

# Binominal Constructions with Instrumental N<sub>2</sub> in Russian: *Pir goroj i piva rekoj*

Valentina Benigni  
Università degli Studi Roma Tre, Italia

Luisa Ruvoletto  
Università Ca' Foscari Venezia, Italia

**Abstract** This paper examines Russian [N<sub>1</sub> N<sub>2</sub>.INS] constructions such as *dožd' stenoj*, lit. 'rain [falling] like a wall' (i.e. 'torrential rain'), where the instrumental noun maps metaphorical manner meanings onto N<sub>1</sub>. Unlike genitive binominals such as *stena doždja* 'a wall of rain', where N<sub>1</sub> acts as a classifier, the instrumental pattern encodes manner-based similitude via implicit predicates. The study identifies a lexicalization gradient from productive uses to fixed idioms and compares these constructions with Italian counterparts to highlight cross-linguistic syntactic differences and similarities. Ultimately, the research shows how meaning is constructionally mediated through specific syntactic configurations.

**Keywords** Italian a-phrase construction. Manner-based similitude. Metaphorical mapping. Russian genitive binominal constructions. Russian instrumental binominal constructions.

**Index** 1 Introduction. – 2 The Genitive Binominal Construction with a Metaphorical N<sub>1</sub>. – 3 The Instrumental Binominal Constructions with a Metaphorical N<sub>2</sub>. – 4 The Instrumental Binominal Construction in the Russian Grammatical Tradition. – 5 Conclusive Remarks.



## Peer review

Submitted 2025-12-13  
Accepted 2026-01-16  
Published 2026-03-31



## Open access

© 2025 Benigni, Ruvoletto | CC BY 4.0



**Citation** Benigni, V.; Ruvoletto, L. (2025). "Binominal Constructions with Instrumental N<sub>2</sub> in Russian: *Pir goroj i piva rekoj*". *Balcania et Slavia*, 5(2), -28.

## 1 Introduction

The present study investigates Russian binominal constructions of the type [N<sub>1</sub> N<sub>2</sub>.INS], in which N<sub>2</sub> appears in the instrumental case and is used metaphorically, mapping its eventive construal onto N<sub>1</sub> (e.g., *pivo rekoj*, lit. ‘beer [flowing] like a river’, i.e. ‘beer in abundance’; *dožd’ stenoj*, lit. ‘rain [falling] like a wall’, i.e. ‘torrential rain’). These constructions typically encode a relation of manner-based similitude, with the instrumental constituent profiling the manner or mode of existence attributed to N<sub>1</sub>.<sup>1</sup>

The analysis builds upon previous research on a semantically similar but syntactically distinct binominal pattern, [N<sub>1</sub> N<sub>2</sub>.GEN], in which the order of constituents is inverted relative to the instrumental pattern. In this pattern, the metaphorical constituent acts as the syntactic head of the construction<sup>2</sup> and functions as a classifier with respect to the second noun (e.g., *reka piva*, lit. ‘a river of beer’, meaning ‘a large quantity of beer’).

After a brief discussion of genitive binominal constructions (§2), the paper focuses on the instrumental type (§3), highlighting both the contrasts and points of convergence between the two patterns in terms of syntactic and semantic constraints. A contrastive digression in §3.1 further explores the relation between the Russian instrumental binominal and the Italian *a*-phrase construction, while a parallel is drawn between the Russian genitive binominal and the Italian *di*-phrase construction, thus illustrating how similar conceptual patterns are structurally distinguished at the syntactic level across different languages.

Section 4 begins with a brief discussion of terminological issues, based on a general review of previous studies on this topic in Russian linguistics. In particular, §4.1 focuses on the types of instrumental nouns occurring in the construction, while §4.2 examines the role of the verbal predicate in explicitly or implicitly licensing the noun in the instrumental case. Section §4.3 considers the distribution and competition between genitive and instrumental binominal

---

**1** The article is the result of the close collaboration of both authors; however, for academic purposes only, Valentina Benigni is responsible for Sects. 1, 2, 3, 4, 4.1, and Luisa Ruvoletto for Sects. 4.2, 4.3, 5.

**2** Agreement is not a central concern of the present study. However, a targeted search in the Russian National Corpus (RNC) for the binominal pattern [*more/reka* + N.GEN] ‘a sea/river of N’, functioning as a subject and co-occurring with a past-tense verb (i.e. contexts in which subject-verb agreement in gender and number is overtly marked in Russian), did not yield any instances in which the genitive noun governs gender or number agreement on the verb. In all attested cases, agreement is controlled by the first noun, which functions as the syntactic head of the construction. For example: *Reka pisem issochla* ‘the river of letters dried up’, where the verb *issochla*.F.SG agrees in feminine singular with *reka*.F.SG and not with *pisem*.GEN.PL.

constructions, highlighting conditions under which one construction is preferred over the other.

Finally, §5 provides conclusive remarks, summarizing the main findings and reflecting on the implications of the study for the broader understanding of metaphorical mapping in Russian.

## 2 The Genitive Binominal Construction with a Metaphorical N<sub>1</sub>

The Russian genitive binominal construction with a metaphorical N<sub>1</sub> relates to the cross-linguistically widespread pattern [N<sub>1</sub> of N<sub>2</sub>], in which the second noun delimits or specifies the reference of the first. In analytic languages such as Italian or English, this relation is typically expressed by a prepositional of-phrase (cf. It. *una marea di gente*, lit. ‘a tide of people’, meaning ‘a large crowd’; En. *a sea of troubles*). In Russian, by contrast, the same type of relation is realized morphologically through genitive case marking, as in *more problem* ‘a sea of troubles’, where the genitive N<sub>2</sub> defines the content or domain associated with the metaphorical N<sub>1</sub>. In such constructions, N<sub>1</sub> functions as a metaphorical classifier, projecting semantic features of shape, arrangement, or movement onto the target domain of N<sub>2</sub> and thereby contributing to a quantifying or evaluative interpretation of the binominal.

The notion of *classifier* is here adopted in Allan’s (1977) broad sense – later elaborated by Aikhenvald (2000) – to refer not only to grammaticalized classifier systems found in languages such as Chinese or Vietnamese, but also to a heterogeneous class of nouns in languages without grammaticalized classifiers. In these languages, nouns occurring in binominal *of*-constructions serve to categorize the referent of N<sub>2</sub> according to salient perceptual or conceptual properties. Within this framework, N<sub>1</sub>s in Russian genitive binominals may be viewed as lexical classifiers that help to ‘classify’ N<sub>2</sub> on the basis of “salient perceived or imputed characteristics” (Allan 1977, 285), such as shape (*grozd’ vinograda* ‘a bunch of grapes’), arrangement (*svjazka ključej* ‘a bunch of keys’), grouping (*stado ovec* ‘a flock of sheep’), or quantity, resulting from either subtractive (partitive) or additive operations (*kroška chleba* ‘a crumb of bread’ vs. *kuča musora* ‘a heap of garbage’). For a detailed discussion of nominal classifiers and their semantic functions, see Zhang 2017.

The metaphorical classifiers considered here form a specific subclass in that they tend to undergo semantic bleaching and develop quantifying and/or qualifying meanings, often associated with evaluative overtones. This semantic evolution brings them close to standard classifiers of quantity, shape, or arrangement. A clear example of this process is offered by the quantifiers *kroška* ‘crumb’

and *kuča* ‘heap’, which have grammaticalized into, respectively, a minimizer and a booster in expressions such as *kroška nadeždy* ‘a shred of hope’ (lit. ‘a crumb of hope’) and *kuča narodu* ‘a crowd of people’ (lit. ‘a heap of people’).

In particular, N<sub>1</sub>s from the semantic domain of nature primarily map quantitative features onto N<sub>2</sub>, which are derived via metonymical extension from the shape or arrangement of the original referent. Classic examples include *more ljudej* (a sea of people), *reka deneg* (a river of money), *dožd’ podarkov* (a rain of gifts), and *volna arestov* (a wave of arrests). These metaphorical classifiers may also project their eventive construal onto N<sub>2</sub>, encoding both actional features – such as continuity, iterativity, or dynamicity – and phasal features, marking the onset or peak of N<sub>2</sub>, as in *razgar popularnosti* (a peak of popularity) or *vspyška bezumija* (a flash of madness).

The process of their complete grammaticalization into a general quantifier (i.e., denoting ‘much’ or ‘a lot’) becomes evident when N<sub>1</sub> combines with N<sub>2</sub> that no longer shares any salient feature of shape or arrangement. For example, *more* (sea) is much more grammaticalized as a quantifier than *lužá* (puddle) because it can combine with both liquids and animate nouns: *more kroví* (a sea of blood) vs. *more ljudej* (a sea of people). By contrast, *lužá* (puddle) combines just with liquids: *lužá krov’i* ‘a lake of blood’ is a well-established collocation in Russian, while *\*lužá ljudej* (a puddle of people) is not acceptable outside creative use of language.

This grammaticalization trajectory illustrates how metaphors grounded in physical experience map semantic features of [+quantity], based on their literal meaning, while simultaneously serving as a conceptual bridge toward subjective evaluative meanings. *More zabor* (a sea of worries) refers to a quantity of worries that is not only perceived as large, but also overwhelming from the speaker’s perspective, thereby conferring a negative connotation upon the entire binominal expression.

For an in-depth discussion of metaphorical quantifiers in the domain of nature, see Latos, Benigni 2025; Benigni, Latos 2024; Benigni, Latos 2023; Benigni 2022, and, more generally, the work produced within the CRAB project (Cross-linguistic Research on Analogy in Binominals), published in *Scando-Slavica*, 71(1), as well as in this volume.

### 3 The Instrumental Binominal Constructions with a Metaphorical N<sub>2</sub>

Constructions such as *pivo rekoj* (lit. ‘beer [flowing] like a river’, i.e., ‘beer in abundance’), *dožd’ stenoj* (lit. ‘rain [standing / falling] like a wall’, i.e., ‘torrential rain’), and *strach volnoj* (lit. ‘fear [rising]

like a wave', i.e., 'a wave of fear') instantiate a distinctive syntactic configuration in which N<sub>2</sub> in the instrumental – typically denoting a concrete object (e.g. *stena* 'wall') or a natural phenomenon (e.g. *reka* 'river', *volna* 'wave') – functions in a way comparable to metaphorically used N<sub>1</sub>s in the genitive construction (cf. *reka piva* 'river of beer' vs. *pivo rekoj* 'beer like a river'). In both patterns, the metaphorical noun projects salient perceptual features of shape, arrangement, or movement onto the other nominal constituent.

Unlike genitive binominals, however, instrumental constructions overtly encode a comparative relation between N<sub>1</sub> and N<sub>2</sub>: the instrumental N<sub>2</sub> acts as a benchmark for the manner in which N<sub>1</sub> occurs or manifests itself.

This semantic difference is reflected in their respective pathways of grammaticalization: metaphorical nouns in genitive binominals tend to develop into subjective, hyperbolic quantifiers (including minimizers and intensifiers), whereas in instrumental constructions they evolve into comparative adverbials of manner.

To conclude this section, it is worth noting the metalinguistic awareness of these parallel structures, as reflected in online lexicographic resources such as the Russian "Wikiquote", which devotes a specific entry to the idiomatic expression *dožd' stenoj* 'rain like a wall'.<sup>3</sup> The anonymous contributor who edited the entry paraphrases it through its specular genitive construction *stena doždja* 'a wall of rain' and glosses it as "a well-established collocation meaning very dense streams of rainwater resembling a wall extending from the ground to the sky".

The entry also lists numerous literary examples where the expression co-occurs with the verb *stojat'* 'to stand', reinforcing the comparison between heavy rain and a standing wall. Notably, the collocation is accompanied by an illustrative photograph of torrential rain, visually reinforcing the metaphorical mapping of *stena* 'wall' onto the perceptual image of a vertical, opaque curtain of rain.

In Russian, certain lexical items can occur in both configurations, giving rise to truly specular and functionally parallel patterns. In example (1a), two comparative instrumental constructions are used: *pir goroj* (lit. 'a banquet like a mountain') and *pivo rekoj* (lit. 'beer like a river'). In both cases, natural images – those of a mountain and a river – metaphorically convey the notion of abundance.

- (1) a. *Pir goroj i pivo rekoj* ([www.instagram.com/p/C4akULHIWgA/](http://www.instagram.com/p/C4akULHIWgA/))  
b. \**Gora pira i reka piva*

---

**3** Search дождь стеной on [ru.wikiquote.org](http://ru.wikiquote.org).

In *pir goroj*,<sup>4</sup> the mountain evokes a richly laden table where food and dishes accumulate; in *pivo rekoj*, the river image maps onto the beverage the idea of a liquid flowing copiously from brimming glasses. However, if we try to transform the instrumental construction into the genitive one in (1b), we observe that only *reka piva* ‘a river of beer’ is acceptable, while *gora pira* ‘\*a mountain of a banquet’ is not used. This restriction can be explained by the different semantic relations encoded by the two constructions. The instrumental construction establishes a comparison based primarily on shape: the banquet is construed as taking the form of a mountain, which only metonymically evokes abundance. In contrast, when *gora* ‘mountain’ functions as a metaphorical classifier in a genitive binominal construction, it tends to project onto N<sub>2</sub> the semantic feature of arrangement – that is, an accumulation of matter or of discrete entities – which is hardly compatible with the eventive semantics of *pir* ‘banquet’.

This shows that, although the two constructions are similar in functional effect, they are not fully interchangeable, and only a subset of nouns can occur in both. This reinforces Goldberg’s (1995, 67) ‘principle of non-synonymy’, a foundational concept in Construction Grammar, which holds that two distinct constructions must differ in meaning or usage.

Anticipating what will be discussed in the following sections, we may thus say that although the final interpretation of the two constructions built on the same noun often converges at the functional level, their semantic architecture differs. The genitive binominal construction is metaphorical in nature: it relies on an implicit comparison based on the projection of certain features (primarily shape, arrangement, and actional traits) from the source-domain N<sub>1</sub> onto the target-domain N<sub>2</sub>. The instrumental construction, instead, is explicitly comparative, as it attributes to N<sub>1</sub> the manner of acting or manifesting itself characteristic of N<sub>2</sub>.

---

**4** We report here some of the versions that emerge from non-specialist discussions concerning the etymology of this idiomatic expression. Some hypotheses link its origin to the traditional placement of drinking cups at the center of the table during large banquets; others refer to the hierarchical arrangement of tables according to the social rank of guests; still others trace it to ritual fires or to decorative “mountain-shaped” incense holders introduced in the 17th century. In the Russian National Corpus, the expression is already attested in 1792 in Krylov’s *Pokajanie sočinitelja kraduna*: “vsě dokazyvalo, čto segodnja v ego dome budet pir goroj...” (everything indicated that today there would be a grand banquet at his house...). Regardless of its historical origin, the idiom *pir goroj* is today well-established in the Russian speaker’s consciousness and is associated with other instrumental expressions of abundance, such as the collocation *pivo rekoj*, to which it is here paired.

### 3.1 A Contrastive Digression

An interesting parallel between classifying and manner-based comparative constructions can also be observed in Italian, where the classifying binominal construction [N<sub>1</sub> di N<sub>2</sub>] with a metaphorical N<sub>1</sub> contrasts with the comparative construction [N<sub>1</sub> a N<sub>2</sub>], in which N<sub>2</sub> – frequently in the plural and licensed by the preposition *a* ‘at; in’ – functions as the term of comparison. The two constructions often share the same lexical items, giving rise to formally distinct yet functionally parallel patterns. Consider the following Italian pairs:

- *una valanga di critiche* ‘an avalanche of criticism’ vs. *critiche a valanga* ‘criticism [coming/downpouring] in an avalanche’;
- *montagne di libri* ‘mountains of books’ vs. *libri a montagne* ‘books in heaps’;
- *un fiume di soldi* ‘a river of money’ vs. *soldi a fiumi* ‘money [flowing] in streams’.

The construction [N<sub>1</sub> di N<sub>2</sub>] has a classifying function, analogous to the Russian genitive binominal construction: N<sub>1</sub>, typically denoting a landscape element (e.g., river, mountain) or a natural phenomenon (e.g., avalanche), serves as a metaphorical classifier quantifying N<sub>2</sub>. In the corresponding [N<sub>1</sub> a N<sub>2</sub>] construction, the same nouns appear as N<sub>2</sub> in a manner-based comparative structure, parallel to the Russian instrumental binominal construction. Here N<sub>2</sub> does not classify N<sub>1</sub> but iconically depicts the way in which N<sub>1</sub> behaves, unfolds, or manifests itself, projecting onto it the dynamic or visual schema associated with the relevant natural phenomenon.<sup>5</sup>

For a detailed, systematic analysis of the Italian *a*-phrase construction and its semantic polysemy, see Piunno 2013. In the present study, however, we focus specifically on the comparative subtype, in which N<sub>2</sub> belongs predominantly to the domain of nature and contributes an iconic image that grounds the manner interpretation.

The parallel between the Russian instrumental construction and the Italian *a*-phrase becomes particularly evident through a contrastive approach. In example (2a), taken from the parallel

---

**5** In the examples above, the manner-based comparison often implies quantity, since natural phenomena like avalanches, mountains, and rivers suggest massiveness or continuous flow. However, a quantitative reading is not necessary in all [N<sub>1</sub> a N<sub>2</sub>] constructions: in *pantaloni a zampa di elefante* ‘bell-bottom trousers’ or *rughe a zampa di gallina* ‘crow’s-feet wrinkles’, N<sub>2</sub> conveys only shape or arrangement, as in Russian instrumental construction *stojat’ stolbom* ‘to stand like a pillar’. In other cases, quantity is secondary to manner: in *una pioggia di finanziamenti* ‘a flood of funding’ vs. *finanziamenti a pioggia* ‘funding distributed like rain’, the former emphasizes the amount, while the latter emphasizes the mode of distribution, with the quantitative reading emerging indirectly from the manner.

corpus Open Subtitles 18, the abundant flux of ideas is expressed in Russian through a manner-based comparison in the instrumental case: *nepreryvnyj potokom* ‘like an uninterrupted flow’, where *potok* (flow) conveys an image of continuous movement. In Italian, the same conceptualization is rendered by the *a*-phrase construction *a raffica* ‘in a burst’, which similarly evokes the dynamic, forceful manner in which ideas follow one another (2b).

- (2) a. *I dejstvitel'no, inogda byvaet trudno upomnit' vse svoi idei, osobenno, esli oni idut nepreryvnyj potokom [...].* (OpenSubtitles 2018)  
And indeed, sometimes it is difficult to recall all your ideas, especially when they come like an uninterrupted flow [...].
- b. *Ed è difficile a volte ricordare di aver avuto un'idea, soprattutto quando ti vengono così a raffica, come deve succedere nella mente di Joe Pasquale.*  
And sometimes it is difficult to remember an idea, especially when they come at you in a burst.

Both constructions thus rely on natural-event schemas to characterize the mode of occurrence of N<sub>1</sub>, confirming that instrumental binominal construction in Russian and comparative *a*-phrase in Italian are convergent strategies for encoding manner through iconic comparison.

#### 4 The Instrumental Binominal Construction in the Russian Grammatical Tradition

In this section, the specific properties of the instrumental binominal construction [N<sub>1</sub> (V) N<sub>2</sub>.INS] will be examined, with particular attention to the semantic and lexical constraints that determine the type of noun allowed in the N<sub>2</sub> position (§4.1) and the class of verbs co-occurring with the binominal (§4.2). Before turning to these issues, however, it is useful to consider how this specific use of the instrumental has been treated in the Russian grammatical tradition.

Vinogradov (1972, 145-6), referring to Potebnja, observed that a range of instrumental functions are internally related, and distinguished among them the instrumental of manner (*tvoritel'nyj obraza*) and the instrumental of comparison (*tvoritel'nyj sravnenija*). The first label applies to binominal instrumental collocations exemplified by fixed expressions such as *grud' kolesom* ‘chest pushed forward / puffed out’ (lit. ‘chest wheel.INS’), and *volosy ežikom* ‘crew cut’ (lit. ‘hair hedgehog.INS’), whereas the term ‘instrumental of comparison’ is reserved for verbal collocations such as *nestis' streloj* ‘to rush like an arrow’ (lit. ‘to rush arrow.INS’), Vinogradov’s analysis thus highlights the ability of the instrumental case to express both

manner or mode of being and comparison, even though he associates the comparative function exclusively with verbal collocations.

In his diachronic study on the functions of the instrumental case in eighteenth-century, Michajlov (2012) notes that as early as 1853 Buslaev, in his *Historical Grammar of the Russian Language* (1959, 471-2), introduced the term 'instrumental of resemblance' (*tvoritel'nyj upodoblenija*), treating it as a subtype of the 'instrumental of manner of action' (*tvoritel'nyj obraza dejstvija*) and emphasizing the ancient origin of this use. Michajlov (2012, 172) further observes that Šachmatov (1925, 338) explicitly pointed out the close connection between the instrumental of comparison and the instrumental of manner, arguing that their common function is to "specify the character of an action". However, Šachmatov's criteria for distinguishing between the two meanings remain unclear. For instance, Puškin's example illustrating the instrumental of manner - *bulavki doždëm sypalis' okolo nej* (lit. 'pins were scattering around her like rain') - is functionally and semantically almost identical to Krylov's example illustrating the instrumental of comparison - *rekoj s bednjažki l'ëtsja pot* (sweat flows from the poor girl like a river).

In his own analysis, Michajlov (2012, 172), following Mrazek (1964, 67), classifies as instances of the instrumental of comparison all cases in which the instrumental characterizes the manner of an action by indicating a person, animal, or object for which that manner, quality, or intensity is especially typical. However, as in earlier works, the comparative function is discussed only in relation to verbal collocations.

More recent studies, such as Rakhilina and Tribushinina 2010, distinguish two instrumental sub-constructions: the shape instrumental (e.g. *stojat' ovalom* 'be arranged in the oval shape') and the quasi-comparative instrumental (e.g. *upast' kamnem* 'drop like a stone'). The former construction simply describes an entity in terms of its shape, whereas the latter involves a comparison between the trajector (the comparee) and the landmark (the standard of comparison).

Janda et al. (2020, 110) refer to comparative function of these constructions under the broader label Instrumental of Paragon, which denotes "a comparison in which two things are claimed to be similar". Building on this framework, Cotta Ramusino (2022, 245) focuses on a specific sub-type of this construction, in which the noun in the nominative is reduplicated in the instrumental case. This instrumental configuration has an intensifying function, as it predicates that N<sub>1.NOM</sub> represents a prototypical instance of N<sub>1.INS</sub> (e.g. *derevuška derevuškoj* 'smallish hamlet').

In short, both labels - instrumental of manner and instrumental of comparison (or paragon) - are justified. These constructions are indeed grounded in a manner-based analogy between N<sub>1</sub> and N<sub>2</sub>. For

example, in *volosy ežikom* ‘crew cut’ (lit. ‘hair hedgedog.INS’), the upright position of the hair is compared to the spines of a hedgehog standing on its back, while in *grud’ kolesom* ‘chest pushed forward / puffed out’ (lit. ‘chest wheel.INS’), the rounded, protruding shape of the chest recalls the curvature of a wheel.

#### 4.1 Types of N<sub>2</sub>s in the Instrumental Binominal Construction

As regards the types of nouns that appear in the instrumental case within the binominal construction, these primarily denote concrete referents such as artefacts, objects, natural forms, or elements of the landscape. Examples include *lampa dugoj* ‘arc lamp’ (lit. ‘lamp arch.INS’), *pyl’ stolbom* ‘a pillar of dust’ (lit. ‘dust pillar.INS’), *dožd’ stenoj* ‘sheets of rain’ (lit. ‘rain wall.INS’), and *pivo rekoj* ‘beer in abundance’ (lit. ‘beer river.INS’).

In most cases, the instrumental noun occurs in fixed or semi-fixed collocations encoding stable, conventionalized comparisons. Examples such as *nos krjučkom* ‘a hooked nose’ (lit. ‘nose hook.INS’), *guby bantikom* ‘pouting lips’ (lit. ‘lips bow.INS’), and *nos kartoškoj* ‘a potato-shaped nose’ (lit. ‘nose potato.INS’) illustrate the high degree of lexicalization typical of this pattern.

However, certain instrumental nouns display greater combinatorial flexibility and can co-occur with different N<sub>1</sub> bases. For instance, *rekoj* (‘river.INS’) combines with *slězy* (tears) in *slězy rekoj* (lit. ‘tears river.INS’), where the actional feature STREAMING / FLOWING is projected from the source domain (RIVER) onto the target domain (TEARS). The comparison is facilitated by the shared perceptual feature of LIQUIDITY, which makes the mapping semantically coherent. In this context, *rekoj* functions as a hyperbolic intensifier – that is, as a maximizer meaning ‘a great quantity of tears, resembling a river’.

In *razgovor rekoj* ‘a conversation flowing like a river’, by contrast, the same feature of CONTINUOUS FLOW is mapped onto the event noun *razgovor* ‘conversation’, attributing to it the qualitative and actional meanings LONG, UNINTERRUPTED, and FLUID. Here, the semantic effect lies in the intensification of the event’s duration and manner-related properties. The comparison involves a higher degree of abstraction, as it relates entities that do not share directly perceptible physical traits.

This example demonstrates that the same instrumental noun can establish various types of conceptual relationships with the governing noun, projecting features that range from concrete, perceptually grounded properties to more abstract qualitative ones. The processes of metaphorical mapping and metonymical extension can be better understood if we consider that N<sub>2</sub> is not directly governed by N<sub>1</sub>, but rather by an underlying verbal predicate that

licenses an instrumental expressing a similitude based on shape, arrangement or manner of acting (for a detailed discussion of the verbal component of the construction see §4.2).

Consider the following example:

- (3) a. *v Moskve – krasota, tusovki, den'gi rekoj tekut.* (RuTenTen20, vtabakerke.ru)  
and in Moscow – beauty, parties, and money flows like a river.  
b. *My govovorim stichijno: den'gi, kak voda, den'gi rekoj, more deneg.* (RuTenTen20, litprom.ru)  
We speak metaphorically: money like water, money in a river, a sea of money.

In (3a), the verb *tekut* 'flow' makes the comparative relationship between N<sub>1</sub> and N<sub>2</sub> explicit: *rekoj* 'like a river' specifies the manner of the process denoted by *tekut* 'flow', reinforcing the iconic parallel between the natural flow of water and the metaphorical flow of money.

In (3b), by contrast, the absence of a verb signals a process of ellipsis and lexicalization: the relationship between *den'gi* and *rekoj* has become direct, and the expression functions as a lexical unit meaning 'abundance' or 'profusion', without requiring an explicit predicate. The omitted verb, however, can be easily inferred from the co-text, which includes the reference to *voda* 'water' and the genitive binominal *more deneg* 'a sea of money'.

This alternation between syntactically integrated and elliptical patterns suggests a gradient of lexicalization within the instrumental binominal construction. At one end of the continuum, we find fully productive, verb-dependent uses, in which the instrumental realizes a similitude based on manner (e.g., *pivo / razgovor [tečēt] rekoj* 'beer / conversation [flows] like a river'). At the other, we find highly lexicalized idioms whose meanings are stored as holistic lexical units, with the verbal component semantically bleached (*volosy ežikom* 'crew cut', lit. 'hair hedgedog.INS').

From a cognitive perspective, this gradient reflects the dynamic interaction between schematic constructional meaning and lexical entrenchment: as certain instrumental collocations become conventionalized, their original comparative and manner features gradually merge into the integrated meaning of the entire expression.

More generally, this shift from verbal predication to nominal collocation points to a metaphor-to-metonymy drift: the original comparison between a river and the flow of money (a metaphorical mapping) evolves into an expression in which *reka* merely indexes a high degree of quantity or continuity (metonymic intensification). Comparable processes can be observed in other binominals featuring instrumental nouns denoting natural elements, such as *pyl' stolbom* 'a pillar of dust' (lit. 'dust pillar.INS') or *dožd' stenoj* 'a sheet of rain' (lit. 'rain wall.INS'). In these expressions, the instrumental encapsulates the spatial or dynamic configuration of the natural phenomenon and

functions as a maximizer, that is, a qualitative marker of intensity, abundance, or characteristic manner.

#### 4.2 Types of Vs Co-occurring with the Instrumental Binominal Construction

Building on the preceding discussion of N<sub>2</sub> semantics, we now turn to the verbal dimension of the construction, examining how different types of verbs shape the interpretation of the binominal pattern. In certain binominal constructions the instrumental N<sub>2</sub> is syntactically and semantically licensed by a verb, which is often omitted from the surface structure. These constructions can be schematized as [N<sub>1</sub> (V<sub>[MOTION/POSITION]</sub>) N<sub>2</sub>.INS], where N<sub>1</sub> denotes the object of comparison and N<sub>2</sub> the term of comparison. At the same time, N<sub>2</sub> modifies the verb, expressing the manner of action or existence of N<sub>1</sub>.

The first group consists of verbs of motion, such as *nestis' vichrem* 'to rush like a whirlwind', *proletet' molniej* 'to flash like lightning', *rasprostranjat'sja lesnym požarom* 'to spread like a forest fire'. The second group consists of stative or positional verbs, such as *ležat' brevnom* 'to lie like a log' and *stojat' goroi* 'to stand up for' (lit. 'to stand like a mountain'). This extended version of the binominal construction can be described as a semi-schematic idiom, in which V and N<sub>2</sub> are lexically specified, while N<sub>1</sub> represents the variable element.

When V is a verb of motion, the construction expresses a comparison based on N<sub>2</sub>'s way of acting, formalized as SEM = <N<sub>1</sub> acts as N<sub>2</sub>>. When V denotes the position or spatial configuration of N<sub>1</sub>, the construction expresses a comparison based on N<sub>2</sub>'s shape, arrangement, or posture, formalized as SEM = <N<sub>1</sub> resembles N<sub>2</sub>>.

Examples illustrate these patterns clearly.

In (4), the implicit motion verb (e.g., 'to gush; to flow') is recoverable from the specification of the source (*iz golovy* 'from my head'), while N<sub>2</sub> (*fontan* 'fountain') introduces a dynamic comparison based on FORCEFUL EMISSION.

- (4) *Ona prišla v soznanie pervaja, stala golosit': "A čto ž on nadelal!". U menja **krov' fontanom** iz golovy. Menja srazu na nosilki i otpravili v voennyj hospital' v Berline.* (Komsomol'skaja pravda, 29.01.2014)  
She was the first to regain consciousness and began to wail: "What has he done!"  
Blood [was gushing] like a fountain from my head. They immediately put me on a stretcher and sent me to a military hospital in Berlin.

In (5), the motion verb *katit'sja* lit. 'to roll' combines with the instrumental N<sub>2</sub>s *lesnym požarom* 'like a wildfire' and *vodnoj cunami* 'like a tsunami' to convey the manner of N<sub>1</sub>'s reaction. The

construction evokes a scene of UNCONTROLLED, DESTRUCTIVE EXPANSION, drawing on an iconic comparison with two perceptually salient natural phenomena.

- (5) *Ich tol'ko podtalkivaj legon'ko, i oni sami budut katit'sja lesnym požarom ili vodnoj cunami po zemle, uničtožaja vseh, kto vinoven ili prosto podvernulsja.* (ruTenTen17, lib.ru)  
Just give them a gentle push, and they [people consumed by suffering] will start spreading on their own like a forest fire or a tsunami across the land, destroying everyone who is guilty or simply happened to be in the way.

In the following example, the positional verb *ležat'* 'to lie' establishes a stative framework, while the instrumental *brevnom* 'like a log' specifies it through a prototypical comparison conveying the idea of complete STILLNESS and RIGIDITY, grounded in the analogy between a motionless human body and a log. Comparable expressions include *ležat' kamnem* 'to lie like a stone' and *ležat' trupom* 'to lie like a corpse'. In all of these, N<sub>2</sub> encodes a position-based similitude, while the verb – whether overt or implicit – provides the stative grounding that guides the mapping of N<sub>2</sub>'s visual features of shape or arrangement onto N<sub>1</sub>.

- (6) *Starucha, rastjanuvšis' na lavke, ležala slovno mērtvaja. On podumal, čto ona umerla, i stal eë trjasti, no ona ležala brevnom i ne ševalilas'.* (ruTenTen17, igrokopilka.ru)  
The old woman, stretched out on the bench, was lying as if dead. He thought she had died and began shaking her, but she was lying like a log, not moving at all.

In (7), the motion verb *idti* 'to go' combines with the instrumental *prachom* 'like dust' to form an idiomatic expression denoting COMPLETE LOSS OR DESTRUCTION. Here, the instrumental evokes the end state of a destructive process, with the image of DUST symbolizing the qualitative outcome of the action: the efforts are entirely wasted. In this case, the original concrete imagery has become conventionalized, yielding what Lakoff, Johnson 1980 term a 'dead metaphor', which conveys an abstract evaluative meaning.

- (7) *Odin nevernyj rez – i vse zatračennye do ètogo usilija idut prachom.* (ruTenTen17, studiogid.ru)  
One wrong cut – and all the effort made so far turns to dust.

Finally, in (8), the instrumentals *gorkami* 'in heaps', *lesom* 'like a forest', and *rekoj* 'like a river' act as hyperbolic intensifiers, mapping respectively features of ABUNDANCE, INTENSITY, and CONTINUITY on N<sub>1</sub>s. The dynamic verbs *nasypan* '[hashish] piled up' and *tečēt* '[vodka] flows', together with the stative verb *stoit* '[craziness] stands', provide

the framework of action or state, while the instrumentals encode a shape- or arrangement-based comparison for N<sub>1</sub>.

- (8) *gašiš gorkami nasypan, iz tabletok dorožki složeny, dur' lesom stoit, vodka rekoj teččet* (RNC, M. Gigolašvili, Čertovo koleso, 2007)  
hashish is piled up in heaps, trails of pills are laid out, the craziness stands like a forest, and vodka is flowing like a river

Motion- and position-based instrumental constructions thus emphasize the manner of movement or the mode of existence of N<sub>1</sub>. Expressions such as *stojat' stolbom* 'to stand like a pillar' or *polzti zmeěj* 'to crawl like a snake' encode shape, arrangement, or manner of motion through a stable comparison with a prototypical N<sub>2</sub>. The mapping of inherently relevant features is guided by embodied experience, which proves central for perceptually salient natural phenomena.

More broadly, the extended instrumental construction exemplifies verb – noun co-selection, in which N<sub>2</sub>'s semantics presuppose and constrain the verb – even when unexpressed – while the verb, in turn, activates a stable comparison.

Lexical meaning is therefore constructionally mediated: clause interpretation depends on networks of form–meaning pairings rather than on isolated words. In Russian, the instrumental noun often evokes an implicit motion or position verb whose meaning is recoverable from context; at the same time, the verb reinforces the comparative reading of the instrumental, grounding the analogy in the manner of motion or mode of existence.

In sum, constructions of the type [N<sub>1</sub> (V[MOTION/POSITION]) N<sub>2</sub>.INS] reveal a structured interaction between syntax, semantics, and pragmatics, whereby the verb's meaning is systematically linked to the ontological and image-schematic features of N<sub>2</sub>. Whether static or dynamic, these patterns employ a comparative mechanism that maps N<sub>2</sub>'s physical or kinetic attributes onto N<sub>1</sub>, showing how even elliptical constructions can support inferential interpretation through conventionalized form–meaning associations.

### 4.3 Distribution and Competition between Genitive and Instrumental Binominal Constructions

As noted above, the genitive and instrumental binominal constructions may involve the same lexical items, which function as N<sub>1</sub> in the genitive pattern [N<sub>1</sub> N<sub>2</sub>.GEN] but as N<sub>2</sub> in the instrumental pattern [N<sub>1</sub> N<sub>2</sub>.INS].

These “mirror” configurations differ not only syntactically but also semantically and functionally. The instrumental construction overtly

encodes analogy, i.e. resemblance between entities belonging to different categories, while in the genitive pattern analogy is conveyed metaphorically, through implicit comparison.

The [N<sub>1</sub> N<sub>2</sub>.INS] type (e.g., *pivo rekoj* ‘beer [flowing] like a river’, *dožd’ stenoj* ‘rain [standing / falling] in sheets’, lit. ‘like a wall’, *žar volnami* ‘heat [spreading] in waves’) combines this analogical function with a predicative one, implying an unexpressed verb of motion or position: [N<sub>1</sub> (V<sub>[MOTION/POSITION]</sub>) N<sub>2</sub>.INS]. This predicate is recoverable from context (see §§4.1-4.2). In this configuration, N<sub>2</sub> anchors the semantics of the predicate, establishing an analogy based on manner, shape, or spatial configuration.

In other words, the instrumental construction performs a dual role: it is comparative with respect to N<sub>1</sub>, and adverbial with respect to the unexpressed predicate, whose semantics both motivate and constrain the selection of N<sub>2</sub>.

By contrast, the [N<sub>1</sub> N<sub>2</sub>.GEN] construction (e.g. *reka piva* ‘a river of beer’, *more alkoholja* ‘a sea of alcohol’, *volna stracha* ‘a wave of fear’) is purely binominal. It contains no implicit predicate and consists of a left-headed NP modified by a specifying genitive that denotes the substance, content, or conceptual domain of the head.

While in *pivo rekoj* ‘beer [flows] like a river’ the river functions as a term of comparison for the flowing quantity of beer, in *reka piva* ‘a river of beer’ it acts instead as a metaphorical classifier of arrangement (Latos, Benigni 2025; Benigni, Latos 2024; Benigni, Latos 2023), conveying the notion of an hyperbolic quantity of beer. In both constructions, the reference to RIVER acquires a quantifying function, serving as a maximizer, but the former does so through explicit comparison, the latter through metaphorical mapping of quantitative and actional properties from the classifying N<sub>1</sub> onto the classified N<sub>2</sub>.

The difference in syntactic structure between the two constructions is reflected in the distinct semantic prominence of their constituents. In the instrumental construction, *pivo* ‘beer’ is both the syntactic and semantic head of the binominal, while *rekoj* ‘river.INS’ functions as its modifier. In the genitive construction, by contrast, *reka* ‘river’ acts as the syntactic head, whereas the role of semantic head is more evenly distributed between the two components.

When both constructions are possible, they give rise to mirror-like semantic mappings along the axes of shape, arrangement, and quantity. Pairs such as *pivo rekoj* ‘beer [flowing] like a river’ / *reka piva* ‘a river of beer’, *dožd’ stenoj* ‘rain [falling/standing] like a wall’ / *stena doždja* ‘a wall of rain’, and *žar volnami* ‘heat [spreading] in waves’ / *volny žara* ‘waves of heat’ share imagery based on the same nature-related noun, which projects actional and, by extension, quantitative features onto the other constituent. However, the choice of construction entails a perspective shift: the instrumental

construction presupposes an external observer who consciously establishes a comparison based on N<sub>2</sub>'s manner of motion or spatial configuration. The genitive construction, by contrast, presents the event or situation as classified and quantified, with the comparison already integrated into its conceptualization.

Cognitively, the two constructions instantiate opposite figure-ground alignments within the same conceptual schema, while differing in their degree of lexicalization. Quantitative patterns in corpora illustrate this contrast. For instance, in RuTenTen20, the instrumental binominal *pivo rekoj* 'beer (flowing) like a river' is slightly more frequent (132 occurrences) than the genitive binominal *reka/reki piva* 'a river/rivers of beer' (103 occurrences). In (9), however, it co-occurs with a genitive binominal featuring a metaphorical quantifier, MOUNTAIN (*gory čipsov i fistašek* 'mountains of chips and pistachios'):

- (9) *piva rekoj s gorami čipsov i fistašek na družeskich večerinkach.*  
beer in rivers, with mountains of chips and pistachios at friendly parties.

This contrast emerges clearly in (10a-b). Both evoke the same visual schema, but the former depicts a dynamic, unfolding event, while the latter highlights the resulting configuration.

- (10) a. ***volosy volnami upali na pleči, vyzvav voschišenie zritelej.*** (kartaslov.ru)  
her hair fell in waves over her shoulders, eliciting the spectators' admiration.  
b. *Podružka sidela za tualetnym stolikom i rasčesyvala pered zerkalom **zolotyje volny volos.*** (kartaslov.ru)  
Her little friend was sitting at the dressing table, combing the golden waves of her hair in front of the mirror.

The alternation *volosy volnami* vs. *volny volos* corresponds to a shift from a process-oriented to an entity-oriented construal.

Finally, the constructions are not always interchangeable. In *reka ognja* 'a river of fire', *more ljudej* 'a sea of people', *stena stracha* 'a wall of fear', the corresponding instrumental forms *\*ogon' rekoj*, *\*ljudi morem*, *\*strach stenoi* are semantically infelicitous, due to insufficient perceptual or dynamic overlap. Explicit analogy is only possible where manner or shape-based comparison is cognitively plausible.

In summary, the [N<sub>1</sub> N<sub>2</sub>.INS] construction tends toward a process-oriented construal with an implicit predicate, while [N<sub>1</sub> N<sub>2</sub>.GEN] favors an entity-oriented construal based on metaphorical analogy. Overlap occurs only when manner, form, and quantitative profiling align. The diagram in Figure 1 is based on attested occurrences extracted from the RuTenTen20 corpus and is intended to identify metaphorical nouns that occur in both constructions. However, this

representation does not reflect the actual frequency of the competing patterns, that is, it does not indicate whether the genitive or the instrumental construction is more frequent overall. In the diagram, the instrumental construction foregrounds manner (and secondarily quantity), whereas the genitive directly encodes quantity; nouns attested in both patterns indicate the overlap between quantifying and qualifying readings.

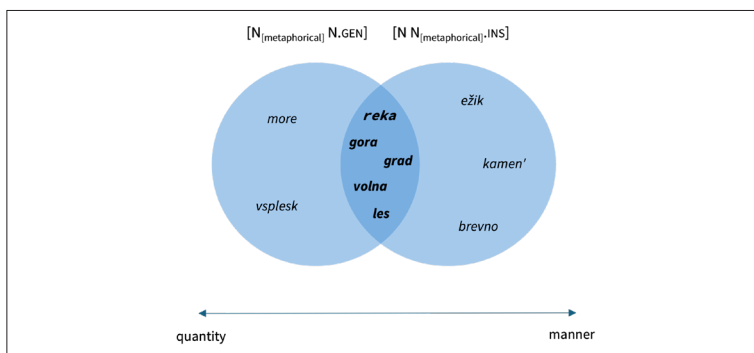


Figure 1  $[N_{\text{metaphorical}} N_{2.GEN}]$  vs.  $[N N_{\text{metaphorical}.INS}]$

## 5 Conclusive Remarks

This study investigated Russian binominal constructions, focusing on the contrasts and points of convergence between the instrumental pattern  $[N_1 N_{2.INS}]$  (e.g., *pivo rekoj*, lit. ‘beer [flowing] like a river’) and the genitive pattern  $[N_1 N_{2.GEN}]$  (e.g., *reka piva*, lit. ‘a river of beer’). These two patterns often form “mirror” configurations using the same lexical items but maintain distinct semantic functions.

The instrumental construction overtly encodes a comparative relation of manner-based similitude, wherein the instrumental constituent N<sub>2</sub> profiles the manner or mode of existence attributed to N<sub>1</sub>. This construction is implicitly predicative and process-oriented, typically relying on an unexpressed verb of motion or position. Accordingly, the instrumental noun performs a dual role: it acts as a comparative expression relative to N<sub>1</sub> and functions adverbially relative to the implicit predicate. Through grammaticalization, the metaphorical nouns in this construction evolve into comparative adverbials of manner. This pattern also reveals a lexicalization gradient, ranging from fully productive, verb-dependent uses to highly conventionalized idioms where the comparison may shift, via metaphor-to-metonymy drift, to index merely a high degree of quantity or continuity.

In contrast, the genitive binominal construction is purely nominal and relies on implicit, metaphorical comparison. Here, the initial noun, N<sub>1</sub>, functions as a metaphorical classifier, projecting semantic features – such as shape, arrangement, or actional traits – onto the second noun, N<sub>2</sub>. The semantic evolution of metaphorical nouns in this pattern is characterized by a tendency to develop into subjective, hyperbolic quantifiers (intensifiers or minimizers). This structure favors an entity-oriented construal.

While the final functional interpretation of these two constructions often converges, particularly in conveying the notion of abundance, they are not fully interchangeable. Their primary distinction lies in perspective: the instrumental construction presupposes an external observer establishing an explicit comparison based on N<sub>2</sub>'s manner of motion or spatial configuration, whereas the genitive construction presents the event or situation as already conceptually classified and quantified. Full overlap is observed only when manner, form, and quantitative profiling align.

Finally, the study highlighted parallels between the Russian instrumental binominal construction and the Italian *a*-phrase construction, and between the Russian genitive binominal and the Italian *di*-phrase construction, demonstrating how similar conceptual patterns – metaphorical classification versus manner-based comparison – are realized through structurally distinct yet convergent strategies across languages. This comparative analysis further substantiates the claim, central to construction-based and usage-based frameworks, that lexical meaning is not inherent but constructionally mediated, emerging from dynamic networks of form-meaning pairings.

## Bibliography

- Allan, K. (1977). "Classifiers". *Language*, 53(2), 285-311. <https://doi.org/10.2307/413103>.
- Benigni, V. (2022). "Binominal Constructions with Metaphorical Quantifiers in Russian: *vsplesk émocij i volna pozitivna*". *Studi Slavistici*, 19(2), 169-92. [https://doi.org/10.36253/studi\\_slavis-12323](https://doi.org/10.36253/studi_slavis-12323).
- Benigni, V.; Latos, A. (2024). "Metaphorical binominal constructions in the domain of water: *a river of words*. Evidence from Italian, Polish and Russian". Baicchi, A.; Broccias, C. (eds), *Constructional and Cognitive Explorations of Contrastive Linguistics*, 129-51. [https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-031-46602-1\\_8](https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-031-46602-1_8).
- Benigni, V.; Latos, A. (2023). "Una montagna di errori: costruzioni binominali con classificatori metaforici in italiano, russo e polacco". *Studia Universitatis Hereditati*, 2(1), 11-31. [https://doi.org/10.26493/2350-5443.11\(1\)11-31](https://doi.org/10.26493/2350-5443.11(1)11-31).
- Buslaev, F.I. (1959). *Istoričeskaja grammatika russkogo jazyka*. Moskva: Gosudarstvennoe učebno-pedagogičeskoe izdatel'stvo Ministerstva prosvěščenija RSFSR.
- Cotta Ramusino, P. (2022). "Zakon zakonom, a žizn' diktuet svoe: the function in discourse of the construction [X1-X1om, a/no]". *Russkij jazyk v naučnom osveščenii*, 2(44), 242-62. <https://doi.org/10.31912/rjano-2022.2.9>.
- Goldberg, A. (1995). *Constructions: A Construction Grammar Approach to Argument Structure*. Chicago: Chicago University Press.
- Janda, L.; Kopotev, M.; Nessel, T. (2020). "Constructions, their families and their neighborhoods: the case of *durak durakom* 'a fool times two'". *Russian Linguistics*, 44(2), 109-27. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11185-020-09225-y>.
- Latos, A.; Benigni, V. (2025). "Binominal Constructions with Metaphorical Classifiers in the Semantic Domain of Nature". *SCANDO-SLAVICA*, 71(1), 93-112. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00806765.2025.2499881>.
- Michajlov, N. (2012). *Tvoritel'nyj padež v russkom jazyke XVIII veka*. Acta Universitatis Upsaliensis. *Studia Slavica Upsaliensia* 47. Uppsala: Ingrid Maier & Juhani Nuorluoto.
- Mrazek, R. (1964). *Sintaksis russkogo tvoritel'nogo (strukturno-sravnitel'oe issledovanie)*. Praha: Státní pedagogické nakladatelství.
- Piunno, V. (2013). *Modificatori sintagmatici con funzione aggettivale e avverbale* [PhD Dissertation]. Roma: Università degli Studi Roma Tre.
- Rakhilina, E.; Tribushinina, E. (2010). "The Russian instrumental-of-comparison: constructional approach". Grygiel, M.; Janda, L.A. (eds), *Slavic Linguistics in a Cognitive Framework*, 145-74. Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang Verlag.
- Šachmatov, A.A. (1925). *Sintaksis russkogo jazyka: Učenie o predložení i slovosočetanijach*. Leningrad: Rossijskaja gosudarstvennaja akademičeskaja tipografija.
- Vinogradov, V.V. (1972). *Russkij jazyk (Grammatičeskoe učenie o slove)*. Moskva: Vysšaja škola.
- Zhang, X. (2017). *English quasi-numeral classifiers. A corpus-based cognitive-typological study*. Bern: Peter Lang. <https://doi.org/10.3726/b10934>.

