

Dr Svenka Savić, Novi Sad

DISTINCTIVE FEATURES OF CHILDREN'S JOKES: A CONTRIBUTION TO
RESEARCH OF CHILD FOLKLORE

it is often stated that not much has been written in our folk literature about jokes as a special form of verbal behaviour. To date there are only a few papers on children's jokes and those are appeared not long ago (Lozica, 1982; Perić – Polonijo, 1982.) Thus, all questions concerning definition, classification, motifs, methods of collecting data and so on are still open. If this phenomenon is to be defined from the point of view of children and their attitude to jokes – and not from an adult viewpoint – then it can be said that *jokes represent a special form of verbal interaction used by children in the process of socialization within their own age group and also their socio-cultural environment.*

This main proposition has been demonstrated on a total of 200 jokes, 100 of which have been collected from different places in Serbia, and compared with 100 collections by Lj. Marks (Zagreb) from elementary school children (ages 7 – 14), with special attention to children between 9 and 11 years of age. Besides collecting jokes from children directly, a short questionnaire was used, with sample questions which the children (themselves) answered: Do you know any jokes? From whom have you heard them? To whom do you tell them?

Answers to the question show that:

1. All children know different jokes.
2. They hear them often at home, in the street, at school, and most often from their schoolmates.
3. Most often they tell them to other kids, «to get more friendly», during their «play».
4. Though all children know jokes, it is more often boys than girls who tell them, and they tell them more often to children of the same sex.

Jokes, then, are a special kind of verbal interaction which enables children to socialize within their own group.

According to content, children classify jokes into different categories:

1. funny jokes, 2. sad jokes, 3. those about lunatics, 4. those about vampires, 5. obscene jokes, and 6. political ones. In the children's classification there are no

ethnic jokes, which figure in the adult classification. At this age, children don't yet know about affiliation to different ethnic groups. However, most of the jokes classified in these six categories tell of members of different ethnic groups (such as those about lazy Montenegrins, clever Ero, good natured but silly Mujo and Haso, shrewd Gypsies, etc.). Retelling such jokes (which they hear from their elders), children become familiar with the stereotypes shared by their own ethnic group. It can be supposed that these stereotypes, reinforced during schooling through other sources (literature, songs, etc.) will move into the domain of «true judgement» of the members of other ethnic groups. Thus there is proof that jokes represent a medium of child socialization within the wider social environment (in which kids grow up).

We have only focused on some aspects of research into children's jokes to show they have their share in 1. socialization of children within their socio-cultural environment and 2. their own age group. Further research into those sources should contribute to a better understanding of the importance of systematic study of our urban child folklore.