

Reassessing Latvian Infant Amusement Verses: Texts and Contexts

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This article examines the historical development and terminology of Latvian *infant amusement verses* within an international framework. The author traces the evolution of the genre through preserved materials and offers comparative insights into similar traditions in other European countries. The article then focuses on instances of violence and other controversial motifs that appear in such verses, offering a critical perspective on their reception in both historical and contemporary contexts.

▪ **Keywords:** infant amusement verses, nursery rhymes, violence in folklore, physical punishment, children, Latvia

Članek obravnava zgodovinski razvoj in terminologijo latvijskih *otroških razvedrilnih pesmi* z njihovo umestitvijo v mednarodni kontekst. Avtorica na podlagi ohranjenega gradiva sledi razvoju žanra in ponuja primerjalni vpogled v sorodne tradicije z drugih evropskih območjih, nato pa preuči primere nasilja in druge sporne motive tega žanra ter ponudi kritičen pogled na njihovo recepcijo v zgodovinskem in sodobnem kontekstu.

▪ **Ključne besede:** otroške razvedrilne pesmi, uspavanke, nasilje v folklori, fizična kazen, otroci, Latvija

Introduction

Just about every Latvian child likely has heard or used verses beginning with the words *Vāru, vāru putriņu ...* “I boil, I boil porridge...”, *Cepu, cepu kukulīti ...* “I bake, I bake loaves...”, or *Tā jāj kungi, tā jāj kungi ...* “So ride gentlemen, so ride gentlemen...”. Infant amusement verses are short, rhythmical texts that are sung or recited by adults. They are accompanied by movements: playing with the child’s fingers, hands, and feet; tickling and stroking; and dandling or swaying the child on the adult’s knees or feet. In addition to parents, grandparents, or other adult relatives, sometimes the verses are performed by other children in the family for and together with their younger siblings.

Infant amusement verses have existed for centuries, and they are still passed on in oral tradition. Catalina Millán Scheiding, a scholar of children’s literature, points out that English nursery rhymes in general are still popular because of their link to oral tradition and their specific textual structure, which is different from written texts and makes them easy to remember. They are designed to be memorable and engaging, and they include rhythm, musicality, movement, formulaic elements, and repetition (Millán Scheiding, 2019: 37). Rhymes and actions are inextricably connected in infant amusement verses as a genre of folklore. Based on the movements employed, Latvian infant amusement

verses can be divided into four groups: 1) dandling rhymes; 2) texts accompanied by actions with the fingers and hands (finger games); 3) texts accompanied by actions with the child's feet; and 4) texts accompanied by stroking or tickling the child.

Considering the international context – both historical and geographical – this article examines Latvian infant amusement verses. Although such verses can be found in the folklore of nearly every nation, their terminology, classification, and research traditions differ significantly from country to country. The first part of the article is structured geographically and provides a comparative analysis of English, German, Lithuanian, and Russian folklore traditions. The second part focuses on instances of violence found in Latvian infant amusement verses, including content that is difficult for young children to comprehend or is considered inappropriate in today's context – as well as depictions of physical punishment. To analyze the infant amusement verses, the article uses previously collected and systematized texts, including materials from the Archives of Latvian Folklore, other previously published texts, and recently recorded texts inherited from oral tradition. For analysis of these texts, the article employs a historical-comparative and geographical-comparative approach, supported by fieldwork, qualitative interviews, analysis of published sources, and examination of unpublished folklore material. The article also explores the dynamics of use and shifting popularity of these verses over time, which is closely linked to changing social attitudes and values influenced by historical and social developments.

A brief overview of the history of infant amusement verses: Collection, classification, terminology, and publications

The term 'infant amusement verses'¹ (*ucināmās dziesmas*) is new in Latvian folklore studies. It was introduced by the author of this article when writing her dissertation *Šūpuļdziesmas un ucināmās dziesmas latviešu bērnu folklorā* (Lullabies and Infant Amusement Verses in Latvian Children's Folklore).² Infant amusement verses were

¹ There is no tradition in translating the term *ucināmās dziesmas* from Latvian to English; the closest corresponding term, 'infant amusement verses', is borrowed from the English nursery rhyme researchers Iona and Peter Opie (Opie, Opie, 1997: 16).

² This doctoral dissertation (Smilgaine, 2008) is the first comprehensive study in Latvian folklore studies dedicated to traditional folklore genres addressed to children: lullabies and infant amusement verses. The research investigates the origins, functions, distribution, and textual variety of these genres while also examining their role within the broader dynamics between adult and children's cultural spheres. A central contribution of the dissertation is the conceptualization and theoretical definition of infant amusement verses as an independent folklore genre, with particular emphasis on their syncretic character: the inseparable interplay of language, movement, and touch. The study draws on an extensive corpus of materials, including major publications of Latvian children's folklore and archival sources from the Archives of Latvian Folklore. To explore the contemporary use and significance of these genres, the author conducted fieldwork between 2003 and 2007, collecting oral testimonies through qualitative interviews with more than thirty respondents from various regions of Latvia exploring the use and function of these songs in everyday family practices.

classified as folk songs (Smilgaine, 2008: 17–18) and were not regarded as a unified group in Latvian children's folklore before, unlike in folklore studies in neighboring Lithuania.³ The genre does not have a common name in the Latvian vernacular tradition. Researchers of Latvian children's folklore usually classified infant amusement verses as folk songs (Greble, 1950; Vītolīņš, 1971), not taking into account their connection with movements, which links them with games. Unlike games played among children, these verses are mainly initiated and led by adults. The verses were not differentiated from other texts in the largest of the publications of Latvian children's songs, the sixth volume of *Latviešu tautasdziesmas* (Latvian Folk Songs, LTdz VI). The texts there are scattered among other folk songs and lack movement descriptions, making it difficult to identify the infant amusement verses among others.

In the English-speaking world, the term 'nursery rhyme' is widely known. It was consolidated in the second decade of the 19th century and is applicable to a broad range of texts intended for children. Nursery rhymes are short verses or songs that are recited or sung for children or otherwise performed by children themselves. The term is a general descriptor for a variety of verse forms that have come to be associated with children over time, especially with young children. The tradition of English children's verses or nursery rhymes is a long one, but new verses have steadily entered the stream. Many popular texts are centuries old and emerged as part of an ancient oral tradition, and others have appeared as part of the written text tradition, although the author cannot always be determined. However, the authors of some texts are known: one notable example is the song 'Mary Had a Little Lamb' (1830) by Sarah Josepha Hale. The song is regarded as one of the best-known four-line verses in the English language (Opie, Opie, 1997: 359). This is also why nursery rhymes are reasonably linked to the very beginning of children's literature in the English-speaking world. In contrast, in Latvian folklore studies children's folklore is strictly separated from the beginnings of literature. One of the oldest such English texts is believed to be 'Thirty Days Hath September'. A similar poem that enumerates days of the month has been identified in the 13th century in French. This is rather an exception because more often children's verses in English date from the 16th and 17th centuries, and they were composed in the greatest profusion in the 18th century (*Encyclopædia Britannica*). Only a small fraction of verses was created specifically for children: for example, lullabies, finger games, or rhyming alphabets. Most of the verses and songs – ballads, folk songs, martial songs, street vendor cries, riddles, proverbs, religious verses, and poems featuring historical

³ *Žaidinimai* (the Lithuanian term for infant amusement verses) is a folklore genre consisting of small syncretic verses. They are created and performed by adults and have a calming function. They differ from games in that children do not play with each other, but an adult plays with a child. The plots depicted in the games are dynamic, characterized by a playful style and the personification of animals through the use of many exclamatory words, repetitions of words, questions, and answers. Unlike lullabies, the lyrics of the playful songs are more varied and flexible, often imitating riding, baking cakes, walking, and so on with movements (*Visuotinė lietuvių enciklopedija*).

figures – were originally mainly intended as entertainment for adults. They came into being at a time when both grownups and children participated in the common oral tradition because children were regarded as small adults until the 17th century (Opie, Opie, 1997: 4–5).

The very first collection of children’s verse in England was published under the title *Tommy Thumb’s Pretty Song Book* in 1744. It was the first book to be published expressly for children (Opie, Opie, 1997: 29), and it was also the first folklore publication for children. The most comprehensive publication with scholarly annotations and a study on the origins and the history of nursery rhymes can be regarded to be *The Oxford Nursery Rhyme Book*, first published in 1955 and later revised and published again in 1997 (ibid.). The book was aimed at a wide readership encompassing scholars as well as parents and children. The authors, Iona and Peter Opie, researched children’s folklore and collected some five hundred popular and less well-known verses. In the introduction to the book, the authors describe the classification of children’s verses. One of the categories, ‘infant amusements’,⁴ includes texts that resemble Latvian infant amusement texts: verses designed for playing with children’s facial features, fingers, and toes as well as dandling songs. This term in *The Oxford Nursery Rhyme Book*, however, encompasses something wider and includes a variety of other verses that are accompanied by actions, as in the following example: “Handy-dandy riddledy ro, / Which will you have, high or low?” While declaiming this, the reciter juggles a small item, which finally comes to rest in one fist, and the spectator is invited to guess which hand is holding the item (ibid.: 232). Although there are texts in English similar to Latvian infant amusement verses, they are nonetheless grouped differently. The guiding principle for selection here is the purpose of the text: to entertain the child.

In German-speaking cultures, infant amusement verses are also viewed together with other children’s songs and verses known as *Kinderreime*. In terms of content, they are a parallel to English nursery rhymes. These children’s verses incorporate a wide range of texts from a variety of sources, including both texts originally intended for children (e.g. lullabies, finger games, dandling songs, and riddles) and verses and songs for adults (e.g. drinking songs; student, soldier, and theatre songs; popular *schlager* songs; parodies; and advertising slogans appropriated by children over the time).

The first anthology of German children’s verses was published as an appendix to the third volume of the major folk song compendium *Des Knaben Wunderhorn* (The Boy’s Magic Horn) between 1806 and 1808. This was accomplished by Achim von Arnim and Clemens Brentano, who completed the compendium a few years before the famous collection of fairy tales *Kinder- und Hausmärchen* (Children’s and Household Tales, 1812–1815) by the Brothers Grimm. The entire 19th century continued to be an

⁴ They are also called “children’s amusements” (Gregor, 1886), but Iona and Peter Opie introduced this category of texts as “infant amusements” (Opie, Opie, 1997: 16).

intensive time of gathering and researching folklore. The anthology *Deutsches Kinderlied und Kinderspiel* (German Children's Songs and Children's Games) by Franz Magnus Böhme in 1897 is the culmination of research in the realm of children's folklore. The book contains materials collected by local history researchers and folklore enthusiasts from various regions in Germany. This publication still continues to be of importance because it presents meticulously researched studies on the origins and dialect variations of children's verses (Gabrisch, 1970: 337–338).

Although infant amusement verses are part of the traditional culture of almost every nation, researchers have seldomly classified this as a separate genre of folklore. This is the case in the United Kingdom and Germany. In Lithuanian folklore studies, the model of children's folklore classification and terminology is similar to Latvia's. The extensive study of children's folklore *Lietuvių liaudies vaikų dainos* (Lithuanian Children's Folk Songs) was published in Lithuania in 1970 by Pranė Jokimaitienė (1922–1989), a researcher of children's folklore. She classified children's songs according to their theme, function, age bracket, authorship, and particular features of the genre. Jokimaitienė separated all children's songs into two groups: texts that were devised for children by adults and texts created by children themselves. Alongside lullabies, cumulative songs, and songs about animals, the first group includes Lithuanian infant amusement verses, or *žaidinimai*. Ten years after the publication of *Lietuvių liaudies vaikų dainos* in 1980, a scholarly edition of children's songs was published in Lithuania, comprising volume one of the collected *Lietuvių liaudies dainynas* (Lithuanian Folk Songs; Jokimaitienė, 1980). The compilation makes practical use of Jokimaitienė's classification system. There is a description of the division of infant amusement verses in the foreword, and it slightly differs from the Latvian version: 1) infant amusement verses accompanied by actions with fingers and hands; 2) rhymes accompanied by rocking and caressing (*mylavimai, sūpavimai*); 3) dandling songs (*kykojimai*); and 4) songs for pacifying and jokes (*maldymai, juokinimai*). The author highlights the pedagogical value of infant amusement verses and proposes that the key aim of this genre is to develop children's physical and mental abilities based on their needs. The texts are performed by adults either by singing, declaiming, or reciting expressively. Some kind of activity is always described, and it often expands into a short adventure story. Compared to lullabies, the activities accompanying infant amusement verses are more varied and they usually illustrate the text, although there is also amusement without corresponding movements (Jokimaitienė, 1980: 22–23).

Similar to Lithuanian folklore, in Russian folklore too there is an equivalent term, *poteshki* (Russian for 'infant amusement verses'). This term was not coined by researchers but is widely used by the general public. The term *poteshki* refers to texts spoken by adults when playing with children's fingers, hands, or any other body part. The aim is to distract, amuse, and also introduce the child to the surrounding world. These texts are inextricably associated with movements (Kapica, 1928: 54).

Evolution of the genre in Latvia

In Latvia, the active time of collecting children's folklore was the 1920s under the leadership of the founder of the Archives of Latvian Folklore (*Latviešu folkloras krātuve*), Anna Bērzkalne (1891-1956) (Vīksna, 1990: 66–68). However, research was not carried out until the middle of the 20th century, when the folklore scholar Vilma Greble (1906-1991) turned her interest toward children's folklore. She was the first to develop a comprehensive system of classification based on grouping folklore material according to children's age and their level of psychological and physical development. Lullabies are the verses mostly applicable to children in the first period of the development, that of infancy. The next period, which Greble labeled preschool age, includes both texts performed by adults for children (e.g. folk songs about cooking porridge and baking bread as well as dandling songs) and folklore performed by children themselves. When they reach age one, songs about their own care and maintenance become relevant to children, whereas at age four or five so-called instructive songs (*mācības dziesmas*) predominate. These are songs about animals and birds, as well as songs that replicate the language of animals and the variety of sounds they make. According to Greble, counting-out rhymes, singing games, naming the days of the week, and ways of telling time are also relevant to this age group. The third period of children's development is school age, characterized by riddles, exercises in mental aptitude, secret languages, secret writing, autograph album inscription verses, schoolchildren's songs, and parodies (Greble, 1950: 104–105). Thanks to Greble's research, *Latviešu bērnu folklorā* (Latvian Children's Folklore; Greble, 1973) was published in 1973 and intended for a wide audience, including children. The book contains folk songs, including infant amusement verses. Texts from other genres of folklore (i.e., stories, anecdotes, myths, proverbs, counting-out rhymes, riddles, games, and singing games) were also published in the book. It was very popular with children, parents, and teachers alike.

Because there was a long-standing community of Baltic Germans, German folklore was also collected in Latvian territory. The Archives of Latvian Folklore hold 3,370 items, which were gathered by the Herder Institute of Riga.⁵ The institute was active from 1921 until 1939, and under its aegis German-speaking students collected German folklore in several places, mainly in Riga, Liepāja, and Cēsis. When the Herder Institute was closed in 1939, the collection was handed over to the Archives of Latvian Folklore. The materials are rich in various genres, including children's songs and counting-out rhymes bearing witness to mutual influences between Latvian and German. There are texts considered traditional for Latvians or Germans as well as borrowed phrases from neighboring cultures that were translated or taken over in the original language

⁵ This collection is catalogued under number [1825] in the Archives of Latvian Folklore, and it is accessible in the digital archive at www.garamantas.lv.

and were popular among children. There are also texts combining and merging both languages into an almost untranslatable “children’s language”, such as, for example: *Kin kinnī, / Minu minnī, / Nāšu pīpī, / Au bānīts, / Bubu mānīt, / Tipu bānīt* (LFK 23, 13691). While reciting this verse, a human face is described; the reciter touches the relevant part of the face, giving its name in the “children’s language”. Usually, the verse begins with the lower part of the face (chin) and ends with the hair or forehead. There are not many similar examples in the Archives of Latvian Folklore, though there are significantly more in German folklore, which the texts presumably derived from, including the following example: *Kinnewippchen, / Rotlippchen, / Nuppelnäschen, / Augenbräunchen, / Zupp-Zupp-Härichen* (Kühn, 1905: 28).

Unlike English and German verses, in Latvian folklore studies there is an attempt to keep folklore texts apart from rhymes with known authorship. Moreover, texts intended for young children are kept strictly apart from those deemed unsuitable for their age for various reasons, though it is often challenging. Children’s folklore can be divided into two layers based on the actor: folklore for children and children’s folklore (e.g. counting-out rhymes). The two layers interact with each other, and the boundary is not always easy to define. According to the materials gathered in the Archives of Latvian Folklore, it is apparent that the same texts are used for the entertainment of young children and among peers at a later age.⁶ Lullabies and infant amusement verses are generally considered to be folklore for children performed by adults. Some texts that originated among adults have gradually migrated into children’s culture, and they are considered to belong to children’s folklore. Latvian folklore is not unique in this respect. The Czech researcher Jana Pospíšilová describes the same phenomenon, pointing out that some Czech children’s games such as the ‘Christmas Shepherd Game’ and the ‘Three Kings Game’ were once part of the ancient ceremonial culture of adults (Pospíšilová, 2008: 15).

The largest collection of infant amusement verses in Latvia is held by the Archives of Latvian Folklore (*Latviešu folkloras krātuve*, LFK). Part of the collection has been published in three scholarly publications: texts in volume one of the collected *Latvju dainas*⁷ (Latvian Dainas, LD I) in 1894, texts in volume six of the collected *Latviešu*

⁶ Example:

Knībā, knābā sūrais vanags

Apēd saldo vīstī,

Aizskrien mežā – špur! (LFK Bdž 116, 7)

There are dozens of variations of this text. When playing, the children form a circle, take hold of their neighbor’s skin on the top of the hand with two fingers (like a hawk grabbing a chicken), and let go at the last word (LFK 28, 6). However, when playing with small children, their hands are clapped in rhythm, and at the last word both palms are shaken, and then the child laughs (LFK 1476, 98).

⁷ Krišjānis Barons (1835-1923) was a Latvian folklore scholar, writer, and journalist, widely regarded as the “father of the dainas” (*dainu tēvs*) for his monumental work in collecting and systematizing Latvian folk songs. His most significant contribution is the compilation *Latvju dainas*, a six-volume collection published between 1894 and 1915, encompassing over 217,000 folk song texts.

tautasdziesmas (Latvian Folk Songs, LTdz IV) in 1993, and texts with musical notation in the collection *Bērnu dziesmu cikls; Bēru dziesmas* (Children's Song Cycle; Funeral Songs) compiled by Jēkabs Vītoliņš in 1971 (Vītoliņš, 1971). Nonetheless, these publications contain only a fraction of the infant amusement verse materials held by the Archives of Latvian Folklore. One of the primary reasons for this is the specific character of the genre: that is, they manifest features typical for both folk songs and singing games.

In the publications so far, priority has been given to the form and the content of texts, whereas the aspect of accompanying movement has hardly ever been noted. The infant amusement verses included in the collections tend to resemble classic folk songs in their form,⁸ such as: *Vāru, vāru, putru, / Pieci milti katlā. / Ko došu kalpam, / Ko kalpa bērniem?* "I boil, I boil porridge, / Five flours in the pot. / What shall I give to the servant, / And to the servant's children?" (LD 2965). Texts that are different in terms of their rhythm or expression are excluded from the publications. These include finger counting games or verses intended for tickling a child, such as: *Kaza nāk ar lieliem ragiem, / Grib to bērnu nobadīt – / Buku, buku, buks!* "Here comes the goat with big horns / It wants to butt the child / Buku, buku, buks!" (LFK 809, 806). The playful interaction between adult and child, however, is an integral constituent part of this genre; often the actions illustrate the text or otherwise the text evolves from the movements performed. Thus infant amusement verses often diverge from the traditional rhythm and number of lines in the folk songs, leaving more space for improvisation, mimicking sounds, and repetition. The materials in the archives also contain comments made by the informants or those recording the texts and melodies, including brief biographical notes, information about the actions to be executed, or the conditions and the purpose for verses to be performed. However, these comments have not been published.⁹

⁸ Classic folk songs or *dainas* are individually composed four-line verses or longer songs that are widespread throughout society and have been handed down from generation to generation. They have a traditional form and content that reflects the lifestyle and world view of the Latvian peasant farmer (Krogzeme-Mosgorda, 2020).

⁹ To document this valuable cultural heritage and make it accessible to the general public, the author of this article is currently working on a book about Latvian infant amusement verses. It will incorporate all the materials pertaining to the genre, both published and unpublished; it will also include infant amusement verses with musical notation. The arrangement and presentation of lyrics is based on the principles of the edition of *Latviešu tautasdziesmas* (Latvian Folk Songs), with the core material supplemented with explanations by contributors and those that recorded the materials. It is currently estimated that almost four thousand texts will be analyzed. More than half of them are texts for actions with a child's hands and fingers (2,089), and the second most prolific are dandling songs (1,811). The remaining texts – infant amusement verses accompanied by playing with a child's feet and legs (fifty-eight) and verses for stroking or tickling a child (thirty-three) – are far fewer. The manuscript contains Latvian folklore materials belonging to this genre collected from the end of the 19th century to the present.

The depiction of violence and questionable themes in Latvian infant amusement verses

Perception of the development and age-specific needs of children and the overall awareness and understanding of violence have gradually changed in Latvian society during the past thirty years – that is, after the restoration of independence in the 1990s. Violence has especially come into focus lately given the uncertainty and vulnerability of the international political context and the war in Ukraine. It is apparent that adults – young parents and grandparents – have become more attentive to traditional cultural heritage in its aspect of representing violence. Thus, folklore texts that parents feel might have a negative impact on young children (e.g. frightening them, encouraging physical violence, or breaching some social norms) are also being reviewed. The folklore materials collected and already published in various sources make possible a holistic view of infant amusement verses and their evaluation in a new context. However, so far the topic of violence has not been addressed by Latvian children’s folklore researchers.

Violence has been highlighted in a number of studies by North American folklore scholars in the last decades of the past century, focusing on children’s playground rhymes or schoolyard songs (Gainer, 1980; Newall, 1994; McCabe, 1998; Sherman, 1999). This is a tradition that exists separately from adult culture and independently of the official school culture and the relationship between adults and children (Newall, 1994). Songs and verses spread among children across geographical locations and across generations almost exclusively by word of mouth. The texts refer to current politics and popular culture, mutating and constantly changing to provide opportunities to play with language and taboo subjects (McCabe, 1998: 72). The texts break cultural taboos and include topics such as sex, racial hatred, banned substances, and various forms of discrimination.¹⁰ Due to the strict separation between children’s and adults’ worlds in the use of certain songs and verses, adults are often unaware and even shocked when they first encounter an oral tradition that children use within their community. Some of these songs violate important taboos concerning children’s speech and violent language toward adults in particular (Newall, 1994: 109). Children themselves often perceive the violence mentioned in the verses not as cruelty but rather as humor (Gainer, 1980: 48), and the songs serve as “an informal safety valve for children’s resentment” (Knapp, Knapp, 1976: 161).

This article focuses on folklore dedicated to young children whose practitioners are mainly adults. Infant amusement verses in oral culture function differently compared to the folklore used by children among themselves at a later age, and therefore the texts should be examined from a different perspective in both cases. Different inheritance

¹⁰ For example, on banned substances: “Marijuana, Marijuana, LSD, LSD. / Scientists make it, teachers take it. / Why can’t we? Why can’t we?” (McCabe, 1998: 71).

mechanisms are at work here. For example, when a baby joins the family, the parents use the verses they heard in their childhood or they learn them from other adults involved in the child's care.¹¹ Assessment and the subsequent choice of verses and songs for their child is mainly up to the adults. The choice depends on their understanding of what is appropriate and necessary for their children. Some verses are discarded over time. The mood of society is also somewhat monitored by the publishers because they try to avoid controversial folklore material in publications for child audiences.

Physical violence

*Sitam, kaujam mazos ežus,
Metam podā, vārījam:
Tēvam gaļiņa, mātei kauliņi,
Bērniem zupa bļodiņā.*
(LFK Bdž 3560, 6)

Let's hit and kill the little hedgehogs,
And throw them in the pot and boil:
Meat for the father, dice for the mother,
Soup in a bowl for the children.¹²
(LFK Bdž 3560, 6)

Variations of the verse in the example above were popular during the 1920s and 1930s throughout Latvia according to the materials held by the Archives of Latvian Folklore. The archives contain around 190 similar texts, mostly recorded by school-children during lessons under the guidance of a teacher. This confirms that they were widely used at the time and were not judged disapprovingly. During the Soviet Latvia (1941–1991), this group of texts was interpreted as “a humorous song about ‘cooking’ small hedgehogs . . . and other animals for a feast” by the folklore researcher Vilma Greble (1950: 114); no deeper analysis followed the statement because the verses were not considered noteworthy.

The author's personal experience in 2005 when compiling a selection of infant amusement verses for the education of parents and practical use (Smilgaine, 2005) served as a testimony to the fact that these texts have become problematic. Initially it was planned to include the verse about the hedgehogs in the compilation, but it was omitted at the request of the publishing house. The publisher was concerned about a negative reaction from potential clients (parents of young children). This situation reflects a general shift in public sentiment because a formerly funny episode of beating and eating small animals in a children's verse as experienced in the first half of the 20th century can become problematic and no longer perceived as a joke.

¹¹ In 2006, during field research for the author's dissertation, while collecting lullabies and *ucināmā* songs in various places in Latvia, the informant also talked about where and from whom they had learned them. The mother of six-month-old Laima describes how she acquired the verse recited while manipulating the baby's feet: “We had this [verse] when we were with Emil [the eldest son], we went for massages, and then he would recite the verse, and then I learned it. And now Lima and I are doing the exercises now, and then we recite the verse” (LFK 2129, 265).

¹² All quoted texts have been translated by the author of this article.

Alongside texts considered inappropriate for young children, physical violence is also extensively depicted in infant amusement verses. This is demonstrated by motifs of spanking children as well as beating and killing animals. There are also a wide range of instruments used for corporal punishment that appear in the verses; for example, a log or a whip, but most frequently mentioned are twigs:

<i>Cep, cep kukul,</i>	I bake, I bake a loaf,
<i>Nesīs pāde,</i>	I'll bring it to my godmother,
<i>Izcep gārd,</i>	Comes out tasty,
<i>Apēd pats,</i>	Eat it myself,
<i>Aiznes pāde</i>	Take to my godmother
<i>Garozīņ vien.</i>	The crust alone.
<i>Pād man izkūl</i>	My godmother beats me
<i>Ar bērz žagar,</i>	With birch twigs,
<i>Pārtecēj mājās</i>	I come home
<i>Raudādams.</i> (LFK Bdž 1959, 4)	Weeping. (LFK Bdž 1959, 4)

The corporal punishment of a child with twigs is often mentioned, and this indicates that this was a widespread and accepted method of upbringing. Spanking and twigs appear as a means of discipline and punishment for various breaches – including, for example, gluttony, laziness, and theft. This was also used as a deterrent to ensure the child's obedience and good behavior; for example:

<i>Op, op, zirdziņ,</i>	Hop, hop, little horse,
<i>Lec par grāvīti</i>	Leap over the ditch
<i>Puisīšam pēc žagariem!</i>	To fetch some twigs for the boy!
(LFK Bdž 2495, 3)	(LFK Bdž 2495, 3)

This example does not state the exact reason for the twigs to be fetched. It does seem to indicate that twigs are an integral part of everyday life with children. The range of tools used for punishment is not limited to twigs because the verses also mention being smacked with a ladle, a wooden spoon, or a club. Mostly this kind of beating is performed if the child refuses to eat the food that has been prepared, but it could also be used simply for preventive reasons. Acceptance of child spanking appears in the beliefs genre. It describes how exactly and with what means it is better to spank children so that they grow up obedient and decent. One belief states that a close and loving relationship between parents and children cannot be established without any spanking. For example: “A child who is spanked a lot by his mother will grow up to love his mother” (LTT 3089). Infant amusement verses about twigs and spanking are no longer recorded nowadays, which likely means that they are also no longer used.

Child spanking is not the only physical violence in infant amusement verses. Tools for beating animals are also mentioned. The texts provide numerous examples of colloquial terms for a whip – *džindžala*, *dandaks*, *daudara*, *dandara*, or *dandas* – traditionally used for controlling horses:

<i>Jājam, jājam Pēter' tirgū,</i>	Riding, riding to Peter's market,
<i>Džindžala palika mājās;</i>	Left a whip at home;
<i>Kamēr jājam džindžalai pakaļ,</i>	While we're riding to get the whip,
<i>Tikmēr tirgus nobeidzās.</i> (LFK Bdž 1347, 8)	The market ended. (LFK Bdž 1347, 8)

Extreme violence as killing is also mentioned in infant amusement verses. Most often the topic is animal slaughter, such as the killing and cooking of hedgehogs mentioned¹³ earlier in this article. Such texts are likely to highlight the consumption of animals normally not used for food, which deliberately creates an exaggerated and comic effect. The educational psychology researcher Tija Zīriņa discusses this understanding of the text. Describing the importance of finger play in infancy, she mentions the example of eating hedgehogs: “Latvian children’s folklore is rich in various jokes. It helps to attract children’s attention to finger play. See, for example, this folk song about eating hedgehogs” (Zīriņa, 2009: 60). Fun, joy, and humor are very important in infant amusement verses because one of the functions of the genre is to attract or distract a child’s attention – for example when a child is impatient to eat – and it can be solved with fun and dynamic content. Nevertheless, the verse about hitting hedgehogs is not in use today. A formerly marginal version of the text with swatting flies and cooking them instead of hedgehogs has gained popularity today:

<i>Sitam, sitam plaukstiņas, kaunam mušiņas,</i>	Let's clap the hands and kill the flies
<i>Metam podā, vārījam;</i>	And throw them in the pot and boil:
<i>Tēvam gaļa, mātei gaļa,</i>	Meat for the father, dice for the mother,
<i>Bērniem zupa podiņā!</i> ¹⁴	Soup in a bowl for the children.

For the past ten years, the verse has been widely popular; it is taught in nurseries and preschools – and is also used for children’s dances.¹⁵ Apparently, there is no social objection to the story about swatting and cooking flies; it is seen as a joke about cooking inedible insects. Thus, a formerly dominant version of the verse has been discarded in favor of a milder version of the same text, which is in line with the contemporary

¹³ See the example “Sitam, kaujam” above.

¹⁴ For an example of an internet portal dedicated to young parents on which some infant amusement verses are published, see www.maminuklubs.lv.

¹⁵ For an example of the integration of the text into a wide potpourri of songs used by a children’s dance group, see <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=K9rdOny3ydY>.

understanding of content appropriate for children. Whether or not to use it is up to the adults; they are free to choose to teach the verse or not in families and preschool settings.

Some verses end with a beheading or cutting a person's throat, but it is not specified who has been killed:

<i>Vāru, vāru putriņu,</i>	I boil, I boil porridge,
<i>Trīs milti katliņā;</i>	Three flours in a pot;
<i>Tam došu, tam došu,</i>	Some to that one, some to that one,
<i>Tam pietrūka krējumiņa,</i>	Not enough cream for that one,
<i>Šņirkst, kakliņš nost!</i>	Slash, off at the neck!
<i>Čir, čir, čir, asintiņi aliņā!</i>	Drip, drip, drip blood into the cave! ¹⁶
(LFK 1177, 20297)	(LFK 1177, 20297)

The action descriptions for this type of text say that the index finger is stirred into the hollow of the child's hand as if porridge were boiled, and then the fingers are counted. Usually the little finger is placed on the palm or pulled, and at this movement it is said *Knaukšķ, kakliņš nost!* "Knock the neck off!" (LFK Bdž 1957, 4) or *Šim galva nost – čiks!* "This one's head off – čiks!" (LFK Bdž 2203, 5), as if imitating the slaughter of an animal. The ending of this text may seem unacceptable for contemporary society, especially if it is performed for a small child. It should be considered, however, that the breeding and butchering of domestic animals in households was common and widespread in Latvia as late as the 1990s. It was even more prevalent in the 1920s, when many of the infant amusement verses were recorded. When the throat-cutting episode is viewed in this context, it may no longer seem so extraordinary, although it is highly unlikely that the verse is still in active use.

Use of substances

The purchase and consumption of alcoholic beverages and tobacco, theft, marital relations, and erotic innuendo are some of the activities considered inappropriate or even criminal nowadays because young children are not ready for that kind of content according to their parents or the general public. Substances such as alcohol and tobacco frequently occur in infant amusement verses. Although not expressly emphasized, the purchase and consumption such substances are not hidden either. Alcohol and tobacco in the verses are symbolic of the masculine world. Tobacco in particular is often mentioned in the verse types featuring travel or riding to a manor, a market, or town.

¹⁶ In infant amusement verses, a common model involves illustrating the content of the text through accompanying movements. However, in this particular case, the process is reversed — the final line of the verse emerges from the movement itself. As in many similar texts, this one concludes with the tickling of the child's armpit, which is symbolically represented as a cave — even though, in terms of content, this final line is not thematically connected to the rest of the text.

*Dop, dop Rīgā,
Pārdop mājā;
Pārved tēvam tabaciņ,
Vecam tēvam pīpgalviņ,
Mātei cukur gubaliņ!
(LFK Bdz 3794, 5)*

Clip clop to Riga,
Clap home again;
Bring tobacco to father,
A pipe bowl to grandpa,
For mother a lump of sugar!
(LFK Bdz 3794, 5)

The “I” in the verses is the child who goes to town with the aim of buying tobacco, which in some verse variants is brought home as a present for those that stayed or is consumed by the child himself or herself. Mostly it is stated that tobacco is for smoking, but in one particular text there are three different uses mentioned: for smoking, as snuff, and for chewing: *Tēvam pīpot, mātei šņaukāt, / Vecam tēvam aiz lūpas bāzt* “For father to smoke, for mother as snuff, / For grandpa to shove behind his lip” (LFK Bdz 1737, 3).

The most frequent alcoholic beverage encountered in infant amusement verses is beer, with occasional instances of wine and homemade spirit. Beer is mentioned as a drink for celebrations and festivities, including in verses such as *Brauksim brāļos, / Saldu alu dzersim* “Let’s go visit brothers, / Sweet beer we will drink” (LFK Bdz 724, 24) and in text variants on cooking porridge, where beer takes the place of porridge:

*Te pelīte brūvēja
Saldu saldu alutiņu.
Tam deva, tam deva,
Tam deva, tam deva,
Tam nenieka neiedeva –
Aiztek mājā raudādams – vidžu, vidžu vurr!
(LFK Bdz 106, 4)*

Here a mouse brewed
Sweet, sweet beer.
Some to that one, some to that one,
Some to that one, some to that one,
Gives nothing to that one:
Runs home crying – *vidžu, vidžu, vurr!*
(LFK Bdz 106, 4)

Similar verses about cooking porridge are common elsewhere in Europe; for example, there is a finger game popular in Poland, in which the main character, a magpie, is described by the researcher Barbara Żebrowska-Mazur. In her analysis of the text *Tu srocčka kaszkę warzyła ...* “Here the little magpie cooked porridge ...”, which depicts cooking and sharing porridge, the author provides an ethnolinguistic analysis of variants of this text (Żebrowska-Mazur, 2024). She concludes that the finger game has a pan-Slavic character; it is known not only in Poland, but also in Slovakia, the Czech Republic, and Ukraine, and possibly in the wider Slavic region. Just as in Latvian folklore, the Polish versions of the text also include brewing beer alongside boiling porridge,¹⁷ and this is recited to young children nowadays.

¹⁷ An example in Polish:
*Tu srocčka piwko warzyła,
ogonek sobie sparzyła,*

Here the magpie was brewing beer,
She burned her tail,

Mentioning beer is not avoided in other Latvian children's songs and verses. A children's song about a ferret that brews beer enjoys popularity in Latvia.¹⁸ It is included in the repertoire of many children's song and dance groups, and it is also used as teaching material when learning Latvian.¹⁹ The song speaks about a small amount of raw materials yielding a lot of beer that it is also unusually strong. In similar mythical folk songs, it is mentioned that the magical beer is made by various birds and beasts as well as divine beings. It is likely that this is not ordinary beer, but that the children's verses instead preserve an ancient view of beer as a magical drink (Kursīte, 1999: 229–231). Parents and children use these texts nowadays with no attention to the fact that they speak about an alcoholic drink. Apparently, mentioning alcohol in verses for children does not cause as much sensitivity in Latvian society as spanking, given that the use of these verses has not been eradicated and is still accepted. The Latvian Academy of Culture conducted a survey on people's perception of cultural heritage in 2019. The survey reveals that brewing beer along with other craft practices is considered a characteristic example of intangible cultural heritage in Latvia. Beer is seen by respondents as one of the traditional beverages that they would like to be included in the list of intangible cultural heritage (Treimane, 2019: 116). This principle is also reflected in the use of folklore texts; that is, beer in folklore texts is not perceived by teachers and parents as inappropriate for children. Along with other national food and drinks, beer is experienced as part of Latvian traditional cultural values.

When speaking of going to the pub, the consumption of alcohol in Latvian infant amusement verses is mentioned indirectly in subtle way, as in the following example:

*Krip, krap kājiņas,
Kājiņas krogā gāj';
Lintur, lentur mājā,
Mājā nāk.* (LFK Bdž 3649, 2)

Tip, tap little feet,
Little feet off to the pub;
Wibble, wobble home again,
Going back home. (LFK Bdž 3649, 2)

*temu dala troszczkę,
temu dala miseczkę,
temu dala garnuszek,
temu dala dzbanuszek,
a temu nic nie dala,
tylko ogonkiem pomachała
i fur poleciała*

She gave this one a little,
She gave this one a bowl,
She gave this one a pot,
She gave this one a jug,
And she didn't give this one anything,
She just flicked her tail
And flew away

(from Rogi in the district of Miejsce Piastowe; Żebrowska-Mazur, 2023: 285).

¹⁸ Example:

*Aiz kalniņa dūmi kūp, –
Kas tos dūmus kūpināja?
Seskis dara alutiņu,
Tas tos dūmus kūpināja.* (LD 2323)

Behind the hill the smoke is rising, –
Where is the smoke coming from?
The ferret is brewing beer,
He is the one making the smoke. (LD 2323)

¹⁹ One example is material for learning Latvian prepared by the American Latvian Association, which includes the song 'Aiz kalniņa dūmi kūp' with the aim of supporting children and non-Latvian speakers in an attractive and simple way: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gDK0NZCQNPU>.

Going to the pub and back is onomatopoeetically portrayed: getting there is quick and easy but coming home after drinking is clumsy. There are at least two levels of interpretation of the text. A little child most likely would not understand the implications and would enjoy playing together, and the hidden meaning of the verse would become a source of laughter and merriment for the adult.

Disapproval of alcohol consumption stems from modern social norms: the purchase and use of alcohol and tobacco is prohibited for children today, but this has not always been the case. An article published in the Latvian press in the 1920s refers to earlier times, when a glass of beer or even schnapps was given to children to help them sleep.²⁰ Already at that time, parents were educated about the harmful effects of alcoholic beverages on children's health and development. However, most of the folk songs mentioning alcohol or tobacco were recorded in the 1920s, according to the Archives of Latvian Folklore. This means that topics connected to tobacco and alcohol were not considered problematic for children, and that the verses were widely used and perceived as a joke.

Marital relations and criminal activities

Theft is another controversial activity depicted with humor in infant amusement verses. In the western part of Latvia, texts about stealing turnips are widespread:

<i>Jāju, jāju rāceņ's zagt,</i>	I ride, I ride turnips to steal,
<i>Satiek rāceņ' saimeniek',</i>	Meet the turnip owner,
<i>Žvīgs, žvāgs, maišels krūmos,</i>	Swish, swoosh sack in the bushes,
<i>Es pats grāvē – špurks!</i>	I myself in a ditch – poof!
(LFK 1965, 2629)	(LFK 1965, 2629)

Texts with this kind of motif can be found in many variations and describe going off to steal either turnips or carrots. Various versions reflect different plot twists: the thief obtains the turnips and arrives home safe and sound, or he is caught in the act by the owner and receives a beating. The verse can also conclude with falling into a ditch. It is characteristic of verses of this type, as well as of the infant amusement verses overall, that the story is narrated in the first person. The agent is “I” or “we”: the child either on his own or together with an adult. He goes to the market, rides a horse, and drinks beer, and thus the story is presented as though he were a grown-up.

²⁰ In the first issue of 1924 of the newspaper *Nākotnes Spēks* (Future Force), which was devoted to the education of children, one of the authors writes that “one often hears that children sleep better if they have a glass of beer or even schnapps. Those that give alcohol to children should know that every drop of alcohol is a dangerous poison for the child's body” (*Nākotnes Spēks*, 1924: 50).

Marriage and marital relations are also part of the topics touched upon in infant amusement verses. There is a very extensive typological group about a wife falling out of a cart:

*Tilli, tilli, buku, buku,
Sievu vedu vezumā,
Pats tecēju kājiņām,
Stabulītes taisīdams.
Atskatos atpakaļ –
Mana sieva izkrituse!*
(LFK 26, 344)

Tilli, tilli, buku, buku,
My wife in a carriage,
I run on my feet,
Making whistles.
Looking back –
My wife's fallen out!
(LFK 26, 344)

The texts portray both respectful and loving as well as hostile relations between husbands and wives. However, negative comments about wives predominate, as in the following example: *Sieva, sterva, izkritusi* “The wife, the nasty one, has fallen out” (LFK 665, 634).

*Nu man bija laba laime,
Kad no vecās vaļā tiku;
Pēc kādām nedēļām
Jaunu sievu mājā vedu.*
(LFK Bdž 1376, 17)

Well, I was very lucky,
When I got rid of the old one;
In some weeks
Took a new wife home.
(LFK Bdž 1376, 17)

The subject matter and attitudes expressed in this group of texts suggest that the texts were initially intended as entertainment for adults rather than for children. Based on their content, Krišjānis Barons (1835-1923), a compiler of *Latvju dainas* (Latvian Dainas), placed this group of texts in a section called *Laulātu ļaužu, vīra un sievas, sadzīve* (Married People: Husband and Wife, Conjugal Life; LD III, 3). The section contains thirty-four texts.

The compilers of the scholarly edition of *Latviešu tautasdziesmas* (Latvian Folk Songs) chose a different approach. Volume six of the collection (LTdz IV) was published in 1993 featuring folk songs about birth and christening as well as songs about the care, upbringing, and instruction of children. Given the similar activities accompanying the verses, the texts with the motif of a wife falling out of a cart have been placed in the section featuring dandling songs, 247 in total. The comments of informants and recorders also confirm that these folk songs were intended for children and were used for dandling. The comments are available in the Archives of Latvian Folklore, such as the following example: *Šo dziesmiņu dziedot, bērņus uzsēdina uz ceļiem un jādina* “When singing this song, children are placed on the knees and dandled” (LFK Bdž 204, 16).

There has been no in-depth discussion of this set of texts among Latvian folklore scholars or educators; they have largely been ignored. According to Iona and Peter Opie, most of the rhymes we now call nursery rhymes were not originally created for children at all, but “are survivals of an adult code of joviality” and are surprisingly inappropriate for babies (Opie, Opie, 1997: 3). This is presumably also the case with the Latvian verses about the wife fallen out along the way because they deal with the relationship between husband and wife, and the content is primarily addressed to adults.

Conclusions

The practice of collecting, publishing, and studying infant amusement verses in Latvia differs from practices in western Europe. This has influenced the quantity and content of this genre of folklore. In English- and German-speaking cultures, nursery rhymes, including infant amusement verses, were already collected and published in the 18th and 19th centuries. Research on these texts commenced shortly after their publication, and therefore the content of rhymes has undergone a different development. The publication of children’s songs in Latvia did not start until the beginning of the 20th century, when volume one of the collection *Latvju dainas* (Latvian Dainas) was published. A more extensive collection of children’s songs took place in the 1920s and 1930s, under the aegis of the Archives of Latvian Folklore. This material was published only in 1993 with the release of volume six of the collected Latvian folk songs. Hence Latvian infant amusement verses remained inherited only in the oral folk tradition for much longer; they were not influenced by published texts. Fairly late publication in turn possibly ensured the diversity and quantity of infant amusement verses that have remained extant until the present day. There are also differences among some European cultures in terms of content: popular songs, ballads, verses with a literary origin, and so on have always been separated from folk songs in Latvian traditional culture and are not included in children’s folklore materials. In contrast, both German and English nursery rhymes include religious, political, and other content suitable for adult entertainment as well as verses that were composed as part of the written tradition. Despite the existence of scholarly editions of children’s songs and individual anthologies, the infant amusement verses collected at the Archives of Latvian Folklore were not published in their entirety until now because they were not regarded as a unified genre, and texts that do not fit the classical folk song form were excluded. This deficiency will be corrected by the author of this article in the forthcoming book *Latviešu bērnu folklorē: Ucināmās dziesmas* (Latvian Children’s Folklore: Infant Amusement Verses), containing all available materials in this genre (i.e., more than four thousand texts).

The infant amusement verse materials collected permit an examination of various controversial issues such as, for example, the portrayal of violence in texts intended for

young children. As a constituent part of traditional culture, infant amusement verses exhibit varying notions from different eras about children and the content suitable for them. Some verses that are now considered infant amusement songs have entered children's folklore from the adult tradition and were not originally intended for children.

Perceptions regarding children and childhood have evolved over time. In the 1960s, the social historian Philippe Ariès was the first to draw attention to the idea that childhood or children's age was a social construct rather than a biological and natural quality. In medieval Europe, children tended to be regarded as small adults that were in the process of formation rather than discrete individuals forming part of differing age groups (Ariès, 1962: 17–32). This clarification is also backed by examples of Latvian infant amusement verses with content more suitable for adults that might often be not understood by children at all. At the same time, the use of traditional infant amusement songs and verses has expanded. In the 1920s, short texts were recited to children by their relatives at home – most often by mothers or grandmothers, but also by older siblings. Today infant amusement verses are actively used in preschools, and they are staged and performed by children's song and dance groups.

In infant amusement verses, violence is expressed both through depictions of physical actions and through themes or narratives that, from a contemporary perspective, are considered inappropriate for children. In terms of content, they appear as brief, anecdotal “narratives” that soften the violence and lessen its impact with the help of humour. Both parents and educators primarily focus on cases of physical violence in children's folklore texts, such as spanking. These verses are gradually being marginalized or deliberately pushed out of circulation. Nowadays, violence is a sensitive topic, especially in the context of publications intended for children. Infant amusement verses that include content incomprehensible to young children – such as the purchase and consumption of alcoholic beverages and tobacco, theft, marital relations, erotic innuendo, and so on – are usually not recognized as problematic in terms of understanding violence. In some cases, verses with “inappropriate content” are overlooked, as in the case with beer; such verses are instead seen as oral heritage to be preserved and passed on. In studies carried out up until now, the significance of infant amusement verses has been highlighted in the foreground with the aspect of simple entertainment and socializing relegated to the back. The issue of unacceptable topics has also been ignored. The dual nature of the texts in terms of content has been confusing when compiling selections and doing research work as well – hence, occasionally texts have been classified for adults. The popularity of certain texts has varied over time as determined by social processes. All the same, throughout the ages infant amusement verses have been intended to be recited or sung under conditions of equal participation, in which children and adults enjoy a mutual experience together, and the choice of texts always remains with the adult.

Research data statement

The author declares that this article is based on ethnographic research materials from the Archives of Latvian Folklore and the author's fieldwork, including qualitative interviews. All archival sources and published references are cited in the bibliography. Further information regarding the research materials, if not publicly accessible or cited, is available upon request from the author.

Abbreviations

LD = Krišjānis Barons and Henrijs Visendorfs, eds. 1894–1915. *Latvju Dainas* 1–6. Jelgava, Saint Petersburg: H. J. Drawin-Drawneeka general-komisijā, Keisariskās Sinibu Akademijas speestawa.

LFK = Archives of Latvian Folklore (*Latviešu folkloras krātuve*).

LFK Bdz = Collection of children's verses and songs in the Archives of Latvian Folklore (*Latviešu folkloras krātuves Bērnu dziesmu kolekcija*).

LTdz = *Latviešu tautasdziesmas* 1–12. 1955–2023. Rīga: Zinātne.

LTT = Pēteris Šmits, 1941. *Latviešu tautas ticējumi*. Vol. 9. Rīga: Latviešu Folkloras krātuves izdevums ar Kultūras Fonda pabalstu.

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Ponovna ocena latvijskih otroških razvedrilnih pesmi: teksti in konteksti

Članek obravnava zgodovino otroških razvedrilnih pesmi in z njimi povezano terminologijo v latvijskem tisku ter pesmi umešča v mednarodni kontekst. Raziskave latvijske otroške folklore, ki so bile večinoma izvedene sredi prejšnjega stoletja, so bile osredinjene na pedagoški pomen otroških razvedrilnih pesmi, čeprav se te pesmi niso vselej uporabljale za namen poučevanja in vzgoje otrok. Danes je določena vsebina takih pesmi lahko sporna in je zaradi prikazov nasilja opredeljena kot neprimerna za otroško občinstvo.

V članku obravnavane pesmi so kratka ritmična besedila, namenjena otrokom. Spremljajo jih gibi, kot so: igranje z otrokovimi prsti, rokami in nogami; žgečkanje in božanje; zibanje oz. zibanje na kolenih ali nogah odrasle osebe. Besedila in telesni gibi so med izvajanjem tega folklornega žanra neločljivo povezani. Glede na izvedene gibe je otroške razvedrilne pesmi mogoče razdeliti v štiri skupine: 1) zibajoče pesmi; 2) pesmi, ki jih spremlja igra prstov in rok; 3) pesmi, ki jih spremlja igra z otrokovimi nogami; 4) pesmi, ki jih spremlja božanje ali žgečkanje otroka.

Pojem 'otroške razvedrilne pesmi' (lat. *ucināmās dziesmas*) je v latvijski folkloristiki nov. Uvedla ga je avtorica članka, ker tovrstne pesmi dolgo niso veljale za poseben žanr otroške folklore, temveč so bile deloma uvrščene med ljudske pesmi, deloma pa med otroške igre. Otroške razvedrilne pesmi odpirajo razmislek o temah, povezanih s fizičnim nasiljem in drugimi vsebinami, ki so v sodobni družbi neprimerne za otroke. Med take vsebine sodijo prikazi nezazelenega ali celo kaznivega vedênja, kot so nakup in uživanje alkoholnih pijač in tobaka, kraja, zakonski spori in erotični podtoni. Fizično nasilje je prikazano neposredno z različnimi oblikami telesnega kaznovanja, npr. z udarci po zadnjici, in umori. Posebna pozornost je v članku namenjena ravno oblikam fizičnih kazni in nasilja, kot sta izražena v latvijskih otroških razvedrilnih pesmih, ki za sodobno otroško občinstvo niso več samoumevne in sprejemljive.