

Development of ideas about the comical among children (based on personal experience and cultural texts)

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Abstract

Humor is a complex phenomenon involving many psychological functions: cognitive processes, emotions, communication, which manifest themselves in various social and cultural contexts. The purpose of this study was to identify the ideas of comic among pre-school and junior school children using the content analysis method. The study involved 78 children at the age of 5 - 7 years (40 girls and 38 boys) and 174 elementary school students (92 boys and 82 girls).

At the first stage of the study, the descriptions of funny stories were compiled by children from personal experience. During the next stage, schoolchildren were asked to recall funny episodes from the works of fiction and television animated series. A qualitative analysis of the data made it possible to identify the actions involved in the creation of the comic context by children. As expected, the use of logical inconsistencies younger schoolchildren increases, the use of figurative inconsistencies decreases. In the descriptions from personal experience, the number of stories containing black humor, the violations of a physiological type, and falls increases among schoolchildren. In the stories compiled on the basis of artistic works and animated films (cultural products), the number of funny stories associated with the violations of the rules of school life and the relations with adults increase (more often with teachers); speech games.

Keywords: humor, funny stories, preschoolers, schoolchildren, cultural texts, personal experience, content analysis, qualitative approach.

Introduction

The cognitive aspects of humor are studied most intensively in psychology. An essential component of humor is the discrepancy, which is regarded as a deviation from ordinary expectations. These expectations are based on cognitive schemes - mental representations stored in memory. Children tend to laugh at objects or events that do not correspond to their existing schemes [1,2]. During the stage of specific operations, children are able to manipulate by schemes in their minds, imagining the consequences of various actions with objects, without the need to perform them on a behavioral level. Thinking operations become reversible. Children also become less self-centered at this stage, and they have the ability to realize that other people may have a different point of view than their own. According to Piaget all these cognitive abilities allow to understand more complex types of humor, which are based on a more complex game with reality [3]. Studying the relationship between cognitive development and the understanding of humor, Schulz found that the resolution of the discrepancy becomes important for humor understanding among the schoolchildren from the grades 1 - 3 [4,5].

Children get the greatest pleasure from humor, which represents an optimal level of complexity for their cognitive structures. Too complex or too easy humor for understanding does not bring joy to a child, according to Park [6], Prentice [7] and Yalisove [8].

The studies by Creusere [9], de Groot [10] showed that until about the age of six, children have no ability to understand an implied meaning of ironic statements. Studying the development of children's understanding concerning the meaning and the pragmatic functions of irony and sarcasm, scholars begin to spread the study of humor development cognitive aspects beyond "canned jokes", drawings and riddles in conversational forms of humor, which often occur in everyday interactions with other people. These types of humor are more dependent on the social context and require the understanding of different linguistic and social factors.

At the age of 7 years, according to McGhee [11], children begin to understand "multiple meanings", to realize the ambiguity inherent in language at various levels, including phonology, morphology, semantics and syntax [4,5]. According to Whitt [12], Yalisove [8], Bergen [13] children are able to enjoy the play of words and double meanings, which are an important component of many jokes and riddles. In addition to the understanding of puns and other jokes based on double meanings and wordplay, children at this age are able to understand other types of abstract humor based on logical inconsistencies and requiring deductive thinking. There was no effect on the use of humor during the development of concepts among schoolchildren in Ozdogru studies [14]. The influence of humor on the solution of creative tasks by children in primary school was studied by Boyle [15]. Vergen studied the preferences of gifted children, a sense of humor and the understanding of riddles [13].

The features of the anecdote story, the creation of a funny story and the oral skills of children with hearing impairment were studied in Nwokah study [16]. Children with hearing impairment used shorter and less complex statements in anecdotes. They tried to stick to the content of anecdotes.

The experimental study of humor styles among younger schoolchildren was conducted by James [17]. The questionnaire was developed to identify humor styles (HSQ-Y) among the children at the age of 8-11 years. It was revealed that primary school boys mostly use aggressive humor, and girls often use affiliative humor [18]. Fox studies [19] revealed that affiliative and self-destructive humor were associated with all four measures of psychosocial adaptation. Aggressive humor was associated with low anxiety and high self-esteem of social competence among boys, and with low self-esteem and high depression among girls.

Materials and Methods

Participants

78 children at the age of 5 - 7 years took part in the study. There were 40 girls and 38 boys. 174 schoolchildren of the primary school at the educational institutions of Kazan (92 boys and 82 girls) agreed to participate in the study. There were 36 children at the age of 9 - 11 years. Parents' consent to work with children was obtained.

Procedure

Funny stories from the personal experience of preschoolers

Children were asked to compose and tell a funny story. 105 of children's stories were compiled and processed.

Funny stories from the personal experience of school children. The schoolchildren were asked to imagine a funny story by themselves and write it down. The adult said, "Imagine a funny story". 170 funny stories of children were analyzed.

Works. In the second part of the study we were interested by the works and films children single out as funny and the specific situations they find amusing.

The stories of schoolchildren from works. In the third part of the study, schoolchildren were asked to remember and record a funny case from a work of art or a cartoon. Schoolchildren gave 112 funny descriptions in total.

Results

Table 1.

Frequency of various actions use at preschool and school age

Acts	Preschool age	Junior school age (in %)	
	Personal experience (in %)	Personal experience	Cultural texts
Transformation	30	14	19
An imaginary discrepancy (an action not characteristic of an object)	24	10	10 14 (hero's behavior)
Fall	16	15	9
Interaction	10 (gaming)	12 (social)	9 (social)
Physiological violations	7	10	2
Direct actions	3		
Violation of norm, rule	4	12	15
Logical discrepancies		8	8
Black humor	5	11	-
Speech games	1	8	14

Table 2 presents works and films, the plots of which are mentioned by schoolchildren most often.

Table 2.

The frequency of works of art and animation films selection by younger students

Groups	Number of choices	In %
<i>Deniskin's stories</i> (V. Dragunsky)	15	17
A child and Carlson (cartoon)	7	8
Sponge Bob Square Pants (animated series)	5	6
I'll show you (cartoon series)	by 4	22

Zootopia (cartoon)		
Harry Potter and the Prisoner of Azkaban (film)		
<i>The Living Hat</i> (N. Nosov)		
<i>Barankin, be a man.</i> (V. Medvedev)		
<i>The Little Prince</i> (Antoine de Saint-Exupéry)	by 3	20
Smeshariki (animated series)		
Pepa, the little pig (animated series)		
<i>The Adventures of Neznaika and His Friends</i> (N. Nosov)		
<i>The Adventures of Baron Munchausen</i> (E. Raspe)		
Eralash (Children's humorous newsreel)		
Mikhail Zadornov	by 2	27
<i>Alice in Wonderland</i> (L. Carroll)		
<i>Warrior-cats</i> (Message) (H. Erin)		
<i>The Adventures of Buratino</i> (A. Tolstoy)		
<i>Wizard of the Emerald City</i> (A. Volkov)		
<i>The Adventures of Tom Sawyer</i> (M. Twain)		
<i>Three fat men</i> (Y. Olesha)		
<i>Nicky's diary</i> (R. Rassel)		
<i>The story "Elephant"</i> (A. Kuprin)		
Masha and the Bear (animated series)		
<i>Dreamers</i> (N. Nosov)		
<i>In the country of unlearned lessons</i> (L. Geraskina)		

Discussion

Violation of norm, rule.

The position of a child in society, the position of a schoolchild, socially supervised educational activities contribute to the fact that younger schoolchildren "meet with the rules", are aware of the requirement to subordinate their behavior to school rules and regulations. This explains the increase in the number of funny stories in the cultural product of society - fiction. In Bayanova's study [20] they identified the rules regulating the behavior of a child. Dowling [21] described the situations of discipline violation, the relations with teachers and hygiene (mostly physiological violations). In our study the rules of school discipline and order, the relations with teachers and parents and hygiene are violated.

Transformation act is often found in the funny stories of preschool children (30% of all descriptions), decreasing by younger age (14-19%). Preschool children were amused by the fact that an object they described or an action performed by this object turned into its opposite in the course of a narrative. As a

rule, transformations occurred within the framework of one category - "animal" [22]. Junior schoolchildren describe the transformations of children and animals into inanimate objects; people in animals; Dialectical transformations (a friend is turned into an enemy, a rescuer is turned into a victim). Transformations are used within the abstract categories (birth-death, old age-youth).

In the stories from the personal experience of junior schoolchildren, the number of descriptions (10%) where imaginative discrepancies are used is reduced: "Nemo drowned"; "The fish drowned". The discrepancy between an imaginary image and a real idea seemed ridiculous and funny for preschool children in 24% of the compiled stories [23]. The decrease of stories among junior schoolchildren assigned to this group may be explained by the fact that the cognitive schemes became more complicated among children [1], imaginative discrepancies do not seem ridiculous and funny to children.

Junior schoolchildren during the imagination of their own funny stories, based on fiction begin to use logical inconsistencies. The results of McGhee [24,25] and Shultz [26] studies also showed that during the pre-operational stage children had difficulties to understand the meaning of various jokes and drawings containing abstract discrepancies, whereas children who reached the stage of specific operations understood them better.

At the younger school age, children begin to enjoy different kinds of speech games: incorrectly pronounced words, speech figures. An especially high indicator is in the stories based on fiction. Similar results were obtained in the studies performed by Whitt [12] and Yalisove [8].

Children's black humor concerns potentially painful, worrying or guilty themes: death, violence, destruction and punishment. Using a playful humorous fantasy, a child is able to turn a threatening situation into something funny and pleasant, according to Herzog [27,28], Oppliger [29]. According to Dmitriev A.V. [30], this kind of humor brings a child to the world of adults. However, black humor is found only in own stories of preschool children and junior schoolchildren. This kind of humor is not singled out by schoolchildren when ridiculous episodes from fiction or animated films are described, as these topics are prohibited.

Interaction situations. Psychologists who study humor also note that laughter and humor among children develop in the context of a game, according to Barnett [31, 32], Bergen [13, 33, 34] and McGhee [11]. A study of humor among the children of kindergarten age [24] showed that the most powerful predictor of child sensitivity to verbal and behavioral stimulation of humor and laughter was the frequency with which they engaged in joint play. Humor has a pronounced communicative function: laughter causes communication, helps to establish a contact, to soften a situation and inspire interlocutors [30].

The act of falling is often found in ridiculous children's stories, decreasing from 16% at the preschool age to 15% in the stories from the personal experience of younger schoolchildren and down to 9% in children's stories based on fiction.

Physiological violations. According to Latyshev [35], physiological laughter is not a product of civilization, but exists as a kind of natural reality inherent in humans from birth. McGee's studies [11] note that small children experiencing feelings and sufferings in the process of accustoming to neatness, the activities and cases associated with a toilet become the sources of emotional tension, a lot of laughter is caused by the scatological humor concerning defecation, urination and gas emission [36,37, 38].

Conclusions

1. During preschool - primary school age the number of funny stories, based on the effect of transformation, is reduced.

2. The number of stories containing imaginative discrepancies during younger school age is reduced.
3. The number of stories containing black humor from preschool to younger school age (in the stories from personal experience) is increased.
4. During the preschool - junior school age the number of funny stories related to the violations of hygiene, discipline and order in an educational institution increases; the number of stories related to the relationships with adults (often with teachers) is also increased.

Summary

In the conducted research of representations among the children of preschool and school age certain laws of comic development were revealed.

First of all, the number of funny stories, based on the effect of transformation decreases with age but the range of categories within which the transformation is carried out, abstract categories appear and the number of logical inconsistencies increases. At school age children often enjoy by different speech riddles, speech mistakes are perceived as amusing ones. The repertoire of social interactions in the free descriptions of preschool children and schoolchildren changes: from playing activity to broad social relations, the role of rules and norms in a child's life increases. The results of the study allow us to state that the development of the comic element occurs in accordance with the laws of age development among children, humor is an important element of culture and allows the development of a diagnostic tool to study humor among children.

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