

Children as subjects and objects of family humour

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Fieldwork on family humour

Initially: focus on dyadic traditions (humour between a husband and a wife)

Later: broader focus as children cannot be excluded from humorous communication



Children's humour

1) (Un)intentionally humorous utterances:

When I was a small kid [in the early 1980s, the time of deficit in the USSR] my father used to take me with him to stand in a queue because people would let him skip the queue. Once there was a queue in a bookstore, but the man who was standing in front of us didn't want to let us skip the queue. ... So I asked my father loudly: "If this man dies, will we be able to skip the queue?" (female, 36 years old)



Children's humour

2) Incongruous behaviour:

... he [a young son] was at the grandparents' place, he managed to forget the keys, then it turned out that he had them, then it turned out that he didn't have them, and then ... when I already thought that he lost them, it turned out that he lost them in his own pocket. But when he found the keys, he came without his backpack. (female, 41 years old)



Children's humour

3) Funny mistakes/idiosyncratic words and expressions:

*If she [a young daughter] asks for something, she says "quietly" («тихонько»), she thinks it is a magic word, or "just once", "the last time", but she doesn't mean it – the main thing is to get what she is asking for. And she also says "Oh, let's..." («Ну давааааау...»), she thinks it is something that has to be said to achieve the result. "Oh let's, just once" is a typical request.
(female, 28 years old)*



Children's humour in adults' communication

- Often forms long-standing parts of family folklore;
- Words and phrases continue to be used after the children grow up and abandon them;
- Some of the humorous flavour is inevitably lost as time passes by.

I worry that my children will grow up before I do.



someecards

Humour at children's expense

- Some parents tend to tease their children playfully to a greater extent than they do each other:

Wife (44 years old): *We don't tease each other, he gets offended.*

Husband (47 years old): *I also don't make any jokes.*

Wife: *We used to constantly tease Ksyusha, the older daughter. She asked: "What is this white thing in the sky?" And everybody wanted to outdo each other by telling her that it was an explosion, or it was painted by a crazy artist, and she would say philosophically: "Okay, it's a plane". She got offended if someone tried to make fun of her.*



Humour at children's expense

- Different power dynamics and attitudes towards humour between adults and children:

Our kid often tells us with a tight-lipped frown: “But I don’t have a sense of humour, I do not understand why you are laughing”. – “So that’s exactly why we are laughing!”. Or it can be: “I do not understand your jokes!”. – “How cannot you understand, we are just teasing benevolently!”. – “No, I am still offended”. (male, 36 years old).



Child as a point of reference in humorous

- Comparing each other to children is a way of teasing:

*She [the interviewee's wife] says:
"Cook your meals yourself, why would I cook for you – are you a small kid? My third son?" (male, 31 years old)*



Humour in parent-children communication

- A didactic tool (a form of criticizing);
- Establishing intimacy;
- Mediating conflicts;
- Breaching the gap in intergenerational communication.



Humorous vs bona fide communication

Case 1. Speaking the language of cartoons



Humorous vs bona fide communication

Case 2. Humorous swearing



Discussion

- Children can play the role of subjects, objects and intermediaries of jokes;
- Humour can offer alternative ways of communication between generations;
- Humorous context deprives some folklore of its taboo status;
- Family humour can be regarded as an important step in children's initiation to adult life.

Thank you for your attention!

