

Interethnic jokes in Transylvania. The case of Gypsy jokes

Noémi TUDOR¹

Weaver (2014a; 2014b), among other researchers, states that ethnicity is a common topic in humour research. Davies (1998) mentions that most ethnic minorities become the butt of ethnicity-centred jokes. In the Romanian context, most ethnicity-centred humorous discourses target the Hungarians and the Gypsies (Popescu 2011). Jokes are, usually, told from the perspective of the Romanians as a central group, while the butts (i.e., the minorities) represent the peripheral one. In the case of Gypsy jokes, the peripheral group (i.e., the Gypsies) is named in various manners. The paper illustrates the ethnonyms and other means of calling this group that were found in the corpus, when presenting the portray of the Gypsy in humorous discourses. When the relationship existing between two ethnic categories is interpreted in the humorous discourse, I use the label of “interethnic jokes”. Interethnic jokes mirror intercultural relationships existing among ethnic groups which live together in Transylvania (the region where the corpus was collected). The perspective and the presence of the joke-teller (as the representative of the central group – i.e., Romanian/Transylvanian) is marked in the discourse by linguistic tools. This research shows that the presence of the central group may be explicitly stated via ethnonyms or may be implied through lexical or grammatical means. Lexically, the use of lexemes referring to (1) occupations/professions, (2) a person in general, or (3) proper names are the most frequent representations. Grammatically, the use of pronouns and verbs (1st and 2nd person, singular or plural) are widely used tools.

Keywords: *ethnic humour, interethnic jokes, canned jokes, Transylvania, centre, periphery.*

1. Preliminary considerations

From a larger perspective, pragmatic analysis applies to any humorous discourse because, as in any interaction, people communicate more than they literally say (Yule 1996). Davies (1990) concluded that ethnic jokes are directly related to social reality and further researchers agreed (e.g. Genova 2014; Weaver 2014a/2014b). Ethnic humour should no longer be analysed just in semantic terms, but the analyst

¹ Transilvania University of Braşov, Romania, noemi.tudor@unitbv.ro

must prove how context (i.e., socio-cultural information) contributes to meaning. Ethnic humour is not interpreted *in extenso* without socio-cultural information, which has to be mutually shared by the humourist and the audience and needs to be accessed while processing the joke. As ethnic humour is culture specific/bound, I propose an analysis of how Gypsy jokes reflect the interethnic relationship existing between Romanians (as a central group) and Gypsies (i.e., Romani – as a peripheral group). Considering the discussion about how ethnic relations are illustrated in jokes one of the most interesting features of ethnic humour, I propose a new analysis of *Gypsy jokes* on this topic. By interethnic jokes, I mean those jokes in which the portraits of both the central and the peripheral groups are presented. The focus of this paper is on the mechanisms of portraying the central and peripheral groups in the Romanian jokelore.

The analysis presents linguistic mechanisms in *Gypsy jokes* without aiming to associate the information with the identity of Romani.

2. Theoretical perspectives on ethnic humour

Ethnic humour was analysed in multiple ways (e.g. via *Script-Based Semantic Theory of Humour*), and conclusions are not homogenous because ethnic humour is culture specific/bound. Between Western and Eastern European countries conclusions are sometimes contradictory.

This paper aims to analyse ethnic humour within the framework of relevance theory (Sperber and Wilson 1986/1995). The reason why I chose this perspective is mainly related to the explanation relevance theory (henceforth, *RT*) offers for why and how people access stereotypical information. In investigating stereotypes associated with an ethnic minority (Romani/Gypsies), I rely on the instruments offered by *RT* (i.e., explaining how the brain processes the humorous discourse based on the expected balance between high cognitive effect and low mental effort; adopting terminology etc.). But there is a need to adapt this new vision, within *RT*, and to take into account the previous research existing in the field. Hence, metalanguage as *centre-periphery* distinction, *ethnic script/ stereotype*, *ethnic identity* are operational concepts used in the current analysis.

RT offers the tools to integrate contextual information in the process of interpreting any piece of discourse. The sender (i.e., the humourist) constructs the joke on the mutual awareness that the receiver is able to select the relevant context, in order to obtain the humorous effect. The *ideal sender* (usually, a representative of the central group) and the *ideal receiver* (i.e., the one who can interpret the joke, being familiar with the contextual support it needs) each

represent a community that share not just the predisposition for the same mental processes (as RT suggests), but also the same background information, usually expressed from a cultural point of view. The fact that the sender and the receiver are confident about their mutual cognitive environment makes them express the joke in a more economical way.

Culture entails the sharing of similar cultural representations, which are held by a high number of members of a certain group. Therefore, an ethnic group shares cultural representations (including stereotypical ones) which are known by them and are associated with them by other groups with whom they come into relation.

The generalization of such cultural representations spreads across groups that interact with each other in the shape of stereotypes. In the case of ethnic jokes, it is frequent that no humorous techniques are used. Sometimes the simple strengthening or contradicting of existing, background stereotypes (without incongruity being involved) suffices to create humour (Yus 2004/2016).

RT seems to be used quite scarcely in the analysis of ethnic humour. I consider that the integrated vision of ethnic humour created through Sperber and Wilson (1986/1995)'s relevance theory and Yus's (2016) application of RT to humour offers a profitable way for analysis.

3. Corpus and methodology

My research focuses on 100 canned jokes about Gypsies that were collected in Transylvania (a region in Romania), in May 2021. The corpus was collected during an informal session in which twenty people were asked to tell jokes about this ethnic minority. People aged between 22 and 60 formed the group. Eleven members were women, while 9 were men. The people involved live in Braşov, Covasna and Sibiu counties. The process of collecting jokes ended when 100 jokes were told. All jokes were told in Romanian, although 5 members were bilingual (3: Romanian-Hungarian + 2: Romanian-German). Where possible, I tracked down the sources of the jokes. Some of them were not found, therefore, I assumed that (1) the speaker was the creator, or (2) the joke has only a spoken version. The corpus was organized according to the main topic the jokes illustrate. One of these categories refers to jokes about *Terms of address* (i.e., jokes that play with the possible names given to the Romani ethnic category).

My research questions are: (1) *How can we make a distinction between ethnic jokes and interethnic jokes?*, (2) *How do the central group call the peripheral one in Gypsy jokes?*, and (3) *Which discursive strategies are performed by the joke*

creator in order to get the audience to infer the relationship between Romanians/Transylvanians (i.e., central group) and Gypsies (i.e., peripheral group)?

In the interpretation of ethnic jokes, I use Yus's *Intersecting Circles Model* (2013a; 2013b; 2016) because it is the only model that operates with three dimensions found in ethnicity-centred humour. The three dimensions (i.e., circles) used in understanding the taxonomy proposed are: (1) *make-sense frame* (i.e., the mental scenario of the joke and the stereotypical way in which they are built; it is an umbrella term that covers similar concepts such as *frame*, *schema*, *script*); (2) *cultural frame* (i.e., cultural information, including stereotypes); (3) *utterance interpretation* (i.e., the pragmatic process intended to obtain an interpretation of the text of the joke). They are presented by Yus (2002, 2013a, 2013b, 2016) in the following way:

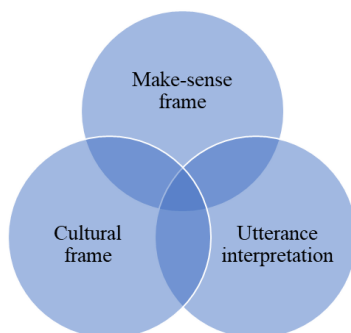


Figure 1. *Intersecting Circles Model*

Make-sense frames are related to (1) information about word meaning (i.e., word-associated schemas), (2) information about the prototypical order of making a particular action (i.e., sequence-associated scripts), and (3) the possible situation which can be related to other events (i.e., situation-associated frames).

The *cultural frame* represents the information we relate to particular societies or cultures individually (i.e., *private beliefs*) or collectively (i.e., *metarepresented cultural beliefs*). These beliefs can complement each other, contradict each other or be similar in a particular way. These frames are present in many ethnic jokes, the scenario of which is usually built on such a script.

The *utterance interpretation circle* is the one that is strongly related to what pragmatics (particularly RT) shows in analysis, meaning how the joke teller manipulates the receiver's interpretative process of the text of the joke. The following inferential strategies discussed by Yus (2016) are at work in this circle:

Reference assignment involves those empty grammatical units that need to be filled with a referent. It is a strategy used in attributing a referent to pronouns and adverbs.

Disambiguation refers to the process of selection of the intended interpretation of a word or phrase, taking into consideration the context (that is given by the interpretation of a previous chunk of the discourse).

Saturation refers to the mechanism through which we fill in some missing information in the discourse, when, in the utterance, there are elided parts without which the discourse makes little sense.

Concept adjustment takes into account the prototypical concepts associated with a word and the other possible interpretations of that particular unit that may be more relevant for the hearer, depending on the requirements of interpretation and contextualization.

In order to describe how the presence of the central group is interpreted in the humorous discourse, I use the mentioned frames and strategies.

The *Intersecting Circles Model* predicts that we can devise humorous texts based either only on exploiting discourse-centred strategies or only based on frame construction or combinations of both.

4. Gypsies and Gypsy jokes

Romani represent the largest ethnic minority in Europe. Romania has the biggest population of Romani in the continent.

The ethnonyms used when referring to this ethnic group are eng. *Roma*, *Romani*/ro. *rom*, *rrom* and eng. *Gypsy*/ro. *țigan*. In Romania, this ethnic group was known as *țigani* for many centuries, the etymology of the word is the Greek τσίγγανος (i.e., *athinganoi*), meaning *untouchable*, *intangible*, *impure*, also referring to the social category of slaves. DEX 2009² defines *țigan* as:

1. A person who is part of a people originating in Northwestern India, who migrated in the fifth century in Persia, Mediterranean Asia, and the Byzantine Empire, in X-XVI centuries in the South-East and central Europe and North Africa, in the fifteenth century in Western Europe (especially in the Iberian Peninsula), and in the nineteenth century in the two Americas, and who speaks an Indo-European language;
2. Epithet given to a brunette person;
3. Epithet given to a person with bad habits.

² www.dexonline.ro

As seen, even if in Romanian it rarely has a negative connotation (its denotative meaning refers directly to population/ethnic group), as it refers to slavery and historically speaking, Romani were slaves in Romania, there has been a mutual agreement to use the ethnonym ro. *rom* (see, for example, Gheorghe Sarău and Delia Grigore in a letter addressed to the Rector of the University of Bucharest, on December 12, 2010 and Zafiu 2009). This ethnonym comes from the Romani language – *romaniceŭ* (i.e., the son of a woman); *rom* (i.e., human being) (Kogălniceanu 1837). In Transylvania, the National Gypsy Assembly required not to use the ethnonym *țigan* anymore (Matei 2010).

Therefore, *țigan* may be considered an exonym (i.e., a name given to an ethnic group that has been created by another group of people), while *rom* is an endonym (i.e., the name used by the ethnic group itself).

It seems to be a preference to use the ethnonym *Romani*, and not *Gypsy*, as it has not got any pejorative meaning. Some studies show that it is risky to address a member of the minority in any way, the only proper ethnonym to use being the one (s)he uses (Fleck and Rughiniș 2008). Somehow, as also Fleck and Rughiniș (2008) consider, the ethnonym *Gypsy* (ro. *țigan*) makes stereotypes profitable, *Romani* (ro. *rom*) protecting people from any stigma of being considered *țigan*. However, it is a general cultural behaviour among the majority to address to this ethnic minority as *țigani*, without necessarily attributing any negative semantic features to this ethnonym.

Analysing ethnic categories, Săftoiu (2017) concludes that, in Romanian, the *Gypsy* category is filled with stereotypical information, hence, pejorative connotations may be interpreted. Adding new attributes, representing this minority, is possible just by taking into account the fond created by the existing information (which is mostly negative). As a result, it is not possible to add positive attributes to the existing *Gypsy* category. In opposition, the *Romani* category is empty of meaning, as it does not appear in any linguistic representation analysed (expressions, proverbs, ethnic jokes) and, in time, can be filled with elements that reflect a positive attitude towards the ethnic minority. Consequently, the Romani category is still under construction in the collective perception. I consider that this view can explain the reason why the ethnonym *rom* is preferred from a politically correct perspective.

Therefore, we may conclude that ethnic humour introduces the portrayal of *Gypsies*, and almost never of the *Romani*, due to the propagation of negative features that makes the jokes prolific in terms of negative stereotypes.

Nowadays, both ethnonyms circulate when talking about the ethnic minority, but *țigan* is more frequently used.

In general, jokes portray the *Gypsy* (ro. *țigan*). This is the most frequent category when talking about this peripheral group and it represents, in most of the cases³, an exonym, as it is the name used by the central group when talking about Romani. The exonym is used 163 times in the corpus, most jokes being introduced by the presence of a *Gypsy*. Out of the total occurrences, 11 refer specifically to a female, adult – *țigancă* and 3 to a child – *țigănuș*, these being the existing derived forms from the base *țigan*. The appearance of *țigan* is also prolific in noun phrases – *pui de țigan* (2 occurrences), *copil de țigan* (1 occurrence), *copiii țiganilor* (1 occurrence) which refer to Gypsy child(ren); *țiganul tată* (1 occurrence), an adult male and father; *țiganul bătrân* (2 occurrences), alluding to an old Gypsy, male. The information is also presented in the following table:

Type	Name	Occurrence
Exonym (Base form)	<i>țigan</i> (adult, male)	163 out of which:
Derived forms:	<i>țigancă</i> (adult, female)	11
	<i>țigănuș</i> (child)	3
Phrases:	<i>pui de țigan</i> (child)	2
	<i>copil de țigan</i> (child)/ <i>copiii țiganilor</i> (children)	1+1
	<i>țiganul tată</i> (adult male, father)	1
	<i>țiganul bătrân</i> (old, male)	2

Table 1. *How do we call Gypsies in jokes? (1)*

In addition, there are other words used in jokes which refer to Gypsy adult males, adult females, young males or children: (1) *puradel* (i.e., Gypsy child – 9 occurrences), (2) *piranda* (i.e., Gypsy female, wife of a Gypsy – 13 occurrences), (3) *tatai* (Gypsy father, male, borrowing from Romani language – 11 occurrences) and *bulibașa* (Gypsy, male – 6 occurrences), and (4) *golan* (i.e., young adult – 1 occurrence). Note that *golan* does not, prototypically, refer to a Gypsy, but as the meaning of the word [1. a person without a job, who walks all day without doing anything useful; 2. a poor, ragged man who has nothing to wear] fits the stereotypic knowledge about Gypsies (part of the *cultural frame*), it is inferred that the joke in which the lexeme occurs targets a *Gypsy* (information presented in Table 2).

³ Some sociological studies showed that there are members of this minority that identify themselves as Gypsies (Fleck and Rughiniș 2008), but, on the other hand, some members consider this ethnonym discriminatory.

Type	Name	Occurrence
Other lexeme used for <i>child</i>	<i>Puradel</i>	9
Other lexeme used for <i>adult, female</i>	<i>Piranda</i>	13
Other lexemes used for <i>adult, male</i>	<i>Tatai</i>	11
	<i>Bulibaşa</i> ⁴	6
Lexeme used for <i>young, male</i>	<i>Golan</i>	1

Table 2. *How do we call Gypsies in jokes? (2)*

In some jokes, prototypical names are present, which inferentially challenge the receiver, as there is a need to access encyclopaedic information about Gypsies and frequent names used in their community (via *cultural frame*). Therefore, the following names were found in the corpus (see Table 3): (1) *Elvis* (male); (2) *Lăcătuş* (eng. *locksmith*) (male, referring to a job performed by Gypsies); (3) *Parpanghel* (male); (4) *Zambila* (eng. *hyacinth*) (female); *His majesty Iulian* (referring to the late Iulian Rădulescu who had proclaimed himself “The King of Romani from everywhere” in 1993).

Type	Name	Occurrence
Prototypical names	Elvis	6
	Lăcătuş (also referring to a prototypical job)	5
	Majestate Iulian	1
	Parpanghel	1
	Zambila	1

Table 3. *How do we call Gypsies in jokes? (3)*

I consider that, even though most of the jokes I have collected talk about a Gypsy (male, female, child), introducing the character through at least one of the linguistic means presented above, stereotypical information is strengthened regarding the whole ethnic minority. Therefore, some expectations are created in the mind of the reader, because, by introducing the portrait of the Gypsy, stereotypical information is accessed through encyclopaedic knowledge and *metarepresented cultural beliefs*, even though this information is not part of one’s *private beliefs* (see Yus, 2016). There are also jokes which invoke Gypsies as a group. Noun phrases used in the corpus are: (1) *şatră de țigani* (referring to very poor Gypsies living in tents); (2) *cartier de țigani* (a Gypsy neighborhood);

⁴ Leader of a Gypsy band.

(3) *comunitatea romilor* (Romani community); (4) *familie de țigani* (Gypsy family); (5) *cetățenii de pe lângă Târgu Mureș* (citizens living near Târgu Mureș).

Type	Name	Occurrence
Designating a group	Șatră de țigani	3
	Cartier de țigani	1
	Comunitatea romilor	1
	Familie de țigani	1
	Cetățenii de pe lângă Târgu Mureș	1

Table 4. *How do we call Gypsies in jokes? (4)*

There are jokes that do not present the Gypsy identity explicitly, the portraying of the Gypsy group being conveyed only as implicated conclusions. Therefore, as in the case of prototypical names, some jokes name a community without mentioning the ethnic component explicitly. In other words, ethnicity is implicated through the origin and stereotypical knowledge attributed to the peripheral group, as exemplified below:

- (1) *After waiting so long, citizens from Târgu Mureș have finally received the news they were waiting for: iPhone 10 will be available to be stolen starting from next month.*

(source 1)

The joke does not explicitly talk about Gypsies, but information about the possible origin of the citizens from Mureș county has to be inferred out of contextual information and cultural knowledge of the receiver (via *cultural frame*): (1) many Gypsies live in Târgu Mureș, speaking, mostly, Hungarian, also known as Gabori and (2) stereotypically, in Romania, Gypsies are considered thieves. Therefore, the joke portrays the Gypsy community. In this particular joke, the humorous effect is generated by the ability of the receiver to interpret the joke, attributing the scenario presented in the *make-sense frame* to a well-known stereotypical behaviour of Gypsies.

Some humorous discourses play with how Romani are named in jokes, this being the main topic addressed in such jokes. When talking about humorous texts added to the category of *terms of address*, jokes can be classified according to three subcategories: (1) *endonym-based jokes*; (2) *name-calling-based jokes*; (3) *non-exonym-based/avoidance jokes*.

In the first subcategory, we have jokes that play with the endonym *rom*. All jokes (6% of the corpus) which rely on the endonym are built on inferences of the explicit meaning (via homonymy).

- (2) *A Gypsy goes to a bar and tells the bartender:*
 – *Bartender, a rum¹/Roma² here!*⁵
 – *I saw you, you mother f***!*

(source 2)

The joke illustrates the homonymy of *rom*¹, referring to [alcoholic drink], the most relevant interpretation of the setup, triggered also by the *make-sense frame* [entering a bar] and [talking to the bartender] and *rom*², meaning the ethnonym [Romani], the interpretation being highlighted by the punchline. Therefore, the mechanism involved in the construction of the humorous text is *discourse-based*, as it challenges the receiver's explicit interpretation.

The most interesting conclusion I need to illustrate is that *rom* ethnonym is used ONLY when the joke is built on a discourse-based inference and it only appears in jokes that are part of the *terms of address* category. If the joke does not play with the possible meanings of *rom*, this ethnonym is not used.

The second subcategory contains jokes that illustrate *name-calling*. There are two epithets/nicknames found in the corpus: (1) *cioară, ciori* (eng. *crow*) – the most productive (8 occurrences) and (2) *moacă, -e* (referring to people who are goofy, slow and lazy). The epithet *cioară* was generated due to similarities regarding the colour of the skin. In addition, it may be transferred and adapted from the meaning of *nigger* in the USA, when addressing the Afro-American community, via *the epidemiological spread of culture* (Sperber 1996). Gypsies are considered a marginal group in Romania and some racial features are related to the colour of the skin, in the same way as African Americans are considered stereotypically in the USA. I illustrate this subcategory with the following example:

- (3) *Q: Can Gypsies be considered cannibals?*
A: Yes, when they eat crows.

(source 3)

After reading the question (i.e., the setup), the receiver will try to search for as much possible contextual information as needed to project some possible interpretations. Hence, knowledge about cannibals is accessed: [people who eat

⁵ Both *rom* in Romanian: *Barman, un rom aici!*

people]. The reader, to fulfil his/her need of relevance, will generate some implicated premises:

- a. Cannibals are people who eat other people;
- b. Gypsies are poor; therefore, they cannot afford to buy food as other people do;
- c. There are no popular cases of Gypsy cannibals, as there is no such a stereotype attributed to the ethnic group.

Consequently, the most relevant interpretation the receiver has in mind is that Gypsies cannot be considered cannibals. The answer (i.e., the punchline) contradicts this expectation of the audience and humorously entertains them. In order to understand the punchline, the receiver has to go through processing new information:

- a. Cannibalism means people eating people;
- b. Gypsies are called crows.
- c. [a crow eats a crow] is the equivalent mechanism to [a human eats a human];

Therefore, the implicated conclusion is that Gypsies can be considered cannibals; this interpretation that is also triggered by the verb used in the setup: *consider* has the semantic feature [+possibility].

In the corpus, I have found some *non-exonym-based/avoidance* jokes, in which the use of any form of address is avoided. One joke from *terms of address* category illustrates the third subcategory mentioned above:

- (4) Q: *When do you call a Gypsy "pop"*⁶?
A: *When he has the gun in his hands.*

(source 4)

Usually, dialogue-based jokes make the receiver create some expectations about possible answers to the question stated by the sender. Therefore, in order to anticipate the possible answers, the receiver spends a lot of mental effort. This mental effort is compensated with the humorous non-propositional effect. Cultural information engages the receiver to consider some implicated premises:

- a. usually, Gypsies are called *Gypsy, Romani* etc.;
- b. in Romania, *nene* is a respectful word used by children/younger people when addressing older people;
- c. as people in Romania stereotypically do not show respect, in their interactions, towards Gypsies, there should be a strong reason to do so.

The punchline illuminates the receiver who will infer that the Romanian is forced by the circumstances not to use (mostly) the exonym or other epithets. As

⁶ rom. *nene*

the endonym is preferred by the peripheral group, it is inferred that the use of it does not represent the object of the joke. Hence, ethnic affiliation is perceived as risky. It is also inferred that the Gypsy is violent, another stereotypical behaviour that makes the Romanian call him in a more polite way.

To sum up, the previously discussed subcategories found in jokes, coping with *terms of address*, are represented in the following table.

Type	Name	Occurrence
Calling names	<i>cioară</i>	8
	<i>moace</i>	1
Endonym-based	<i>rom/rrom</i> (adult, male)	5 out of which:
	<i>pui de rom</i> (child)	1
Non-exonym-based/ avoidance	<i>nene</i>	1

Table 5. *How do we call Gypsies in jokes? (5)*

5. Interethnic relations in Gypsy jokes

Considering this one of the most interesting features of ethnic jokes, I propose a short discussion about how ethnic relations are illustrated in Gypsy jokes. I have presented in section 4 which are the strategies used to illustrate the presence of the peripheral group, the butt of such humorous discourses. Section 5 focuses on the representation of the central group. How can we infer the presence of the majority in ethnic jokes?

First, we should make a distinction between (1) *ethnic jokes* and (2) *interethnic jokes*.

I consider *ethnic jokes*, those humorous discourses that focus exclusively on a specific ethnicity, in which no interethnic relations are described, and the presence of the centre is not inferred. In these humorous texts, inside group relations are presented by means of illustrating an interaction between: (a) two Gypsy men, (b) two Gypsy women, or (c) a Gypsy man and a Gypsy woman, as in the following example.

- (5) ***The old Gypsy man, reading the newspaper, tells the old Gypsy woman:***
“Fa, it says here that an atomic bomb costs two million dollars.”
“God, drop one in our garden!”

(source 5)

Other ethnic jokes reflect in a unique way the relationship existing between the centre and the periphery in Transylvania, or even in Romania. I call this typology *interethnic jokes*.

Interethnic jokes are those jokes in which the portraits of both the central and the peripheral group are presented (1) explicitly or (2) implicitly. Interethnic jokes mirror stereotypes about intercultural relationships existing among ethnic groups which live together in Transylvania.

In a nutshell, in most of the jokes, the central group, reflected either by the prototypical name *Romanian* or by the presence of a (wo)man/group of people (without explicitly naming the ethnic origin), represents a sum of people living in Transylvania, who target Gypsies in their jokes (Hungarians, Romanians and Saxons). The peripheral ethnic minority (i.e., Gypsies) are the butt of such jokes.

How can we infer the presence of the central group?

5.1. Via explicit, ethnonym-based interpretation

In those jokes in which the interethnic relation is mirrored through the presence of a Romanian (explicitly stated through the ethnonym) and a Gypsy, jokes illustrate:

A. **Romanians (i.e., including minorities) are the centre.** Considering that my study focuses on ethnic humour in Transylvania, sometimes, it seems to be difficult to identify how these jokes represent the Transylvanians' view of the Romani people. However, as I have already mentioned, the corpus selection has taken place in a particular context, involving people living in Transylvania. Therefore, I assume that these humorous texts are also a representation of Transylvanian ethnic humour. In addition, there are also some jokes that illustrate short humorous discourses which refer to places from Transylvania (ex. in Târgu Mureş, Ținutul Secuiesc, Sibiu etc.).

Romanians do not exclusively make up the central group in most of the jokes under analysis, as one could have believed. Instead, all ethnicities living in the territory under discussion (i.e., Transylvania) are portrayed in these jokes. A reflection of the Hungarian/the Szekler, the Saxon and the Romanian is presented as the other person to whom the Gypsy is related. Therefore, when it is stated that the joke is about a *Gypsy* and a *Romanian*, this is analysed by me as *a Romanian citizen/Transylvanian/Romanian + Hungarian + Saxon*.

B. **Romanians and Gypsies may represent the target** because of some mechanism that helps the receiver interpret similarities between the two ethnic groups. In this case, the centre/periphery distinction may get blurred or even vanish. We can interpret such jokes as being told from the perspective of Transylvanians as the centre who target Romanians living in other regions of the country.

Compare the following examples:

- (6) **A Gypsy** is sitting on the bench with **a Romanian** man. The Romanian asks him:

“Hey, you, Gypsy, how did you do when you were begging?”

“Well, when I wanted to ask for 10 euros, I said ten, and, when I was begging for 100, I said ten ten ten ten ten ten...”

(source 6)

- (7) Q: Do you know the difference between **a Romanian** and **a Gypsy**?

A: **Romanians** steal from each other, and **Gypsies** steal from Germany!

(source 7)

Joke (6) shows the opposition existing between the two ethnic categories, stereotypes being attributed only to Gypsies, while joke (7) illustrates a similar disparaging attitude towards Gypsies and Romanians, both categories being filled with *theft* stereotype.

5.2. Via explicit interpretation, but utterance interpretation and cultural frame needed

The presence of the centre may be inferred from (1) *lexical units* or (2) *grammatical information*.

5.2.1. Lexically

Words through which the presence of the central group is implied usually refer to:

A. occupations/professions that may illustrate individual or group representatives of the centre:

- ✓ individuals: the teacher, the policeman, the judge, the landlord, the gardener, the seller, the cashier, the client, the forester, the bartender, the interviewer, the doctor, the dentist and the priest.
- ✓ group: the class, the Police.

In all these cases *concept adjustment* is involved and the meaning is narrowed. In the following example, *Doctor* is interpreted as *Romanian Doctor* via *concept adjustment*.

- (8) *Bulibaşa, at the hospital, with a broken leg:*

Doctor: “We have to put your leg in a plaster cast.”

Bulibaşa: “Use marble. I Pay!”

(source 8)

B. more general lexemes: the lexical meaning of the word used to designate the central group is more general - a man, a human, a father, a child, a neighbour;

(9) *A Gypsy woman at a traffic light, carrying her child around her neck:*

"Give me 10 lei for this little one!"

The man opens the window, gives her 10 lei and wants to leave.

The Gypsy woman knocks at the window again.

The man answers angrily:

"Yes, now what else do you want?"

"Well, what are you doing, aren't you taking him?"

(source 9)

Concept adjustment is at work again, as the meaning of *man* is narrowed and interpreted as *Romanian man*.

C. the use of proper names: in the corpus, there is one joke in which the referent is assigned through a political/historic personality – Antonescu. The interpretation needs contextual support via *cultural frame*: in the 20th century, many Romani were deported by the pro-nazi government led by Ion Antonescu. Authorities considered that Gypsies were dangerous and undesirable. Especially those were deported who had a nomadic way of life (Nicoară 2005).

5.2.2. Grammatically

Grammatical information that makes the receiver infer, through *reference assignment*, the presence of the centre is mainly first and second-person singular or plural verbs and pronouns. For example, we search for a referent to the pronouns found in the following humorous discourse and interpret *I/my* as a *Romanian person*.⁷

(10) *One day, a Gypsy came into **my** house to steal.*

*The good part is that **I** caught him and **I** jiggled him well.*

*The bad part is that **I am** full of lice now.*

(source 10)

⁷ In Romanian, the subject may be included in the verb form. In this case there is no pronoun involved in the process of searching for the referent, but the verb.

To conclude, ethnic jokes reflect in a unique way the relationship existing between the centre and the periphery in Transylvania, or even in Romania. I call these type of jokes *interethnic jokes*.

Taking the corpus construction process as an illustrative socio-cultural trend, allows me to state that, in those jokes in which the Gypsy is presented in relation to another man (e.g. *a bartender, a policeman, a teacher, the class, a seller* etc.), ethnic relationships are reflected. Therefore, the people involved in a given scenario are the representatives of the central group.

The information presented in this section is summarized in Figure 2.

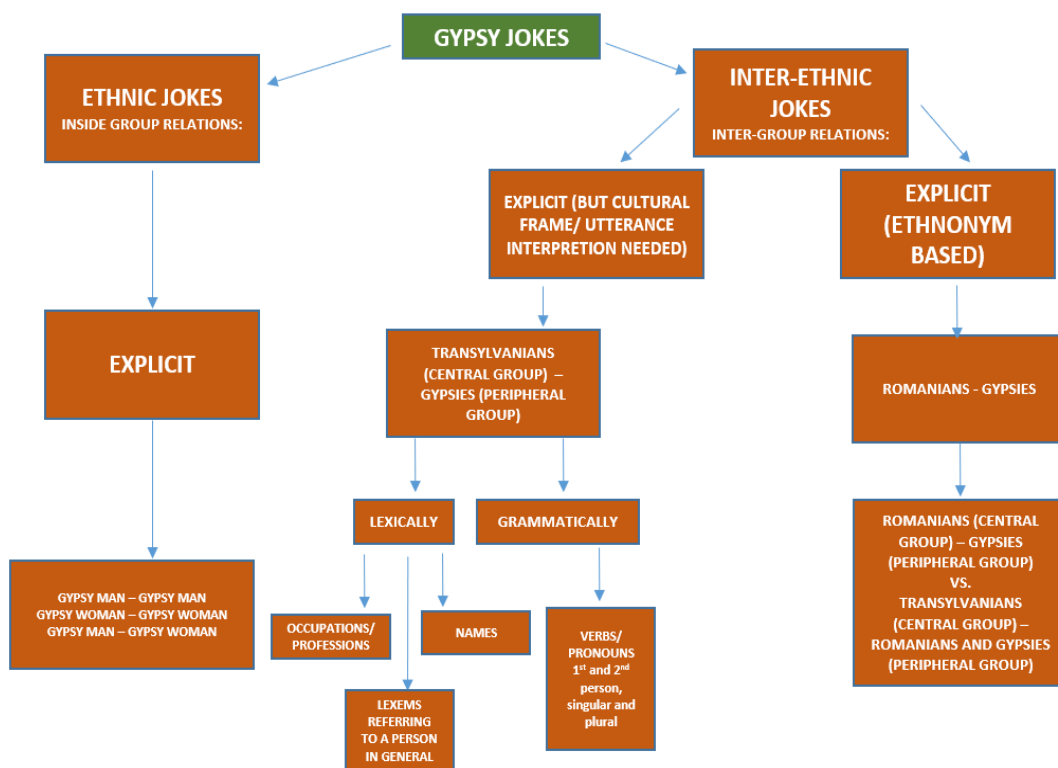


Figure 2. *Gypsy jokes: ethnic vs. interethnic*

6. Conclusions

Davies (1990; 1998; 2011), referring, in particular, to *stupidity* jokes, proposes the *centre-periphery model*. This shows three factors that can determine the choice of a group as the target of joke-telling: 1. geographical factor - a group living in the centre or periphery of a geographical area; 2. linguistic and cultural factor - the peripheral group speaks a strange version of the language of the central group; 3. economic factor - the central group has a higher standard of living compared to the peripheral group. I can state that all the above-mentioned factors may be at work in the case of Romani people.

Davies (1998, 1) argues that the peripheral ethnic group is “a strange version” of the central group. Thus, the peripheral group is not very different from the dominant group, therefore, the sources of humour are hidden in those small differences that exist between the two groups.

Takovski (2015), referring also to the studies of Davies (1982; 1990) and Raskin (1985) respectively, perceives ethnic humour as that manifestation of humour that creates and even maintains boundaries between a central group, that performs the joke, and a peripheral group, that becomes its target. In Transylvania, Romanians (as Romanian citizens, including other minorities) represent the central group. They target the peripheral group, namely *Gypsies*, in ethnic jokes.

The main aim of the paper was to create a distinction between *ethnic jokes* and *interethnic jokes*. Therefore, ethnic jokes are considered the ones in which only the portrayal of the minority is perceived. On the other hand, interethnic jokes illustrate the presence of both – the dominant group and the minority.

Inferring the presence of the central group is a process that requires the interpretation of the explicit meaning of some lexical and grammatical units. This is done through inferential processes, needing the interpretation of the utterances (via concept adjustment and reference assignment) and culture-specific information.

(Inter)ethnic jokes are built on the expectation of mutual awareness of ethnicity-related background information, making up the relevant context that is essential to obtain the humorous effects.

In view of the fact that interethnic jokes embody the presence of the central group, further research on the topic may take into account to analyse what kind of stereotypical information is attached to the portrayal of the dominant group. It is

obvious that, in many humorous discourses, the dominant group also communicates something about itself, not only about the periphery.

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Appendix 1 – Sources

Source 1 - oral collection

Source 2 - <https://fun.regielive.ro/bancuri/tigani/>

Source 3 - adapted: <https://fun.regielive.ro/bancuri/tigani/>

Source 4 - <https://www.portal-info.ro/bancuri/bancuri-cu-tigani.html?p=3>

Source 5 - <https://www.portal-info.ro/bancuri/bancuri-cu-tigani.html?p=3>

Source 6 - https://adevarul.ro/locale/focsani/cele-mai-bune-bancuri-tigani-raspuns-primeste-eminescu-comandat-cazan-arama-1_581467935ab6550cb804be57/index.html

Source 7 - <https://www.portal-info.ro/bancuri/bancuri-cu-tigani.html?p=4>

Source 8 - <https://bancuri365.ro/bancuri-cu-tigani/>

Source 9 - <https://bancuri365.ro/bancuri-cu-tigani/>

Source 10 - oral collection