

**LOCAL TERMINOLOGY AND LEXICOGRAPHIC
CLASSIFICATION IN MACEDONIAN MUSICAL FOLKLORE:
THE EXAMPLE OF *AJD OVNO SINGING****

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Abstract: This paper focuses on the methodological challenges involved in defining and selecting lexicographic entries within Macedonian musical folklore. Proceeding from the fact that a large part of the terminology derives from local, dialectal, and practical contexts, the question arises regarding the criteria by which a given term can be included and standardized as a lexicographic unit. The concept of *ajdovno singing* is examined as a case study; in field materials, it appears as a designation for a specific singing style, yet lacks a clearly established and unified definition in the scholarly literature. The analysis shows that such terms often function at the intersection of empirical usage (by tradition bearers) and scholarly interpretation, creating uncertainty during their lexicographic processing. Through an interdisciplinary approach, the paper examines the criteria for validating such entries – their frequency, geographical distribution, functional role, particularly through the musical-performative model, and semantic stability. In conclusion, a model is proposed for processing such “unstable” lexemes, allowing for their inclusion in the lexicon without reducing their cultural and contextual complexity.

Keywords: *ajdovno* singing, local and scholarly terminology, definition, unstable lexemes

The documentation and classification of traditional musical terminology represent one of the central methodological challenges in contemporary ethnomusicology and folklore lexicography. While many musical concepts have become established through scholarly discourse, numerous terms continue to exist exclusively within local communities, where they function as part of the emic conceptual system of the tradition bearers. Determining whether such locally used designations should remain

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regional expressions or be recognized as independent lexicographic entries requires the application of clearly defined theoretical and methodological criteria.

The central thesis of this study is that the lexicographic validation of traditional musical terminology should not depend exclusively on the frequency or standardization of a term, but also on the stability of the musical phenomenon to which it refers. Consequently, the paper argues that the criteria for recognizing this type of lexicographic entries in folklore should integrate linguistic, ethnomusicological, and cultural perspectives. Particular attention is given to the relationship between traditional (emic) terminology and scholarly (etic) classification, as well as to the extent to which local designations reflect stable and recognizable musical practices.

The present study examines *ajdovno singing* as a case study in folklore lexicography. The term denotes a distinctive style of Macedonian traditional female multipart singing performed in the northwestern part of the country, in the regions of Gorni and Dolni Polog, used primarily during wedding ceremonies and seasonal spring rituals. It is characterized by a recognizable polyphonic vocal technique and a stable musical-performative model. Although the designation called *ajdovno singing* has been documented in local tradition and discussed in a limited number of ethnomusicological studies, it has not yet been systematically examined from the perspective of folklore lexicography.

Methodologically, the research adopts an interdisciplinary approach that combines ethnomusicological analysis with principles of specialized lexicography. The study draws upon published ethnomusicological literature, archival and field documentation, comparative analysis of archives' musical examples, and theoretical concepts from lexicography and linguistic anthropology. The evaluation of *ajdovno singing* as an independent lexicographic concept is based on five principal criteria: frequency of use, geographical distribution, functional role within the tradition, stability of its musical-performative model, and semantic stability of the term itself.

Theoretical framework

Scholarly research has shown that terminology related to traditional singing is strongly shaped by local cultural and disciplinary traditions and is therefore not always directly translatable across languages and cultures (Pegg 2001; Peycheva 2011; Väina, Särg 2025). This issue is particularly evident in terms originating from local musical practice rather than from established scholarly terminology.

From an ethnomusicological perspective, such designations belong to the emic conceptual system of tradition bearers, whereas lexicographic description requires semantic stabilization to enable scientific communication (Pike 1967; Bergenholtz, Tarp 1995; Svensén 2009).

Pike's (1967) distinction between etic and emic categories provides the theoretical basis for the present study. He emphasizes the importance of distinguishing between externally imposed analytical categories (etic) and culturally internal categories (emic) in the study of human behavior and cultural systems.

Etic units and classifications, based on prior broad sampling or surveys (and studied in training courses) may be available before one begins the analysis of a further particular language or culture. Regardless of how much training one has, however, emic units of a language must be determined during the analysis of that language; they must be discovered, not predicted – even though the range of kinds of components of language has restrictions placed upon it by the physiology of the human organism, and these restrictions are to some degree reflected in the events of the observed range of language phenomena

(Pike 1967: 39).

The present study therefore examines whether *ajdovno singing* should be understood merely as a local designation or whether the recognizability and continuity of its musical-performative model, together with its cultural function, geographical distribution, and semantic stability, justify its treatment as an autonomous lexicographic concept within Macedonian musical folklore.

Ajdovno Singing as a Lexicographic Challenge

The lexicographic interpretation of locally used musical terminology must be grounded in both linguistic evidence and musical practice. As Peycheva (2011) observes, the terminology employed by tradition bearers provides an important key to understanding multipart singing traditions. Emerging from direct musical experience, these emic designations preserve aspects of musical knowledge that cannot be fully reconstructed through analytical description alone.

The present analysis is based on an archival corpus preserved at the Institute of Folklore “Marko Cepenkov” in Skopje, comprising digitized magnetic tapes recorded by Ć. Ćorgiev and M. Dimovski in 1968 (inventory no. 628–633 and 693–698). These archival materials are complemented by the ethnomusicological studies presented in the Ćorgi Ćorgiev's article “The musical characteristics of the songs from Polog that celebrate the shepherd's life” and Trpko Bicevski's book *Two-part Singing in the Socialist Republic of Macedonia* (Ćorgiev 1976; Бицевски 1986).

Analysis of this corpus demonstrates that the designation *ajdovno singing* is both etymologically and functionally associated with refrain text formulas such as *ajde jo*, *Biljaro*, and *Lazare*, from which the term appears to derive. The archival recordings further reveal a consistent musical-performative model that distinguishes this vocal practice from the dominant forms of Macedonian traditional two-part singing. Its principal music

characteristics include: a mobile tonal center, shaped through ascending *glissando* movement; the continuous use of minor and major seconds as the principal intervallic relationship; sustained sonic tension throughout the melodic stanza; climactic convergence of the voices in unison at the refrain; chromatic upward movement extending to the interval of a seventh; and a characteristic vocal expression closely related to speech intonation.

As concluded by the digitalized recordings, during the interview, just before the singing began, the expression “we sing it *ajdovno*” occurs as an authentic self-designation among recorded female singers in the rural areas of Gorni and Dolni Polog. Today these songs are not part of the living musical tradition of this region, and they can be encountered very rarely among the older female population. Considered together with the continuity of the musical-performative model, this provides evidence that the term originated within the local musical tradition rather than representing a later scholarly construct.

Performance stability and variability of *ajdovno* singing

The following analysis is based on archival field recordings preserved at the Marko Cepenkov Institute of Folklore in Skopje, comprising recordings made by Ć. Ćorgiev and M. Dimovski in 1968 during their typological survey of traditional singing in the regions of Gorni and Dolni Polog (inventory no. listed above). An examination of the aforementioned corpus of archival field recordings reveals a distinctive vocal music tradition characterized by a remarkably stable musical-performative model despite the gradual disappearance of the practice, even at that time.

Comparison of the recorded songs performed by groups of older and younger performers (e.g., inventory no. 628, village of Zubovce, informants born in 1915, 1921, 1922 and 1925; inventory no. 697, village of Galate, informants born in 1950, 1951 and 1957) indicates that the basic performance model remained stable, although younger singers display reduced spontaneity and expressive intensity. Yet, the specific ritual vocal expression characteristic of the oldest performers, occasionally approaching qualities associated with ritual trance, is noticeably less pronounced among the younger generation. These observations suggest that stylistic modifications occurred without altering the fundamental identity of the singing model.

The stability of this performance model is most clearly reflected in its tonal organization and melodic horizontal and vertical structure. The melody moves within an ambitus ranging from B-flat to A-flat¹ (an interval of a seventh), excluding the exclamatory tones, which may extend to G² (transcribed in an original intonation). Parallel second-based polyphony creates continuous sonic tension throughout the performance. Through the accentuation of nearly every tone, the second voice drives the melody towards chromatic upward movement, creating the impression of a mobile tonal

center. This tonal mobility constitutes one of the defining stylistic features of *ajdovno singing*.

The musical organization is closely related to the collective model of performance. According to the archival recordings and field testimonies, these songs were performed not by solo singers but only by groups of two to four women. Vocal density and collective energy were regarded as essential for achieving the ritual effectiveness traditionally associated with the performance. A leading singer with a penetrating vocal timbre initiates the melody, while the accompanying voices follow either in unison or in parallel second intervals.

Characteristic exclamatory vocal calls serve not merely as ornamental elements but also as coordinating signals within the ensemble. They usually precede the ascending *glissando* or mark the end of a melodic stanza. Equally distinctive are the long notes (semibreve) before *caesuras*, sometimes lasting up to ten seconds, which are dynamically shaped through micro-accentuation and articulation involving the consonant *h*. These features testify to a highly developed vocal technique.

The relationship between text and melody further distinguishes this singing practice. The lyrics are fragmentary and largely formulaic, functioning primarily in support of vocal realisation rather than narrative development. As ritual songs with magical and apotropaic functions, the texts were adapted to specific ritual contexts and therefore exhibit considerable variation while preserving the same musical-performative structure (Земцовски 1968; Blacking 1973; Големовић 1997; Стојкова-Серафимовска 2014).

Although this singing style has received only limited scholarly attention, the archival recordings demonstrate a consistent combination of musical and performative characteristics across different villages and generations of singers. Today, however, the tradition has disappeared as a living performance practice and appears to survive only in the collective memory of the oldest female tradition bearers.

The stability of the musical-performative model contrasts with the variability of the terminology used to designate it. Analysis of the available evidence suggests that *ajdovno singing* once existed as a distinct female vocal tradition with its own local designation. Following the disappearance of this practice, however, the term appears gradually to have been absorbed into the broader designation *glasoečko singing*, polyphonic singing traditionally associated with the rural areas of the Dolni Polog region.

Glasoečko singing is primarily documented as a traditional male two-part vocal practice characteristic of Dolni Polog. It is performed polyphonically, with a sustained drone moving contrapuntally against the leading melodic voice, often accompanied by a shepherd's flute (*kaval*) or bagpipe (*gajda*). Traditionally, it is performed spontaneously by groups of

two or three singers during weddings, celebrations, communal gatherings, and other social occasions. Owing to its outstanding cultural significance, in November 2015, *Glasoečko – a male two-part singing from Dolni Polog* was inscribed on UNESCO's List of Intangible Cultural Heritage in Need of Urgent Safeguarding (Stojkova-Serafimovska 2017: 423).

Ethnomusicological research has almost exclusively documented *glasoečko singing* as a male vocal tradition. Nevertheless, cultural memory preserved among the inhabitants of Gorni and Dolni Polog suggests that a corresponding female multipart tradition once existed, although it has not survived as a living performance practice. While this continuity cannot be demonstrated directly, it raises an important methodological question concerning the relationship between terminological variability and the continuity of musical practice.

From a lexicographic perspective, the case of *ajdovno singing* illustrates the importance of distinguishing between the historical variability of terminology and the historical continuity of the musical-performative model. Although neither the designation nor the singing practice has survived as a living tradition, the archival recordings demonstrate that the documented performances shared a stable set of musical and performative characteristics despite local differences in terminology. Consequently, the lexicographic interpretation of historical musical concepts should be based not only on the terminology recorded in the field, but also on the musical and functional evidence preserved in archival documentation.

Scholarly interpretations of *ajdovno singing* and terminological stabilization

The transition of *ajdovno singing* from local terminology into scholarly discourse illustrates the process through which an emic designation gradually acquires analytical and lexicographic significance. As Nettle (2015) and Rice (2014) observe, musical categories used by tradition bearers often reflect modes of musical thought that do not correspond directly to scholarly classifications. Rice further argues that the cognitive categories underlying traditional musical knowledge are frequently tacit and only partially verbalized (Rice 1994: 66). This perspective is particularly relevant to *ajdovno singing*, whose identity is expressed primarily through performance rather than explicit verbal definition.

Within Macedonian ethnomusicology, *ajdovno singing* has received relatively limited scholarly attention. One of the earliest references appears in Ćorčiev's (1976) study "The Musical Characteristics of the Songs from Polog that Celebrate the Shepherd's Life". He describes the practice as "an unusual two-part singing style associated with older layers of musical thinking and tonal relationships that are not organized according to functionally codified systems" (Ѓорѓиев 1976: 279). His analysis emphasizes the glissando-based

vocal movement, the gradual upward sliding of the voices, and the archaic sonic character of the performance.

A more systematic interpretation was offered by Bicevski (1986) in *Two-part Singing in the Socialist Republic of Macedonia*. He classified *ajdovno singing* as a distinct performance model, identifying its characteristic intonational organization, speech-related vocal expression, continuous *glissando* movement, and persistent second-based polyphony as its defining musical features.

Together, these studies illustrate the gradual stabilization of *ajdovno singing* within Macedonian ethnomusicological terminology. Although the designation itself remained locally variable, both authors recognized the appearance and the existing of the underlying musical-performative model, thereby providing an important foundation for its subsequent lexicographic interpretation.

Conclusion

The case of *ajdovno singing* demonstrates that the lexicographic description of traditional musical concepts cannot rely exclusively on the stability of terminology. Although the designation itself exhibits local variation and limited geographical distribution, the available archival documentation, ethnomusicological studies, and musical analysis demonstrate the existence of a recognizable musical-performative model, a clearly defined ritual function, and sufficient semantic consistency to justify its treatment as an independent lexicographic concept.

The study further shows that local musical terminology should be interpreted within the cultural context in which it is created and transmitted. In the case of *ajdovno singing*, the emic designation preserves knowledge that extends beyond linguistic naming and reflects the performers' own understanding of musical practice. This confirms that lexicographic interpretation should integrate local linguistic, musical, performative, and cultural evidence rather than relying solely on terminological standardization.

Such an approach contributes not only to the scholarly systematization of traditional musical terminology but also to the documentation and safeguarding of Macedonia's intangible cultural heritage by preserving culturally meaningful concepts together with the musical practices they represent.

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ЛОКАЛНА ТЕРМИНОЛОГИЈА И ЛЕКСИКОГРАФСКА КЛАСИФИКАЦИЈА ВО МАКЕДОНСКИОТ МУЗИЧКИ ФОЛКЛОР: ПРИМЕРОТ НА АЈДОВНОТО ПЕЕЊЕ

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Резиме

Овој труд ги истражува методолошките предизвици поврзани со дефинирањето на лексикографските одредници во македонскиот музички фолклор преку студијата на случај за ајдовното пеење – традиционална повеќегласна вокална практика забележана во регионите Горни и Долни Полог. Истражувањето испитува дали ајдовното пеење треба да се смета само за локален емички назив што го користат носителите на традицијата или, пак, покажува доволна семантичка стабилност и стилска посебност за да го оправда неговото третирање како посебна лексикографска одредница. Истражувањето се заснова врз етномузиколошки теренски материјали, архивски корпус зачуван во Институтот за фолклор „Марко Цепенков“ во Скопје (составен од дигитализирани магнетофонски ленти снимени од Ѓ. Ѓоргиев и М. Димовски во 1968 година), врз компаративна музичка анализа и врз теоретски перспективи од етномузикологијата и специјализираната лексикографија. Посебно внимание е посветено на односот меѓу традиционалната музичка терминологија и научната класификација, како и на критериумите што го оправдуваат лексикографското вклучување на локално користените музички термини. Анализата покажа дека ајдовното пеење претставува посебен изведувачки модел кој се одликува со стабилен збир на музички и стилски карактеристики, вклучувајќи подвижен тонален центар, надолно глисандо движење, константна полифонија заснована на секундни интервали, изразена звучна тензија, колективна изведувачка практика и специфична вокална техника поврзана со обредното пеење. Иако терминологијата варира меѓу локалните заедници, основната музичка структура и изведувачката практика остануваат исклучително доследни. Резултатите понатаму покажаа дека континуитетот на изведувачкиот модел е значително постабилен од терминологијата што се

користи за негово опишување. Соодветно на тоа, трудот застапува став дека лексикографскиот третман не треба да се потпира исклучиво на стабилноста или зачестеноста на одреден термин, туку треба да ги земе предвид и неговата музичка структура, функционална улога, географска распространетост и културно значење. Врз основа на овие критериуми, утврдено е дека ајдовното пеење ги исполнува условите за признавање како посебна лексикографска одредница, и покрај неговото локално и емичко потекло.

Трудот заклучува дека фолклорната лексикографија треба да инкорпорира културно значајни концепти чија терминологија останува варијабилна, додека нивните музички и изведувачки карактеристики се стабилни. Ваквиот пристап придонесува кон посеопфатно разбирање на традиционалната музичка терминологија и обезбедува методолошка рамка за документација и заштита на нематеријалното културно наследство на Македонија.