From this point, the list was expanded to include verbs denoting the use of the voice as an instrument: *петь*, *насвистывать* and *свистеть* as well as verbs referring to professional or staged forms of performance: *исполнять*, *концертитовать*, and *музицировать*.

The network was further enriched with verbs denoting sound production without necessarily implying musicality, but which regularly appear in musical contexts: *барабанить*, *бренчать*, *дудеть*, *звучать, пиликать* and *трубить*. Thus, the network gradually grew from a single basic verb into a coherent group forming a radial category of musical performance.

Once the relevant verbs were identified, attested examples were collected from the Main Corpus of the Russian National Corpus (ruscorpora.ru), with the analysis restricted to thematic subcorpora that are particularly rich in descriptions of music and culture (Nonfiction; Journalism: Leisure and entertainment; Art and culture; Art history; Culturology). The resulting subcorpus contains approximately 28.6 million words.

For each verb, queries generally targeted all forms of the lemma using a wildcard prefix * (e.g., **бренчать*). In cases involving extensive homonymy or morphological overlap, additional exclusion filters were applied to eliminate irrelevant forms, such as verbs *успеть* and *терпеть* for *петь*.

For *играть*, the search was further restricted to constructions with prepositions. However, such queries cannot guarantee the retrieval of every musical instance of *играть*. Conversely, not every occurrence of *играть* with *а* preposition necessarily corresponds to a musical use; non-musical uses (e.g., games, gambling as in *играть в карты*) were filtered out manually during data inspection. Musical uses of *играть* without a prepositional phrase (e.g., *музыка играет*) were not targeted in the search because searches for bare *играть* in the RNC produce a large number of non-musical occurrences, resulting in low precision of the query results. However, the resulting dataset contains occurrences such as *музыка, которую играют в лучшем столичном джазовом клубе*, where prepositional phrase encodes location rather than instrument.

The study focuses on the verbs displayed in Table 1. The Source category indicates the prototypical context associated with a verb within its musical usage. Only musical senses of the verbs are included in the table; other basic meanings are excluded.

Verb	Prefixed verbs in our database	Source category	Raw (IPM)	Total
барабанить 'to drum, to beat (a drum or repeatedly tap)'	*забарабанить, отбарабанить, побарабанить, пробарабанить*	Musical instrument	43 (1,5)	42

Verb	Prefixed verbs in our database	Source category	Raw (IPM)	Total
бренчать 'to strum (casually), to twang'	*побренчать*	Musical instrument	33 (1.15)	32
дудеть 'to toot, to blow (on a horn, pipe)'	*задудеть, подудеть*	Musical instrument	18 (0,63)	17
звучать 'to sound'	*зазвучать, отзвучать, прозвучать*	Performance	4 842 (1,15)	160
играть + *preposition* 'to play (an instrument)'	*заиграть, наиграть, отыграть, переиграть, поиграть, подыграть, проиграть, сыграть*	Musical instrument	4 746 (165,88)	280
исполнять 'to perform'	NA	Performance	2 497 (87,27)	160
концертировать 'to give concerts, to tour as a performer'	NA	Performance	46 (1,61)	45
музицировать 'to play music'	*помузицировать*	Performance	45 (1,57)	44
насвистывать 'to whistle (a tune)'	NA	Voice	40 (1,4)	40
петь 'to sing'	*воспеть, допеть, запеть, напеть, отпеть, пропеть, попеть, перепеть, распеть, спеть*	Voice	5 870 (308,32)	280
пиликать 'to fiddle, to squeak'	*запиликать, пропиликать*	Musical instrument	24 (0,84)	24
свистеть 'to whistle'	*высвистеть, засвистеть, посвистеть, просвистеть, пересвистеть*	Voice	295 (10,45)	160
трубить 'to trumpet, to blow a horn'	*вострубить, затрубить, оттрубить, протрубить, раструбить*	Musical instrument	318 (11,11)	162

Table 1. Verbs taken for the analysis in the present study

All retrieved examples were manually checked to ensure semantic relevance and consistency across the dataset. The final dataset was annotated for agentivity, event construal, syntactic patterns, and semantic extensions. For lemmas with fewer than 100 occurrences, all examples were annotated. For more frequent lemmas, we annotated 160 pseudo-randomly selected examples for lemmas with a smaller number of prefixed variants, and 280 examples for lemmas with a larger number of prefixed variants to account for semantic variability.

4. Semantic grouping of verbs by agentivity and event construal

The analysis of corpus examples reveals that Russian verbs of musical production can be classified into four semantic groups, based on two dimensions emerging from corpus data: agentivity (high vs. low) and orientation (performance-oriented vs. sound-oriented). Differences in construal are attested not only across lexemes but also across alternative constructions involving the same lexeme, indicating that event conceptualization is shaped by both lexical choice and constructional framing. These groups therefore should be understood as corpus-informed semantic categories rather than statistically derived clusters. Figure 1 summarizes four main groups.

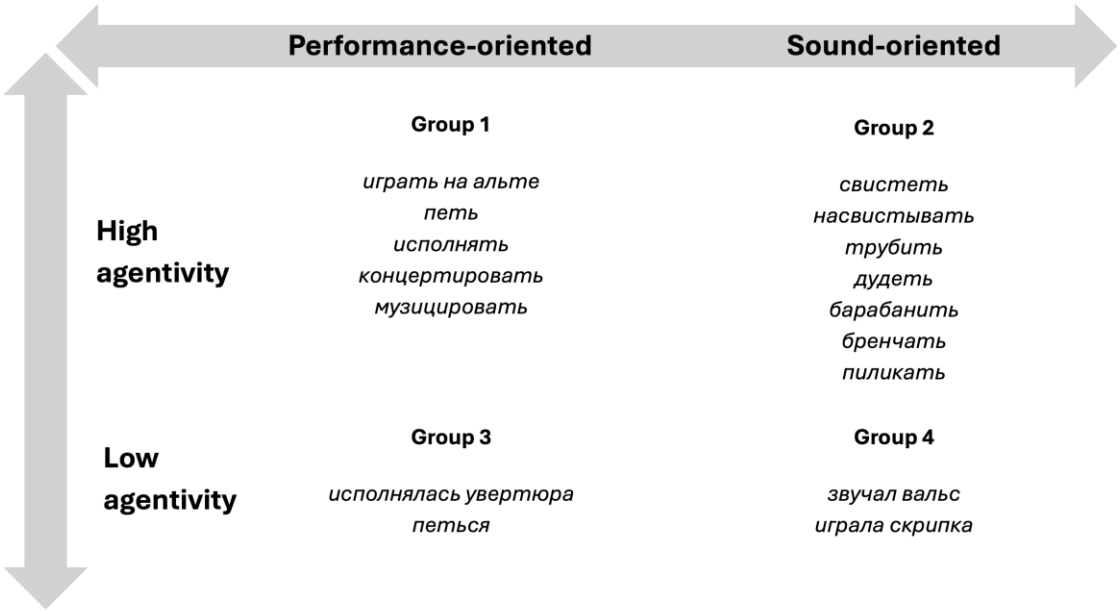


Figure 1. Grouping of Russian musical verbs

The distinction between the four groups captures both whether a predicate profiles a human performer acting within a socially recognized structured practice (performance-oriented) or instead foregrounds the acoustic output and its properties (sound-oriented), and whether agentivity is high or reduced. Crucially, agentivity is not a binary property but a scalar one: it may be high, reduced, or almost entirely absent, as in constructions where sound is construed as emerging autonomously. Furthermore, agentivity is not

determined solely by the verb itself, but also by the construction in which it occurs. Performance- and sound-orientation are likewise scalar rather than categorical opposites, as the degree of orientation varies depending on the verb and the construction in which it occurs. Each group is discussed in detail in the following subsections.

4.1 Group 1: Performance-oriented verbs with high agentivity

This group comprises verbs that construe musical events as intentional, controlled, and culturally structured activities, carried out by a human agent who is fully responsible for the outcome. Rather than merely encoding sound production, they profile music-making as an activity embedded in artistic, professional, or recreational norms. Within the semantic network, this group represents the prototypical construal of musical performance in Russian.

At the center of this group stands *играть*, which functions as the most general and flexible predicate for musical activity. In the musical domain, its prototypical construction is *играть на* [Instrument], attested with a wide range of instruments (*играть на рояле, гитаре, скрипке*). This construction foregrounds handling of the instrument and assumes a certain level of technical skill.

Beyond instrument-centered uses, *играть* allows the Theme to be foregrounded, either in generalized form (*музыка, которую играют в лучшем столичном джазовом клубе*) or with reference to a specific work (*играют над нею нестройный реквием*). It further combines productively with expressions of genre (*играть в стиле диско-фанк*), shifting the focus from a concrete event to a performer's style. These constructions underscore the verb's role as an umbrella predicate capable of integrating multiple facets of musical activity, such as instrument, repertoire, and style within a single lexical frame.

A particularly important subset of constructions brings *играть* close to performance-oriented verbs such as *исполнять* and *концертировать*. Expressions like *играть в группе / в квартете* and uses without an overt instrument (*играть на свадьбе*) construe the activity as giving a performance (*выступать*), often in front of an audience. In such cases, the instrument is frequently encoded implicitly in the agent (*Пианист играет на декабрьских вечерах*). Unlike *исполнять* and *концертировать*, however, *играть* does not normally extend to vocal performance where the voice functions as the sole instrument.

At the same time, *играть* readily applies to theatrical contexts (*играть главную роль*), where the preposition *на* no longer encodes an instrument but instead specifies the venue or occasion (*на московской сцене, на Театральной олимпиаде*). From its musical core, *играть* further extends metaphorically to domains of emotional and psychological influence (*играть на струнах души, играть на низменных инстинктах*).

While *играть* occurs in various contexts, other verbs in the group restrict how the performance is conceptually framed. The verb *концертировать* profiles musical activity as public, professional performance. Unlike *играть*, it does not encode the instrument, the repertoire, or the manner of sound production; instead, it conceptualizes the event holistically as participation in concerts. Corpus data show that *концертировать* is restricted to professional musicians and typically construed as an iterative or habitual activity, referring to a series of performances over time (*концертировать по России, каждый год зимой*). The agent role is obligatory and consistently filled by individuals or groups belonging to the professional musical domain. Notably, *концертировать* does not develop metaphorical extensions, which reinforces its status as a highly specialized, peripheral verb within the network.

In contrast, *музицировать* profiles musical activity as informal and recreational. While it shares high agentivity with *концертировать* and *играть*, it differs sharply in its evaluative and situational framing. *Музицировать* typically denotes non-professional music-making, often situated in domestic or small-group contexts and integrated into broader scenarios of social interaction (*вечера, посиделки, собрались попить чая и помузицировать*). The activity is construed as an open-ended, emphasizing process rather than outcome. Although professional musicians may appear as agents, their activity is framed as private or leisurely rather than public or institutional. Explicit specification of instruments is rare, and the verb shows no tendency toward metaphorical extension, maintaining a stable meaning of informal music-making.

The verb *исполнять* occupies a distinctive position within this group by systematically foregrounding the performed entity rather than the act of sound production or the instrument involved. Its canonical musical construction is [Agent] *исполнять* [Theme], where the theme is a musical work, a part, or a generalized category (*музыка*). Unlike *играть*, *исполнять* unifies instrumental and vocal realization within a single predicate: whether the performance involves playing or singing is inferred contextually (*Виолончелистка исполняла концерт Шостаковича* vs. *Пугачева исполняла свою песню*) rather than lexically encoded in the predicate itself.

The flexibility of Theme enables *исполнять* to bridge music with adjacent performance domains such as theater and cinema (*исполнять роль*), dance (*исполнять испанские танцы*), and, by further abstraction, non-artistic domains where action is construed as the realization of a predefined script or obligation (*исполнять долг, назначение, намерение*). Within the present group, *исполнять* thus represents the most theme-oriented construal of performance, contrasting with *играть*, which balances instrument, agent, and style, and with *концертировать*, which profiles the performance event as a professional practice.

Петь profiles intentional, vocal performance by human agents (artists, ensembles, street musicians), similarly to the verb *исполнять.* This verb is situated within the music production domain, however, there is no musical instrument used for the production. Instead, the human is using the voice (*артист поет*), which can be optionally encoded by the noun phrase in the instrumental case (*поет тонким женским голосом*) or metonymically expressed in the syntactic subject (*сопрано поет*).

Beyond the musical domain, *петь* can extend to inanimate entities (*поет колокол*, *поет ветер*), body parts and inner states (*душа поет*, *сердце поет*). Interestingly, *петь* can be used within the context of playing musical instruments via metaphorical extensions like *поет флейта* or *пропела скрипка,* where the agency is demoted. *Петь* is often embedded in evaluative or ideological discourse (*воспевать* meaning praising, glorifying). These uses shift attention away from controlled action toward perceptual effect and expressive quality.

Taken together, the verbs in this group illustrate different ways of construing high-agentivity musical performance in Russian: from the maximally general and metaphorically productive *играть*, through the professionally specialized *концертировать*, the informally framed *музицировать*, and the strongly theme-oriented *исполнять* to voice-oriented *петь*. Their systematic contrasts show that high agentivity does not entail uniform event construal but rather supports a range of performance profiles differing in publicness, professionalism, thematic focus, and degree of abstraction.

4.2 Group 2: Sound-oriented verbs with high agentivity

Unlike *играть*, which functions as a general and underspecified predicate of musical performance, the verbs in this group construe music-making primarily through the acoustic properties of the sound produced and the manner of its production. While they all presuppose a human agent acting intentionally, they shift the conceptual focus away from performance as a socially structured practice toward how the sound is emitted and how it is perceived, often incorporating an evaluative stance.

A first unifying feature of these verbs is their lexical specialization. Verbs such as *трубить, дудеть,* and *барабанить* are derived from particular instrument types (wind or percussion), while *пиликать* and *бренчать* are onomatopoeic and motivated by sound symbolism. As a result, they encode specific acoustic qualities, such as loudness, sharpness, repetitiveness, or metallic resonance.

A second common property is the prominence of manner and effort. Compared to *исполнять* or *концертировать*, which abstract away from the physical act of sound production, sound-oriented verbs foreground embodied action: blowing, striking, plucking, or producing air pressure. This is particularly clear for *барабанить*, which resists metonymic construals where the instrument itself acts as subject (*барабанит*

барабан is unattested). This resistance suggests that the verb conceptually favors the agentive, effortful action over the instrument's autonomous sound-producing capacity, in contrast to *трубить* or *дудеть*, where metonymic subjects (*труба трубит, дудит рожок*) are fully acceptable.

Evaluation is the third common property for this group. Verbs such as *пиликать* and *бренчать* are inherently evaluative, typically conveying the listener's negative assessment of the performance as annoying, careless, unserious, or unskilled. This evaluation is part of the lexical meaning rather than a pragmatic inference and applies regardless of whether the focus is on the instrument (*бренчать на гитаре, пиликать на скрипке*) or on the musical product (*пиликать мелодию*). By contrast, *трубить* and *дудеть* are evaluatively more neutral in their literal musical uses.

A further shared property is the productivity of metaphorical extensions, though the target domains vary. For *трубить* and *барабанить*, sound production motivates extensions into signaling, public announcement, and ultimately information dissemination or temporal construal (*протрубить истину; оттрубить смену, отбарабанить два года*). In these cases, repetitive or forceful sound is reinterpreted as repetitive, effortful, or obligatory action over time.

For *дудеть*, metaphorical extensions target alignment and error in the domain of speech and cognition (*дудеть в одну дудку, задудеть не в ту дуду*), mapping coordinated musical action onto unanimity or deviation. By contrast, *бренчать* remains largely confined to the sound domain and shows little evidence of metaphorical expansion, while *пиликать* extends into evaluative descriptions of verbal production (*пиликать рифмами*).

The verbs *свистеть* and *насвистывать* occupy a partially overlapping but distinct position within this group. Both involve vocal sound production rather than instrument use and are thus closer to *петь* than to instrumental predicates. However, they differ sharply in aspectual and evaluative profile. *Насвистывать* is strongly associated with light, casual, durative activity, often accompanying motion, and remains almost exclusively literal (*распахивая на ходу двери, шел, насвистывая, Жадов*). *Свистеть*, by contrast, forms a highly articulated semantic network combining neutral sound production, signaling, musical construals, public disapproval (booing), and interactionally loaded evaluations of speech (*не свисти* meaning 'don't lie'). Derivatives of *свистеть* like *высвистеть лауреатов, засвистеть певицу*, and *просвистеть пьесу до дырок* encode negative assessment and public disapproval.

Taken together, sound-oriented verbs with high agentivity form a coherent group characterized by manner-rich construal, sensitivity to acoustic properties, and frequent evaluative stance. While they share intentional human agency with performance-oriented verbs, they diverge systematically in what they profile: not musical performance as a cultural practice, but sound as an embodied, perceptually salient, and socially interpretable phenomenon.

4.3 Group 3: Performance-oriented verbs with low agentivity

The strong thematic orientation of the verb *исполнять* is further reflected in the verb's compatibility with passive constructions (*исполнялась увертюра*), which background the agent. The agent can be explicitly expressed in the sentence (*Раньше они исполнялись просто дуэтом под гитару* <...>) by a noun phrase in the instrumental case (thus grammatically demoted in comparison with an active construction) or omitted (*Песни исполнялись под аккомпанемент балалаечного оркестра г. Андреева и без оркестра*). The reflexive form *петься* systematically suppresses or backgrounds the agent and construes singing as a collectively distributed, habitual, or situation-bound process (*частушки пелись*).

As a result, the *-ся*-verbs *исполняться* and *петься* construe musical performance as an event with low agentivity, where the realization of a piece is presented as occurring independently of a salient human actor, suggesting their placement in a separate group within the performance-oriented domain.

4.4 Group 4: Sound-oriented verbs with low agentivity

The verb *звучать* and the instrument-for-subject construction with *играть* occupy the non-agentive pole of the system. These verbs construe musical and acoustic events as auditory presence, foregrounding sound emergence and perception rather than human action. Agency is systematically backgrounded or eliminated, and the perspective is shifting from the musician/performer to the hearer/audience.

In contrast to high-agentive *играть на рояле,* contexts with metonymically foregrounded instruments, such as *скрипка играет,* highlight the perceived sound by the hearer rather than intentional play. The musician is construed as absent or irrelevant; what is foregrounded is the acoustic event as experienced by a hearer. This perceptual orientation motivates the placement of this construction at the low-agentive pole of the network.

In musical contexts, *звучать* profiles either the musical work (*зазвучал вальс*) or the instrument (*зазвучала скрипка*). Beyond literal sound production, *звучать* extends systematically into the domain of evaluation and interpretation. In expressions such as *звучит двусмысленно, Шекспир зазвучал по-новому* or *звучит голос эпохи*, the verb no longer denotes acoustic emission but assesses how utterances, ideas, or stylistic choices are received. Here, sound functions as a metaphor for interpretive stance.

In contrast to low-agentive *исполняться*, which presents musical performance as a controlled act that brings a work into existence, *звучать* offers a complementary construal in which music, speech, or cultural forms manifest themselves as audible and interpretable phenomena. Across its uses, *звучать* provides a bridge between perception and meaning, allowing Russian to conceptualize understanding, evaluation, and cultural presence in explicitly auditory terms.

4.5 Summary

Figure 2 visualizes the internal structure of a music production event in terms of three core participants: Agent, Theme, and Instrument. For vocal predicates such as *петь, свистеть,* and *насвистывать*, the voice is treated as a subtype of Instrument, reflecting its functional alignment with instrumental sound production. The horizontal axis represents a gradient from high agentivity (left) to low agentivity (right), capturing systematic shifts in how musical events are construed.

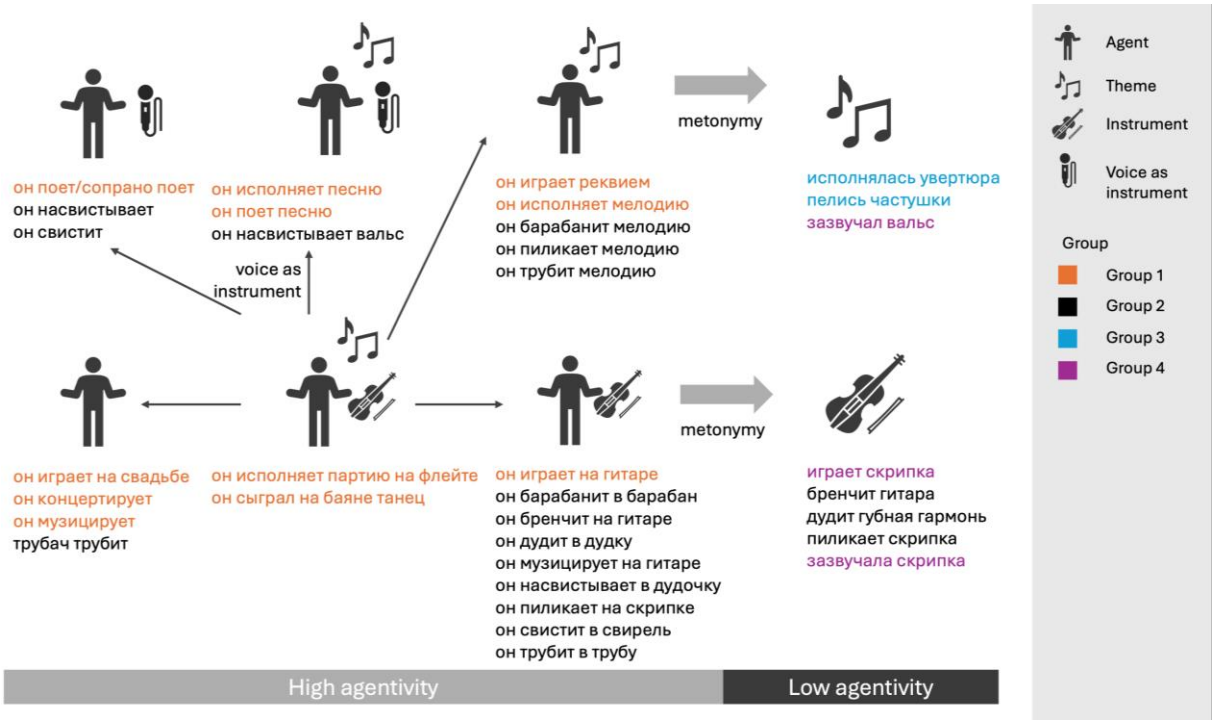


Figure 2. Music production verbs by event construal type

Our analysis suggests that Russian music verbs typically foreground the Agent and the Instrument, yielding the prototypical construal of intentional sound production by a human performer. Other recurrent configurations include Agent + Theme and Agent + Theme + Instrument. By contrast, performance-oriented predicates such as *концертировать* and *музицировать* consistently foreground only the Agent, while the instrument, repertoire, and concrete sound production remain backgrounded. Notably, our database contains no attested cases in which both the Theme and the Instrument are foregrounded while the Agent is suppressed.

A key pattern highlighted in the diagram is the systematic shift from agent-centered construals to construals in which either the Instrument or the Theme functions as grammatical subject. The shift in agentivity is attested both across groups (whereby Groups 3 and 4 are low agentivity groups) and within individual groups, where alternative construals coexist depending on the construction.

Two metonymic pathways are particularly productive. First, the agent → instrument shift backgrounds the human performer while promoting the sound source, as in *он бренчит на гитаре → бренчит гитара*. Although the agent is no longer syntactically expressed, human agency remains conceptually accessible. Second, the agent → theme shift construes music itself as the source of activity: *оркестр исполняет увертюру → исполнялась увертюра*.

Taken together, our findings reveal that Russian musical verbs form a structured semantic network. High agentivity supports multiple construal options: performance-, sound-, instrument-, and theme-oriented, while low agentivity emerges through systematic metonymic shifts.

5. Prepositional variation

Since Russian musical verbs occupy overlapping areas of the semantic network, prepositional variation in encoding the instrument role follows naturally from differences in event construal. The summary of typical constructions is provided in Table 2.

***на* [Instrument]**	***в* [Instrument]**
играть	—
исполнять	—
пиликать	—
бренчать	—
дудеть	*дудеть*
—	*трубить*
—	*барабанить*

Table 2. Marking of Instrument with music production verbs in our database

The construction *играть на* [Instrument] serves as the default pattern for instrument-mediated musical performance. Other performance-oriented verbs align with it to varying degrees. *Исполнять* can combine with *на* when an instrument is relevant but often omits it when the musical work is foregrounded, while *музицировать* typically appears without an instrument and only rarely with *на*, reflecting its holistic construal of music-making (*музицировал на гитаре*).

Sound-oriented manner verbs show greater flexibility. *Пиликать* and *бренчать* strongly prefer *на*, similarly to *играть на*. *Дудеть* alternates between *в* and *на*: *в* highlights the physical channel of sound production (*в дудку*), whereas *на* aligns the verb with conventional instrumental playing (*на саксофоне*). *Трубить* strongly prefers *в*, reinforcing its orientation toward directed airflow. *Барабанить* alternates between *в*

for musical uses (*в барабан/бубен*) and *по* for non-musical sounds (*барабанить по столу*).

Several verbs systematically lack instrumental marking. *Петь, концертировать, исполняться*, and *звучать* do not license instrument complements, as they foreground the musical work or sound event rather than instrumental action. *Свистеть* and *насвистывать* are usually used without instrument, though rare examples are attested. In that case, prepositions can vary: *свистеть в свисток/зубы* vs. *свистеть на флейте*, *насвистывать в дудочку* vs. *насвистывать на мундгармонике*.

Overall, prepositional patterns reflect differences in how musical events are construed: as controlled instrumental action (favoring *на*), embodied sound emission (favoring *в*), or autonomous acoustic events (omitting instrument). However, в/на prepositional variation with music verbs needs further research.

6. Neighboring semantic domains of musical production

Based on the attested uses of the Russian verbs of musical production examined here, musical production is embedded in a dense network of closely adjacent semantic domains. These neighboring domains are not accidental but recur systematically across multiple verbs, indicating stable patterns of semantic association. Together, they reveal how musical production relates to sound, communication, performance, and experience more broadly, visualized in Figure 3.

The closest and most pervasive neighboring domain is **Non-musical sound**. Verbs associated with music frequently occur in situations where no musical structure is involved, provided that the acoustic profile is salient. Thus, *барабанить, бренчать, пиликать, свистеть,* and *дудеть* are regularly used for natural phenomena (*дождь барабанит, ветер свистит*), animals (*пиликают насекомые, птицы свистят*), and mechanical sources (*мотор бренчит, паровоз свистит*). These uses are motivated by acoustic similarity rather than by agency or intentionality: musical sound functions as a reference point for categorizing other auditory events.

A second core neighboring domain is **Signaling**. Several verbs of musical production are also used for intentional sound that is used to attract attention or convey information. Verbs *трубить* and *свистеть* denote literal signals (*трубить в рог, свистеть кому-то*), public announcements (*протрубить победу*), and the dissemination of information (*трубить о чём-то, раструбить на весь мир*). In these cases, sound is reinterpreted as message: loudness, repetition, and reach map onto informational scope and publicity, allowing musical action to structure the domain of communication.

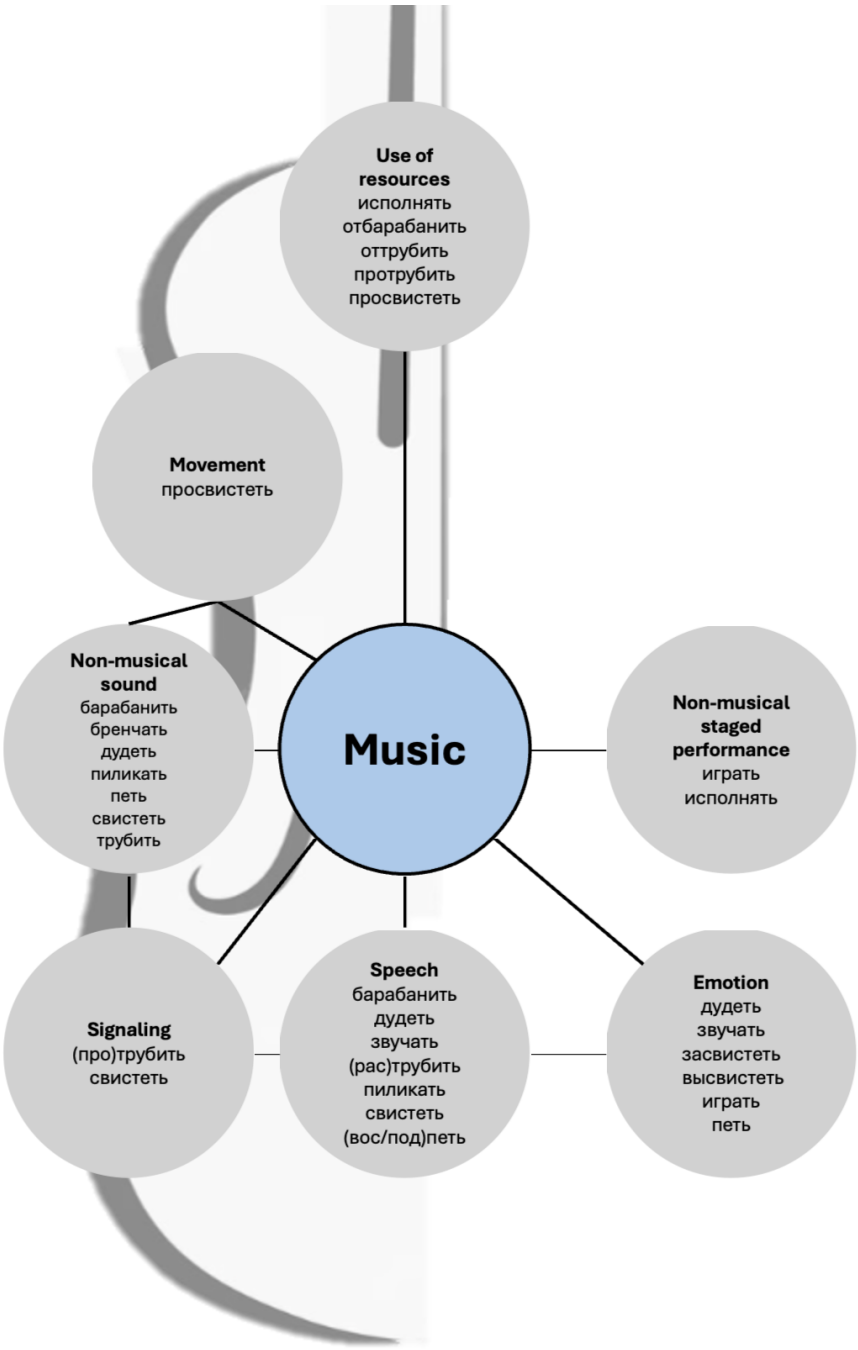


Figure 3. Neighboring semantic domains of musical production. The central circle represents the Music production semantic domain. This domain is covered by all verbs in the set. The surrounding circles represent adjacent semantic domains. We specify the verbs that are used in these domains. Lines represent conceptual connections among domains.

Closely related is the domain of **Speech**, particularly in its negatively evaluated forms. Musical verbs are frequently used to construe speech as sound rather than as propositional content. Expressions such as *барабанить в уши* and *дудеть в одну дудку* emphasize monotony, insistence, and sound intensity, *пиликать рифмами* highlights aesthetic failure, and colloquial *не свисти* (meaning ‘don’t lie’) evaluates speech as

empty or unreliable. Here musical production provides a model for viewing speech as rhythmic, repetitive, or irritating.

Musical production also neighbors the broader domain of **Non-musical staged performance**. Beyond music, verbs *играть* and *исполнять* are associated with theatrical performance (*играть роль, исполнять роль*), and dance (*исполнять танцы*). The shared conceptual core is not sound production but structured public realization under conditions of social visibility and evaluation.

A more specialized but robust neighboring domain involves the **Use of resources**, such as time, work, and effortful activity. Prefixed forms such as *оттрубить, отбарабанить,* and *просвистеть* denote completing a work shift (*оттрубить восемь часов*), serving a required term (*отбарабанить два года*), or spending and losing time or resources (*просвистеть деньги, поэзия отзвучала слишком рано*). These meanings arise from construing repetitive musical action as sustained effort with duration and an endpoint, allowing sound production to structure temporal experience.

Musical verbs also overlap with the domain of **Emotion** and psychological influence, though more selectively. Expressions like *играть на струнах души* or *играть на инстинктах* conceptualize emotional manipulation as musical performance, while *звучит двусмысленно* or *звучит голос эпохи* use sound as a model for evaluative and ideological resonance. Emotion is thus treated as a resonating medium responsive to skilled "playing."

Finally, musical verbs intersect with **Movement** and bodily activity, especially in the case of *свистеть*. Whistling frequently accompanies locomotion and action (*свистеть на ходу, просвистеть мимо ушей*), contributing to characterization rather than constituting a focal event. This adjacency is grounded less in metaphor than in habitual co-occurrence and embodied experience, reflecting how musical sound integrates into everyday action.

Taken together, these neighboring domains highlight stable conceptual links between musical production and the domains of sound, communication, performance, time, emotion, and movement in Russian. Musical production thus serves as a salient experiential reference frame within a broader semantic network.

7. Conclusions

Our study has demonstrated that thirteen Russian verbs of musical production form a structured semantic domain. These verbs participate in a coherent network that systematically modulates how musical events are linguistically conceptualized, whether as intentional human action, embodied sound production with particular sound properties, or perceptual experience.

First, we identified two intersecting dimensions that structure this domain: orientation (performance-oriented vs. sound-oriented) and degree of agentivity (high vs. low).

Together, these dimensions yield four groups. Group 1 comprises performance-oriented, high-agentivity verbs such as *играть*, *петь*, *исполнять*, *концертировать*, and *музицировать,* which construe music as a public performance or private recreational practice. Group 2 comprises sound-oriented, high-agentivity verbs (*трубить*, *дудеть*, *барабанить*, *бренчать*, *пиликать*, *свистеть*, *насвистывать*), which shifts attention to the manner of sound production, acoustic properties, and listener evaluation, while still with an active control of an Agent. Low-agentivity construals in Group 3 arise through systematic grammatical and semantic mechanisms: passive constructions with *исполняться* and *петься* background the performer while retaining a performative frame, whereas *звучать* in Group 4 construes hearer-oriented perception of music performance and foregrounds the Theme.

Second, two metonymic shifts are particularly productive in lowering agency: the agent → instrument shift, which promotes the sound source while keeping agency conceptually accessible (*бренчит гитара*), and the agent → theme shift, which construes music itself as the locus of activity (*исполнялась увертюра*). These patterns demonstrate that musical verbs provide speakers with flexible resources for redistributing attention across participants in an event.

Third, our analysis shows that the musical production domain is systematically connected to a wide range of neighboring semantic domains. Across multiple verbs music is connected to non-musical sound and noise, signaling and information transfer, speech, public performance, the use of resources like time, money etc., emotional influence, and motion. These domains are connected via metaphoric extensions in acoustic similarity, repetition and effort, public audibility, rhythmic structure, and resonance.

From a theoretical perspective, the study contributes to cognitive linguistic research on sound and perception by demonstrating that auditory events are subject to the same fine-grained construal variation. By integrating agentivity, construal, metaphor, and metonymy within a single empirical domain, the article shows how linguistic meaning is modulated through systematic shifts in perspective rather than through isolated lexical changes.

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