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The Chastushka on the Internet: the Problem of Genre Viability

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Abstract

The article attempts to contribute to solving the urgent problem of the viability and functions of folklore in the modern world. We study the modern chastushka represented at special websites designed for chastushka exchange. Such websites are a special communicative sphere which uses modern technology to realize folklore intentions. The chastushka is a popular modern folklore genre which has lived through the change of information reality. This is due to the features of the genre world modelling aimed at the comic reflection of reality. In the process of integration into the modern communicative space, these principles are preserved, yet the chastushka form demonstrates flexibility in relation to the needs of the modern information environment regulated by common postmodern tendencies of modern culture.

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1. Introduction

Currently, the debate about whether "folklore is alive" has lost its urgency. Modern researchers understand folklore as a form of a person's communicative expression [Ben-Amos, 1971, 1993; Dianova, 2005; Dobrovolskaya, 2005; Gabbert, 1999; Goodwin & Duranti, 1992; Putilov, 1994].

Folklore is viable as it participates in the satisfaction of relevant human communication needs. One of the essential needs folklore meets is the need for self-identification.

The functions of folklore in modern society are unquestionably different from those in traditional society. Folklore is a part of the universal multi-functional communicative system which correlates with the system of social and communication needs of the person. Thus, the media perform the leading role in meeting people's need to

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engage in designing society; while literature, art and the like in satisfying the aesthetic needs.

Globalization of cultural space forms social conditions for people to explore diverse social practices. People have to engage in several cultural systems simultaneously. As a result, people have a greater need for self-identification, and folklore sublimation is an adequate form to meet this need: "It is not important that proverb and bylichka texts teach us something. What is important is the type of texts they are recognised as, 'native' or 'alien', 'normative' or 'deviant'" [Bogdanov, 2000]. Folklore is able to satisfy the need for self-identification due to its flexibility and focus on the present: it is an adequate communication form which preserves stable patterns of world modelling.

The viability of folklore in modern society is also due to the oral way of its translation. Even though modern folklore has acquired a written form along with the oral one (see works by S.B. Borisov, N.V. Braginskaya, V.S. Efimova, M.M. Krasikov, M.L. Lurie, A. Petrova, S.Yu. Neklyudov, et al.), modern folklore users continue the tradition of exchanging and sharing folklore texts on-line. However, the orality of the folklore tradition in the new socio-cultural conditions has a new perspective and enhances its viability through other information transmission channels, which results in a better adaptation to the present. For instance, in the second half of the twentieth century songbooks with folklore song texts became popular; thus, songs were fixed in the written form. Folklore users turn to songbooks like to their own memory, while turning to officially published folklore collections is functionally close to referring to the artistic text. Written existence of folklore should be distinguished from the written storage of folklore texts: existence assumes the transfer of the text in order to access it in a communicative situation; storage is passive in relation to the text and is not intended for distribution.

A special written form of folklore is its representation on the Internet.

Since its inception, the Internet as a special communicative sphere has proven to be a convenient environment of folklore existence (M. Alekseevskiy, E.L. Backe, J.H. Brunvand, T. Owens, D. Radchenko, et al.). Its technical capabilities support the natural exchange of folklore information. Firstly, the Internet supports folklore of separate subcultures shared within communities represented on the web (e.g., tourist folklore as a form of cultural exchange of a tourist Internet community). Secondly, the Internet supports "general" folklore shared within topical communities (websites of jokes, chastushkas, anecdotes, etc.). Folklore fixation on the Internet can be seen as a form of folklore storage.

The system of folklore genres responds flexibly to the challenges of our time: unclaimed genres fall into disuse, new genres appear, some genres change.

We study the chastushka as one of the genres which change. Firstly, such genres are indicative in terms of the aspects of their socio-communicative adaptation. These genres demonstrate the principles of genre adaptation most vividly. The balance of stability and change allows them, on the one hand, to be a kind of a "container", "cell", "intended for the preservation and reproduction of what is culturally classified as 'right'", blocking "foreign elements" [Ries, 2005, 76]; on the other hand, to reflect the results of the impact of modernity.

One of the changing genres in Russian folklore is the chastushka, a genre of late-traditional folklore (first appeared in the end of the nineteenth – early twentieth centuries [Zueva & Kirdan, 1998; Kviatkovskiy, 1966; Lazutin, 1960, etc.]). It is a short Russian folk song, which consists of four lines with a simple (*ABAB*, *ABCB*, or *AABB*) rhyming scheme, full of humour, satire or irony. Its main purpose is to verbalize an expressively marked response to a real routine situation.

Researchers of the chastushka distinguish its following key features: 1) the specific nature of the textual form: its verse, verbal and musical organization; 2) the broad range of topics; 3) the special way of reflecting the world: fixing a vivid response to reality; 4) the special way of interpreting reality: dominance of the lyrical nature, the major basic emotional tone, the fundamentally evaluative content [Kulagina, 2000; Lazutin, 1960; Sokolov, 1925; Adon'eva, 2004, et al.].

The genre purpose initially determines the specificity of the chastushka genre modelling throughout the existence of the genre.

This genre stands out for its content focuses on the "outside", unlike the "closed" folklore texts in general. Researchers pay particular attention to this feature of the chastushka: "Most folklore genres are alien to topicality, immediacy and urgency. Every genre has its spheres of life, its social function and its capabilities. As for the urgent, it is the prerogative of rumours, gossip, all sorts of hearsay, jokes, live speech. The urgent is expressed in the chastushka and, of course, in jokes" [Putilov, 1994, 53]. Chastushkas are always topical, which can be observed in

the broad variety of objects they describe: from interpersonal (mainly, love) to institutional relations. This feature of the chastushka is particularly manifested in chastushkas on the socio-political situation in different periods: *Kak vo stalinskom kolkhoze / Zarezali merina. / Razdelili vse kishki, / Vspominali Lenina* (Once on a Stalin farm / They slaughtered a gelded horse. / Divided all the guts, / Recalled Lenin in memory); *Perestroyka, perestroyka / – ya i perestroilas'.* / *U sosedu deneg mnogo / – ya k nemu pristroyilas'* (Reconstruction, reconstruction / I reconstructed my life. / My neighbor has a lot of money / I have fallen in beside him). The chastushka describes the reality in a specific, as compared to most folklore genres, way. The "ideal" reality in the chastushka is expressed as an anti-normative world. The consistent rejection of the norm is one of the principles of the chastushka world modelling [Tubalova & Emer, 2005; Emer, 2011, et al.]. Norms are given by the model "to the contrary": faithfulness to the beloved as a collective norm of love relationships (*U menyia milenka tri, / Tri i polagayetsya: / Poka ya s odnim tseluyus', / Dva drugikh rugayutsya* (I have three beloved men, / Three is as many as there should be: / While I am kissing with one, / The other two are quarrelling); unquestioning obedience to parents (*Menya doma b'yut, rugayut, / Velyat milogo zabyt'.* / *Vyydu v senechki, poplachu, / No po-ikhnemu ne byt'* (They beat, abuse me in my house, / Tell me to forget my beloved. / I will go to the entryway to cry, / But it will not be their way), and others.

2. The Internet chastushka

The chastushka is one of the few genres of traditional ("classic") Russian folklore which actively functions in the present. Its viability is ensured, first of all, by the genre intention of responding to external reality, which provides an opportunity of personal sublimation, as well as by its feature of the comic, anti-normative interpretation of reality, which provides people's active interest.

The object of this research is the modern chastushka presented at special websites designed for chastushka exchange. These websites are a special communicative sphere of folklore intention expression with modern technical tools (anegdoty.narod.ru/chastushki; chastuchka.yaxy.ru; prazden.ru/pozdravlenie/pozdravlenie07.htm, et al.). For comparison, we have used texts of traditional chastushkas collected in folklore expeditions of the Philological Faculty of Tomsk State University (Tomsk, Russian Federation) from 1946 to the present.

Focus on the "outside" in the chastushka assumes audience, public representation and collective character of evaluation; the Internet has special opportunities for that. Specialised chastushka websites can show the positive reaction of the audience on the chastushka (the number of "likes", ranking texts by maximum likes for a certain period: "The Week's Top", "The Month's Top", lists of users who posted most popular chastushkas, etc.).

In their Internet form chastushkas have a different image of their performer. Both the author and the performer of a chastushka are anonymous (as opposed to the classic chastushka sung directly to the public).

The different sphere of existence and the adapted form of existence of the Russian chastushka do not change the basic principles of chastushka world modelling.

In terms of content, the chastushka has always evaluated both common (love, family, etc.) and institutionally determined (politics, economy, etc.) objects. Chastushka site users actively post chastushkas on these topics. Chastushkas follow the anti-normative principle of reality reflection and use constant basic chastushka oppositions (chastushkas on common topics: he-darling / she-darling, she-darling / rival, children / parents; chastushkas on institutional topics: power / people). However, different thematic blocks of chastushkas acquire various features due to the changes in the chastushka content and in the principles of the text form organisation.

We further consider the specifics of the verbalisation of the topics in the described communication environment.

2.1. Verbalization of common topics

Some common topics, discussed in the traditional chastushka, acquire a different, modern sounding on the websites. For instance, in the traditional chastushka the topic of children / parents covers the violations of rules only by children, and the norm is "children should obey their parents, the bearers of traditional values": *Ne rugay menyia, mamanya, / Ne rugay tak grozno. / Ty sama byla takaya, / Prikhodila pozdno* (Do not scold me, Ma, / Do not scold me so menacingly. / You were like me yourself, / Came home late); *Menya mama bila – oy! / Ob skameyku golovoy.*

/ Ona bila, govorila: / "Prikhodi ran'she domoy" (My mother beat me, ouch! / Hit my head on the bench. / She beat and said, / "Come home early"). Parents were not subject to discussion / evaluation for they were norm bearers. In the modern chastushka the subject of discussion is not only "children" as one of the opposition members, but also "parents" who are discussed as potential norm violators: *Mama spit, ona ustala. / Zavalilas' s kem popalo. / Nu a kto popalsya mame, / Dogadaytes', deti, sami* (Mom is sleeping, she is tired. / She has fallen with any Tom, Dick or Harry. / Who did mom catch? / Children, guess yourselves); *"Razvodis' da razvodis'", - / Peli mne roditeli. / Vzyal razvod. S Polkanom v budke / My teper' sozhiteli* ("Get divorced, get divorced," / My parents kept telling me. / I got divorced, now I am sharing a dog-house with Polkan [name of a dog]). In the first text the abnormal behaviour of the mother is expressed by the meaning of the words and phrases *zavalilas'* ("has fallen") and *s kem popalo* ("with any Tom, Dick or Harry"), and by contrast with the content of a popular children's poem (Mom is sleeping, she was tired / Oh and I play did not!), where the image of the mother, in accordance with the genre, is presented as an ideal. The second text is a story which is absolutely impossible for the traditional chastushka (divorce) due to the fact that the traditional normative system does not have this category as such. In our context, the parents, firstly, participate in the implementation of this category; secondly, their position is abnormal: they are the instigators of their child's divorce.

The poly-discourse existence of modern man as well as changes in the structure of information exchange is expressed in the blurred boundaries between the common and the institutional in the chastushka picture of the world. For instance, everyday objects can be evaluated by referring to institutional facilities: *Menya milyy ne tseluyet, / I drugogo nichego. / Govorit, povsyudu krizis, / Zastoyalos' u nego* (My darling does not kiss me, / And there is nothing else. / He says crisis is everywhere, / He is also stagnated). A low object is comically interpreted by referring to a negative common state with the word indicating a negative social phenomenon, "crisis".

2.2. Verbalization of institutional topics

The genre orientation on the active interpretation of reality determines the ability of the chastushka to evaluate not only common, but also institutionally determined objects of reality. Traditional chastushkas have a special group of social chastushkas which reflect the collective view on the current social events of reality. If common evaluated objects are "eternal", institutionally determined objects only reflect the temporally conditioned reality. Groups of chastushkas date back to the period of World War I: *Shli v Gubinu my na nemtsa, / Govorili - nemets strog. / Na nego poshli v ataku, / A on stonet: okh, da okh!* (We went to Gubin to fight the German, / They said the German is strict. / We attacked him, / And he groans, oh, oh!) [Nedviga, 2000]; of the revolution and the collective farm movement: *Trotskiy Leninu skazal: / "Poydem, Volodya, na bazar, / Kupim loshad' karyuyu, / Nakormim proletariyu!"* (Trotsky told Lenin, "Volodya, let's go to the market, / Buy a brown horse / And feed the proletarian!); of the Great Patriotic War: *Dumal Gitler nayavu: "V desyat' dney voz'mu Moskvu!" / A my vstali poperek: "Ty Berlin by pobereg!"* (Hitler actually thought, / "In ten days I will occupy Moscow!" / We went against it, "You'd better watch Berlin!); of perestroika: *Pri zastoye plokho zhili, / O yede my ne tuzhili, / A teper' golodnyye, / No zato svobodnyye* (During the stagnation we had a bad life, / We did not bother about the food, / And now we are hungry, but free); etc.

The semantic (evaluative) models in social chastushkas on special websites are virtually identical with the traditional ones. The key opposition the chastushka content is organised around is "power / people". This opposition is used for the interpretation of society from within, from the perspective of "people" not only in the chastushka, but also in other informal verbal systems. The difference from the traditional chastushka is that the social one refers to current objects of reality, which confirms the indicated principle of modelling: *Kak-to vse u nas ne tak / Yazycheskaya sila / Krizis v Shtatakh zabrodil, / A vzdrognula Rossiya!* "We have everything going wrong / Darn it / The crisis got hard in the States, / Yet Russia startled!"; *Krizis etot nevznachay / Shibko lupit po karmanu. / My odin paketik chaya Okunaem v 2 stakana!* "This crisis accidentally / Hits us in the pocket hard. We dip one tea bag / into two cups!" These texts verbalize a characteristic folklore opposition "own / alien". Semantically, this opposition is implemented either as its internal, characteristic of Russian social culture, version "power / people" (lower living standards are represented by descriptions of everyday problems relevant to all people: *we dip one tea bag into two cups*), or as a nationally given external opposition "Russia / USA" (*we, Russia / in the States*).

Thus, in these texts the semantic modelling principles do not show fundamental differences from the principles of the traditional chastushka formation. Genre orientation on reflection of current and topical objects and their comic interpretation, sublimation of anti-normative reflections, as well as active common people's interest in lower semantics, determine the relevance of the chastushka in modern folklore groups.

2.3. Formal features of the chastushka

A principal feature of the chastushka on the Internet is its form.

It is, first, connected with the chastushka's written fixation, which influences its form: the chastushka on the Internet is meant for reading, not live performance, and the written chastushka medium generates texts phonetically and rhythmically unsuitable for singing. Written texts can contain special graphic signs that promote better understanding of the chastushka sense: *Krizis*: *paltus, gradus, plintus, / Katekhizis, Cantus Firmus, / Dafnis, sifilis, avtobus, / Epidermis, aerobus* (*Crisis*: halibut, degree, plinth, / Catechism, Cantus Firmus, / Daphnis, syphilis, bus, / Epidermis, airbus). In this context the asterisks highlight the key word in the chastushka ("crisis") and the words which follow are its rhyming associations. Often, chastushka meaning is based on a play with the written form (e.g., play of homophones), which can be perceived only if visualized: *Kosmosa podorozhali – / I kolbaska v misochke: / Ran'she "MIR" v rukakh derzhali, / A teper' – Pi – Piece – ochki* . . . In this context, there are two cases of word play. The word "MIR" is associated with 1) a space station and 2) the world as such. The word "Pi – Piece – ochki" has an English element in it ("piece"). If one knows English, the word is a hint on the "bits" that are left after the crisis. If one turns to the sound form, the word is a diminutive form of a vulgar word denoting genitalia; its contextual meaning is "nothing". Thus, this chastushka expresses an idea that Russia (its people) used to have everything, but now it has nothing.

The formal structure of the written chastushka is also different from that of the chastushka for singing: it has a more rigid rhyme, rhythm pattern ("syllable organization") [Petrova, 2009].

All these features are a result of changing the channel of perception from auditory to visual: chastushka "to read" is psychologically perceived as a printed work, becoming a fact of everyday urban written culture.

The comic effect, an element of the genre cognitive system, in the traditional chastushka is formed due to a play with a described situation: *A mne milyy izmenil, / Na koze uekhal v Krym, / A ya makhu ne dala – / Na korove dognala* (My darling cheated on me, / Went to the Crimea on a goat, / And I did not screw up – / Caught up with him on a cow). In the modern chastushka, presented at special websites, the comic effect is realized not only due to the specifics of the plot, but also due to a play with the text, the word: *Nash Vanek ne khodit v shkolu – / Khleshchet v bare "Koka-kolu". / Pet po-chernomu, do kolik, / Kak zavzyaty kokakolik* (Our Johnny does not go to school – / He gulps down Coca-Cola at the bar. / He drinks heavily, to colic, / like an inveterate Coca-holic). This is consistent with the principles of the contemporary, postmodern, perception of the text which makes the textual form significant as such. In order to comply with the accuracy of the analysis, we note that the traditional chastushka also plays with the sound shells of words: *Moy milenok – perevertenok, Perevertushechka moya*: the following word repeats an element of the preceding one; *Ili ty igraesh' – taesh', Ili ya po'yu – ta'yu*: words have common flections and stress; the last word "ta'yu" can be interpreted in two ways: 1) as an unusually stressed form of the verb *tayat'* (to melt) with a stress shift for the rhyming purposes, or 2) as a word with a regular stress meaning "to conceal" (examples from [Adon'eva 2004]). Yet, in case of the Internet chastushka, plays with words are more numerous and diverse.

The Internet chastushka does not possess non-verbal means of emotion expression (facial expressions, gestures, dance steps, voice mediation, etc.) and musical and melodic means (singing), yet the high level of emotionality, dictated by the genre, is preserved in the play with the text, in its structural and logical originality.

The significance of the speech form of the Internet chastushka also consists in the fact that the response of the chastushka to the reality is supported textually and expressed in its poetics.

The traditional chastushka expresses semantic contrast: *Okh, kak byla okhotnitsa / Plyasat' i pesni pet'. / A tepericha prikhoditsya / V okoshechko glyadet'* (Oh, how much I used to love / Dancing and singing. / And now I have to look out the window); parallelism: *Posmotryu ya v zerkalo, / Ne budu li krasivaya, / Pozhivu bez milogo, / Ne budu li schastlivaya* (I will look in the mirror [to see], / Whether I will be beautiful, / Will live without a darling,

/ Will be happy); hyperbole: *Na prilavke v magazine / Po tri sorok kolbasa. / Dve starukhi s golodukhi / Poteryali golosa* (On the counter in the shop / the sausage is three forty. / Two old women, being hungry, / Lost their voices); paradox: *Zhirinovskiy obeshchaet: / Vsekh ot goloda spasu! / Starikov ya sdam na myaso, / A starukh na kolbasu!* (Zhirinovsky promises: I will save all from starvation! / I will have meat made from old men, / And sausage from old women!), etc. primarily in the structure of the text with the uniform chastushka style.

The modern chastushka destroys the stylistic uniformity. Semantic models can be implemented through stylistic contrast. For instance, evaluation of formal activities of social structures is expressed in the use of formal style elements: *V gosti deputat prishel / Da na noch' ostalsya. / Ya morgnula, nameknula, / A on vozderzhalsya.* "A deputy came to visit me / And stayed overnight. / I winked, hinted, / But he **abstained**"; *Agronom tovarishch Kogan / Politicheski podkovan. / Zval menya on tet-a-tet / V senoal'nyy kabinet.* "**Agronomist Comrade Kogan / Is politically literate.** He invited me in for a tete-a-tete / In a hayloft **office**". Evaluation of the hypertrophied significance of political attitudes for the Soviet people is expressed in the use of the formulas of political language: *Sputnik, sputnik, ty letaesh', / Ty letaesh' do nebes. / I naveki proslavlyaesht' / Mat' tvoyu – KPSS* (Sputnik, sputnik, you fly, / You fly up to heaven. / And you forever **glorify / Thy Mother – the CPSU**); *Khorosho, chto Yu. Gagarin / Ne vrey i ne tatarin, / Ne tungus i ne uzbek, / A nash, sovetskiy, chelovek* (It is good that Yu. Gagarin / Is not a Jew or a Tartar, / Not Tungus and not Uzbek, / But **our, Soviet**, man).

The modern chastushka uses the traditional chastushka formulas, but users of specialized websites distort chastushka's formal and semantic features. The traditional chastushka, connecting the older generation, as traditional family norm guardians, and the young people in a dialogue, regularly uses the text model *ne rugay menya, mamanya* ("do not scold me, Ma"). The modern written chastushka uses a variant of this model, *ne rugay menya, milenok* ("do not scold me, darling"): *Ne rugay menya, milenok, / I prosti v posledniy raz: / Ya Kirkorovu sprosonok / Tol'ko v myslyakh otdalas'* (Do not scold me, darling / And forgive me one last time: / Being half asleep / I surrendered to Kirkorov [Russian pop-singer] only in my mind). Referring to a darling is not organic for the traditional chastushka, given the independence of its female character in relation to her partner. Another example is nominations of the chastushka character similar to the traditional ones (e.g., *milka* ("darling")), new for the chastushka and common in today's everyday speech: *milashka* ("cutie"), *malyshka* ("babe"). This transformation, though referring to the traditional chastushka, blurs the chastushka image of a feisty country girl. These models exist in the minds of modern chastushka compilers in the passive form.

3. Conclusion

Functioning of websites designed for chastushka exchange can be regarded as one of the manifestations of folklore viability in the modern world.

The popularity of the chastushka is determined by its specific genre features which consist in the rapid response of its content to the "outside" reality and in the adaptability of its form. The stable semantic world modelling principles allow the chastushka to function as a folklore group member's social identification, based on the reflection of the modern collective norm. The flexibility of the genre form allows it to find its niche in the new information environment, in particular, in the Internet space as a modern person's communicative activity field.

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