

INVOLVING THE INTRODUCTORY STUDENT OF FOLKLORE
IN THE FUNCTIONAL ANALYSIS OF THE MATERIAL HE COLLECTS

Tom Burns
Folklore Institute
Indiana University

Introduction

At the 1968 meeting of the American Folklore Society in Bloomington, Indiana, one of the sessions was devoted to the discussion of the teaching of folklore to undergraduates. Among the questions from the floor following the statements from each of the panel members was my own: (paraphrase) "It seems to me that most of the undergraduate collecting projects that have been described by the panel members make collecting itself the primary goal; that is, the student is involved in collecting for collecting's sake. I wonder to what extent you attempt to involve the student in the analysis of the material he collects." The response to the question was to categorically deny that students were engaged in collecting only. Unfortunately, no one on the panel followed through to indicate what types of analyses his students were performing. Discussion with some of the panel members after the session revealed that students were involved mainly in two types of analysis: 1) classification of their materials, primarily for storage in university archives and 2) comparative annotation to reveal the traditionality and/or the geographical distribution of the folklore items collected.

It is the purpose of this paper to suggest a design for an undergraduate collecting project which involves the student in a third type of analysis—the investigation of the functional relationship between the folklore item and the performer of that item. The type of folklore item for which the project is specifically designed is the joke, although only slight alterations are required for the design to be applicable to many other folklore genres. The project as outlined and modifications of it have proved highly successful in the teaching of the Introduction to Folklore course at Indiana University during the past year (1968-1969).

Procedure

Unlike most collecting projects which are conducted and supervised totally apart from what transpires in the classroom, the project outlined here calls for the use of the classroom as a forum for discussing both the methodological and analytical procedures involved in the project. This of course means that all students are necessarily engaged in the same type of collecting project. This does not mean, however, that the core of the project outlined here cannot be supervised by the instructor with individual students outside of class. Several instructors teaching the introductory course at Indiana University operated on this basis and achieved excellent results. I personally discovered no students who objected to doing the one type of assignment, and I found the classroom an excellent arena for outlining and discussing the project. The amount of classroom time involved is about nine hours or three weeks on the

basis of three class meetings per week. The nine class sessions are devoted to the discussion of 1) functional study in folklore; 2) research methods for the project and 3) the concepts of functional analysis. A key aspect of the classroom discussion of methods and analysis is the use by the instructor of his own previously collected, documented and analyzed joke as an example (see the sample analysis following the detailed outline below). The class meetings are scheduled so that the final session corresponds to the last day of class before either Christmas or Spring vacations. The student collects his own data over the vacation.

What follows is a slightly more elaborate outline of the use of the nine class hours.

- I. (three days) General discussion of function
 - A. functionalism - overview of
 1. origins in anthropology
 2. primary assumptions and weaknesses
 3. its aims
 - B. specific functional theories particularly with regard to myth and magic. A distinction is made at this point between function at the psychological and sociological levels.
 - C. the joke and its functions
- II. (at the end of the third day) Project initiated; each student is to analyze the function of a joke to the joke teller. The student is provided with the instructor's own sample analysis which includes:
 - A. personal data on informant and collector
 - B. the text of the joke
 - C. descriptions of the contexts in which the joke was told and collected
 - D. a transcription of the taped interview with the informant
 - E. the analysis
- III. (one day) Examination of the material included in sections A, B, and C of the sample analysis. The instructor's taped interview is heard
 - A. Section A: name, address, birth place, age, sex, race, ethnic background, and occupation of both the collector and the informant
 - B. Section B: exact transcription of the joke text
 - C. Section C:
 1. context of the joke telling - place, occasion, participants (roles and role relationships), time, audience response
 2. context of interview - arrangements, place, situation, time, preparation, informant's attitude, recorded or noted in writing
 - D. The tape of the instructor's half hour interview is played for the students
- IV. (two days) Consideration of the interview in detail (sample interview serves as the basis for the discussion of all the following points)
 - A. selection of an informant, setting up the interview, interview situation, rapport, recording
 - B. type of interview; types of questioning - direct vs. indirect, specific vs. general, the hypothetical situation question, the question that assumes; picking up leads, the calculated pause, preparation for the interview - constructing good questions

- V. (two days) Analysis procedure
- A. analysis of the joke prior to the interview: isolating themes and attitudes; preparing questions to determine:
 1. which, if any, of these themes in the joke the informant focuses on
 2. whether the attitudes implicit in the themes which are focal are also generalized
 - B. functional analysis at the psychological level
 1. what themes are focal for the informant (interview evidence)
 2. what attitudes are generalized (interview evidence)
 3. if there are focal themes and some of the attitudes are generalized, then the basic postulate is that the joke accurately reflects these attitudes
 - a. in this case the following functions are some of those which might be posited
 - 1) means for expression of attitudes
 - 2) positive audience response results in reinforcement of
 - a) negative attitude toward others
 - b) positive values of one's own group
 - 3) wish fulfillment - repressed desires projected; participation in tabooed behavior at fictive level; catharsis
 - 4) other functions
 4. whether or not some themes are focal or the implicit attitudes are generalized, the following function may nevertheless be involved:
 - a. means for the successful assertion of self in particular social situations - ego gain
 - C. functional analysis at the sociological level
 1. if the audience response is positive, consider positing to the group a general function of unity or cohesion
 2. on the basis of the nature of the item, audience response and interview data on audience members (if available), consider positing to the group as a whole functions comparable to those possible for the joke teller
- VI. (one day) Review of project procedure
- A. the joke is experienced in its natural context
 1. as soon as possible the essentials of the joke and the context of its telling are written down
 - B. from several possibilities, a single joke teller is selected who is expected to both cooperate and produce the most fruitful results
 - C. the prospective informant is contacted, his willingness to cooperate is obtained, a time and place for the interview is set and permission to use a tape recorder or to take notes is agreed upon
 - D. a detailed thematic analysis of the joke involved is performed
 - E. a set of questions is constructed to determine
 1. what themes are focal for the informant
 2. what attitudes are generalized
 3. what the bases for the informant's attitudes are
 4. how the informant views the group to whom he told the joke with regard to the focal themes and attitudes in the joke
 - F. the interview is conducted [a well prepared student can find out most of what he needs to know in about a half hour]

- G. the tape is accurately transcribed or the interview is re-constructed in detail from notes
 - H. using the thematic analysis of the joke and the interview data, the function of the item to the informant is analyzed
 - I. the project is worked up into a finished paper
- VII. Vacation - students do their collecting and interviewing
 /During vacations most students return to their homes where in the course of festivities among their peers many jokes are usually told. Students were encouraged to collect from among their peers, especially from those whose backgrounds they knew fairly well. It was felt that the quality of informant selection, rapport establishment, question construction and interpretation of the interview data would be considerably increased if such were the case. It was found in addition that in the home environment nearly all students were able to locate and use a tape recorder for their interviews whereas in the university setting finding equipment for so many people in any one two week period would be difficult indeed.7
- VIII. Students are given two weeks after their return to campus to write up and turn in their papers

Sample Analysis by the Instructor Presented to Students
for Purposes of Illustration and Discussion

I. Data

A. Personal data - collector and informant

Date collected: 12/1/68

Place collected: Toledo, Ohio

Collector's name: Thomas A. Burns

Address: 3922 Fairington Drive

Bloomington, Indiana

Birthplace: New Orleans, La.

Age: 27

Race, Nationality, or Ethnic

Background: W A S P

Occupation: graduate student at
Indiana University

Informant's name: John

Address: Toledo, Ohio

Birthplace: Toledo, Ohio

Age: 27

Race, Nationality or Ethnic

Background: W A S P

Occupation: minor executive in a large glass
company

B. Item

Mandy is a colored girl up in her apartment, and she hears a knock on her door, and she goes to the door, and there is Rufus. And Rufus says, "Hi there Mandy; how's you doin'?" I've missed you for such a long time." Pretty soon he walks in, and they get talking, and pretty soon they are doing what comes naturally, - rolling around. And then comes a knock on the door. Mandy says, "Rufus, you've got to get out of here." He says, "Well, where should I go?" Mandy says, "Well, I don't know. Go get in that big trunk over there." So Rufus goes over and gets in the big trunk, and they put the top down, and she goes to the door, and it's Rastus. Rastus says, "Well, Mandy, I've missed you for such a long time, and I've just been wanting to see you." And he walks in, and pretty soon they are doing what comes naturally. And then they hear another knock on the door. Mandy says, "Rastus, you've got to get out of here. It must be my husband coming home." So Rastus says, "Well, where shall I go?" So she says, "Well, climb out the window." So he goes

over to the window and starts to climb out the window, and the door swings open and it's her husband. He runs over and slams down the window, catches him half in and half out the window. And he is so blasted mad he goes over to the fireplace and grabs a poker and heats up the poker and goes back to Rastus and puts it right in the back of Rastus' back. Psssss. He's climbing out. Rastus yells, "Fire! Fire!" and from the other corner of the room comes, "Save the big trunk, Save the big trunk."

C. Description of circumstances when item was related

The joke was told in the home of the informant in the presence of the informant's wife, his two year old daughter and three male friends of the informant including the collector. The occasion of the gathering was the Notre-Dame - Southern California football game televised late Saturday afternoon, November 30, 1968. All of us were seated in lounge chairs in front of the television in the den room. The male members of the group are all well known to one another having lived in the same small suburban neighborhood and having attended the same small high school as students in the same class. The members of the group usually meet one another socially when they return to Toledo to visit their parents during vacations (Thanksgiving, Christmas, New Year and during the summer). During these visits, the spirit of revelry is high with frequent parties involving a good deal of humor and drinking.

The joke was related in the course of conversation which persisted uninterrupted during the game. The attention of nearly everyone was divided between watching the game and conversing with the others. When the joke was told, most attention was focused on the informant and all found the joke humorous. No further jokes were told at that time. The informant, however, told the joke three times that same evening at a party for which he was host and thinks that he has told the joke about seven times since he first heard it a month ago.

The joke was collected on tape at the time of the interview, Sunday, December 1, 1968, at about 6:30 P.M., once again in the informant's home. The informant had agreed over the phone to relate the joke again and to answer some questions about the joke, the whole of which would be tape recorded. The interview took place in a bedroom where the informant and myself were alone with the recorder.

I had prepared a set of fifteen questions, and after the item was collected the interview proceeded with these questions forming the basis. Periodically I would refer to a list of these questions.

D. Interview Transcription

For reasons of space, the interview transcription which follows is presented in an abridged form. A full transcription was provided for the students where all of the dead ends and false starts were retained. The importance of the sample interview transcription as a heuristic device must be stressed. In making his own offering the instructor has revealed himself in the same way he expects his student to do. The full trans-

cription clearly shows both the instructor's strengths and weaknesses as an interviewer. The instructor's willingness to criticize his own work and to have it criticized by his students demonstrates to the student that while the perfect interview can be described and should be sought, it is never attained. In exposing himself, the instructor reduces the student's reticence to take on the task of interviewing and curbs the student's tendency to feel that he must polish his transcriptions before submitting them. What is more, after examining the instructor's interview transcription, the student becomes aware of the fact that given good preparation on the student's part, remembering a few general interview principles, and exercising a modicum of common sense, he can probably elicit a good deal of valuable information from his informant.]

When the questions which were prepared for the interview appear in the transcription they are marked by an asterisk and the information the question was designed to elicit is indicated in the parenthesis following. [Including this information provides the student with an opportunity to see how the instructor shaped different questions to elicit different types of information, and, of course, how successful he was.]

C: Collector

I: Informant

- C: *Who did you hear it from? (Is the joke in oral tradition; how was it learned?)
- I: I heard it from a guy at work.
- C: How long ago was that?
- I: About a month ago.
- C: *How many times have you told it? Any idea? (How vital is the item in the informant's repertoire?)
- I: I'd say possibly seven or eight. I did a pretty good job last night.
- C: Did you tell it last night?
- I: I told it about three times last night at the party....
- C: You told it three times last night! I didn't come across it - I didn't hear you tell it. *Do you know any others of that sort - the Rastus, Mandy and Rufus or whatever type? (How extensive is the informant's traditional material reflecting exoteric attitudes toward Negroes?)
- I: You mean about colored girls?
- C: Well, any joke that would - jokes about colored people?
- I: Well, (laugh) do you know the story about the two little colored girls? The one looks at the other and says, "Is you four or is you five?" The other one says, "Well, I don't rightly know." The first one says, "Well, have you ever had intercourse?" and she says, "No." She says, "Then you're four."...
- C: Well, let's go back to Rastus and Mandy....*What I want to know is, what is it that makes this joke humorous from your point of view? (On what character /s/ or action /s/ does the informant focus as being laughable?)
- I: Or why do I enjoy telling it? I don't really know what makes it that humorous myself. (Pause) I was surprised the first time I told the joke that I got such a good reaction out of it. I found it an enjoyable joke and I - I think the punch line is

sort of - you're not expecting it - what in the hell he's going to say. (Pause) I don't think it really makes any difference if it's a Rastus and Mandy or El Salvo or somebody - some Italian or Polack. I think it's probably - you use colored people because they are - on each other in doing what comes naturally.

- C: Are you suggesting then that colored people are...(pause)
- I: They are promiscuous. They're black too.
- C: Compared to white people?
- I: I mean that to the - at least the normal ...
- C: *What I'd like you to do is characterize both Mandy and Rastus as they appear in the joke. What are they like? (How does the informant envision the characters and in doing so reveal his attitudes toward them.)
- I: Well, you could probably - in my image I would say the girl is the low class colored girl in a tenement house whose morals have been throughout her life questionable - letting them enter, starting messing around with them. I think you could characterize her as a low class little colored girl with a red satin dress - you know.
- C: Alright. What about Rastus?
- I: Well, they're just dumb bucks going around. They've gotten out of their old fifty-two Cadillacs and are going up to see what's going on with Mandy....
- C: Let me give you a hypothetical situation. ...*Suppose, you know, that your parents remain alive until H. (name of informant's daughter) is ready to get married, and H. comes home and wants to get married to a Negro. What do you think your parents' response would be? (What is the source of the informant's attitudes?)
- I: They would not - I don't think they would be too upset about it.
- C: You're being honest now?
- I: Yeah. They wouldn't mind it.
- C: Would you?
- I: You'd better believe it. I don't let a nigger sit at my table. (laugh)
- C: In other words you think that your position is different from your parents'?
- I: Oh, very. ...
- C: What brought you to that conclusion?
- I: I think living with them in New York. I had some of them spit on me and got beat up in Harlem. ...I was coming back from - coming back on the subway from school with my briefcase and reading my paper, ...and I hear these three guys laughing at me and the subway is starting to pull out and they are pointing at me, and I looked at my coat and there were just blobs of spit rolling down the side of my coat. I was a little upset - tried to catch the train. ...
- C: So you don't like Negroes in general?
- I: Right.
- C: *Single out for me one or two attributes which are most disgusting in terms of your own experience. (Do informant's general attitudes correspond to the exoteric themes in the joke?)
- I: I would say that ignorance would be the number one - the general

ignorance of the Negro - that teamed with their lack of any initiative. We run into - out in the plants we run into situations where, you know, you have to hire all these Negroes and you get them in there and then they work for eight minutes and then they'll decide that no, this isn't what they want. They want an easy job where you sit on top of the tow-motor. But white people are doing the same thing. See, we don't have any plants that are - you know we don't have the Negroes doing this and the white people doing that - I mean we have come pretty close to it sometimes down in the South, with the mills down there, but that's all taken care of now, you know, with the government coming in. But - yeah - you have a white man working behind the - you know - some sort of machine that isn't too glamorous. He's been working there for twenty years. There are many Negroes there that are working there - same way - and Puerto Ricans and everything else, but now you get this new group that says they don't want to do it. They could make a helluva lot of money behind those machines too. They make ten, twelve thousand dollars a year. See, we have a bonus system, but you've got to work though. They won't do it. I'd say ignorance and lack of initiative.

- C: You mentioned cleanliness before.
- I: That's their thing. I don't get close enough to let that bother me (laugh). ...
- C: *There were about six or eight women at the party last night. Now how many of those women intrigue you enough so that you would be interested in - not that you would but that you would be interested - that it intrigued you - to go to bed with them? (Does the informant recognize promiscuous desires in himself; is the joke projective?)...
- I: How many would I be - let's see (long pause) - oh, probably three of them. I would have turned that the other way (laugh). Who he wouldn't want to go to bed with.
- C: *Suppose that you were having an extramarital affair, what do you think K's (name of informant's wife) response would be if she found out about it? (To what extent is the informant's wife active in frustrating or causing promiscuous desires to be repressed?)
- I: She'd say, "Pack up your bag and get out of my house" (laugh). She has already told me. She said that she and H. would go back to Louisville and take everything with them. She would not liken up to it very much.
- C: She's laid down the law, huh?
- I: Yeah.
- C: Now suppose we switch that around. *What would your response be if you found out that K. were carrying on an extramarital affair? (To what extent does the informant recognize legitimate promiscuous desires in others close to him.)
- I: I'd be shocked (laugh). I don't know. I'd probably go out and start a little thing of my own. I'd be shocked. I don't think I would - I wouldn't be as upset as she would. But I think it would change things. ...
- C: The group that were there when you told the joke, M. and H. (male friends of the informant) and myself and and I guess K. - do you think that - excluding myself since I'm already married - but *do you think that there would be a possibility

that either M. or H. could become sufficiently interested in a Negro girl to marry her? Or consider marriage? (Does the informant see the other members of his group as having the same attitudes as his own?)

- I: I would hope not (laugh). I don't think so. ...
- C: *Now, can you describe a group in which the telling of that joke would not produce humor? Is there a group for whom - in other words, you wouldn't - in which you would not tell that joke? (Does the informant see the joke as insulting to Negroes and thereby appropriate to selected groups?)
- I: No, I think that - the only thing that I would guess would be some group of Negroes, but I think they would probably get more - I wouldn't tell them - but then of course I don't - I wouldn't be there in the midst of them (laugh). But I think they'd probably enjoy it as much as - I think there would probably be, you know, some church groups, things like that - you know like God-fearing people who would not enjoy a joke like that just because it discusses promiscuity and - from the morality of it and -
- C: Do you think that the joke is sufficiently biting for Negroes that you wouldn't want to tell it in a Negro group?
- I: Oh, you could tell it to the Negroes - you could tell it about Polacks - that's what you'd do - probably.
- C: *Do you think, though, looking at the themes - the ingredients in the joke - do you think it would be as applicable for - in other words, could you substitute a Swedish couple? (Are the themes in the joke particular to Negroes or general to many groups?) ...
- I: No, I think it's a Negro joke. I wouldn't tell it to a Negro group - you know I'm a - fearing man. ...
- C: *Suppose that yesterday when you told that joke you got - it didn't get a laugh - it - that it wasn't funny - but suppose that it met with indifference - not negative, but just with indifference. How would you feel? (What does the actual performance of the joke achieve for the informant in a social interaction?)
- I: I've had several jokes fall through (laugh). I wouldn't tell the joke again. That's the reason I - I enjoyed the joke - the first time I told the joke I got a good response and the second time I told it I got a good response, and so you remember the joke. You know throughout a period of time you might tell hundreds of jokes but you only repeat or tell those jokes over and over again which have or get a humorous response.

II. Analysis

A. Psychological

1. The themes in the joke

In terms of the WASP's sexual standards, the conduct of Mandy, Rufus and Rastus is promiscuous. Mandy is not only involved in at least two extra-marital affairs but from the WASP point of view has an abnormal desire for sexual intercourse, taking on Rufus and Rastus in quick and "natural" succession. From the WASP perspective, then, the first major theme of the joke is Negro hypersexuality with minor

themes of sexual promiscuity and adultery.

In WASP terms, Mandy is not only promiscuous but is also a dominant figure. She directs the floundering men in their escape attempts, flaunts her sexual prowess before both men by having intercourse with Rastus in Rufus' presence (in the trunk) and she is unchallenged by her husband who directs his wrath to the male partners in the affair. From the WASP point of view, then, a second theme in the joke, if a less major one, is the dominance of the Negro female in her relations with Negro men.

Rufus is not only the goad of Mandy's dominance in the joke, he is portrayed as stupid as well; and it is his stupidity which is the focal theme in the joke. Misinterpreting Rastus' proclamation, "Fire, Fire" as meaning a fire in the apartment and desiring to be rescued while at the same time not wanting to be discovered, Rufus reveals everything and totally defeats his purpose by yelling from within the trunk, "Save the big trunk." From the WASP perspective, then, the third and most important theme in the joke (the theme upon which the humor is based) is the stupidity of the Negro.

2. Focal themes and generalized attitudes

If these are the major themes in the joke, as we anticipate they might be identified from the WASP point of view of the informant, then what does the interview data reveal about the informant's recognition of these themes and about the degree to which the exoteric attitudes revealed in these themes are held generally by the informant? The performer of the joke clearly identifies two of the three themes - promiscuity ("a little girl with a red satin dress," "bucks") and stupidity ("dumb bucks"). There is no suggestion in the informant's description of Mandy to indicate that he sees her as a dominant figure. However, it must be admitted that the questioning in this regard is weak. That these themes in the joke reflect the informant's generalized view of the Negro is also apparent - ("They are promiscuous," "I'd say ignorance and lack of initiative.").

3. Postulated functions

The positive correlation between two of the themes of the joke and the general attitudes of the informant allow for the hypothesis that one psychological function of the joke for the informant is that it serves as an outlet for the indirect expression (through a narrative vehicle) of these exoteric attitudes which he might find too risky to express directly among most of his northern, educated, white associates.

The joke seems not to be simply a means of expressing these exoteric attitudes. Because the expression is couched in indirect joke form and because the joke requires only laughter for its success, the informant's attitudes can be reinforced without requiring the audience to explicitly

state its own attitudes (laughter constitutes the positive reinforcing response). Thus, the second psychological function of the successful reception of the joke by the audience is to reinforce the attitudes of the informant. Although it is relevant to the later consideration of the sociological functions of the joke as well, it is worth noting here that the audience's laughter at the joke does not necessarily mean that all members of it subscribe to the informant's general view of the Negro. It is possible to laugh at the individual stupidity of Rufus in the joke without considering the matter of promiscuity and without generalizing either the stupidity or promiscuity to Negroes as a group. Thus, the joke teller may interpret the laughter of the audience as supporting his attitudes when in fact there may be no such support. Since, however, the audience is never required to stipulate the meaning of its laughter, the reinforcement of the informant's attitudes goes unchallenged.

It is probably also worth noting at this point that the reinforcement of negative attitudes toward others is simply an indirect way of reinforcing the positive values in oneself and one's own group. Thus, the rejection by the informant of the Negro because of stupidity and promiscuity is essentially a negative way for the informant to assert for himself and his own group the values of intelligence, sexual temperance and marital fidelity.

In addition to serving as an outlet for the expression of attitudes and as a vehicle for reinforcing these attitudes, the data seems to indicate that the joke also functions as a device for the informant to both project and reject his own promiscuous desires. In the questioning it is clear that while the informant is definitely critical of the Negro for being promiscuous ("morals have been throughout her life questionable") he is himself beset by significant promiscuous desires ("are there any of the girls at the party that go the other way" - disinterest him sexually). It is also clear both from the questioning and from observation that the informant's promiscuous desires are frustrated not only by the protestant ethic of sexual fidelity to which he subscribes but also by definite pronouncements by the informant's wife (C: "She's laid down the law?" I:"Yeah.") In light of this situation it does not seem unreasonable to suggest that by projecting his own repressed promiscuous desires to the Negro the informant vicariously acts in the joke in accordance with his own desires, and by in turn rejecting promiscuity in the Negro the informant rejects it in himself.

The joke probably functions for the informant in at least one additional way at the psychological level. When the informant tells the joke, and the joke achieves its desired effect (laughter), the informant has made a successful assertion of himself in a social interaction. The informant suggests that the joke functions to satisfy his social

needs when he describes himself as having "a nice feeling" when he tells a joke which is greeted with a hearty laugh and his frustration ("feel like the biggest fool in the world") when "one dies."

B. Sociological

It seems reasonable to suggest that in the common laughter produced by the joke a social function of a sense of momentary cohesion or unity can be posited. To indicate that the sense of unity is based on anything more than a common involvement in entertainment can not be supported by the present data. For the reasons mentioned earlier (the indirect nature of the joke and the inability to assess the attitudinal implications of the audience's laughter) we could not suggest a strong exoteric function for the group as a whole. It would be necessary to interview each of the other members of the group before any reasonable comment could be made in this regard. Certainly the questioning indicates that the informant views the group as holding attitudes similar to his own. While this point of view may be important to the informant's decision to tell the joke, there is nothing to assure the accuracy of that opinion. Perhaps what can be said at this point is that the attitudes of the members of the group toward Negroes were not so positive or sensitive that a Negro figure could not be used as the central butt in a joke about promiscuity and stupidity. In short, the stereotype of the Negro presented in the joke is at least allowed by the group for the purpose of humor.

Results

Student response to the collecting and functional analysis project was favorable from the outset. In anonymous evaluations of the course solicited by the instructor at the conclusion of the semester most students indicated that the project was the most valuable and interesting part of the course. Several students mentioned that the instructor's sample analysis was valuable for understanding exactly what it was they were to be doing.

From the point of view of an instructor, I was delighted with the great majority of the student papers. Student grades which had been running fairly low on less demanding prior assignments (average grade C-/D+) jumped to an average grade of "B" for the project papers. In spite of the fact that the class was composed of students from several levels (Freshmen through Seniors) with a good many Freshmen, only one student indicated in his evaluation of the course that he felt the project was too advanced for a student at his level. Better than eighty percent of the students managed entirely on their own to obtain and utilize a tape recorder in their interview. Most significant, the great majority of the students were able to apply the methodological and analytical concepts of the sample model with sufficient flexibility so that their questioning and analyses were specific to their jokes and informants.

A brief review of one of the better student papers will have to suffice to suggest the type of material that many of the students produced. A

girl dealt with the following well know riddle-joke as told by one of her girl friends:

Q.: "What did Onassis give Jackie for a wedding present?"

A.: "An antique organ."

The student identified the following possible themes in the joke to investigate in her interview and designed interesting questions to find out how the informant related to these themes: 1) Jackie's marriage - possible negative attitude toward it; 2) the Kennedy family and Democrats generally - possible negative attitudes toward them; 3) Greeks - possible negative attitudes toward them; 4) distrust of the wealthy - possible envy. Interview data confirmed the first and fourth themes as focal for the informant while themes two and three seemed not to be relevant. Theme one was clearly predominant and the student did a fine job of pursuing the reasons for the informant's negative attitude in her interview. It seems that one reason the informant was displeased with Jackie's marriage was because she felt Jackie had degraded both herself and her country by marrying money rather than intellect and culture. Here themes one and four clearly mix. The intensity of the informant's negative feelings toward the wedding was revealed in the interview when it was discovered that the Jackie joke was the only one the informant knew and that the informant had told it "hundreds of times" since she heard it two months earlier. The student proceeded to call upon her background knowledge of her girl friend to point out that the informant had previously idolized Jackie to the extent of trying to talk and fashion her hair like Jackie. The student indicated that in light of the informant's personal investment in the Jackie image, there was a sense in which Jackie's degrading act had the effect of also degrading the informant, of threatening her own identity. The student concluded by postulating as one function of the joke for the informant that it provided her with a means to express her disappointment with Jackie's act and to strike back.

A second reason for the informant's distress with the Jackie marriage was most interesting because it had not been anticipated. From the interview we learn that the informant is especially concerned about the consequence to the Kennedy children of the marriage to Onassis. The informant fears that Onassis will not be a good father because he is too old to appreciate, understand or love Jackie's young children. A new theme emerges - that of age disparity not between husband and wife but between father and children. The student pursued this topic with the informant and soon found herself discussing the informant's own long battles as an only child with her much older parents to achieve the degree of social independence enjoyed by her girl friends. The interview reveals that the informant sees as the major contributing factor to her own parental problem the fact that her parents are too old to understand her situation in the way the younger parents of her peers can. From this data the student postulates a second function for the joke to the informant. In essence she says, the antique organ in the joke serves for the informant as a means whereby the informant punishes Jackie sexually for having married an older man and having abrogated her responsibility to her young children.

The student goes on to discuss the functions of anxiety release and ego gain, but the real excellence of the student's work lies in her superb response to a new lead in the interview situation and in her insightful interpretation which suggests the intimate and specific ties of the in-

formant to the joke she tells. The informant in this case seems to wield the riddle-joke as a kind of personal retaliation device. We can not know this until the informant is interviewed. After all, the informant could have just as easily been a great hater of the Kennedys. Clearly the same joke can function in different ways for different people, and one of the lessons for the folklorist from a project of this type is that it is a risky business to second guess what those functions are in any single instance.

Conclusions

The purpose of this paper has been to report on one way in which beginning students of folklore were successfully involved in the functional analysis of the material they collected. Other instructors engaged in teaching the introductory course in folklore at Indiana University made use of the sample analysis in various ways. Most of them chose not to involve all of their students in the project but suggested either modifications or extensions of the design to some of their students who were interested in producing a term paper for the course. Most modifications have involved the adaptation of the design to other genres of folklore besides jokes. For instance, a very interesting paper was written on as seemingly unpromising an item as the benediction used by a particular minister at a Sunday service. Extensions of the project design include: 1) interviewing the various audience members as well as the joke teller to allow for conclusions on function at the sociological as well as the psychological level, 2) comparative studies of psychological function in two or more informants telling the same joke, 3) interviewing the informant in depth to indicate how the attitudes expressed in the joke are integrated into the informant's personality as a whole, 4) the addition of psychological testing to serve as a check on the validity of the interview data and the consequent interpretation, and 5) the assessment of the psychological functions of several related items in one informant's repertoire.

While it is not the purpose of this paper to diminish in any way the value of or necessity for adequate comparative annotation and classification of lore, there do seem to be some clear advantages of a collecting project like the one outlined here which involves the introductory student in functional analysis. Projects which focus on annotation and classification generally are designed to demonstrate to the student that 1) a great deal of lore still exists and that it should be collected and properly documented; 2) lore can be fitted into categories for comparative study and retrieval purposes; 3) seemingly unique traditions are really widespread; and 4) over time and space lore changes in form and/or content. What such projects don't do is indicate to the student why lore is important to the individual who carries and performs it and to the group who enjoys it. It is precisely to this question that the project involving functional analysis is directed. In the present period of educational turmoil with students demanding that education be relevant to their lives, it seems important that folklorists teaching undergraduate courses try to make available to the student collecting projects which help the student to answer for himself the question, "Why is folklore important to me, to my friends, to my group?"

There is an added advantage to a project which focuses the beginning

student's efforts on the informant and his lore. In the project outlined in this paper the student's research is conducted for the most part in the face to face rather than face to book situation. The project is people, not index or archive oriented. Indexes, printed collections and archives are valuable for the folklorist, but Paul Arnold, Mr. Average Introduction to Folklore Student, is not going to find expertise in the use of the various motif indexes very useful in his job as a securities broker. On the other hand what he learns about eliciting information from people in an interview or how different lore is fitted to different individuals and groups may prove quite useful.

It is not only students who may benefit from engaging in a project of the type suggested in this paper. There is one clear cut advantage to the folklorist. Rather than receiving several traditional items elicited by the student collector in an artificial context with each item minimally documented, the instructor receives one item collected from its natural context and with relatively full documentation. Not only is personal and contextual data more extensive than usual, but if the student has been the least bit insightful in his interview, the folklorist is provided with interview data which relates the item to the informant and his audience. The archive into which such well documented items of lore are placed benefits in that it can now begin to service not only questions of what item is known by whom at what time and what place, but also questions of why the item is important to the tradition carrier, why the item is performed before certain groups in certain situations and why and how it is enjoyed by the different groups who hear it.