

TYOLOGY OF FOLK GAMES

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1. QUESTIONS OF CLASSIFICATION

Researchers and teachers dealing with folk games sooner or later face the question of classifying the games. Researchers need such a system for their comparative work and for publication of the material, while teachers need it for use in practice.

Classification can be made on the basis of all elements of the game. A system can be created on the basis of the text of the games, their melody, spatial form or the age of the children playing them. Each of these has its justification: the musicologist and the singing teacher are interested mainly in melody, the folklorist and literature teacher in the text, and the physical education teacher in spatial form. It is also important for teachers to know what games to teach children of which age. However, none of the elements mentioned is able to serve as a basis for a system that contains all kinds of games.

Classification on the basis of text, melody and spatial form can be applied to only some games: many games have no text, even fewer have a melody, and fewer still a specified spatial form. The basic forms of tag or making floral wreathes, for example, are played without text, melody or spatial form; most forms of counting out have a rhythmic text but no melody; most games for infants have a text and melody but no spatial form.

Classification by age raises different problems. Firstly: the material collected does not always contain information on the ages of the children who played the different games. Secondly: the age limits can be very broad for certain games. Squatting ring games, for example, are generally designated as games of children aged 3–5 or 4–6 years, while ring games choosing pairs are played by girls 8–12 years old, so that these can be regarded as acceptable age groups. But what would be the classification of games of tag which are played from the age of 5–6 years right up to 12–14 years (some kinds even later)? Thirdly: the age groups may change for some games. Games asking for a girl's hand, for example, were traditionally played by girls aged 12–14 years, approaching the age of marriage, but nowadays in the towns they are taught to children of kindergarten age. Since they enjoy these games (not only the girls, but the boys as well), it would be foolish to say that they shouldn't play them, particularly since children aged 12–14 years now consider themselves too old for these games. It is useful, then, to keep age in sight when teaching, changes

such as the above must be known, and it is not fortunate to build a system on this basis.

Since the games material in the Institute of Musicology of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences is not restricted to singing games,¹ a principle of classification that could be used for the entire material had to be found. This principle is the game action (since all games have a mode of play) and within this the game core, the most important element of the action.²

2. TYPE, TYPE GROUP, BLOCK

One of the most important phenomena distinguishing folk culture from high culture is that the products of folk culture exist in variants. The same game with more or less differing text or melody may be played with different rules in Transdanubia from those followed in north-eastern Hungary: the difference is not an error as it would be, for example, when reciting a verse, but a variant.

The sum of variants of a given game is the *type*. The similar types form *type groups* and the type groups form *blocks*. In the typology of games, the four game blocks are joined by two rhyme blocks. Within the different types, other principles of classification may also be applied. Subtypes have been formed within some types on the basis of text,³ in others according to melody;⁴ there are others where spatial form⁵ or age⁶ also play a determining role.

3. THE TYPOLOGY

The four blocks of games comprise games using implements, of movement, of the intellect and pair selection.

¹ Among others, the extensive collection of games made in the Folk Art Institute in the early 1950s was also placed here; they include a large number of sport-type folk games and other game genres without melody. The monographic publications also contain many games without melody.

² The principle of classification by game action is not new: György KERÉNYI used it to classify the game material in Volume I of the Collection of Hungarian Folk Music. The innovation is introduction of the concept of game core; in addition, the practical realisation also differs from KERÉNYI's system. This is not surprising, since we now have more than 25 times more material than we did in 1951: there were 1160 games in Vol. I of the Collection of Hungarian Folk Music and in March 2000 we have more than 26,000 descriptions of games in our archives.

³ Within the type of turning out ring games, for example, we find text subtypes ("Lánc, lánc, eszter-lánc"; "Ispiláng, ispiláng"; "Kis kacsá fürdik"; "Most jöttem Bécsből", etc.).

⁴ The melody played the main role in forming the subtypes of one pair selection game, "Fehér lilionszál" (bipodal, beginning with *sssl s m*; bipodal beginning from *soh*; tripodal beginning with *d-m-s-s-m-s*; tripodal beginning with *s-s-l-f-m-f*, etc.)

⁵ Among the games asking for a girl's hand, for example, we distinguish ring games and row games.

⁶ Games for infants, for example, are played by children under two.

3.1. GAMES USING IMPLEMENTS

The essence of games using implements is what happens to the implement figuring in the game: can I make it? Can I handle it skilfully enough? These are games of the outside world which require materials or objects of natural or man-made origin from the environment.

We distinguish four type groups of games using implements: games making objects, games of skill using implements, ball games and sport-type folk games.

3.1.1. Games making objects

As the name of the type group indicates, the essence of the games belonging here is the production of an implement or object. These can be of many different kinds, ranging from objects imitating the adult environment (*sand castle, well, oven*), to copies of various implements they use (*toy furniture, farm equipment, weaving-frame*). This group includes toy animals (*pigs, horses, cattle* made of clay or plant parts or fruits), *dolls* made of various materials, different kinds of vehicles (*paper boats, carts*) and the jewels and ornaments (*floral necklaces, floral rings, wheat bouquets*). The types formed of musical instruments (*rattle, plucked instrument, reed violin, whistles*) and of weapons (*slingshots, mud guns, popguns, bows and arrows*) are important.

3.1.2. Games using implements based on skill

The essence of games using implements based on skill is whether the player can handle an implement with sufficient skill. This implement may be simply a flat *pebble* which they try to skim across the surface of water, or a *hoop* driven with a stick taking care not to let it fall over, or *five small pieces of bone* that have to be picked up from the ground in a specified way. This group includes *string games* (the players pass string wound around the fingers to each other in a specified way), *tiddly-winks* and *skipping*.

3.1.3. Ball games

Ball games are in reality also games of skill using implements, but they are distinguished from the previous group of games by their implement, the extremely popular *ball* which has multiple uses. Basically two modes of play are known: *catching* and *throwing out* games.

In catching games, the aim is to catch the ball. These include throwing the ball against a wall and catching it and a game in which a penalty is paid for dropping the ball: the first time the ball is dropped the player must stand on one foot, the second time he must cross his legs, the third time he must kneel on one knee, the fourth time on both knees and the fifth time he must lie flat on the ground. If he succeeds in catching the ball, he may go one step higher (e.g. from two knees to one).

In throwing out games, the ball must be thrown so that it hits someone then falls to the ground. In one of these games each player chooses the name of a country and when this name is called he tries to throw out the others as they scatter. In a simpler form, the ball is thrown up into the air and the player who catches it can throw any other player out. This is a game of all against all and the one who remains in last is the winner.

3.1.4. Sport-type folk games

The essential difference between games in this group and sports is that the latter have internationally accepted, uniform rules while the folk forms are played in numerous variants, sometimes even within the same village. This is why the name of “folk sports games” met with protest.

One group contains games of a pastoral origin. In the *swineherd game*, holes are dug, one less than the number of players: these are grouped around a larger hole in the centre. The player who cannot occupy a hole by placing the end of his stick in it after the rhyme has been said becomes the swineherd who tries to drive a ball into the central hole with his stick. Herding the animals can be recognised in this game. In another game, *csülkőzés* (=knuckle-boning) a stick must be thrown at a piece of wood to knock it over, while the guard sets it up again if it has been struck: during this time the players must run for their sticks which are lying on the ground and run back with them behind the strike line.

The other group comprises games found throughout Europe or even on the other continents. One of the best known of these games internationally is *rounders*, a game of Graeco–Roman origin, which was a game of kings and aristocrats in Hungary in the 15th–16th centuries. It reached the villages through college students. It is still played in different forms on all five continents and is the basis of baseball.

3.2. GAMES OF MOVEMENT

The essence of games of movement is to be able to perform a given movement or form of movement. There is movement in all games, but here it is the central element around which the game is organised. These are games of the body.

Four type groups are distinguished within the games of movement: games of infants, various games of skill and strength, tag games and procession games.

3.2.1. Games of infants

The games of infants are typical games of movement: right from the age of a few weeks or months, these games help them to learn the limits of their own bodies, the parts of the body and the movements that can be performed with them. How long a child enjoys them depends on the individual; sometimes even children of 6–8 years

suddenly feel nostalgia for them. They are generally popular up to the age of 2–3 years.

In the literature this group of games is often called “Games of adults with infants”. However, the games listed below are not games of adults, even if it is the adult who is the initiator or the active partner. The games serve to entertain the infant, are adapted to the child’s “vocabulary” and range of movements and teach the child to perform various movements. They include *face stroking*, *finger games* and *palm games* which are often linked with each other, *clapping*, *fist tapping*, *dancing*, *bouncing on the knees*, *carrying on the shoulders*, etc. The related texts often refer to a work process: the text of a clapping game can be simply an encouragement to clap, but in variants with a more archaic text we say “Bake, bake a cake / For Mother, for Father, / For little Anna!” The clapping evokes a movement used in kneading the dough. The same applies to the punching games where one common text variant is: “Crush, crush the poppyseed, / We’ll bake a cake with it!” The texts are not said alone, but with simple, short melodies.

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Csip - csip csó - ka,	Vak var - júcs - ka,
Jó volt - e a	Kis - fi - úcs - ka?
Ha nem volt jó	Kis - fi - úcs - ka,
Meg - e - szi a	Vak var - júcs - ka!

3.2.2. Various games of skill and strength

This is a rather heterogeneous group; the only thing linking the types belonging here is that strength and/or skill are needed to perform the movement on which the game is based. The games range from *swinging* and the *hopscotch* already known from Breughel’s Children’s Games, through various kinds of *leap-frogging*, to *whirling in pairs*, *jumping in pairs*, *squatting* and *turning out* games. Some of them have neither melody nor text while others are round games with song (e.g. the squatting games), or jumping and whirling in pairs which are also accompanied by singing.

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Für - dik a ká - csa	Fe - ke - te tó - ba',
Any - já - hoz ké - szül	Len - gyel - or - szág - ba,
A - ra - nyos a há - ta,	E - züs - tös a tal - pa,
Sze - der - sze - mű szép Ma - ris - ka,	For - dulj an - gyal - mód - ra!

3.2.3. Games of tag

The essence of all types in this group is that a selected child (the “he”) must catch someone. This central element may be accompanied by a dialogue, melody or spatial form, it may be played individually or in two teams. The task of the “he” may be made more difficult in various ways, e.g. movement in space may be restricted, he may be blindfolded, he may be required to run holding the part of his own body where he was touched, etc.

3.2.4. Processions

Elder girls played games of walking in procession through the village or in a particular spot in various spatial formations: one of their important aims was for the whole village to see the girls dressed in their Sunday best. In part they are of cultic origin: one variant, for example, is the “new moon game”, its spatial form is a crescent, another has preserved the custom of walking in procession around the village lands in spring.

The image shows a musical score for a Hungarian folk song. It consists of nine staves of music in a single system, each with a corresponding line of lyrics in Hungarian. The music is written in a simple, rhythmic style, likely for a single melodic line. The lyrics are:

Egy sze-ge, két sze-ge, hat sze-le - me - nye,

Hat ágy hagy - ma, Hat - van diny - nye,

Csi - ri - pám fe - ne - ke, Hol a tik - nak a fi - a,

Szór i - de, szór o - da, Ki - men - tek a domb - ra.

Ka - lo - csa - i sző - lő - he - gyen hat szál vesz - szó,

Ősz - sze - szed - ték, ősz - sze - fon - ták, Ősz - sze - ko - co - gat - ták.

Szél fúj - do - gál - ja, Har - mat haj - to - gál - ja.

Á - ru - di, pá - ru - di, Majd el - fá - rad egy - gyen - ki,

Azt se tud - ja, me - lyi - ké, Husz, husz, husz.

3.3. INTELLECTUAL GAMES

Intellectual games test the players' memory, thinking and inventiveness. The intelligence is the main actor: these are games of the intellect and reason.

We distinguish five groups of intellectual games: games of mental skill, tricks, guessing, finding and taboo games.

3.3.1. Games of intellectual skill

Players are successful in these games if they can say shorter or longer texts, if they can keep the sometimes very complicated rules, if they can respond quickly enough. These games include the short verses listing the days of the week or the numbers from one to ten, drawing and line-drawing games, tongue-twisters and alliterating rhymes, syllable or word chains (when the next player has to say a word beginning with the last syllable or letter of a word); there are also a number of types where the player has to obey a command under given circumstances, or at other times must do the opposite of the command. An example of the latter is "*Pull, let go*" where the players hold the edge of a kerchief and the leader traces circles, saying "Pull, let go, pull, let go, pull, let go..." He suddenly points to one of the players who must do the opposite of the command; if it is "Let go" he must pull the kerchief, and if it is "Pull" he must let go. Players who foul must give a pledge. A similar game is *Commanding*. In this the leader says various commands which either begin with the word "Kubó" or not. Those that do must be obeyed, while those that do not must be ignored.

3.3.2. Trick games

The games belonging here show similar features to initiation customs: one thing in which they are definitely similar is that a child plays the trick games only once in his life. Each has a trick that the still uninitiated does not know and this is the basis of the game: once a child knows the trick he does not allow himself to be tricked again. These include many riddles, such as: "Do you believe that I can draw a line you can't step over?" The other tries to guess why he couldn't step over a line: if it is too thick to step over, if he has to step over it lengthways, and after negative replies he declares that he doesn't believe it. Then the questioner draws a line at the foot of a tree: it is in fact impossible to step over! But next time he tries in vain if the other person knows the trick.

There are many games in which the essence is pouring water on someone: someone sends a young lad out of the room saying that he will cut off the sleeve off his coat and sew it back without thread or needle. The lad slips half out of his coat and pushes the sleeve in the door, but it is neither cut off nor sewn back: the trickster pours a jug of water into the sleeve and it flows back onto the owner.

3.3.3. Guessing games

The essence of these games is to find out something. For example, the occupation demonstrated in the movements of the other player; which of the other players hit him on the bottom; who is covering his eyes (either by feeling the head and hands of the person covering his eyes, or from the distorted voice when he asks: “Hoo, who am I?”). In the *flower name* game, the player has to guess at random and without prompting: the “angel” and the “devil” go in turns to the “gardener” to ask for flowers; after a dialogue they say a flower name at random and if one of the players is a flower of this name they take the player.

3.3.4. Finding games

In these games the seeking is the essence: either a hidden toy or players in hiding must be found. In the *ring* game, a leader goes round the players and makes the motion of dropping a ring into the hand of each player. At the end of the melody they call in the seeker who has to find the ring: if he succeeds they change places, if not he remains the seeker. If a player is unsuccessful three times, he is given a “punishment”.

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Kul-lán-kul-lán gyű - rű, Ná-lad, ná- lad a-rany-gyű-rű,
 Kér-di, kér- di kis- fi - át, A- rany-bé - lű szom-széd-ját,
 Itt csö-rög, ott csö-rög, Csak- u- gyan is itt van,
 Meg - főtt a ká - sa, Be-gyü-het a pá - pa.

Two children play the *hidden object* game: one hides a small object (coin, pebble, etc.) in one hand and the other has to find it.

Hide-and-seek games include those where players seek not a hidden object but each other: this game may have various rules and can be played individually or in two teams.

3.3.5. Taboo games

The essence of games in this group is that the players are not allowed to do something. The players test each other’s endurance and self-discipline: how long can they resist blinking, speaking, moving or laughing. *Staring out* is a game played by

two: they look into each other's eyes and the first one to blink is the loser. In the *silence-making game* someone shouts a short verse which ends with the declaration that the next to speak will be the devil or the fool or perhaps will have to do something unpleasant. In the *statue game* one of the players (the "sculptor") stands with his back to the others who are leaping around and when he suddenly turns round everyone must freeze in their pose. The "sculptor" picks the most beautiful statue, but anyone who moves is eliminated from the game.

The most frequent taboo is laughing. A great variety of games to *induce laughing* are known: the main actor is generally a questioner and all the players have to answer his questions with the same set word (e.g. "dishcloth"). The players must not laugh, something that is not easy if the question was, for example, "What did you have for breakfast?"

3.4. PAIR SELECTION GAMES

The essence of pair selection games is to decide turns or to select partners. The game throws light on attractions and relations formed among the children. These are games of the heart.

Pair selection games can be divided into three type groups: pair selection round games, games seeking the girl's hand and pair selection parlour games.

3.4.1. *Pair selection round games*

In reality this is a single type since the action is the same in all games belonging here: the players form a circle, one stands in the centre and at the appropriate place in the song selects a pair (if not at the end, they dance until the end), then joins the ring and the player chosen remains in the centre. The difference lies in what they sing during the game. Since everyone regards the games with different texts and melodies as different games and since there are also many variants within the different text types, it is expedient to treat these as a type group, classifying them into types on the basis of the texts.

In this group there are many melodies of foreign origin borrowed from other peoples, and moral songs which always cause the elimination of a more archaic variant closer to Hungarian folk taste. For this reason, we do not recommend the spread and popularisation of these.

It is important that these games were originally played only by girls. Boys would have been ashamed to join and the girls would not have let them: they would have laughed at a boy wanting to take part in such a game. It is therefore friendly relations among the girls that play the main role.

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Kis ka-csa fűr - dik fe - ke - te tó - ba',
Any - já - hoz ké - szül Len - gyel - or - szág - ba,

Hej, bögyem, bö - gyem, szép lány ba - rá - tom,

A - kit sze - retsz, azt vedd be!

Ezt sze - re - tem, Ez az én é - de - sem!
Ezt ked - ve - lem,

Ad - jon Is - ten las - sú e - sőt,
Mos - sa ősz - sze mind a ket - tőt,

Tánc - ra, a Ti - sza part - já - ra!

Ha pénz vol - na, csőr - ge - ne, Még - is ki - for - dul - na.
Ró - zsa vol - na, il - le - ne,

Kál - ló - ba' fúj - ják, Deb - re - cen - be' jár - ják,
A kas - sa - i lá - nyok
Csak azt ki - a - bál - ják:

Ker - tem a - latt í - ró - di - ák, E - redj ki po - kol - ba!

Tá - lat tör - tem, Szi - ta, szi - ta pén - tek,
El - rop - pan - tam,

szil - lá - rom csü - tör - tők, dob szer - da!

3.4.2. Games seeking the girl's hand

In games seeking the girl's hand the elder girls play different elements of the custom. The circle represents the bride's house: in earlier times it was called the royal house or castle and research has shown that the game of marching around the castle preserves the memory of an old ceremony from the time of the Magyar settlement. The mother (queen) stands in the centre of the circle and the suitor moves outside it. After singing and a dialogue, the suitor takes a girl from the circle who goes with her. The game continues until he has taken all the girls from the circle.

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 Most vi-szik, most vi-szik Da-ni-ká-né lá-nyát,
 Bí-bor-ba', bár-sony-ba', gyön-gyös ko-szo-rú-ba',
 Nem a-dom a lá-nyo-mat a-rany-hin-tó nél-kül,
 Ab-ba' pe-dig hat ló le-gyen,
 Mind a hat-nak a-rany far-ka le-gyen!

There is only one type of game where the girls form a line, not a circle and the suitor stands facing them. They sing in turns and at the end he takes a girl until all the girls are on his side.

These games too are played only by girls and the suitor is also a girl.

3.4.3. Pair selection parlour games

These games are probably of middle class origin; this is indicated by certain elements in them and by the fact that there is little variation in the individual types. They were generally played in the spinning room, or on occasions when boys and girls met. These games were played together and the interesting thing in them was that they could reveal which boy liked which girl and vice versa.

In the game known as *I've fallen into a well* someone sits on a chair placed in the middle of the room and conducts a dialogue with the others: "I've fallen into a well! – How many feet deep is it? – One/Two/Six feet deep! – Who'll pull you out?" Here the person sitting in the middle, if a girl says a boy's name and if a boy, a girl's name; the person named goes up to the person on the stool and gives as many kisses as the depth of the well. Then that person remains in the middle and the game begins again.

3.5. RHYMES

Rhymes are distinguished from other games by being associated with particular occasions: they are said only in certain situations. The *call to the sun* is said only in cloudy, cold weather, the “*I live – I die*” verse is said when an acacia leaf is found, the one addressed to a stork is said when the first stork is seen in the spring.

In form these are generally rhymed couplets, often with a melody but sometimes only rhythmic.

The type groups of rhymes are: nature, plant and animal rhymes, cradle songs, taunts, and other rhymes.

3.5.1. Nature rhymes

Rhymes addressed to the sun and rain belong here: it is interesting to note that there are no rhymes addressed to other natural phenomena (wind, snow, etc.) in the Hungarian games material. The children address the sun and the rain as equal partners, encouraging the sun to shine and give warmth and the rain to fall to “Let oats increase, wheat grow bushy”. These rhymes preserve the traces of the magic view of the world, when belief in the power of the spoken word was still alive.

E - sik e - ső Szil - va - fa tö - vé - be,
 Zab sza - po - rod - jék, Bú - za bok - ro - sod - jék,
 Az én ha - jam o - lyan le - gyen, Mint a csi - kó far - ka,
 Még an - nál is hosz - szabb, Mint a Du - na hosz - sza.

3.5.2. Plant rhymes

The rhyme material about plants is quite limited in scope: the most popular type is one in which the petals or leaflets of a plant with many petals and leaves (acacia leaf, daisy) are stripped off to the rhyme: “I live, I die, I live, I die!”, or “He loves me, he loves me not, he loves me, he loves me not!” What is said as the last leaflet or petal is stripped is thought to be true.

3.5.3. Animal rhymes

There are a great variety of rhymes addressed to animals or imitating their voices. Practically all the animals a village child could meet figure in the collection, ranging from the different birds (titmouse, stork, swallow), to insects and beetles (moth, ladybird), spiders, snails and frogs, as well as domestic animals: the bull, the pig, goose and turkey. (Rhymes about cats and dogs are the product of art poetry.)

In these rhymes the children speak to the different animals in the same way as to the sun or rain: they ask the stork to bring a baby, the girls ask the ladybird where they will be taken to marry (in the direction the ladybird takes when it flies off their finger), they call the snail to come out of its house and encourage the goose to eat well. They imitate the voice of the titmouse, frog and pig.

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Ká - gyu - la, ká - gyu - la, told ki a szar - va - dat,

Ha nem to - lod, i - de vág - lak, ka - pu - fá - hoz vág - lak!
o - da vág - lak,

3.5.4. Cradle songs

These rhymes are addressed to infants, they are sung to them in the evening to put them to sleep. Some of the cradle songs contain only meaningless words (rocking words), together with an address to the baby (“Tente, baba, tente”; “Hejdelilibe”). In most cases, this text is expanded, e.g. “daddy’s gone to town to bring you a cake”, or “Daddy’s gone to the mill to bring you flour, we’ll bake a loaf”.

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Hej - de li - li - be,

Hej - de, hej - de, Ja - ni - kám!

E, e, e, e,

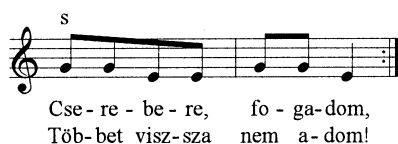
Haj - dá - ba, haj - dá - ba, Ja - ni - kám!

3.5.5. Taunting rhymes

Children taunt each other a lot. The taunting rhymes include *name taunts* (generally first names), *property taunts* (thin, fat, red-hair, untidy, lying, tell-tale, etc.), *occupation taunts* (smith, soldier), *nationality taunts* (Gypsy, Jew) and *other taunts* (e.g. if three persons are going along the street, a taunt can be addressed at the two on the outside or the one in the centre).

3.5.6. Other rhymes

This group contains rhymes which cannot be classified in any of the previous five groups. If someone finds someone else's lost belonging, he announces it to the others with a rhyme. If belongings are exchanged a rhyme is said to stress that they will not take back the exchanged things.



3.6. DRAWING LOTS, COUNTING OUT

Drawing lots and counting out are also linked to a particular occasion: they are used to select an actor for a game or to determine which role falls to each of two teams. In the case of drawing lots, the selection is made with an action of some kind; counting out texts are rhymes.

3.6.1. Drawing lots

Lots are generally drawn before sport-type games when it has to be decided which team starts or which is to be first to enjoy a more favourable position. This can be decided by the two team captains playing *hiding objects* (see under intellectual games), or by *pulling matchsticks* (one holds two matchsticks of different length between his fingers so that the difference in length cannot be seen and the other draws one; the player with the longer matchstick is the winner), or by *tossing a coin* (one tosses a coin into the air and the other says “Heads!” or “Tails!” and if the side he calls is face up when the coin falls, he is the winner.) Decisions are often made before games played with sticks by *clasping the stick* (the two captains clasp the stick in turn, hand over hand and the one who is still able to clasp it at the top wins); before the knuckle-boning game, the decision is made by *kicking sticks* (all the players place their sticks at their feet and when a sign is given kick them; the player whose stick is the closest is eliminated, that is, the player whose kick is least successful is the loser and becomes the guard).

3.6.2. Counting out

The counting out rhyme is an internationally known and widespread genre, but its role in folk games is probably less important than could be thought. It is generally used when someone has to be chosen for an unpleasant role, otherwise roles are frequently appointed by simple designation, when one of the leaders of a group says: “Let’s play flower names; I’ll be the gardener, you be the angel and you be the devil!”, or even: “Let’s play hide-and-seek, you be “he”!”

In form counting out rhymes are the same as the rhymes already discussed. Among the types according to the text, there are ones based on counting (*One, two, three*) and others consisting of entirely meaningless words (*Ántánténusz*).

^s
 Án - tán - té - nusz, U - be - re - ke té - tusz,
 U - be - re - ke ti - ke to - ka, E - je - fe - je bumm.

Both types are known throughout Europe; those with texts beginning “One, two, three” are also known in English, German and various Slavic languages, as are the nonsense texts. The latter have a ritual background (the origin of the “magic power” of the meaningless words is that the shaman or magician in contact with the other-world says the text backwards and since the reversed text has no meaning, later magic power was attributed to meaningless text in general).

4. THE TEACHING OF FOLK GAMES TODAY

In connection with our subject, it has of course been asked why children today attending kindergartens and schools in towns and housing estates need these games. In the past the function of games was to entertain children who, at the same time, while playing, became acquainted with different materials and plants, learnt to handle different implements (stick, penknife, string whip, rope), learnt to communicate and co-operate with other children and to respect the rules. The urban culture of today differs in many respects from the old village culture, but in towns, too, children have to find their place in the community, learn the norms of behaviour and respect all kinds of rules. Communities of children are now formed differently: while spontaneously formed communities of children living in the same neighbourhood exist, these are not the primary ones, but rather the kindergarten groups and school classes. However, this does not affect the essence: in these communities, too, folk games are able to play the same roles in the individual and social development of children as in the past in the village.

One such role is shaping and developing activity and creativity. In the traditional culture active participation had an important role not only in work but also in entertainment. Apart from a few drama-type folk customs, at the most the tale was a genre with the fundamental characteristic that it had an audience. Active participation, “self-sufficiency” was the general rule in both work and entertainment. Everyone danced, everyone sang, everyone played; people did not sit in a hall and watch the dancers or listen to songs on the radio. This is an essential difference between folk culture and what is called “high culture”: while the former was principally active participation the latter was mainly passive reception. Teachers and parents now know how important activity is for children. Play has a positive influence on their initiative, inventiveness and independence, developing these qualities in all children and in the least didactic way possible.

The other role is helping to shape group awareness. This is important, among others, because it is the basis for later awareness of belonging to larger groups. The roots of family love, local patriotism, national consciousness and patriotism are also found here.

Folk games help children not to be shy and retiring, or, on the contrary, aggressive and unable to communicate, teach them to co-operate and find their place in society. It is not our intention with the games to bring back an outdated, obsolete world, but to preserve those elements which satisfy general needs and so are still needed today.

It also follows from the complexity of the role of play that it cannot be regarded either as primitive singing, or primitive dancing, or primitive sports. It is able to give something to all three areas, although it cannot be regarded as the preformation of any of these either. It is sufficient to say that children learn – almost incidentally – various skills that are needed in sports and in dancing. We must never lose sight of the fact that this is not the aim in teaching games! Play should be taught in its own complexity, and if we give the children an experience and play with them ourselves we receive more than pure intonation of a melody or learning the basic steps of the *csárdás* for pairs.

Naturally, we must educate our children to find their place in today’s changed world and this means that we cannot rely solely on folk games. They should also learn to play chess (if they have the inclination), to play board games and computer games, but what folk games are able to offer should not be left out of their lives either!