

PRACTICAL VIEWPOINT

THE COLLECTION OF HUNGARIAN TRADITIONAL GAMES

Katalin Lázár

Folk Music Archives

Institute for Musicology, Hungarian Academy of Sciences

Hungary

lazar.katalin@abtk.hu

Abstract: In the first half of the twentieth century, the collection of Hungarian traditional games was housed in the archives of the department of folk music of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences. Folk music researchers published the first volume of the *Corpus Musicae Popularis Hungaricae I*, with the title *Children's Games*, containing 1,162 songs from traditional games. As Zoltán Kodály, world-famous folk musicologist, wrote in the preface of the volume, the publication of the volume marked the beginning of the work, not the end of it. Further work has verified this. The type system of traditional games was completed in the 1980s, and contained all kinds of games. It was developed on the basis of Hungarian traditional games although it is also suitable for systematising the traditional games of other European peoples. The article exemplifies a decades-long journey of a collection from an analogue format to a database.

Keywords: folk music, games, game melodies, Hungarian folklore

Different branches of science and education take an interest in traditional games. In the nineteenth century linguists collected Hungarian traditional games, with the help of which they could study, on the one hand, language dialects, and on the other hand, various linguistic phenomena. Among the experts of the movement, the teachers of physical education, there were also some who collected and taught traditional games in the twentieth century. In kindergartens nurses have also taught traditional games by making objects (rag dolls, figures of animals, etc.) to develop children's manual skills. At the beginning of the twentieth century folk music researchers were interested in traditional games, to be more exact, their melodies, as the twin-bar melodies of the games are different from the strophic melodies of songs of the grown-ups, being more archaic.

This is partly the reason why the collection of traditional games at the Institute for Musicology (Hungarian Research Network, Research Centre for the Humanities) increased up to 13,000 descriptions, which was the result of collecting traditional games by teachers of physical education and of students of the kindergarten teachers' training-school. These descriptions reached the Institute for Musicology, independently from whether they had melodies or not.

In 1951 the melodies of traditional games were published as the first volume of *Corpus Musicae Popularis Hungaricae* (Treasury of Hungarian Folk Music): the system of the melodies was created by Pál Járdányi. In the second half of the volume the system of György Kerényi is presented, created on the basis of the actions of the games.

After György Kerényi, Ilona Borsai became the researcher of the collection of traditional games at the Institute for Musicology, and she regarded not only researching but also publishing and popularisation of traditional games as very important. This is proven by her studies and publications on traditional games:¹ the latter ones she compiled from the material of the collection together with other researchers.

In 1971 the Institute and the youth section of Hungarian Radio announced a competition, to which more than 140 works were submitted. The works of certain senders contained only a few games known to them; however, some other senders collected more than a hundred games and sent those, so the collection increased by more than 2,500 descriptions.

From 1980, my task at the Institute was to systematise and study traditional games, after Ilona Borsai, who was a tireless enricher and excellent researcher of the collection. However, she was not interested in systematisation, and collected certain kinds of games and lyrics of games for the sake of research and comparison. I considered the systematisation of the material of the whole collection to be my first task.

The material of traditional games is highly complex, so its systematisation is possible from many perspectives. A game may have a melody, lyrics, form, action, and other systems. However, none of these is suitable for keeping all the highly mixed material in one system. It was my task to create a system suitable for this: this was made in the 1980s. This is the type system of traditional games, similar to the one based on action, but much more exact. As the actions of traditional games are sometimes very ramifying, it was more useful to base the system on the game seed, the most important element, without which the game cannot be played, or without which it would be another game.

Types were created on the basis of the game seed: games with the same game seed are variants of a game type. There are levels above and below the level

of the types. Types being similar to each other from some kind of aspect form a type group, and type groups having a common characteristic form a block. The uppermost level of the type system is that of the blocks, containing 6 of them; under that comes the level of the type groups – 24 of them; under that there is the level of the types – more than 1,000 of them. There are 3 levels under the level of types, created on the basis of other elements of action besides the game seed, or just on the basis of lyrics, or even melodies. These are the levels of subtypes, under them the level of inner distributions and under them the further distributions of those. There are a number of types having all the three levels under the type level, but there are also a number of those having no levels under the type level.

When an opportunity presented itself for the material of the collection of traditional games to get on computer, a method of numbering had to be created as well. The numbers are separated by dots, on one place by a virgule. The first number (4) shows that this is a collection of traditional games at the Institute for Musicology. The second number shows one of the 6 blocks. The third number contains 3 figures: the first one shows the type group of the block, the other two – the place of the type in the type group. The fourth number was originally 0 everywhere: the function of this number is to make it possible to insert new types. This is necessary as the system is open, and when new data are added, new types may be created, as it happened in the past 20–25 years. After that there is a virgule followed by the numbers of the levels under the level of the type, also separated by dots. If there are no such levels, the virgule is followed by 00; if there is/are such level(s), there is a number consisting of two figures, the second figure being originally 0 everywhere (0/10, 0/20, 0/30, etc.). The second figure is necessary for making it possible to insert new subtypes, inner distributions or further distributions between two others.

The blocks and type groups with the numbering are shown in the following table.

BLOCKS	TYPE GROUPS
Games using implements 4.1.xxx.x/xx	Games making objects (4.1.1xx.x/xx) Games of skill using implements (4.1.2xx.x/xx) Ball games (4.1.3xx.x/xx)
Games of movement 4.2.xxx.x/xx	Games of infants (4.2.1xx.x/xx) Various games of skill and strength (4.2.2xx.x/xx) Tag games (4.2.3xx.x/xx) Games of procession (4.2.4xx.x/xx)

Games of the intellect 4.3.xxx.x/xx	Games of mental skills (4.3.1xx.x/xx) Tricks (4.3.2xx.x/xx) Guessing games (4.3.3xx.x/xx & 4.3.3xx.xx/xx) Hiding and seeking games (4.3.4xx.x/xx) Games of taboo (4.3.5xx.x/xx)
Games of pair selection 4.4.xxx.x/xx	Pair selection ring games (4.4.1xx.x/xx) Games asking for the girl's hand (4.4.2xx.x/xx) Pair selection parlour games (4.4.3xx.x/xx)
Rhymes 4.5.xxx.x/xx	Nature rhymes (4.5.1xx.x/xx) Plant rhymes (4.5.2xx.x/xx) Animal rhymes (4.5.3xx.x/xx) Rhymes for infants (4.5.4xx.x/xx) Taunts (4.5.5xx.x/xx – 4.5.6xx.x/xx) Others (4.5.7xx.x/xx) Moral songs (4.5.8xx.x/xx)
Drawing lots, counting out 4.6.xxx.x/xx	Drawing lots (4.6.1xx.x/xx) Counting out (4.6.2xx.x/xx)

In the 1990s László Dobszay, the creator of the type system of Hungarian traditional music and professor of the Musical Academy, received financial support for making students of the Musical Academy enter the data of the parts of the type system in the computer. When this work was finished, there was still some money left, and I could ask them to enter the data of the type system of the traditional games in the computer as well. The collection was entered in the Isis database management programme, every description with four indicators: type number, locality, county, and identification number. The identification number could be an inventory number of those data without sound recording, or the number of Academic Pyral disc in the sound archive of the Institute, or the reference of publication and the number of pages or the game.

The problem with the database management programme was that it needed plenty of time to insert between two descriptions a third one: in every single case it took more minutes for the programme to make place for the new one. This does not seem to be a great problem if you want to insert one description, but back then there was too much data to insert, and when I wanted to insert 30 descriptions, and in all the 30 cases I had to wait some more minutes (altogether more than an hour), it was very annoying. I was pleased when a colleague of mine solved the problem: he transferred the whole material into an excel file.

The type number, the location, the county and the identification number each got a column, and it was very easy to insert new data.

During the past years I developed the database significantly: instead of 4 indicators, all descriptions have 14 ones now: the type number, location, information about the location, county, primary identification number, further identification numbers, primary publication, further publications, the name of the collector, the date of collecting, the name of the informant, the date of birth of the informant, the beginning of the lyrics, the beginning of the melody, and the number of the Type System of Traditional Melodies. There are descriptions for all the 14 indicators, but generally there are 10 indicators: there is a ~ where we do not know the data (e.g., the name and the date of birth of the informant); there is a – where there are no data (e.g., the game has no melody). The localities beyond the frontier have Slovakian, Romanian, German, and Serbian names as well: these are written in the column of information about the location. Descriptions published several times are written in the column of primary and further publications, but there are also unpublished descriptions with no information written in the columns of publications, and there are games having no melodies and no lyrics (e.g., hopscotch or hobbyhorse), having nothing written in the last 3 columns. The table demonstrates a small part of a sheet, containing games with melody and lyrics. The complete file shows that the collection contained 35,434 descriptions as of 25 August 2017, but as at present there are more than 1,000 games that are not yet included in the collection and not entered in the computer, this number changes weekly.

This file is one of the most important ones in the collection, but not at all the only one. There is a list of types, showing what the type numbers mean. From that we can see that, for example, the type 4.2.115.0 contains clapping games with 4 subtypes, in the second and third subtypes there are 5 and 6 inner distributions respectively, created on the basis of lyrics. The number of types, inner and further distributions also increases because new descriptions are added into the collection: mainly new subtypes, inner and further distributions are created, but it also happens that new types are created. On 25 August 2017 the collection contained altogether 4,685 types, subtypes, inner and further distributions.

Besides this I considered making the database of informants and that of collectors also worthy. Especially the database of informants proved to be useful in certain cases, when, for example, it helped to find out the date of birth, which did not always become evident from the age of the informant. The database of the informants contains the location, the name and date of birth of the informant, the date of collection, his/her age at that time and the name of the

collector. The database of the collectors contains the name of the collector, the location, and the date of collecting.

In 2016 I began to compile a volume of traditional games of Germans living in Hungary with the help of a colleague speaking excellent German. In the course of this work it came to light that German traditional games can be easily systematised according to the system created on the basis of Hungarian traditional games. I had suspected it earlier, since the majority of traditional games are known internationally: there are no people the children of which traditionally did not play tag games, hide-and-peek games, did not tell rhymes about natural phenomena and animals, so it is possible to enumerate all type groups. This was verified in the course of compiling the volume of German traditional games.

The system created and working for more than 20 years could be usable for foreign researchers as well. For this it is necessary to translate it, for example, into English. First I thought about translating the list of types, but I realised that the translation “unpaired game” or “pure tag game” does not make their meaning quite clear, especially if neither the translator nor the foreign researcher is English.

Finally, I came to the conclusion that it was necessary to write down how unpaired games, pure tag games and all the others are played. I completed the recording of the type system of Hungarian traditional games. In this all blocks, type groups, types, subtypes, inner and further distributions are written down: how these are played, and why they are where they are. At the end of every distribution there is a table showing territorial division: how much data is found in the type/subtype/inner distribution / further distribution and from where. In addition to this, the significant variants of lyrics, and, if there are melodies, the significant variants of those are also written down. In 2023 the text, transcriptions of melodies and necessary drawings were ready, the Hungarian variant was completed and, with a positive opinion of a proofreader, it was given to a publisher.

I planned to translate it into English, but my English is not good enough for that. I made a variant for translation. There are many things in the Hungarian variant which would be left out: the territorial division, transcriptions and Hungarian lyrics are not necessary in the English translation. The subtypes, inner and further distributions created on the basis of lyrics or melodies were also left out, only a mention was made that they exist in the Hungarian type system. Other peoples' lyrics and melodies are evidently different, so these are not worth the trouble of translating.

Unfortunately, the type system was not translated by anyone speaking English as the mother tongue or speaking better English than me. The Hungarian text for translation is ready, and the drawings in the Hungarian variant can be used; hopefully there will be someone to translate it into English.

NOTES

- ¹ Without the demand of completeness: Borsai 1980, 1981, 1984; Borsai et al. 1954; Borsai & Haider & Kovács 1976, 1977; Borsai & Hajdu & Igaz 1980; Borsai & Kovács 1976.

REFERENCES

- Borsai, Ilona 1980. Gyermekjátékaink és mondókáink dallamvilága. [The Melodies of Our Children's Games and Rhymes.] In: Ilona Borsai & Gyula Hajdu & Mária Igaz (eds.) *Magyar népi gyermekjátékok*. [Hungarian Traditional Games.] Ének-zene szakköri füzetek 2. Budapest: Tankönyvkiadó, pp. 67–76.
- Borsai, Ilona 1981. A magyar népi gyermekmondóka műfaji sajátosságai. [Literary Characteristics of Hungarian Traditional Rhymes.] In: Ilona Borsai. *Gyermekjátékos III*. Szombathely: Megyei Művelődési és Ifjúsági Központ, pp. 1–57.
- Borsai, Ilona 1984. Népi gyermekjátékok, mondókák. [Traditional Games, Rhymes.] In: László Dobszay (ed.) *A magyar dal könyve*. [The Book of Hungarian Songs.] Budapest: Zeneműkiadó, pp. 17–110.
- Borsai, Ilona & Czigány, Tibor & Igaz, Mária & Pesovár, Ernő 1954. *Népi gyermekjátékaink az általános iskola I-II. osztályában*. [Our Traditional Games in the 1st–2nd Forms of the Elementary School.] Budapest: Tankönyvkiadó.
- Borsai, Ilona & Haider, Edit & Kovács, Ágnes 1976. *Bújj, bújj, zöld ág*. [Slip through, Slip through, Green Branch.] Budapest: Móra Ferenc Könyvkiadó.
- Borsai, Ilona & Haider, Edit & Kovács, Ágnes 1977. *Kivirágzott a diófa*. [The Walnut Tree Blossomed.] Budapest: Móra Ferenc Könyvkiadó.
- Borsai, Ilona & Hajdu, Gyula & Igaz, Mária 1980. *Magyar népi gyermekjátékok*. [Hungarian Traditional Games.] Ének-zene szakköri füzetek 2. 4th ed. Budapest: Tankönyvkiadó.
- Borsai, Ilona & Kovács, Ágnes 1976. *Cinege, cinege, kismadár*. [Tit, Tit, Little Bird.] Budapest: RTV–Minerva.
- Kerényi, György (ed.) 1951. *Corpus Musicae Popularis Hungaricae I. Children's Games*. Budapest: Zeneműkiadó.

Katalin Lázár

Katalin Lázár (PhD) is ethnomusicologist, concentrating mainly on Finno-Ugrian folk music and Hungarian traditional games.

lazar.katalin@abtk.hu