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Summary of a PhD thesis entitled:

Traditional oral children's folklore: ethnolinguistic and textological approach

In this doctoral thesis an attempt has been made to approach children's folklore in a comprehensive and synthetic manner. The subject matter were texts of folk origin. Since it is difficult to decide if their authors were adults or children, no terminological distinction between folklore by children and folklore for children has been introduced. In the thesis' author view, children's folklore is a more appropriate term as far as its scope is concerned. Children's folklore encompasses texts in which a child is not only an addresser or an addressee, but also an agent and a topic. Hence, taking these categories into consideration, the scope of children's folklore was enlarged to include genres which had not been previously identified with it.

The thesis is divided into two parts. The first one describes children's folklore and tries to show the following: its essence, the way it presents itself against the background of adults' folklore, children's needs underlying it, a child's situation in a traditional family and peasants' culture, as well as the state of research on Polish children's folklore. This part is closed by my own proposal of how to classify genres of children's folklore on the basis of Jerzy Bartmiński's system. The following was taken into account: situaltional conditioning of a text, kind of situation, type of situation, degree of child's involvment, presence of a plot, form of communication, use (the necessity of gestures, their character) or lack of use of gestures, lyrical or narrative form, internal intentions of the text, truth value of contents, style and theme. It allowed to distinguish 26 genres: lullabies, finger and toe games, lap rhymes, clapping rhymes, rythmic rhymes often used as jump-rope rhymes, rhymes, tongue twisters, nonsense rhymes, text used to initiate or stop the play, counting-out rhymes, child's play, derisive rhymes, teasing rhymes, taunting rhymes, rhymes used during whittling of pipes, charms and invocations, riddles, children's prayers, carols specific to celebration of Epiphany in the Lublin region rhymed name day wishes, godparents rhymes speeches, baptism songs, orphan songs, shepherd songs, tales.

The list of these traditional genres seems to be complete and closed. However, the material may by incomplete despite its great scope. It is difficult to determine whether or not texts belonging to other genres (unavailable to modern scholars) existed among children. It needs to be pointed out that children keep adding new elements to this set, sometimes replacing them with others (due to the extreme pace of civilisation's progress this process is very fast).

The second part of the thesis focuses on reconstructing textual patterns of children's folklore's selected genres. Their analysis was proceded by a description of most important terms and theoretical problems. Two genres – rhymes used during whittling of pipes as well as charms and invocations were subject to a detailed analysis. The description of others is limited to providing basic information, characteristic traits, and qualities which single them out in terms of genre, language and style. The rationale behind this approach were primarily practical concerns – a complete description of all genres of children's folklore is impossible within one thesis. Hence, for the analysis of a textual pattern the most representative genres were chosen in which qualities characteristic for children's folklore are most prominent. On the one hand, we have to do with a ulitilarian connection with playing games, phisical activities and learning abilities useful in peasant's life. On the other hand, we observe the intention to convey information which are vital to the agriculture, as well as to give children access to its symbolic space – a universe of beliefs, values and traditions. What makes the choice of these genres even more reasonable is the fact that they have not been satisfactorily elaborated until now, in spite of a rich and interesting set of texts which is representative of them.

Although children are unaware of old beliefs and symbols (borrowed from adults' folklore which is inextricably bound up with children's) inherent in these texts, we can still set them apart and explain by means of textual patterns' reconstruction method employed in this thesis. Nonetheless, as the analysis of rymes used during whittling of pipes showed, as soon as a specific text-bound situation draws to a close, the text itself gradually disappears from collective memory. Together with the text also the knowledge about the old world which is so precious from the cultural point of view is erased. What it evidences is not only the importance, but also the urgent necessity to continue research on folklore verbal texts. The need to comprehensively describe all the genres mentioned in the thesis is a research perspective as well as a task to be taken up in the future.

The reseach material which forms the basis of this paper has been collected mostly as part of an investigation into available etnographic sources enumerated in the bibliography), an in-depth inquiry in Etnoliguistic Archive of Maria Curie-Skłodowska University in Lublin, Museum of Folk Culture in Kolbuszowa, as well as dialectological and audiovisual resources of Lesser Poland Cultural Center „Sokół" in Nowy Sącz. These materials have been gathered in the years 2012-2017 mostly in Lesser Poland Voivodeship – primarily in the region of Cracow. All the 661 texts (Polish and foreign ones) have been placed in three appendices at the end of the paper.