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SPECIFIC FEATURES OF THE “DOZENS” GENRE IN AFRO-AMERICAN CULTURE

ANNOTATION

In the development and maturity of American literature, folklore plays a vital role. Although many researchers have studied various genres of folklore, such as folk songs, folk tales, fairy tales, ballads, proverbs and riddles, the “dozens” folkloric genre of Afro-Americans has not been explored thoroughly. Moreover, the “dozens” genre has not been compared with its analogue in other languages.

This article touches upon the “dozens” genre, the oral speech product of Afro-American peoples, and its emergence. The “dozens” genre is a verbal game between participants, prevalent in black groups living in the USA. Here, contenders mock one another (jokingly) until they surrender. Interestingly, the “dozens” can be compared with “askiya” in the Uzbek language – folklore genre; an artistic competition of two or more people or groups on a specific topic at a public gathering (party, wedding, and celebration). The parties try to respond quickly, sometimes sitting, standing or walking in the opposite direction, to present their answers succinctly, eloquently, subtly, effectively, charmingly and funny. However, “askiya” to some extent differs from the “dozens”. Based on the Uzbek mentality, “askiya” participants do not raise sexual issues or they do not insult players’ mothers. So, these are some of the distinctive features between “askiya” and “dozens”.

Since it is aimed at exploring an element of the folklore genre (the dozens), the researcher also pays close attention to the interconnection of folklore with the national literature of a particular country, the history of Afro-American peoples as it is necessary to explore the origins and development of the “dozens” genre.

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“DOZENS” JANRINING AFRO-AMERIKALIK XALQLAR MADANIYATIDAGI O‘ZIGA XOS XUSUSIYATLARI

ANNOTATSIYA

Amerika adabiyotining rivojlanishida folklor muhim rol o‘ynaydi. Ko‘pgina tadqiqotchilar xalq og‘zaki ijodining turli janrlari, jumladan, xalq qo‘shiqlari, xalq ertaklari, sehrli ertaklar, balladalar, maqollar va topishmoqlarini o‘rgangan bo‘lsalar-da, afro-amerikalik xalqlarning “dozens” folklor janri to‘liq tadqiq etilmagan. Bundan tashqari, ushbu janr boshqa tillardagi analoglari bilan taqqoslanmagan.

Maqolada “dozens” janri – afro-amerikalik xalqlarning og‘zaki nutq mahsuloti va uning paydo bo‘lishi xususida so‘z yuritiladi. “Dozens” – ishtirokchilar o‘rtasidagi og‘zaki o‘yin va u Amerika Qo‘shma Shtatlaridagi qora tanli jamoalar orasida keng tarqalgan. O‘yinda ishtirokchilar taslim bo‘lgunga qadar bir-birlarini haqorat qilishadi – hazillashishadi. Qizig‘i shundaki, “dozens” janrini o‘zbek tilidagi “askiya” folklor janriga qiyoslash mumkin. O‘zbek xalqiga xos bu janr ommaviy yig‘ilishlarda (bazm, to‘y, bayram) muayyan mavzudagi ikki yoki undan ortiq kishilar yoki guruhlar ishtirokidagi badiiy tortishuv hisoblanadi. Tomonlar tez javob berishga, ba‘zan o‘tirib, ba‘zan turgan holda yoki qarama-qarshi yo‘nalishda yurib, o‘z javoblarini lo‘nda, nozik, ta’sirchan, maftunkor va kulgili tarzda bayon etishga harakat qiladilar.

Biroq, “askiya” “dozens”dan muayyan darajada farq qiladi. O‘zbek mentalitetidan kelib chiqqan holda, “askiya” ishtirokchilari jins bilan bog‘liq mavzuni ko‘tarmaydilar yoki askiyachilarning onalarini hazillashiib ham haqorat qilmaydilar. Demak, bular “askiya” va “dozens” o‘rtasidagi o‘ziga xos farqli jihatlardir.

Traditionally, “dozens” is performed in front of spectators, which encourages them to respond with increasingly strong insults in order to increase the responsiveness among the participants. As a result, it makes the competition more enjoyable.

Customarily, the opponent’s intelligence, appearance, skills and socioeconomic status are on the target by the game comments. Discriminatory remarks about other participants’ family members are acceptable. Particularly, they are used to humiliate mamas (so, they start the game with the remark “yo’ mama...”). Spectators often hear the comment associated with intimate matters, a pun that is later referred to as “dirty dozens”.

The word game “dozens” is based on the agility, critical thinking and responsiveness of the participants. It’s natural that the competition between them will arouse the interest of the audience. The audience evaluates the parties and their responses with their laughter and passionate shouts.

Key words: dozens, audience, competition, mental acuity, Afro-American, agility, disparagement, remark.

Mazkur ilmiy maqolada folklor janrlari elementlaridan biri (“dozens”)ni o’rganish maqsad qilingan. Shu sababli tadqiqotchi folklorning muayyan mamlakat milliy adabiyoti bilan o’zaro bog’liqligiga va afroamerikalik xalqlar tarixiga e’tibor qaratgan, chunki “dozens” janrning kelib chiqishi va rivojlanish tarixi juda muhim jarayon sanaladi.

An’anaga ko’ra, “dozens” tomoshabinlar oldida o’ynaladi, bu esa ishtirokchilar orasida hozir-javoblikni oshirish uchun tobora kuchli haqoratlar bilan javob berishga undaydi. Natijada, bu musobaqani yanada qiziqarli bo’lishiga olib keladi.

Tortishuvda asosiy e’tibor raqibning aql-zakovati, tashqi ko’rinishi, mahorati, ijtimoiy mavqei va moliyaviy ahvoriga qaratiladi. Boshqa ishtirokchilarning oila a’zolariga nisbatan haqorat-tomuz so’zlar tez-tez uchraydi, ayniqsa, onalar haqidagi (“yo’ mama...”) haqoratli hazillar ko’p ishlatiladi. Ko’pincha, bellashuvda jinsiy muammolar bilan bog’liq so’zlar ishlatilib, keyinchalik u “dirty dozens” (“jirkanch dozens”) deb nomlandi.

“Dozens” so’z o’yini ishtirokchilarning epi-chilligi, tanqidiy fikrlashi va zukkoligiga asoslanadi. Ular o’rtasidagi raqobat tomoshabinlarda qiziqish uyg’otishi va ular taraflardan birini qo’llab-quvvatlab turishlari tabiiy. Tomoshabin o’z kulgisi va ehtirosli qiyqiriqlari bilan taraflar va ularning javoblariga baho berib boradi.

Kalit so’zlar: dozens, tomoshabin, raqobat, zukkolik, afro-amerikalik, chaqqonlik, kamsitish, eslatma.

INTRODUCTION

Scholars have always been interested in the question of the influence of a language on the culture of an individual and a society, the features of the reflection of the culture in the language. Humor is an indicator of a culture with the intention to actualize the thought process.

Humor, by its very nature, adapts people to changing circumstances. To a certain extent, it expresses the human life, that is, humor is related to human’s life values.

Allegedly, a set of ethno-cultural artifacts that have a status of an increased significance in the process of application of a given nation indicates the limits of the national value-semantic space of culture. The world’s national cultural model is renovated by systematizing the meanings of the primary nomination objects and things expressed through national traditions. The world’s national language model, simultaneously, speaks through subordinate nominative meanings obtained as a result of distinguishing meaning from the internal forms of prime nominative words. The

meanings of the secondary nomination are interpreters of linguistic signs or stylistic means of the language, which serve as a code for the system of the secondary linguistic semiosis (the study of sign processes). The world's national linguistic picture is attributed to a static linguo-semiotic occurrence that exemplifies the nation's linguistic consciousness.

The concepts of “cultural model of a national humor” and “language model of a national humor” should be clearly distinguished. The cultural model of a national humor blends the logical real-life categories, and objects used by a person and located in his/her instant location. The linguistic model of a national humor expresses the unique relationships of the categories of reality that are incompatible with each other. Linguists consider that national cultural features are expressively exhibited in linguistic means with the use of stylistic devices.

In a humorous work of fiction, the writer criticizes some of the shortcomings in social life, in particular, in some people. In this case, the writer is not in favor of the loss of the object under criticism, but sympathizes with it and wants to correct its shortcomings. It should be also noted that humorous satire differs from light criticism. In a satirical play, the events of social life are exposed through burst of laughter, while the flaws in the character are criticized with humor and irony. Just as satire has an element of humor, so humor has an element of satire. Humor is found in all literary works (novels, short stories and poems). The main representatives of Western literature are Cervantes, L.Stern, Ch.Dickens, M.Twain and in Russian literature N.V. Gogol, Zotchenko and etc.; in Uzbek literature, Mukimiy, G.Gulam, A.Kakhkhor, S.Akhmad and others. Humor is generally a comical depiction of a story, object, or animal, especially a human being. It is easy to catch the signs of humor of any nation, but it is rather difficult to characterize them accurately.

In this research work, the “dozens” has been defined as a folkloristic genre. It is known as a funny and amusing “word game”. However, it has not been researched in detail. So, what does the word “dozens” mean? According to the contemporary Merriam-Webster dictionary, the word “dozen” has three main meanings: (1) a group of 12; (2) an indefinitely large number *dozens* of times; (3) *dozens plural in form but singular in construction*: a ritualized word game that consists of exchanging insults usually about the members of the opponent's family – used with *the* [<https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/dozens>]. In this article, the third meaning has been focused on, and its origin, purpose and practice have been analyzed.

The “dozens” is mainly practiced among American black communities, where participants humiliate each other with a sense of humor until one party gives up. This contest is customarily executed before the watching crowd, who raise the participants' spirits. Consequently, the contest becomes more interesting to watch.

This folkloristic genre is very unique. Attendees in it will do their best to win the contest. Interestingly, they become more aggressive while performing their verbal communication skills. They insult one another with the aim of amusing the audience. Indeed, it is very entertaining for people who are watching it in the vicinity.

We have a little bit explored the meaning of this word. And now it is important to look back to the history of black communities in America. Afro-Americans are an ethnic group consisting of Americans with partial or total descent from African black racial groups [United States Census Bureau, 2000]. The term “African American” commonly symbolizes offspring of enslaved Africans who are from the USA [Carol L. & Richard F., 2008; 21-22].

The history of Afro-American people began in the 16th century. Africans from West Africa started to be sold to European slave traders and transported across the Atlantic Ocean to the Thirteen Colonies. After arriving in the Americas, colonists from Europe purchased them as vassals. Slaves were placed to work on fields located in the southern colonies. Before and during the American Revolution, very few enslaved people were able to obtain freedom. Later, they established their independent communities.

In 1776, thirteen colonies united and declared the independence of the United States (the USA). Then most African immigrants were enslaved. In the American South, four million enslaved were let go during a civil war in 1865 [Harris P., 2012]. The status of slavery caused this war. In the course of the reconstruction period, they gained citizenship and the right to vote, but due to White supremacy, they were largely treated as second-class citizens and found themselves soon disenfranchised in the South. Ultimately, these circumstances changed in the United States, because citizens participated in the military conflicts, substantially migrated out of the South. They demanded elimination of legal racial segregation. As a result of such efforts, Barack Obama became the first Afro-American to hold the presidential office of the United States [MacAskill, E. et al., 2008].

For instance, a free black domestic servant from Seville and a white Segovian conquistador got married in 1565 in St. Augustine. That event was the first known and recorded Christian marriage in the American continent [Michael J., 2018; 35]. However, there were some legal hardships for such actions. At some point, citizens were imposed fines and penalties for joining the marriage parties.

The enslaved people established families and got married to other Africans. Sometimes, intermarriage cases between Native Americans or European settlers were also recorded [U.S. News & World Report, 2007].

By the 1640s and 1650s, several wealthy African families purchased their own indentured servants. They were able to possess some thanks to their financial possibility. An interesting fact: in 1640, the Virginia General Court sentenced John Punch, a Negro, to lifetime servitude under his master Hugh Gwyn for running away [New Netherland Institute, 2019]. This was the earliest documentation of lifetime slavery.

There are several historical facts about mixed-race inhabitants. For example, in the state of Florida, descendants of some Spanish colonists formed a mixed-race population of mestizos and mulattos [Higginbotham A., 1975]. Some sources state that classification of people of mixed-race is offensive. Nevertheless, some people are much less tolerant to such racial segregation.

The miscegenation of the whites and blacks extended so widely that it became a matter of concern to the colonies farther north where the Negro population was not considerable. Seeking also to prevent this “*spurious mixt issue*” Massachusetts enacted in 1705 that a Negro or mulatto man committing fornication with an “English woman, or a woman of any other Christian nation” should be sold out of the province. “An English man, or a man of any other Christian nation committing fornication with a Negro or mulatto woman” should be whipped, and the woman sold out of the province. None of her Majesty’s English or Scottish subjects or of any other Christian nation within that province should contract matrimony with any Negro or mulatto, under a penalty imposed on the person joining them in marriage. No master should unreasonably deny marriage to his Negro with one of the same nation; any law, usage or custom to the contrary notwithstanding [Woodson C.G., 1918; 335-353].

Anthony Johnson was one of the Dutch Africans. He later owned a black slave following the court ruling [John H., 1913; 29-30]. Courts of that time adjourned several similar trials.

The enslaved people were settled in colonized areas. Their labor force was exploited by their owners. Of course, slave owners restricted their freedom. In most cases, they were treated inhumanly. As human beings, slaves wanted freedom and enjoyment in the social life. Alas, they were deprived of such happiness. Consequently, they had the only opportunity to play the “dozens” and keep themselves away from hatred and resentment.

Background of the “dozens” genre and its origin

There are common misconceptions about racial slavery. One is that slavery was benign. It was neither really bad, nor very nice. Secondly, it has been so far in the past that it has nothing to do with us today. Third, particularly in North America, people believed that it was only those bad people in the South. Another misconception is that the Black people should be happy; we brought them here to make life easier. Look at what has happened in Africa and look at the kind of conditions that they live in the United States. Another mistaken belief was that they were sold into slavery by their own people. So, what is the problem? The Black people are not responsible. Those are some of the misconceptions that they essentially bolster an argument that no people have responsibility for the past, and therefore people have no responsibility for the present. The past shapes citizens in certain ways.

Until the 18th century, the widespread conception of a race-based slave system did not fully develop [Frank W.S., 2005; 117].

In 1641, the current American state of Massachusetts legally recognized slavery. A year later, a Virginian law was passed according to which children of enslaved women took the status of the mother, rather than that of the father. This legal principle was called *partus sequitur ventrum* [Hodges R.G., 1999; 48], which dictates that all offspring would inherit their mothers’ status.

In accordance with an act of 1699, the colony deported all free Blacks and virtually defined as slaves all people of African origin that remained in the colony.

In 1670, a law prohibiting free and baptized Blacks (and Indians) from purchasing Christians (White Europeans) was passed, but people were to buy slaves “of their own nation” [PBS, 2011].

At that time, there was no movement toward abolition of the African slave trade in the Spanish Louisiana. A new law called *coartación* was introduced, which allowed slaves to buy their freedom [John C.R., 2014]. Government took measures on slavery. Consequently, many black people were allowed to be free by buying their freedom. This caused various problems in the Spanish Louisiana; that measure was noted as one of the worst systemic elements by French creoles [Goldsmyth S. et al., 1916; 233-242].

In 1704, groups of armed White men – slave patrols – were formed to monitor enslaved Black people in South Carolina [Berquist E., 2010]. Their function was to observe and monitor slaves. Because slave owners feared that they might organize slave rebellions.

Slaves were strictly controlled. They spent much of their leisure time with playing the “dozens”. A lot of practice and eagerness to win the word battle made them intellectually powerful. Furthermore, it was an entertaining activity where Black people enjoyed themselves.

DISCUSSION

By 1775, Africans accounted for 20% of the population in the colonies. This made them the 2nd largest ethnic group after English Americans [National Law Enforcement Museum, 2019].

Based on the aforementioned facts, the enslaved people had hard times. Their owners fully exploited them without giving the enslaved ample opportunity to socialize with others. And playing the “dozens” was the unique tool to overcome hardships. At the same time, Afro-Americans realized that this game kept them vigilant and witty as it required quick response and smart replies.

American sociologist Harry Lefever and journalist John Leland say: “the game is almost exclusive to African Americans; other ethnic groups often fail to understand how to play the game and can take remarks in the “dozens” seriously”. It is more popular among low-income, urban communities, but is also found in middle class and rural settings. Both men and women participate in it. Nevertheless, the game is more commonly played among males [Lefever H.G., 1981; 73-85].

The “dozens” was first academically depicted in 1939 by Yale-based psychologist and social theorist John Dollard, who described “the game’s importance among African-American men, and how it is generally played”. Nowadays Dollard’s explanation is considered groundbreaking and precise [Jordan L.E., 1983; 79-101].

This game is a “pattern of interactive insult” among all classes of African Americans, among males and females, children and adults [Davis A. & Dollard J., 1940; 278-279].

Often, two contestants participate in banter in front of others, who, in turn, urge the participants to carry on the game by making the verbal abuses worse.

“Dozens” players use topics indicating one’s opponent’s lack of intelligence, ugliness, alleged homosexuality, alleged incest, cowardice, poor hygiene, and exaggerations of physical defects, such as crossed eyes.

American psychologist and social scientist Dollard originally wrote that he was unaware of how the term “dozens” developed. Although he suggested a popular 12-part rhyme may have been the reason for its name. He merely made a forecast on how the game itself grew to such eminence.

Various authors followed Dollard and came up with their theories. A journalist for *The New York Times* John Leland describes its etymology. According to him, the term is a modern survival of an English verb – “to dozen” – dating back at least to the 14th century and meaning “to stun, stupefy, daze” or “to make insensible, torpid, powerless” [Leland J., 2004; 173].

In 1976, Amuzie Chimezie published an article in the *Journal of Black Studies* and connected the “dozens” to a Nigerian game called *Ikocha Nkocha*, he literally interpreted it as “making disparaging remarks”. Children and adolescents play this form of the game, and it takes place in the evening, in the presence of parents and siblings [Chimezie A., 1976].

Nigerian Igbo people provide more restrained comments on the game: “remarks about family members are rare, and are based more on fanciful imaginings than participants’ actual traits”.

Amuzie Chimezie also noted that “in contrast, during the game in Ghana, which is also commonly played in the evenings, insults are frequently directed at family members”.

American writer Amiri Baraka individually summed up that the “dozens” originated in Africa and states that they are a surviving adaptation of “African songs of recrimination” [Baraka A., 1999; 27].

American folklorist Mona Lisa Saloy, an author and professor, suggests a dissimilar theory in “African American Oral Traditions in Louisiana”:

“The “dozens” has its origins in the slave trade of New Orleans where deformed slaves – generally slaves punished with mutilation for disobedience – were grouped in lots of a “cheap dozen” for sale to slave owners. For a Black to be sold as part of the “dozens” was the lowest blow possible” [Saloy M.L., 1998].

RESULTS

The “dozens” participants have to demonstrate intellectual power and proficiency with words. American political activist H. Rap Brown, in his political autobiography *Die Nigger Die!* (1969), writes that the children he grew up with practiced the “dozens” to kill time and stave off boredom. Meanwhile, he emphasizes that playing the game is a form of mental exercise. American sociologist Harry Lefever affirms that verbal communication skill and wittiness is just as valued among African Americans as physical strength: “Verbal facility is thus a criterion that is used to separate the men from the boys” [Lefever H.G., 1981; 73-85].

Actually, participants should be very smart and fast, because they should be

ready to respond simultaneously to their opponents.

According to author John Leland, amazing and surprising one's opponents with swift and skillful speech is the game's object. However, word meanings are lost during the game.

The "dozens" remarks can be articulated in rhyme or general language. Younger children use more unsophisticated forms:

"Your mother is a bricklayer, and stronger than your father" [Abrahams R.D., 1962; 297].

In this example, we can see that the contestant is emphasizing the reversal of roles in the family – the mother is involved in the hard work that is regularly carried out by the father. In fact, it used to be a realistic view of the lower class Negro family life.

The "dozens" can be played "clean" or "dirty". If the participants refer to sexual organs, then the game is called "dirty dozens". Otherwise, the competitors play the "clean dozens".

More often, adolescents refer to sexual themes and play the "dirty dozens". Sometimes, the players talk about effeminacy as a common topic trying to embarrass one another. The "dirty dozens" samples with the use vulgar and offensive words were given in the article *"Playing the dozens"* [Abrahams R.D., 1962; 211]. We find it inappropriate to provide examples in our paper.

In some examples, the insults can take the form of one-liners that rhyme, e.g.: *Your hair is so nappy 'cause King Kong's your pappy* [[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Dozens_\(game\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Dozens_(game))]. For information, "dirty dozens" have been known among African-American slaves since the 19th century. "Dirty dozens" were poetic insults to the opponent and his family. The goal was to humiliate the opponent as witty, unusual and harsh as possible. Similar poetic forms are known among many peoples, but they received particular development among black enslaved persons in the USA.

It should be noted that initially "dozens" were exercises in eloquence and foul language, but did not serve as causes of enmity or resentment.

At the beginning of the XX century, "dozens" were used in new genres of Afro-American music. Accordingly, one of the most prominent bluesmen of the 1930s James "Kokomo" Arnold recorded the song "dirty dozens".

In the 1970s, "dirty dozens" formed the basis for one of the first forms of hip hop music, freestyle rap. Freestyle is a poetic improvisation, usually performed as part of a competition between several MCs (rap battle) and containing ridicule against a competitor. Insults inflicted during the rap contest were not taken seriously and did not lead to enmity. However, when exactly the same songs began to be released outside the competition, they began to give rise to serious conflicts.

Hinging on the above facts, we may assume that the "dozens" has been a ground for the foundation of today's modern rap.

It should be noted that playing the "dozens" is also known as *"blazing"*, *"roasting"*, *"hiking"*, *"capping"*, *"clowning"*, *"ranking"*, *"ragging"*, *"rekking"*, *"crumming"*, *"sounding"*, *"checking"*, *"joning"*, *"woofing"*, *"wolfing"*, *"skinning"*,

“sigging”, “scoring” or “signifying”, while the insults themselves are known as “snaps” [Percelay J. et al., 1994; 12].

“Snapping” is a form of “playing the dozens” which derives from the rich oral history of blacks in America. It is a verbal contest in which two opponents hurl all kinds of insults at each other, the object being to see which one can beat down the other without either of them losing their cool or resorting to physical violence. It does not mean cursing the opponent out; in fact, the most effective snaps, or insults, involve no profanity at all. Percelay, Dweck and Ivey have compiled hundreds of snaps from sources all over the black community and organized them into categories (fat snaps, skinny snaps, stupid snaps, ugly snaps, color snaps... well, you get the idea). A few examples: “*Your mother’s so fat, she has her own area code*” or “*Your father’s so dumb, he leaves his fly (American English - “trousers”) open in case he has to count to eleven*”, or “*You were so ugly when you were born, the doctor slapped your mother instead of you*”. “Snaps” is hilarious and will have you laughing out loud, as well as appreciating the razor-sharp wit of whoever dreamed some of these gems up [<https://www.amazon.com/Snaps-Original-James-Percelay-2006-08-01/dp/B01FIYR4X8>].

The rhetorical contest of playing or shooting the “dozens” (also known as *capping*, *ranking*, and *sounding*) is most commonly practiced by young African American males.

- *Your mama’s so FAT, after she got off the carousel, the horse limped for a week.*
- *Your mama’s so skinny, she can hula-hoop through a Froot Loop.*
- *Your mama’s so FAT, her blood type is Ragu.*
- *Your mama’s so skinny, she looks like a mic stand.*
- *Your mama’s so FAT, instead of 501 jeans she wears 1002s.*
- *Your mama’s so skinny, she turned sideways and disappeared* [Nordquist R., 2018].

The attractive “dozens” genre has been explored and a variety of explanations have been offered. Its expansion is intertwined with the cruelty Afro-Americans experienced, first as slaves and later as second-class residents.

The “dozens” was viewed as a manifestation of frustration aggression theory by John Dollard. He hypothesized that Afro-Americans had been victims of racism; they were unable to respond kindly towards their oppressors. Instead, the poor people presented their anger in the form of series of insults in front of their friends and neighbors [Davis A. & Dollard J., 1940; 290-294].

Dollard’s theory is partially true, because the enslaved people had no choice of getting rid of their resentment. That’s why they widely practiced playing the “dozens” which in turn resulted in social development of Afro-Americans. White people treated African emigrants as second-class citizens in comparison to themselves. A life of poverty and degradation made Black people grow stronger. So they were able to catch up with the up-to-date world.

These days, we often hear rappers performing their raps. They are very fast and witty to select the words in their songs. They skilfully rhyme words. If we look at the performance of Canadian rapper Drake Graham, the following words were voiced

in his song so-called “GOD’S PLAN”. Here, we can see rhyming in words *trouble*, *struggle* and *cuddle*. They sound very melodic in the song.

Folklorist Alan Dundes provided an approach based on psychoanalytic theory. According to him, American oppression disregards the possibility that the “dozens” may be native to Africa [Dundes A., 1991; 295-297].

We do not fully support the approach of Dundes. Perhaps similar verbal battles have been found in other African countries. But people living in those African states were free and had not encountered oppression and cruelty. Humiliating treatment and the depths of despair forced enslaved Africans to stay vigilant and grow instantly with the changing world.

Alternatively, the game is used as a tool for preparing young Afro-Americans to cope with verbal abuse without becoming furious. Many Afro-Americans try to develop the ability to remain calm during the “dozens”, because it is regarded as a hallmark of virtue.

“In the deepest sense, the essence of the “dozens” lies not in the insults but in the response of the victim. Taking umbrage is considered an infantile response. Maturity and sophistication bring the capability to suffer the vile talk with aplomb, at least, and, hopefully, with grace and wit” [Lefever H.G., 1981; 73-85].

Still many such competitions end in brawls. When Afro-American youth reach a definite age (between 16 and 26), they ignore the game’s principles and try to enter into sparring contests. Often, such activities result in viciousness.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, humor is one of the most convenient ways of adapting a person to changing circumstances; it is a reaction to an unexpected development of events.

The linguistic picture of humor is made up of the peculiarities of the mentality of different nations, the difference in views on certain life phenomena. From linguistic point of view, the “dozens” is one of the folkloristic-humoristic oral speech genres. The game of spoken words occurs between two contestants. The black communities of the USA commonly practiced it. The “dozens” is played in front of an audience of bystanders, who, in turn, inspire the contestants to respond with stronger insults. Such a course of the game heightens the pressure in the contest.

Remarks and disparaging notes in this genre focus on the opposite party’s social status, intelligence, competency and appearance. Usually, the family member of the opposing participant becomes the target of insults.

Low-income and urban communities predominantly play this game. The game is more commonly performed among men like “askiya” in Uzbekistan. We have to note that there are several similarities and differences between the Afro-American “dozens” and “askiya”. But one thing should be clearly understood: “askiya” participants never insult family members of the opposing party, in particular mothers.

In the “dozens”, two contenders usually go in for chitchat, but always in front of others. Playing the game is a form of mental exercise; the parties in it are required to perform their wittiness and efficiency with the selection of appropriate words.

Initially, the “dozens” were exercises in eloquence and foul language, but did not serve as causes of enmity or resentment.

In the 1970s, the “dozens” formed the basis for one of the first forms of hip hop music, freestyle rap. In this context, this genre has contributed significantly for the emergence of improvisational music.

Historical sources state that Afro-Americans have become victims of racism. However, they were able to shift their anger to friends and neighbors playing the game of verbal words. As a result, the “dozens” genre has developed as one of the folkloristic-humoristic genres of the United States.

It is noteworthy that although Black people suffered a lot in the past and experienced bitter experience of slavery, they were able to maintain their national identity. Afro-Americans founded the “dozens” genre and contributed substantially to the development of American folklore.

Playing “dozens” or performing it in front of the audience is a kind of reflection of a democratic government, peaceful and happy life. We all know that playing a game, playing a joke on somebody is acceptable when people are joyful and free from violence. The “dozens” genre is one of such things which may unite people, harmonize them.

In our forthcoming works, we have aimed at exploring linguistic features of the “dozens” and “askiya” folkloristic genres, as well as their textual-compositional structures.

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