

Russian Nouns with “Voice Sound” Meaning: Relations of Semantics and the Paradigm of Number

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Abstract

Nouns denoting voice sounds can mean single or multiple, short or prolonged sounding; they can imply one or many sound producers. These specific features result in possibility / impossibility to create the plural form or the meaning of this form by such nouns.

The Russian nouns GALDEŽ ‘hubbub, din’ (in its 2 meanings), GAM ‘clamour’, GVALT ‘uproar’, GOMON ‘hubbub’, OR ‘shouting’, KRIK ‘cry’, ‘shout’ (in its 3 meanings) and VOPL’ ‘scream’, ‘yell’ are considered in the paper in terms of the above mentioned criteria.

Keywords

semantics, polysemy, paradigm of number.

The paper states some observations made by the author while compiling dictionary entries of the lexemes under consideration for the Russian Active Vocabulary Dictionary.

Nouns denoting voice sounds as well as other names of sounds can mean single or multiple, short or prolonged sounding; they can imply one or many sound producers. These specific features result in possibility / impossibility to create the plural form or the meaning of this form by such nouns.

Let us consider in this respect Russian nouns **GALDEŽ** ‘hubbub, din’ (in its 2 meanings), **GAM** ‘clamour’, **GVALT** ‘uproar’, **GOMON** ‘hubbub’, **OR** ‘shouting’, **KRIK** ‘cry’, ‘shout’ (in its 3 meanings) and **VOPL** ‘scream’, ‘yell’.

On the whole, the names of sounds can be classified into 2 groups: the first group comprises names denoting homogeneous or a multiple repeated sound. Such sound is understood as indiscrete and the related nouns belong to singularia tantum type. Compare: *plesk* ‘splash’, *šelest* ‘rustle’, *ščeбет* ‘twitter’, *lepet* ‘babble’, *rokot* ‘roar’, *šepot* ‘whisper’, *smex* ‘laughter’, *xoxot* ‘loud laughter’ and others.

The second group presents countable singular nouns with the full paradigm of number; such nouns denote discrete sounds. Compare: *gudok-gudki* ‘whistle’ – ‘whistles’, *zvonok* – *zvonki* ‘bell’ – ‘bells’, *smešok* – *smeški* ‘giggle’ – ‘giggles’, *xlopok* – *xlopki* ‘clap’ – ‘claps’ and others ¹.

From the above mentioned names of voice sounds the nouns **GALDEŽ**, **GAM**, **GVALT**, **GOMON**, **OR** belong to the first group. When it comes to the nouns **KRIK** and **VOPL**, they can possess the properties of the both groups as it is to be shown later.

Let us consider the nouns of the first type.

GALDEŽ, **GAM**, **GVALT**, **GOMON** usually denote prolonged sound. Compare: *postoyanny* <*beskonečny*> *galdež* <*gam*, *gvalt*, *gomon*> ‘constant <endless> hubbub <clamour, uproar, din>’ VS quite impossible combinations as **nedolgiy*, **korotkiy galdež* <*gam*, *gvalt*, *gomon*>; **minutny gam* **short* <*brief*> *hubbub* <*clamour, uproar, din*>; **‘a minute clamour’* and quite doubtful combinations as *? minutny galdež* <*gvalt*, *gomon*> ‘a minute *din* <*uproar, hubbub*>’. It should be said that the following phrases can be realized: *V klasse na minutu podn’als’a galdež* <*gam*, *gvalt*, *gomon*>, *no učitel’ postučal ukazkoy po stolu, I deti pritixli* ‘There was a hubbub <clamour, uproar, din> in the classroom for a minute, but the teacher tapped the desk and the children got quiet’. But prototypically all these nouns describe a sound lasting a lengthy period. Compare also: *Na ploščadi den’ i noč stoyal gam* <*galdež*, *gvalt*> ‘There was a clamour <hubbub, uproar> on the square day and night’; *Za oknom ves’ den’ ne stixal detskiy* <*ptičiy*> *gomon* ‘The whole day there was a children’s <birds> hubbub heard outside’.

Two nouns out of the words in questions **GAM** ‘clamour’ and **GOMON** ‘hubbub’ denote quite homogeneous noise that can be defined as follows as follows: **GAM** means ‘a loud homogeneous prolonged noise that can occur when people speak loudly and simultaneously so causing difficulty in singling out separate words’; **GOMON** is ‘homogeneous noise serving as background for other sounds/noises that can occur when many people speak simultaneously thus causing difficulty in singling out separate words’. However, it should be noted, that combinations of these nouns with adjectives denoting complete homogeneity of the sound are impossible as neither **GAM**, nor **GOMON** are “perfectly” homogeneous sounds: **ravnomerny* <**monotonny*> *gam* <*gomon*> ‘steady <monotonous> clamour <hubbub>’ (compare, for example, *ravnomerny* <*monotonny*> *gul* ‘steady <monotonous> hum’). (But here it can be assumed that the impossibility of the combination **monotonny gomon* ‘monotonous hubbub’ is determined firstly by the fact that *monotonny* is associated with the notions of ‘dull’, ‘tiresome’, ‘bothersome’, meanwhile *gomon* possesses quite opposite associations. Compare: *vesely* <*radostny*, *privetlivy*> *gomon* ‘jolly <joyful, affable> hubbub’, but **nadoyedlivy* <**ugnetayuščiy*> *gomon* ‘tiresome <depressing> hubbub’.

¹ (Lyaševskaya, 2004, p. 315).

The other two words **GALDEŽ** ‘hubbub’, ‘din’ and **GVALT** ‘uproar’ denote heterogeneous noise: *galdež* and particularly *gvalt* can manifest considerable single “bursts” of volume. Compare corresponding parts of the definitions: **galdet’ 1** (**galdež 1** is a derivative from this verb – compare *galdež gračey* ‘rooks’ clamour’ – and is defined through the verb; there should be a link to the verb in the dictionary entry) means ‘to shout/cry simultaneously thus creating heterogeneous noise in terms of volume and pitch’ [about birds]; **galdet’ 2** (connected with **galdež 2** in the same manner; compare *galdež detvory* ‘kids’ din’) is ‘to speak loudly and simultaneously thus creating heterogeneous noise in terms of volume and pitch’. **Gvalt** is ‘a strong unpleasant noise heard in clamour, heterogeneous in terms of volume and pitch heard in clamour’².

So for being included into the singularia tantum type, the most important factor for such nouns is neither the homogeneity of the sound, nor the regular repetition of its pitch movement, nor, perhaps, the considerable length of it, but the continuity of its existence. Compare: *bespreryvny* <*besprestanny*> *gam* <*galdež, gvalt*>, *nesmolkaemy gomon* ‘endless <non-stop> clamour <din, uproar>; never-ceasing hubbub’. (However, all three Russian adjectives – *bespreryvny*, *besprestanny*, *nesmolkaemy* ‘endless’, ‘non-stop’, ‘never-ceasing’ – express at the same time the idea of length/duration).

The fact that the nouns in question describe sound as indiscrete continuum puts a semantic veto on creating their plural forms. Continuity, thus, presents the most important sound property than the other above mentioned ones.

It should be noted here that all the nouns under consideration suggest only a collective sound producer. Compare: *V barake galdež: u kogo-to payku dnem uveli, na dneval’nyx kričat, I dneval’nye kričat* ‘In the barrack there’s a din: somebody’s ration has been pinched, the guys on duty are being shouted at, and the guys on duty are shouting’ (A. Solzhenitsyn); *Kak tol’ko perestupit ona porog, ee vstretit gamom I svistom celaya tolpa* ‘As soon as she comes out, a crowd will welcome her crying (in a clamour) and whistling’ (L. Andreev); *Vdrug vse l’udi, vyzvannye na podium, stali čto-to kričat, podn’als’a žutkiy gvalt* ‘All of a sudden all the people on the stage began shouting something; a terrible uproar arose’ (L. Petrushevskaya); *V koridore r’adom s kabinetom razdavals’a topot I gomom, kto-to podergal dver’, poslyšalis’ šlepki brošennyx na pol portfeley* ‘In the corridor next to the office there was a patter of feet and a hubbub heard, someone tried to pull the door, one could hear slaps of briefcases dropped on the floor’ (A. Ivanov)³.

The noun **OR** ‘shouting’, ‘yelling’ also belongs to the first group. It corresponds to the three meanings of the verb **ORAT** ‘shout, yell’: **orat’ 1** - A1 yells from A2 ‘Living being A1 shouts loudly and in a drawling manner very often due to a strong emotion or pain A2; the speaker feels unpleasant’; **orat’ 2** - A1 shouts A2 to A3 ‘Person A1 pronounces very loudly and in a drawling manner utterance A2 addressing to person A3; the speaker feels unpleasant; **orat’ 3** A1 shouts at A2 ‘Person A1, being very displeased with the behavior of A2, tells this

² Ibid., pp. 633, 634.

³ All the examples discussed in the paper and having a reference to the author are taken from the National Russian Language Corpus (www.ruscorpora.ru).

to him/her very loudly and in a specific tone; the speaker appreciates this negatively'⁴. But the derivative noun has not evolved separate meanings corresponding to the stated meanings of the verb.

On the whole, this noun is associated with the idea of a prolonged sound and in this respect it is similar to the above mentioned words. Compare standard uses: *Beskonečny <postoyanny, neskončayemy> or 'endless <constant, never-ceasing> shouting'*; *Krugom stoyal or 'There was shouting all around'*; *Ot polučasovogo ora premier vzmok, rubaška prilipla temnymi p'atnami 'Because of a thirty minute shouting the PM got soaked, with his shirt stuck to the body' (A.Voznesensky)*; as well as its figurative use: *Ves' etot or tak I ne prekraščals'a s momenta vyxoda knigi 'All that shouting has been going on since the book was published' ("The Swan")*. On the contrary, the following collocations are impossible: **Razdals'a korotkiy <sekundny, otryvisty> or 'There was a short <a second-long, brief> shouting'*.

However, **OR** is significantly different from **GALDEŽ**, **GAM**, **GVALT** and **GOMON**. **OR**, as a rule, manifests a sequence of very loud and lengthy cries, which of them is pronounced in one breathing out and eventually ends in a pause. Such sequence can take any lengthy period, but, from an objective point of view, it is discrete. Compare: *Vs'u noč iz komnaty donosils'a košačiy or 'All night through there was a cats' yawl heard'*.

On the other hand, **OR** 'shouting', 'yelling' can be perceived as a single loud lengthy cry. But such usage is practically on the confines of the word's semantics. For instance, the statement *Razdals'a košačiy or 'There was a cats' yawl heard'* is quite acceptable, when *ʔKot izdal or ʔ'The cat uttered a yawl'* is doubtful. In the both cases one quantum of the corresponding sound is in the point, but the collocation with the verb *izdat' 'to utter'*, in contrast with *razdat's'a 'to be heard'*, accentuates the single character of the sound (*izdat'* – one sound can be uttered, but *razdat's'a* – either one sound, or a sequence can be heard) – thus the usage of **OR** gets limited.

But, on the whole, **OR** in comparison with **GALDEŽ**, **GAM**, **GVALT** and **GOMON** is, so to speak, a step closer semantically to the nouns **KRIK** 'cry', 'shout' and **VOPL** 'scream', 'yell', which mean single separate sounds (as it is to be shown later the noun **KRIK** can also be used to denote not a single sound, but nevertheless its central meaning is a separate sound).

Let us consider the phrase *Posle nedolgogo <minutnogo> ora mladenec zamolk 'After a short/ a minute cry the baby went silent'*. Similar uses are believed to sound more natural than those mentioned above *ʔminutny galdež <gvalt, gomon> ʔ 'a minute clamour <din, hubbub>'*. The reason for that is that **OR** with its first meaning of a lengthy sequence of separate sounds, but, at the same time, with a potential of denoting a single separate sound can readily allow contexts assuming short periods of sounding.

However, as well as **GALDEŽ**, **GAM**, **GVALT** and **GOMON**, this lexeme belongs to the singularia tantum type. In spite of its objective discreteness, **OR**, being a sequence of frequently repeated sounds, is reflected in the language as indiscrete sound. Compare standard collocations: *bespreryvny <besprestanny, beskonečny, neskončayemy> or 'non-stop <endless, never-ending> shouting'* – here it is easy to trace that the noun under consideration

⁴ Ibid., p. 637.

can be combined with the same adjectives (or similar adjectives) as **GALDEŽ**, **GAM**, **GVALT** and **GOMON** can.

OR can infer any number of sound producers. Compare, on the one hand, *On podn'al čudoviščny or* ‘He raised an appalling cry <shouting>’ and, on the other, *Vse-taki ya prorvals'a čerez vseobščiy or i skazal, čto pročítayu stixi* ‘Finally I got through that shouting all around and said that I was going to recite my poetry’ (A Voznesensky). This property singles out the word from the other four nouns under consideration belonging to the first group, but anyway this property makes it closer to the nouns **KRIK** ‘cry’, ‘shout’ and **VOPL** ‘scream, yell’. It is quite obvious that a potential of denoting a single sound producer and a potential of denoting a single sound are interrelated: to produce a single separate sound is natural for a single sound producer, and if there are several subjects, then special efforts to synchronize are necessary for producing such sound.

Let us consider now properties of the nouns **KRIK** and **VOPL**. Shall we start with the noun **KRIK**.

This word can be used in its three meanings. Firstly, it can denote a sound pronounced by a person or an animal with a strong breathing effort; as a rule, such sound is produced because of pain or a strong emotion. Compare: *krik radosti* <vostorga, boli, gneva, otčayaniya> ‘cry of joy <delight, pain, anger, desperation>’. Secondly, **KRIK** can describe an utterance pronounced by a shouting person and which is addressed to another person. Compare: *Razdals'a krik*: “Ey, podoždite!” ‘There was a cry: “Hey! Wait!” heard’. And, finally, in its third meaning the noun **KRIK** can denote a person’s displeasure by some situation and which is pronounced by a loud voice and in a special tone with its aim to improve the situation. Compare: *Esli ya pridu domoy pozdno, budet krik* ‘If I come home late, there will be a lot of shouting’⁵.

Let us consider this word in terms of its properties of duration and discreteness / indiscreteness.

In its first and second meanings the noun **KRIK** can equally describe both a long and a short sound. Compare: *otryvisty* <korotkiy> *krik* – *protyažny krik* ‘A staccato <short> cry’ – ‘a long-drawn-out cry’ [in both cases it can be **krik 1** or **krik 2**]; *Nikto ne pomnil, skol'ko dlils'a etot dušerazdirayuščiy krik* ‘Nobody could recall for how long that harrowing cry could be heard’ [**krik 1**]; *Nad tribunami povis protyažny krik*: “Go-o-ol!” ‘There was a long cry heard over the stadium: “Goal!”’ [**krik 2**]. It should be noted here, that the duration of *krik* in similar uses is basically different from the duration expressed by the above mentioned words. *Krik* here presents a sound formed by a single breathing out and this fact considerably limits its duration. In other words, in all the adduced examples the noun *kruk* indicates “a quantum” of the sound. Compare: *pervy krik rebenka* ‘the baby’s first cry’ [**krik 1**]; *Razdals'a krik*: “Stoy!” ‘There was a cry: “Freeze!”’ [**krik 2**].

But there exists another usage of the word in question – when **KRIK** describes multiple repeated sounds or a range of various utterances and in this way gives an idea about a

⁵ Ibid., p. 635.

multitude of separate quanta; either meaning of **KRIK** can be realized in such uses. Moreover, the third meaning of **KRIK** can be realized only in this usage. Compare: *Mladenec kričal vs'u noč, i yego krik ne daval nikomu spat* 'The baby cried all night through and his cries let nobody fall asleep' [**krik 1**]; *So vse storon donosils'a krik trgovok* 'There cries of market sellers all around'; *V dome podnyals'a detskiy krik: "Ura! My edem na more!"* 'In the house there were the children's cries heard: "Hurrah! We are going to the sea!" [in both cases it is **krik 2**]; *Ix vstreči vseгда končalis' krikom ili drakoy* 'All their meetings would end up in shouting and fighting' [**krik 3**].

Thus, the noun **KRIK**, as well as **OR**, can denote a discrete sequence or a range of sounds or utterances, but the language reflects it as indiscrete continuum (the same happens with **OR**). In this usage both **KRIK** and **OR** do not possess the plural form.

As well as **OR**, the noun **KRIK** in all its meanings can infer one or many sound producers. Compare, for instance, *krik žertvy – krik žertv* 'a victim's cry' – 'the victims' cry'. The latter case (when the singular form is used in a distributional context) can present two possible interpretations: firstly, it can be single (simultaneous) common shouting; secondly, it can be a sequence of *cries*-quanta that are produced by various subjects in different times but they merge into one common, so to speak, endless shouting.

Now let us consider what the plural form of this noun means.

The plural form indicates a multitude of single *cries* and, as well as the singular form, can correspond to any number of sound producers. Thus, the plural form of this noun can be synonymous to its singular form in case the latter denotes a discrete sequence (it should be noted once more, that this sequence is objectively discrete) of sounds or utterances. Compare, on the one hand, the usage of the singular form: *Vs'u noč pod oknom razdaval's'a čey-to krik* 'All night through there was someone's cry heard outside' [**krik 1** or **krik 2**]; *Vse utro v dome stoyal krik: "Gde moi očki? Opyat' ničego ne mogu nayti!"* 'All the morning there was shouting heard in the house: "Where are my spectacles? I can't find anything here again!" [**krik 2**]; and, on the other hand, the usage of the plural form: *V otvet razdalis' kriki: "Nam ne nužno muzyki, nam nužen xleb, den'gi I novye doma"* 'There were cries heard in reply: "We don't need music, we need bread, and money, and new houses" (S.Spivakova)) [**krik 2**; in this case the plural form indicates multiple *cries* produced by a multitude of sound producers; the direct speech conveys general sense of the ideas expressed by all the present]. But **krik 3** does not possess such pair as in this meaning **KRIK** (as we have already noted) does not have the plural form. Compare: *Čto ty skandališ? Nadoel tvoy postoyanny krik!* 'Why should you make fuss again? I am sick and tired of your never-ending yelling!'

A slight semantic difference between the forms of singular and plural consists in the point that the singular form indicating a multitude of single short acts, nevertheless, presents them as a persistent continuum, as one prolonged *cry*; when the plural form clearly conveys the idea of discreteness.

As it was stated by E. Rakhilina⁶, in pairs similar to the type *krik – kiki* 'cry' – 'cries' the plural form is used to convey a typically aspectual meaning – the meaning of iterativity (in the

⁶ (Rakhilina, 2000, p. 67).

paper the example of *vzдох - vzdoxi* (*sigh – sighs*) is drawn that is identical to the pair *krik – kriki* (*cry – cries*) related to the topic of interest). O. Lyashevskaya introduces the term “the iterative plural form” for the case in question and states that such usage of the plural form is not connected with the category of countability /uncountability⁷.

The noun **VOPL’** ‘scream, yell’ which is a syntactical derivative of the verb **VOPIT’** ‘yell or scream often because of a strong emotion or pain’⁸, in contrast to **KRIK**, can denote only a single sound or a quantum. Compare a standard usage: *On izdal vopl’* ‘He made a scream’ and an impossible usage: **Vs’u noč pod oknami slyšals’a čey-to vopl’* *‘Outside there was a scream heard all night through’.

Scream/yell can last either a long or a short period, but even for a long *scream/yell* there is a similar limit as to the quantum of *cry*: its duration is limited by the fact that this sound is pronounced in one breathing out. Compare: *protyažny vopl’* ‘A long-drawn-out scream/yell’; *Razdals’a dlinny nizkiy vopl’*, *opuskayuščiy’s’a do utrobnogo ryčaniya* ‘There was a long low scream heard that was going into deep and hollow growl’ (L.Ulitskaya); and, on the other hand, *otryvisty <korotkiy> vopl’* ‘a brusque/short scream’.

As well as **KRIK**, the noun **VOPL’** can infer one or many sound producers. Compare: *vopl’ žertvy – vopl’ žertv* ‘victim’s scream’ – ‘victims’ scream’. However, in comparison with the collocation *krik žertv* ‘victims’ cry’ the latter case can be interpreted only in one way: there is only one synchronous common *scream/yell*, but not a sequence of this sound’s quanta, as the noun **VOPL’** can indicate only a single quantum.

The plural form of *scream/yell* indicates a multitude of single sounds and also infers an optional number of sound producers. As in its singular form the noun **VOPL’** (in comparison with **KRIK**) cannot denote multiple sounds, so the plural form in no case synonymous to the singular form. Compare: *vopl’ boel’ščikov* ‘the fans’ yell’ [only single sound] – *vopli boel’ščikov* ‘the fans’ yells’ [only multiple sound].

So we have considered the following semantic properties of nouns denoting voice sounds: duration of its existence; homogeneity/heterogeneity of the sound (for those nouns with this property being actual); discreteness/indiscreteness; the number of sound producers involved. Besides that, we have considered one grammatical characteristic of the nouns in question – their potential of creating the plural form.

The nouns under consideration are heterogeneous in terms of the properties stated above. One side is presented by the nouns **GALDEŽ** ‘hubbub’, **din**, **GAM** ‘clamour’, **GVALT** ‘uproar’, **GOMON** ‘hubbub’. All these nouns indicate a lengthy sound created by a multitude of sound producers. This sound is perceived as either quite homogeneous, though not ideally, (**GAM**, **GOMON**) or having considerable volume fluctuations (**GALDEŽ**, **GVALT**), but, in any case, this sound is conceptualized as indiscrete continuum. The above mentioned nouns do not allow creating plural forms.

⁷ (Lyashevskaya, 2004, p. 313).

⁸ (Prospekt aktivnogo slovary, 2010, p. 632).

The other side is presented by the noun **VOPL'** (**scream/yell**). This noun indicates sounding of any duration including short staccato sounds, infers any number of sound producers and describes only one quantum of the sound produced in one breathing out. That is why even a lengthy *scream/yell* according to the, so to speak, "ultimate scale" is considerably shorter those sounds that are denoted by the four other nouns mentioned above. This noun possesses the both forms.

From the rest of the words the noun **OR** (**shouting**) is close to the first side and the noun **KRIK** (**cry, shout**) – to the other.

OR in its standard uses denotes a lengthy sound created by either a multitude of sound producers or by only one sound producer and consists of a sequence of sound quanta. A possibility to denote a single quantum is practically out of the semantic potential of this word, but in contrast to the first side nouns is sometimes possible. As well as these nouns **OR** conceptualizes a sequence of sounds as indiscrete one and does not possess the plural form.

KRIK, as well as **VOPL'**, indicates a sound of any duration and infers any number of sound producers but it can describe not only a single quantum, but an indiscrete continuum as well. In the former case the noun **KRIK** possesses the both forms of number, but in the latter it does not have the plural form.

To conclude, those nouns that describe a speech situation as a process but not as a set of single completed acts do not possess plural forms.

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