





**LIISI LAINESTE**

Post-socialist jokes in Estonia:  
continuity and change

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## FOREWORD AND ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This dissertation represents a stage in the journey that I began in the year 1998, after discovering a weighty red volume of published papers presented at the first international conference of humour studies in Cardiff, Wales, 1976 (Chapmann & Foot 1977). This helped me to choose the direction for my first attempt at academic writing, and has not failed to inspire me ever since. Humour as a research topic is far from what one can call fun in an emotional sense, but its complexity and interdisciplinarity is compelling on an intellectual level. My field of research has caused perplexed looks, but at the same time earned me new friends by introducing me to a supporting society – the ISHS, International Society of Humour Studies – to which I am proud to belong.

After doing a course work and writing a bachelor's thesis about humour at the Department of Psychology of the University of Tartu, a fortuitous occasion relocated me to the Chair of Estonian and Comparative Folklore that has remained my academic home since then. That move also led to several changes in the way I looked at my subject – I acknowledged its interdisciplinary nature, finally managed to get a firmer grip on my research material, and came to terms with the inner life of the genre of jokes that for me had been just a means to acquire quantitative results.

During this journey, I have been blessed with a supervisor who is interested in and inspired by the subject of humour as much as I am. In addition to his other numerous areas of expertise, he has invested his time into studying humour to support my strivings in this field of research. In him I found the mentor who gave the necessary motivation towards pursuing an academic career above other possible choices, which was further supported by the fact that for the first years of our cooperation, we shared an office at the Estonian Literary Museum. That period was filled with long discussions about humour.

The research would have been restricted solely to Estonian material and a narrower selection of problems and literature, if there had not been substantial support from Estonian Science Foundation, grants No 4935 and 6759, starting from the year 2001. The grants provided substantial support for the designing and compilation of the primary resource for the following research, the database of Estonian contemporary humour (<http://www.folklore.ee/~liisi/o2>). The second term of the grant project also represented the start of the endeavour to perform comparative studies. Discussions with fellow researchers at the symposium of Post-Socialist Humour (organized by Arvo Krikmann and myself) gave me confidence that this is an under-studied but versatile branch of research, and the published compendium of the papers presented at the symposium offer evidence of the richness of the topic. I would like to thank all of the authors of this volume for taking the challenge and contributing to the overview of post-socialist humour, especially Dorota Brzozowska, Władisław Chłopicki, Christie Davies, and Jurate Kavaliauskaite for the well-orchestrated cooperation we developed along the way.

I am most grateful to all of my colleagues in Estonia and elsewhere for their assurance and advice, and for not thinking – or at least not showing publicly – that humour is a lighthearted and unscientific matter. Thought-provoking responses from audience members during seminars and other public presentations about parts of this dissertation have played a share in shaping this work. I have encountered only sincere interest and good ideas. Different people have advised me on various parts of my articles. I would like to thank Tiiu Jaago for her profound comments on the article about post-socialist political jokes, Elliott Oring for looking through the article about ethnic jokes and their targets in Estonia, Ülo Valk for commenting on the final version of the thesis, and of course Arvo Krikmann for commenting on all my articles. It nevertheless goes without saying that all ideas in the articles are mine, and so are the (potential) faults in form and content, as well as the responsibility for these. From the practical side of academic writing, I was inspired by Tiina-Ann Kirss' lectures on how to strike a balance between being precise yet captivating in scientific articles, and although I am only just beginning to discover the tools to achieve that, I hope my readers will bear with me and give me time to develop. All of these articles have been proofread by native speakers of English Alexander Harding and Casey Collins, who corrected my numerous mistakes. They offered (modest, but still encouraging) positive feedback about my command of the English language and consolation despite the heavy mark-up on each page.

Humour was indeed always present in my childhood home, but I must say that jokes as a genre remained an unfamiliar terrain for me for a long time. Nobody really told me jokes at home, and school was also a serious matter. This may also be the reason why I have for now dealt only with the text and its broader context, but not the performance itself.

This work would not have been possible without the support of my family and friends, who have kept company to my children Pipi-Lotta and Kataleena while I was writing articles, and of course Jaak who has accepted my non-profit occupation without any objections. My first steps in writing, drawing and other fields of self-discovery were faithfully supported by my grandmother Asta-Evi Reilent, who set an example for me by also pursuing an academic career in her youth. I hope this dissertation will partly also fulfil her dreams.

Tartu, October 2008

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## LIST OF PUBLICATIONS ON HUMOUR

1. Joon, Liisi (2002). Etniline huumor sotsiaalses kontekstis: Eesti ja Soome [Ethnic humour in social context: Estonia and Finland]. *Lemmeleht. Pro folkloristica*. Mall Hiimäe, Kanni Labi & Janika Oras. Tartu: Eesti Kirjandusmuuseum, pp. 25–37.
2. Joon, Liisi (2003a). Anekdoovid ideoloogia tööriistana: “Hallaste ja Murutari juhtumi” analüüs. [Jokes as a tool for ideology: The “Hallaste and Murutar” case] In Mall Hiimäe, Kanni Labi (Eds). *Teekond. Pro Folkloristica*. Eesti Kirjandusmuuseum, pp. 15–32.
3. Laineste, Liisi (2003b). Take It with a Grain of Salt: The Kernel of Truth in Topical Jokes. *Folklore: Electronic Journal of Folklore*, Vol. 21, pp. 7–25.
4. Laineste, Liisi (2003c). Suunad huumori uurimises [Recent directions in the study of humour]. *Keel ja Kirjandus*, Vol. 46, No. 11, pp. 793–804.
5. Laineste, Liisi (2003d). Researching Humour on the Internet. *Folklore: Electronic Journal of Folklore*, Vol. 25, pp. 93–97.
6. Laineste, Liisi (2005a). Tegelased eesti etnilises huumoris. [Characters in Estonian ethnic humour]. *Mäetagused*, No. 28, pp. 9–77;  
<http://www.folklore.ee/tagused/nr28/laineste.pdf>
7. Laineste, Liisi (2005b). Targets in Estonian Ethnic Jokes Within the Theory of Ethnic Humour (Ch. Davies). *Folklore: Electronic Journal of Folklore*, Vol. 29, pp. 7–24.
8. Laineste, Liisi (2005c). Characters in Estonian ethnic humour (1890–2004). *Folklore: Electronic Journal of Folklore*, Vol. 29, pp 197–202.
9. Laineste, Liisi (2006). Eesti anekdootide andmebaas. [Database of Estonian contemporary jokes] Kõiva, M. (Ed) *Võim ja kultuur II*. Tartu: Eesti Kultuuriloo ja Folkloristika tippkeskus, Eesti Kirjandusmuuseum, lk 103–124.
10. Laineste, Liisi (2007). Poliitilised anekdoovid postsotsialistlikus Eestis Delfi Naljalehe näitel [Political jokes in post-socialist Estonia on the Delfi joke page]. *Keel ja Kirjandus*, Vol. 50, No. 1, pp. 15–34.
11. Laineste, Liisi (2008). Political Jokes in Post-Socialist Estonia (2000–2007). In Arvo Krikmann & Liisi Laineste (Eds.). *Permitted Laughter: Socialist, Post-socialist and Never-socialist Humour*. Tartu: Eesti Kirjandusmuuseum, pp. 39–68.
12. Laineste, Liisi & Arvo Krikmann (2008). Conclusion. In Arvo Krikmann & Liisi Laineste (Eds.). *Permitted Laughter: Socialist, Post-socialist and Never-socialist Humour*. Tartu: Eesti Kirjandusmuuseum, forthcoming.
13. Laineste, Liisi (2008). The Politics of Joking: Ethnic Jokes and Their Targets in Estonia (1880’s–2007). *Folklore: Electronic Journal of Folklore*, Vol. 40, pp. 109–138.
14. Laineste, Liisi (2009). Post-Socialist Jokelore: Preliminary Findings and Further Research Suggestions. *Acta Ethnographica Hungarica*, Vol. 53, forthcoming.

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## PUBLICATION DATA

- I Laineste, Liisi (2006). Eesti anekdootide andmebaas. [Database of Estonian contemporary jokes] Kõiva, M. (Ed.) *Võim ja kultuur II*. Tartu: Eesti Kultuuriloo ja Folkloristika tippkeskus, Eesti Kirjandusmuuseum, pp. 103–124.
- II Laineste, Liisi (2003b). Take It with a Grain of Salt: The Kernel of Truth in Topical Humour. *Folklore: Electronic Journal of Folklore*, Vol. 21, pp. 7–25.
- III Laineste, Liisi (2008). The Politics of Joking: Ethnic Jokes and Their Targets in Estonia (1880s–2007). *Folklore: Electronic Journal of Folklore*, Vol. 40, pp. 109–138.
- IV Laineste, Liisi (2008). Political Jokes in Post-Socialist Estonia (2000–2007). In Arvo Krikmann & Liisi Laineste (Eds). *Permitted Laughter: Socialist, Post-Socialist and Never-socialist Humour*. Tartu: Eesti Kirjandusmuuseum, pp. 39–68.
- V Laineste, Liisi (2009). Post-Socialist Jokelore: Preliminary Findings and Further Research Suggestions. *Acta Ethnographica Hungarica*, Vol. 53, forthcoming.

# INTRODUCTION

## I. Structure and objectives of the research

This dissertation consists of an introductory chapter and five articles (four published and one in press, see publication data). The included articles represent a substantial section of the research I have done on the subject of humour over the past 5 years, from 2003–2008. The thematic approaches are mostly limited to contemporary jokelore, focusing on the characteristic developments of post-socialist topical, ethnic and political jokes. Post-socialism is an important keyword that leads the discussion in four articles (articles II, III, IV and V). It denotes a specific transitional period in the history of the former Soviet states, but this context also proposes that there are fundamental similarities in contemporary, post-socialist Eastern European jokelore. When studied in depth, these similarities will offer insights into and comparisons to previous findings about jokes from different societal contexts. By considering both the context and content of jokes, the research will help to clarify the relationship between folklore and its surroundings – the social reality. The main objectives of the dissertation are to:

1. Provide different angles of research for insights into the interactions between folklore (topical / ethnic / political jokes) and its surroundings (political, economic, cultural and other contexts);
2. Give an overview of the database of Estonian contemporary humour that has supported this research;
3. Outline the research that has been done so far on Estonian contemporary jokes;
4. Analyse the past and present developments of the categories of Estonian topical, ethnic and political jokes in order to define the continuities and changes;
5. Provide a more universal model to describe and predict target choice in ethnic jokes.

My path through this most interesting, yet far too serious subject has continuously encouraged me to continue searching answers to new questions that have arisen along the way. The articles in the dissertation reflect the different paths I have followed (not in a chronological but in a thematic order), though the direction has long been the same. My research interests have developed in a coherent manner, starting from more specific problems encountered in the Estonian material (articles I, II, III and IV), and gradually growing into a more broad-based investigation of post-socialist humour (article V). This logical development is guided by the discoveries I have made on this path: during my

initial research into Estonian ethnic jokes<sup>1</sup>, I encountered several puzzling and discontinuous facts that lead me to think that there exists a powerful factor that interferes with culturally “logical” preferences in the choice of targets and other aspects of ethnic humour – the political context. The essential discrepancies between jokes from different countries, the local peculiarities, could be swept aside by the influence of the totalitarian system that injected a strong political dimension to nearly all categories of jokes. This in turn has motivated me to obtain further evidence from other countries with similar histories in order to prove the hypothesis of the influence of political context on ethnic jokes. For that purpose, A. Krikmann and I have made efforts to gather a body of experts from former Soviet republics and perform initial research on some aspects of post-socialist humour. The cooperation project between the post-socialist Eastern European countries<sup>2</sup> that should fulfil this aim is only in its first phase. An article outlining the main research issues is also included in this dissertation (article V).

The theoretical grounds that have informed my investigations into humour will be presented in a separate section of the introduction. I will provide a historical overview of the main theoretical frameworks in the sociological branch of humour studies, positioning my research in the field, and I will also define some significant terms in my research. Throughout nearly all of the articles, I am in a dialogue with several established humour researchers and their theories, primarily the theory of ethnic humour formulated by Christie Davies (e.g. in 1990 book “Ethnic Humor Around the World”).

The next chapter outlines the threads of discussion that will be followed in the articles. The intertwined issues include the relationship of folklore and its surrounding reality on various levels, the specificity of the post-socialist features in Eastern European jokelore, the developments of joke categories (ethnic and political) over the past decades, and trends of globalization and sub-culturalization in humour.

The following section of the introductory chapter deals with methodological issues. This presents more thorough information and related polemics than the articles themselves would reveal. An understanding of the issues imposed by jokes as a research topic as well as the assets and drawbacks of researching jokes on the Internet is vital to be able to interpret the articles in the dissertation. This section will first present an overview of jokes as a research subject in humour studies. This in turn brings the discussion to the more specific object of this study: jokes circulating on the Internet.

A significant part of my research is based upon the material organised in an electronic database (the Database of Estonian Contemporary Jokes and

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<sup>1</sup> A bachelor’s thesis on mutual joking between the Finnish and the Estonian, 2000; and a master’s thesis on the history and development of Estonian ethnic jokes from 1880s onwards, Laineste 2005.

<sup>2</sup> Russia, Poland, Romania, Bulgaria, Hungary, Lithuania, Estonia

Anecdotes, electronically available at <http://folklore.ee/~liisi/o2>). The development and future prospects of the database are outlined in article I of this dissertation. One of the focuses of the subsection will be the context of the specific medium that interacts with both the form and content of the jokes. I will highlight the profound influence of the medium, the Internet, on the nature and volume of the material.

Although the immediate communicative context of the material used in the studies remains in the background, and the wider social and political contexts dominate the discussion, I have always been aware of the limitations and values of the chosen material. I believe that jokes on the Internet offer deeply meaningful issues for the future researcher of both folklore in general and humour in particular, especially as it is precisely the comic “infotainment” mode that draws the Internet-user – many people use the net with the aim of finding and communicating humour (e.g. Dutton et al 2005).

Even if there is no standard methodology that governs all of the articles, the combination of quantitative and qualitative methodology is the principle that guides the research. The process will be outlined in general terms in the methodology section.

All five articles included in the thesis will be briefly summarised, and their main aims and results will be discussed in the fourth chapter of the thesis. The four articles that are in English (II, III, IV and V) are motivated by the intention to find a broader international audience and contacts, primarily from relatively fragmented world of Eastern European humour studies, and develop subsequent cooperation that would make the work and future results in the area of ethnic and political jokes more meaningful and significant. To bring together two worlds of research that have for quite a long time existed separately – i.e. the whole versatile realm of Russian humour research on the one hand, and the ideas concerning the sociology and folkloristics of jokes in Western scholarship on the other – is also the aim of the compendium on post-socialist humour (edited by Krikmann & Laineste 2008). The only article in Estonian (article I) is added to the dissertation to balance the investigative approaches and provide background information about the Estonian empirical material under observation. In addition, there has been growing interest from folklorists and other colleagues from various countries in the structure of the Estonian joke database. In aspiring to form a body of material that would also be suitable for cross-cultural comparison, there is a need for a unified system of joke categorisation using a common meta-language (English). I encountered this problem at the beginning of my path, and the solution I reached will be described in article I. The article will soon also be translated into English (a brief English article on a similar subject (Laineste 2003d) concentrates on general issues about folkloristic research on the Internet).

In the closing chapter, I will present the main conclusions of the articles published in the thesis. Future directions will be outlined, as I consider the subject of my research to point at several issues that are still to be discussed.

Emotions, hostility, the interactions of ethnic jokes and ethnic identity, jokes used in relation with politics, globalization and Internet humour – all of these topics are brought together under the general title of folklore and its environment, a subject that is already present in the thesis.

The dissertation concludes with a summary of the introduction in Estonian.



## 2. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK AND MAIN CONCEPTS

This chapter deals with the general background of the dissertation, offering an historical overview of some of the most relevant and influential approaches in humour research. It will also provide definitions of the main concepts applied in the articles.

### 2.1. Interdisciplinarity

Humour is increasingly viewed as an interdisciplinary subject (for an overview, see Laineste 2003c). The beginning of the scientific investigation of humour begins with the works of philosophers, with Henri Bergson opening the discussion in the 20<sup>th</sup> century (Le Rire, 1901). Another important contribution and great influence on the following approaches was presented in the works of the psychologist Sigmund Freud (Der Witz und Seine Beziehung zum Unbewußten 1905). In folklore studies, the first to address the subject was the Finnish school, laying down the principles for classifying folktales, including comic tales, and describing some joke tale types (e.g. Aarne 1914 and 1915). Early folkloristic research was partly influenced by anthropological studies through the theories of functionalists and structuralists including Radcliffe Brown (with his 1940 monograph discussing the function of joking relationships). Also Freudian interpretations of jokes have been frequent in folkloristics (most explicit in the works of Alan Dundes, e.g. 1987, 1971). It was only in the mid-1970s when the field was re-discovered by psychologists, literary scholars, and others. Since then, the ambition to outline an overarching theory for all of the disciplines dealing with humour has grown, though there has been little success in formulating it (e.g. as concluded by Morreall 1983). The aim of the International Journal for Humour Research has been to prioritise studies that offer interdisciplinary accounts of the subject<sup>3</sup>. There have, however, been some issues that penetrate many or even all of the disciplines in humour research.

Patricia Keith Spiegel brought order to the great diversity of humour theories, placing all in “one tidy theoretical household” (1972: 15). More recently, the main directions in research have been reduced to three: psychoanalytic, sociological and cognitive theories<sup>4</sup> (Attardo 1994: 47). In the context of this research, the sociological models (dealing with concepts such as superiority, aggression, derision, disparagement, hostility and conflict) are those that should be considered in greater detail. I will describe how the sociological

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<sup>3</sup> In the notes to contributors, the editors suggest 20% of the references to be outside the authors’ discipline.

<sup>4</sup> These essentialist theories are not mutually exclusive, but address different aspects of humour.

approach has evolved and developed. This will in turn provide the key to understanding the origins of the issues I tackle in my research. Although the subject is folkloristic, my advances to explaining of ethnic and political jokes are borrowed from various disciplines, including sociology.

## **2.2. Sociological theories of humour**

### **2.2.1. Influential sociological approaches to humour in the 20<sup>th</sup> century**

Sociological approaches to the study of humour concern themselves with the social functions and, even more importantly, with the social shaping of humour. Some of the more influential sociological perspectives in the course of the 20<sup>th</sup> century will be subsequently outlined in a roughly chronological order (influenced by Kuipers' overview of the sociology of humour, 2008b): functional, conflict, and comparative-historical approach.

The functionalist approach concerns itself with the purpose of humour, which is to maintain order in society. Even though humour does not have the same function for everyone, and may in some cases even be dysfunctional, the theory is still – quite fruitfully – applied in research. Addressing the function of jokes directly requires one to focus on the performance rather than the text (i.e. on how the text is used in interaction), and that is why an analysis concentrating only on a large corpus of jokes is not directly suitable for the discussion of the functions of humour. This does not mean, however, that it is unable to provide any insights on that matter that could be applicable in future research. The functions emphasised so far are positive social (control, relief, cohesion), negative social (resistance, exclusion), and psychological (coping).

Another very influential approach maintained that humour is a tool that can be used in conflict, as a weapon for attack and defence. This has not been a particularly well-supported line of argument – even if conflict is embedded in a joke, it is of marginal use in explaining its existence in a particular place and time (Davies 2002: 128), and will not be used in interpreting the data in this context (for reasons also elucidated by myself in Joon 2003a). It is, however, significant, as it draws attention to the possible interpretations and the pretext of a joke (evident in the utterance “just joking!”), which is unavoidable in the light of the latest controversies in the field of humour.

The historical-comparative line of thinking offers a methodology for describing variations and continuities of humour in different contexts. Although studies based on this approach often deal solely with the comparison and description of the popularity of topics (e.g. Apte 1985), techniques of humour production and functions of humour, it can also be used to decide which contextual cues produce which jokes, how traditions are created and spread, and – even more broadly – what can be said about the societies using this kind of

humour (e.g. in Davies 1990, 1998, 2002 and elsewhere). This is also one of the intentions of this study: to show the relations between jokes and the society in which the jokes are told, contrasting different periods and different political contexts. As one of the main aims was to provide additional support or offer alternative solutions for Davies' theory of ethnic humour, more precisely to the rules of target choice (outlined by Davies 1990), a short overview of this theory is in order.

Christie Davies has described his theory of ethnic humour in three books (1990, 1998 and 2002) and several articles (e.g. 1982, 1987, 1999a). This predominant theory of ethnic humour attempts to discover societal regularities in different joke traditions (above all in the wide-spread scripts of stupidity and canniness) through the comparative sociological analysis of jokes. He claims that stupidity and canniness, but also other more specific ethnic scripts (e.g. promiscuity, cowardliness), are applied under particular circumstances in the social reality of the ethnic groups concerned. Regarding the most universal category of stupidity jokes, he states that the targets of these jokes are usually people who (1) are close neighbours and are or have been citizens of the same country, (2) dwell on the periphery of that cultural area and are perceived as culturally ambiguous by the dominant people of the centre, and (3) share the same cultural background or even speak a similar or identical language. They are usually rural people or immigrants in search of unskilled and low-prestige manual work (1990: 41).

Although not a widely renowned theory, the hypotheses posed by Alexander Rose (2002) in a comparative and relatively theoretical overview of political jokes under democratic and totalitarian regimes encouraged to search for similar patterns in Estonian jokelore, taking the two periods (pre- and post-1991) as examples (article IV). Rose states that the most significant difference between jokes in totalitarian and democratic regimes is that the former primarily mocked the system, whereas the latter concentrate on the pitfalls and personal deficits of the leaders. He develops his argument further by stating that because democratic leaders emerge from the ranks of the people, they are seen as "one of us" and thus open to criticism, but under totalitarian regimes the system is imposed on the people and becomes the primary target of fear and jokes. As jokes about totalitarian regimes criticise the absurdity of the system, the only exceptions to that rule are the purely military regimes which foster political jokes about their leaders.

### 2.2.2. Humour as aggression versus humour as mirth

The birth of sociological theories of humour took place in a context in which theories that linked humour with aggression flourished. The aggressive side of humour was already mentioned in the earliest works of Western philosophers<sup>5</sup>. The seventeenth-century English philosopher Thomas Hobbes noted the “sudden glory” based on one’s perceived superiority over others that humour should provide, while Henri Bergson viewed it as a social corrective, and Sigmund Freud saw aggression as a central aspect in jokes. The most recent elaboration of this line of reasoning comes from Charles Gruner (1997), who defines humour as “playful aggression”.

Interpreting humour in terms of aggression has greatly affected the development of the sociological approach of humour (although its early validation is limited to Freud’s seminal work, as aptly noted by Oring 1992: 1). Jokes often attracted the attention of researchers when they had become problematic in the society or when they concerned some important social issues (race, gender equality, social class etc, Kuipers 2008b: 365). Inspired by the theory of humour as disparagement, psychologists have, in the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, conducted numerous studies (resulting in quite contradictory and ambiguous results) linking the amount of hostility to the perception of funniness in a joke (e.g. McCauley et al 1983, Graesser et al. 1989, Mio & Graesser 1991, cf Ruch & Hehl 1998), and describing how the intensity of this correlation is influenced by the social relationships and the self-identification of the joke-teller and the audience (La Fave 1972, Zillmann & Cantor 1976).

The extremely positive way that humour is perceived today has greatly contested these views based on hostility and derision<sup>6</sup>. Mirth is a term to describe an emotion, the positive reaction to humour (not just the facial and vocal expressions of the positive emotion). It has also been used in sociological studies as a term referring to the basically non-aggressive quality of humour (Davies 2002). Davies emphasises that when uttering an ethnic joke, the joke-

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<sup>5</sup> Plato stated that laughter originates in malice (Plato in *Philebus*, cited by Morreall 1987). Aristotle’s account of wit (in *The Poetics*, cited by Keith-Spiegel 1972: 7) holds that ludicrous means a defect, deformity, or ugliness that is not painful or destructive. This has also had a significant influence on how the Western world perceives humour in general (Attardo 1994: 49). At the same time, sense of humour has long been perceived as an essentially positive characteristic (for an overview of how this perception developed, see Martin 2007: 24, 192, also Wickberg 1998: 121). Lack of a sense of humour can cause anything from mild surprise to severe exclusion from the community (as seen in some late humour controversies: the Muhammad cartoons, Borat movie, etc, (Lewis et al 2008)).

<sup>6</sup> Focusing on positive emotions rather than negative ones in sociological but more increasingly in psychological research is a growing trend in humour research (Martin 2007: 16)

teller primarily intends to amuse, and not anger the audience<sup>7</sup>. Besides, Davies argues, aggressiveness is not a heuristically productive tool to approach the subject of humour, as theories based on aggression are difficult to falsify (e.g. Gruner's theory of humour, the drawback also highlighted by Martin 2007: 54).

Evolutionary studies of humour tend rather to support the fundamental mirthfulness in humour, which states that laughter originates in social play (Gervais & Wilson 2005). Nevertheless, most of the studies of ethnic humour have been influenced by the premises of functionalist and conflict approaches (see also above, section 2.2.1.). As recent studies in psychology devote more attention to the role of humour in well-being (e.g. Ruch 1997), the investigation on ethnic humour is dominated by a heated discussion of the pre-eminence of its conflict- versus mirth-evoking potential (see discussion in Lewis 1997).

To explain the background of the choices I have made regarding the frameworks of my research, I must be clear in pointing out the early influence of functionalist and conflict theories of humour on my academic thinking and writing, and at the attempt I have made to dispute them along the way. Talking only about the purpose of jokes (something that is popular in the functionalist approach) has often become a speculative contemplation on the release of tension (joking under totalitarian rule, e.g. in Speier 1998 about *Flüsterwitze*, whispered jokes) or sublimed aggression (jokes about immigrants, Dundes 1971). These insights do have their appeal, but tend to result in circular argumentation, and lack sufficient potential for falsification. In order to avoid this, the researcher should become aware of comparative data and use it respectively, or conduct historically and culturally embedded longitudinal research that will, in the course of analysis, reveal patterns of popularity and other features that are also informative concerning the function of humour, among other things. It was my aim to approach these matters through a more indirect angle (by describing the choice of targets, the interaction of jokes with society, etc).

### 2.2.3. Humour research in Estonia

Up to the present, the field of humour research has remained relatively neglected in Estonia, at least on a more organized level, though some preliminary research has been performed in various disciplines: primarily folkloristics (most notably Krikmann 2002, 2003a, 2003b, 2004a, 2004b, 2006a, 2008 etc), but also psychology (Suits et al 2005, Kindlam 2005, Suits 2007), Estonian language and literature (Anupõld 1960, Kuus 1961, Hein 1936), and a number of

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<sup>7</sup> The intention to amuse is usually manifested through the choice of appropriate audience. This may certainly be true in face-to-face communication, but in the (global Internet-based) audience in which the ethnic, ideological and other characteristics of the audience members are inexplicit and vary greatly, the author is less able to control the reach of his / her message.

undergraduate theses under the supervision of Juhan Peegel, Marju Lauristin, and later Halliki Harro, Tiit Hennoste and others (Škuubel 1967, Napa 1975, Lättemäe 1979, Juur 1986, Pullerits 1990, Jahilo 1994, Normet 2001, Tamm 2001). In other fields, humour has not been paid much academic attention.

This section will offer a brief overview of folkloristic humour research focusing on Estonian material. Old folk jokes in the Estonian Literary Museum in Tartu were compiled in an organized archive, first by Rudolf Põldmäe in the late 1930s (now being revised by Rein Saukas), and as he had several academic interests, humour was not among his primary subjects. Two decades later, the pioneer of Estonian humour studies Loreida Raudsep chose the quite narrow field of jokes about clerics as her topic, and produced several meticulous overviews: an index of anti-clerical jokes (1969), and some articles written as an outcome of the research project depicting class struggle in folklore, led by Eduard Laugaste (e.g. Raudsep 1976, 1983). This initial research was supplemented in the 1990s, when several researchers touched upon the subject of contemporary jokes (as opposed to old joke tales), addressing political jokes (Sarv 1995, 1996, 1997a – c, 1998), sexual jokes told by schoolchildren (Kalda 1995) and ethnic jokes (Tuisk 1997). An even more active period in the research began in 2001, when a work group at the Estonian Literary Museum (Arvo Krikmann, Peeter Tulviste, Rein Saukas and Liisi Joon) began to make organized efforts to gather the contemporary material in an extensive database and publish substantial studies on that basis (funded by the Estonian Science Foundation, grants No. 4935 and 6759). The grant project acquired cross-cultural ambitions by the end of the first term (grant No 4935). The Estonian Literary Museum hosted an international conference on humour in 2007 and published a volume of articles on post-socialist humour (Krikmann & Laineste 2008). Over the last seven years, our work group has published over 20 articles and two monographs on Estonian jokelore, many of which can be found in the references to this dissertation. Hopefully the increasing interest in humour studies will grow in the coming years, acquiring new contributions from the students as well as established researchers, in order to activate the field of Estonian humour studies.

## **2.3. Definitions**

### **2.3.1. Jokes**

Jokes (in Estonian: *anekdoot*) form a genre that is quite familiar to the folklorists, and it may be a useful introductory material for bringing the subject closer to students and explaining to them what folklore is about (Dorst 1990). It is also a research tool (in addition to being a research topic) for linguists, psychologists, sociologists, etc. The genre can be seen as lying at the crossroads of different disciplines.

A joke (sometimes referred to also as a “canned joke”) is a text that starts with a *setup* and ends with an unexpected *punch-line*, and is usually intended to be funny. It can be understood without the conversational context (e.g. Attardo 1994: 296). Jokes are informative of the societal environment in which they were created / told (or reproduced in another way). Following the turn towards concentrating on performance rather than text in folkloristics, the interest in collecting and analysing jokes as text diminished, and jokes were considered to be essentially contextual. This, in turn, led researchers to study humour in conversation (e.g. Bauman 1986), and the study of large joke corpora was neglected.

The eventual dominance of the contemporary short form of the joke has generally been located in the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century<sup>8</sup>. Before the emergence of the canned joke, the primary defining aspect of comic joke tales was their embeddedness in social relations (Knuuttila 1992, chapter 4). Humour did not exist outside a particular social situation. In the joke collections of M.J. Eisen, who was a diligent folklore collector and publisher, both types – old joke tales and contemporary punch-lined jokes – exist side by side, which makes this an interesting transitional period to study.

After folklorists began to collect and archive joke texts, the genre started to lead two separate lives (a trend also described in other folklore genres, see Honko 1991). This change reflects the polemics of orality and literacy (Ong 1982), especially as this was followed by another turn, which was evident in the hybrid quality of jokes increasingly transmitted on the Internet. Besides being constantly re-performed and changed in the course of that, Internet jokes often combine the features of oral and written speech. The first thing to transform was the form of the jokes, and it is again the form that changes in Internet jokes – they may once more be longer than oral punch-lined jokes (in that way, bringing them closer to old folk jokes), they are sometimes visual, and the punch-line can be built on both a visual and verbal pun / unexpected solution (e.g. in jokes that prolong the punch line through the scrolling down function).

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<sup>8</sup> As Wickberg 1998: 124 argues, it coincided with the increasing evaluation of the sense of humour as a personality trait and the subsequent need to answer to the demand of the audience and publish more – and shorter – jokes in newspapers, journals and other readily accessible publications. Wickberg also argues that the public “mania for jokes” began in the 1860s (concluded from American jokelore, Wickberg 1998: 123). The expansion and rationalization of a market for humorous productions resulted in the spread of short and self-containing jokes (ibid. 134). The drawback of this argumentation is that it is based purely on the American example and is largely theoretical, but it is acceptable, as the shift towards preferring short punch-lines to long comic tales did occur around that time in other places as well, including Estonia (even to the extent of reducing comic utterances to two- or one-liners).

### **2.3.2. Ethnic jokes**

Extending the discussion that concerns the humour derived from and inherent in the opposition of “us” and “others”, the basic tendency of humans to perceive social groups in these two categories is a well-covered topic in social psychology. The construction of an ethnic group (or a group based on other criteria) begins from this distinction, as it is central to the issue of self-identification.

Ethnic jokes are viewed here in the context of the developments in the field. This is a category of (canned) joke that targets one or more ethnic groups, naming these by nationalities or other specific markers such as typical first names (Fritz, Ole etc). Without the conversational context, the issue of ethnic jokes being either hostile or mirthful may well be left aside. Instead, jokes as texts can be informative of the social reality of the target and the teller of the joke, their relations and the context where the joke was created in.

In the 1970s, the “new wave” of humour research began precisely by examining ethnic jokes, both in mutual interaction and as self-containing texts. The conference volume from 1977 (edited by Chapman & Foot) lists this as the primary issue in humour research and urges humour scholars to describe the aggressiveness and superiority embedded in these jokes (1977: xxvii). This is an evident outcome of the problems that the society (primarily the United States) faced concerning growing interethnic violence – there was a social demand for this discussion. The direction of the first investigations has put a stigma on the phenomena, and due to the pervading atmosphere of political correctness, is pushing the subject away from the focus of researchers (for scathing criticism on publishing or citing ethnic jokes in the context of scholarly investigation, see Billig 2005: 27).

### **2.3.5. Ethnic identity**

Ethnic identity is a term that constantly lingers in the background of studies of ethnic humour, but is rarely discussed directly. In general, the recent views (stemming from Anderson 1983, stating that any national or ethnic groups are imagined communities) examining ethnicity in terms of culture transmitted from one generation to another see it as one of the many, rather flexible, constantly re-constructed ways of self-identification, describing the relationship between a person and an ethnic group (Verkuyten 2004: 80). It is about performing an identity and becoming ethnic than having these qualities ready. Ethnic (self)identifications cannot only be explained by psychological tendencies and dispositions, because ethnic identity is partly also socially constructed and contingent (political and cultural discourses and local discursive practices must be considered as well).

Ethnic identity was important in the studies of the functional paradigm of superiority theories (see references above in section 2.2.2 on humour and



aggression), as the degree of perceived hostility was presumed to be based on one's ethnic identity, and the sense of belonging to this ethnic group.

In spite of the scientific need to deal with clear-cut categories, there are plenty of in-betweeners, who are neither "us" nor "them" (well-integrated ethnic Russians in Estonia, for example). This shows vividly the fluidity of the borders of categories, which are constantly re-constructed according to the situation. Nevertheless, the categories are required because of a basic need to mark the boundaries of one's existence. The boundaries are maintained through basic oppositions. Also in jokes, the primary mechanism is the creation of a strategic opposition between "good" and "bad", and everything that falls under that division (see Raskin 1985: 113–114, 127, for the five main most common oppositions in jokes). In this way, jokes re-construct the basic oppositions between groups: by telling a stupidity joke about another ethnic group, the teller reinforces the essential, though often fabricated difference between "us" and "them", labelling the "other" as strange, non-conformant to the norms, deviant, abnormal, briefly: bad (the same process is at work in contemporary legend construction, see Kalmre 2007). These oppositions may be seen as an articulation of aggression and racist stereotypes, which was the case with the functionalist and conflict-based approaches of the 1970s.

That brings us to the question of real attitudes compared to those used in jokes. As Christie Davies argues (and I agree with him), we cannot decide the motives and attitudes of those who share the jokes on the basis of content alone (1990: 3), and even when analysed in a conversational context, the shared joke scripts (e.g. of stingy Scots or stupid Latvians) are only conventional and mythological texts, and not seriously held stereotypes (*ibid.*, 6). In some cases these mythological qualities (or common-sense beliefs – to put it more broadly) may have a priming effect on opinions and actions (e.g. Ford, Wentzel & Lorion 2001: experiments on the effects of exposure to humour displaying hostile stereotypes). What we can conclude from researching stereotypes is, however, why certain targets arise at certain times, and what the change of a joke's target tell us about the perception of the groups featured in that joke.

Recently, the radical notions of xenophobia and racism have also entered the field of humour studies (Billig 2001, 2005; Pickering 2004, Pickering & Lockyer 2005, Laineste forthcoming). Whereas the carnival described by Bakhtin was an official permission to parody in a certain time and place (for summary see 1984: 129–130), there is no parallel match to that in contemporary society, with its international media channels that transcend the limits of time and space. Following the misleading permission to carnivalise anything, a joke may travel to places with different norms and agreements about the limits of what is ethical and aesthetical. Even in our close geographical proximity, a group of people with different cultural values may withdraw their consent to take a joke as a joke and accuse the joke-teller of disrespect. The terms racism and xenophobia are often used by the opposing group (also in politics) to limit

the “carnival”, and the defining of the limits of humour plays an important role in this argument.

#### **2.3.4. Post-socialism**

Post-socialism (term coined by Hann, 1994) is essentially seen as a transitional stadium, something that follows socialism and precedes some other, yet nameless (or perhaps called post-post- socialist, see Sampson 2002: 298), stage of development in the Eastern European region (including the countries participating in the humour project; see article V and the conclusion to the compendium on post-socialist humour, Krikmann & Laineste 2008). In this context, I will not go into the details of the profound economic influences it had on the former Soviet bloc, and even leave the elaborate background of the political transformations unaccounted for. I will borrow the term simply to outline a specific period in the history of Eastern European countries that is very useful in comparative humour research: the different periods saw the effects of different political regimes, the re-establishment of nation states increased interest in ethnic identities (and, to some extent, ethnic and especially political jokes), and all of this happened in a relatively short period of time. Issues concerning the appropriateness of the term are discussed in greater detail in the concluding chapter of the compendium on post-socialist humour (Krikmann & Laineste 2008).

### **3. DISCUSSION**

The articles included in the dissertation approach the subject of humour (more precisely, jokes) from different angles and focus on different sets of material, but they also share some assumptions that should be explained in greater detail. The leading threads of issues embedded in the articles are outlined in the following subsections.

#### **3.1. Folklore and social reality**

The main assumption of my research is the recognition of strong ties between folklore and its surroundings. The two terms (folklore and reality), here used as two interdependent concepts, have in some contexts been addressed as opposite entities, much to the dismay of folkloristics as a scholarly discourse. In the context of this research, I would rather view them as parallel worlds, the traceable interactions of which offer the opportunity to study the mind, social perceptions, and cultural differences in general by describing the way in which humans react and adapt to their environment by using folklore in addition to other creative means. In a slightly different context, V. Propp (1984: 10–11) describes this complex relationship, stating that “... we look in vain for an existential reality behind a folkloric reality”. Besides the claim about the way all realities are constructed, this approach maintains that folklore reflects life only through a thick lens: it follows the interests of its creators, the demands of the audience, and in the case of jokes, the criteria for “good” entertainment. Jokes are filled with assumptions that are considered unreal, implying a suspension of disbelief in the listener (see e.g. Attardo, Hempelmann & Di Maio 2002). This essential feature does not, however, make the contribution of the teller and audience less significant – their lore is motivated by certain existing basic needs.

Folklore is (as is social reality) an interpretation of an array of the economic, social and ideological contexts that make up a society. The context forms an outline for the object of study, without which the analysis of the text would be much less informative. At the same time, placing the focus mainly on the interaction and interdependence of a text (joke) and its context enables to avoid the pitfalls that may be brought about by the use of the term “reality”. This study does not imply the existence of an objective reality behind the multiple subjective ones, but instead examines the folkloric reality side-by-side with the social reality. The interaction between jokes and reality is evident through research into political jokes and their context (article III), but even more so in the analysis of topical jokes (article II). Topical jokes reflect their surroundings to a great degree, which makes the nature of the interaction most easily accessible to the researcher. This subgenre performs as a comic kaleidoscope, not only for the events that have a comic potential, but also for the genre that

presents the daily events. Topical jokes offer a reaction to the events in the surrounding reality, which is visible in the intensity at which the jokes are sent over the Internet joke portal (Figure 5 and 6 article II). Article II offers evidence of the behaviour and habits of Internet users while they are engaged in sending jokes (Figures 2, 3 and 4 article II). In the case of political jokes, the relationship is not that obvious. Measuring the intensity of joking on a web site over a six-year period was concluded in the statement that jokes are inspired by daily events, but the relationship cannot be seen as direct and straightforward (Figure 5 article IV and the following discussion). The way that folklore depends on the inspiration it receives from daily life is evident in their relevancy to the context in which they are found. Old folk jokes, Soviet and post-socialist ethnic jokes all refer to the most important issues that a person living in their contemporary society had to face (discussion in article III).

Topical humour is a subject for many studies on how humour interacts with its surroundings (Oring 1987, Davies 1999b, Kuipers 2002, Csaszi 2003). These compose a subtype that is obviously dependent on the “hot” issues: political, social, or other public scandals will be referred to in topical jokes (if the requirements for comic potential are met, see article IV). The tradition of topical jokes was not alien to Soviet jokelore either (as evidence of joke cycles on the death of Soviet leaders, some environmental catastrophes, etc has shown, see Krikmann 2006b). Jokes about topical issues (also referred to as topical joke cycles, see Ellis 2001 and 2003, Dorst 1990) often lend motifs to political humour, which causes overlap in the two subcategories (article IV). This is also a factor that makes some political jokes (that I would call contemporary or democratic political jokes) short-lived, but at the same time is evidence and a cause of the tradition to be stronger and more vibrant than many other joke categories (see Figure 3, article IV, Figure 1 article II). Although Abrahams (1976) maintains that jokes only deal with superficial issues instead of ontological and existential ones, I believe that the way jokes lay down the social limits and borders between groups (while simultaneously playing with them, as the central claims in jokes can usually be interpreted ambiguously) is significant for its creators and thus also ontologically motivated (described in the conclusion of articles III and IV). The relationship between humour and the social reality is a complicated question with various aspects that must be tackled, and a number of instigating and obscuring factors, but this research as a whole (primarily through articles II, III and IV) has contributed to elucidating the matter.

### 3.2. The political situation as an environment for jokes

Humour research offers a means not only to peek into the ways in which the mind interacts with the “real world” and re-constructs it for several purposes (be it a release of tension, coping with problems, inducing acceptance, processing information, out of enjoyment of play or for other reason)<sup>9</sup>. The specific period and material of this study also allow the researcher to track the changes that jokelore undergoes when society makes a transition from one political system to another (in this case from totalitarian to democratic). Nearly all of the articles in the thesis investigate how the political system changes jokes (articles III, IV and V). The change, both in terms of form and content, is characteristic not only of the Estonian tradition, but of the whole Eastern European region. Describing this will help to add relevant aspects to the known and accepted theories of humour.

The analysis in the articles helps to describe and explain the different status of humour in its political contexts, which is another underlying thread of thought in the articles included in this dissertation.

Humour (political and ethnic jokes) varies in different political contexts. The comparison of totalitarian joke traditions with democratic ones and also the description of the transitional stage represented by post-socialist jokelore could result in significant insights about the interactions of folklore and social reality. The best opportunity for this kind of research presents itself in the post-socialist region (as proposed in article V). This is also one of the aims of the compendium of post-socialist jokelore (Krikmann & Laineste 2008), which is compiled in order to complement the established humour research in democratic Western countries mainly based on jokes from their near vicinity. It provides a reference point that helps to redefine some of the most influential aspects that shape jokelore. Evidence of variations of humour in different political systems is presented in article IV, though the results do not support the theory that the fundamental difference lies in the choice and nature of the target (Figure 8, article IV). Instead, the most significant difference lies in how most jokes attained a political allusion in the totalitarian period, so that in addition to many jokes on leaders (see also article V), there were many jokes on the absurdities of daily life, which are not so frequent in post-socialist or “never-socialist” humour.

The next question is how this relationship (between the jokes and the political system, together with its specific conditions in all fields of life) works, and whether there are any rules, local or universal, behind the ties. This will add

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<sup>9</sup> From a more psychological approach, humour as acceptance (coping, trying to understand) versus denial (escaping, distancing oneself) of the surrounding reality has been one of the central issues in many studies on humour (see Keith-Spiegel 1972: 26 for a brief overview).

a (post)socialist measure to the leading theory of ethnic humour (Davies 1990, 1998, 2002 and elsewhere), which is among the primary tasks of this dissertation. Moderate amount of existing research shows that the general rules described by Christie Davies largely hold true (e.g. Cui 2006 about German vs. Chinese ethnic jokes, Efharis 2004 about the universals described by Davies 1990). In trying to describe contemporary Estonian ethnic jokes, however, the concessions were too great to comply with the current model<sup>10</sup>. This encouraged me to attempt to construct a more efficient one that would account for not only Western ethnic and political jokes, but for the choice of ethnic targets in post-socialist Eastern Europe too. The main problem is that in Soviet times, the range of targets in Estonian ethnic jokes increased, embracing new nationalities that had had no relation to the nation telling the jokes (article III). This can be explained by emphasising the influence of the Soviet regime in all walks of life, including jokes (article III and IV). It also brought about a more global outlook on the world (e.g. including the USA or coloured people, see also article III). A specific feature is the existence of ethnic-political jokes from Soviet times, which also interfered with the more “natural” choices in target selection (article III). In post-socialist times, the range of targets has increased once again (Figure 2, article III), and there is a simultaneous strive to relocate the old targets – the closest neighbours and kinsfolk (in Estonian material, article III). The appearance of this tendency should be studied in other post-socialist countries as well, in order to draw more substantial conclusions. Thorough research into this matter will result in a model (hopefully *one* coherent and substantial one) that will explain the presence of certain types of jokes and targets in certain environments (cultural, social, political etc conditions).

### **3.3. The transformation of category boundaries: ethnic and political jokes**

The categories of ethnic and political jokes form the primary material under examination in the dissertation. The obvious change in the category limits forces the researcher to look into the social settings that have given rise to the categories throughout the periods under observation. The object of study presents an interesting case for the analysis of category formation and its dependence on the social reality (discussed in detail in article III). I will refer to the development of the category of ethnic jokes: in Eisens’s collection, most jokes mentioned an ethnic marker (article III, see also Figure 1 in article V), the category was very broad. After the Soviet occupation, the pan-Soviet ethnic targets largely carried a mixed ethno-political meaning (article III). Another shift took place in the 1990s, when the diminishing ethnic category (Figure 5,

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<sup>10</sup> Even if there was distinct concurrency to Davies’ theory in the case of ethnic joke targets from 1900 and earlier, see Figure 6 article V.

article V) obtained more rigid boundaries, as did the political joke (Figure 8 article IV, and the following discussion). The amount of ethnic jokes has diminished, but the amount of targets has increased (Figure 1 in article V and Figure 2 in article III), creating a situation in which every joke carrying only an ethnic marker to define the target is categorized as ethnic. In the case of political jokes, the category is now relatively well defined and in the Delfi joke page<sup>11</sup>, a joke is registered as political when it mentions the names of politicians or comments on a topical issue (article IV).

A significant part of my contribution to the investigation of contemporary Estonian jokelore is the compilation of a digital database of jokes, initiated in 1996 by A. Krikmann in order to collect and categorise at least some of the immense material that is “out there”. The completed categorization of ethnic and political jokes therein follows flexible tagging principles (see article I for details), which is specifically useful with respect to changing category boundaries.

### 3.4. Identity

From the equally important socio-psychological point of view, the reframing of experiences in a comic mode helps to redefine, understand and organize daily matters. This can be seen in the way jokes constantly adapt to the everyday issues of their users (article II, but also article III in the discussion about the relevant targets in ethnic jokes). It also facilitates the formation of and participation in groups, fostering affinity (this tendency can also be seen in the sub-culturalization of jokelore, article V). Simultaneously, and quite controversially, this feeling of togetherness that is created by sharing in-group lore that will automatically be coupled with identifying the out-group, the “other” (although results are received by just studying the joke texts, there are patterns of the comic other: see article III for the changes in joke targets and article V for the problematic relationship between the joke-teller and the “other”). This relationship between real attitudes, actions and the perceptions of international relations on the one hand, and jokes on the other, present patterns of interaction that vary from fairly direct on the one hand and very implicit/ indirect on the other.

The changes in the popularity of different targets leads us to a discussion of ethnic jokes and their relation to identity, but also to the attitudes and perceptions of a nation, both about themselves and their “others”. The co-existence of “old” Soviet and “new” translated / created / modified jokes is not a static state but a process in which the latter seems to get the upper hand (Figure 7 in

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<sup>11</sup> Delfi joke site is an interactive “humour hub”, a popular site with an option to read, send and evaluate jokes on that page. It is connected to the wide (pan-Baltic) website [www.delfi.ee/lt/lv](http://www.delfi.ee/lt/lv) and is by now the most active site in the Estonian internet for reading the news, exchanging comments, and for other types of infotainment, including joking.

article IV). Following the discussion in article IV, the old Soviet jokes form an important part of the social memory and bring a specific “flavour” into our otherwise rapidly globalizing tradition; at the same time, most of the tellers (senders) of the old jokes are not even familiar with the Soviet atmosphere. Evidence that the category of old Soviet jokes is quite isolated comes from article IV and V, which point to the fact that there are not many modifications of these jokes in circulation. In addition, old Soviet jokes tend to be constant repetitions of the same popular plots rather than single appearances of more rare plots (Figure 4, article V). Relevant results pertaining to the issue of identity are also presented in article III, in which the contemporary choice of targets is stressed to signify their relevance in a particular societal context as well as their dissociation from the outdated targets and a quest for a new “comic identity”.

### 3.5. Globalization

With globalization, humour and its targets are prone to change. Globalization as a process in contemporary folklore is intricately entwined with the subject of my research. Any material on the Internet must acknowledge its global reach, but also its influence on other (local) texts in terms of form and content. Whereas the generally neutral definitions of globalization emphasise rapidly developing interconnections and mutual influence (e.g. Tomlinson 1991: 170), this has been highly contested on ideological grounds, as it primarily strengthens Western hegemony (e.g. Liebes & Katz 1993, cf. Storey 2003 with a discussion of the process in terms of hybridization and “glocalization” referring to a global melange instead of an unidirectional hegemony). Translated jokes in Estonia seem to originate from the resourceful English-speaking Internet (article IV). In humour research, the global spread of some joke cycles (about WTC, or example: Ellis 2001, Csazsi 2003, Kuipers 2005 and others) and targets (such as Scots or Jews) offers evidence of these processes. Even in 1960s, the Sovietization of Estonian jokelore was accompanied with an influx of foreign (Soviet) jokes. Soviet Estonian ethnic jokes targeted the stingy Scots (Laineste 2005c), and also the Chukchis, a faraway nation imported by Russian jokelore, and several other targets that were quite irrelevant in the cultural and historical context. Soviet joke tradition may be viewed as a wave of globalization in Estonian (or the whole Soviet Eastern European) jokelore, because of the increase in new (and in Estonia’s sense foreign) targets (Figure 2, article III; Figure 7, article V).

A tendency towards a global variety of targets has been noticed in post-socialist countries (e.g. Brzozowska 2007, Stanoev 2008). In the contemporary world, jokes could be made about all kinds of ethnic groups, although some are more popular than others. They are borrowed and travel in untraceable ways. Jokes (and people who tell the jokes) are no longer focused on their moderately strange, less-well-off neighbours, and instead look for greater contrasts, and



their horizons are also respectively wider. There are many new targets in Estonian post-socialist jokelore (Figure 2, article III), and many political jokes are translated from foreign languages, mostly English (article V). At the same time, the same new media, the Internet, has been applied to preserve and reproduce locality (Robertson 1995), and the increasing trends of globalization have become balanced by social subculturalization (which may simultaneously be global in essence, as the members of these groups form an international community linked by the Internet), as argued in article V.

The emotional aspects of the interethnic conflicts that are bound to arise due to increased immigration can be approached through the investigation of ethnic humour and attitudes towards it. If ethnic jokes act as a thermometer of opinions (Davies 1990: 9), we should be able to point to the possible sources of actual conflicts. At present, there is no evidence in the Estonian material that the increase in ethnic jokes could coincide with the perception of an acute conflict situation involving real aggression (e.g. Figure 2 article V, and the discussion about the recent Estonian jokes about Russians). Globalization in the joke market is also a steaming source of conflicts. Jokes that are incidentally drawn into the international arena will trigger unexpected reactions, and there are few opportunities for moderation or instances to turn to (Kuipers 2008a: 8–9).

The rise of a joke tradition of international reach also has its role in shaping the genre. It is both the structure and content that has changed. Even though Wickberg (1998) sees continuity in the content of comic folk tales and jokes, I will argue in article III for some certain changes in the choice of targets and topics embedded in social reality. Having studied both the form and content of Estonian ethnic jokes throughout the 20<sup>th</sup> century, I conclude that even if it is mostly the form that has changed, there are also many topics that are not considered funny, and if, then belonging primarily to the category of the absurd. The topics of old comic tales were mostly tied to a specific locality, personal experience or context (even if the globalization of topics and plots was common, the targets became local, “customised”), but the aspiration towards universality has placed the simple stupidity script with interchangeable targets above all others (article III). Globalization is also an important feature and motivator of topical jokes. The reflection of daily global events in a manner that does not discriminate between that which is essentially important and secondary causes alienation from and sarcasm towards media coverage (article II, also argued by Davies 1999b: 265–266). The nature of the media brings about a specific blended form and content of humour, in which local and global catastrophes, but also serious and comic modes, meet and mix.

## 4. METHODOLOGY

### 4.1. Jokes as a research topic

Jokes present a simple yet elegant and informative research material for the humour scholar. They have been called the fruit flies of humour research<sup>12</sup> for obvious reasons: they are abundant, easy to approach, and have a long history in humour research, just as these insects have in genetics. In addition to this, there are other reasons for picking jokes as a primary target for research. The genre is popular, and exceedingly so on the Internet. Jokes are also a relatively stereotypical and standardised form of communication, which makes them greatly similar in both speech and writing (even if some aspects go missing in the latter). In addition, everyone agrees that jokes are (or intend to be) humorous, which leaves a lot of complex issues aside (e.g. when presenting a paper on irony, the most usual question from the audience will probably be “is this really humour?”). And last but not least, jokes are global, but culturally specific social phenomena, and are representative of their surroundings, which makes their investigation informative about the people who tell the jokes.

A joke is generally perceived as having been created by the people and not belonging to any single author (this is also emphasised as an important feature in sociological research in Davies 2008, Kuipers 2006: 6). The genre is quite volatile in face-to-face communication, and collecting an ample body of material for research can be a painstaking enterprise. “Joke-telling sessions” are rare, and even if the intention of telling a joke is usually marked with a cue like “Do you know that one about...” or “There was a Russian, a German and an Estonian...” it would be difficult instantly to record the event together with the meta-data.

The solution to this problem would be concentrating on jokes that are offered “on a plate”: jokes sent to and collected on the Internet by Internet-users. These jokes come with a contextual set of information that can be of great importance in processing the data: the type of the site (dynamic or passive), the date, the sender (frequent or accidental), and sometimes its placement in a category and other additional knowledge about the joke is openly accessible (see also Oring 2003: 139–140).

A topic that only briefly appears in my previous research is the transformation of the formal aspects of the genre. In some approaches labelled the commodification of the joke form (Wickberg 1998), the long humorous tale has turned into a short fixed and standardized text, with the punch-line being its quintessential component<sup>13</sup>. In the Estonian material, the shift is probably most

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<sup>12</sup> Not knowing the exact origin of the metaphor in humour research, I will attribute it to Giselinde Kuipers (Galati, Romania, June 2008).

<sup>13</sup> Even though the evidence of a punch-line as such can be traced further back, see Krikmann 2008.

visible in jokes dating to the turn of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, and the collections published by M. J. Eisen display both of these formats side by side.

## **4.2. The Internet as an environment and as a source for folkloristic research**

The loss of quality of information has always been an issue in Internet studies (the gold standard being face-to-face interaction / fieldwork, Hine 2005: 5, romanticized and sought for also in folkloristics, e.g. Bendix 2000: 34), but when it comes to research into jokes, the quantitative abundance and ready availability of a metatext (the time of sending the joke, the user name, user profile, etc) justify the use of this source.

Collecting jokes on the Internet is becoming more common and useful, and even unavoidable, as a large proportion of oral joke-telling has shifted to that media. The media in turn has had a profound influence on the genre. The renewed nature of jokes (short, electronically distributed in addition to oral circulation, specific jokes created only for the electronic media – for example lists and video / picture jokes (see Ellis 2001) etc) requires renewed methods for collecting and processing of data, and researchers are now also becoming more aware of that need. The density of jokes on websites (a function of the intensity of sending, in the case of an active, portal-type joke site) depends on the time of day, the day of the week, and the season (see also Aikat 1998 on the general patterns of Internet use). Accessibility is an issue frequently mentioned in earlier articles about Internet research, but concerns about the representativeness of Internet users are now largely neglected as non-relevant. A few scholars have begun to focus on the subject of Internet jokes, drawing our attention to the fact that when Internet-based humour is studied, it usually focuses on specific topics or cases, and does not attempt to provide an overview of valid methodologies, nor to formulate unified methodological principles for future studies (Shifman 2007: 188).

The functions of the joke in a virtual environment are not directly addressed as an independent topic of the articles included in the dissertation, but it is a significant issue with respect to why people choose to share jokes on the Internet, resulting in an abundant body of material that humour researchers can benefit from in their studies. The abundance of jokes on the Internet shows that these are in a close relationship with the social reality – as a tool for processing information, discussing issues, expressing the otherwise inexpressible or unpermitted, etc. It is also useful to point out the other things that jokes can be used to inform us about (e.g. forwarding jokes in e-mail as a form of bonding, Shifman 2007, Aro 2003, Salo, Zimmerbauer & Suutari 2005)

### 4.3. Mixing quantitative and qualitative methods

There have been discussions about the appropriateness of traditional sociological methods in Internet research (e.g. Hine 2005, Joinson 2005, Schneider & Foot 2005). Humour research offers the researcher a range of possibilities as the phenomenon is not tied only to performance, nor is it merely a subject for textual analysis. The researcher is free to choose either of these approaches, though most revealing results would present themselves through the combination of both.

In interdisciplinary research, combining different methodologies is more an aim than a sub-product. All research in Internet studies (Consalvo et al 2004, Kiesler 1996, Hine 2005) accentuates the importance of trying out different conventional methodologies while doing research on the Internet. As a result of the specific features of the Internet (i.e. the abundance of material in which the researcher must extract meaning from chaos), combined quantitative and qualitative analysis has been the choice in many studies (e.g. Jankowski & van Selm 2005; an alternative would be to do qualitative face-to-face or virtual interviews, observations, case studies, versus quantitative surveys). There are different options and levels for both modes of analysis, and in this research, the quantitative approach usually gives an overview of the subject and offers directions for the more descriptive, comparative or contextual analysis. A methodology that combines the two is content analysis (see Shifman 2007 on an option to use content analysis in Internet humour research), but for more than categorization purposes this method is not informative enough. Quantitative analysis combined with qualitative analysis is especially suitable for the large corpuses that are common in folkloristic research (also used in Estonian comparative folkloristics, e.g. Anderson 1935, Laugaste 1969, but also Järv 2005, Saarlo 2005, Sarv 2008).

My aim has also been to combine quantitative methods with qualitative analysis, the first to describe and filter the material, and the second to analyse it in greater depth. What has been done in most of the articles (articles II, III, IV and V) is first to pinpoint the tendencies in the material by presenting all of the material (by categories) on a chronological graph, and identifying the density of existing material over the years. As the next step, the category under examination is investigated in greater detail, calculating its relative share (e.g. of ethnic jokes) among the entire body of material. In the case of ethnic jokes, the corpus is also broken down in the lines of targets, mechanically counting their occurrence in joke texts and calculating their share in the category of ethnic jokes. Throughout the analysis, the temporal scale is maintained for the comparison of the results of the changes and continuities in their societal context. In-depth qualitative analysis includes analysis of the jokes of a particular subcategory (e.g. Russians in Estonian ethnic humour) – their topics and types, the repetitions or modifications of jokes, allusions to politics and other relevant topics, etc. The methods of each article are described in greater detail in the articles.

The described method, supported by a sociological overview of the context, has proved itself to be the most useful means to tackle for example the question of target choice or other changes in jokes throughout the examined period. The comparative sociological approach also offers a valuable addition to the research toolkit: looking further from the specific subject and its surroundings to other examples where similar humour arises in different surroundings, and vice versa – where a similar context causes different jokes – will lead to significant insights (this will also be attempted in my next article about the ethical dimensions of ethnic jokes). Straying aside from the main methodological choices, I have occasionally also made use of discourse analysis (Laineste 2003a and 2003b: article II).

The main source of the research has been the Database of Estonian Contemporary Jokes and Anecdotes<sup>14</sup>, covering the period of 1950s – present day. This includes jokes from Delfi Joke site<sup>15</sup>, a “humour hub” that represents the most active and versatile joke site on Estonian Internet at the moment.

#### 4.4. Assets and limitations

Throughout my research, I was aware of the assets and limitations of researching humour on the Internet. Article IV refers to this in opening the discussion as “we can give full account [about Estonian political jokes] only when considering both the specific, contemporary background and the historic perspective, and in addition to this, the media where the material appears” (p. 40).

In addition to digitalization, archiving and categorization, one must also discuss the matters of access and ethics. I must admit I was oblivious to these issues until they were brought to my attention by the public debate about (allegedly distasteful and potentially dangerous) ethnic jokes being collected and displayed, using the state funds in the Estonian Literary Museum (that is, the Database of Estonian Contemporary Jokes and Anecdotes). The issue of sensitive data has also been brought up in academic writing, although the type of data has been different, extending mostly to personal data about the informants (Corti, Day & Backhouse 2000). This controversy will be discussed in a forthcoming article by the author.

This brings us to another possible function of a database, namely as a tool to foster dialogue between joke-tellers and targets, or merely people interested in the subject (preferably moderated by professionals, described also in article V). In addition to holding a role of mediator, the portal would offer new humour resources, added by its visitors.

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<sup>14</sup> <http://folklore.ee/~liisi/o2>

<sup>15</sup> <http://publik.delfi.ee/jokes/>. In the articles, the Delfi joke site is referred to with its previous address, <http://www.delfi.ee/jokes>.

## **5. THE ARTICLES IN BRIEF AND THE MAIN IDEAS DESCRIBED THEREIN**

The dissertation includes 5 articles published between the years 2003 and 2009. The first article (article I) is published in a volume of articles by the Estonian Literary Museum and the Centre of Cultural History and Folkloristics. Articles II and III are published in the electronic journal *Folklore* (Estonian Literary Museum), made available to an international audience on the Internet. Article V is directed towards Eastern European humour scholars (published in *Acta Ethnographica Hungarica* (Akadémiai Kiadó, Budapest, Hungary), and so is article IV (published in the compendium of articles on post-socialist jokelore at the Estonian Literary Museum, including articles by Western and several Eastern European humour scholars). All of these publications have an international advisory board, and have been chosen through a conscious effort to find a well-chosen arena for the dissemination of the results and discussion of the issues raised in my research.

The article-based dissertation format inevitably means that there is a certain amount of overlap between the articles. The divergence of audiences has elicited some continuously revisited topics, for example the overview of Davies' theory of ethnic humour. As the nature of the present and future research is (or at least strives to be) cross-cultural, the language of the dissertation is English. Nevertheless, some of these articles have been published in both, Estonian and English (parts of article I have appeared in English, with a focus on Internet research in general (Laineste 2003d); article IV appeared first in Estonian, Laineste 2007). Article III is based on the several studies about ethnic humour in Estonia, which were launched in 2004 (Laineste 2005a, 2005b and 2005c). Article III was written in order to rephrase and concentrate the results of the previous research on the same subject.

The references to joke sources use the address of the web page from which the joke was archived, and not the archival identity code in the joke database, as the first type of data is more informative for the reader.

In the next sections, I will give a general overview of the aims and results of each article, and describe the theoretical background and assumptions. In many ways, going through the articles over and over again is an enlightening experience, as it points out all of the shortcomings and constantly tempts one to re-write alongside re-reading. In the following overviews of the published articles, I have added a new aspect of discussion to the articles when necessary.

## 5.1. Article I

Laineste, Liisi (2006). Eesti anekdootide andmebaas. [Database of Estonian contemporary jokes] Kõiva, M. (Ed) *Võim ja kultuur II*. Tartu: Eesti Kultuuriloo ja Folkloristika tippkeskus, Eesti Kirjandusmuuseum, pp. 103–124 (for an English overview with a slightly different focus, see Laineste, L. (2003d). Researching Humour on the Internet. *Folklore: Electronic Journal of Folklore*, Vol 25, pp. 93–97.)

The first of the articles included in the dissertation provides a key to understand the underlying assumptions about the material used in the studies, as all the following papers are based on jokes found on the Internet. For this reason, I will herein provide an overview of both the issues described in the paper as well as the implications connecting this with the rest of the articles. A discussion of connected issues can also be found under the section about methodology (see above, section 4.2).

The digital database described in the article was designed to simplify the synchronic study of a genre – the joke. Estonian contemporary, punch-lined jokes (from the 1960s to the present day) form a 50,000-strong database with various archived joke collections and the Internet as its source. This has been both a body of material and a technical aid in conducting the research.

The article was motivated by the desire to (1) advocate the merits of combining qualitative case-analysis with a broader view of the subject by describing the material using the toolbox of elementary statistics, and (2) receiving feedback on and disseminating the categorization system used in the database in order to facilitate the cross-cultural, comparative studies of jokes. It looks through the material, its categorization, and the possibilities of the search engine (that were available in the year 2006). It acknowledges the possible problems in completing, organising and using any folkloristic / ethnographic or other qualitative database, and recognises the biases of the present one. The chapter concerning categorization presents a system based on tagging the texts (jokes) from various aspects (9 different properties for one text), thus resulting in a semantically organised database that is easy to access. The system may be described as “relational” (as opposed to “unidimensional / linear” and “hierarchical”). Attention is also devoted to the semantic collocation of variants of the same joke, which display only minor differences in wording, performed using a specifically designed programme that calculates the index of similarity of the texts. The merits and drawbacks of a digital database (as opposed to a traditional non-digital archive) are analysed. The overview of the search engine names the available options and also outlines some future functions that the interface should possess (e.g. a thematic catalogue). Some of these options have already been introduced (e.g. categorization almost completed and similar jokes tagged), but some tasks still remain.

The assumption is that Internet jokes and the patterns of their popularity offer insights into the way their senders, the inhabitants of a particular social

reality, think. In my research, I have implicitly followed this, nevertheless being also aware of the limitations ascribed to the media I use: it is but one of the many media in which humour is published, it overlooks the communicative aspect of humour, it may include the abundant jokes that are created and shared by just a small group of people, which may yield misleading results, etc. However, jokes on the internet account for a big part of humorous communication, and have taken over many of the functions that face-to-face interaction has performed. In order to minimise the problem of representativeness, validity is provided by a quantitative joke database, including static and dynamic, personal and communal sites in the material, and focusing (e.g. in articles II and III) on something that can be called a “humour hub” (Shifman 2007: 188) – a large, active and dynamic repository of visual and verbal humour on various topics, often linked to a commercial mass media website (in this case, the Delfi news portal). The communicative aspects of humour are deliberately overlooked in my articles, as my focus has been the macro-sociological relationship between humour and society. As for the variety of media that publish humour, the Internet (competing with printed sources) presents the most versatile source of the specific object of my study, the joke.

The main conclusions of the article can be summarized in the following points:

1. A textual database of jokes (but also almost any other folkloristic material) assists not only in archiving the material, but also in analysing it with the help of the user interface of large databases.
2. Much of the work with material in digital databases can be computerised, but there is still a considerable amount of qualitative work that can only be done by an expert (or preferably by finding a consensus in a group of experts).
3. There is a need for a cross-culturally applicable system for the categorization of jokes, in order to facilitate comparative studies of humour.
4. Semantic search engines and specifically designed computer programmes (for the clustering of similar types, but also different jokes with similar punch-lines, or similar jokes with different punch-lines, etc) are of great assistance in the categorization process and should accordingly be paid more attention to.

## **5.2. Article II**

Laineste, Liisi (2003). Take it with a Grain of Salt: The Kernel of Truth in Topical Jokes. *Folklore: Electronic Journal of Folklore*, Vol. 21, pp. 7–25.

Article II is based on a presentation held at the conference of the International Society for Humour Studies in Bertinoro, Italy (2002). Its main aim was to (1) outline the general patterns of joke-sending on the Internet and (2) describe the form, content and function of topical jokes.



This study reinforces that jokes can serve other aims than receiving an immediate communicative reward – they fulfil a cognitive task by commenting on the daily events and their reflection in the media. The approach uses general quantitative analysis to reveal patterns in joke-sending, and combines this with qualitative methodology borrowed from discourse analysis. The article also presents a study of the media in which the jokes are published, following the interactions of time of day / week and the identity of contributors in order to outline the increasing practice of sending jokes to Internet joke portals. It is already evident in this paper (and further supported by article IV) that the comic potential of the real-life event decides whether the topic will appear in subsequent jokes, and so does the nature of the media coverage of that issue. The analysis identifies three types of topical jokes: jokes that comment on only one event, jokes combine the commentary of several (local and global) events, and jokes on relevant topics from already circulating jokelore (e.g. airplane jokes in the case of 9/11 catastrophe), and analyses four examples that use discourse analysis. During times of catastrophes and other events that receive extensive media coverage, the amount of topical jokes also rises, which points to the need to comment on these issues. The way these jokes often make use of intertextuality, e.g. by borrowing the form of a regular news text, offers evidence of information overload that people have to deal with, and how they manage this with healthy humour.

The main results include:

1. Sending jokes over the Internet is an activity that coincides with the general patterns of Internet usage.
2. Topical jokes are directly and without much delay influenced by everyday issues, depending on their comic potential and the nature of the news coverage.
3. Through a play with both form and topics, topical jokes bring forth the absurdity of the social reality, and thus function as a means to cope with the events themselves as well as the information overload that accompanies them.

### **5.3. Article III**

Laineste, Liisi (2008). Politics of Joking: Ethnic Jokes and Their Targets in Estonia (1880's–2007). *Folklore: Electronic Journal of Folklore*, Vol. 40, pp. 109–138.

Estonian ethnic jokes and the transformations inside the category was the main subject of my master's thesis ("Characters in Estonian Ethnic Jokes", supervisor prof. A. Krikmann, 2004). The aim of this article was to rephrase the main results and put them in context. The choice of ethnic targets in jokes is emphasised here as a conscious choice dictated by the relevant societal issues (relations with closest neighbours, the absurdity of Soviet politics, and the quest

for a new national identity (including a new "comic identity"), respectively). The focus is on ethnic jokes about stupidity, overlooking other joke scripts. The transition from the joke tale into the punch-lined joke is also described.

The article is divided into three subsections, each dealing with different periods (1890s–1909; 1960s–1990; 1991–2007). The changes that the jokes have undergone are ascribed to the general attitudes of Estonians towards themselves as a nation, and the opposition to a relevant “other”.

The analysis of old joke tales forms the largest and most substantial part of the article. The reason for this is to bring the subject closer to the reader, as there are more overviews of the contemporary (including Soviet) jokelore than the jokes that were known in the 1900s. It is informative to show the perceptions of the world and neighbours shared by the people who lived then, and to contrast this with the following periods, in order to highlight the continuities and change in the tradition. The other periods are analysed in the light of the first period which provides a context for the insights formulated in the following results:

1. The political system may influence the content of ethnic jokes, downplaying the importance of social, cultural or economic contexts.
2. In old ethnic joke tales, the targets were close neighbours, immigrants or kinsfolk.
3. The heroes of Soviet ethnic jokes were mostly pan-Soviet characters: Chukchis, Russians, Armenians and other ethno-political targets.
4. The present trends in choosing targets for ethnic jokes are dominated by an unconscious attempt to mock others instead of the nations that were popular during the totalitarian regime (there are many “new” nations among the targets, both European and even further away, but there is also an increasingly large amount of jokes about close neighbours and Estonians themselves).
5. The theory of ethnic humour (Ch. Davies) does not apply fully – through all of the analysed periods – to Estonian jokelore. The discrepancy is mainly due to the strong influence of Soviet jokes.

## 5.4. Article IV

Laineste, Liisi (2008). Political Jokes in Post-Socialist Estonia (2000–2007). In Arvo Krikmann & Liisi Laineste (Eds). *Permitted Laughter: Socialist, Post-socialist and Never-socialist Humour*. Tartu: EKM Teaduskirjastus, pp. 39–68.

The article surveys Estonian political jokes on the Estonian Internet ([www.delfi.ee/jokes](http://www.delfi.ee/jokes)) in the period 2000–2007. The analysis concerns the nearly 800-strong collection of political jokes that is accessible on this popular and active humour site. The content of Estonian contemporary political jokes is discussed, in order to offer new evidence about the interdependence of jokes and social reality. The article was written to (1) give a thorough overview of the

primary features of contemporary Estonian political jokes, against the pervasive background of Soviet political jokes as the relevant context and (2) confront A. Rose's (2002) theory of jokes in totalitarian and democratic countries (which has also found falsification in other post-socialist countries, see Brzozowska 2007, Stanoev 2008).

The article is built on three hypotheses that govern the structure and results. The first hypothesis deals with the reaction of political jokes to both global and local politics-related events (although in some cases the combination of different topics results in a type of topical jokes that approaches the absurd rather than political humour). I presumed that a more politically active period (elections, political scandal, etc) will result in a heightened interest in jokes. Studying the popularity of political jokes in comparison to the background trends in the media, there was a significant difference in the patterns – the number of news items, and also ethnic, vocational and animal jokes are falling, whereas the number of daily comments on the news and the proportion of political jokes is rising (out of the total number of jokes). These fluctuations in the popularity of political jokes were not, however, directly influenced by events in daily politics. Nevertheless, even if there was insufficient evidence to state that jokes are a truthful mirror of social reality, the topicality of political jokes is more the rule than the exception.

The second hypothesis concerns more formal issues, observing the categories of political and ethnic jokes and their boundaries. The development of these categories is followed by the examination of some examples of contemporary jokes that demonstrate continuity in terms of the script (sometimes also the target), but simultaneously display discontinuity in their possible categorisation. A typical change is represented by examples, where a joke with originally political allusions is transferred into other joke categories (absurd, ethnic etc), and if it remains in the political category, it receives a new relevant target (e.g. a contemporary politician instead of a militia (civilian police in Soviet Russia)). The analysis showed that old Soviet political jokes that are still in circulation have a second, absurd / ethnic / scatological / sexual / etc allusion that makes them relevant to the contemporary audience. Formerly political jokes can be found in these categories (absurd, ethnic or other), unless the targets are well-known Russian Soviet leaders.

The third line of reasoning in this paper has arisen from a presentation at the congress of the International Society of Folklore Narrative Research (ISFNR), titled "Political Jokes Under Different Regimes" (Tartu, July 2005). This is an issue that relates to the first point but approaches it more broadly, by posing the question of jokes and the social reality in a general political context instead of the immediate political surroundings. The dependence of jokes on the political regime into which they are born has also been discussed by other humour scholars, and this article verifies a hypothesis presented by Alexander Rose (2002). This states that political jokes from democratic countries target politicians, while totalitarian jokes are more about the system itself. The hypo-

thesis was falsified on the basis of the Estonian material: contemporary political jokes are indeed interested more in our own and foreign politicians, but in the case of Soviet jokes, the absurdities of Soviet daily life on the one hand and of its leaders on the other were both targeted with equal intensity.

The main results can be summarized in the following points:

1. The immediate political reality influences political jokes in an indirect way, resulting in a cycle of jokes only when several factors (the importance of the issue, the existence of potential comic qualities in the issue or its presentation in the media, persons involved and the popularity of their “comic persona”, etc) coincide.
2. The large proportion (1/4 of all the political jokes) of old Soviet jokes in the material can be explained in several ways: the nature of the Internet as a limitless external memory, the lingering meaning of the ingenious tradition of Soviet jokes, a tendency towards nostalgia, and as evidence of the slowness of folkloric processes. The proportion of old Soviet jokes is falling.
3. The limits of the categories of ethnic and political jokes have changed, becoming better delineated and leaving aside the typical Soviet ethno-political category.
4. Contemporary jokelore shows a clear inclination to choose a target from among domestic or foreign politicians. Soviet jokes mainly made fun of the system itself, but also (to an almost equal extent) the leaders.
5. The difference between totalitarian and democratic political jokes should be explained through other terms than target choice because this is not a feature that would set these two types apart in a significant way.

## 5.5. Article V

Laineste, Liisi (2009). Post-Socialist Jokelore: Preliminary Findings and Further Research Suggestions. *Acta Ethnographica Hungarica*, Vol. 53, forthcoming.

This article will propose a model for a post-socialist humour research project, identifying areas that are worth studying. It will also repeat some findings from Estonian humour research (causing some overlap with articles II and III). The article is based on a plenary lecture at the International Symposium “Humor and Linguistics/Folklore”, at the University of Pécs (Székesvárd), Hungary, September 2007, presented to attract interest from the Eastern European humour scholars present at the event. Publishing the article in a special volume of the *Acta Ethnographica Hungarica* will also support the idea of disseminating the vision of the project among scholars of humour and the intersecting disciplines in the region.

The project’s main aims were first to create a pan-Eastern European database and a portal of contemporary jokelore, and secondly, to conduct research using this new database, in order to point out the interconnections between the jokes

and their cultural, political, demographic and economic contexts. The article will give a brief overview of the design of the database, and three sets of problems (intolerance, globalization and the comparison of socialist, post-socialist and non-socialist jokelore) that could be addressed with its assistance.

Jokes have long escaped any attempts to censor them. This makes it a worthwhile subject while studying the otherwise hidden aspects of a culture: interethnic conflict, intolerance, etc. This is especially relevant in post-socialist Eastern Europe, where feelings of nationalism have flourished. The findings in the Estonian material show that (1) the proportion of ethnic jokes is constantly falling, (2) ethnic labels are being replaced by more general ones, and (3) even if the Russian is a major figure in Internet hate speech in Estonia's news portals and discussion boards, it is not a noteworthy target of Estonian ethnic jokes.

The second chapter deals with the effects of globalization on the so far relatively secluded and long-standing tradition of Soviet jokelore. The results show that Soviet jokes are still around, but the amount of jokes about local and foreign politicians (other than Russian) is constantly increasing. Many new jokes are being translated from English.

The last chapter concentrates on spotting the specific features of post-socialist jokelore. It dwells upon the proclaimed shortage of jokes (but finds no proof for that), although it admits that the status of joke-telling in the last 15 years might have decreased. The previous research suggests that Eastern European jokelore diverges namely because of the strong intervention of the Communist regime with the local tradition. The most recent trend is to try out new targets (including local kinsfolk) in order to reconstruct more "natural" choices for joke targets.

The main points are summarized below:

1. Eastern European humour research would benefit from an international database, also functioning as a medium for discussion and dialogue between conflicting parties.
2. Ethnic jokes are diminishing, but the genre of jokes is not disappearing, instead it is moving to the Internet and its status is changing.
3. Globalization is an important trend in post-socialist jokelore, which introduces new targets and translated jokes. At the same time, the tradition of the old Soviet joke is still existent and lives side-by-side with the new jokes.
4. Post-socialist jokelore as a whole does differ from socialist and non-socialist (democratic) joke traditions, but more precise and substantial conclusions could only be made in a comprehensive comparative study.

## **6. MAIN RESULTS AND DIRECTIONS FOR FURTHER STUDIES**

The dissertation fulfils all of the proposed aims (see above, chapter 1).

The study has provided different angles of research, covering the area of topical, ethnic and political jokes. This has given several insights about the interaction of folklore and its surroundings (the political, economic, cultural and other contexts), claiming that the features and coverage of events in the social reality have a slightly varying, but established influence on jokes. The introductory and concluding articles display a wider approach to the subject, with article I underlying the methodological background and describing the material, article V summing up the results of several years of research and raising questions and hypotheses for further research on jokes and humour.

The introduction gives an overview of humour research in Estonia, and articles of this dissertation include references to other relevant studies carried out on Estonian contemporary jokes throughout the two grant periods (2001–2005 and 2006–2009). In this way, the dissertation offers a concise shortcut into the ideas, questions and results of the research on Estonian jokelore performed in the last decade.

As an indicator of an interaction between a genre and its surroundings, the continuities and change in some subcategories (most of all, political and ethnic jokes) were described. This has made it possible to conclude that the history and development of the two subcategories mainly display change and only moderate continuity, both in terms of content and category boundaries. This in turn is in accordance with the constant transformations in the social reality of the country as opposed to long-standing democracies with much more firmly established choices of joke targets.

The aim to provide a more universal model for the description and prediction of target choice in ethnic jokes was only partly fulfilled, as the targets and content of ethnic (and, in comparison, old Soviet ethno-political) jokes from other Eastern European countries should first be studied in greater detail. Nevertheless, there is a need to stress the influence of the political context on ethnic jokes. In addition to this, the relative nature of centre and periphery, better and worse off, etc should be kept in mind. Another important feature is the influence of more powerful cultural, economic and political hegemonies on peripheral countries that easily adapt and “domesticate” the characters and other features of jokes told by this mainstream.

## **6.1. Main conclusions**

### **6.1.1. Material**

Researching jokes on the Internet has become unavoidable because of the popularity of the genre in this environment. Humour is one of the main pastimes of people using the Internet and its entertainment value is frequently exploited to make web sites more attractive. Even if the popularity of joke-telling in everyday interaction may be diminishing, the same does not account for jokes found in the Internet. This may mean that joke as a genre is once again undergoing a change, and our task will be to document this change, partly with the help of the database of contemporary jokes.

Despite the critique that the investigation of jokes on the Internet is too far from the life of the genre in face-to-face conversations, I believe that the material has a lot to offer on the none the less important life the genre leads in the Internet. In addition to immediate social embeddedness, there is the wider societal context to jokes. If the researcher treats the subject as text in a significant context rather than as a pure text, the approach will offer a key to understanding social and cultural processes.

There is a need for a cross-culturally applicable categorization system of jokes, in order to facilitate comparative studies of humour – first of all in Eastern Europe, and then broadening the area in order to compare the results to jokes that have been told in Western Europe (e.g. Scandinavia).

### **6.1.2. General**

Jokes react to events in the social reality, but not in a direct and uncontested way. Generalising the results, we can state that the influence of social reality on jokes is visible in the way jokes adapt to different social, economical, cultural and other contexts, displaying motivated transformations of targets and even form. Topical jokes present a more direct relationship with daily events and news texts.

### **6.1.3. Categories of jokes: topical, ethnic and political**

The limits of the categories of ethnic and political jokes have changed, becoming better delineated and leaving aside the typical Soviet ethno-political category.

Topical jokes form a category that presents a stable commentary on social reality. Significant in both form and content, these jokes play with the absurdity of media coverage and the absurdity of the events alike. They rarely exit their

virtual life, and circulate only as long as the event is still remembered, and in a few cases form joke cycles.

Ethnic jokes is a diminishing category among the Estonian contemporary material, but the changes in the choice of targets offer evidence of the sub-genre's relevance to the main problems and issues that people face in their social reality. The political system may influence the content of ethnic jokes, downplaying the importance of social, cultural or economic contexts.

Political jokes form a distinct and (relatively) growing category in the contemporary material. The immediate political reality influences political jokes in an indirect manner, resulting in a cycle of jokes only when several factors (the importance of the issue, the existence of potential comic qualities in the issue or its presentation in the media, the persons involved and the popularity of their "comic persona", etc) coincide.

#### **6.1.4. Comparative**

Post-socialism is a distinct period in the political, economic and cultural past of Eastern Europe. In Estonia, Soviet jokelore imposed new jokes just as the Western world is influencing the post-socialist jokelore. Despite the obvious differences the Eastern European countries display after regaining their independence, we can still assume that there are some overall tendencies in post-socialist humour as a whole (which differ from socialist and non-socialist (democratic) joke traditions). Of all phenomena and traditions in culture, jokes and other forms of humour may offer a unique topical prism for a broader discussion of post-socialist culture by examining its main processes, features and functions in the society. More precise and substantial conclusions could only be drawn from a comprehensive comparative study (see Krikmann & Laineste 2008).

### **6.2. Future directions**

During the last years, my interest has turned to the social problems that transitional (or, to some, post-transitional) societies are facing, and their interaction with / manifestation in jokes and humour in general. Eastern Europe is expected to be a place where future problems of interethnic violence can arise as the area is, according to many studies and surveys, a cradle of nationalism (comparative study in Mudde 2005, for more specific overview of individual post-socialist countries see e.g. Nyiri 2003, Žagar 2002). These tendencies are fostered by the totalitarian history that recognized Soviet nationalism and suppressed the local one.

Even though the theories of humour as mirth prevail, the common sense belief that dictates the attitudes towards jokes favours the view of humour as



aggression. Ethnic jokes are often taken to be straightforward proof of racism and xenophobia. The distinction between “us” and “them” that has always been present in all folklore, including jokes, also often leads to the issue of humour and hostility in public discussions on taste, censorship and other related issues. Moira Smith (2007) states that the Western ideal of everyone having – and, indeed, valuing – a sense of humour does not necessarily apply to other nations / cultures living side by side with “us”, which will in turn be a source for innumerable misunderstandings on the basis of humour. The manifold relationship of jokes and their surroundings was already discussed above, but more detailed research must be performed on the emotions and attitudes in the society combined with an analysis of reactions to jokes, or to issues such as censorship. Again, this should not be done in isolation from the broader societal context, as this would lead to results that would not help to understand the local situation. Research like this will only benefit from comparative cross-cultural studies that would take into account similar situations with different jokes, and cases of the same jokes under different societal conditions, which would lead to the naming of some basic features that will be effective in describing the primarily large-scale contextual qualities of potentially harmful jokes.

One of my future areas of study should be the relationship of written jokes on the Internet and oral jokes. In order to describe the degree of their interaction, in-depth qualitative methods should be used.

The third direction of future research concerns the way in which jokes merge into different modes and forms of communication through citations and references to punch-lines or (sub)culturally known joke characters. The emergence of new forms of parody and mockery (e.g. in television shows) and their intertextuality should be studied, paying special attention to the occasional emergence of traditional (perhaps even old Soviet) punch-lined joke formats. This would clarify the issues of globalization in humour, and jokes as an active commentary not only on the content of the surrounding social reality but also the way in which it is presented.

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## EESTI ANEKDOOTIDE DIGITAALNE ANDMEBAAS

***Teesid:** Eesti anekdootide digitaalne andmebaas lihtsustab uurija tööd selle žanri uurimisel ajalises plaanis (läbi 20. sajandi teise poole) või mõne teema lõikes ning pakub huvitavat ajaviidet anekdoodihuvilisele, kes leiab sealt muidu eri kohtades asuvad või asunud anekdoodid. Artikkel kirjeldab, millised on digitaalse kogu ja kategoriseerimise puudujäägid ja eelised. Pikemalt peatutakse materjali kategoriseerimisel, mis peaks lähitulevikus võimaldama sooritada praegusest põhjalikumaid sisulisi otsinguid. Tutvustatakse loodud süsteemi kui üht lahendust tekstilise materjali organiseerimiseks. Edasise tegevuse põhieesmärk on kategoriseerimissüsteemi täiustamine ja senikogutud materjali kategooriatesse paigutamine, arendatakse ka verbaalse huumori teoorial põhinevat kategoriseerimissüsteemi, mis on erinev igal anekdooditekti tasandil.*

***Märksõnad:** huumor, kategoriseerimine, tekstiline andmebaas*

### Sissejuhatus

Arvutiteaduse arenguga käskäes on kasvanud ka inimeste nõudmised (uurimis)töö lihtsustamisele. Kui varem oli arvuti abiks kvantitatiivset arvutust võimaldavate reaalteaduste juures, siis nüüd nõuavad ka humanitaarteadlased võimalusi materjali digiteeritud säilitamiseks, klassifitseerimiseks ja analüüsiks. Ühest küljest tähendab see olemasoleva materjali digieerimist, teisalt edasise kogumis- ja arhiveerimistöö ning analüüsi arvutipõhiseks muutmist (Fischer 1994). Eesti naljade andmebaas puutub kokku esimesega neist ülesannetest (kuigi näiteks edasine uurimustöö anekdoodirääkimise popu-

laarsusest – vastandina anekdoodikirjutamise populaarsusele – nõuab ilmselgelt tutvumist ka teise suunaga; samuti hõlmab naljade uurimine digiteeritud materjali kvantitatiivset analüüsi, ei kuulu see käesoleva artikli probleemistikku).

Folkloristi töö suurte tekstikorpustega kuulus nn soome koolkonna põhitegevuste hulka, kuid vajadus töötada suurema hulga tekstidega (*versus* üksikjuhtumi analüüsiga) püsib. Peale mikrostruktuuri kirjeldamise ja kontekstuaalse analüüsi tuleb sageli uurimusele kasuks makrostruktuuri nägemine, materjali esialgne üldine kirjeldamine elementaarse statistika abil. Selleks peab digiteeritud materjal omama n-ö loendatavaid parameetreid, ehk teisisõnu: arvuti peab “mõistma” võimalikult täpselt tekstilise materjali sisu (või olema liigitatud võimalikult detailselt sisulisest aspektist lähtuvalt, seda kas uurijapoolsete pingutuste tulemusena või arvuti abiga).

Praegune (Eesti) arvutiteaduse seis ei võimalda eestikeelse teksti täielikult digiteeritud sisulist kategoriseerimist, sest kuigi arvutile teksti “mõistmise” õpetamine teeb edusamme, on esialgu nt tekstikorpuste kategoriseerimist abistavale programmi nõudlus veel peaaegu olematu. Seetõttu on kaasaegsete anekdootide praegune andmebaas vaid üks võimalik katsetus ja mitte sugugi ainuõige tee tekstilise materjali digiteeritud kogu loomiseks.

Käesolev ülevaade tutvustab Eesti Kirjandusmuuseumi kaasaegsete anekdootide digitaalse andmebaasi materjali ja sellega tehtud tööd ning kirjeldab eesmärgi ja arengusuundi, samuti seda, millised on antud digitaalse kogu puudujäägid ja milline näeb ideaalpildis välja kogumis-, arhiveerimis- ja toimetamisprotsess, kui selle juures on abiks arvuti. Peatun ka üldiselt digitaalse kogu võimalustel materjali kategoriseerimise vallas.

Kaasaegseks anekdoodiks või naljaks nimetatakse siinkohal folkloorset teksti, lühikest puänteeritud nalja, mis eristub vanast pikemast puänteerimata rahvanaljandist. Enamasti erinevad need kaks



žanrialaliiki ka sisuliselt, kuid eristamise mõttes on esikohal siiski vormilised muutused, mis naljandiga aja jooksul on aset leidnud. Anekdootide andmebaas sisaldab vaid uuemaid, puänteeritud nalju.

## Materjal

Eesti kaasaegseid anekdoote on Eesti Kirjandusmuuseumi digiteeritud kogus umbes 50 000 ja nende hulk kasvab keskmiselt paarikümne teksti jagu päevas (millest mõned võivad olla kordused ja variandid, kuid lisatakse siiski andmebaasi). Esmajoones oli anekdoodikogu eesmärgiks talletada 1990. aastate teisel poolel seoses interneti levikuga hüppeliselt kasvanud naljade kirjutamise, saatmise ja ilmselt ka lugemise praktika, mis väljendus näiteks Sünerkomi *Jokebooki Meie Naljaraamat* ([www.zzz.ee/jokes](http://www.zzz.ee/jokes)) fenomenis. See viitab anekdoodižanri tähtsale rollile internetikommunikatsioonis.

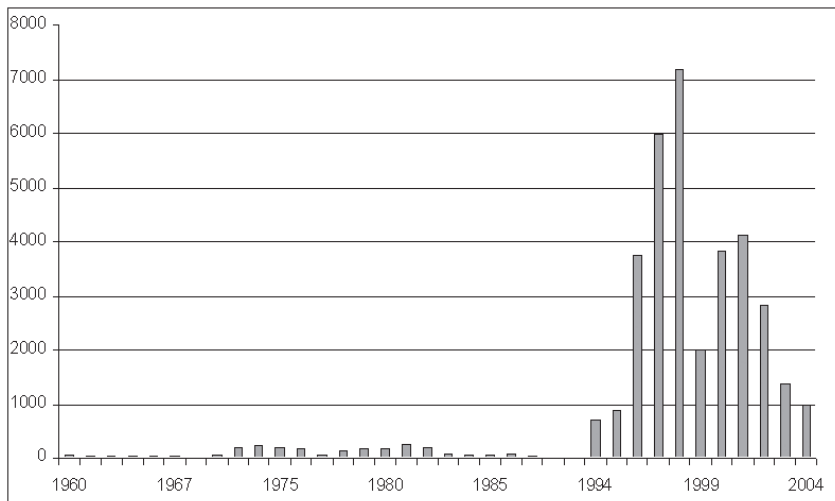
Internetikeskkonnas asuv aktiivne jututoa-tüüpi “plank”, kuhu kõik võisid nalju kirjutada, teiste omi kommenteerida, naljale naljaga vastata vms, saavutas ülisuure populaarsuse ja avas seninägemata võimaluse jäädvustada ning vormistada uurimiseks sobivasse formaati midagi suulise anekdoodirääkimise sarnast. Lisaks paberkartoteegile otsustati kogu avaldada ka digitaalse andmebaasina (sh otsinguna), sest internetis leiduvate anekdootide esmane ja loomulik olek on digiteeritud olek. Pealegi on materjali sedavõrd palju, et digitaalne andmebaas oli peaaegu ainuke võimalus ülevaatlikkuse säilitamiseks.

Anekdoodiandmebaas lihtsustab uurija tööd selle žanri uurimisel ajalises plaanis (läbi 20. sajandi teise poole) või mõne teema lõikes, samuti pakub huvitavat ajaviidet lihtsalt anekdoodihuvilisele internetikasutajale, kes leiab sealt muidu eri kohtades asuvad või asunud anekdoodid. Hetkel kannab digitaalne kogu veel selle praeguse arendaja, st käesoleva artikli autori huvidest tulenevat ilmet (nt täielikult on kategoriseeritud vaid etnilised anekdoodid). Selline kallutatus on probleem, mida on teravalt tunnetatud just tekstilise ma-

terjali digiteeritud kogudega töötamisel (Coffey & Atkinson 1996), sest kuigi kategoriseerimisüsteem püütakse luua võimalikult erinevaid huvisid arvestav ja mitmetasandiline, on see siiski välja mõeldud peamiselt ühe grupi uurijate poolt, seega dikteerib selle ülesehitus edasiste uurimisküsimuste ringi. Andmebaasi koostamise võimalusi ja kvalitatiivseid meetodeid, mis lubaksid uurijal formuleerida täpselt teda huvitavad hüpoteesid ja uurimisküsimused, mitte lastes neid dikteerida baasi struktuuril, kirjeldavad näiteks Robert G. Burgess (1995) ja Eben A. Weitzman & Matthew B. Miles (1994).

Kaasaegsete anekdootide andmebaas koosneb peamiselt internetis leiduvatest ([www.delfi.ee/jokes](http://www.delfi.ee/jokes)) või sealt leitud (kodulehekülgedel asunud anekdoodikogud) naljadest, mõned allikatest, nagu Jüri Viikbergi kogu (Viikberg 1997) on ilmunud trükis. Andmebaas kaatab ajavahemikku 1960. aastatest tänase päevani. Materjal pole jaotunud kaugeltki ühtlaselt (vt joonis 1, millel on esitatud summaarselt anekdootide hulk aastate kaupa). Kõige arvukamalt on anekdootide *Meie Naljaraamatu* algusaegadest (asus aadressil [www.zzz.ee/jokes](http://www.zzz.ee/jokes)) aastatest 1996–1998, sellele järgnev tõus kuulub internetiportaali [www.delfi.ee/naljad](http://www.delfi.ee/naljad) (*Delfi Naljaleht*) avamisaastasse (naljalehekülg avati anekdootide saatmiseks, hindamiseks ja kommentaarideks 2000. aasta aprillis). 1990. aastate algusest on graafikul näha lünka, kuigi sel ajal korraldatud koolipärimuse kogumise käigus saadi muu hulgas ka hulgaliselt anekdootide. Neid pole aga veel muust materjalist eraldatud (v.a keerdküsimused, mida võib lugeda ka anekdootide alla kuuluvaks) ega digiteeritud.

Ebaühtlane jaotus muudab tüübi või teema esinemise arvukusel põhinevad arvutustulemused kallutatuks, kuid selle kompenseerib mõnevõrra varasemate (enne 1990. aastaid kogutud) anekdootide representatiivsus – suur hulk erinevaid tüüpe, mõned paralleelvariandid, väga vähe kordusi –, ja enamasti näitavad osakaalul põhinevad arvutused siiski üsna objektiivset pilti.



Joonis 1. Materjali jaotus anekdoodikogus.

Pidevalt täienev digitaalne andmebaas, mis oleks internetis kättesaadav ja käepärane nii anekdoodihuvilisele arvutikasutajale kui ka folklooriuurijale, on parim sellise aktiivse ja elusa traditsiooni nagu anekdoodid kogumise, säilitamise ja eksponeerimise vorm

### Kategoriseerimine

Kõikidele sissekannetele lisatakse juba internetist alla laadides juurde info, mis puudutab nende allikat ja kogumise (või naljaportaali saatmise) aega. See võimaldab vastata küsimustele anekdootide populaarsuse, kogumise aktiivsuse ja ulatuse kohta. Kuid detailsemaks uuringuks mõne teema siseselt (nt prantslaste- või Juku-anekdoodid, nende põhiteemad, teised tegelased, vormilised eripärad vm uurijat huvitav) on vaja kategoriseerida materjal ka sisuliselt.

Enne kategoriseerimissüsteemi loomist pöörduti Ameerika, Suurbritannia ja Soome huumoriuurijate poole, et jõuda selgusele, kas on mingit levinud süsteemi, mida ka Eestis tasuks järgida. See oleks vajalik eriti juhul, kui uurijal on eesmärgiks kultuuridevahelise uuri-

mistöö tegemine. Erinevate maade anekdootide võrdlemine on palju lihtsam ja tulemuslikum, kui taksonoomiad seda soodustavad. Kahjuks selgus, et iga maa arhiivis kasutatakse erinevat süsteemi, mis enamasti lähtuvad andmebaasi looja isiklikust uurimisfookusest. Enamasti ei looda andmebaase üldiseks kasutamiseks ega pikemaajaliseks arhiveerimiseks. Huumoriuurijad, kes kasutavad uurimismaterjalina kirjutatud anekdoote, piirduvad anekdoodikogude ja/või internetiportaali läbivaatamisega ega kogu kõike, mida leiavad. Näiteks Alan Dundesi koostatud tuntud ja olemasolevatest ilmselt kõige põhjalikum (ameerika) anekdootide arhiiv jagab anekdoodid seitsmesse suuremasse alaliikideks jagunevasse kategooriasse:

- 1) anekdooditsüklid (*knock-knock*-naljad, anekdoodid elektripirni keermisest jms);
- 2) mittenarratiivsed naljad, üherealised naljad, laused, mõistatuse vormis naljad;
- 3) Narratiivsed naljad, mis ei kuulu anekdooditsüklitesse;
- 4) nn karvase koera lood (*shaggy dog stories*);
- 5) obstsöönseid naljad (seksuaalsed, skatoloogilised jms);
- 6) vembud ja vingerpussid (*practical jokes*);
- 7) *blason populaire* (etnilised, rassistlikud, ka poliitilised naljad).

Nimekirjast jäävad silma A. Dundese enda artiklitest tuntud huviobjektid – tema huumoriuuringud räägivad naljatsüklitest, obstsöönsetest naljadest, poliitilisest ja etnilisest huumorist (Dundes 1985, 1987; Dundes & Banc 1986 jpm). N-ö tavaliste anekdootide jaoks tundub olevat siin vaid kolmas kategooria, eraldi asetatud on seksuaalse (ning skatoloogilise vm obstsöönse) sisuga ja etnilisi rühmi pilavad naljad.

Järeldärimiste põhjal sai selgeks, et konkreetse eeskuju puudumise tõttu tuleb liigitussüsteem ise koostada. Järgnevalt kirjeldan, milliseid põhimõtteid järgides loodi kategooriad ja kuidas toimub sisuline kategoriseerimine digiteeritud andmemassiivi sees.

Kategooriad saadi juhuvalimisse sattunud anekdootide sisu analüüsimise tulemusel. Valim hõlmas u 3000 anekdooditeksti. Kategoriseerimissüsteemi väljatöötamiseks kasutati paberkartoteeki, et anekdoodid oleksid reaalselt silma ees ja naljad, millele esialgu sobivat kategooriat ei leitud, võiks hiljem uuesti läbi vaadata ja ära paigutada.

Põhiliseks eristusparameetriks võeti tegelase isik, sest see on naljal tavaliselt kõige selgemini määratletud (nt Juku; vs sitatsioon, mis võib olla konkreetset nimetatud või markeeritud ainult vihjeliselt, nt sissejuhatusega: *Kohtunik kohtualusele...*). Kuid on ka situatsioonidel põhinev kategooria selleks puhuks, kui tegelasi pole otseselt nimetatud, ning liigitusvõimalus muul sisulisel alusel, kui selline kategooria tundub pakkuvat huvi uurijale või on esinduslikult ja selgelt eristatav mingi tunnuse poolest (nt absurdihuumor).

Liigitussüsteem laenas arenduspõhimõtteid hetkel eesrindlikemast huumoriuurimise valdkonnast, verbaalse huumori teooriast (GTVH, *General Theory of Verbal Humor*; vt Attardo & Raskin 1991; Attardo 1994; Ruch & Attardo & Raskin 1993; Hempelmann 2004; Brône & Fayaerts 2004). Selle kohaselt on verbaalseid nalju võimalik kirjeldada kuuel tasandil (nende hierarhia ja asetuse kohta üksmeel veel puudub): keel (LA, *language*), narratiivi strateegia (NS, *narrative strategy*), objekt (TA, *target*), situatsioon (SI, *situation*), loogikamehhanism (LM, *logical mechanism*), ja skriptivastandus (SO, *script opposition*). Lisaks tegelasele (GTVH sõnastuses "objekt", *target*) võiksid andmebaasi lõplikus variandis olla anekdoodid eristatud ka ülejäänud mainitud tunnuste alusel (v.a keelelisel (LA) tasandil, mis tähendaks praktiliselt oma kategooriat igale naljale). See oleks ilmselt esimene katse kasutada GTVH arendatud süsteemi naljade klassifitseerimisel, ja kui lähenemine peaks osutuma viljakaks, võib see olla aluseks ka teiste maade anekdoodibaaside loomisel.

Esimese sammuna eraldati tegelaste jaotuse suuremad põhikategooriad, seejärel alamkategooriad ja nende alajaotused (viimased ju-

hul, kui tundus, et selline eristamine võib hilisemat andmebaasikasutajat huvitada või kui mingi jaotus hakkas silma arvukuse poolest). Alajaotuse vajalikkus kerkis esile näiteks abielurikkumise alamkategorias: armukese omamisest rääkivate naljade hulgas eristuvad selgelt need, mis algavad sellega, et mees tuleb (varem) komandeeringust koju. Selline arvukas alajaotus nõuab ilmselt äramärkimist ka kategoriseerimissüsteemis. Teised armukese-anekdoodid kuuluvad aga üldisemalt mehe-naise suhete > abielurikkumise alamkategoriasse. Vajadusel lisatakse kategoriseerimise käigus uusi alamkategoriaid, kui tuleb ette selgelt teistest mingi tunnuse põhjal eristuvaid anekdoote, mida algsest valimist välja ei tulnud (nt mehe-naise suhted > abielurikkumine > armuke kapis).

Loomulikult tuleb lubada anekdooditeksti kuulumist mitmesse kategooriasse samaaegselt. Tekstilised andmebaasid jagunevad kolme suuremasse rühma: ühemõõtmelised, hierarhilised ja relatsioonitorgetud (Burnard 1987). Vaid viimane neist võimaldab kirjeldada tekstidevahelisi seoseid, lubab liigitada ühte teksti samaaegselt mitmeti ning annab kasutajale sel viisil kõige mitmekesisema ja anekdooditekstide loomulikke mitmetasandilisust arvestava ülevaate.

Andmebaasi relatsiooniline ülesehitus nõuab uurijalt ka vähem tööd ja vastutust, sest kategoriseerija ei pea oma arusaamise kohaselt ja vägivaldselt valima teksti sisulist poolt esindama vaid ühte märksõna (nt sageli pole Juku-anekdoodi tegelane mitte ainult Juku, vaid ka õpetaja, vanemad vm; situatsioon võib olla seks, õppimine jne). Selline tekstide organiseeritus osutub vajalikuks siis, kui uurija või huviline andmebaasist reaalselt mõnda anekdooti otsima hakkab. Et olla kindel, et soovitud anekdoot ka leidub (kui see kogus sisaldub), peab selleni jõudmiseks olema võimalikult palju erinevaid lähenemisteid – näiteks peaksid lühikeses anekdoodis *Elevant ja sipelgas olid luurel. Korruga sosistas sipelgas: "Rooma üksi edasi, mind on märgatud!"* olema eristatud kategooriad Loomad > Elevant, Loomad > Sipelgas, ning Absurd.

Mõni suurem kategooria võib olla jaotatud alajaotusteks mitmel viisi üheaegselt. Näiteks etniliste anekdootide (erinevaid rahvuseid pilavate naljade) seas liigitati anekdootid lisaks tavalistele rahvusekategoriatele naljadeks, kus juttu tegelase ihnsusest, rumalusest, seksuaalsetest kommetest, mustusest või alkoholitarbimisest. Järgnev anekdoot näiteks kuulub kategooriatesse Rahvused > Mustanahaline ja Rahvused > Mustus).

*Miks neegrikirstu kannavad ainult 2 meest? Sest prügikastil pole rohkem sangu* (Tanel Mägi kogu).

See, millised on etniliste anekdootide põhiteemad (kas konkreetse etnilise rühma kohta räägitakse pigem nalju nende ihnsusest kui lollusest vms), kõneleb suhtumisest naljaobjektiks olevasse rahvasse ja annab seega huvitavat teavet kultuurist, kus see anekdoot liigub (nt viimane anekdoot pole niivõrd indikaatoriks mustanahaliste ameeriklaste mustuse, kuivõrd valgete ameeriklaste hügieeniobsessiooni kohta – Davies 1990, 2002).

Sageli tuleb ette anekdoote, millel on erinevad tegelased, kuid iseenesest on tegu sama või sarnase skriptiga. Paralleelide toomine nende naljade vahel on tähtis, sest peamiselt ikkagi tegelaste (või mõnel harval juhul, kui tegelane puudub, situatsiooni) põhjal kategoriseeritud materjali sees otsimine ei too uurijale kõiki selle skriptiga anekdoote, kuigi need võivad lisada väärtuslikku infot, mida tasub naljade analüüsimisel arvestada.

Näiteks on etnilise anekdootide seas sageli nalju, mis võivad olla kohaldatavad mitmele erinevale rahvale. Eriti selgelt väljendub see nende naljade puhul, mille skript on üles ehitatud tegutseja rumalusele. Kui otsida rahvuse järgi nalju soomlastest, on näeme tulemuste seas anekdoote, mis räägivad ajuoperatsioonist ja kirurgi eksitusest tulenevast rahvusliku kuuluvuse muutusest. Võtmefraasiks on lause, mille opereeritu pärast narkoosist ärkamist kuuldavale toob (soomlase puhul nt: *Ah perrkele, külla see käy...!* (Delfi naljad 5.06.2003)).

Kuid sageli tuleb ette nalju, milles inimene, kes kaotab kogemata rohkem ajast kui planeeritud, räägib ärgates mõnda muud keelt (vene, läti). Anekdootidegelase muutmise võimalus on nalja levikupotentsiaali tunnus. Siinkohal pole oluline see, mis keeles ja mis tegelasega anekdoot “alguses” võis olla, vaid mitme kultuurikonteksti ja sotsiaalse situatsiooniga sobiva skripti avastamine ja selle analüüs.

Lisaks sellistele naljadele, kus skripti ei muudeta ja vahetatakse vaid tegelast (nt sellise vastu, kes anekdoodirääkijatele on omasem ja tuntum kui tegelane algses naljas – näiteks eestlane vahetab iirlase soolmase vastu), on raskemini leitavad ja subjektiivsemalt kategoriseeritavad need, kus ühes naljad on põimitud kaks erinevat skripti või esineb sama situatsioon, kuid puänt on teine. Sellisel juhul on tulemuseks uus anekdoot (puänt kui anekdoodi kõige olulisem osa erineb), kuid nendevahelist seost on siiski huvitav märkida ja teinekord vajadusel kiiresti andmebaasist leida. Näiteks anekdoodid, kus kolme rahva esindajad püüavad kuldkala ja viimane soovija tahab erinevates variantides sõpru tagasi (ükskikule saarele), luba tervitusi saata, lööb kala sakuska saamiseks maha vms.

Iga kategooria, kuhu anekdoot kuulub, märgitakse vastavasse veergu punktidega eraldatud numbritena (näiteks 1.11.2). Kasutades punkti kui eraldusmärki, saab need hiljem eraldi veergudesse lahutada, et kiirendada otsingumootori tööd. Esialgu pole see vajalik, sest materjali hulk on väike ja tulemused ilmuvad brauseriekraanile piisavalt kiiresti. Kategooriate numbrid ja nendele vastavad nimed on indekseeritud eraldi tabelisse.

Kategoriseerimiseks kasutatakse Postgresi andmebaasi graafilist internetipõhist kasutajaliidest PhpPgAdmin. See on andmebaasi haldamiseks loodud vahend, mis lubab administraatoril kerge vaevaga leida vajalikke sissekandeid ja muuta, lisada või kustutada andmeid.



Järgnevalt kirjeldan lühidalt olemasolevaid andmeid ja tabelit, kus need andmed asuvad – selles esinevaid veerge ja nende sisu ning veergude täitmise tingimusi. Postgresi tabelis on kategoriseerimise põhiliseks tööriistaks käsk *Edit Row*. Selle valimisel avaneb aken, mis on näha joonisel 2. Kuigi tekstid on tabelisse juba paigutatud ja mõningal määral grupeeritud programmi abil, mis koondab anekdoodivariante sama nimetaja alla, vaadatakse iga tekst kategoriseerimise käigus üle, et vältida sisulisi eksimusi kategoriseerimises ja korrigeerida vormilisi vigu anekdoodi tekstis. Veerud on järgmised:

*Id* – veerg, mis sisaldab anekdoodi unikaalset numbrit. See antakse anekdoodile kohe andmebaasi sisestamisel.

*Anekdoot* – nalja tekst. Vahel ka koos kommentaaridega, kui nalja saatja on lisanud naljale anekdooti puudutavat metateksti (tuleb ette nt Sünerkomi *Meie Naljaraamatust* pärit anekdootidel).

*Kuupaev* – enamasti täpne kuupäev ja kellaaeg, millal anekdoot on portaali või naljakogusse saadetud. Internetti riputatud anekdoodikogude puhul on kuupäevaks üks juhuslikult genereeritud päev ajavahemikust, mille jooksul konkreetne kogu koostati (sest veeru formaat nõuab ka päeva ja kuud lisaks aastale). Otsingu tulemusaknas kuvatakse ajavahemik, mil anekdoodikogu koostaja oma kogusse anekdoote lisas (nt Tanel Mägi kogu on koostatud aastatel 1994–2000).

*Allikas\_id* – koondtabelis ülevaatlikkuse ja info kättesaadavuse kiiruse ja lihtsuse huvides väljendatud numbriga, viitega indekstabelile, kus numbrile vastav anekdoodiallikas (interneti-või trükikogu) on lahti kirjutatud.

*Anekdoodityyp* – nt keerdküsimus, kolmeastmeline anekdoot, anekdooditsükklisse kuuluv anekdoot vms. Anekdoodi vormiline määratlus on vajalik juhul, kui andmebaasi kasutaja soovib vastuseid ainult teatud ülesehitusega anekdootide hulgast, nt kolmeosalise ülesehitusega etnilisi anekdoote.

Parent\_id – number, mis võib olla identne selle anekdoodi Id-numbriga (kui naljal puuduvad samasse tüüpi kuuluvad paralleelvariandid või kui nalja tekst on selle tüübi pea) või siis sisaldab veerg tüübi pea numbrit, kusjuures tüübi peaks on alati vastava tüübi väikseima Id-numbriga anekdoot. Selle veeru täidab esialgu automaatselt programm, mis hindab anekdooditekstide täht-tähest sarnasust. Kui kokkulangevus kahte teksti vahel oli suurem kui 80%, märgitakse sinna sarnastest anekdootidest väikseima Id-numbriga nalja Id. Väiksema kokkulangevuse puhul jäetakse veerg tühjaks ja kui ülevaatamise käigus sama tüübi anekdoote ei avastata, saab anekdoot parent\_id-ks oma Id-numbriga identse arvu.

Parent\_id\_lisa1 – veergu märgitakse sarnase tüübi pea Id-number (nt juhul, kui on olemas sama anekdoot teiste tegelastega).

Parent\_id\_lisa2 – täidetakse juhul, kui on olemas paralleelvariant, mis erineb teistest millegi muu kui tegelaste poolest (nt juhul, kui anekdoot on sama situatsiooni ja ülesehitusega, kuid teistsuguse puändiga). Tegelikult peaks veerge, kuhu paralleelseid tüüpe märgitakse, olema veelgi rohkem (vastavalt vajadusele), praegu märgitakse siia veergu komadega eraldatult vastavate tüübipeade Id-numbrid.

Kategooria\_1–3 – kolm veergu, mis sisaldavad kategooriasse kuuluvust. Seda väljendab punktidega eraldatud numbriline tähistus. Kui kategooriaid, mis anekdoodist võib välja lugeda, on rohkem kui kolm, üritatakse üles märkida kolm kõige selgemini välja tulevat kategooriat. Kui edasise kategoriseerimise käigus selgub, et rohkem kui kolme kategooriasse kuuluvaid anekdoote on väga arvukalt, võib kategooriaveerge juurde luua (Kategooria\_4 jne).

Näiteks järgmine anekdoot:

*Kuldkalake on Eestis. Ta ütleb, et võib täita kolm soovi, aga ainult kolm.*

*Eestlane ütleb, et tema sooviks, et Eestis ei oleks enam ühtegi venelast.*

*Venelane ütleb, et tema sooviks, et Eestis ei oleks enam ühtki eestlast.*

*Juut ütleb, et kui eelmised soovid täidetakse, siis tema sooviks pitsi konjakit (Viikberg 1997).*

Siin tuleb märkida kategooriaveergudesse 11.7 ("eestlane", veerg Kategooria\_1), 11.39 ("venelane", veerg Kategooria\_2) ja 11.19 ("juut", veerg Kategooria\_3); viite kuldkalale võib antud juhul märkida Parent\_id\_lisa1 veergu, et siduda anekdoot teiste naljadega, kus kuldkala täidab kinipüüdjate soove.

Veerge Id, Kuupaev ja Allikas\_id ei muudeta, need on juba eelnevalt standardiseeritud ja sissekande õigsus (kuupäeva puhul) on kontrollitud – vales formaadis sissekannet ei lase programm sisestada,

**anekdoodid: Tables: anekdoodid: Edit Row**

Field	Type	Format	Null	Value
id	integer	Value	<input type="checkbox"/>	34574
anekdoot	text	Value	<input type="checkbox"/>	"Härra direktor, kui palju lapsi teie koolis õpib?"  "Päris täpselt ei tea, aga pooled kindlasti."
kuupaev	timestamp without time zone	Value	<input type="checkbox"/>	2004-04-15 19:52:00
allikas_id	integer	Value	<input type="checkbox"/>	1
anekdoodityyp	integer	Value	<input type="checkbox"/>	2
parent_id	integer	Value	<input type="checkbox"/>	34574
parent_id_lisa1	integer	Value	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	
parent_id_lisa2	integer	Value	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	
kattegoria1	text	Value	<input type="checkbox"/>	1.10
kattegoria2	text	Value	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	
kattegoria3	text	Value	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	

Save Cancel

Joonis 2. Andmebaasi kasutajaliides PhpPgAdmin.

vaid teatab veast. Kui veerus, kus on anekdoodi tekst, leidub mõni nähtavalt häiriv kirjaviga, üleliigne tähemärk või anekdoodi juurde mittekuuluv tekstilõik (nt *<br>*), võib muuta selle veeru sisu. Lisatakse info anekdoodi ülesehituse kohta (veerg Anekdoodytyp). Kontrollitakse, parandatakse või lisatakse info selle teksti tüübilise kuuluvuse kohta (veerg Parent\_id). Kui tegu on naljaga, millele on sarnaseid tekste (nt teise tegelasega, kuid sama ülesehituse ja puändi või isegi täiesti kattuva sõnastusega anekdoote), täidetakse ka veerg Parent\_id\_lisa1 – väikseima Parent\_id-ga anekdoot saab nende ühishimetajaks. Veergu Parent\_id\_lisa2 kirjutatakse nende anekdootide Parent\_id numbrid, mis sarnanevad tegelaste ja/või situatsiooni osas, kui erinevad puändi poolest. Veerud Kategooria\_1–3 täidetakse vastava kategooria numbrilise tähistusega, kuhu antud anekdoot kuulub. Esialgu kasutatakse klassifitseerimiseks punktidega eraldatud pikemat tähist (nt kategooria 6.2.2 tähistab alakategooriat Loomad > Kalad > Lest).

Digitiseeritud materjalil on kategoriseerimisel paberkartoteegi ees eeliseid. Esiteks on sarnaste tekstide koondamiseks võimalik luua andmebaasisiseseid programme (kuigi selle tulemusel tekkinud tüübid nõuavad kindlasti uurijapoolset ülevaatamist ja korrektiive). Anekdootide grupeerimiseks loodi tekstide sarnasuse hindamisel põhinev programm. Kõiki anekdoote võrreldi omavahel ja arvutati nende täht-tähelise kokkulangevuse protsentuaalne väärtus. Kui sarnasus oli suurem kui 80%, märgiti veergu automaatselt nendevaheline sarnasus (kuuluvus samasse tüüpi). Protsessi optimeerimine toimus sarnasusprotsendi märkimise piirmäära väljaselgitamise abil, vastasel juhul oleks tulemustabel tulnud 50 000x50 000 veergu, mis kokkuvõttes oleks pigem segadust tekitanud kui abistanud sarnasuste avastamisel.

Teiseks, palju kergem on leida ja grupeerida identseid koopiaid – see ei nõua mingit reaalselt ümberpaigutamist, piisab vastava kate-

gooriamärgistuse kandmisest anekdootide koondtabeli vastavasse veergu. Sama tekst võib sel moel kuuluda mitmesse kategooriasse, ilma et seda peaks seejuures reaalselt mitu korda kopeerima.

Kolmandaks, kategoriseeritud andmemassiivis on kergem pärin-gud sooritada, tulemusi on võimalik oma vajaduse kohaselt eelsort-ida (nt hilisemad sissekanded enne).

Neljanda plussina võib välja tuua selle, et digiteeritud kogu või-maldab juurdepääsu igalt poolt, selleks ei pea viibima Eesti Kirjan-dusmuuseumis.

Viiendaks: kasulikuks osutub andmete digitaalne kuju sellele, kes soovib rakendada andmeanalüüsis statistilisi meetodeid. Andmeid saab tellida vastavalt vajadusele (nt erinevate rahvuste kohta käivaid anekdoote aastate kaupa), neid saab tõsta ümber andmetöötlusprog-rammi ja seejärel analüüsida, tulemusi graafiliselt kujutada jms. Prae-gu nõuab see ligipääsu Postgresi tabelile andmebaasi sees, kuid esi-algse üldpildi saab ka internetis kättesaadava anekdoodiotsingu abil ja lisamaterjali saamiseks või selle leidmisel abisaamiseks on või-malus pöörduda andmebaasi haldaja poole.

Digitaalsel kategoriseerimisel on ka miinuseid. Keeruline on meel-de tuletada töö käigus juba varem tehtud kategoriseeringuid. Kui juhtub ette mõni redaktsioon juba varem liigitatud naljast või on vaja kategoriseerida anekdoot, milles on kahe juba kategoriseeritud nalja elemente, on nende viidete Parent\_id leidmine aeganõudev toi-ming, mis sageli nõuab mitut otsingut ja eeldab naljas esinenud märk-sõna(de) mäletamist. Selleks tuleb kas väljuda kategoriseerimisprog-rammist või teha lahti uusi otsinguaknaid, mis aeglustab tööd. Sa-muti ei saa anekdoote n-ö kõrvale panna ja hiljem üle vaadata, mis paberkartoteegi sorteerimisel on lihtne toiming. Hilisemaks ülevaa-tamiseks peab uuesti tegema otsingu, sest märgistatud anekdoodid paigutatakse järjest naljakogu lõppu. Otsing ajab omakorda segi mär-gendamist ootavate anekdootide järjestuse. Ka brauseriakna sulge-

mine ajab järjestuse segamini ja uuesti alustades peab liikuma kõigepealt õigesse kohta, olles eelnevalt sorteerinud anekdoodid Id-numbri, tähestiku vm järgi.

Anekdoodihulga kategoriseerija kohtab ka klassikalisi probleeme kategoriseerimissüsteemi subjektiivsusest. Antud ülesande puhul üritati kategooriate loomisel vähendada subjektiivsust sellega, et üksikisikuliselt loodud süsteemi vaatasid üle üks ekspert ja kolm nõuannet teadlast ehk folkloorikogumisega mitte kokku puutunud inimest, kes andsid oma hinnangu süsteemile ja esitasid parandusettepanekuid.

Kõige objektiivsem on naljade liigitamine anekdoodis selgelt väljendatud tegelas(t)e järgi, kuigi praeguste ettekirjutuste kohaselt võib tegelase järgi kategoriseerida ka juhul, kui sellele viitab ainult situatsioon (nt dialoog kahe inimese vahel toimub kohtus, millest võib järeldada, et tegelasteks on kohtunik ja kohtualune, kategooria 1.5, või nt dialoog, kus üheks tegelaseks on märgitud õpetaja, kategooria 1.10, kuid vastajat pole nimetatud – järeldatakse, et teiseks tegelaseks on laps ehk õpilane, kategooria 5.2.3).

Juhtudel, kus tegelast pole märgitud ja seda ei anna tuletada ja situatsioonist, liigitatakse anekdoot situatsiooni järgi (nt ühistranspordis, kategooria 2.2, aga situatsiooninali on ka poliitiliste naljade alaliik nõukogudeaegne eluolu, kategooria 10.1.3, või obstsöönised naljad, kategooria 15 ja selle alaliigitused).

Tegelaste järgi liigitamine on võimalikest variantidest objektiivsemaid, kuid selline mitmetähenduslik ja mitmekesine materjal nagu anekdoodid ei allu ühelegi kategoriseerimiskatsele ideaalselt. Seetõttu tuleb mõnda, et mis tahes kategoriseering ei suuda märkida ära kõike, mis ühes anekdoodis sisaldub. Küsitavusi tuleb ette peaaegu igal sammul ja need peab lahendama kategoriseerija ise vastavalt oma nägemusele selle kohta, kuidas oleks andmebaasi kasutajal seda nalja hiljem kõige kergem leida. Võimalik, et GTVH-l põhine-

va verbaalse huumori tasandite põhjal loodud kategoriseering aitab tulevikus seda objektiivsemaks muuta.

Kategooriate arv peaks olema optimaalne – piisavalt suur, et andmehulka haaratavateks osisteks liigendada. Samas peaks kategooriaid olema võimalikult vähe, et säiliks ülevaatlikkus. Kui mõni kategooria osutub töö käigus ülearuseks, st ei sisalda piisavalt suurel hulgal ja eristuvaid nalju, võib kõik sinna kuuluvad anekdootid kergesti ühe käsu abil ümber kategoriseerida. Suuremad kategooriad tuleb hiljem üle vaadata ja luuavajaduse korral kategooriasiseseid liigitusi.

## Otsing

Nüüd vaatleme, milliseid võimalusi pakub (juba olemasolev) otsinguprogramm. Otsinguks on kaks võimalust: esiteks lihtne sõnaotsing, mis sirvib tõstutundlikkuseta läbi kogu andmebaasi anekdootid (mitte autori, allika vm infoga veergu). Kui on soov leida mõnd anekdooti, mis osaliselt meelest läinud, või otsida nalju mõne konkreetse tegelase kohta, kellel on piiratud arv pseudonüüme (nt Juku, Illar (Allaste, aga ka Hillar või Hallaste), kuldkala vms), sobib see otsing hästi. Samas, ka nt Juku-anekdootide koopiaid või variante võib leida kujul, kus tegelast pole mainitud (Juku asemel poiss või on tegelaseks lihtsalt õpetaja, isa vms). Tüüpilise Juku-anekdooti tegelane võib olla mõni hoopis teise nimega poiss (nt Robert, kes tuleb ette Sõnumileht *on-line*-anekdootides tüüpiliste Juku-anekdootide tegelasena).

Otsinguga on keeruline leida vajaminevat ka juhul, kui märksõna, mis seda anekdooti iseloomustada võiks, ei meenu või konkreetne anekdoot ei sisaldagi ühtegi “erilist”, ainult sellele tekstile omast väljendit või sõna.

Lisaks sellele töötab kategoriseeritud anekdootide (esialgu *Delfi Naljalehe* [www.delfi.ee/naljade](http://www.delfi.ee/naljade)) ulatuses detailsem otsing, mis leiab otsi-

tava autori, allika, sõna või täpse väljendiga soovitud kategooriasse kuuluva anekdoodi. Anekdootidest on kategooriate kaupa kättesaadavad Delfi Naljalehel leiduvad anekdoodid, mille on liigitanud Delfi portaali töötajad. See kategoriseering on väga üldine, koosnedes kuuest kümnest suuremast naljaliigist ilma alakategooriateta. Praegu-seks on lisaks kategoriseeritud ka etnilised anekdoodid, neil puudub veel vormiline liigitus, mis tuleb lisada. Etniliste naljade juures on ka kataloog, mis võimaldab kõigi praegu andmebaasi kuuluvate etniliste anekdootide seast vajalike tegelastega naljad välja otsida.

Tulevikus saab kategooriate kaupa anekdoote sirvida ka ilma otsingu abita. Selleks otstarbeks on kataloog, mis võimaldab soovi korral valida lugemiseks nt kõik naljad, mis puudutavad elukutseid, või siis vaadata alamkategooria tasemel selliseid anekdoote, mis räägivad ainult kultuuritöötajatest, või lugeda veelgi täpsemalt vaid tsirkuse-artistide puudutavaid nalju, seda lihtsalt lingile klikkides.

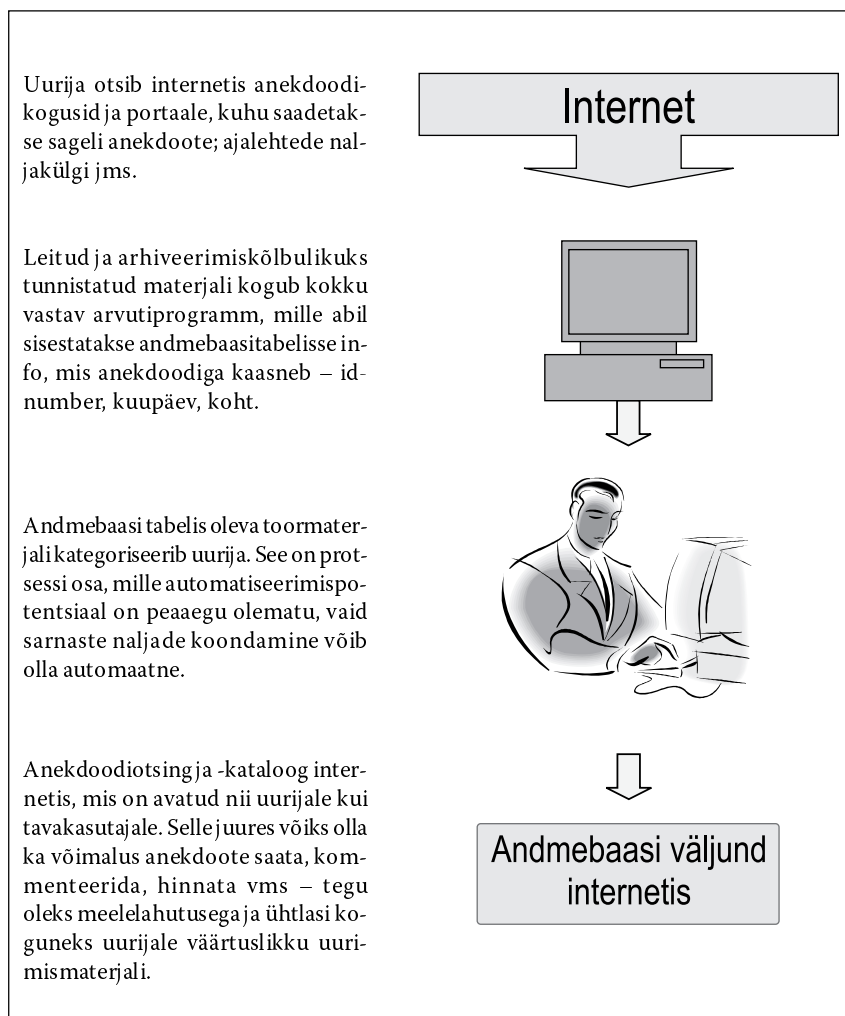
Tulemuslehel on ka link sarnastele naljadele. Enamikul juhtudest on see praegu alles "tühi" link, sest suurem osa anekdoote pole vastavat tähistust paralleelsete tüüpide või variatsioonide kohta juurde saanud. Etniliste anekdootide puhul aga on süsteem lõplikult välja töötatud ja lingile vajutades jõuab andmebaasi kasutaja järgmisele tulemuslehele, kus on toodud kõik samasse tüüpi kuuluvad naljad. Lubatud on ka väikesed variatsioonid (erinevad tegelased, mõnel juhul ka erinev puänt). Pole veel otsustatud, kas lubada sarnaste naljade tulemuslehele ka nt sarnase teksti ja tegelaste, kuid erineva puändiga nalju, või peaks selle kohta olema eraldi viide. Viimane oleks otstarbekas siis, kui tulemusi tuleks vastasel juhul liiga palju, praegu aga tundub, et lihtsam ja ülevaatlikum on kõik (nii sama tüübi naljad kui selle tüübi variatsioonid) koos tulemuseks tuua.

Töötab ka kategoriseerijale abiks loodud lisaotsing, mis annab tulemuseks arvuti poolt sarnasuse alusel järjestatud anekdooditeks-tid (rohkem kui 80% tekstidevahelist sarnasust).



## Kogumis- ja arhiveerimisprotsess

Arvtuti abil on arhiveerimisprotsessi võimalik muuta kiiremaks ja paindlikumaks. Joonis 3 kirjeldab folkloori kogumise ja arhiveerimise protsessi internetis ja märgib, millised võimalused on digitaalse materjaliga töötamisel.



Joonis 3. Folkloori kogumise ja arhiveerimise protsess internetis.

## **Kokkuvõte**

Edaspidi tuleb jätkata kogu materjali juba alustatud ülevaatamist ja kategoriseerimist loodud süsteemi alusel. Töö edenemise põhitaktiseks on kohmakas kasutajaliides PhpPgAdmin, mille vahendusel toimub kategoriseerimine. See ei võimalda kiirelt ja paindlikult liikuda sama andmetabeli eri akende vahel – näiteks otsida sarnaseid anekdoote lisaks ka sõnaotsingu abil, kui käsil on arvuti poolt tekitatud sarnaste (sama tüübi) naljade sülemi ülevaatamine ja vajadusel korrigeerimine, – ega pöörduda tagasi mõne sülemi juurde, kui ette satub anekdoot samast tüübist või paralleelvariant, mille seost oleks otstarbekas kajastada ka kategoriseeringus. Selle asemel võiks olla spetsiaalselt programmeeritud vahend.

Miinuseks tuleb selle töö juures pidada ka suurt subjektiivsust, mis paratamatult kaasneb tõsiasjaga, et kategoriseerimisega tegeleb vaid üks inimene. Esiteks tähendab see, et kategooriad on loodud paljuski kategoriseerija enda vajadusi arvestades, teiseks seda, et anekdoodid on liigitatud lähtuvalt ühe inimese visioonist. Pealegi, nagu varemgi mainitud, on siin tegu žanriga, mis on edukalt resistentne igasugusele lahterdamisele. Seda puudujääki saab vähendada nt sellega, kui paigutada anekdoodid võimalikult mitmesse kategooriasse, ja kui võimalik, kaasata kategoriseerimisprotsessi (vähemalt etapi) n-ö naiivseid teadlasi või eksperte.

Küsimuseks jääb, kas andmebaasi peaks hiljem täiendama ka tagantjärele arhiivis olemasoleva materjaliga (näiteks puuduvad koollipärimuse kogumisel saadud anekdoodid; enne 1960. aastaid kogutud naljad ja naljandid on samuti arhiveeritud vaid mittedigitaalsel kujul). Naljandite puhul saab komplitseerivaks asjaoluks see, et nende klassifikatsioon on hoopis midagi muud kui kaasaegsete anekdootide oma, nende teemad ja tegelased on hoopis teistest valdkondadest (nt sulase-peremehe naljad) ja nii naljandeid kui ka anekdootte katva ühise kategoriseeringu väljatöötamine on ilmselt võimatu.

Seetõttu on nende kahe ainese lahushoidmine põhjendatud, kuigi longituudsete uurinute tegemine on keerulisem, kui naljandid ja naljad asetsevad eraldi kogudes. 1990. aastate esimesel poolel eestlaste hulgas räägitud ja arhiivi jõudnud anekdootidega tuleb aga kindlasti tööd jätkata – need ülejäänud (koolipärimuse) tekstidest välja sorteerida, digitaalsesse andmebaasi sisestada ja süstematiseerida.

Tegu on projektiga, mida ei saa lõpetatuks lugeda nii kaua, kuni anekdoodid veel säilitavad oma värskuse ja traditsioon pole staatiline ja hääbuv, vaid aktiivne ja pidevalt muutuv ning kohanev. Kuigi on märke, mis osutavad anekdootide rääkimise vähenemisele, ei saa sama täheldada internetis leiduva huumoripärimuse kohta. Tundub, et anekdoodivestmine võtab lihtsalt teisi vorme, ja antud projekt ning andmebaas on üks katse seda muutust jäädvustada ning pakkuda materjali, vahendeid ja inspiratsiooni selle muutuse kirjeldamiseks.

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# TAKE IT WITH A GRAIN OF SALT: THE KERNEL OF TRUTH IN TOPICAL JOKES

*Liisi Laineste*

## INTRODUCTION

Jokes are a vitally important part of everyday discourse. Joking occurs mostly in social situations, but there is an emergent source of jokes circulating on the Internet. The vast number and popularity of jokes proves that jokes possess roles other than those connected with immediate communicational gains. My interest is not to discuss the psychological or social, but rather the cognitive function of humour. This article suggests that jokes possess a cognitive function for both the joke-tellers and readers: jokes are a way of dealing with events in social reality. They help to organize the massive amount of information and experience of contemporary times. Jokes reveal the complexities and paradoxes inherent in living in a rapidly developing society that forces us to work through vast amounts of information from innumerable (mostly one-way-communication) sources: television, newspapers, and the Internet.

The emphasis of this study is on the way people relate to the media in contemporary society, and how this relationship is reflected in news parodies and other topical jokes.

What motivated me to turn my attention to topical jokes was the discussion of the social function of jokes, which has, in my opinion, reached high levels of interesting but fruitless speculation. In my prior research (Joon 2000, Joon 2002) I have examined the nature and possible functionality of neighbourly humour between the Estonians and the Finns, and the use of jokes as part of a PR-campaign. The results showed that in addition to its ambiguous social function, humour functions as a cognitive tool for the joker himself to categorize (i.e. better manage) the paradoxes and complexities of his environment.

I have been fascinated by the nature of topical jokes and the way news parodies have always found a grateful audience. News parody

<http://www.folklore.eelfolklore/vol21/jokes.pdf>

is a relatively new genre that first appeared on Estonian radio in around 1995, and is now popular in (the more convenient and accessible) chatroom-type joke portals.

This research is unique from several aspects. First, in a small country like Estonia it is easy to gain valuable and comprehensive information on topical jokes. Secondly, to do research on the basis of the most popular Internet joke book ([www.delfi.ee/jokes](http://www.delfi.ee/jokes)) is to capture a constantly moving stream. This is not the standing water of printed books nor the rapid stream of joking in oral social situations that is nearly impossible to capture: the jokes appear in real time and interact with each other, forming cycles and causing various reactions from readers. Thirdly, Estonia is a highly computerized country. Many people use the net in their daily work and entertainment and are thus also more or less involved in the creation of Internet joke-lore. And last but not least – the nature of jokes is changing completely. The change is due to a high level of computerization. The nature of jokes has radically changed in computer-mediated communication: situational social performance, context, or reception no longer plays such a central role. This might indicate that the function of jokes has also shifted.

## TOPICAL JOKES

Defining the object of the study – topical jokes – is best done through their content, form and function.

Topical jokes often come in the form of news parody, but slogans, top ten lists or topical pictures/ cartoons can also be included in this category. One can assume that some existing jokes on the same theme will be rediscovered because of their newly acquired salience, i.e. some jokes can be turned into topical jokes because of their salient content.

The content of a topical joke is often an ironic comment on a currently “hot” topic. This implies that topical jokes are strictly tied to their wider context, both social and cultural, they should arise shortly after a triggering event and remain popular for a limited period of time until the theme loses its salience for the public.



I seek to reveal the function of topical jokes through an examination of their form and content (and the contradictions between them) with the methods of critical discourse analysis.

## **METHODOLOGY**

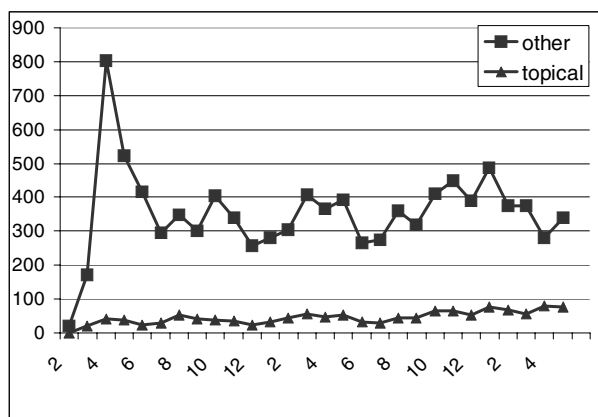
Critical discourse analysis consists of three levels of investigation, as defined by Fairclough (1993): description, interpretation and explanation. Description is the analysis of content and form (or texture) on the textual level. Fairclough stresses the importance of comprehensive textual analysis. Interpretation draws conclusions about the level of discursive practice: how the participants interpret the text, how it makes use of interdiscursivity or mixed discourses and genres (Fairclough (1995) offers examples where genres of information, persuasion and entertainment are combined). Explanation goes deeper into social practice. Levels of social organization such as situation, institution, power and ideologies can also be found in topical jokes, especially when their form is institutionally determined, as in the case of news parodies.

### **General analysis of joke patterns**

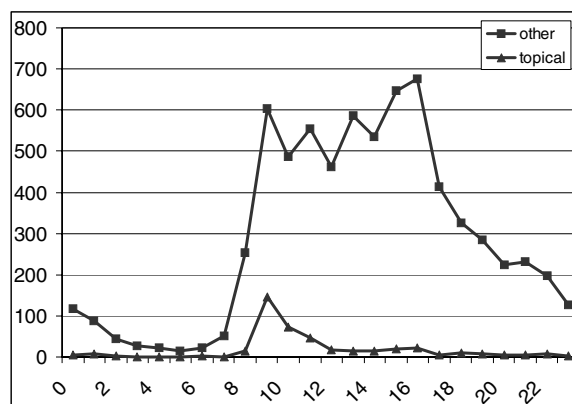
General trends in sending jokes to the Internet were calculated on the basis of all entries in the history of the Internet joke book on the largest Internet portal in the Baltic region, <http://www.delfi.ee/jokes>. Altogether 10,112 items (of which ca 2000 were topical jokes/ news parodies) were analysed statistically to characterize general joking behaviour on the Internet. The following trends were established:

The general trend (see Graph 1: Topical and other jokes on [www.delfi.ee](http://www.delfi.ee)) shows a predictable peak shortly after the joke book was opened to the public (i.e. in April/May 2000), then a sharp fall and a consequent steady rise in the number of jokes contributed daily. In analysing topical joke patterns statistically, we find the steady rise to be significant ( $t=7.5$ ,  $p=0.000$ ): the number of topical jokes rises an average of 1.175 per day (year 2000) to 1.83 (year 2001) to 2.32 (year 2002).

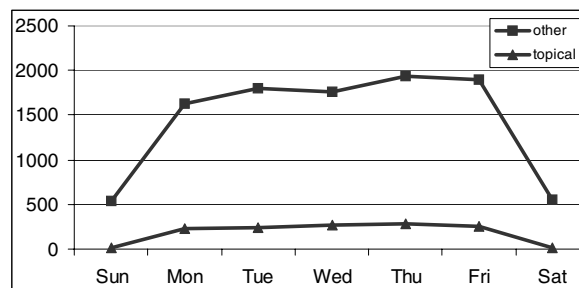
There were visible trends in respect to weekdays and times of the day, both in the case of topical and other jokes (see Graph 2 and 3:



Graph 1. Jokes on <http://www.delfi.ee>. Number of jokes submitted (x-axis) in the period under observation (numbers indicate months).



Graph 2. Times of joking. Number of submitted jokes (x-axis) by time of day.



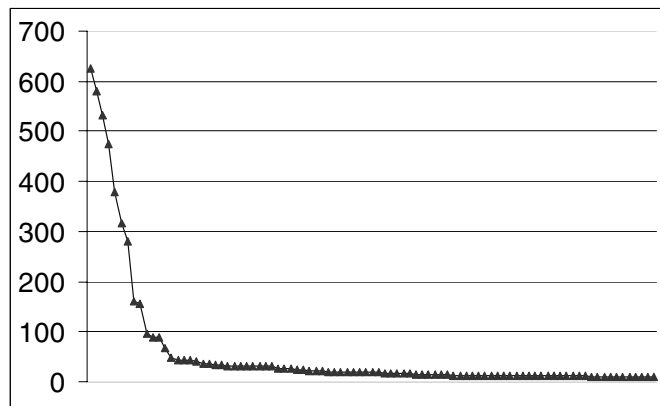
Graph 3. Days of joking. Number of jokes (x-axis) by days of the week.

Times of joking, Days of joking). The graphs clearly indicate the same pattern that has been established in Internet use in general (see Aikat 1998). The difference between topical and other jokes is most visible in the time of day when jokes are contributed: topical jokes are sent mainly after reading the news, i.e. most likely in the mornings, while other jokes follow the more general trend of entertaining oneself directly after coming to and before leaving the workplace.

In analysing the variance among contributors, we see that there are a limited number of frequent contributors, but in addition there are numerous others who participate in public joking (see Graph 4: Jokes sent by different contributors).

The latency of news becoming news parodies or other topical jokes is short, appearing either on the same day or with a brief delay. Whether it will result in a joke (several jokes, or even a joke cycle) or not depends on the event. The most common subjects for topical jokes are on the one hand minor local news items (e.g. a honey-eating competition in Alatskivi), or issues that cannot be disregarded (the terrorist attack in New York). The trigger in the first case can be a seemingly insignificant detail in the news article: an opportunity for word play, absurdity, etc.

Throughout the existence of the joke book <http://www.delfi.ee/jokes>, three categories of topical jokes can be differentiated, the first two



Graph 4. Jokes sent by different contributors. Number of jokes submitted (y-axis) by number of contributors.

of which are “original” (i.e. created specially for the issue) and the third contains jokes already known to the public:

1. Jokes commenting upon one single event, either local or international. Jokes pertaining to a single news issue are most common. Throughout the material some daily and mostly local events resound in topical jokes, for example:

*Civil servants will be charged a third of the full price to see Clinton’s presentation. Civil servants will see a Clinton who is wearing not a suit, but instead soiled and greasy overalls and has a bristly and scarred face swollen with hunger. Businessmen who pay the full price will see the usual Clinton.* (www.delfi.ee/jokes; sent by Erkki Kõlu on May 21, 2002).

This kind of news parody refers to existing newspaper articles, usually from the same day (in this case Postimees, May 21, 2002: “Civil servants will see Clinton’s presentation at a third of the regular price”).

2. Jokes that are a blend of at least two different events – e.g. the common denominator of WTC and methanol catastrophes can easily be found in death, dying, or a world that is coming to its end. Blending local issues with events of international scale is common practice. An Estonian joke from 1963 refers to the Cuban Missile Crisis:

*Armenian radio was asked why the Cuban Missile Crisis took place. The answer was: to distract attention from the infamous unfinished construction of the viaduct over Endla Street.* (personal communication 2002, Arvo Krikmann).

The generic space is in both cases the feature of a catastrophe or a disaster. News of local value and mild consequences inherit the attributes of a disaster from one of the source domains – that of international catastrophe.

3. Jokes that pertain to a topical subject – e.g. the WTC catastrophe and aeroplane jokes. Other jokes – as compared to topical ones – originate from varied themes and are mostly unrelated to daily news. In the case of September 11 jokes, we find many aeroplane-jokes

because of the weight of the issue and the existing joke-lore on the subject. Thus jokes on relevant themes arise when there is some existing joke-lore on the theme. For example, aeroplane-jokes are quite common, but alcohol jokes usually come in an unsuitable and excessively loaded context (i.e. referring to a particular group of people, e.g. Irishmen), and are not relevant to the discussion of the Estonian methanol catastrophe in September 2001.

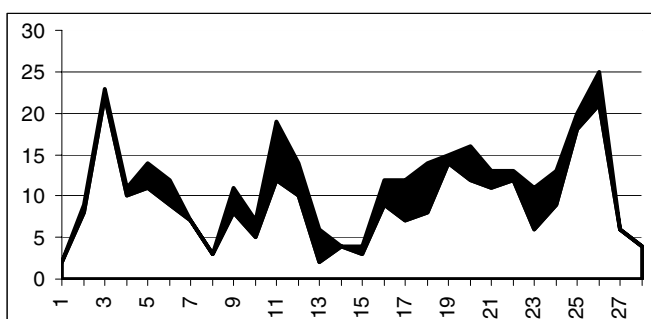
## **EVENTS AND THE BACKGROUND IN SEPTEMBER/ OCTOBER 2001**

September 2001 was a month packed with disasters on both local and international levels. The most important of these found lively reflection in Estonian Internet joke books. On the international level, the September 11 terrorist attack overshadowed all other possible media events. The local Estonian reaction to that catastrophe was preceded and influenced by a national tragedy of nearly 70 deaths caused by the drinking of methanol-tainted bootleg liquor in southwestern Estonia that began on the 10th of September. The emphasis on the local methanol catastrophe is further justified and explained by calculations of the percentage of deaths in USA and Estonia – 50 out of a million is equal to 10,000 out of 250 million – which would appear to demonstrate that the Estonians suffered a comparatively greater loss than the Americans (see e.g. article in *Eesti Ekspress*, Dec. 20, 2001). Issues tied to these topics (e.g. bioterrorism and anthrax) or coinciding in the temporal plane (presidential elections in Estonia) were later also blended into jokes on these topics.

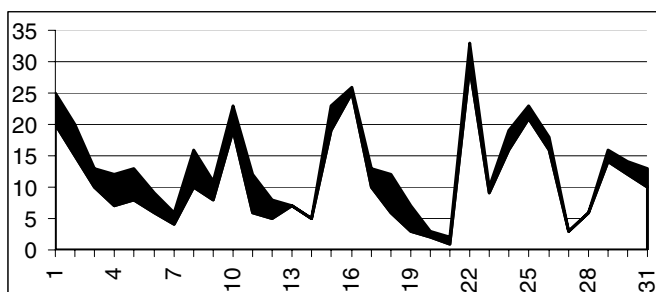
It should also be kept in mind that in the Estonian context, September was already stigmatized as tragic and ominous. An article by Rein Veidemann in *Postimees* on 14 Sept. 2001 stated that September was a month of mourning, referring to the methanol deaths, and earlier tragedies, such as the sinking of the ferry 'Estonia' (Sept. 28, 1994), the military training accident in Kurkse, northern Estonia (Sept. 11, 1997), etc.

## GENERAL JOKE PATTERNS IN SEPTEMBER/ OCTOBER 2001

September began with a relatively mild interest in sharing jokes. Until the 11th of September, an average of one topical joke per day was sent to the joke book. The average number of topical jokes then rose to 2.9 after Sept 10 (a statistically significant change,  $t = 11.2$ ;  $p = 0.000$ ), and maintained that rate until the end of October (thereafter falling to an average of 2.4 in November and December). What is even more illustrative is the difference in contribution during weekends: the end of September shows a considerable interest in sharing jokes, both topical and other, during the usually empty days. Here we find the greatest relative differences in deviation from the usual weekday regime: the weekends show an increased number of all kinds of jokes, including topical jokes and news parodies (see also Graphs 5 and 6).



Graph 5. Jokes submitted in September. Number of jokes (x-axis) by days of the month.



Graph 6. Jokes submitted in October. Number of jokes (x-axis) by days of the month.

## SAMPLES 1 AND 2

Sample 1 and Sample 2 were the first that commented on the two almost simultaneous catastrophes – one international (the USA terrorist attack) and one local (methanol deaths) – in [www.delfi.ee/jokes](http://www.delfi.ee/jokes). They belong to the first category of “original” topical jokes commenting upon one single event.

### Sample 1

Mon., Sept. 10, 2001; 10:32

Sent by: Valdo Jahilo

*The consumption of wood alcohol has claimed the lives of 13 people, 22 are hospitalized. “I do not understand why this happened,” the distributor of the wood alcohol said. “I thought nothing bad would happen, because the buyers were all wood-heads.”*

### Sample 2

Wed., Sept. 12, 2001; 14:00

Sent by: TerroRist Text Unladen

*Advertisement: DEMOLITION SERVICE in Manhattan. Information and orders from United Airlines booking offices.*

## Vocabulary, grammar and structure

Jokes usually present one keyword that explores an unexpected aspect of an otherwise “normal” text. In Sample 1, the keyword is the idiom “blockhead” (or “woodhead” if translated directly, alluding to “wood-alcohol” as a synonym for methanol<sup>1</sup>). First we are presented with an honest news-like account of the consequences of the massive consumption of wood-alcohol, and the sincere concern of the public and those responsible. Then we come to the reason for the concern: “I do not understand why this happened [---] I thought nothing bad would happen, because the buyers were all woodheads”. What the joke’s author implies is that wood-alcohol can be sold to “wood-heads”, because they are assumed not to be poisoned by it, and (implicitly) that they are the only ones who are irresponsible and stupid enough to buy it. Sample 2 builds its joke on context-loaded keywords: “Manhattan” (the location of the World Trade Center), and “United Airlines” (whose planes were hijacked to commit the act of terrorism).

Nominalization (“consumption of wood alcohol”) is used in Sample 1 to objectify the suffering group of people. It shifts the responsibility – neither a deficient alcohol policy or the carelessness of methanol producers are to be blamed, but “methanol consumption by the blockheads” led to their misfortune. The literalization of a figurative idiom (e.g. ‘woodhead’) is a frequent practice in joke-lore. Sample 2 uses straightforward and laconic wording, as appropriate to newspaper ads, where every letter counts. This creates an anonymous atmosphere further reinforced by the passive voice. Both samples use the definite indicative mode, which functions to emphasise the author’s wish to be plausible (which is challenged by the overlying joke mode). Subjective and indefinite modality is used only in direct speech (citation) by the methanol distributor to hint at his false assumptions about the effects of consumption of methanol as mentioned in Sample 1.

In both examples the text is incongruous, as dictated by the genre rules of jokes (Raskin 1984). Incongruity is found in the false assumption of the methanol distributor, and in the suggestion that one could obtain information about demolition work from a United Airlines office (which is by common knowledge a national aeroplane company). In Sample 2, we discover the pre-constructed premises of the “ad” by examining the way it is constructed: the first sentence (“DEMOLITION SERVICE in Manhattan”) already implies that there exists a target group for such business. The incongruity lies in the absurdity of considering it a normal business among other companies.

### **Interpretation**

The point where discourses of official news and parody meet determines the interpretation of the joke text. Samples 1 and 2 are interdiscursively quite simple, the generic structure following the rules of two genres: both newspaper articles and jokes, and hinting to the joking mode only with a keyword in the end (Sample 1) or in the text (Sample 2). The meeting point provides a paradox or conflict that leaves one to wonder about the truthfulness of the particular news (and maybe all of the news that we are confronted with daily).



Important in understanding topical jokes is being aware of antecedent and consequent news texts. Especially in the case of Internet joke books, readers reinterpret the texts continuously on the basis of newly acquired knowledge. The tragedies have happened, they have a strong emotional load and impact, and this cannot be doubted. But from the moment the event takes place, interpretations (including jokes) arise. News interpretations usually follow the principles of some institutionalised discourse (media itself is called the fourth power in society). People take sides, and finally – or immediately, as in the case of immediate topical jokes – sides over the side-takers are taken – in jokes.

In the case of Sample 1, the first articles in the newspapers were published on September 10, 2001 (on the same day the first joke appeared on [www.delfi.ee](http://www.delfi.ee)), the titles being: “Methanol intoxication claims lives of eight people in Pärnu” (Postimees, Sept. 10, 2001), and later “Moonshine drunk at wake of methanol victim” (Postimees, Sept. 18, 2001), “Death through moonshine: guilty or innocent?” (Postimees, Sept. 21, 2001). The majority of the jokes are closely linked to some specific news article on the subject. But the first joke is already reluctant to draw a straight line between guilt and innocence – it adopts an attitude that is at once superior and critical. Sample 2 is preceded by an article entitled “Act of terror in USA forces the implementation of reinforced security measures all over the world” (Postimees, Sept. 11, 2001) and several on-line articles. We notice that the discussion in the official media and in jokes differs far more than in the case of Sample 1: “titles” do not overlap, and, as we see in the analysis of Samples 3 and 4 below, there is a tendency to discuss the issue through local news.

The power that the media holds is intricately woven in Sample 1. The person who sold wood alcohol comments on the issue, while the standpoint of the victims is not mentioned. This, firstly, reinforces the general attitude expressed through newspaper articles on the subject: death from drinking is the fault of the blockhead drunkards, and even providing them with medical assistance is too generous a gesture. This attitude is subsequently supported by the media by not asking for commentaries from the victims themselves. At the end of the public discussion some articles even stated that they should not be so harsh, because there were also some decent and innocent people who suffered, once again supporting the idea

that the majority were “blockheads” who suffered because of their vice.

The standpoint of the authors of both samples is that of critical commentator. They stand above the actual event, the responsible and criminal parties, and the commentaries in the media, commenting on the stupidity of all parties involved. That the author of the joke makes the distributor of wood alcohol say that the “buyers were just wood-heads”, indicates his criticism of them: only people as irresponsible as those who bought and drank it could believe that “wood-headedness” would remove the fatal effects of wood-alcohol. The same is seen in the demolition joke: the author comments critically on both the attackers (who publish a (regular?) ad to sell their services) and those attacked (who are not clever enough to prevent the tragedy after obtaining appropriate information from the regular reading of newspapers and ads).

### **SAMPLES 3 AND 4: BLENDED TOPICAL JOKES**

Samples 3 and 4 (belonging to the second category of topical jokes) represent jokes that are usually not created immediately after the events concerned, and mix international issues with local events.

#### **Sample 3**

Sat., Sept. 22, 2001; 15:26

Sent by: Sii-enn-enn (CNN)

*Clear Conscience. CNN reports that the Islamic extremists and the Taliban have firmly asserted that they bear no responsibility in the matter of the Estonian presidential election tragedy.*

#### **Sample 4**

Sun., Oct. 8, 2001; 19:02

Sent by: Anonymous

*To enter the competition, simply look under your one litre methanol bottle cap. If you find the combination of letters “N.Y.”, you have won a trip to the World Trade Organization in New York. Transportation is organized by United Airlines with Osama Bin Laden’s best soldiers as pilots.*

*P.S. Tickets will be delivered in a white envelope free of charge.*

## Vocabulary, grammar, structure

The classification in Sample 3 is constructed not on the contrasting of different items but instead on the linking of similar ones. It implies that the Islamic extremists and the Taliban, who assumed responsibility for the terrorist attacks in the USA, are as vicious as those responsible for the outcome of the presidential elections in Estonia. These similar items, the tragic September 11 and September 21, although different in weight, are now both labelled catastrophes. This identifies the audience of the joke as those who consider the results of the presidential elections to be a catastrophe of international proportions. The common features of the two “tragedies” might be their unexpectedness and undesired results. Sample 4 combines the catastrophes under one commercial text that resembles the type of ad used by beverage producers. It also indicates a desire to group similar items: methanol deaths are thus linked to terrorist attacks and anthrax. There is no conflicting classification (i.e. an explicit opposition of two or more parties involved in the discussion). The classification of similar items is a cognitive tool used to manage the manifold social reality.

The key to Sample 3 is that electing Arnold Rüütel to a four-year presidency is a tragedy for the Estonian people and state. In Sample 4, all of the keywords are presented one after another (methanol bottle, New York, World Trade Center, United Airlines, Osama Bin Laden and his “soldiers”, a white envelope as a metaphor for envelopes containing anthrax powder), assuming the reader possesses good media competence and background knowledge.

In Sample 3, nominalization marks the author’s passivity, with what he hints that he could not say his word in electing the president. Though the election procedure in Estonia takes place through parliament members who are in turn elected by the people, the result of the election does not seem to fulfil everybody’s expectations. Indirect speech is used in Sample 3, with CNN cited as a reliable source of information, though here this is used as a stylistic feature to stress the reality vs. joke contradiction.

Sample 4 is very personal in style, like advertisements directed to young people: “simply look under your [---] bottle cap” (implying in a positive mode that you already have one). The ad’s addressee is an

active agent who makes his own decisions (“enters”, “looks”, “finds” etc.). But this is contradicted by the manipulative advertising text that sells him a low-value generic product that causes death.

The incongruence noted in the analysis of Samples 1 and 2 is also found in Samples 3 and 4. This incongruence lies in the fact that in Sample 3 it is suggested that the reason for the results of the Estonian presidential elections is connected to Islamic terrorist organizations. Sample 4 creates the same effect by mixing the cheerful form of advertising with a serious and dramatic issue, i.e. terrorism and the lack of security.

In both samples, the format imitates media discourse: in Sample 3 that of news, and in Sample 4 that of advertising.

### **Interpretation**

Without knowing the context for Sample 3, one might assume that something tragic had happened either to the presidential candidates or the newly elected president. If one is familiar with the opinions expressed in the press and broad-based weekly candidate ratings, the thought of linking the two quite different “catastrophes” under one common denominator is not unexpected or misleading. We can see from headlines in the daily newspaper *Postimees* that this kind of attitude is common (see also discussion below): “Arnold Rüütel – the eternal “second”” Sept. 07, 2001 (referring to his supporters from “second”, i.e. less well-off Estonia), “Carl Bildt considers the election of Rüütel to the presidency to be normal” Sept. 22, 2001 (while constantly referring to all the drawbacks mentioned with respect to Rüütel), “Arnold Rüütel – a punishment for arrogance” Sept. 22, 2001, “Shock is the best teacher in politics” Sept. 26, 2001, etc.

The institutional background of Sample 3 is relatively obvious: a large proportion of Estonian citizens (and especially the readers of and contributors to [www.delfi.ee/jokes](http://www.delfi.ee/jokes)) preferred some other candidate for the presidency. Those who supported the candidate of the winning party were older people with relatively low income and also farmers. But the Internet is more representative of the voice of young or middle-aged citizens with at least an average income, as does the daily newspaper referred to above. Thus the joke ech-

oes the opinion of the institutionalised media and those with relatively more power in Estonian society. For them the election of an old (but good-looking) candidate who has a poor knowledge of foreign languages and a Communist background is a tragedy. The media itself dictates the “tragedy” attitude woven into the topical joke in Sample 3.

Sample 4 also makes extensive use of several media events in one text. The sources are the endless beverage and other advertisement campaigns. The Coca-Cola campaign in July 2001 is one example (e.g. television and newspaper advertisements, as is the article “Coca-cola bottle caps keep disappearing from shops”, *Postimees*, July 13, 2001).

In Sample 4 the institution represented in the joke is that of advertising. Its interests are to make something attractive so as to sell goods. We can name some attempts to make the offer in Sample 4 desirable: “you have won a trip”, “best”. This contrasts with the actual value of the offer, and thus makes a joke of both the fuss over the tragedies as well as of the advertising genre that tries to sell anything and everything regardless of its real value.

In both samples, we can see that the joking mode enables one to interpret the jokes as a critique of both the president and those who lament the election (it is absurd to consider the results of national elections an international catastrophe); of the several actual catastrophes and the advertising means they were turned into (to discuss the irresponsible blockheads who are themselves to be blamed for their deaths, to curse the police who were too incompetent to find the distributors, to give an account of the mass hysteria about envelopes with white power – also cleverly reflects how everybody grabs the opportunity to take his share of the fuss around a currently hot topic).

Samples 3 and 4 are good examples of what cognitive scientists call the blend – it operates on two input spaces to create a new space with partly inherent and partly emergent structure (see for example Fauconnier 1997). That is a cognitive tool that, when used in jokes, assumes good media competence and background knowledge.

## CONCLUSIONS

The general trends evident in participating in Internet joking copy that of general use of the Internet. Differences arise during times of more intense media coverage of (possibly dramatic) events. This suggests that people also have a heightened need to comment on the issues, for the amount of information as well as the amount of noise is greater. There are conflicting opinions about the relationship between social conditions and the creation of jokes. Laughter can be viewed as an antidote to legal public discourse (Douglas 1975, Schehr & Milovanovic 1999). Mulkay (1988), on the other hand, has argued that jokes reinforce existing social structures. Public discourse in the media gives us most of the information about our social reality. Topical jokes are a comment on that genre. Every news item consists of (potential) conflict and (hopefully) a resolution (Moss 1999) to reinforce order in society. Topical jokes seem to play with the established order (and also the temporary chaos) to protest against the artificially prolonged life of the potential media events and how topics are over-exploited by the media, be they important or irrelevant issues (see Ellis 2001).

We should distinguish between content and the manner of linguistic realization (form) to explain the nature of topical jokes. On the one hand, the authoritative form of news dictates a firm belief in what is said, while on the other hand this is contradicted by the all-criticizing anti-authoritarian joke content. Topical jokes are a good way of making a point – both by commenting on the issue, and on a more general plane, on the discourse between media and news itself.

The indicator of a joke in news parody is usually one keyword that deviates from the formal style of regular news. The framework of formal media items is used: news and advertisements. News parodies make use of the conventions of news discourse on the one hand and ridicule on the other (this comes close to the theory of parodic allusion, see Ott and Walter 2000). Parodic allusion describes a stylistic device in which one text incorporates a caricature of another, most often popular, cultural text. The parodic text imitates or exaggerates prominent or representative features of the “original” text and incorporates those features as part of its own textuality.

Sometimes remarks about a topical event are expressed in the form of event-triggered jokes that are already known to the public (a known joke is presented in original or slightly transformed appearance). The rediscovery of such topical jokes (i.e. plane jokes after September 11) is explained by an event acting as a trigger. But as these jokes do not offer anything new in terms of social reality, they are not cognitively functional and are thus not as frequent, at least in the Estonian sample (e.g. the methanol catastrophe did not result in an increased number of alcohol jokes).

Topical jokes seem to disregard the ready-made formulas for jokes (i.e. only a few news items result in traditional joke cycles (for examples of joke cycles, see Dundes 1987, Kissling 1995, Rahkonen 2000), but new topical jokes arise from news items every day).

The content of topical jokes creates an incongruence between the form reinforcing established order and media power, pointing either to the absurdities in the event itself or the media, which pushes the discussion to the limits of absurdity.

What is the cognitive function of this? News is becoming more and more complicated. Cohen (1998) argues that the way reporters, editors, and newscasters present the news makes it extremely difficult, if not often impossible, for the average citizen to follow, cope with, make sense of, internalize, and use much of the information contained in the news. The stylistic form borrowed from the news genre gives the commentator omnipotence and power to be placed above the catastrophe or otherwise distressful event. The superiority found in humour is here most visible, though the superiority does not imply a definite target (i.e. does not define “us” or “them”, “good” or “bad”), but rather shifts the locus of control to the person who tells a topical joke.

Through their conservative form, topical jokes rationalize and objectify an event, purging it of emotions, as is appropriate to the news genre. This might be interpreted as a way of coping with emotional issues, or as a means of protesting against the emotionless nature of media discourse. Topical jokes are critical of the villains and the victims, and more so, even towards the opinion of and means used by the media. They hold a critical position vis-à-vis the parties involved and the genres depicting them.

In conclusion, we can say that there is a certain functionality to jokes as a mental tool for categorizing and discussing social phenomena. The idea of topical jokes and news parodies is to point to the need to take the constant flow of news, i.e. social reality itself, with a grain of salt.

## Comment

<sup>1</sup> 'wood alcohol' = methanol, shellac, paint remover. After MEDLINEplus Medical Encyclopedia, <http://www.nlm.nih.gov/medlineplus/ency/article/002827.htm>.

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# POLITICS OF JOKING: ETHNIC JOKES AND THEIR TARGETS IN ESTONIA (1890s–2007)

*Liisi Laineste*

**Abstract:** The article will describe the transformation of cultural heritage, focusing on ethnic jokes. Starting with the jokes from the 1890s, collected by Estonian folklorist Matthias Johann Eisen (1857–1934) during the country-wide folklore collection campaigns tied to the idea of the national revival, and ending with the most recent jokes shared over the internet, the article will give an overview of how a political system interacts with the universal rules of target choice (as described by Davies 1990, 2002 and elsewhere) in Estonian ethnic jokes. The analysis is cast into three subsections: First, it will give a brief overview of the old folk jokes that do not correspond to contemporary requirements for a joke that will “work”, secondly, the similarity of joke tales and contemporary jokes from the 1960s to present day is examined, and finally the new and re-discovered old targets are analysed. The article will also consider the structural change of the genre, pointing at the universal stupidity joke cycle (e.g., light-bulb jokes based on ethnicity) as the most suitable in the current globalising world and media.

**Key words:** ethnic humour, folk joke, jokes and social reality, joke tale, Soviet joke

## INTRODUCTION

Ethnic jokes are usually specific to a certain society. They are dependent on a particular social, economic and cultural context. The choice of targets, the direction and even the content of mockery stems from the complex interaction of these factors, which operate not in a vacuum but in an environment that is unique in both past developments and the present situation. But it is sometimes the political aspect of the societal context that plays a more influential role, visible in the way that politics downplays the social, economic and cultural context in the case of an oppressive political system. Jokes will then become politically motivated and tend to reflect the criticism towards the imposed hierarchy rather than growing out from the long-standing traditions in interethnic relations. A political system may thus influence the creation and

content of ethnic jokes, offering new targets whose choice is explained by political rather than other motives.

The article will describe the transformation of cultural heritage, focusing on ethnic jokes. Starting with the jokes from the 1890s, collected by Matthias Johann Eisen<sup>1</sup> during the country-wide folklore collection campaigns connected to the national revival, and ending with the most recent jokes shared on the Internet, the article will give an overview of how a political system interacts with the universal rules of target choice in Estonian ethnic jokes. Telling changes have taken place both during the Soviet regime after the 1950s, but also after Estonia regained independence in 1991. Not intending to describe the continuity or origin of texts, I will analyse ethnic jokes that existed back in the 1890s and are in one form or another still part of our jokelore, and compare these with some texts that are specific to one certain era, circulating only then or now. The analysis will throw light on the tensions between the local and the global inside a tradition, showing the change in the direction of mockery from local numskulls to foreign targets (e.g., immigrant/neighbouring/Estonian groups versus ethnic groups or nations from the rest of the world). In order to be more specific, I will focus solely on ethnic jokes on stupidity (see general overview of Estonian jokes in Krikmann 1999, 2006, Laineste 2005, 2008). In addition to changes in the content and targets in ethnic jokes, there are great differences between the more formal aspects of the genre (length, style and language, punch-line) that will also be addressed in this article. These transformations are attributed to the need to create and consume (both listen and read) texts more quickly, as was argued also by Dorst (1990).

While describing jokes and their targets, I will refer to a theory of ethnic humour proposed by Christie Davies (1990, 2002 and elsewhere). To put it briefly, the theory proposes a set of universal rules for the choice of ethnic targets in stupidity jokes. For example, the stupid characters usually come from a culturally close society to the joke-teller and/or share a similar language, and are regarded as backward and employed in low-status manual work. Besides that, the joking relationship between joke-tellers and targets is characterised by asymmetry. Jokes are told in one direction only (for example, French about the Belgians, people from the United States about the Polish, English, Scottish and Welsh about the Irish, Canadians about the Newfoundlanders etc. For more examples see Davies 1990: 11). The present article attempts to complement this theory and account for the numerous cases that discard the rules in the Estonian ethnic jokelore: in the case of Estonia and presumably also many other post-socialist countries, jokes are told from the periphery to the centre (Estonian jokes about the Russians<sup>2</sup>), or even periphery to periphery (Estonian jokes about the Chukchis), there may be no linguis-

tic similarities between the groups telling jokes about each other (Estonians about Latvians and Latvians about Estonians) or even any cultural or economic ties (Estonians about Blacks), neither are the nations involved in a joking relationship geographically close (Estonians about Americans). I will suggest that the presence of political pressure has in this case muddled up the emic target choices (that can be encountered, for example, in the earlier material collected by Eisen) and that this idea could help to explain the choice of targets in ethnic jokes in several other East-European countries as well. There are, of course, other factors interrupting the universals (such as globalisation in the form of strong cultural influence, or the general openness to loans and influences), but it is primarily the political aspect that will be under scrutiny in the following chapters.

## **SOURCES AND METHOD**

The results are based on analysing the database of Estonian jokes (approximately 50,000 jokes, of which 4,000 are ethnic) covering the periods 1880–1910, 1950–1990 and 1991–2007. Each period is represented by an uneven number of jokes (*ca* 1,500, *ca* 4,000 and *ca* 42,000, respectively). Relative proportions are used in the analysis. After removal of the replicas from the latest, most numerous portion of the dataset, around 19,000 different plots remained (*ca* 50 per cent). The two earlier sets of jokes are mostly written down from personal conversations, collected by local correspondents and sent to Eisen for publishing, or by Estonian folklorists and linguists (e.g., Jüri Viikberg, Arvo and Luule Krikmann). Contemporary jokes (circulating after 1991) are copied from different home pages, joke collections and portals on the Internet and presented in the form of an Estonian-language online joke archive *Eesti kaas-aegsed anekdoodid* (Online Joke Archive). All sets are characteristic of their time, representing the general tendencies in the choice of joke targets and other features of jokes of the period.

I will compare ethnic jokes from the three periods to describe their most important features, and point at the societal influences on the transformation that the jokes have undergone. The analysis will show that in addition to the asserted effect of close cultural and economic contexts, the political environment plays an important role in target choice. The development of the short and punch-lined format as a result of commodification of the old folk joke will support the line of argument presented in Wickberg 1998 (see also Kuipers 2002 on the influence of the Internet on jokes). Even though scholars have formulated quite different perceptions about the origin and age of the punch-

line (for an intriguing discussion see Krikmann 2008), the fact is that jokes started to be shorter and more concentrated after the turn of the 20th century.

In this article, I use the notions of ‘(old) joke tale’ and ‘(old) folk joke’ as synonyms, and the term ‘contemporary punch-lined joke’ as its modern counterpart. Jokelore/joke tradition is an overarching term signifying the whole set of jokes circulating throughout the periods.

## ANALYSIS AND RESULTS

In the next chapters, jokes from the three periods (pre-1910, 1950s–1990, and 1991–2007) will be analysed in order to find similar joke scripts of stupidity and their targets in order to see how political turns have affected the choice of targets in Estonian jokelore. Similar patterns should also be applicable to other post-socialist and post-colonial societies, where the oppressive power has interfered with the “emic” choices of ethnic target positioning (from the local, neighbouring, and culturally similar to faraway, culturally unrelated), and also mixing the ethnic and the political into one single undistinguishable ethnic-political or political-ethnic joke category. Examples of joke scripts that have disappeared or survived highlight the specific features and interests of the jokelore of each period.

Collections of old folk jokes, edited by Eisen and collected by his contributors, were published in several volumes (1895–1910), each consisting of about 200 unique texts. In his foreword to *Eesti Rahvanali* ‘(Estonian Folk Joke’, Eisen 1909), Eisen also claimed that jokes (even if they have escaped the attention of collectors because they were too light-weight or frivolous) need to be documented and stored in archives for future generations. He admitted that next to the productive tradition of tragic or pragmatic folklore there had always been a thin but viable line of humour present in Estonian folklore. Tales of Kaval-Ants (*Sly Hans*) and Vanapagan (*Old Devil*) (ATU 1000–1199) often include incidences when the trickster character Kaval-Ants outplays his strong and mighty but stupid opponent, tempting the audience to laugh at the latter<sup>3</sup>. Eisen also criticised the translated jokes that started to appear in the Estonian daily *Postimees* in 1857 as not authentic and “Estonian” enough. The turn of the century was characterised by a heightened interest in “genuine” folklore, and Eisen positions the beginning of the Estonian joke tradition in the 1880s, when the newspaper *Virulane* started to publish traditional Estonian ethnic jokes on Hiiu men (men living on the island of Hiiumaa, Northwest Estonia). He was biased in collecting jokelore, and referred to his preferences in the



foreword of *Eesti Rahvanali*, stating that jokes must not be too obscene or profane/ungodly. Ethnic jokes escape both of these restrictions and it may be because of this that ethnic jokes are the most numerous categories in his collections.<sup>4</sup> His collections present a perfect material for researching the transition from old, long format folk jokes to short and punch-lined jokes, as both formats are present there. This is also evident in the fact that when going through the ATU index of old folk tales, the index is not applicable to categorise modern jokes. Most of the long and non- punch-lined comic tales have disappeared or changed in terms of form. Also the content is at best similar, but not identical to contemporary jokes (see also below for some comparison examples of old and new jokes). Under the subcategory of stupidity (AT 1675–1724), or a special section of fabricated joke tales from Kilplased (AT 1200–1349), ethnic jokes are most numerous. The stories of Kilplased were translated in the 19th century, and during the translating process, the stupid group itself got relocated: instead of being the Schildbürger from the 16th-century Germany, they became Kilplased from Uppakallo (a fictitious Estonian village). At the same time, many of the same plots were already known in jokelore and publishing the translated jokes about Kilplased was largely an example of fabricated lore, even though its target later became synonymous with general stupidity. Translating the targets (even if imaginary) along with the texts was perceived necessary, and as already noted, Eisen was critical of the translated jokes that retained a foreign target. As we will see later, the tendency to adjust the jokes to “local needs” disappeared since the Soviet occupation in Estonia (lasted during 1940–1991). After the 1950s, not only were the targets left unchanged and adopted from Soviet jokes, the punch-line or the whole joke text was sometimes retained in, especially if it was based on puns, in Russian. The trend to prefer local ethnic characters in stupidity jokes has been re-introduced after the 1990s with Hiiu men and others from the periphery (in rare cases also Kilplased) as new targets.

## TARGETS OF ETHNIC JOKES

Revisiting the idea that many old comic folk tales featured in Eisen’s collection have become extinct by now, as they are too long or their topics out-dated, some examples that cannot be transferred to the contemporary society, and also those that still circulate with slight modifications will be considered. Their choice of targets will be analysed in order to see if the targets may also become outdated, and to register the directions of change.

## THE IMPOSSIBLE JOKES: SOME OLD JOKE TALES

First of all, there is the most numerous set of old joke tales that have no equivalents in modern jokelore. Some joke tales were too long and complex to be remembered or retold. Although Eisen has collected many shorter jokes with a clear unexpected twist in the end, there are also instances where the punch-line is explained in a way that dismisses funniness, or where the joke stops even before the punch-line. An explicit moral in the end of the story does not qualify as a characteristic of a comic tale (for more differences, see Oring 1992: 81–82). An example of this is a joke that could be filed under contemporary black/absurd humour, only that the solution seems not particularly funny but expected, and is thus not incongruous enough. It is already short and certainly easy to understand, but the dialogue is logical and the absurdity of the humour does not outweigh the tragic presentation of the situation:

*“How’s your deceased child?” a woman living on the coast asks from another woman. – “Dead!” – “Did you cry when he died?” – “Sure I did! If you wish, I could do it even right now.” (Eisen, 1895 / 2002: Is your deceased child still alive? J. Ploompuu, Kuusalu parish, North Estonia.)*

Also jokes on scarcity are missing, at least in the form they were told a century ago. In the case of old folk jokes on poverty, the daily struggle for bread is something characteristic of agrarian life, and cannot be avoided, much like the forces of nature. There is no irony or sarcasm in these jokes (unlike the Soviet jokes about the deficiency of elementary goods, which were essentially political). Only in a joke would a simple man know what fine bread with fish tastes like, or make a loaf of bread run after him for a while:

*A Saare man [a man from the island of Saaremaa] bought a loaf of bread. He tied a string to the bread and pulled it along, saying, “Now you run after me, I am tired of running after you!” (Eisen 1986 / 2002: Bread on a string. H. Reisar, Halliste parish, Southwest Estonia.)*

Many of the forgotten jokes are short and incongruous, but have still been neglected as outdated because they depict issues that are irrelevant in a modern society. We see incompetence in how to handle animals correctly, what to eat and what not, what knowledge of the world is essential, or how to behave at public events, etc. Escaping wild beasts, such as wolves, is an issue often encountered in old folk jokes, as is the even more frequent theme of treating domestic animals:

*It so happened that a Hiiu man had to cross the bay in winter. Almost at home, his horse fell in an ice split. He had to run for help, but could not leave the horse in case it would die while he's gone. Finally, he came upon a good idea: he tied the horse's throat with a rope so that its spirit would not escape. The Hiiu man reached the nearest farmhouse. People were inside, sitting by the table and eating. The man joined them. After eating and drinking, the local peasant asked him, "What brings you here?" – "My horse, the old devil, fell into an ice split, I came to ask for help!" Everybody was boggled, "Why didn't you say so before?" – "I'm sure the horse is fine, I tied its throat properly," the Hiiu man replied. They went to the horse, but it had already kicked the bucket. The Hiiu man lamented, "Blast it! What an ass I am! Forgot to tie its backside! That's the hole from where the spirit finally escaped!" (Eisen 1985 / 2002: Tied spirit, anon.) AT 1293\*\*; ATU Ø.*

Mastering modern technological equipment is also a frequent theme of present-day stupidity jokes, the classical examples being jokes about computers, domestic appliances, and the light-bulb joke cycle. In old folk jokes, this "technological stupidity" has different implications. Managing a successful farm house in a rustic small village was an esteemed skill, and screwing in a light bulb was not yet an issue for obvious reasons. A very vivid example is the following joke in which the stupidity of an islander is characterised by his limited understanding of the world and narrow horizons. This is, in a way, also a generalisation of the 19th-century society model – only these nations and locations were relevant with whom there was personal contact, which is not a very probable issue in the modern society:

*A Kihnu man visited the mainland for the first time to sell his fish on the Pärnu market. He told himself, "The world is wide and large! There are people and villages beyond Pärnu. This means that the edge of the world is somewhere even further away!" (Eisen 1986 / 2002: World's edge. Eisen, Vigala parish, West Estonia).*

Or consider the following joke on heuristic/practical versus theoretical knowledge:

*Two Hiiu men are on the mainland with their fish cart, on their way to the market. It's midnight. One man asks from the other, "How come the Moon is here? We left it behind when we left home." The other one answers, "Are you stupid or what? That's not the only Moon there is. There are heaps of them up there!" (Eisen 1987 / 2002: There are heaps of them. J. Ekemann, Tapa town, North Estonia.) AT 1334, ATU 1334A.*

These jokes explain the stereotypes about stupidity back then: the false beliefs and narrow understanding of the world were the main issues, and stupidity jokes could no longer follow the same scenarios, mocking backward beliefs (about the solar system, Earth and its inhabitants, medical knowledge, etc.) that seem too absurd nowadays.

## OLD AND NEW, LOCAL AND GLOBAL JOKES COMPARED

The changes involve both the form and the content of jokes. There are also jokes that are recognisable as similar, but still show certain differences. To point at the telling changes in target choice and their relevance to the surrounding social reality, the following section will describe the jokes that have survived. These differences can be elaborated on, if examining side by side the scripts that were used both in the 19th and the 20th century. This not only gives an overview about the switch in the joke format, but also about the directions of change in target choice. The types that have survived are often not straightforward continuations of the old scripts but modified and adjusted jokes resembling the old folk jokes in logical mechanism, script opposition, setup, or in combination of these aspects (for explanations of the different levels of joke components and their hierarchies, see Attardo & Raskin 1991, Ruch *et al.* 1993). It will be interesting to see how they have been modified and what can be the reasons behind that. In this section, I will compare the old folk jokes with the punch-lined jokes (i.e. jokes from pre-1910 and post-1950s), without specifically emphasising the difference between the Soviet times and the post-1990 era. The distinction of these will be an issue of the section discussing the recent developments.

The most abundant type of stupidity jokes is about any kind of inaptness, inability to recognise the function of objects or the way things work. There are some devices that were relevant then and are now, such as guns:

*Two men from Hiiumaa found a gun. None of them knew what it was so they decided to investigate. One thrust the barrel into the other's mouth and said, "Mats, you blow into it, I'll press it in the middle!" He pulled the trigger, the gun went off, and filled Mats' mouth full of buck-*

*A monkey and a horse are taking a walk. They find a gun. The horse looks down the barrel; the monkey plays with the other end. The gun goes off, and blows away half of the horse's head. The horse falls down, twitching. The monkey gets angry, "What's so funny? I got a bad fright!"*

*shot. “Mats, spit it out!” the other man cries. Mats can’t spit any more. Mats doesn’t even move.*

(Eisen 1895 / 2002: Loaded gun, O. Hintzenberg, Tapa town, North Estonia.) ATU 1228.

(Online Joke Archive: Meie Naljaraamat, 15.10.1997)

There are jokes where necessity makes people take desperate action so that it looked foolish in its absurdity in an earlier time and still does today.

*A Hiiu man was working on the mainland the whole summer, and got a bottle of vodka as a bonus. Winter was coming and he figured the cheapest way to survive is to buy a bag of peas and boil a weeks’ ration at a time. One day the peas didn’t taste too good any more. The Hiiu man had advice ready: took the bottle of vodka, and told himself, “Now look here, Hiiu man, you eat the peas, and I’ll give you a sip of vodka as a reward!” He struggled to finish his peas, and when he was finished, he put the bottle away again and said, “Got you, I’m not giving you any!”*

(Eisen 1895 / 2002: Cunning Hiiu man. D. Pruhi, Metsiku village, Vihula parish, North Estonia.)

*Jew Abraham was alone at home, Sarah was away, and he had to prepare his own food. He decided to make soup and eat it for the whole week. For the first few days the soup was a pleasure to eat, but on the fourth day it was not so tasty any more, and on the fifth day he ate it with great difficulty. On Saturday there was no way he could eat it. Stomach was upset. Abraham took a bottle of cognac from the cupboard, poured it into a shot glass and said, “You eat this, and I’ll give you cognac!” Snorting and sputtering, he managed to shovel the soup down. He then poured the cognac into the bottle, took it back to the cupboard and giggled, “I conned you, Abraham!”*

(Viikberg 1974)

False analogy that accentuates the target’s naivety has always triggered amusement:

*A man from Hiiumaa complained to a man from Saaremaa that he had a terrible pain*

*“I have a terrible pain in my eyes! What should I do about it?”*

*in his eyes. He had tried all manners of ways to cure it, but to no avail.*

*The Saare man replied, "You idiot! When I had a toothache, I had my tooth pulled out, and the pain was gone in no time! You should have your eyes pulled out, and you'll see the pain go away immediately."*

(Eisen 1901 / 2003: Eye out. M. Rekkaro, Raiküla parish, North Estonia.)

*"Well, I had toothache last year."*

*"And what did you do?"*

*"Pulled the tooth out!"*

(Online Joke Archive: Eesti Päevaleht online, 18.12.1997)

There are uneducated people who are unable to count money and do a simple calculation:

*An old woman from the coast went to buy straw slippers. The merchant asked for half a rouble for the pair. The old woman started to haggle, "Let's make a bargain, I'll give you 70 kopecks! Half a rouble is far too much!"*

(Eisen 1909 / 2003: Let's make a bargain. J. Niinas, Risti rural township, West Estonia.)

*An oil tycoon wanted to rent oil-fields from the Indians and offered Winnetou 1/8 of profit. Winnetou shook his head thoughtfully and said, "We want more. You give us 1/16!"*

(Online Joke Archive: Erik Vallikivi joke collection, 1999)

A script of ethnic jokes closely tied with stupidity is that of slow wit, slow speech, and no speech at all and can sometimes be a marker of this slowness of character. The older version of this joke relies solely on the slowness interpreted as stupidity formula, whereas the contemporary variant has acquired allusions to ambiguous national stereotypes besides slowness. Specific stereotypes of drinking too much can be interpreted both negatively and positively, which makes the second joke sound almost like boasting, even if it primarily mocks the Estonians as poor communicators:

*A Hiiu man often told his sons, "No need to chatter!"*

*Two Estonians go to a pub. They line up 7 vodkas on the bar and start drinking.*

*Once the two sons were fishing at sea, and one of them drowned. The other came home, but said nothing.*

*After three days the father asked, “Where is Mats?”*

*The son answered, “Fell overboard and drowned!”*

*Father asked, “Why didn’t you tell us?”*

*Son replied, “But you said yourself, no need to chatter!”*

(Eisen 1896 / 2002: No need to chatter, J. Vitismann, Jüri village, Vihula parish, North Estonia.)

*After a while, the first Estonian says, “You know...”*

*The other interrupts him, “Listen, did we come here to drink or talk?”*

(Delfi, 23.05.2001)

As mentioned before, jokes accentuate the importance of normality, and both extremes (no power and status versus all the power and status) fall astray from the golden midway. Among the old joke tales and modern jokes alike, we find telling examples of how jokes depicted not only the peasants from the periphery but also the masters, although the joke-tellers were definitely of lower status (see Davies 1998: 93, who has also noticed that unjustified power often results in stupidity jokes). In the following comparison, the contemporary joke follows the old model in target choice (a peasant versus the master), not a very frequent cast of characters in recent ethnic jokes.

*A man from the coast was heading inland. On his way, he meets the landlord who asks where he is coming from. “I come from below!” (meaning: from the coast). “From hell, then?” the master is curious. “Yes, that’s right, straight from hell!” the man nods. “How is life down there? Better or worse than here? Were there any land-*

*The German said to the peasant, “Go to hell!” The peasant left and was gone for many days. On his return, the master inquires, “Where have you been?” – “Went to Hell, like I was told!” – “Did you see my ancestors?” – “Sure. Yours and mine. Master here, master there – your parents didn’t have to do anything, just sat in the furnace.*

*lords?" The man answers, "Life was pretty good down there. I saw quite a number of landlords, all of them very well off. Once a master, always a master. They did not have to work at all." – "What about the peasants?" the landlord is interested. – "There were plenty of those too, but life was not so good for them. Slaves they are here, and slaves they will be there. Landlords all sit around in big furnaces, but peasants have to work hard to keep the fire up!"*

(Eisen 1896 / 2002: I come from below. F. Freimann, Lehtse parish, North Estonia.)

*My parents worked their guts out, shoving coal."*

(Online Joke Archive: Tanel Mägi joke collection, 1994 ... 2000.)

A popular text with many variants during Eisen's time, the following joke has also made it until the present day. It is another good example of how insufficient or one-sided knowledge of how human organism works can sometimes be helpful, and hints that some are so stupid that they fail in everything, even in committing suicide:

*A Hiiu man was fed up with life and wanted to hang himself. He tied the rope tight around his belly and suspended himself from a tree. Another Hiiu man happened to pass by. "What are you doing?" he asked. – "Hanging myself!" answered the man tangling from the tree. – "You daft man, is that a way to be hanged? Tie the rope around your throat first!" But the one up the tree replied, "Well, Mr Know-It-All, but when I tie it*

*A man was lying on the train tracks. A passer-by asked him, "Why do you lie here, you could be hit by a train?" – "That's what I'm counting on," the man answers. – "And what's that bundle by you side?" – "That'd be my sandwiches. I wouldn't want to die of starvation while waiting for the train."*

(Online Joke Archive: Peedu Põllu joke collection, 1994 ... 1998)



*around my neck, I can  
breathe no more!”*

(Eisen 1986/2002: Hanging  
the Hiiu man. J. Niinas, Risti  
rural township, West  
Estonia.)

There are no similar punning jokes from the periods under discussion. In every edition published by Eisen, there was a small set of jokes based on language play (3–5 texts). This indicates that the difference between Estonian dialects did inspire some jokes in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. So did the mistakes that foreigners make while speaking Estonian (there are jokes on how Russians, Gypsies or Finns can understand and speak Estonian). Contemporary jokes do not actively use punning; also, Estonian is a language of few homonyms. Estonians mispronouncing or not being able to speak a foreign language is the subject of a few contemporary jokes (but it forms a considerable share of contemporary Russian jokes about Estonians), compared to the old folk jokes that mocked Estonians speaking pidgin German or Russian to improve their status. There are few jokes about foreigners failing to speak proper Estonian but since ethnocentrism is vanishing and in the globalising world people have started to realise that the knowledge of Estonian is not so self-evident, their number is diminishing.

## REVIVAL OF LOCAL TARGETS

In this section, the targets of the most recent ethnic stupidity jokes are tackled with. The Soviet times saw the importing of many new joke butts in Estonia, and so did the translated jokes from the beginning of 1990s (see Fig. 2). The influx of more universal stupidity jokes is continuing, but the tendency to “translate” the targets in accordance with the text has become more usual. There is an increasing interest in Latvians, Finns, Estonians themselves and the inhabitants of local peripheries as the stupid characters in Estonian jokes. Technical stupidity is often attributed to Latvians:

*Latvian Air is on its first flight to Tallinn. “We are nearly there”, Captain Renars says, “but what a short runway it is!” Renars and co-pilot Uldis still decide to risk landing the plane. With the engine roaring and burning tyres, the plane stops just a few inches from the end of the runway. The crew and passengers all sigh with relief. Renars looks out of the*

*window and exclaims, "Well that sure is the shortest runway I've ever seen!" -Yup," Uldis agrees, looking from side to side. "But look how wide it is!" (Delfi, saarlane, 02.01.2003, 13:02)<sup>5</sup>*

*Latvian news story. On Tuesday evening, there was a major power cut in downtown Riga. Hundreds of people were trapped waiting for the escalators to start moving again. (Delfi, vallerii, 10.11.2004, 14:13)<sup>6</sup>*

The typical format of universal stupidity jokes, the question and answer, is a short and easy formula that is especially frequently used in computer-mediated jokelore. The conundrum joke is a quasi-riddle that expects no answer (e.g., Chiaro 1992: 69). This is also the main form of ethnic jokes about Blacks; these jokes were popular in Estonia at the beginning of the 1990s<sup>7</sup>. They usually represent straightforwardly unpleasant and even aggressive stereotypes, the following being a mild exception to the rule.

*– What do you get when you cross a donkey and a turtle?*

*– A Latvian with a helmet. (Delfi, Combainer, 13.10.2004 19:56)*

The Finn is also an occasional character in stupidity jokes, sometimes replacing the Latvian in the same jokes. Some of these display neighbourly affection also through sexual allusions, as in this ethnic stupidity joke (in variants, a Latvian replaces the Finn):

*A Finn and an Estonian are on a deserted island. Finally they get really desperate for sex and start to look for a way to satisfy their needs. Suddenly they come upon a deer, its head stuck firmly between two trees. The Estonian gets down to business. Finished, he tells the Finn, "OK, now it's your turn!" The Finn sighs, steps next to the deer and puts his head between the two trees. (Delfi, mz, 13.09.2000 08:55)<sup>8</sup>*

In general, the Finns are becoming a less frequent joke target than the Latvians (even though in the overall statistics of the most popular online joke portal since 2000, *Delfi Naljaleht*, provides a larger number of jokes containing the word "Finn" (278) than "Latvian" (144)). At the beginning of the 1990s, the great number of Finns visiting Old Tallinn, or vodka-tourists as they were called, were considered a problem by the local population. This resulted, among other things, in a wave of stupidity jokes.

*A Finn has a brain tumour, and it has to be operated on. He needs new brains. The doctor says, "You can choose the brain you want. Estonian brain is the cheapest, 1,000 EUR / gram. We also have Russian brains, for 2,000 EUR / gram. But if you really want the Finnish brain, you'll*

*have to pay 10,000 EUR / gram.” The Finn starts protesting: how can the Finnish brain cost so much, it’s not THAT much better. The doctor replies, “No, it’s not that – do you know how many Finns we need to get just one gram?” (Delfi, M&M, 04.07.2000 13:52)*

*A Finn is hitchhiking on the Tallinn–Pärnu highway. An Estonian offers him a ride. The Finn asks, “Is Tallinn far away?” – “Not really.” The Estonian answers. They drive for an hour, then the Finn asks again, “Is Tallinn still far away?” The Estonian replies, “Yes, now it’s far away.” (Online Joke Archive: Meie Naljaraamat, 01.09.1998)*

In recent years, the Finn has become the target of jokes built on more specific stereotypes (e.g., when being boiled by a cannibal, a Finn asks for some cold vodka as it was getting quite hot in the kettle – a reference to the Finnish sauna culture), and the similarity of the two Fenno-Ugric languages inspire few language jokes.

Of local targets, the most popular is still the Hiiu man, aside from the very general “Estonian” as ethnic marker. Also a universally known joke text, this joke is more a trickster joke than a stupidity joke, and in many cases that is what has become of the Hiiu man in modern jokelore.

*A Hiiu man goes to the clinic. He complains to an attractive female doctor, “I think I have three testicles.” The doctor asks him to undress, looks and examines thoroughly, but sees nothing unusual. She asks the nurse to come and look at it too. They examine the man together, but conclude he’s only got two and there are no anomalies. The Hiiu man gets dressed, thanks the doctor and leaves. On his way out he meets a friend, who is curious about what he was doing at the doctor’s. “I had some spare time before the ferry left,” the Hiiu man replied. “So I came here to have my balls massaged.” (Delfi, 17.05.2001)*

There are some modern (most often former blonde) jokes about Kilplased, even if this pseudo-ethnic group has never been a very popular target. It seems that by today the quasi-nation symbolises the Estonian numskull in general.

*Why does the wall fall when a Kilplane [previously: blonde] props himself up the wall? – The wiser gives in.*

*Why did Kilplane [previously: Chukchi] laugh, running around the mountain to escape from the polar bear? – He had outrun the bear by three laps.*

(Online Joke Archive: <http://www.feim.ee/nali.php?p=19>)

Jokes that target the Estonian himself very often juxtapose him with other nations (e.g., Finns in the examples), especially in the form of three-nation jokes:

*Once upon a time there were a blind Latvian, a deaf Lithuanian and a paralyzed Estonian. One day, God comes to them and says that everyone is granted one wish. They enter a room. In a few minutes, the Latvian runs out and screams, "I can see!" A while later, the Lithuanian is jumping around, cheering, "I can hear!" After a short while, the Estonian comes out and shouts happily, "I got new wheels for my wheelchair!" (Delfi, 23.10.2002)*

Heightened interest in the local target, most often the fellow Estonian, also appears in contemporary three-nation jokes. Astrid Tuisk (2008) in her analysis of the targets of this specific sub-genre of ethnic jokes compared the three-nation jokes from two quite close periods, acquired in the course of national school lore collecting campaigns in 1992 and 2007. The interval of 15 years proved long enough to see changes in the collected jokes. From among all the topics that the open-ended questionnaires from the two campaigns covered, jokes varied the most (Voolaid 2007): Recent plays or ghost stories told by school children resemble very much the plays played and stories told at the wake of the Estonian republic, whereas jokes have a remarkably different focus than before. There are still few Juku (*Little John*) jokes, ethnic jokes (including three-nation jokes), and an increasing amount of animal and sexual jokes, but political jokes are almost non-existent, though these were the dominating category in the 1992 campaign (the jokes collected in 1992 consisted largely of old Soviet jokes). The three-nation jokes were present in the results of both campaigns, and the genre is very traditional and stable. At the same time, Tuisk (2008) notices some important changes that are telling in the context of this study. Namely, there is a growing tendency of showing the Estonian character as stupid:

*A Russian, a German, and an Estonian are stranded on a deserted island when they find a Genie. Everyone is granted one wish. The Russian wants to get home to Moscow and a case of vodka bottles. The German wishes to go home to Berlin and asks for a prettier wife. The Estonian asks for a lot of beer and his two friends back.<sup>9</sup>*

or sometimes dirty:

*A Russian, a German and an Estonian are in prison. The one who can stand the smell of a camel for the longest time, will be freed. The German*

*manages to stay there for some minutes and then rushes out, the Russian for some hours. The Estonian has stayed in the tent for some time already when the camel rushes out, screaming, "I can't bear the smell any longer!"*

There are not many recent jokes that positions Russians on the loser's slot, this position is now occupied by the stupid Estonian. Of the few jokes in which the old power relation has been maintained, the most popular is the airplane joke showing that the amount of Russian ethnic immigrants and their integration was a problem then and is still an issue, even for schoolchildren.

*A Russian, a German and an Estonian are flying a plane when an engine breaks. Each has to throw something down. The Russian throws a bottle of vodka – they have enough of it. The German throws a pack of cigarettes – they have enough of it. The Estonian throws the Russian down – they have enough of them.*

Despite the first impression of straightforward self-deprecation, the Estonian is also the character of many self-boosting three-nation jokes. Tuisk gives examples of several jokes that depict the Estonian as the winner. The positive ("winning") jokes have retained the same positive hero (the Estonian), but the derogating jokes have gained a new twist by introducing the Estonian as the stupid one instead of the former butts (Russians, Chukchi, etc). Frequent are also jokes where winning a three-nation competition is of very dubious quality. These are jokes with scatological allusions: the contestants have to climb the stairs without defecating, or cross the bridge without blowing their nose, etc. The "winner" is then the one who manages to pass the test, but more than being delighted in his obscene victory; children laugh at the dirtiness of the mock hero – who is, very frequently, the Estonian himself.

The character on the last slot may not always be the target, but the winner instead. At the same time, as seen from the last examples, the winner does not unequivocally gain the upper hand in the battle – his victory is often smelly, strange, or awkward. The Estonian acts a part in all of the positions of the three-nation joke, he may be the target, the hero, or the mock hero. Thus it cannot be concluded that the Estonian as a target is solely a national laughing stock. Instead, the generalised interest shows that the Estonian as a character in our jokes (as a target or the one gaining more or less ambiguous victory) is becoming more and more relevant much like in the ethnic jokes from 1991 until the present day.

## DISCUSSION

The previous examples gave an overview of Estonian stupidity jokes throughout the past century. Looking at the targets of stupidity jokes in these different periods, we see that there has always been confusion about who would be the most suitable one. Further towards the end of the 20th century, the number of new targets is growing, their geographical location is diversifying. Christie Davies, who acquired his data and conclusions as a result of cross-cultural comparison, has described the typical butts of stupidity jokes in a number of countries worldwide, and formulated universal rules of target choice on the basis of that (Davies 1990, 2002 and elsewhere). Interestingly enough, the theory accounts for most of the old folk jokes in the earliest period of our study, found in Eisen's collections. The stupid characters are true outsiders with a peculiar speech and seemingly backward habits (Setu, Saaremaa and Hiiumaa, people living on the coast Fig. 1, map).

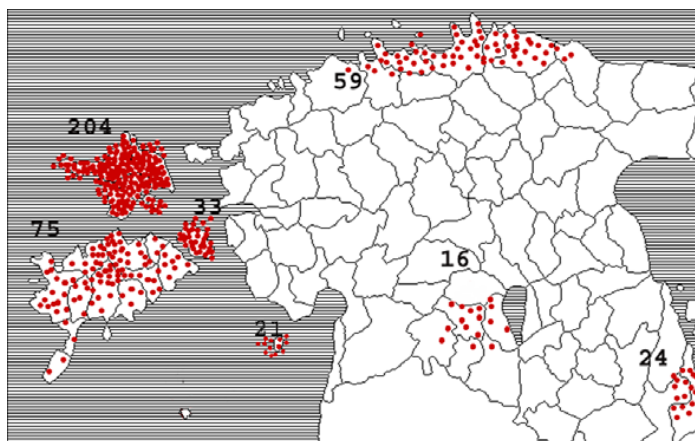


Figure 1. Joke targets in Estonian old folk joke tales (Eisen, 1895–1910). Number indicated the amount of joke texts with the particular target. 204: Hiiuman, 75: Saareman, 59: man / woman from the coast, 33: Muhuman, 24: Setuman, 21: Kihnuman, 16: Mulgiman<sup>10</sup>.

In the old joke tales, the targets are mocked for their slowness, for being unable to understand simple rules necessary for a successful (country) life, or other characteristics. Stupidity jokes are in the majority,<sup>11</sup> and there are several targets (which vary in different regions; although based on the results of comparing the amount of sent jokes and the location of their senders, jokes about Hiiumen came in from all around Estonia). In Estonian old folk jokes and early punch-lined jokes, targets are peripheral groups with funny speech

and perceived backwardness. Foreigners are in a clear minority and limited to those who have had direct contact with Estonian natives (travelling Gypsies, Russians, Germans and Jews, less often Finns). Their vice is usually more specific than just universal stupidity (Gypsies are cunning but lazy, Russians speak a strange language and knowing a few words of Russian is necessary, Jews are stingy and materialistic, etc.). There are no completely irrelevant stupid/dirty/strange characters like the Blacks, Armenians or Americans present in Estonian jokelore after the 1950s.

Even more curiously, the rules of target choice cannot be applied to Soviet-Estonian ethnic jokes about stupidity (1950s–1991 in our sample). First of all, there are no traditional stupidity jokes in the Soviet period, only politically loaded ones. Secondly, the scope of targets moved to the East and in part also to the West. The pan-Soviet enemy constructed by the official media was the USA. It is obvious that the relationship between Estonians and Russians, Chukchis, or Ukrainians was not that of cultural closeness, perceived differences in living standards, or even occupying the same geographical location. At the same time, there are indications that at least children telling jokes about the Chukchi were not even aware that this is a nation, and answered that the jokes are about a boy called Chukchi (Tuisk 1995: 73, in an article about the 1992 school lore collecting campaign). The analysis of Estonian joke targets (Laineste 2005, reprinted in Fig. 2) shows that the local targets disappeared completely during the Soviet times, and were replaced by a number of new ones which, arguing from the stand-point of everyday reality and problems, was choice were absolutely justified. Towards the end of the 1990s, the importance of Soviet targets diminished, but again many new nationalities

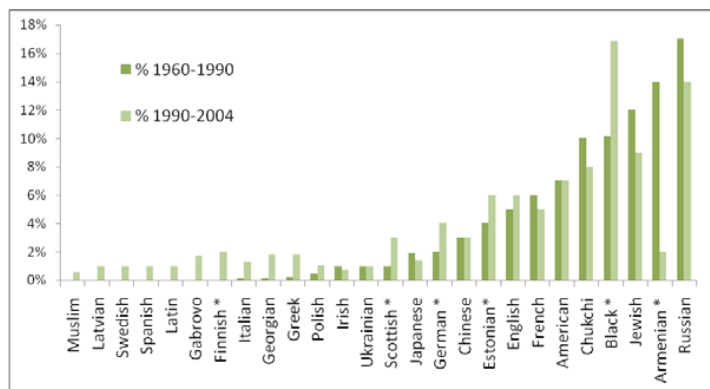


Figure 2. Targets of Estonian ethnic jokes, 1960–2004. The nations marked with an asterisk (\*) show a statistically relevant change in popularity (percent improvement coefficient was calculated, and an increase or decrease exceeding 25% was considered significant). No distinction was made between local ethnic groups in the case of “Estonian”.

(Finns, Greek, Gabrovo, Latvian, Swedish, Italian, Japanese, Arab, Latin American, and others, whose proportion in the corpus was less than 1%) were introduced (mostly as translations of those used by the English-speaking world).

The universal rules of target choice seem to be again valid, and increasingly so, after 2000, when the newly regained independence in Estonia has necessitated “updating” the jokelore. Already visible from the illustration that compares Soviet and post-socialist joke-butts (Figure 2), the amount of jokes about Estonians themselves have risen. Jokelore has transformed from mocking Soviet power and nations into a tradition that strives to find other, more relevant targets, laughing now at our own stupidity or that of our close neighbours (Latvians, Finns).

While in the Western world the stable nation states have created long-lasting and fossilised stereotypes of the most stupid people (usually kinsfolk: Irish, Belgians, Vallonians, Karelians etc), the now post-socialist countries were for a long time part of the unified “joke circulation” of the Soviet Union. They shared the fears, economic hardships, and even joke targets. This very fertile and long-lasting Soviet joke tradition in most post-socialist countries is an exception to the rules of target choice postulated by Davies, and should be given attention to in order to revise the universality of the theory. The question of discussion is why the 19th-century targets were non-existent during the Soviet times, who replaced them, and what has made them to return.

Drawing from the analysis of jokes from the three periods, several conclusions can be drawn.

First of all, targets have systematically been changed from more specific into less specific, from geographically close into less close. In general the tendency to use less ethnic markers and more neutral or general ones (“man”, animals, officials) is visible. So a Hiiu man, coastal woman, Estonian have become a man, an animal, an American. Also the proportion of ethnic jokes has fallen consequently (see also Laineste 2008). Ethnic markers have been replaced with more general vocational and gender markers.

Even in old folk jokes, there was not one strong and nationally recognised joke target that could have survived under the influx of Soviet jokelore. Hiiu and Saare men are making their comeback most forcefully, but during the Soviet times the target was completely forgotten.

Next, examining the Estonian joke tradition does not support the fact that the direction of joking is universally directed from the centre (the better-off), towards the periphery, where the backwardness of its inhabitants is notorious.<sup>12</sup> In the earlier times, the “normal” lifestyle was mostly connected with rural, not city life. Few jokes were sent from people from Tallinn or Tartu – the majority of jokes were sent in by people living in Hiiumaa, Saaremaa,



Tapa, or other rural areas. Perhaps the most widely known mutual joke exchange was between the islands of Saaremaa and Hiiumaa. That is to say, Estonians used to laugh at the regional differences, and that was not necessarily linked to the qualitative differences in status, as the living standards in Hiiumaa and Saaremaa, for example, were broadly the same. The notions of centre and periphery were muddled, because in the 1890s, life revolved around the local and regional rather than a state level. Also during the Soviet times, there was no local centre of power, and the pan-Soviet division was between the centre of Moscow and the periphery of all the rest. Regardless of this, the ethnic-political joke of the time was quite often targeted at the centre of power. The power was represented by Russians, which was at the time the most common joke target in Estonia. An exception of this general direction are the jokes about different peripheral nations (in pan-Soviet sense; Chukchi as the most famous, but also Ukrainians and a few others) who were not actually peripheral to Estonia but to the whole Soviet Union. Therefore, the Soviet Union introduced new pan-Soviet targets who by theory should have no particular appeal to Estonians. Soviet joke tradition replaced all local targets, being more vital, more topical.

Another change in jokelore is coming about in Estonia as the Soviet jokes are diminishing and old local targets are slowly re-entering jokelore (Estonians themselves are becoming more popular targets, as are several local numskulls like Hiiu, Saare and Setu men; also the frequency of Finns and Latvians is on the rise). We have stupidity jokes that were not told in the Soviet times, and even if the joke itself is translated, the targets are switched into more appropriate local characters, resonating better with Davies' theory of target choice. Russians have rarely been targets of straightforward stupidity jokes in Estonia but Finns and Latvians as joke targets were to some extent also present in Eisen's joke collections. The Finnish would be the most likely choice of target for stupidity jokes (because of culture, language and location, even though economic tensions and relative centre–periphery distinction has usually been perceived as the Estonians as the “younger brothers” of the Finns), but it seems that Latvians have bettered them in this competition. There are many universal stupidity jokes featuring Latvians or Finns, sometimes even interchangeably. From local groups, the same geographic locations as in the 1890s are giving most jokes on stupidity: Hiiu, Saare and Setu.

And finally, Estonians are eager to look for their very own and specific group to whom stupidity jokes could fit. To a growing extent, these groups are Latvians, Finns, and most of all Estonians themselves. The same groups that were mocked a century ago are now re-emerging in our jokelore: Saaremaa, Hiiumaa and Muhu islanders, Setu and Mulgi men from South Estonia, etc.

All the post-1991 popular targets (Europeans, Blacks, and more exotic nations) are losing their actuality.

Besides the content, jokes as a genre have gone through even greater changes in terms of their structure.

## **DEVELOPMENT OF UNIVERSAL STUPIDITY JOKES**

There has been a need for increasingly universal/global sense of humour – in the 19th century, every folk joke was embedded in a certain social situation and usually assigned to a neighbouring village, or an outsider from the same village, and the “market” for the punch-lined joke with easily interchangeable targets was not born yet. There were joke tales that used similar plots for mocking different groups in various countries (e.g., some of the typical num-skull stories in Uther’s index), but this was nothing like the contemporary, quickly spreading universal stupidity jokes that gained simultaneous popularity all around the world. In the modern globalising world, stupidity proved to be the universal characteristic that could be pinned on almost anyone. There are a number of stupidity jokes that are known with minor modifications throughout the Western world. The increasing popularity of the stupidity joke seems to accompany the development of the short and punch-lined format, which was among other things motivated by the commodification of the genre (a process elaborated by Wickberg 1998).

This is closely tied with another aspect of the issue, namely the interactions of the universal stupidity joke and the nation-specific ethnic joke. Though older stupidity joke tales were numerous in the earlier tradition before the short punch-lined joke became into being, the choice of targets in most jokes relied on actual contact with the targeted group and was thus quite specific (there were a lot of jokes about Hiiu men who travel to the mainland for work, Saare men are known for the poor quality of their workmanship, and the Gypsies eat inedible leftovers that they consider to be proper food, etc.). The joke tales were mostly connected to specific ethnic stereotypes, and even if there was the obvious stupidity of the ethnic group underneath, the top layer displayed a number of more individualised characteristics derived from personal contacts or collective beliefs. Even if the plots were borrowed, there was a clear tendency to “translate” the targets in addition to the jokes themselves.

The jokes that use these most basic oppositions to maintain the ludic difference between “us” and “them” have developed in order to claim global spread. Some of these have formed joke cycles. Their reusability and quite homogenised form (e.g., the question and answer format) prompts to use the whole

set, not just certain texts, besides, the idea they carry is identical in all cases. Serial jokes can be used without further modification in the context of ethnic confrontations (Kvideland 1983 about the Scandinavian joke war) or after catastrophes (Challenger jokes – Smyth 1986; Princess Diana jokes – Davies 1999; Chernobyl jokes – Fialkova 2001; WTC – Csaszi 2003, Ellis 2001). Many nations assert in the jokes that some ethnic groups (Polish, Jews, Russians, Estonians, etc.) would fail to change an electric bulb. Even if some nation-specific trait is present, it is never as strong as in stereotyping jokes that render meaningless if the target is changed. The light bulb joke cycle is the most wide spread of the jokes cycles of universal stupidity: besides being ethnic, they can be about vocational subgroups (policemen), gender (blondes), or other specific subcultures in the society (musicians, etc.).

National stereotypes are heuristics that organise the world into categories, but the categories they present are more varied, more complex than those of stupidity jokes, which mainly rely on “stupid vs smart”, or the even more conventional opposition of “good vs bad”. To “get” a specific joke, one must first go through a series of associations and available national stereotypes. He must realise that behind the specific script of hyper- or hyposexuality, for example, is the general assumption that the “other” strays from normal/ is bad/ is stupid in essence. Serial jokes, on the other hand, present the listener with a “chewed” pair of oppositions ready for “instant digestion”. It does not take too much time and energy to understand the joke. The most simple and basic oppositions have huge potential for popularity worldwide.

The field of connotations and allusions in the case of specific jokes is more ambiguous, as the “bad” is not univocally negated, even if it is abnormal. In the case of jokes on sexuality or drinking, for example, the target may well be proud of its abilities instead of being embarrassed, and the joke may be borrowed into the jokelore of the target as not derisive of but complimenting the group.

The spread of serial jokes has intensified with the proliferation of electronic communication. It fits with several characteristics, possibilities and features provided by the new form of interaction. Traditionally, the jokes were transmitted orally. Remembering the joke required mnemonic techniques, including knowing the beliefs and attitudes, and awareness of the “us” and “them” distinction. Every joke was easily modifiable in the course of representation. In the case of Internet jokes, the text appears in written form, which makes it more rigid. Copying jokes from one site and posting them to another is a regular practice which keeps multiplying identical jokes on the web and is subject to a few modifications. The highly stereotyped form allows instant admission to the second level, its oppositions, without any critical examination of the

suitability of the new target. The form is standardised, and often uses words like building blocks: anyone can compose a stupidity joke without any knowledge of the target. It creates an atmosphere of similarity and familiarity. Already after the first line, the listener can enter the play frame that is much more understandable than the jokes in which not knowing the specific stereotypes may ruin the amusement.

The shortened form has thus dictated the change in content and vice versa. Oppositions strive to be more readily available, more forceful, dwelling on the universal extremes from the golden midway. All this has been reinforced by globalisation, in the era when jokes travel faster and need to be adapted from one nation to another, between languages and over cultural contexts. Although the cultural norms and expectations of humour may vary, the serial stupidity jokes seem to fulfil most of them for most nations. Thus the stupidity jokes are the extreme manifestation of a 'commodified' (a term borrowed from Wickberg 1998) canned joke. Even if we do find some similar approaches to human folly in both the old folk jokes and in contemporary jokes, the availability of oppositions, impersonality and universality of the latter are the imposed requirements for a (globally) successful joke text. In addition to the former observation, this is another reason why there are not many similar scripts in the earliest and latest datasets of Estonian jokes.

## CONCLUSION

As Davies' theory claims, there are few universal rules to decide the identity of the joke-butt, and these have evolved due to long-term cultural, economic and other conditions. What it does not account for are the political conditions that have a profound effect on ethnic joke targets.

Politisisation of ethnic jokes results in a tradition of ethnic jokes that do not bend under the rules of target choice postulated by Davies. It seems necessary to take the wider macro-context into account. Not only are the economic and cultural position of the target necessary to decide its popularity, but also the prevailing political situation and opinions play along. In the case of a totalitarian regime, some global (and locally quite unexplainable) joke targets were introduced in Estonia. Stupidity was not just a silly, mirthful and laughable characteristic, it was politically laden with despise towards the oppressors (and one joke could do both: in Chukchi jokes, the stupid character was Chukchi, but the context of the joke often framed an opposition with the source of his misery, the regime, and its henchman, the Russian). The presence of political oppression muddled up the emic target choices, bringing in the new groups

and erasing others that were originally valued by Eisen as “authentic” Estonian joke-butts. The recent rejection of an otherwise versatile and infamous Soviet joke tradition is an indication of a search for more relevant targets, and it seems that the last choices of targets partly follow the universal rules of target selection in stupidity jokes. In fact, the two competing impulses of rehabilitating the popular numskulls of old joke tales and focusing on closest neighbours are only partly backed up by previous theory. With Latvians, there are no linguistic similarities. The Finns, who speak a similar language, have always been better off than Estonians. It seems that the theory of target choice applies only in the case of a limited number of nations that represent a more ethnocentric worldview, and (cultural and economic) peripheries will adopt much from the centres of joke production. This means that Estonians borrow jokes from the nations with who they have closer relationship for the time being: German (folk tales and *schwanks* by the Grimm Brothers) in Eisen’s collections, Russians in the Soviet times, and English, Americans, perhaps also Finns in contemporary jokelore. We could call it a reference group for jokes. Peripheries are usually more prone to adopt tradition modifying it in the process. At the same time they retain their previous folklore, resulting in an exciting mix of mainstream and unique. Estonia has long been a periphery of different political and economic formations: of several hegemonies, of the former Soviet Union and the present European Union. Estonia forms a distinct exception to the theory formulated regarding primarily the central tendencies in the target choice of the globally “central” countries.

Generally speaking, Davies’ theory is missing a sufficient political dimension to account for the totalitarian joke targets. It might also benefit from realising the relative nature of the categories/ dimensions of better and worse off, of centre and periphery, which are difficult to appoint to countries without being biased, and which are to a great extent perceived qualities as opposed to more definitive features. Even though the line of argument concerning the borrowing and blending jokes from regions that set a cultural and other role model is interesting, there are certain drawbacks: claiming that Estonia is the periphery to other globally more recognised countries does not help to explain the number of jokes on Finns, or previously on Russians, as being borrowed only because these were the perceived centre – there is always free choice involved. Besides, this would turn the boards also with the general rules set by Davies’ theory, maintaining that it is particularly the centre that tells jokes about the periphery. It would be useful to make comparative research between post-socialist countries, keeping in mind the continuities and disruptions in the tradition.

Culture contacts and periods of intensive political-economic and other societal changes indisputably do affect folklore. We see this also in Estonian jokes where these transformations are well visible because of the large scope of changes. These took place in a relatively short period of time, and we can trace back the course of the changes. The recent trends of globalisation are also changing the present jokes. The 1990s turn towards the West resulted in a great influx of foreign, mostly English loans, but more recently we see again a creative adaption of joke scripts to meet the need for self-identification.

At all times, jokes have been a conscious choice. The focus has always been on the relevant issues: in the earliest times described here, the main focus was the neighbours or the inhabitants of the neighbouring parish. During the Soviet times, people were most concerned with the politics and ethnic groups responsible for the political oppressions, and as the borrowed Soviet jokes were critical towards the regime, there was no need for more elaborate and free-running alterations or modifications of these jokes. After Estonia regained independence the main focus was on the quest for a new identity, which in jokelore found expression in a rejection of old Soviet jokes and even turning back to the 19th-century models – at least in terms of target choice. The creation and alteration of traditions is thus closely connected with everyday reality and the political context influencing this.

Taking all variables into account, the theory of Christie Davies on ethnic humour does not fully apply to the choice of targets of Estonian ethnic jokes. This discrepancy is due to the strong influence of Soviet jokelore on Estonian jokes during the second half of the 20th century, and to a different nature of the relationship between peripheral countries as opposed to the interethnic relations of Central Europe. Contemporary Estonian ethnic jokes are striving to re-discover the joke targets familiar from 19th-century joke tales. The analysis throws light on the relationship of jokes and the society in which they are told. Jokes are dependent on the immediate political, cultural, economic etc environment, shaped by relevant issues of the period like the quest for national identity.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

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## COMMENTS

- <sup>1</sup> Matthias Johann Eisen (1857–1934) was Estonian folklorist, mostly known for his folklore collection work and compiling a systematic typology of Estonian folk tales.
- <sup>2</sup> The axiological division of the centre (better off) and periphery (worse off) does not function here in an unambiguous manner. Soviet Estonia (as other Baltic states) was usually regarded as a nearby, but prosperous “foreign” country by people living in Russia.
- <sup>3</sup> This is, in a way, also an instance of the weak laughing at the powerful: a protest against fate, nature and other unbeatable forces in life. These jokes vent the anxiety of the mishaps and misery of the little man, showing that there are ways one can outplay the seemingly invincible forces. There are also instances when the better-off can be stupid (Estonian jokes about the Finnish), and the worse-off can be a clever trickster (old Estonian joke tales, but also Soviet and post-socialist jokes about the Russians; e.g., the three-nation jokes – see below the chapter on targets of three-nation jokes)
- <sup>4</sup> Other genres in the older layers of folklore often included ethnic references as well, whereas in contemporary folklore ethnic markers have been replaced with other, more generalised tags (male/female, etc.) (see Mintz 1996: ethnic humour being most manifested on stage in 1890–1910; Allen 1990: fewer and milder ethnic nicknames than at the beginning of the 20th century; Cray 1962: 28 ethnic naming has diminished from derogatory to derisive, e.g., more aggressive to mildly aggressive; Rappoport 2005: ethnicity doesn’t carry the same weight than in the beginning of the century).
- <sup>5</sup> The joke is popular on Indian web sites, but it frequently also targets Irish and other nations.
- <sup>6</sup> On Russian web, the joke is depicting Finns and Estonians above others and can thus be categorised as a joke on stoical patience (besides stupidity.)
- <sup>7</sup> These question and answer jokes circulated mainly on the Internet, being posted at discussion boards or other public sites in sets of 10 – 20, sometimes even more jokes at a time (a feature similar to blonde joke cycle). Very aggressive in content, they were mostly translated from the English-language web. These serial stupidity / dirtiness jokes were also later used in a warfare between two media figures wishing to discredit one another (Joon 2003), and in this meta-joke form even won attention, precisely because of the absurdity of its re-use.
- <sup>8</sup> On Russian web, the targets of this wide-spread joke are Estonian and sometimes Latvian.
- <sup>9</sup> The following three examples are cited in Tuisk 2008.
- <sup>10</sup> It is a noteworthy tendency that all folklore, including joke tales, are usually more variegated / diversified in the peripheries and duller / monotonous / less varied in the centre (Krikmann 1997). In terms of unique texts as well as in terms of intensity (number of texts), South Estonia displayed the greatest variety.

<sup>11</sup> In old folk tale tradition, the driving force / animating principle of the tales involving a conflict and its solution is of axiological character: in the case of fairy tales and legends, the power is nested in virtue, and in the case of animal tales, trickster stories and joke tales, the possession of intellect grants the victory. That makes stupidity the main laughing stock in old folk jokes, either in jokes that juxtapose the clever and the stupid, or in jokes where the stupidity of the actor in itself, without any help from more or less hostile fellow people, is sufficient to cause failure or suffering (Krikmann 2003: 168).

<sup>12</sup> There is counterevidence on the direction and asymmetricality of the joking relationship from Scandinavia, where Danes, for example, tell jokes about the Germans and Swedes, even if the target is perceived as more powerful and successful. At the time when Denmark was perceived as more powerful, there was no animosity against the Swedes (Bondeson 2005), but when their power over Danes grew, stupidity jokes about the Swedes evolved.

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# POLITICAL JOKES IN POST-SOCIALIST ESTONIA (2000 – 2007)

Liisi Laineste

## Abstract

Estonian contemporary political jokes offer insight into several issues discussed in humour studies, including the interdependence of jokes and social reality, and on a broader scale also the dependence of jokes on the political regime into which they are born. The article surveys Estonian political jokes on the Estonian Internet ([www.delfi.ee/jokes](http://www.delfi.ee/jokes)) in the period 2000 – 2007. The material covers both “old” and “new” jokes, as they exist side by side. The analysis concerns the nearly 800-strong collection of political jokes accessible on the humour site. The jokes are analysed from three points of view: first, how actual political events may have influenced the number and contents of the jokes, second, the inner structure of the category of political jokes, to reveal whether this could indicate a shift towards the depoliticisation of certain (e.g. animal or vocational) jokes; and third, whether the recent transition from totalitarianism to democracy may have caused some change in the target choice of jokelore. Thus, against a pervasive background of old Soviet jokes, the article will put the contemporary joke traditions into context, in order to discuss the main targets, popularity and directions of the contemporary political joke.

Keywords: humour, political jokes, ethnic jokes, post-socialist, Internet

## INTRODUCTION

The article will give an account of contemporary Estonian political jokes, most of all their general characteristics, possible subcategories and popularity in recent years, focusing on Internet jokes. We will see how political jokes react to local and global events, acting as cognitive tools that help to comment on daily politics in a playful way, performing the role of a more or less subtle parody. So far Estonian ethnic jokes have already been studied to some extent (see Laineste 2005a, Krikmann 2008, this volume). This article focuses on political jokes. Distinguishing ethnic from politic jokes is not an easy task: on many

occasions the categories of political and ethnic jokes tend to fuse and form a distinct category so typical to Eastern Europe, the ethno-political joke. The targets of these jokes are ludicrously behaving ethnic neighbours, but also the much-loathed political oppressors, and these two may end up in being just one target. The recent development of more distinct categories will be traced. Another characteristic feature of post-socialist jokes is the coexistence and interaction of old Soviet and new or modified/ adapted/ recycled political jokes. The changes in their popularity inevitably lead towards the discussion of national identity and its construction. Getting to terms with and – in a way – opposing past heritage in contemporary traditions is an important part of a nations' self-identification. The intertextuality of contemporary jokes is examined, to reveal the presence of these complex identity issues. The rejection of old jokes reflects only a section of a nation's struggle to define itself: the choice of new targets, and in some cases the switching of old targets for new ones, is also an identification of new perspectives based on inclusion ("us") and exclusion ("others"), indicating our opinions and fears. The results will, all in all, demonstrate how the political reality of a post-socialist society is reflected in jokes.

In post-socialist societies, complex changes are taking place in jokelore, and in the performing and telling of jokes. There are several reasons for this change: first, the regained independence in Estonia and the consequent transition from being a periphery of a huge totalitarian society into a free democratic nation state, secondly, globalization, which is altering jokes in the same way it is affecting all kinds of traditions worldwide, and thirdly, the dawn of the Internet era and the high level of computerization that has transformed joke-telling practices. Political jokes were among the first to undergo these changes.

In describing the present situation, we can give a full account only when considering both the specific, contemporary background and the historic perspective, and in addition to this, the media where the material appears. It is thus necessary, alongside the newer jokes that characterize most of the contemporary active joke tradition, to describe old Soviet (political) jokes. Their tradition was very vital, and had a great effect on thinking about political jokes in general (at least in the former Soviet bloc), besides it is still a distinct though diminishing category among contemporary political jokes.

## JOKES AND THEIR RELATIONS TO SOCIAL REALITY

Most jokes (in Freud's terms *tendentious jokes* (Freud 1905/ 1989) are, according to some humour scholars, a (distorting) mirror of the society they are born or adapted into (Douglas 1968, Linke & Dundes 1988). There are some, who, after stating the relationship of the joke and its object, also advocate the aggressive effect or consequences of these "ugly" jokes and try to refrain from citing them to avoid further "pollution" (Billig 2001) thus outlining the relationship between the joke and its target as possibly harmful to the subject (in the same vein, several psychological studies have supported the hypotheses that aggressive/ sexist jokes predispose subjects to hostile sexism, e.g. Ryan & Kanjorski (1998); or diminish self-directed negative affect for enjoying the jokes as maintained by Ford, Wenzel & Lorion (2001)). On the other hand, many relevant studies (e.g. Dundes & Hauchild 1983) have refrained from becoming involved in the problems of reception, and for them the essence can be revealed without examining the effect of jokes. It is enough to describe the joke text and its broader social context. They (e.g. Dundes) believe that even if the picture we see there is unsettling or even downright disgusting, it is in part still the ugly essence of the actual feelings and thus needs to be studied, described, and perhaps brought forward as a question worth discussing in public, in order to raise awareness of our prejudices. These studies support the safety valve theory, claiming that jokes express the aggressive impulses that would otherwise be painfully inhibited. Yet others maintain (Davies 1998) that jokes have little to do with actual stereotypes or real feelings of distress. Jokes express emotions, but not only (or rather: primarily) at times of greater oppression or perceived threats. In the times of conflict, there tend to be more apt measures than jokes to deal with the problems. Jokes are elicited by other factors. Peaks in creating jokes and telling them coincide with periods of decay of political regimes, diminishing tensions etc. According to this theory, political jokes are the result of uneven or unjustified exercises of power. In addition to this, there is the question of whether jokes are "true" in an emotional, or on a higher level, a societal sense – or are they merely a play with stereotypes we might know but do not really believe in. We play with an inspiring detail of a real-life event not because of the event itself, but mostly because of the allusions evoked by the event, the possibilities of interpretation it allows, the ambiguities it involves, etc. The choice relies not on the importance of the event, but on more

irrelevant factors such as playfulness and the search for ambiguity that are decisive in joking. Besides, maintaining that jokes are in accordance to social reality is complicated because the multiplicity of realities, opinions and emotions that surround and inhabit the contemporary man. All of these standpoints and approaches challenge the researcher with questions that are empirically difficult to tackle.

The most basic and auspiciously also the most easily accessible of the issues is the interaction between jokes and their social reality – if jokes do mirror reality, how does this mirror work? If they are a thermometer for registered emotions, are they indicative of opinions only at a meta-level? The latter would mean that there is no straightforward relationship between the jokes and the society with its stereotypes, instead the connection is evident on a generalized level (e.g. there are more jokes on stinginess if the mocked nation is believed to be an economically successful former outsider). As we often have to admit, there are not many examples to point at when we want to maintain that a joke reinforces some certain attitudes, and there are attitudes, that will induce certain jokes. Internet jokes, with their meta-text of time, place and sender, provide the interested researcher with the necessary material to answer the questions: e.g. when and related to what event the jokes became popular.

W. Bascom and R. Abrahams have discussed the functions of folklore genres, including jokes. For them, jokes are either disruptive/destructive texts in folklore that target taboo areas, in order to point out the forbidden (Bascom 1965: 10), or conflict-focused texts that raise problems instead of solving them (Abrahams 1976: 206 – 207). That is, in folkloristic research, the aggressive side of jokes is emphasised over its coping, bonding or other positive functions mostly mentioned in psychological studies (visible in psychologists' rising interest in positive psychology). Jokes do not, however, exist only at the times of conflict: the USA is famous for its black and Pole jokes, but these do not stem from an actual hatred towards the group or any actual threat from them (Davies 1990). Instead, the threat is more often economic in nature, and the jokes are thus rooted in economic inequality, unevenly distributed assets etc, from which stupidity and canniness jokes arise. There may be an event that triggers them, but it may not be that evident. In the case of political jokes, the relation to a conflict (a daily political issue) is more visible, but here too the actuality of the stereotypes exhibited therein is questionable. What the choices displayed in political jokes represent is a relevant issue to this article. Joke cycles are a good example of how real events are reflected in jokes, but even if the events are there, the outspokenly aggressive context of these joke cycles (e.g. Challenger, WTC etc) hold very simi-



lar reactions to different events and people, which leads us to think that it may not be the stereotypes we have about these joke objects but rather some other drive pushing us to express the overwhelming emotions in a particular way. Other motives are involved in creating and circulating these “sick” jokes – possibly emotional coping with the event as well as with its representation in the media.

Jokes in which the relations with social reality are self-evident include topical jokes and news parodies (eg Kuipers 2005, Kürti 1988). Political jokes do not, however, clearly and univocally refer to their source. This research shows that there are many aspects involved in how social reality becomes distilled into jokes: it depends on the social and political context, and the qualities of the stimulus (the textual, contextual and intertextual characteristics of the news text, political or other events as social text etc), which will be discussed in greater detail below.

## **CATEGORIES AND TARGETS IN POLITICAL AND ETHNIC JOKES**

Another issue is that of the direction of joking, both in socialist and post-socialist society, and the closely related problem of distinguishing between ethnic and political jokes. Broadly speaking, these two categories of jokes work by different means: the ethnic joke (as Christie Davies has argued on a huge amount of comparative data, 1990) is directed towards the inferior, while political jokes target the superior. Davies has firmly stated that most numbskull-jokes are directed downwards, that is from the centre and better-off towards the periphery and worse-off (the few exceptions being British jokes about the aristocrats and in cases where the political power has been unjustifiably attained, see Davies 1998: 93 – 95). In most multiethnic societies, however, jokes are often told both about the majority and the minority (Estonians and Russians in Estonia, Jews and Russians in Soviet Russia, Polish/Black and WASPs in the USA etc). Minorities can tell jokes about their own group (in self-deprecating jokes), but they can also mock the majority. The question is more about the power and recognition of the multiplicity of jokes and the intensity of these jokes: some cycle or target may be less spread, limited only to a few groups. Sometimes the derogatory jokes are spread by the targets themselves (as shows the classical example of Jews (Davies 1993), but also visible Estonian (Laineste, 2005a), Serbian (Hicks 2003, Vucetic 2004) and other jokelore, to offer but a choice of very different examples). Thus there are societies in which

the universals of the direction of target choice do not apply. In the segmented topological division, it is the centre or the “golden mean” that qualifies as normality. Normality is the ideal that the in-group is eager to identify itself with – “they” are strange, marginal; “we” are normal. It is also the nature of folklore by definition – folk traditions are created, maintained and passed on by the “average folk”, with no particularly great power or powerlessness. The socially marginal groups at either extreme of economical, territorial or other spectra do not belong to this in-group. The old folk jokes seem to follow precisely this argumentation in their choice of targets (see also Remmel 2003: 174). In some other historic examples, top-down and bottom-up joking forms an undistinguishable set of joke tradition, which has the main aim of mocking a regime in general (eg jokes from the Soviet bloc). There the centrifugal forces are overplayed by a common, both political and ethnic target, that dictates the direction of jokes. In Soviet jokes, it was the Russians bringing about and impersonating the Soviet way of life (though there was also the Chukchi, more a miserable victim of the system than the reason for the country’s misery). In many cases, the nationality of the target was not mentioned, but it was instead supplemented with a “code-name” from the animal world, for instance. Different groups inside the totalitarian society were represented by animals (wolf as the “power”, fox its lip-servicing two-faced disciple, hare as the innocent victim – and sometimes the trickster, etc). The Soviet joke tradition can also be seen as adding a general political overtone in every joke. It mocked all aspects of the absurd everyday life, turning almost every humorous text, be it situated in the bedroom, school, workplace or public space, into a political joke. The omnipresent skepticism and nihilism in Soviet jokes made a point of discrediting the regime by using every walk of Soviet life as an inspiration (see also Graham 2003: 99). Thus in Soviet jokelore (but not only there) we encounter confusion between the direction of joking and also in joke categories. Belonging to the category of political jokes did not mean that a joke could not belong to other relevant categories, as was often the case with Soviet jokes. A joke could be political and ethnic, sometimes also harbour an additional sexual allusion etc. Ethnic jokes about Jews carry a strong political connotation, especially those that date from the 1950’s (see Benton 1988). We can assume that certain political, economic, etc repressions or organized persecutions load different types of jokes with political meaning, and the jokes will then represent more than one category: they have political and also ethnic, sexual, animal etc material. The transition from a totalitarian to democratic society should then produce a set of de-politicized jokes – the categories do not mingle, but instead display relatively fixed and objectively

identifiable characteristics and boundaries. In addition, the old Soviet jokes that had a political undertone are now being circulated because of some other amusing detail – absurdity, sexual abnormality etc. It is debatable whether a formerly political joke will now be perceived as apolitical (if the wording remains largely the same), but the tellers of the joke distance themselves from it. The problems it depicted are now bygone. Even if the joke is remembered to be political, it probably does not actually carry the significance of a political joke. As in this following joke, where in contemporary presentation the political power relations give way to a much stronger sexual undertone:

A Russian and Chukchi are fighting on the street. A policeman approaches them: –“What is going on here?” –“We are arguing about who is the master of Chukotka (the Chukchi Peninsula)”. –“You will continue the argument in jail,” answers the police officer. Next morning the policeman asks them: –“Did you solve you issue?” –“Yes,” answers the Chukchi. –“The Russian is the master, and I’m the mistress...” (*Delfi, Dr Huibolit, May 28, 2004*)

## JOKES IN SOCIALISM AND POST-SOCIALISM

These jokes, like the one about the Chukchi and the Russian, could be regime- and society-specific. Political jokes still do travel from society to society, as tradition is an active flow of texts that do not simply cease to exist. Jokes change, merge and diffuse. Jokes from Soviet Russia or communist Cuba live a parallel life in democratic Finland or Great Britain, only with different targets (although the popularity of those jokes can be different in the country of their origin and among “secondary” joke-tellers). Raskin (1985: 222) admits that there are two types of political jokes: some context-specific political jokes are only possible in a certain country (or a certain regime), as the knowledge needed to understand the joke is not available to the listeners, whereas others can exist successfully under all regimes and circumstances. Politics has been the object of jokes since Roman times, and some of these are still known today, even if they have been modified somewhat to fit into contemporary society (Larsen 1980: 5). Abraham Lincoln, who was a skilful orator, has said that he could at best call himself a restorer of jokes, as he did not create new ones but recycled old ones (Parker 1978: 4). The totalitarian Soviet Union, especially in the last decades of its existence, has often been said to be the most fertile environment for joking about politics and politicians (Davies 2007, Krikmann 2006).

Political jokes are said to owe their popularity to the feeling of superiority which is achieved by ridiculing those in power. Jokes that poke fun at the incompetence of our leaders or reduce them to the level of the average citizen (or, for that matter, below that; the lower the better) have always been favoured in all societies. Tony Veale claims that mocking those of higher status, reputation, social and economical level provides emotional satisfaction for the “average citizen”, i.e. those not in power (Veale 2004). As old jokes keep reappearing in different contexts, with stupidity and vanity as the main concerns, there seem to be no specific contextual parameters that dictate certain types/themes of jokes. Some limits are nevertheless set by the relevance of texts. The main setting and oppositions involved should be culturally understandable and relevant to the new context they are told in. Some jokes seem to have quite limited potential: even if they are not complicated to understand (which might also be the case, as older joke tales are longer, more elaborate and often do not have a punch-line), they may involve certain rigid moral norms that are not today regarded as important. In the contemporary world of gender equality, for example, there is no significant emotional difference between the male and female adultery that forms the core of this joke:

Franz Joseph notices a man who resembles him strikingly. “Was your mother at some time in service at the palace?” the emperor asks. “No, Sire” is the answer, “but my father was!” (*Central European, 1900ies, cited in Raskin 1985: 225*)

The joke retains its archaic setting, and it is not possible to transform the joke into a contemporary setting by merely changing the targets. In Estonia, the joke was told during the first republic in the 1930s, with the Estonian peasant talking to a Baltic-German estate owner (Hindrey 1931: 209), but the text has not appeared in post-socialist jokelore. There are, however, jokes with less specific contextual parameters. These cross temporal and geographic borders with remarkable ease. Consider the following joke:

Hitler takes a walk in the woods and falls into a lake. A young boy pulls him out. Hitler tells him to ask anything he wants in return for having saved his life. “Oh yes,” said the boy. “May I ask you not to breathe a word about this to anybody?” “But why?” asks Hitler. “You could be made famous for this heroic exploit.” “This is what I am afraid of, sir” says the boy. “If I become famous, my father will hear about it also, and he will wring my neck right away!” (*cited in Raskin 1985: 226*)

There are several records of this joke, with different targets: Nixon, Clinton and other higher officials, to name but a few. In Estonian ma-

terial, the target was well-known and despised contemporary politician Edgar Savisaar:

Edgar falls into the river and starts crying for help. A farmer comes running and pulls him out of the water. Savisaar says: "I will grant you everything you wish for. Do you want to become a member of my party?" – "No." – "Do you want a place in the top ten of our election list?" – "No." – "What then?" – "Just don't tell anyone I saved you..." (*Delfi Naljaleht: She*, Feb 24, 2003)

The recyclability of political jokes seems to rest in the setting of the events and norms involved. More universal jokes with a less region-, culture- or era-specific context do travel well and may appear under different regimes. Consequently, we could claim that this cultural context or build-up of the joke is one of the main factors that determine the popularity of a text in different times and countries. Another competing theory maintains that cultural values inherent in jokes are important, but they cannot be adapted from one country to another merely as a result of this – instead, different jokes apply to different political systems and are not transferable. It is the target that differs in totalitarian and democratic political jokes (Rose 2002). Totalitarian jokes tend to mock the system in general, while jokes from democratic regimes mock leaders in person, reminding us that they are people from among "us", their voters. This supposition does not prove entirely correct from the standpoint of Soviet political humour. Soviet Estonian political jokes can be divided into three categories: (1) jokes and conundrums about politicians, with the main focus on gaining the upper hand over the opposing character (in many cases Russian vs. American politicians); (2) those that mock the socialist regime without naming any particular political leaders who were responsible for the miserable living standards; and (3) jokes and conundrums on daily life referring to the inefficiency of the system (Sarv 1995: 106). While the last two categories correspond to what Rose said about the targets of totalitarian political jokes (i.e. jokes are about the system in general), the first type of jokes on international relationships prove that political leaders were not an unknown joke target during socialism. Nevertheless, there is some evidence that political jokes in Estonia are now more leader-oriented, focusing on politicians' (sometimes imaginary) vices (Laineste 2005b), and the issue will also be addressed in the empirical part of this research. Contemporary jokes lack a pervading, central theme, and there are not many jokes about the political system or the hardships of daily life created by politicians; there seem to be more effective means of discussing these issues (the most active of which being discussion boards on the Internet, see Imfeld & Scott 2004:

206). Jokes become political mainly by using the names of politicians. Inspiration comes from daily news – those who find themselves in the limelight will soon figure in personalized jokes:

Minister of Agriculture Ivari Padar orders farmers to plant potatoes at night.

“Why?” ask the puzzled farmers.

“Then the potato bug will not see where the seeds are planted.”

(Delfi Naljaleht: Urmas, Oct 12, 2004)

Polemics on how well jokes mirror social reality, what forces are behind the choice of joke targets in different societies, and how this is expressed in political/ethnic jokes will be viewed, using the jokelore of post-socialist Estonia as an example. Analyzing the material on a wider temporal scale from the 1950s to the present day, one can put the jokes in a proper context. Briefly put, the following research hypotheses / assumptions will be tested in this article:

- (1) Political jokes stem from a real social-political context. The creation of new jokes thus depends on everyday life: the more political conflicts or intriguing events, the more jokes in circulation. Active periods (elections, scandals and other local/global events that reinforce each other and are incorporated into jokes) result in a heightened interest in jokes.
- (2) Contemporary Estonian political jokes form a distinct category that excludes ethnic and other thematic topics, whereas in Soviet jokes all categories are intertwined.
- (3) Contemporary Estonian political jokes concentrate more on the leaders than on the shortcomings of the current political system or difficulties of daily life, while Soviet humour focused on the latter.

## METHODOLOGY

We assume that the situation in Estonia is not an isolated exception but mirrors the underlying mechanisms of how jokes change in all transitional societies in Eastern Europe. For this research, political jokes from Estonia's major joke source at [www.delfi.ee/jokes](http://www.delfi.ee/jokes) (Delfi Joke Page) were analyzed. The Delfi Joke Page is a popular site where users post about 20 new jokes a day in different categories that have been assigned to the received jokes by the portal's editors. A total of 854 jokes from the category of political humour, from the years 2000 to 2006, were included in the analysis. In describing political jokes, we

will compare the category to other major thematic sections (jokes about animals, ethnic groups, sex) which were also analyzed for the study.

Simple quantitative analysis was performed on the material, counting the frequency of jokes during the period.

## ANALYSIS

First we will describe the medium in which the jokes are published. The Delfi portal is an extremely popular pan-Baltic news and entertainment site, a common example in public discussions on several issues concerning Internet ethics, culture etc. It is evident that its popularity is still growing, as it surpasses all of the now emerging and developing online newspapers or other infotainment portals. The most essential feature of the Delfi portal is online news and commentaries. In the years 2000 – 2005, the number of news and commentaries rose alongside – and as evidence of – the popularity of the portal, as shown in Figure 1. At the same time, the number of daily news texts has stabilized at around 1750 a day, although the quantity of news rose until 2004. There is an optimal amount of news that people need and want to read, and an overload of information is not attractive to potential readers, which might be the reason for subsequent standstill. Further analysis reveals that while the number of daily news has remained stable, the number of commentaries is still on the rise (with the average in 2007 being around 150 comments per news item), indicating a deep interest in engaging oneself in online interaction.

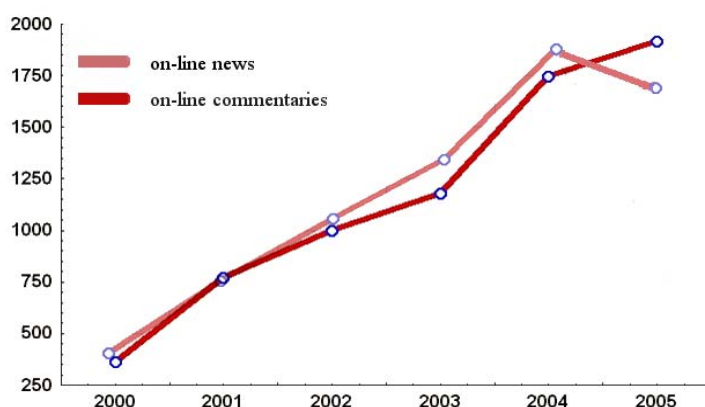


Figure 1. Amount of online news and commentaries in Delfi (2000 – 2005).

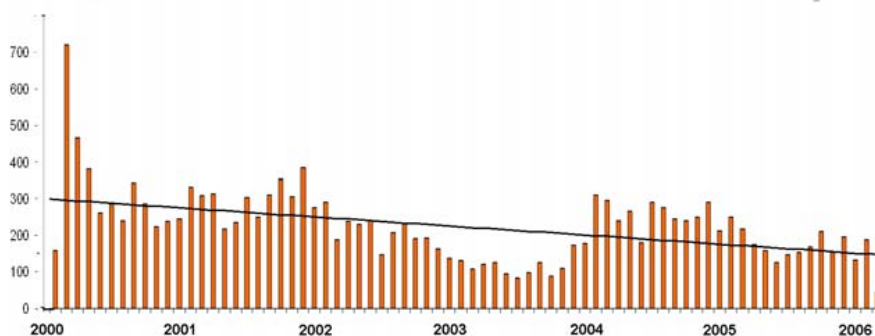


Figure 2. Overall amount of jokes in Delfi (2000 – 2006)

Commentaries are the soul of this media – their great number shows that people are willing not only to read the news but also to form an active community, discussing the events and their significance. They express opinions, take sides, argue (and of course insult each other when discussion becomes heated), and occasionally also share jokes.

Regarding the growing popularity of the medium, it might be surprising that the overall number of jokes follows a falling trend (Figure 2).

Since the launch of the joke page [www.delfi.ee/jokes](http://www.delfi.ee/jokes) in February 2000 and the first peak of fascination therein, there has only been one slight revival in 2004/2005, but it does not compare to the average of 430 jokes during the site's first months, in winter and spring 2000. Some reorganizations of the joke site took place, raising interest among Internet users in 2004 (new features for evaluating jokes, new categories of visual material, such as cartoons and film strips, were added, etc<sup>1</sup>). The trendline on Figure 2, however, shows a falling tendency. There is a negative relation between the daily amount of both news and commentaries on the one hand and the number of jokes on the other. Considering that identical jokes will not be posted on the joke site (there is editorial control over duplicates), this is to be expected. At first, all jokes that were circulating were sent to the Delfi joke page, and later the sources ran dry. When we look at each of the joke categories separately, however, summing up the amount of jokes in these over the years, we see an interesting pattern. There are great differences in how political and topical jokes are created/ sent on the one hand, and the rest of the categories on the other. All other categories (e.g. jokes about vocations, absurdity, computers, blondes, etc) other than political jokes fit the mentioned trend: the first months see a

<sup>1</sup> Personal communication with Delfi Jokebook editor Ingvar Kupinski in April 2002.



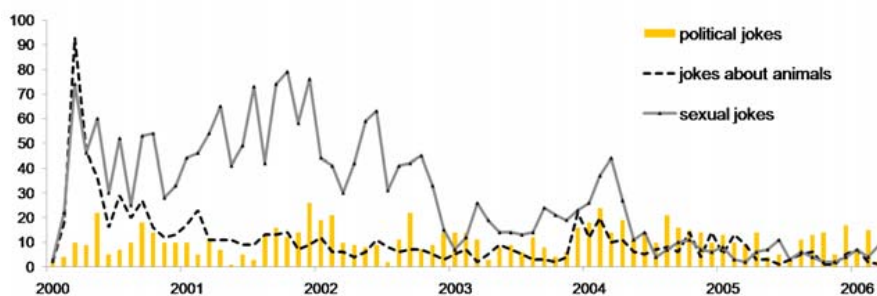


Figure 3. Amount of political, sexual and animal jokes in Delfi (2000 – 2006).

huge number of jokes, and then a decline follows. In Figure 3, the latter category is shown together with jokes about animals (this contained roughly the same number of jokes, ca 800). The popularity of ethnic and sexual jokes from the same period was also added to the comparison.

Though interest in sexual jokes remained high for a longer period of time, it has recently lost popularity and remained roughly stable at around 6 jokes a month sent to the Delfi joke site. Correspondingly, animal and ethnic jokes have remained at around 8 – 15 jokes a month since 2001. Such jokes are not inspired by real-life events. Even if their total number is the same as that of political jokes, it is only the latter that systematically appears only when there is a certain triggering event. Political jokes do not cease or decrease in frequency because the joke-tellers may run out of jokes; instead they rely on the joke-tellers urge to react to social reality, appearing only if there is something to joke about. The greatest difference with other joke categories is the shallow/unenthusiastic start in 2000, which gradually changed into a greater interest in sharing political jokes online (see also Figure 4). As the overall number of sending jokes decreases (Figure 2), political jokes remain at the same level of popularity, leading to the increase shown in Figure 4. This indicates that the mechanisms behind the creation and sending of political jokes differ from those in the rest of the categories – other factors are at work here that influence rises and falls in their popularity. We could suggest that political jokes help to process and give meaning to daily experience and their functions differ from other jokes only meant to amuse.

The typological reserve of political jokes may not be greater, but their potential use is, as is their flexibility. In general, the popularity of political jokes seems to be rising. It is possible to argue that the commenting of daily politics through humour is an Internet-specific trend

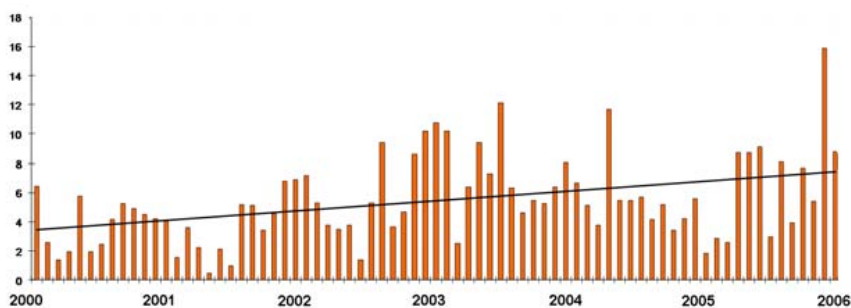


Figure 4. Share (%) of political jokes (2000 – 2006).

and has nothing to do with the situational joke-telling in real interaction, but even if that were the case, it is significant that Internet users in Estonia have a heightened interest in sending (and reading) political jokes. The Internet as a medium is, after all, a very popular and increasingly influential medium that to some extent involves the majority of Estonians. In addition, ironic humour and humour mixed with insults (e.g. in naming, ethnic slurs, etc) is very common in Internet commentaries.

Next we could ask next if the fluctuations seen in Figure 3 are straightforwardly influenced by events that take place in daily politics or whether there is no link between the frequency of the sending of jokes and the intensity of political issues. The social and political background of each period, which had an average of more than 15 – 20 jokes per quarter was analyzed. At the same time, the periods in which jokes showed a considerable decrease (averaging less than 5 jokes per quarter) were analyzed as a control group. To this end, the front-page topics of daily newspapers were examined. The news texts were taken from the period of heightened interest in joke-sending, but also two months previous to that, in order to account for the possible delay in creating relevant jokes. The high and low periods of joke-sending can be seen in Figure 5.

In autumn 2000, the background events include a court trial over Siim Kallas, who according to the overruled accusations, set aside money from successful deals with the state's finances (the so-called "million dollar deal trial"), and no confidence vote for Jüri Mõis, mayor of Tallinn. In the area of other countries' politics, the re-election of George W. Bush as the president of the US is the main issue. The jokes are, however, more often about domestic politics:

Once upon a time there was a man who had three sons. Two of them were normal, the third was Jüri Mõis. (*Delfi: Jaanuspoiss, Nov 8 2000*)

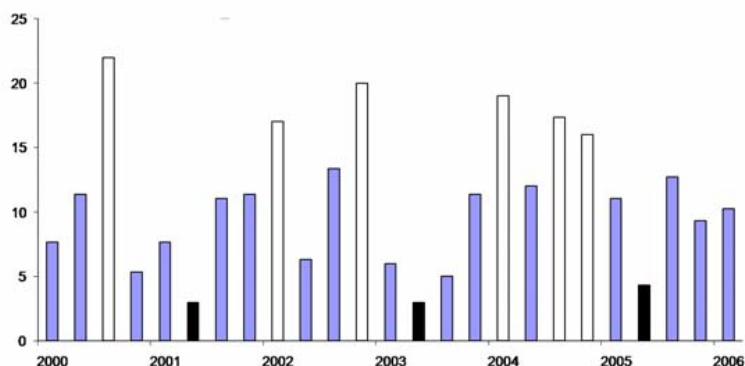


Figure 5. Intensity of joke-sending in Delfi joke page (2000 – 2006). More intensive joke-sending is marked in white (autumn 2000, spring, late autumn and winter 2002, spring, autumn and winter 2004), less intensive joke-sending in black (summer 2000, summer 2003, summer 2005). These periods will be analyzed in detail below; the quarters marked in light blue will not be given attention to in this article.

The joke parodies a fairy-tale format, alluding to the meager mental abilities of the mayor of Tallinn. This makes it a simple stupidity-joke that requires no specific context to understand it – fairy-tales with a simple-minded third son are known worldwide. This is a type of political joke that uses front-page news quite arbitrarily. It reacts quickly, though without any insight or significant allusions, picking characters that happen to stand out in the crowd. Nevertheless, it is a political and context-specific joke.

There are also jokes that try to penetrate issues more deeply. They display associations that are of ontological quality (i.e. are meaningful with regard to the event or the persons involved). Though the following joke did not appear in the first period of joke increase on the Delfi joke site, it depicts issues relevant to autumn 2000 with a delay of some months:

Kraft, Kallas and Kaju are sitting in a pub drinking cognac. “Damn it!” Kraft suddenly exclaims. “I must head back to the office. I think I left the safe open!” – “So what,” the others try to calm him. – “What if someone steals the money?” Kraft worries. – “Who could do that, we’re all here, aren’t we?” (Delfi, PAX, Feb 7, 2001)<sup>2</sup>

<sup>2</sup> Kraft, Kallas ja Kaju – The (now former) president of the Bank of Estonia, and two main figures involved in the “ten million dollar deal” (ex-president of the Bank of Estonia and his advisor).

The majority of jokes from that period deal with specific issues from current affairs, and not all of them use such universal scripts as in the first example. In addition to these, however, we also find a number of old, non-topical, Soviet jokes, even though the events these depict are no longer relevant. Another line of jokes are those with general topics (“*Democracy – it’s like bureaucracy, only a demo version*”), the politics of foreign countries are not reflected in jokes from that period.

Spring 2002 was a very active period in terms of domestic politics. Background information includes Mart Laar resigning from the post of prime minister, re-electing new government members (a new and exceptionally young members being Mailis Rand (Reps), Minister of Education and Sven Mikser, Minister of Defence), as well as the building of an expensive (1 million EEK) public toilet opposite the parliament building in Tallinn. The latter event has offered material for many jokes, for example:

Kallas tells Savisaar: “Listen, you should tear down the outhouse you built here.” Savisaar: “Which one?” (lit: the million (kroon, Estonian currency) one?) Kallas: “No, the two million one.” (*Delfi, March 21, 2002*)

Autumn 2002 witnessed the election of local governments with Res Publica as the surprise winner. Many jokes from that period depict different parties, but also the elections themselves:

October 21. Candidate No. xxx won three votes. At home, his wife is outraged: “You have a lover!” (*Delfi, I, Oct 18, 2002*)

Spring – autumn 2004: The period between spring and autumn 2004 is made up of several months of heightened interest in joke-sending, not only of political jokes but also of other categories of jokes (see Figure 2 and 3). The portal in general and the joke page in particular has improved, and in our research material this interacts with an active period in politics: Estonia enters the European Union and NATO, a theft from Estonia’s grain surplus is discovered, local elections for the European Parliament are held, the first “statue scandal” took place (a monument depicting an Estonian soldier in an outfit resembling a German military uniform was erected in Lihula, but taken down by the government soon afterwards, accompanied by protests), Mayor of Tallinn Edgar Savisaar is under attack. The jokes depict all of these issues, e.g. the Lihula events:

(Prime minister) Parts goes to meet the people in Lihula. “Why are there only women in the audience?” he asks. – “Those that came with eggs were not admitted for security reasons.” (*Delfi, Mo Nu Ment, Oct 31, 2004*)

The joke-scarce periods are of course not event-free, but the events are obviously less inspiring: the Ministry of Education moves from Tallinn to Tartu, problems with the privatization of Estonian Rail (summer 2001); the referendum on joining the EU, speeding tickets received by some important politicians, President Rützel meets President Putin (spring-summer-autumn 2003); the EU sets fines for exceeding the amount of sugar that may be stored, corruption accusations against Edgar Savisaar, terrorist explosions in London (summer 2005).

What then is the comic potential that turns some news into great jokes, while others are left out? An examination of these joke-scarce periods indicates that above all, the event or news item has to be essentially attractive, prominent, short and simple, yet striking, pointing at typical shortcomings, “greater” than just one event (being exemplary of some general tendency in politics, e.g. corruption). For example, the long and profound polemics on the privatization of Estonian Rail did not result in jokes, because the topic violated the rule of brevity and simplicity – events that are too complicated or multifaceted are unsuitable for joking. Another feature of good material for joke-telling is that it should be fresh and up-to-date but not overexploited. If the media fulfils the need to comment on issues in serious mode, jokes cease to be appreciated because the problems have been discussed too much – this is what happened to government officials who received speeding tickets (although there were jokes, especially because of the fact that it was Minister of Justice who was caught speeding). The fact that the media influences folklore in several ways, in some cases supporting and in others hindering it, has also been noted in other genres than jokes (see Donovan 2004).

There is also the question of how many of the jokes are actually on topical issues – if many of them are irrelevant to ongoing events we have failed to prove that there is indeed a connection between social reality and emergent jokes. It is expedient to differentiate between four types of jokes (see Figure 6) and count their relative frequency during the four more intense periods of joke-sending.

Not all of the political jokes sent to the Delfi joke page are topical (Old Soviet jokes, politics as a general subject vs. local politics and foreign affairs, which largely depict recent topical issues), but there are significant changes in all of these four categories during the period under observation. The relative incidence of jokes shows that topicality is more valued than before, while non-topical political jokes, especially those on general politics, but also old Soviet jokes, are decreasing. Largely context-free general political issues have fallen from an

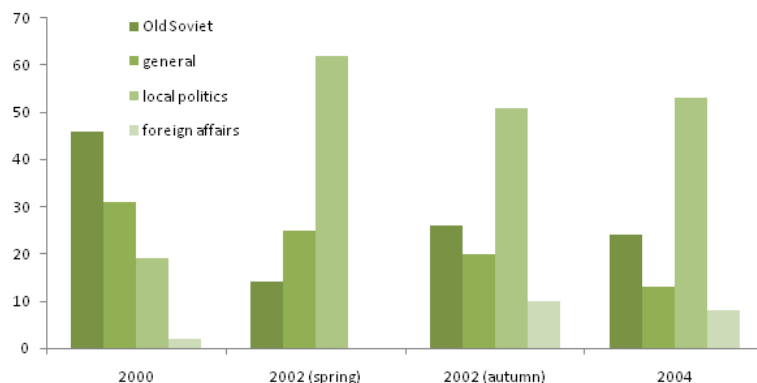


Figure 6. Share of old Soviet jokes, and jokes on general / local politics and foreign affairs, the last two being topical.

average of 32% in 2000 to 13% in 2006 (jokes on politician as a vocation, or problems of democracy, e.g. “*What is democracy Russian-style?*” – “*It’s when everything is done as the head democrat says.*”). The reduction in the number of Soviet jokes has been even more significant (from 45% to 24%). It seems that these jokes neither respond to any specific event, nor do they receive an outward impulse to be sent, or even created. Especially the old Soviet jokes that no longer belong to the active, self-renewing tradition are running out of versions. We can say that their decrease resembles the patterns visible in other joke categories (that of animal jokes, for example (see Figure 3)). The politics of foreign countries have not been a very active joke theme, but with the emergence of Western influences on Eastern European jokes, translated jokes featuring foreign politicians are making an entrance. Most of all, these jokes mock the Presidents of the USA (Clinton for sex affairs, Bush for the anti-terrorist war), but there are also jokes about relationships with other countries (in the vein of jokes from Soviet times, when, for example, the leader of the Soviet Union met – and competed with – the leader of the United States: *Americans have landed on the Moon. Brezhnev orders the Soviet astronauts to land on the Sun. – “We will burn up”, the astronauts object. – “I have thought of that: you will fly at night...”* Viikberg 1997). The main tendency evident in Figure 6 is the rise of topical jokes about Estonian politics and politicians.

As demonstrated, political jokes make up a considerable proportion of all of the jokes sent to the Delfi joke page. Nevertheless, we should keep in mind that their overall intensity is not extremely high, and it may affect the differentiation between accidental and regular trends in

the material. In the first years of the Delfi joke site, old Soviet jokes were quite numerous. Figure 5 with “joke reactions” to daily politics contains both old and new jokes, and the share of old Soviet political jokes can be seen in Figure 6 – in 2000, nearly half of the texts were actually not on political topics, but were instead remembered as having been political. Other periods with increased joke-sending become more and more topical, more focused on daily politics and less on Soviet times. Another problem is that there were also periods that produced new and topical, creative political jokes, but counting all the jokes together were not numerous enough to be included in the analysis.

Leaving aside old Soviet political jokes and looking at the “new” jokes that are left, we see that some of them are influenced by Soviet times, displaying a considerable intertextuality between the two joke traditions: these are old modified or recycled jokes that use a fragment and/or recognizable opposition and/or resolution of incongruity. As a former part of the Soviet Union, Estonia has a distinct and versatile background of jokelore that still lives on in our collective mind. In the subcategorisation of new jokes, we also find some that are translated from other languages, primarily English. The latter are very often simple stupidity jokes, which are quite universal in their construction. It suffices to change the name of the target to make the joke relevant to local daily politics (as also mentioned in the initial discussion of “travelling” jokes, see the example in which Hitler -> Savisaar is saved from drowning). Jokes that mock general stupidity do not need a direct influence, or much less a proof of real stupidity – the only necessary factor is public interest in the person. The interest may be the result of political actions, but also general attitudes towards certain political parties, politicians’ physical features, or even a funny/ allusional name. There are also more specific jokes that rely on social reality to a greater extent, commenting on real issues (e.g. the million dollar deal joke). All in all, however, we can say that most new jokes are topical political jokes, because they display an array of current political emotions and map focal issues (e.g. the vast amount of jokes on Edgar Savisaar denote a general dissatisfaction with the Centre Party, etc).

On the basis of the analyzed material, there is insufficient evidence that jokes are a truthful / complete mirror of reality: old Soviet jokes and joke-scarce periods, etc overrule the suggestion. Traditions are dependent on the historic context of the jokelore (Estonia’s political past dictates the lingering of old Soviet jokes and their recycled new versions), the attractiveness and ambivalence of the news text, the medium itself (its popularity, sometimes due to purely arbitrary im-

provements), and even on the season (see Aikat 1998, Laineste 2003). As evidence of the last point, in this study all of the setbacks took place in the summer, while spring was the most intensive joke-sending period. We can, however, still say that the topicality of political jokes is more the rule than the exception. It may at times be more operative or other times more tardy, and is always dependent on the comic potential of running news; nevertheless, there is increasing interest in political jokes.

Looking at the Estonian contemporary political jokes on the Delfi joke page, and also at other categories listed there, we can see if distinctions between categories have become more obvious. Old Soviet jokes (as described above) selected joke targets from many groups of people, aiming both upwards and downwards, and being also inevitably infused with political issues. It would be a challenge to test the rules of ethnic joking on pre-1991 Eastern European jokelore (see also Laineste 2005). The globalization of joke scripts influences the obvious change in Estonian political jokes, which was also visible in the thematic subdivision of jokes on the politics of foreign countries: these are becoming more popular, not because we are more interested in these matters, but also because the matters present themselves more readily (in the form of Internet jokes). Ethnic jokes that are about to lose their political dimension have already been discussed above, and examples of the tendency are numerous. The tension between Estonians and Russians is no longer a political issue, and animosities are exchanged on a more basic ethnic level:

Why do the Estonian, Filipino and Russian go to a brothel?

The Estonian goes to spend some time with the prostitute, the Filipino goes to clean the girls' rooms, and the Russian goes to pick up his girlfriend after she has finished working. (*Delfi, Dr Huibolit, May 26, 2005*)

At the same time, Russians have also begun to interest themselves in Estonians: their stupidity and most of all their proverbial slowness, creating increasingly popular (Internet-) jokes about the nation (Krikmann, this volume). One interesting tendency is that three-nation jokes (classically about a German, a Russian and an Estonian), which are still told among schoolchildren (see Tuisk 2008), no longer target the Estonians instead the previously popular Russians. Political jokes no longer interact with ethnic jokes, and there is even some evidence that Estonians are in a way searching for the most fitting ethnic group as a new joke-target (Laineste 2007).

It is notable that there are quite a lot of old Soviet jokes still circulating (this can, for instance, be seen in contemporary Estonian jokes about Americans, Figure 7):



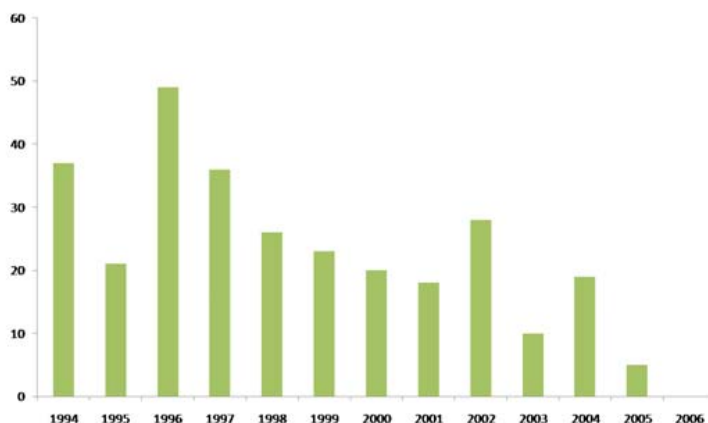


Figure 7. Share of old Soviet jokes in contemporary Estonian jokes about Americans (1994 – 2006).

The jokes that have survived the society's transformation from a totalitarian to a democratic system must have some common asset that helped them survive. They usually have a strong sexual undertone or rely on acute absurdness. Thus we are more likely to find these jokes under the latter categories. The following joke about policemen already circulated before the 1990's, but then it was more about the stupidity of the officials who maintained the system, would have been classified under political jokes:

A piece of shit was floating in the gutter. Suddenly it noticed a police officer passing by and yelled: "Hi, comrade!". -"I am not your comrade." said the officer, who increased his pace. The feces won't drop behind: "Hi comrade!" The officer is offended: "How am I your comrade?", he asks. - "Well, we're both from the internal organs"<sup>3</sup>, the answer comes. (*Anekdoodi-raamat, joke from 1979*)

This cited joke is now under absurd jokes, as well as the next one:

What is the difference between oral sex and the KGB?  
A mere slip of the tongue can land you in deep shit. (*Delfi, Kiizu, April 20, 2007*)

These are jokes that were clearly about political issues, but have turned into absurd jokes with respectively a strong scatological and sexual undertone. At the same time, exemplifying the overall trends of changing

<sup>3</sup> "internal organs" is a Soviet term meaning institutions of interior defence (police, both public and secret, etc), ie the offices created for keeping interior affairs under control.

categories, a version of the scatological joke can also be found under political jokes:

Kalle Laanet gloomily drives his dear new Audi to the police station to pass it on to his successor, when he suddenly hears someone yelling: “Hi, colleague!” He stops the vehicle, looks around, but sees no-one. He hears again: “Hi, dear colleague!”, steps out of the car, but still sees no-one. After searching around for a while, he notices a piece of shit lying on the ground, ogling at him. “I’m not your damned colleague!” Laanet shouts angrily. But the feces reply: “How so, we’re both from internal organs!” (*Delfi, klassik, March 4, 2003*)

This shows how jokes are considered political when they depict actual characters or issues, as in the joke about Kalle Laanet at the time he was the head of Tallinn police precinct, which appeared shortly after polemics about his acquiring a luxurious Audi as his official vehicle. The Delfi joke page contains jokes that mainly perform the function of political commentary, excluding jokes that do not name any particular political clues. The only exception is old Soviet jokes that are remembered as political – they are categorized under political jokes, like the following example:

A wolf and a fox caught a hare and want to stew it. The wolf sends the fox to the shop to bring some fat for frying, as the hare is very bony. The fox returns without any fat: “There was no fat at the shop!”. “Well, bring some butter then,” the wolf says. The fox soon returns, and says there was no butter in the shop. “Go get some margarine!” the wolf demands. The fox returns: “There was no margarine either!” he cries. The hare cheers: “Long live the Soviet Union, the home of the poor and the repressed!” (*Delfi, Tshuks, March 24, 2006*)

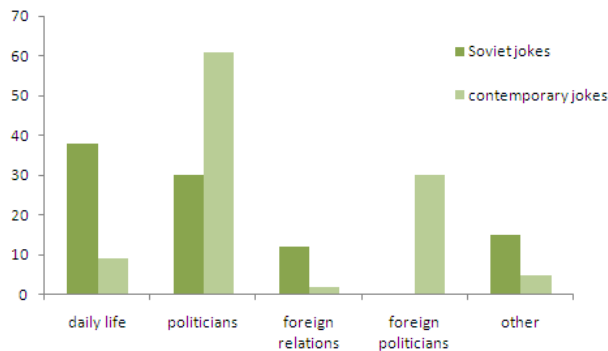
This joke survived over the fall of communism and has become almost apolitical, acquiring a nostalgic/ mythological meaning, and calling to life the retro and strange Soviet world when everything was deficit. The old Soviet jokes told today need more explaining and cannot be understood without some additional clues. In many cases, joke-senders add to old Soviet jokes the introductory sentence “That happened way back in Soviet times...” This brings the joke text closer to the genre of myth or fairy tale. At the same time, a number of old jokes gain new value when they are recycled, by changing the targets into contemporary politicians. This is, in a way, also an act of “domesticating” the largely foreign and borrowed tradition, as is the case with many translated jokes. The dialogue is performed on different levels, from profound alterations to mere borrowings of some formulas (e.g. “Armenian radio was asked...”).

Political jokes here mostly include those that mention the names of active politicians or political parties, dwell on some topical issue in

politics (elections etc), and the old Soviet political jokes listed there also largely follow the same principles. Political jokes in contemporary Estonia mock certain political figures or events, addressing them quite directly.

We reach the question of the target of the contemporary Estonian political joke, compared to the socialist ones. Estonia offers a good research site to discuss jokes under different regimes. Assuming that society's transition is mirrored in its active joke tradition, this change should be visible in our material. According to Rose's (2002) thesis, the direction is from more general jokes on the political system in a totalitarian society towards more targeted jokes on politicians in a democratic society. A comparison of the targets of contemporary political jokes to the characters in old Soviet jokes reveals interesting developments – not only have the targets become local (Estonian politicians), they have also become more directed at certain persons, more universal (e.g. stupidity jokes instead of more specific scripts), and at times also more aggressive.

To account for the change from one political system to another, 300 randomly selected political jokes from the Delfi joke site were analyzed on the basis of their content, and for comparison, the same amount of old Soviet political jokes were chosen from Jüri Viikberg's joke collection.



*Figure 8. Main subcategories of political jokes (1950's – 1990 and 1991 – 2007).*

As we can see from Figure 8, jokes about politicians are more numerous than before, as are jokes about the politics of foreign countries (before the 1990s this was an almost completely unexamined topic). Still, during Soviet times, jokes about politicians were as numerous as jokes about the system (32% versus 38% respectively) are now. Jokes about daily life also exist today, although these are not as popular as

they were before. The most significant change is that of political jokes about foreign politicians and political events that did not concern Estonians in the pre-1990's. They spread through the Internet, being translated from the English, but their focus is on more influential countries and closer neighbours. The European Union also features in jokes:

Q: What will happen when the Sahara desert is accepted into the European Union?

A: Nothing at first, but in about 4 or 5 years the price of sand will rise severalfold.

An Estonian sends his son abroad to study at a European university. One day he gets a telegramme: "Send 50 EUR, must go shoot some chicks." The father sends 20 EUR: "Go shoot some cheaper ones!" Two weeks go by, and the boy sends another telegramme: "Send 5000 EUR! Must fix the gun!" (*Delfi, sass, Nov 22, 2003*).

Also from the same category (jokes on foreign politics) and by far one of the most numerous subtopics there are jokes about the USA and its leaders:

News: In a recent fire, US President George W Bush's library burned down. Both of his books were lost. As Ari Fleischer, his public relations officers said, Bush was particularly upset about the second one – he hadn't even finished colouring it. (*Delfi, Justus, Feb 26, 2008*)

Foreign countries are no longer seen as competitors (which was the main issue concerning foreign politics in Soviet jokes) but equals that are allowed to laugh at.

We will now focus on the main topics in post-socialist political jokes, the most popular of which are jokes about contemporary politicians. The choice of more exploited targets (Edgar Savisaar (former Prime Minister of Estonia, currently a government minister; 169 jokes), Arnold Rüütel (President of Estonia 2001 – 2006; 120 jokes), Juhan Parts (former Prime Minister of Estonia; 65 jokes) is based on both their actions as politicians and the comic potential of their characters. Even if there are hordes of mockable politicians, certain characters are preferred. Important factors that can turn a politician into a laughing-stock include the actuality of real events relevant to the politician, political views of the wider public (in this case of Internet users), the inner character and external features of the target, etc. This all makes up the comic potential of a person. In this case, Savisaar gets extra attention because of his weight problem, Rüütel is mocked because of his slow (and at times unintelligible) speech, and Parts is laughed at for his muddled diction and crooked posture. These special features allow the use of recycled jokes that were known from different persons. We could even suggest that jokes are not told about politicians who are

unpopular or even hated, but rather about those who are perceived as (present themselves as) good targets.

Jokes about Estonian politics are largely dependent on topical issues, and characters are chosen according to their actuality in the political arena. A person who does not stick out will not be encountered in jokes any more (Lennart Meri, Estonian President from 1992 – 2001, was only popular in jokes at the time of his presidency). Many of the contemporary jokes involve general stupidity or other features alluding to it (slow or muddled speech, unintelligent reasoning or decisions, bad foreign language skills, etc), but those about physical characteristics are also quite numerous. Many jokes refer to the understanding that the target is unqualified for his/her office (a very short joke: “*Stupid as the Minister of Education*”, *Delfi, J, Sept 12, 2005*). A funny or allusion-loaded name present good options for joking (the jokes about Edgar Savisaar’s wife and fellow politician Vilja (lit: grain, corn) are based on this pattern).

Another common sub-topic is jokes about foreign countries. The most popular joke targets here are countries from the former Eastern bloc (Ukraine, Belorussia, Chechnya, Latvia), but also the USA, Finland and other Western countries. Estonian daily life is only rarely depicted:

Estonian old age pensioners are so poor that even the bags under their eyes seem empty. (*Delfi, Cobra, Apr 29, 2005*)

The contemporary material shows a clear inclination towards choosing targets from among domestic and foreign politicians, though jokes about daily life do exist too. Old Soviet jokes, however, even if focused largely on daily absurdities, were also interested in politicians. Thus the difference between totalitarian and democratic jokelore lies in something more than just mere choice of target: while totalitarian jokes poked fun at almost everything, and much of the laughter was simultaneously politically motivated, then the democratic system has brought about a de-politicization of jokes. Only those that mention politicians’ names or topical issues are labelled as “political”. Democracy gives plenty of reasons to criticize the system, but the means for doing it are more numerous (due to free speech) – in addition, people feel more in control of their lives.

Contemporary political jokes in Delfi include many old Soviet jokes, their proportion being around 1:4. In discussing this topic, we should keep in mind that the categories of “old” and “new” are quite arbitrary, as old jokes get recycled, and the decision of whether a joke is “new” enough is quite subjective. Those Soviet jokes that are still told without any modification of content (incl. target) are numerous, and this

points to the fact that traditions are slow to change, even in the case of an operational genre that deals only with surface issues instead of ontological and existential questions (see Abrahams 1976). The folkloric process is more inert. Even if new jokes appear (are created, modified, translated), the old jokes stay in the nation's memory. Again, this is partly due to the medium itself: the memory space produced by the Internet is illimitable and allows all texts to co-exist simultaneously and for an unrestricted period of time. The Internet serves as external memory that documents all that is inserted, including those that are already inactive in everyday interaction. There may be two contradictory reasons for old Soviet jokes still being sent to the Delfi joke site (even if their number is diminishing, as can be seen in Figure 7): either they circulate because the inertia of collective memory as jokes "remembered as political", or they are actively taking part in an identity struggle. By telling them we remember our difficult past and also construct a more dramatic contrast between "then" and "now", "totalitarian" and "democratic", "repressed" and "independent". Even if the joke-tellers themselves have not experienced the repressions of the totalitarian regime (being too young to remember the consequences that gave rise to Soviet political jokes), the memories still exist in a collective space which takes part in forming a specific post-socialist jokelore. It is untenable to state that the collapse of the totalitarian Soviet Union ended in a lack of jokes altogether (eg Adams 2004: 159). On the contrary, post-socialist jokelore freely uses both old and new material, producing creative blends, showing its distinctive character. But it is still an open issue whether the jokes are still told, or exist at Internet joke sites.

The researching of contemporary Estonian jokelore and its comparison with Western and Soviet traditions makes it possible to see differences, analyze changes and point at specific patterns of how political systems influence jokes.

## CONCLUSION

Political jokes are quite popular in the studied media, the Internet. The reasons (also discussed above) may be that Internet is an appropriate media of expressing all kinds of opinions, including political opinions, often in an informal and humorous manner. Also, Internet users' demographic profile could contain reasons for this interest in political jokes (the choice of characters, for example, is dependent on the political preferences of the joke-senders, who are mostly well-paid, right-

wing government officials). At least political jokes are alive and well, which could be because its cognitive functions differ from those of jokes from other joke categories.

Post-socialist jokelore is herein viewed as a completely different, transitional stadium with specific characteristics. “New” jokes (modified, translated, created) more or less fit the description of jokes typical to democratic regimes (after Rose 2002). Unmodified old Soviet jokes are, however, also still being told (or rather sent to joke sites), even if the joke-tellers have little or no knowledge and experience of the circumstances that gave rise to those jokes. They are disappearing, but the old jokes still circulate as an important part of our social memory. Soviet political jokes that still circulate lack acute emotion – fear, anger, distress. In contemporary new jokes, the popular themes come and go, arousing discussion in both serious and jocular conversation (themes like elections, incompetent decisions, corruption, etc), but one single foolproof joke incentive like the one offered in Soviet times is missing. That is why the old Soviet political jokes can even acquire the status of “real” political humour for those who consider contemporary jokes to be too universal, shallow and lame. Another reason for remembering old political jokes could be because of an affiliation with 1980s style. The younger generation uses them to reconstruct a retro world of their parents with the help of symbols like Mischka the Olympic bear or the personalities of Gorbachev or the gerontocrats, etc. It is clearly an oversimplification just to state that democracy makes fun of leaders, and totalitarian jokes mock the system. The difference between totalitarian and democratic jokes seems to lie elsewhere, most of all in the politicization of all jokes in the Soviet bloc. Our research proved that in a Western, democratic society, jokes tend to be more focused on current affairs and certain politicians that represent them. It also causes them to turn away from many unfitting themes, considering them to be too complicated, overexploited or uninteresting. In a society with free speech, politicians’ human weaknesses, errors, their alleged stupidity and other vices pique the audience’s interest. Subcategories of old Soviet and new/modified/translated etc jokes show interesting tendencies over the years 2000 to 2006. The number of old unmodified jokes sent is falling in favour of topical political jokes that depict everyday domestic affairs in Estonia. Some rising interest in foreign affairs can be noticed. This all points to the fact that political jokelore is (slowly, but still) transforming to be about the issues we have to face today, and not past problems. Concerning the relationship between social reality in a narrower sense (not the system and its jokes, but rather real political events and consequent jokes), we found that political jokes are embedded in the surrounding

reality in contemporary Estonian material, though with some reservations. We could suggest that the topicality of jokes may be dependent on the political system. In a totalitarian society, events and jokes are more loosely linked, as every joke could have a potential political dimension. Political humour did not need an incentive (though it did reflect on reforms, speeches, the death or inauguration of new leaders), and fed itself on “normal” everyday life, and was actually part of everyday life itself. Subsequently, politics evaded into different subtopics of jokes, causing fuzzy categories. In democratic society, all media channels are full of news texts that provide the necessary inspiration. Jokes refer back to the news in a more straightforward way. In the studied material, news with the necessary comic potential produced a wave of thematically linked jokes. If many remarkably strange, catastrophic etc events happen simultaneously, the topics may blend in jokes.

This research shows that political jokes are not losing their edge and have a constant appeal to Internet users. Even if people do tell fewer jokes, they are sending more political jokes than was the case a few years ago. Political humour is a functional and popular way of discussing the rapid changes that are taking place in our society, the decisions that affect them, and the personal characteristics of the people who are responsible for it all. A more comprehensive pan-Eastern European study analyzing regional old Soviet jokes (also those that have now been forgotten) could help shed light on the topic. This would not only give an overview of the present situation of jokes in the former Soviet bloc, but allow insight into more basic questions such as the characteristics and status of political jokes under different regimes and in societies in transformation.

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# **POST-SOCIALIST JOKELORE: PRELIMINARY FINDINGS AND FURTHER RESEARCH SUGGESTIONS**

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## **ABSTRACT**

Humour is a cultural phenomenon situated at the juncture of societal changes, being most actively present at the spot where the sharpest transitions in value systems take place. Both universally and in the present context of the expanding European Union, it has functioned as an indicator of conflict, transformation and/ or assimilation. Now is the perfect time to analyse post-socialist jokelore in Eastern and Central Europe and to compare the results to the jokes of the well-established democracies of Western Europe. Describing the amount and content of political, ethnic and other jokes, their dynamics through the last decade, and viewing the results in a historical perspective will throw light on the issues of self-identification and -positioning and also complement the best-known theories of ethnic humour with regard to choice of targets, the asymmetricality of joking relationships, etc.

The article will propose a model for a post-socialist humour research project, pointing to areas that need further research, and present some preliminary research findings. In the next step of the research project we will be engaging humour scholars from other post-socialist countries to share ideas and expertise, forming a generalized picture of the features of post-socialist humour.

## **KEYWORDS**

Ethnic humour, political humour, post-socialist studies, ethnic intolerance, hate-speech

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The main goal of this article is to give an account of jokes from socialist and post-socialist periods and eras that are merging into the multicultural context of the European Union – to promote understanding, facilitate dialogue, in order to assess, act in and prevent cultural conflicts. By using humour as a tool for uniting and understanding peoples instead of fostering hostility and aggression amongst them, a dialogue between different (from time to time conflicting) cultures and traditions can be established, and intercultural value conflicts moderated. We possess a great deal of valuable material that will complement previous research on political, ethnic and other humour, which has mostly been performed in the English-speaking world, but claims to be universal. The question remains whether these theories make it possible to account for the choice of targets in socialist and post-socialist periods, and if not, what are the underlying mechanisms specific to the jokelore of Eastern Europe. As this could only be determined through extensive, cross-cultural study, a draft research project entitled “Folk Humour as a Form of Human Creativity Under Socialism, Post-socialism and Non-socialism” was recently completed at the Estonian Literary Museum. It was submitted under the 7th Frame Programme of European Union humanities research in June 2007, with main focus on creating a pan-Eastern European database and portal of contemporary jokelore, and consequently conducting research using the database to point out the inter-connections and dependencies between jokelore and its cultural, political, demographic and economic contexts. Countries currently involved in the project include Estonia, Russia, Poland, Romania, Hungary, Bulgaria and Germany.

Three sets of problems will be presented as central to the topic of post-socialist jokelore. First, the issue of ethnic intolerance in multicultural societies, closely combined with the occasional perception of jokes as hate speech, which will be tackled within a study on the sociology and psychology of humour. Second, the issue of the globalization and sub-culturalization of jokelore. And, last but not least, the issue of difference between socialist, post-socialist and non-socialist jokes in terms of the theory of ethnic humour formulated by Christie Davies (in DAVIES 1990, 1991, 1998, 2002, 2007 and elsewhere).

There are several reasons why research on post-socialist jokes will now enjoy a good start. Contemporary jokes in Eastern Europe are not yet quite like their western counterparts. Transformations are taking place quite rapidly, and the changing jokelore offers invaluable material for researchers, who must merely seize the opportunity to look into the matter. Thus one point of research is that now is a time of eruption, unease, changes – the most interesting time for a researcher. A stable situation might be easier to understand and describe, but changes are more telling, more informative, and allow comparative research on multiple levels. Eastern European jokelore is losing its specificity, is becoming globalized (or at least more similar to jokes from the English-speaking world). Besides, striving towards a world of politically correct societies is transforming jokes, especially ethnic and political ones. If the stigmatization of potentially

hostile jokes continues, the material we are analysing will vanish before the work is done.

Studies of this scope need an extensive database designed for international use. Our first task will be to create an Internet portal of contemporary jokelore (with English as the meta-language) compiled by professional humour scholars. The database will: a) include all relevant publications, archive and internet materials from post-socialist countries on political and ethnic jokelore, and b) provide a platform for a dialogue for the interested public, interdisciplinary scholars and schoolchildren, concerning the issues of ethnicity, identity, multiculturalism, diversity and conflicts arising from those issues. A preliminary version of a research-oriented database of Estonian contemporary jokes has already been completed, and this is available for searching and browsing at <http://www.folklore.ee/~liisi/o2>. The international database will have the capacity for elementary statistical operations (sum, average, regression and correlation between two variables) and their graphic representations, whereas the partial maintenance of natural hierarchic substructures would facilitate statistical calculations and make the results of queries more easily readable. The Database of Eastern European Jokes will be organized as “text-oriented” (vs. “context-oriented”). We can assume by the nature of our material that many recent jokes largely originate from Internet sources. Much of this (though usually context-free) material will include several copy-paste duplicate texts without any context. Beside the factors resulting from difference of contexts, two or more textually identical records will then not have any other differences in terms of content. Furthermore, we will need to make statistics on different levels – for example, to count not only occurrences of plots and concrete records, but also distinct text forms, in order to evaluate the “power” of a certain plot or characteristic motive in our joke material. It therefore seems reasonable to form one more level between the higher (“plot”) and lower (“single record”) levels, i.e. an intermediate “distinct text” level.

## ETHNIC INTOLERANCE, XENOPHOBIA AND JOKES

The first set of problems touches upon ethnic intolerance, xenophobia, and jokes as a possible expression of these. There are basically two opposite approaches (or rather two ends of a scale) to ethnic and other potentially harmful humour. We find a tension between two contrastive elements – aggression / conflict on the one hand and mirth / relief on the other. The two intertwined and opposite incentives have long fought to define the nature of humour. Discussions about aggression versus mirth in humour have lasted far more than a few decades, being the subject of a most vigorous exchange of arguments in the field of humour studies. Some research (e.g. INFANTE-RIDDLE-HORWATH-TUMLIN 1992: 116–126, ZILLMANN-CANTOR 1976: 95–142; LA FAVE 1977: 237–260) views the function of humour as aggressive, pointing to

the fact that tendentious humour described already by Sigmund Freud (FREUD 1905 / 1989: 121) is by nature most popular precisely because of its hostile implications.

At the same time, research has also recognized the commonality aspect in humour, stating that by uttering a joke, the teller disclaims any allusions to real hatred or aggression and intends to amuse, not to anger the audience (e.g. in DAVIES 2002: 17; 130–131). Despite the heightened scholarly interest, no common view has been reached on the nature of joke texts. Recent investigations (see e.g. KUIPERS 2006) maintain that jokes are an ambivalent form of communication and can be regarded as either aggressive or mirthful, depending on several factors, reaching a compromise with the two conflicting opinions but at the same time ceasing to be heuristically and empirically fertile.

Jokes have a history of being regarded as anti-discourse, “tiny revolutions” (ORWELL 1945). This is also why jokes have been outlawed in some and carefully monitored by all political and ideological systems. The amount and direction of criticism in jokes has even been forced to follow ideological orders. The western world has now claimed ethnic and political jokes to be potentially harmful and banned ethnic jokes as hate speech (e.g. the cartoon controversy that followed the publication of Mohammad cartoons by a minor Danish newspaper, suits launched in the USA after the screening of the movie „Borat: Cultural Learnings of America for Make Benefit Glorious Nation of Kazakhstan”).

In reality, jokelore as part of the “culture of contestation” is positioned above (or in relation to) official morals and has – over time – remained independent and objective in spite of totalitarian censorship and other factors that affect free speech. This makes the complex phenomena worth studying in order to establish a clear connection between the targets, jokes and the underlying context (e.g. interethnic relations, economic and cultural / historical circumstances etc). Eastern Europe is still struggling to take the official position, which is a good reason to commence research before jokes become stigmatized in the context of political correctness.

Another layer of the aggression-mirthfulness dichotomy is the fact that the appreciation of humour is tied to people’s personality and attitudes, and is also dependent on the social setting and group dynamics. The best predictors of humour appreciation are conservatism-radicalism, sensation seeking, openness to experience, and complexity – simplicity of personality. Thus judgements of humour need to be understood against the background of the individuals in that culture. Our project will assemble the valuable efforts of the experts in the field of humour studies to create a common understanding of the scaleability of the content of (most importantly ethnic and political) jokes. A cross-cultural questionnaire will be selected and adapted to different languages (a personality/attitude questionnaire, e.g. the Wilson – Patterson Attitude Inventory) and interviews will be designed and carried out in post-socialist countries in order to better assess the interdependencies of ethnic jokes, perceived hostility and



intolerance. Representative groups of 150 persons from each country (controlling for age, gender, political orientation, ethnicity, religion) will be selected. Thus we will create a measure for assessing hostility in jokes and its correlation with attitudes and personality attributes as a basis for a culture-specific approach towards initiating a dialogue on joke perception.

In the context of increasing migration and thus closer contacts with a number of nations and groups, conflicts arise more easily. Studies also show that the quest for national identity in Eastern Europe often takes the form of extreme nationalism, bringing about intolerance and interethnic conflicts (ŽAGAR 2002: 37–45, GURIN 2004: 1–4, KUZMANIC 2002: 17–37, ŠKOLKAY 2002, and a project reported at <http://xeno.sova-center.ru/213716E>). The focus of intolerance research has been on the economic, social and political dimensions of the Eastern European countries in the period of transition, which leaves the issue of the emotional aspects of interethnic relations – and humour as a mirror of these – in the background.

Researchers address the tellers' stereotypes and audiences' reactions to racist humour in the context of the society as a whole as negative and stereotype reinforcing (see LOCKYER-PICKERING 2005: 15–16), drawing a line between “laughing with” and “laughing at”. We proposed in our project draft that ethnic and political humour could be a barometer, and in a professionally moderated environment also a platform for dialogue. In small communities or groups and in everyday conversation, laughter is viewed as positive. Not only does humour insult at times, its potential for uniting and bonding (e.g. in LOIS 1996: 38–52, HARRINGTON – NECK 2000: 606–625) is often overlooked.

Preliminary findings on difference and change can be taken from a study on socialist and post-socialist ethnic jokes in Estonia.

In general, when comparing the share of ethnic jokes throughout the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries, ethnic jokes are being replaced by other categories, as the proportion of ethnic jokes is constantly falling.

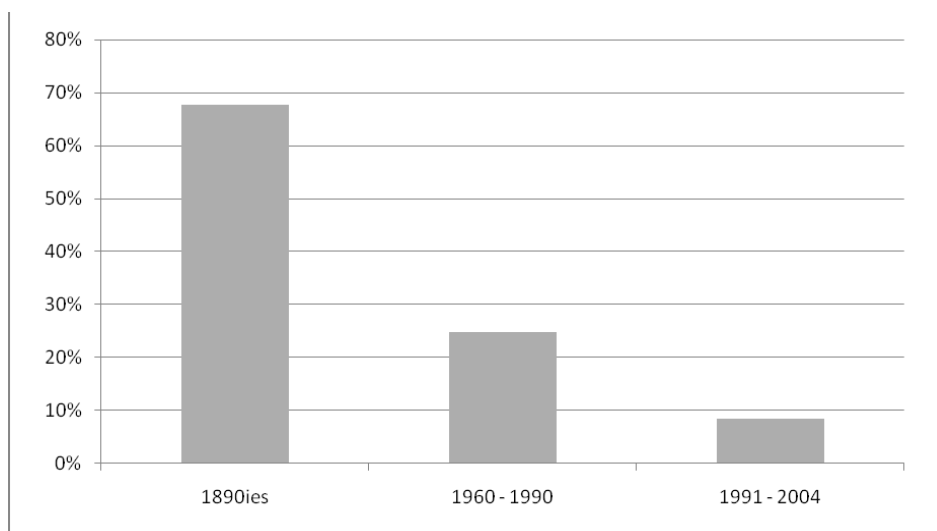


FIGURE 1. Share of ethnic jokes in Estonia from the 1890s to the present (material from M.J. Eisen’s collection “Rahva Nali” [Nations’ Joke], joke collection of Jüri Viikberg in EKM archives and joke book “Naeruga eilsest” [Merrily about yesterday], internet joke portals and collections from 1996–2004).

The image of the joke is becoming diversified (for example including genres that are Internet-specific). A thorough study on Finnish wellerisms (1880–1955, JÄRVIÖ-NIEMINEN 1959: 108–109) points to the similar development of ethnic labels being replaced by gendered or vocational ones. Nevertheless, several ethnic groups are the targets of contemporary Estonian jokelore: until 2004 the jokes primarily mocked Russians, blacks, Jews, Chukchis, Americans and Estonians.

The rising proportion of racist jokes points to the underlying emotions (mostly rising national extremism) accompanying societal changes in post-socialism. In recent years, the Russian is actually no longer a regular joke butt – 7 jokes of the roughly 40 ethnic jokes submitted to the joke portal at [delfi.ee/jokes](http://delfi.ee/jokes) mention Russians, which is less than jokes about Jews, Americans and surprisingly even Chukchis. At the same time, the Russian is a major figure in Internet hate speech (targets of hate-speech are listed in Fig. 2), as revealed by a study on the biggest Estonian online newspaper and news portal commentaries about objects of hate speech from 2000–2007 (LAINESTE 2008).

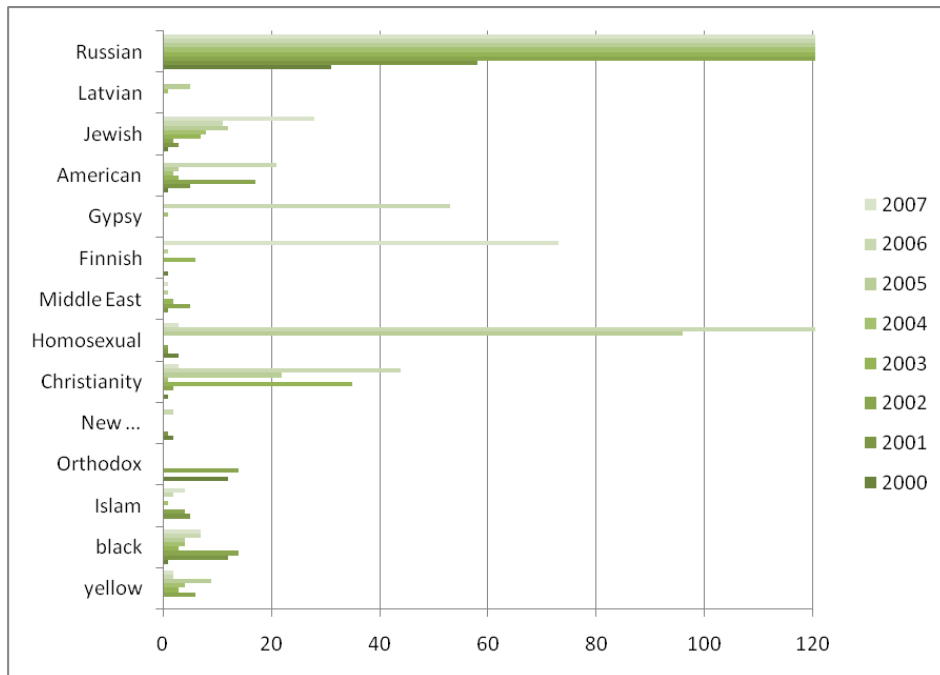


FIGURE 2. Targets of internet hate speech in news commentaries from *www.delfi.ee* (2000–2007). New... - new religions (e.g. Jehova's witnesses).

In the light of recent societal upheavals and tensions, this may throw some light on the limits of joking – is there an optimal level for a “healthy” joking relationship? What are the conditions that foster ethnic jokes, and are these observations also valid for the Western world? We can suggest that there may be differences between Western and Soviet/post-socialist humour in this interconnection between the historical, political, economic etc. context and the choice of targets in ethnic jokes. Jokes and the relations between the countries telling the jokes should be studied in greater detail, with special attention on ethnic conflict, the history of aggression between the nations, etc. Another interesting trend evident from Arvo Krikmann’s recent study on Russian jokes about Estonians confirms that while Russians are no longer funny for us, Estonians have suddenly emerged as the top targets of Russian ethnic jokes – Estonians are depicted as stupid, slow, and having a funny accent when they speak Russian. Though the distinct and detailed time-line of the appearance of these jokes is unknown, we know that Russian jokes about Estonians have increased considerably during the last decade (KRIKMANN 2007). We would like to find out how this fits into the general theory of the stupid and the cunning (e.g. DAVIES 2007). It should also be asked how different nations’ perception of the “others” (e.g. Russians’ historic and contemporary perception

of Estonians and vice versa) affects the choice of stereotypes mocked in jokes or the popularity of the target, and how this change in perception is reflected in jokes.

## GLOBALIZATION AND SUBCULTURALIZATION

The second issue deals with the effects of globalizing culture and value systems in a relatively secluded set of joke material from Eastern Europe. It has always been maintained that Soviet jokes (or other jokelore from totalitarian regimes) are different from those that arise in a democratic society. But different in what way? And what has become of this “difference” now – if it ever existed? We need a comprehensive joke database in order to answer questions concerning the issues of continuity and change. This will account for both the socialist and post-socialist period. The proportion of Soviet jokes in the material, new incentives and subjects of jokes will be listed, and the problem will be discussed in relation to oral vs. internet joke-telling in post-socialist countries as well as the intersections and overlaps between these two differentiating traditions.

When we follow a thematic categorization in the Estonian material, namely among political jokes in *delfi.ee/jokes*, old Soviet jokes appear to form a distinct category besides jokes on local politics, foreign affairs, and general jokes on politics as such (as in “*What is democracy? – It’s the demo version of bureaucracy.*”).

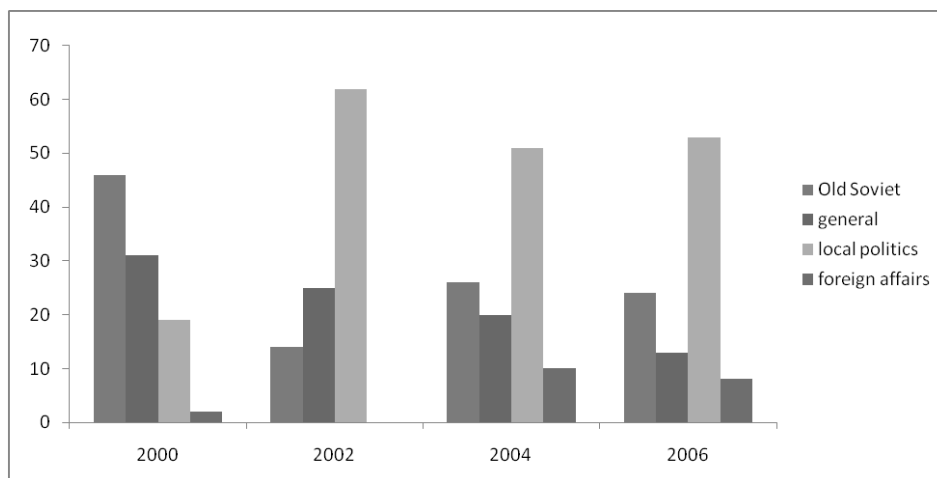


FIGURE 3. Share of subcategories in Estonian political jokes (2000–2006, *delfi.ee/jokes*).

The category of Soviet jokes consists of jokes known previous to 1991 with unmodified content (eg *“At the Olympics in the Soviet Union, Brezhnev started a speech at the opening ceremonies. He began as follows: “Oh....” “Ooooo....” “Oh....” “Ooo.”*). Jokes on local politics and foreign affairs depict current political issues either in Estonia or abroad, or in the context of diplomatic relations. As we can see also in Fig. 4, there are less Soviet jokes, but more jokes on local politics and foreign affairs throughout the years 2000–2006. We can suggest that the overall trend is that old Soviet jokes are finally starting to be forgotten, and people are more interested in commenting on current affairs.

We can draw a distinction between Soviet jokes and all new jokes. The category of new jokes also encompasses those translated from other languages (primarily English), newly created improvisational jokes, and any old jokes that have been modified to fit the current situation. New jokes should be studied in greater detail to understand the direction and agility of the changes in jokes. The majority of new political jokes are about current affairs. The most numerous of these fall under the category of translated jokes, there are fewer created jokes, and even fewer jokes that use the script or base of an old Soviet joke, replacing the characters with contemporary politicians as new targets. The jokes that make use of joke scripts from Soviet times are an interesting example of how jokelore adapts to transformations in society, e.g. *“Prime ministers are flying on a plane. Suddenly the bottom of the plane falls down and in order to land the plane, one passenger must jump. Nobody is willing to do so, until Savisaar finally says: “I will jump.” Tumultuous applause follows...”* (delfi.ee/jokes, Sirts, 10.04.2000 20:39) (a loan of the well-known Soviet joke where totalitarian leaders are flying in a plane), hinting at the dislike of the character as well as his totalitarian ambitions. A created joke uses a simple comic technique, as in the case where the weight problem of the same politician is addressed: *„Savisaar meets the king of Sweden: I am Karl Gustav XVI. – I am Edgar Savisaar XXXL”*. (delfi.ee/jokes, Eero, 22.03.2006 20:43). In the case of Edgar Savisaar, the least popular Estonian politician and the most popular joke object in delfi.ee/jokes, only 6 of the 195 jokes are modified old Soviet jokes. This points to the fact that old Soviet jokes remain quite an isolated category and are generally not adapted / adaptable to contemporary political issues. When we compare the share of repetition of plots among old Soviet jokes and new jokes (visible in a study of Estonian ethnic jokes about Americans), we see that the old jokes seem not only to be disappearing (as seen in Fig 3), but also their variation is declining.

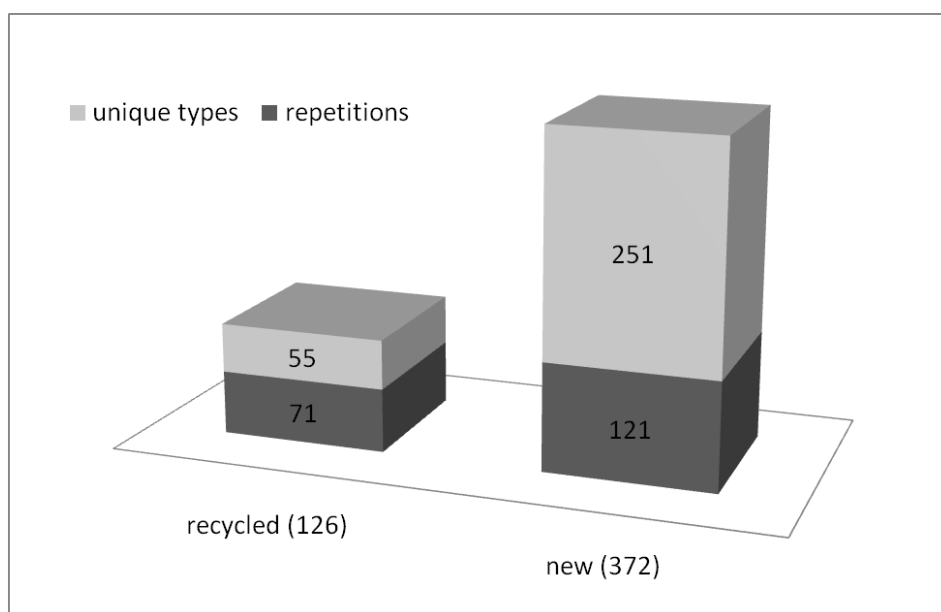


FIGURE 4. Amount of repetitions and unique plots in Estonian jokes about Americans, among old (recycled) and new (translated, created) jokes.

People still know the jokes to a certain extent, but the repertoire is quite limited. Also, these must have another connotation than just being out-datedly political. The sexual or absurd jokes are the most frequent of the old Soviet jokes told nowadays.

A connected topic worth studying in this set of issues is that of globalization and specificity / subculturalization. Globalization is an important issue in culture studies. Its impact on cultural diversity and national specificity is a question that also needs to be asked in the context of the expanding European Union. Research on jokes shows that post-socialism has allowed an influx of innumerable translations and loans into local jokelore (LAINESTE 2005: 20–23, BRZOZOWSKA 2007). At the same time, jokes from distinct groups of people (e.g. youth subcultures) are becoming more culture-specific, with citations, untranslatable puns etc. (LURIE 2007, SHMELEV-SHMELEVA 2007). The synchronic and two-directional movement of the simultaneous globalization and differentiation of tradition is a universal trend that needs closer examination, especially in the context of the multicultural European Union. We must clarify the dynamics, intersections and direction of these processes in Eastern European jokelore by analysing the amount of loans, common texts and unique plots.

In the present rapidly globalizing world with flexible borders, post-socialist joking is not as region-specific as it used to be. Jokes from the totalitarian period used to be opposed to those from the democratic world, but now the

difference is less out-spoken. At the same time, however – and also as a global phenomena – the same flexible borders allow the formation of distinct groups of people not based on an ethnic dimension. Their jokes are becoming more (subculture) specific, with citations, references, etc, that are understandable only to the members of the group based on interests, vocation etc.

We could ask whether and how fast these globalization / subculturalization trends are invading Eastern European jokelore. In the 7<sup>th</sup> Framework Programme project calls, considerable attention is turned to globalization as one of the major forces in the contemporary world which on one hand fosters dialogue and facilitates better understanding, and on the other hand also endangers local diversities and reshapes / unifies cultural heritage, jeopardizing cultural diversity. We should compare the amount of similarities, one-culture-specific jokes, two-and more-culture specific jokes, to draw thus a folkloristic map of script variation and change. Both the specificity as well as steps towards globalization are still very clearly visible in post-socialist folklore, so we can say without reservation that the post-socialist situation in Eastern Europe offers an excellent platform for analysing the process, steps and speed of globalization.

Another related question of globalization is how scripts from different backgrounds blend (as in some examples where Soviet jokes have new targets from among contemporary politicians, either local or international). Jokes about disasters and other topical humour tend to use a ready set for a new wave of jokes (see e.g. ELLIS 2001, DUNDES 1987, RAHKONEN 2000 and elsewhere).

## SOCIALIST AND POST-SOCIALIST JOKES

The last set of problems involves the specificity of Soviet and post-socialist jokes. The transformation of the political context of jokelore must be studied in terms of inherent features of totalitarian vs. democratic ethnic and political jokes, and changes therein connected with societal transformations in Eastern Europe. In a study on Estonian political jokes, we have shown that totalitarian ethnic jokes were told about both the politicians and the system, whereas jokes from the last 15 years of independence (and young democracy) mostly mock politicians (LAINESTE 2007: 15–34, Cf. ROSE 2002: 1–9). More cross-cultural research is needed to confirm the rules for the choice of targets under different political systems.

Victor Raskin (RASKIN 1985: 222–229) stresses the difference between political and ethnic jokes. But in the jokelore of the Soviet Estonia (1960–1991 in the database of Estonian jokes), this distinction is not evident as ethnic jokes (often about Russians, Chukchis or other groups from among the “great brotherhood of nations” of the USSR) also had a political allusion in every studied case. The interrelation of these categories remains an issue that needs to be studied. In Estonian contemporary joke texts (from [delfi.ee/jokes](http://delfi.ee/jokes)) we see

that a clear distinction is kept in categorizing political and, e.g., ethnic jokes: political jokes are those that mention the names of politicians or reflect on some current news, state politics etc. Ethnic jokes, on the other hand, depict the stupidity and other stereotypes of different ethnic groups. Russians as joke targets no longer carry a political connotation and fit under ethnic jokes perfectly well. There is another aspect to this question: Estonian Soviet political-ethnic jokes were mostly directed at Russians, who were both the centre of the Soviet world and the personification of power. Russians rarely mentioned Estonians in jokes – we were altogether insignificant and completely unfunny. How does this fact match the idea (proposed and proved by Christie Davies (e.g. DAVIES 1990) that the direction of ethnic jokes is top-down (i.e. from the centre, better-off, more educated towards the periphery, worse-off, less educated) in most of the countries? In case of Chukchi jokes this was the case, but what about Estonia's jokes about Russians (or the three-nation Russian, German and Estonian jokes)? Even if the jokes were largely translated from Russian, they were a conscious choice of the Estonian joke-tellers.

Another relevant problem concerning the transformation of folklore alongside changes taking place in society is the popularity of political jokes as such. The general idea is that after the fall of the Soviet bloc, a great boom in jokes took place (books, shows etc.) and after a while a major setback followed, which lasts until now. This question of course has a lot to do with the issue of the Internet as the electronic vernacular. In reality, however, there seem to be more political jokes than there were a few years ago – preliminary research on jokes confirms that as other jokes wear out and lose their edge and are not repeatable/modifiable to the same extent, political jokes still remain a focus of growing interest (probably after some decline during the first years of independence).



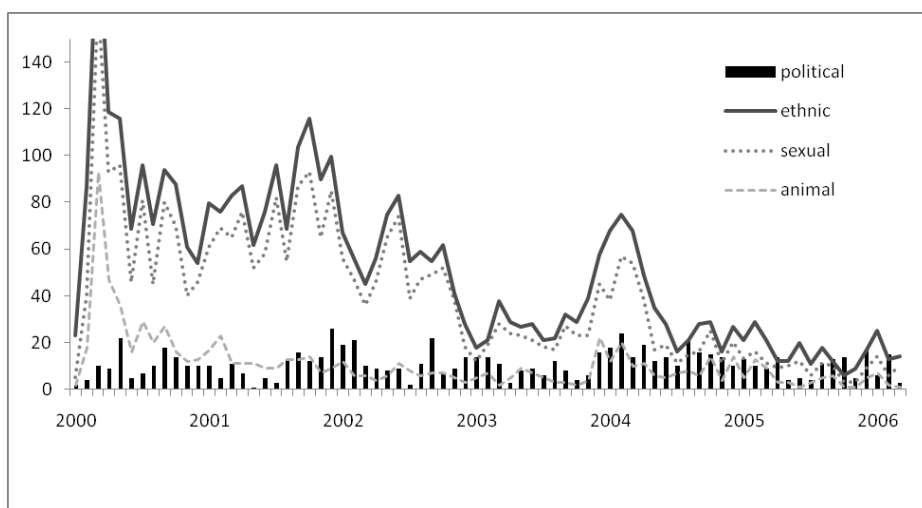


FIGURE 5. Jokes about politics, animals and sex compared to the amount of ethnic jokes in delfi.ee/jokes, 2000 – 2006.

Joke-telling as an oral tradition in general should be analysed with special attention to transforming societies. In addition to the Internet, political and other jokes in everyday interaction should also be studied, and the results compared to joke-telling patterns in Western countries. We can hypothesize that oral joking in Eastern Europe is going through more severe changes than in the West, as the in post-socialist situation the status of joke-telling diminishes as well. It was part of the lifestyle and has now been reduced to just a simple entertainment among other fun stuff. BELIN (2002) describes the diminishing tendency of telling jokes compared to Soviet times. Jokes appear to merge into other cultural phenomena, including advertising, in the vacuum that post-socialism has created in joke production.

Another issue of the political and economic context as factors that effectively shape tradition is that of the obvious exceptionality of Eastern European ethnic jokes with regard to Davies' theory of joke targets (DAVIES 1990, 2002 and 2007). In the predominant and most widely known theory of ethnic humour, Christie Davies attempts to discover universal rules in the choice of joke targets. He looks for the links between main scripts and social facts, such as, for example, modern society's hesitance in regarding people's primary actions, such as working, eating and drinking, sexual life and warfare. Jokes in every country (or a reasonably homogenous cultural and linguistic area) have certain targets for stupidity jokes – people who dwell on the edge of that nation or domain and who are perceived as culturally ambiguous by the dominant people of the centre. In addition, they will likely be rustic people or immigrants in search of unskilled and low-prestige manual work. They are to a

great extent similar to the joke-tellers themselves, share the same cultural background or even speak a similar or identical language. These universals apply well enough to Estonian jokes from before the Soviet times; the main joke targets are listed in Figure 6.

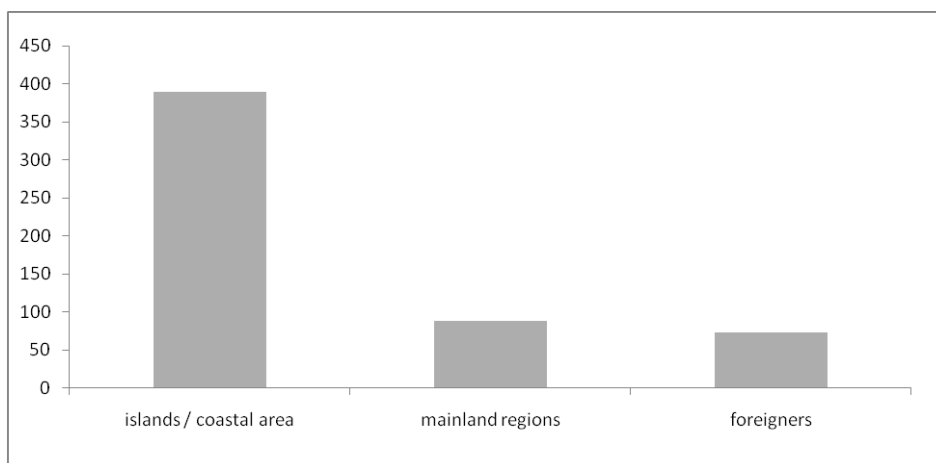


FIGURE 6. Targets in Estonian ethnic jokes in the 1890ies (M.J. Eisen's collections). Islands / coastal area include Saaremaa, Hiiumaa and mainland coast in North-Western Estonia, mainland regions include Mulgimaa and Setumaa in Southern and South-Eastern Estonia, foreigners include Jews, Gypsies, Russians, Finns and Latvians.

Here we see that without any exceptions, most of the stupid and cunning characters (respectively e.g. people from Hiiumaa and rich peasants in Mulgimaa) were at that time chosen from among our closest kinsfolk, who spoke the Estonian language with a strong and distinctive dialect, lived in the periphery (Tallinn and its surroundings served as the centre) and were also differentiated on economical grounds (poor on the islands, newly-rich in the south). Estonians also mocked the closest neighbours it had economic and political contacts with. But this situation, described and explained with a number of parallels by DAVIES (elaborated in 2002) goes through a complete change after the onset of totalitarian rule in Estonia. Figure 7 reflects the choice of targets in the two periods, vividly demonstrating that foreigners (many of them not neighbours) are now the prime targets in Estonian ethnic jokes.

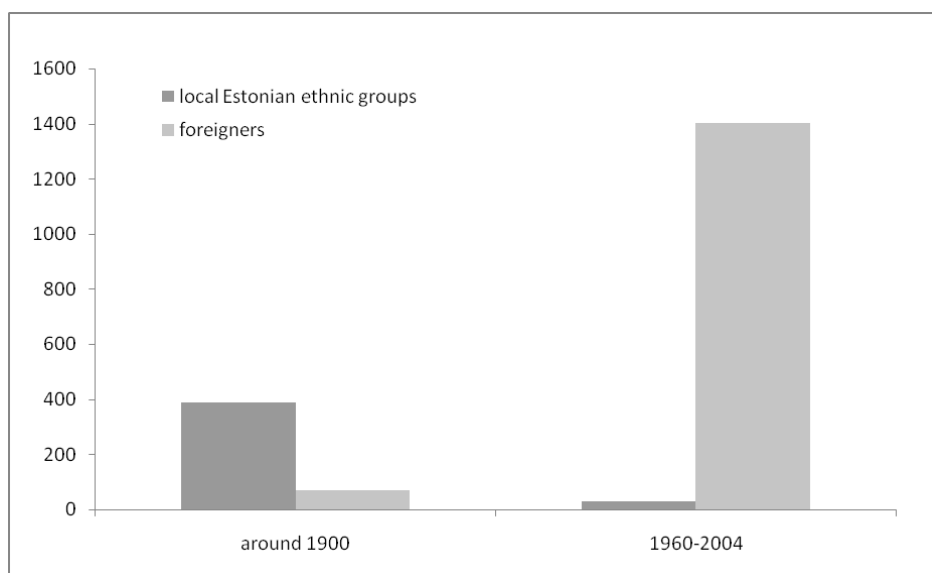


FIGURE 7. Estonian ethnic jokes on kinsfolk and foreigners from the 1890s and 1960–2004.

The political situation intervened heavily with the „natural” development of jokelore, and caused the jokes and targets to be largely alien or uncommon to those telling them. In recent years we have witnessed a search for the “lost” identity in jokes, and as a result the number of jokes about Estonians has risen – and among them the stupid (but not cunning) local groups are making a comeback.

It can also be noticed that under normal conditions (without political or other intervention) the scope of targets is constantly broadening from the closest groups to more exotic ones. The relationship between geographical location and the chronological development of jokes is, however, by no means uniform. A growing number of jokes about the more distant neighbours in the West (British, Italian, Swedish etc; including some groups that were not present in the Soviet period) and about unfamiliar exotic cultures (coloured people) emerged after 1991, but most of them were already introduced during the Soviet period. It can be concluded that in the Estonian material, the correspondence between developments in the temporal and spatial dimensions exists until the middle of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, and from then on no clear synchronism can be detected. This can be accounted for by the influence of the Soviet regime, as the interests and ambitions of the state dictated a more global world-view and thus also a more global choice of targets in ethnic jokes. Nevertheless, the diversification of joke targets is still underway, pointing to the active transformation of the joke tradition and its adaptation to the changed circumstances.

So far some of these areas have been examined within the limits of the two grant projects funded by the Estonian Science Foundation since 2001 (grants No 6759 and 4935). Estonian contemporary jokelore is compiled into a research database, parts of the material have been analysed, with special attention to ethnic and political jokes of the period. But what is needed for more insightful results is some comparative and cooperative research which is sketched out in the project proposal to the European Union 7<sup>th</sup> Framework Programme. The pan-Eastern European research network created in the course of enacting the project will answer research questions on the nature of jokelore in the transitional period, globalization and the localization of joke plots. It will also account for the targets of ethnic and political jokes in socialism, post-socialism and non-socialism, with the aim of clarifying the relationship between the broader societal (political, economic) context and folk creativity.

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## SUMMARY IN ESTONIAN

### **Muutumine ja järjepidevus Eesti postsotsialistlikus naljatradsioonis**

Doktoritöö teemaks on Eesti kaasaegsed anekdoodid ja nende seotus sotsiaalse reaalsusega. Anekdoote on vaadeldud nende esinemisaja laiemas sotsiaalses, poliitilises ja kultuurilises kontekstis; kitsam kommunikatiivne kontekst pole uurimisfookuses. Kuigi kommunikatiivsus on anekdoodi kui žanri oluline koostisosa, on siinse, peamiselt folkloristliku ja sotsioloogilise huumorikäsitluse põhirõhk just naljade sisu, vormi ja muude aspektide sõltuvus laiemast ühiskondlikust taustast.

Väitekirja koosneb katuspeatükist ja viiest artiklist, mis annavad läbilõike minu teadustegevuse peasuundadest viimase viie aasta jooksul (2003–2008). Töö põhieemärgid olid:

1. Pakkuda erinevaid nurki sissevaateks folkloorsete (eelkõige päevakajaliste, etniliste ja poliitiliste) naljade interaktsioonidesse nende poliitilise, majandusliku, kultuurilise jm ümbrusega ning tutvustada empiirikat ja internetinaljade kui allika omapära.
2. Koondada osa eesti kaasaegsete anekdootide kohta tehtud teadustööst (ja pakkuda viiteid enamikule neist), luua sobiv raamistik edasiseks uurimistööks nii teooria kui materjali osas.
3. Analüüsida eesti päevakajaliste, etniliste ja poliitiliste naljade arenguid minevikus ja tänapäeval, osutamaks aineses nähtuval järjepidevusele ja muutustele.
4. Kirjeldada etniliste tegelaste valikut erinevatest ühiskonnakorraldustest võrsunud anekdootides ning täiendada seeläbi põhiliselt Lääne empiirikal rajanevat uurimusi, et ehitada seniseist universaalsem mudel etniliste naljade “sihtmärkide” kirjeldamiseks ja prognoosimiseks.

Artiklid on järjestatud sisuliselt, mitte kronoloogiliselt, kajastades küll ka mu huvide üldist suundumust eesti materjalilt postsotsialistlike anekdootide laiaskaalisemale vaatlusele: alul tutvustatakse enamiku analüüsides empiiriliseks aluseks olevat andmebaasi, seejärel esitatakse päevakajaliste, etniliste ja poliitiliste naljade analüüsid, lõpuks visandatakse vajadused ja kavatsused nende ainete edasiste uurimissuundade kohta.

Esimene artikkel, mis kirjeldab ja põhjendab anekdootide andmebaasi ülesehitust, tutvustab lugejale materjali ja manipulatsioone, mis eelnesid analüüsidele. Siin osutatakse ka rohketele eelistele ja võimalikele puudujäkidele, mis peaaegselt digitaalse materjaliga töötades ette tulevad. Teine, kolmas ja neljas artikkel tegelevad vastavalt trendidega päevakajalistes, etnilistes ja poliitilistes anekdootides. Viimane artikkel võtab ühtlasi kokku lähimate aastate edasised uurimisplaanid.

Dissertatsiooni katuspeatükk koosneb kuuest osast:

1. Töö ülesehituse tutvustus.
2. Ülevaade põhilistest huumoriteooriatest, nende üldistest arengutest ning kaalust autori kui uurija positsioneerimisel. Enamus mind inspireerinud teooriatest pärineb just sotsioloogilisest paradigmast, mida on käsitletud muudest detailsemalt. Ühtlasi defineeritakse uurimuses kasutatud põhitähtsused ning tehakse põgus ülevaade eesti vanema ja uuema folkloorse nalja senisest uurimisest
3. Sissevaade komponendartikleis käsitletud võtmemõistetes ja -probleemidesse, milleks on: folkloori ja reaalsuse suhted; poliitiline situatsioon kui naljade levikukeskkond ja selle mõju anekdootidele; identiteet, globaalsus vs lokaalne spetsiifika. Viidatakse samateemalistele varasematele aruteludele ja tuuakse sisse tõestusmaterjali ja ümberlukkavaid fakte käesolevast tööst.
4. Naljade kui uurimisaine eripära, kvantitatiivsete ja kvalitatiivsete meetodite ühitamine nende uurimisel; internet kui kaasaegsete naljade peamine allikas ja levikukeskkond.
5. Lähem sissevaade viide komponendartiklisse: nende saamisloogu, eesmärgid, põhitulemused.
6. Kokkuvõtte töö üldteoreetilistest tulemustest, tähelepanekuist üksikute naljakategooriate kohta, senistes käsitlustes vastamata jäänud küsimustest, neile vastamise ning uute uurimisprobleemide püstitamise võimalustest.

Kuigi huumor on interdistsiplinaarne uurimisobjekt, pole siiani veel suudetud rajada kõikehaaravat huumoriteooriat, mis võtaks võrdselt arvesse huumori psühholoogilisi, kognitiivseid, sotsiaalseid jm omadusi. Seda mitmete autorite poolt võimatuks peetud eesmärki ei taotle ka käesolev uurimistöö, mille fookuseks on pigem eelkõige huumor kui sotsiaalne fenomen, mille põhitunnusteks on anonüümsus (siit järeldus, et huumor väljendab üldtrende arvamustes ja hoiakutes) ja kommunikatiivsus (st eeldus, et inimesed on motiveeritud anekdootide (ja huumorit tervikuna) kuulama, rääkima, edasi saatma jne). See tähendab ühtlasi, et populaarsus / esinemissagedus on anekdootide ja sotsiaalse reaalsuse seoste uurimisel oluline näitaja, osutades eelistatud valikutele anekdootide tegelaste, süžeede ja muude parameetrite osas. Käesolev uurimus eeldab, et anekdootid on tihedalt seotud neid ümbritseva reaalsusega, ja see avaldub mõõdetavate näitajate kaudu. Analüüsides anekdootide esinemissagedust, selle muutumist ajas jms, saame informatsiooni selle kohta, millised on anekdootide tunnused (süžee, tegelased, vorm) erinevates ühiskonnakordades, ning mille poolest on need võrreldavad. Samas väljendavad muutused ja jätkuvused anekdootide välistes parameetrites ka raskemini tabatavaid aspekte, näiteks funktsiooni ühiskonnas. Siiski, võrdev analüüs ajendab tihti küsima, miks on mingi näitaja just selline just sellisel perioodil, ning siis on tulemuslikem ajaloolist, kultuurilist jm konteksti arvestav uurimus. Teooriad, mis käesoleva uurimuse



kujunemisel on olulist rolli mänginud, kuuluvad sotsioloogia valdkonda. Funktsionalistlik lähenemine oli paljude esimeste süstemaatiliste teaduslike eksperimentidele toetuvate analüüside aluseks, sidudes anekdoodi naljakuse tajumist hoiakute ja sotsiaalse identiteediga. Huumorit kui konflikti käsitlev vaatepunkt rõhutas eelkõige nalja agressiivset olemust, mitte aga ta siduvat, kommunikatsiooni hõlbustavat rolli. Minu töödes leidub viiteid ka neile vastandlikule lähenemisele, kuid need pole siin keskseteks argumentideks. Veendununa mõlema liigsest fokuseeritusest konkreetsetele, kuid žanri seisukohast mitte kesksetele aspektidele, jõudsin viimaks kolmanda ja hiliseima käsitlusviisi – võrdlevajaloolise analüüsi – juurde, mille plussiks on laiem ja üldistavam vaatenurk. Selle lõppeesmärgiks on leida mustreid just suurema hulga erinevate (ja mõnes aspektis samaste) keskkondade võrdluses.

Arutelus esilekerkivad põhimõisted on *anekdoot*, *etniline anekdoot*, *etniline identiteet* ning *postsotsialistlik ühiskond* kui põhiline vaatlusalune keskkond, milles aimub nii varasema poliitilise konteksti järelmeid kui ka püüdlust tuua sisse uusi trende poole ja mis ühtaegu ilmutab erilisi, vaid sellele perioodile iseloomulikke üleminekutunnuseid. Käesolev uurimus eeldab, et anekdootide ja etnilise identiteedi vahel on teatud seos, mis pole aga kindlasti ühene ega otsest funktsionaalne, ja väljendub pigem üldises tõdemuses, et naljades konstrueeritakse “oma” ja “võõra” kategooriaid samamoodi nagu muudeski kommunikatiivsetes (folkloori) nähtustes. Ühtlasi usun, et üleminekuühiskonnas on sellised vastandused kiiremad tekkima. Kuigi anekdoodid kätkevad eelkõige mütoloolilisi stereotüüpe, millele leitakse harva tõendust tegelikes hoiakutes ja arvamustes, peegeldab nt tegelastevalik kaudselt soovi vastanduda “võõrale” (siin mängivad küll kaasa ka teised faktorid, mis valikut mõjutavad: etnilise (siht)grupi olulisus antud ajahetkel, selle koomiline potentsiaal, ajalooliselt väljakujunenud stereotüüpide olemasolu, poliitiline kontekst jms). “Oma” ja “võõra” vastandumissuhted ja väljakujunenud mustrid saavad aga hoopis uue sisu kaasaegses maailmas, kus internet soodustab kogu folkloori, sh anekdootide, globaliseerumist. Selle mõju post-sotsialistlikele anekdooditegelastele tuleks lähemalt uurida, et mõista seda samaaegset ja vastassuunalist tendentsi, so globaliseerumist vs subkultuuride teket. Esiteks, etniliste tegelaste hulk naljades, tõlgitud naljade osakaal jne ilmselt suureneb, kuigi samal ajal on see globalisatsioon “subkultuurne”, kuna tähendab ameerika ja euro-konstituentide (nagu varem ka vene omade) invasiooni oma algkodust väljapoole. Teiseks, samas paneb internet aluse kitsamate huvidega gruppide tekkele, mis suhtlevad neti kaudu globaalselt, sh kujundades oma subkultuurseid huumorivorme

Kasutatud meetod kombineerib kvantitatiivset ja kvalitatiivset lähenemist, mis leitud sagedusmustrite kirjeldamise ja sisuanalüüsi kaudu üritab ainese süvaolemusele võimalikult lähedale pääseda. Tähelepanu on pööratud ka internetimaterjali omapärale. Sageli on erialakirjanduses täheldatud, et see materjal esitab vaid osakest käibehuumorist, pealegi konserveeritud, st kunstlikult pikendatud elueaga osa. Lisaks pole teada sageli midagi saatja kohta, ning pole võimalik kummutada oletust, et suur hulk naljadest on samade aktiivsete saidi-

külastajate saadetud ning väljendab seega ainult väikse hulga inimeste eelistusi. Kolmandaks puudub võimalus arvestada naljade kommunikatiivset aspekti. Nende väidete ümberlükkamiseks on aga piisavalt põhjendusi: esiteks on internet olemuselt ühtaegu informeeriv kui ka meelelahutuslik, ja need funktsioonid on paljudel saitidel tihedalt põimunud. Aina suurem osa internetikommunikatsioonist koosnebki naljadest (vt ka viiteid). See teeb interneti representatiivseks ja aina olulisemaks huumorillikaks, mida uurijad ei tohiks ignoreerida. Representatiivsust nii naljade kui nende saatjate osas aitab suurendada fakt, et uurimuses kasutatud eesti materjali hulk on suur (kuni ca 50 000 teksti), ning suurem osa minu uurimustest keskendub “virtuaalsetele huumorikeskustele” (*humour hub*, koht, mis on inimeste seas tuntud kui populaarne ja pidevalt täienev naljasait). Kommunikatiivse faktori kõrvalejätmine on teadlik valik, sest uurimuse fookus oli makro-sotsioloogilisel kontekstil.

Edasi refereerin põgusalt väitekirja komponentartiklite sisu ja põhitulemusi:

**I Laineste, Liisi (2006). Eesti anekdootide andmebaas. (Database of Estonian jokes] Kõiva, M. (Ed.) Võim ja kultuur II. Tartu: Eesti Kultuuriloo ja Folkloristika tippkeskus, Eesti Kirjandusmuuseum, pp. 103–124.**

Esimese artikli põhiülesandeks on pakkuda ülevaadet eesti kaasaegsete anekdootide andmebaasi rajamisel ja arendamisel tehtud tööst (asub aadressil <http://folklore.ee/~liisi/o2>), tutvustada selle ülesehitust, anda näpunäiteid kasutamiseks, tuua välja selle mõned puudujäägid ning mitmed eelised traditsioonilise arhiivikataloogi ees. Lisaks lihtsustab see artikkel järgnevate analüüside eelduste mõistmist ning põhjendab internetis leiduvate anekdootide uurimise vajadust.

Põhitulemused:

1. Elektrooniline andmebaas on heaks abiliseks mitte ainult materjali organiseerimisel ja koondamisel, vaid pakub pärast kategoriseerimist palju võimalusi andmete automaatseks (sh kvantitatiivseks) analüüsiks.
2. Naljade kategoriseerimine ja suur osa sisulisest tööst jääb teksti töötlemise ja analüüsi praeguste vahendite juures kummati ekspertide tööks (sh tuleks saavutada arvestatav kategoriseerijatevaheline reliaablus).
3. Tulevikus muutub üha teravamaks vajadus rahvusvahelise kategoriseerimissüsteemi järele, et võimaldada kultuuride/ maade/ regioonide vahelisi võrdlusi.
4. Semantilised otsimoorid ja (semantilist) sarnasust tuvastavad arvuti-programmid on ka folkloristikas vajalikud ja ootavad edasiarendamist.

**II Laineste, Liisi (2003b). Take It with a Grain of Salt: The Kernel of Truth in Topical Jokes. Folklore: Electronic Journal of Folklore, Vol. 21, pp. 7–25.**

Artikkel käsitleb päevakajalisi nalju ning nende seoseid ümbritseva reaalsusega. Lähema vaatluse on ka all naljade kognitiivne funktsionaalsus, mis väljendub nii selles, kuidas uudiseid ja katastroofe kommenteeritakse, kui nende naljade sisus ning saatmissageduses. Artikkel valmis 2002.a ISHS konverentsil (Bertinoros, Itaalias) esitatud ettekande baasil. Eesmärkideks oli tuvastada peamised mustrid internetikäitumises, mis puudutab naljade saatmist ja avada päevakajaliste naljade vormi, sisu ja funktsiooni kaudu naljade seoseid sotsiaalse reaalsusega.

Põhitulemused:

1. Naljade intensiivsem saatmine internetis langeb kokku üldiste aktiivsemate internetikasutuse perioodidega (vahetult pärast tööle tulekut ja enne sealt minekut, rohkem nädala lõpus ja alguses, vähem nädalavahetusel).
2. Päevakajalised naljad saavad inspiratsiooni päevasündmustest, kajastades neid vaid väikese hilinemisega, sageli laenavad naljad ka uudiste kui ajakirjandusžanri vormitunnuseid.
3. Päevakajaliste naljade põhifunktsiooniks on vajadus toime tulla ülevoolava infoküllusega, mis meedias valitseb.

**III Laineste, Liisi (2008). The Politics of Joking: Ethnic Jokes and Their Targets in Estonia (1880s–2007). Folklore: Electronic Journal of Folklore, Vol. 40, pp. 109–138.**

Artikkel kirjeldab etniliste anekdootide arengut ja tegelastevalikut Eestis läbi viimase sajandi. Töö baseerub mitmel samateemalisel kirjutisel ning ISHS 2008 aasta suvekooli ettekandel (toimus Galatis, Rumeenias). Kirjutamise motiiviks oli seik, et tegelaste valik eesti etnilistes naljades sattus selgesse vastuollu Daviese etnilise huumori universaalide teooriaga. Seetõttu järgitakse käesolevas artiklis eesti etniliste naljade tegelastevahtust alates 1890ndatest, mil esmajoones pilgati naaberid ja perifeerlasi (ning mis sobib ka Daviese teooriaga), kuid hiljem, Nõukogude Eesti etnilistes naljades näeme suurt hulka uusi ja üsna “võõraid” tegelasi, kes pole ei meie naabrid ega muulgi moel meie lähedased. Ka viimasel (sotsialismijärgsel) perioodil on tegelaste hulgas palju uusi rahvuseid, ning samaaegselt on nähtav püüd taaselustada kohalikke naljategelasi (hiidlased, setud jm). Need kaks katkestust loogilises (või pigem: teooriale vastavas) tegelastevalikus on kahe (kuigi erineva mõjuala ja suunaga) “globaliseeriva” jõu, Nõukogude korra ja peamiselt läänesuunalise üleilmastumise, tulemiks.

Põhitulemused:

1. Poliitilisel kontekstil on etniliste naljade sisule suur mõju: selle tulemusel võivad muutuda kategooriapiirid (nt tekkis sotsialistlik etno-poliitiline / poliitilis-etniline anekdoot), tegelaste karakterile lisanduvad uued aktsendid, anekdoodiobjektide populaarsus muutub, jne.
2. Vanemate etniliste naljade tegelasteks on naaberrahvad ja perifeerlased.
3. Nõukogude ajal domineerisid üleliidulised etnilised universaalid: tšuktšid, grusiinid, ukrainlased, armeenased.
4. Kaasaegsete anekdootide "programmi" näib kuuluvat soov taassleida kohalikud naljaobjektid ning vastanduda eelmisele, nõukogude perioodile.
5. Christie Daviese teooria satub eesti empiirikaga vastuollu, ning ilmselt oleks asjakohane täiendada seda poliitilise aspekti suurema rõhutamise ning postsotsialistliku mudeli eraldi väljajoonistamisega.

**IV Laineste, Liisi (2008). Political Jokes in Post-Socialist Estonia (2000–2007). In Arvo Krikmann & Liisi Laineste (Eds). Permitted Laughter: Socialist, Post-socialist and Never-socialist Humour. Tartu: EKM Teaduskirjastus, pp. 39–68.**

Artikkel räägib poliitilistest naljadest taasiseseisvumisjärgses Eestis. Artikli aluseks on kirjutis ajakirjas Keel ja Kirjandus (Laineste 2007) ning selles taotletakse eelkõige analüüsida eesti kaasaegset poliitilist anekdooditraditsiooni, kõrvutades seda varasema, nõukogudeaegse materjaliga, täpsustada etniliste ja päevakajaliste anekdootide vaatlusel tekkinud kujutelmi naljade ja sotsiaalse reaalsuse seose kohta, ning kirjeldada eesti poliitilisi nalju Alexander Rose'i (2002) teooria valguses. See teooria väidab, et poliitilised naljad sõltuvad suuresti režiimist, milles neid räägitakse: totalitaarsed ühiskonnad räägivad nalju süsteemist, kuid demokraatlikes keskendutakse juhtide personaalsetele puudujääkidele. Artikkel on jagatud kolmeks suuremaks uurimisprobleemiks: (1) naljateemade ja -tegelaste reaktsioon päevauudistele, (2) etniliste ja poliitiliste anekdootide kategooriapiiride hägusus / selgus; (3) ning poliitiliste naljade põhiobjektid Eestis enne ja pärast iseseisvumist.

Põhitulemused:

1. Vahetu poliitiline kontekst küll mõjutab nalju, kuid mitte otseselt ja selgelt. Mõned teemad jäävad naljades kajastamata (kui liiga keerulised, liiga läbi seletatud, lihtsalt igavad), teised aga võetakse anekdootides kiiresti omaks.
2. Neljandik kaasaegsetest poliitilistest anekdootidest on vanad nõukogudeaegsed naljad, mis elavad muutumatuna edasi internetis ja inimeste teadvuses, kuid nende osakaal langeb.
3. Etnilise ja poliitilise anekdoodi piirid on selgemad kui varem.

4. Kaasaegsetes poliitilistes naljades eelistatakse teemana poliitikuid (nii kohalikke kui välispoliitikast tuntud figuure). Nõukogude anekdootides naeruvääristati nii süsteemi kui ka juhte.
5. See näitab Rose'i teooria ebaadekvaatsust ja osutab sellele, et parem identifikaator nende kahe ühiskonnatüübi poliitiliste anekdootide eristamiseks kui anekdooditegelased on pigem nõukogudeaegsete naljade läbiv politiseeritus, mis kaasaegses demokraatias on kadunud.

**V Laineste, Liisi (2009). Post-Socialist Jokelore: Preliminary Findings and Further Research Suggestions. Acta Ethnographica Hungarica, Vol. 53, forthcoming.**

Viimane artikkel võtab kokku varasemad uuringud ja pakub välja edasisi sõlmküsimusi, millele peaks edaspidi keskenduma. Artikkel põhineb Szekszardis, Ungaris 2007. a. sügisel toimunud rahvusvahelise konverentsi "Humour and Linguistics/Folklore" plenaarsessioonil peetud ettekandel, mille eesmärgiks oli kõita tulevasi koostööpartnereid. Artikli põhilisteks teemadeks on anekdootide andmebaasi koostamise põhimõtted ning postsotsialistlike ühiskondade huumoriga seotud küsimused: anekdoodid ja ksenofoobia, globaliseerumine, postsotsialistliku naljakultuuri võimalikud erijooned.

Põhitulemused:

1. Ida-Euroopa huumoriuurimuse arendamise seisukohalt oleks vägagi vajalik luua ühtsete põhimõtete järgi ehitatud andmebaas, mis võimaldaks uurida erinevaid naljakategooriaid, nende siseliigendusi, tegelastevalikut jms.
2. Etniliste naljade hulk Eestis väheneb, kuid seda tendentsi oleks huvitav võrrelda ka teistes endistes idabloki-riikides toimuvaga.
3. Kuigi globaliseeruv anekdooditraditsioon toob pidevalt sisse uusi tegelasi, on praegu selge roll ka vanadel Nõukogude naljadel.
4. Postsotsialistlik anekdooditraditsioon erineb sotsialistlikust ja ka demokraatlikust, kuid selle põhilaadi peaks selgitama ekstensiivsete ja süsteematiliste võrdevate uuringute abil.

Edasised uurimissuunad on kõige selgemalt piiritletud viimases artiklis, ning lähiaastate uurimisprogrammi kuulub esmajoones postsotsialistlike ühiskondade anekdootide võrdlev analüüs, uurijatevõrgustiku laiendamine ning tihe koostöö erinevate maade huumoriuurijate vahel.

Anekdoodid nagu teisedki folkloorižanrid on tihedalt seotud ühiskonnaga, milles neid luuakse ja levitatakse. Nad on avatud muutustele ja käsitlevad olukordi, mis inimestele sel hetkel kõige relevantsemad tunduvad, ning teevad seda kõige tabavamal moel. Sellele pakub kinnitust ka käesolev artiklite kogumik.

# CURRICULUM VITAE

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### Education

- 1996 Tallinn English College
- 2000 Tartu University, BSc in psychology. “Verbaalne agressiivsus” [Verbal Aggression] (supervisor prof. A. Pulver), “Etniline huumor sotsiaalses kontekstis” [Ethnic Humour and its Social Context] (supervisor prof. P. Tulviste)
- 2000 – ... Tartu Art College, department of photography
- 2004 Tartu University, MA in Estonian and comparative folklore “Tegelased eesti etnilises huumoris” [Characters in Estonian Ethnic Humour] (supervisor prof. A. Krikmann)
- 2005–2008 Tartu University, postgraduate student in Estonian and comparative folklore

### Employment

- 2000 Tartu Art College, lecturer of psychology
- 2001–2005 research team member, Estonian Science Foundation grant No 4935 (Eesti kaasaegne rahvahuumor [Estonian Contemporary Folk Humour])
- 2005 – researcher, Estonian Literary Museum, department of folklore
- 2006 – research team member at Estonian Science Foundation grant No 6759 (Folkloorne anekdoot tänapäeval: postsotsialism – internet – kognitiivsus [Contemporary Jokelore: Post-socialism – Internet – cognitivity])

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2000 – ...	Tartu Kõrgem Kunstikool, fotograafia
2004	Tartu Ülikool, MA eesti ja võrdleva rahvaluule erialal. “Tegelased eesti etnilises huumoris” (juhendaja prof A. Krikmann)
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2000	Tartu Kõrgem Kunstikool, loengukursus psühholoogiast
2001–2005	granditäitja, Eesti Kirjandusmuuseum, ETF grant nr 4935 (Eesti kaasaegne rahvahuumor)
2005 – ...	teadur, Eesti Kirjandusmuuseum, folkloristika osakond
2006 – ...	granditäitja, Eesti Kirjandusmuuseum, ETF grant nr 6759 (Folkloorne anekdoot tänapäeval: postsotsialism – internet – kognitiivsus)

## DISSERTATIONES FOLKLORISTICAE UNIVERSITATIS TARTUENSIS

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8. **Anu Korb.** Siberi eesti kogukonnad folkloristliku uurimisallikana. Tartu, 2007.
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