

National and Literary Specificity Of Children's Verbal Folk Games: A Comparative Study Of Russian, English, And Uzbek Traditions

Kamila Akhmedova

PhD Doctoral Student (2nd year), Fergana State University, Philology (Comparative Literature, Folklore Studies), Uzbekistan

Received: 25 November 2025; **Accepted:** 13 December 2025; **Published:** 29 December 2025

Abstract: The present article examines the national and literary specificity of children's folk games with verbal content in Russian, English, and Uzbek cultural traditions. The study focuses on the interaction between verbal folklore, play activity, and cultural context as a complex semiotic system reflecting collective memory, national mentality, and social values. Using a comparative and interdisciplinary approach, the research analyzes genre classification, systems of imagery, symbolic meanings, and compositional structures of children's games. The material base includes more than 1500 authentic folklore texts—counting rhymes, taunts, circle games, and ritualized play—supplemented by a sociolinguistic survey involving 300 respondents. The findings demonstrate that children's verbal folklore represents not a static relic of the past, but a dynamic and adaptive cultural phenomenon that continues to evolve under conditions of globalization and digitalization.

Keywords: Children's folklore; verbal folk games; national specificity; system of images; symbolism; comparative folklore studies; oral tradition; cultural heritage.

Introduction: In the context of globalization and rapid digital transformation, traditional forms of children's culture are increasingly marginalized by mass media and virtual entertainment. This process threatens the continuity of oral traditions and the preservation of intangible cultural heritage. Children's folklore, particularly folk games with verbal content, occupies a unique position within national cultures, as it combines language, movement, social interaction, and symbolic meaning into a unified cultural practice.

The relevance of studying children's verbal folk games lies in their role as an early mechanism of cultural socialization. Through games, children acquire linguistic competence, internalize cultural norms, and reproduce collective models of behavior. Despite the universality of play as a human phenomenon, its verbal and symbolic realization varies significantly across cultures, reflecting national traditions, historical experience, and worldview.

This article aims to identify both universal and culture-specific features of children's verbal folk games in Russian, English, and Uzbek traditions, emphasizing their literary, symbolic, and compositional

characteristics.

Theoretical Framework and Literature Review

The study of children's folklore has a well-established tradition in international scholarship. Foundational contributions were made by Iona and Peter Opie, whose works documented the folklore of schoolchildren in England and demonstrated the autonomy of children's oral tradition. Brian Sutton-Smith conceptualized play as a culturally ambiguous phenomenon reflecting social values and psychological development. Alan Dundes applied structural and semiotic approaches to folklore, revealing deep symbolic patterns within seemingly simple verbal forms.

In Russian folklore studies, scholars such as G. S. Vinogradov and O. I. Kapitsa emphasized the independence of children's folklore as a distinct subsystem of oral tradition, characterized by its own genres, functions, and poetic language. Uzbek folklore scholarship, represented by researchers including F. A. Jahongirov and O. Safarov, has documented rich traditions of children's games connected with ritual practices, moral education, and collective interaction.

However, despite extensive research within individual cultures, comparative studies that systematically analyze children's verbal games across Russian, English, and Uzbek traditions remain limited. This gap underscores the necessity of a cross-cultural and interdisciplinary approach.

Materials and Methods

The research is based on a comprehensive corpus of over 1500 folklore texts collected from published sources, archival materials, and field records. The corpus includes counting rhymes, teasing songs, circle games, ritualized play, and verbal formulas accompanying physical movement.

The methodological framework combines several complementary approaches:

- Comparative-typological method, used to identify similarities and differences in genre structures and imagery across cultures;
- Structural-semiotic analysis, applied to examine symbolic codes, repetitive formulas, and compositional patterns;
- Historical-genetic method, employed to trace the origins and evolution of verbal game forms;
- Thematic-semantic classification, allowing systematic grouping of texts based on dominant motifs and functions;
- Sociolinguistic survey, conducted among 300 respondents to assess contemporary usage and transformation of traditional games.

This interdisciplinary methodology ensures both theoretical depth and empirical reliability.

Analysis and Results

The comparative analysis reveals that children's verbal folk games in all three traditions share universal features, such as rhythmic repetition, formulaic language, role distribution, and playful manipulation of sounds and meanings. These elements facilitate memorization, group cohesion, and communicative competence.

At the same time, each culture demonstrates distinctive characteristics:

- Russian tradition emphasizes rhythmic expressiveness, poetic imagery, and connections with nature and seasonal cycles. Counting rhymes and circle games often preserve archaic symbols and collective movement patterns.
- English tradition is characterized by logical structuring, humor, wordplay, and social role modeling. Many games reflect urban settings, historical references, and ironic attitudes toward authority.

- Uzbek tradition foregrounds collective participation, moral instruction, and harmony with nature. Verbal games frequently retain links to ritual practices and emphasize ethical values such as respect, cooperation, and social responsibility.

The system of images across cultures includes animals, natural elements, numbers, and anthropomorphic figures, but their symbolic meanings vary according to national mentality and cultural context.

Discussion

The findings confirm that children's verbal folklore functions as a cultural code that mediates between language, play, and social experience. While globalization introduces new forms of play, traditional games continue to adapt, incorporating modern vocabulary and contexts without losing their structural core.

The comparative perspective demonstrates that universality in children's play does not negate national specificity; rather, it provides a framework through which cultural uniqueness is articulated. This insight is particularly relevant for contemporary discussions on cultural preservation and intercultural communication.

Conclusion

The study concludes that children's verbal folk games constitute a dynamic and culturally significant form of oral tradition. Their comparative analysis across Russian, English, and Uzbek cultures reveals a complex interaction between universal play mechanisms and nationally specific literary and symbolic features.

The research contributes to comparative folklore studies, linguoculturology, and children's anthropology by proposing a systematic classification of verbal games based on genre-functional, symbolic, and compositional criteria. The results may be applied in educational practice, cultural policy, and digital heritage projects aimed at preserving and revitalizing traditional children's folklore in the modern world.

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