

Lexical-Semantic Features of Musical Culturonyms

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Keywords	Abstract
musical culturonyms identity cultural linguistics globalization borrowings	<p>This study investigates the lexical-semantic features of musical culturonyms—lexical items that denote culturally specific concepts related to music, such as genres, instruments, performers, movements, and musical traditions. Drawing from a corpus of 150 terms, the research employs methods from lexical semantics, cultural linguistics, and corpus analysis to classify and analyze the semantic structures, etymologies, and contextual uses of these terms in English and cross-linguistically.</p> <p>The findings reveal that musical culturonyms are semantically stratified units with both denotative and connotative layers of meaning. Many of them originate as loanwords or untranslated borrowings that retain strong cultural identities, such as flamenco, sitar, or opera. Others, such as punk, hip-hop, or K-pop, have developed polysemous meanings that extend beyond the musical domain into ideology, fashion, and identity politics. Corpus-based analysis further shows that these terms exhibit distinctive collocational behavior, reflecting their embeddedness in specific cultural discourses.</p>

1. Introduction

Culturonyms are linguistic units that encode cultural phenomena specific to a particular society or group (Vorobyov, 1997; Vereshchagin & Kostomarov, 1999). Musical culturonyms, as a subtype, refer to terms that denote musical genres, instruments, figures, traditions, and movements embedded in cultural and historical contexts. These units serve as verbal symbols of musical culture, carrying both denotative and connotative meanings.

Language is both a repository and a transmitter of culture, encoding values, norms, and worldviews of the societies that use it. Within this broad framework of cultural linguistics, the study of culturonyms—linguistic units denoting culturally specific concepts—has gained attention for its

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ability to illuminate how culture is reflected in language. Culturonyms are lexical items that acquire meaning within a cultural frame of reference and are often untranslatable without cultural commentary. They serve as markers of identity and tools of cultural memory, bridging the linguistic and the extralinguistic.

Given the global interconnectedness of musical traditions and the ongoing exchange of cultural values through music, musical culturonyms function as key lexical items that reflect intercultural dialogue and identity (Wierzbicka, 1997). Despite their cultural significance, the semantic characteristics of musical culturonyms have not been widely analyzed in terms of their lexical and structural features.

A distinct and particularly rich subset of culturonyms pertains to musical culture. These musical culturonyms encompass terms that refer to musical genres (jazz, opera), instruments (sitar, bagpipes), social roles (DJ, conductor), movements (punk, K-pop), and events (Woodstock, Eurovision). These terms are not merely referential; they are densely loaded with cultural, historical, emotional, and social significance. The term flamenco, for instance, immediately evokes associations with Spanish identity, Andalusian tradition, and gypsy folklore. Similarly, hip-hop carries connotations of urban culture, African American history, and youth expression.

This paper aims to investigate the lexical-semantic features of musical culturonyms in English and other Indo-European languages, identifying how these terms function in cultural discourse and how their meanings evolve or expand in various contexts.

Despite their cultural richness, musical culturonyms have not been the subject of systematic semantic analysis within linguistics. Most existing work on musical terms has emerged from ethnomusicology or cultural studies, focusing on the sociocultural dimensions of music itself rather than the linguistic encoding of musical concepts. This study aims to fill that gap by applying methods from lexical semantics and cultural linguistics to investigate how musical culturonyms function as linguistic signs within a broader semiotic system of culture.

There are several reasons why the study of musical culturonyms is timely and relevant. First, globalization and digital media have amplified the cross-cultural circulation of music, leading to the widespread adoption and adaptation of musical terms across languages and cultures. Words like *K-pop*, *reggaeton*, and *EDM* have entered global lexicons, often carrying cultural assumptions and evolving in new contexts. Second, the semantic shifts and borrowings observed in these terms reflect broader processes of language contact, identity formation, and cultural exchange. Finally, understanding how musical culturonyms work can contribute to translation studies, intercultural communication, and language education, where culturally loaded vocabulary often poses challenges for comprehension and equivalence.



As culturonyms can be found in cuisine, arts and fashion, they can also be reflected in music (Sadikhova, 2025); (Javid & Sadikhova, 2025). Actually, art has different subfields such as painting, music, theatre, cinema, etc (Sadikhova & Babayev, 2025)

This study investigates the lexical-semantic features of musical culturonyms, exploring their structural classifications, etymological roots, semantic fields, and cultural connotations. The research is grounded in a corpus-driven approach and aims to provide a typological and functional description of how musical culturonyms operate within English and cross-linguistic contexts.

By highlighting the intricate interplay between language and music-related culture, the paper contributes to the broader understanding of how linguistic signs encode, preserve, and transform cultural meanings in an increasingly interconnected world.

2. Methods

The study adopts a qualitative-quantitative mixed methods approach, combining elements of lexical-semantic analysis, etymological investigation, and corpus linguistics to explore the structural and semantic properties of musical culturonyms (Davies, 2008). The methodological design aims to ensure both linguistic depth and empirical breadth, allowing for the systematic classification and interpretation of the data.

2.1. Corpus Selection and Data Collection

A total of 150 musical culturonyms were compiled from multiple sources to ensure representativeness and cultural diversity. The data were drawn from:

- Lexicographic sources: Oxford English Dictionary (OED), Cambridge Dictionary, and Collins English Dictionary were consulted for definitions, usage examples, and etymologies.
- Specialized music glossaries and encyclopedias: such as *The Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians* and genre-specific reference works.
- Corpus data: The Corpus of Contemporary American English (COCA) and the British National Corpus (BNC) were used to gather real-world usage examples and frequency data.
- Online media and music journalism: To capture emergent and culturally dynamic terms (e.g., *K-pop*, *Afrobeats*), sources such as Pitchfork, Rolling Stone, and Billboard were also included.

The selection criteria for inclusion in the dataset were:

- Cultural specificity: The term must refer to a musical concept embedded in a particular cultural, national, or subcultural context.



- Lexical autonomy: The term must function as a discrete lexical unit in English or another target language, with recognizable semantic content.
- Contemporary relevance: Preference was given to terms that are either historically significant or in current usage across media and academic discourse.

The collected terms were then stored in a database categorized according to semantic field, origin, syntactic category, and cultural domain (Lehrer, 1974).

2.2. Semantic Field Classification

Each culturonym was assigned to one or more of the following semantic fields, based on its primary referent:

1. Musical Genre (e.g., *jazz*, *grunge*, *flamenco*)
2. Instrument (e.g., *sitar*, *balalaika*, *shamisen*)
3. Musical Role or Person (e.g., *maestro*, *DJ*, *troubadour*)
4. Event or Tradition (e.g., *Woodstock*, *Carnival*, *Eurovision*)
5. Subculture or Movement (e.g., *punk*, *hip-hop*, *K-pop*)

This classification was guided by theories of lexical field and semantic domain analysis (Lehrer, 1974; Cruse, 1986).

2.3. Etymological Analysis

To investigate the diachronic and cross-cultural origins of the terms, etymological dictionaries and online etymology databases were consulted. This step aimed to determine:

- Source language and path of borrowing (e.g., from Spanish, Hindi, Yoruba, etc.)
- Historical period of entry into English or other target languages
- Cultural and social contexts associated with the term at the time of borrowing

Particular attention was paid to untranslated borrowings (e.g., *samba*, *tabla*, *aria*), which tend to preserve their cultural identity and resist domestication.

2.4. Lexical-Semantic Analysis

The analysis of lexical and semantic properties included the following dimensions:

- Denotative meaning: The literal, dictionary-defined meaning of the term.
- Connotative meaning: The emotional, cultural, and symbolic associations.



- Polysemy and semantic shift: How the meaning of the term may have expanded, narrowed, or changed over time.
- Metaphorical or figurative use: Instances where the culturonym is used metaphorically (e.g., *rock star* as a metaphor for fame or charisma in non-musical contexts).

2.5. Contextual Usage Analysis (Corpus-Based)

Using COCA and BNC, selected musical culturonyms were analyzed in contextual usage to observe:

- Collocations and phraseology (e.g., *classical composer*, *jazz improvisation*, *K-pop idol*)
- Genre-specific usage patterns (e.g., journalism vs. academic texts)
- Frequency and distribution across registers (spoken, fiction, news, academic, web)

This analysis provided insight into how culturonyms are embedded in discourse and what semantic roles they perform in real communicative contexts.

2.6. Intercultural and Cross-Linguistic Comparison

Finally, selected terms were compared across multiple languages, including Russian, Spanish, French, and Japanese, to examine:

- Equivalence and non-equivalence in translation
- Borrowing patterns into and from English
- Semantic shifts across linguistic and cultural boundaries

This step supports the identification of universal vs. culture-specific features in the lexical encoding of musical concepts.

3. Results

The analysis of 150 musical culturonyms revealed several key lexical-semantic patterns. These findings are presented under four main categories: semantic field distribution, etymological patterns, lexical-semantic features, and contextual usage patterns based on corpus data.

3.1. Semantic Field Distribution

The musical culturonyms in the dataset were classified into five semantic domains, with the following distribution:



Semantic Field	Examples	Proportion
Musical Genres	<i>jazz, reggae, flamenco, punk, K-pop, grunge</i>	24%
Musical Instruments	<i>sitar, djembe, balalaika, shamisen, oud</i>	18%
Musical Roles / Persons	<i>maestro, troubadour, DJ, composer, raga performer</i>	20%
Events / Traditions	<i>Woodstock, Eurovision, Carnival, Glastonbury</i>	15%
Movements / Subcultures	<i>hip-hop, metalhead, emo, rave, folk revival</i>	23%

This distribution illustrates the diversity of music-related lexical items and highlights the sociocultural roles these terms play beyond their literal referents. For example, genre terms often serve as identity markers (*punk, hip-hop*), while role-based terms reflect evolving functions in the music industry (*DJ, producer*) (Stock, 2004).

3.2. Etymological Patterns and Cultural Origins

A detailed etymological analysis revealed that a substantial proportion of musical culturonyms are borrowings from other languages, many of which have been fully integrated into English lexicon while retaining cultural specificity (Gaines, 2011).

Language Sources of Borrowed Terms

Source Language	Examples	Proportion of Total
Italian	<i>opera, maestro, aria, concerto</i>	14%
Spanish	<i>flamenco, salsa, mariachi, bolero</i>	10%
African languages	<i>djembe, marimba, juju</i>	8%
Indian languages (Hindi, Sanskrit, Urdu)	<i>sitar, tabla, raga, bhangra</i>	7%
Japanese	<i>shamisen, enka</i>	3%
Other	<i>balalaika</i> (Russian), <i>klezmer</i> (Yiddish), <i>didgeridoo</i> (Australian Aboriginal), etc.	8%
Native English origin	<i>jazz, blues, rock, country, folk</i>	50%

These findings support the idea that musical language is one of the richest areas of lexical borrowing and cultural exchange, with some terms (e.g., *samba, reggae*) maintaining strong ethnocultural identity even in global use.



3.3. Lexical-Semantic Features

The lexical-semantic analysis revealed several noteworthy patterns:

3.3.1. Polysemy and Semantic Extension

Many musical culturonyms have developed secondary, metaphorical, or symbolic meanings beyond their original referents:

- *Rock star*: now used metaphorically to refer to a person who is outstanding in any domain (e.g., “She’s a rock star in the courtroom”).
- *DJ*: originally “disc jockey,” now includes broader roles such as producer, remixer, influencer, and performer.
- *Opera*: retains its core reference but also implies theatricality or formality in figurative use (“It was a political opera”).

3.3.2. Cultural Stereotypes and Ideological Connotations

Certain culturonyms carry embedded cultural ideologies or stereotypes:

- *Punk*: associated with anti-establishment values, DIY ethics, and rebellion.
- *K-pop*: linked with perfectionism, visual performance, commercial polish, and fandom culture.
- *Classical*: often connotes elitism, formality, and European cultural heritage.

These connotations affect both perception and usage, making musical culturonyms potent tools in discourse related to identity, ideology, and cultural positioning (Hornby et al, 2015).

3.4. Contextual Usage Patterns (Corpus-Based Findings)

Using the COCA and BNC corpora, we examined frequency, collocation, and register-based variation. The following trends emerged:

3.4.1. Collocational Behavior

- *Jazz* frequently co-occurs with terms like *improvisation*, *ensemble*, *saxophone*, and *standard*.
- *Hip-hop* is commonly collocated with *culture*, *artist*, *scene*, *beats*, and *community*.
- *Opera* appears with *house*, *singer*, *aria*, *performance*, and *libretto*.

3.4.2. Register Variation

- Academic texts often use *classical*, *contemporary*, *genre*, and *ethnomusicology*.



- News texts frequently feature *pop*, *K-pop*, *chart*, *award*, and *concert*.
- Spoken data (in interviews or podcasts) reveals colloquial forms like *EDM*, *indie*, and *banger*.

3.4.3. Emerging Terms and Neologisms

Contemporary corpora show the rising frequency of relatively new musical culturonyms such as:

- *K-pop*, *Afrobeats*, *Lo-fi*, *Synthwave*, *Hyperpop*
- *Stan culture* (used in relation to fandom and pop music identity)
- *Soundcloud rapper* (specific to digital platforms)

These reflect both the digitalization of music culture and the globalization of linguistic borrowing, where non-Western music styles become mainstream in English-language discourse.

3.5. Cross-Linguistic Observations

In a limited comparison with equivalent terms in Russian, French, and Japanese, we found:

- Many musical culturonyms are transferred without translation (e.g., *jazz* = ジャズ (*jazu*) in Japanese; *hip-hop* = хип-хоп in Russian), preserving their cultural identity.
- Some cultures develop local analogues or hybrid terms (e.g., *chanson française*, *russskiy rock*).
- Lexical gaps exist where certain culturally specific musical concepts have no direct equivalents, necessitating explanation or loanword adoption.

These results collectively demonstrate that musical culturonyms are semantically rich, culturally embedded, and highly dynamic within discourse. Their meanings are shaped not only by linguistic rules but also by cultural history, social ideology, and global media trends.

4. Discussion

The findings from this study reveal that musical culturonyms are not merely lexical labels for music-related concepts; they are multifunctional semiotic units that operate at the intersection of language, culture, and identity. They embody both referential meaning (denoting specific musical phenomena) and connotative potential (evoking emotions, ideologies, and cultural associations). This dual function positions musical culturonyms as key sites for analyzing how language encodes and transmits cultural experience.



4.1. Culturonyms as Cultural Anchors

Culturonyms, by definition, serve as linguistic representations of culturally salient phenomena (Vorobyov, 1997; Vereshchagin & Kostomarov, 1999). Musical culturonyms, in particular, demonstrate how music—arguably one of the most universal human activities—becomes linguistically codified in culturally specific ways.

Terms such as *sitar*, *balalaika*, or *flamenco* are deeply tied to specific ethnic, national, or regional identities. Even when borrowed into global languages like English, they often resist semantic flattening and retain their cultural provenance, functioning as “verbal fossils” (Wierzbicka, 1997) of the cultural contexts in which they originated.

This retention of cultural specificity distinguishes musical culturonyms from other borrowed lexical items. For example, while general vocabulary like *coffee* or *pasta* may become semantically neutral over time, musical terms like *tango* or *K-pop* continue to index particular cultures, histories, and aesthetic values.

4.2. Semantic Stratification and Ideological Meaning

The corpus-based analysis highlighted that musical culturonyms often exhibit semantic stratification—the coexistence of multiple semantic layers:

1. Core (denotative) meaning – e.g., *punk* as a musical genre;
2. Cultural meaning – *punk* as a symbol of rebellion and anti-establishment sentiment;
3. Sociopolitical meaning – *punk* as a subversive ideology or lifestyle.

This stratification reflects the indexical function of language, whereby terms point not only to objects or actions but to entire worldviews, ideologies, or identities (Silverstein, 2003). For example, *opera* may denote a musical form, but it can also connote elitism, European classical heritage, or dramatic performance depending on context.

Similarly, *hip-hop* functions as more than a genre—it becomes a shorthand for urban identity, African-American cultural expression, and resistance to dominant narratives. These culturally embedded meanings cannot be extracted from the linguistic form without a deep cultural understanding—making musical culturonyms prime examples of what Wierzbicka (1997) calls cultural keywords.

4.3. Globalization and Semantic Evolution

Globalization has led to a significant semantic broadening and diffusion of musical culturonyms. Terms that originated in highly localized contexts now function as global cultural commodities, especially in the digital era:



- *K-pop*, once referring specifically to Korean pop music, now indexes a global fandom, a specific style of performance, and a youth-centered subculture.
- *Afrobeats*, once rooted in West African popular music, now circulates globally, often divorced from its original sociopolitical context.

This process illustrates the glocalization of language—where global spread interacts with local meanings, leading to hybrid forms and evolving significations (Robertson, 1995). While these terms retain traces of their origin, their meanings become polysemous and fluid, adapting to different cultural discourses.

However, such globalization also risks semantic dilution, where the deeper cultural or political meanings are lost or commodified. For example, the original activist roots of *reggae* may be overshadowed in global pop contexts where the term becomes a stylistic label rather than a sociocultural movement.

4.4. Translation, Equivalence, and Intercultural Communication

The study also suggests that musical culturonyms present challenges in translation and intercultural communication. Given their cultural specificity and semantic complexity, they often resist direct translation:

- Some languages adopt phonetic borrowings (e.g., *hip-hop* = хип-хоп in Russian), preserving form but not always connotation.
- Others create descriptive equivalents or avoid the term entirely, depending on cultural familiarity.

This makes musical culturonyms a useful area of study for translation studies, particularly in exploring the concept of untranslatability and cultural mediation. Translators often need to provide cultural glosses or contextual cues to preserve meaning, which underscores the semiotic density of these terms.

Furthermore, in multilingual and multicultural environments, musical culturonyms can serve as linguistic bridges or, conversely, as barriers to understanding. Their use can foster shared cultural reference, but also highlight cultural gaps or stereotypes.

4.5. Lexical Innovation and Digital Culture

Emerging musical culturonyms such as *SoundCloud rapper*, *hyperpop*, and *lo-fi* demonstrate the productive capacity of language to innovate in response to technological, aesthetic, and social changes. These terms often originate in online communities, where linguistic creativity thrives.

For example:



- *Hyperpop* blends music genre terminology with internet slang, becoming a label for a sonic and visual aesthetic associated with digital-native youth.
- *Stan culture*, rooted in music fandoms, has extended into broader discourse to describe extreme or devoted fan behavior.

These examples illustrate how digital platforms influence not only music production and consumption, but also its linguistic representation. Musical culturonyms today are shaped by algorithmic culture, virality, and online identity performance, contributing to rapid lexical change and semantic innovation.

4.6. Implications for Linguistic Theory and Cultural Studies

The study of musical culturonyms offers insights into several broader linguistic and interdisciplinary debates:

- **Lexical Semantics:** It reveals the dynamic and layered nature of word meaning, especially in culturally charged contexts (Cruse, 1986).
- **Cultural Linguistics:** Musical culturonyms exemplify how language encodes cultural knowledge, values, and ideologies.
- **Sociolinguistics:** Their usage reflects social variables such as identity, community membership, and cultural capital.
- **Translation Studies:** They raise questions about equivalence, domestication vs. foreignization, and the politics of representation.

Ultimately, musical culturonyms function as verbal artifacts of culture, making them essential for understanding the interplay between music, language, and society.

5. Conclusion

This study set out to explore the lexical-semantic features of musical culturonyms, focusing on how music-related terms function as culturally significant lexical units in the English language and beyond. Through semantic field classification, etymological tracing, corpus-based usage analysis, and cross-linguistic comparison, the research has demonstrated that musical culturonyms are not simply genre or instrument names—they are culturally embedded lexical items that encode history, ideology, identity, and emotion.

One of the key findings is the semantic richness and stratification of musical culturonyms. Many of these terms operate across multiple levels of meaning—literal, symbolic, ideological—and their interpretations often shift depending on social, historical, and discursive contexts. For example, a term like *punk* cannot be fully understood without recognizing its sociopolitical connotations, while a word like *K-pop* simultaneously denotes a musical industry and a global youth subculture.



The globalization of music has played a crucial role in the spread and transformation of these culturonyms. As musical styles cross borders through digital media and globalized entertainment industries, the terms that represent them are increasingly borrowed, adapted, and recontextualized across languages and cultures. Yet, even as they circulate globally, many musical culturonyms retain strong ties to their cultural roots, serving as markers of national, ethnic, or subcultural identity. This dual tendency—to globalize and retain specificity—makes them linguistically and culturally complex.

The research also revealed that musical culturonyms are sites of linguistic innovation, particularly in online environments where new terms and hybrid forms emerge rapidly. Neologisms like hyperpop, SoundCloud rapper, and stan culture reflect the evolving landscape of musical production and fandom in the digital era. These emerging terms challenge traditional genre boundaries and demonstrate the fluidity of contemporary cultural lexicons.

From a theoretical perspective, the study contributes to cultural linguistics, lexical semantics, and sociolinguistics by providing a model for analyzing culturally loaded vocabulary through a combination of corpus data, semantic analysis, and cross-cultural comparison (Silverstein, 2003). The findings also have practical implications for translation studies, language teaching, and intercultural communication, where musical culturonyms often act as either bridges or barriers to understanding.

However, this study also acknowledges certain limitations. The dataset was restricted to 150 terms, predominantly from English, with only limited comparison to other languages. Future research could expand the linguistic scope to include more diverse languages and investigate how musical culturonyms function in non-Western or less-globalized musical traditions. Additionally, further work could focus on diachronic studies to trace how these terms evolve over decades and respond to changing cultural landscapes.

In conclusion, musical culturonyms occupy a unique space in the lexicon: they are words that sing with cultural meaning. They help linguists, educators, and cultural theorists alike to understand how language interacts with sound, performance, identity, and global exchange. By examining how we talk about music, we uncover deeper insights into how we understand ourselves and each other across cultures.

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