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## Analysis of Russian Comedy Feature Films about Family and Family Education in a Student Audience

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### Abstract

The article presents methodological and practical approaches to studying Soviet and post-Soviet feature films of the comedy genre about family and family education. Watching Soviet and Russian films, the audience has an opportunity to become familiar with the system of values, traditions, and models of family education presented in audiovisual media texts of different years. Developing value attitudes about family traditions and family education in the younger generation based on Russian feature films about family is a pressing issue in the present-day socio-cultural situation. The author presents individual forms and methods of media studies in a student audience, which can be a basis for further successful application in media education focused on feature films about family and family education; development of technologies and methods for integrating media education on this issue into university courses or subjects related to the fields of education, psychology, and sociocultural studies. Media education based on feature films of the comedy genre addressing family issues from the Soviet and post-Soviet periods includes autobiographical, structural, critical, semiotic, identification analysis, cultural mythology analysis, key character analysis, and others. Film studies addressing family issues in a student audience, do not only solve the main goals of media education, but also reveal potential opportunities for using feature films in building university students' future professional trajectory for educating the younger generation, forming their value ideas about family and family relationships.

**Keywords:** media, media education, Russian feature films, family, family education, comedy, analysis.

### 1. Introduction

Studying and analysing feature films about family and family education is an important aspect of media education. One of its current areas is analysing audiovisual media texts based on the cinematographic art of various genres. Among the numerous genres of feature films, comedy films occupy a worthy place; many of them were about family both in the Soviet period and at the present stage. The choice of the family theme in analysing comedy films is due to the fact preserving and strengthening family ties, forming the true value of family relations are especially relevant in modern mediatized society. Here we can agree with the opinion of M. S. Topchiev that "the acceleration of information flows, the growth of consumption of mass culture products give rise to a desire in people to consume everything new and new, easily discarding the old. The growth of individualism and constant immersion in the virtual space of young people leads to a decrease in the value of family relations" (Topchiev, 2019: 120).

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Let us attempt to consider the most promising, in our opinion, forms and methods of analysing comedy feature films on the family theme with university students. In the process of studying and analysing films about family and family education, we will turn to comedy feature films of the Soviet and post-Soviet periods.

## 2. Materials and methods

The material underlying this research is Soviet and Russian comedy feature films about family and family education, forms and methods for analysing audiovisual media texts of the comedy genre in a student audience.

The research methods are the main types of analysis based on comedy feature films including structural, critical, autobiographical, semiotic, identification, analysis of cultural mythology, analysis of key characters in the process of studying comedy feature films in a student audience. Creative activities used in conducting media studies focus on the most productive methods and approaches of contemporary Russian film and media education.

## 3. Discussion

Comedy films have always enjoyed great popularity among a mass audience. In Russian film production there are many comedy films related to family and created in different years. The issues of studying comedy audiovisual media texts are presented in a number of scientific studies.

Comedy films, including Soviet and Russian comedy films, have been analysed in some foreign studies (Allen, 1999; Beumers, 2003; Boym, 1993; Condren, 2021; Enzensberger, 1993; Gérin, 2018; Gillespie, 2003; Horton, 1993; Johnson, 1993; Kaganovsky, 2018; Kupfer, 2013; Kupfer, 2016; Leigh, 2017; MacFayden, 2003; Mitkus, Steiblytė, 2018; Sover, 2014; Taylor, 1983; Yugay, 2023).

Many Russian scientists consider cultural and art studies approaches to comedy films (Bedenko, 2020, 2021; Gabliya, 2021; Salnikova, 2022; Tueva, 2008; Zhurkova, Evallyo, 2022).

The study by V.N. Bedenko presents a detailed description of the genre specificity of comedy films. The author presents the following definition of the comedy genre in cinema: “a film comedy is a genre of cinema in which the main goal is not only to entertain the viewer, but also to make them laugh in order to provoke the so-called comic effect, which is achieved with the help of various techniques of a dramatic and technical nature, for example, an exaggerated demonstration of certain human qualities by an actor, directing and constructing comic situations, as well as combining the incompatible in real life” (Bedenko, 2020).

In the dissertation research carried out by M.I. Gitis, which presents an analysis of sound solutions in cinematographic art, it is noted that there is a consistently high interest in film comedy shown by the public in “various historical periods, the wide popularity of comedy actors, the diversity of themes of comic films chosen by scriptwriters, the significant range of expressive means used by comedy directors, make the genre in question a unique phenomenon of audiovisual culture” (Gitis, 2013: 3).

The educational potential of studying comedy films is also highly valued by many scholars: (Chelysheva, Sapozhnikova, 2024; Fedorov, 2015; Mikhaleva, Lozovitskaya, 2024). The authors point out numerous factors that influenced the popularity and interest of the mass audience, including children and youth, in the comedy genre.

Many viewers choose to watch comedy films for entertainment, a desire to get positive emotions, have fun, etc. At the same time, the comedy genre is not only a means of relaxation, but also an important factor in education, promoting ideological attitudes and values. Indeed, “the importance of comedy films in society is due to its educational potential, broad opportunities for social criticism and deconstruction, providing viewers with opportunities for relaxation. Comedy films allow you to relieve tension caused by social contradictions inherent in any society, shortcomings in certain areas of collective life” (Bedenko, 2020).

A large number of studies are devoted to the development of the comedy genre in the Soviet and post-Soviet periods. For example, G.N. Ryabova describes the emergence of Soviet comedy and defines the comedy films typology of this period, including the following films: “agitation films; social and situational comedy, propaganda or agitation-propaganda, satirical comedy and parody” (Ryabova 2022: 604). The author notes that “the formation of the comedy genre in Soviet cinema involved solving at least two problems: determining the nature of the content and developing a film language. The solution to the first problem contributed to identifying the types and subgenres of

film comedies. The solution to the second problem enriched cinematography with methods and techniques for creating a comic effect" (Ryabova 2022: 603).

The analysis of Soviet comedy films of the 1930s-1950s, among which there were many films about family, is provided by some Russian researchers (Tueva, 2008; Zhurkova, Evallyo, 2022).

D.A. Zhurkova and V.D. Evallyo describe the transformation which took place in the cinema of this period and emphasize that "since the formation of film comedy in the 1920s-1940s, a change in philosophical paradigms, transformations of the eccentric principle, the formation of new artistic images and motifs were recorded" (Zhurkova, Evallyo, 2022: 280). The leading role of strict adherence to ideological canons and public opinion was also reflected in comedies addressing family issues.

P.V. Knecht studies the female image in comedy films of the period and characterizes it as follows: "In Soviet comedy of this period, characteristic elements of the light genre are repeated: "a chance acquaintance", "the path from Cinderella to princess", "love confusion", "tricks of rivals", etc. As a rule, love relationships develop in public. The heroes' personal space is invaded by older comrades, who take on the role of mentors not only in everyday work, but also in matters of the heart" (Knecht, 2020: 155).

V.N. Bedenko also notes that "in the USSR during the times of totalitarianism, satire was not allowed, but comedies were encouraged that showed the happy life of workers (*Jolly Fellows* (1934), *Volga-Volga* (1938), both directed by G. Alexandrov). They produced a variety of comedies, such as sports (*Happy Finish* (1934), directed by P. Kolomoitsev), grotesque comedy (*The Adventures of Petrushka* (1936) directed by K. Isaev), musical comedies (*The Rich Bride* (1938), *Tractor Drivers* (1939), both directed by I. Pyryev)" (Bedenko, 2021: 93).

Comedy films of the "thaw" period are analyzed by some Russian researchers (Dedinsky, 2022; Kosinova, 2015; Palshakova, 2024). Emphasizing the importance of this period in the development of the comedy film genre, M. Palshakova writes: "The sixties brought Soviet comedy to a new level. For a long time, this genre existed on the periphery of Soviet film production (in the post-war years until Stalin's death, it even fell into oblivion), not distinguished by either a variety of means or a sharpness of vision. With the onset of the thaw, comedy not only returned to the screen, it appeared in an incredible variety of forms – from lyrical sketches stylized "like a document" (*I Walk Through Moscow*) to emphatically theatrical grotesque (*Aibolit-66*)" (Palshakova, 2024: 168).

When analyzing the film repertoire and audience preferences during this period, M.I. Kosinova states that the comedy genre became one of the leaders in film distribution: "in the 1960s, according to sociological research, viewers preferred films distinguished by the simplicity and clarity of the cinematic language. Among them, comedies, adventure films and melodramas were especially popular. The box office champions of this time were *The Diamond Arm* (L. Gaidai, 1968), *Kidnapping, Caucasian style, or Shurik's new adventures* (L. Gaidai, 1966), *Wedding in Malinovka* (A. Tutyshkin, 1967), *Operation "Y" and Other Adventures of Shurik* (L. Gaidai, 1965), etc." (Kosinova, 2015).

Comedy films of the 1970s-1980s have also been analysed in some Russian studies (Osinovskaya, 2008; Tsyrukun, 2022) and others. For example, O.S. Osinovskaya gives a characteristic of the carnivalization of comedy films about family. The author, for example, points out: "The film "Hello, I am your aunt!" is permeated with the idea of a carnival from the very first frames. The feeling of carnivalesque is born thanks to the black-and-white pseudo-documentary introduction, and then maintained throughout the film by the grotesque, stereotypical nature of the characters, who are more like masks than real heroes" (Osinovskaya, 2008: 263).

The features of modern comedy films and TV series about the family are presented by Z.K. Bedanokova and B.A. Gavrilova. The authors state that at the present stage the value attitude towards the family is presented far from ambiguously. Thus, analyzing well-known TV series for young people, the authors note: "Children and motherhood are perceived by the characters as something undesirable. In the TV series *Univer* and *Real Boys*, young mothers and their children are considered as something unattractive, which is why they become the object of ridicule. In the TV series *Happy Together*, the main character and his wife are not involved in raising children, they experience their problems and failures without the help of their parents" (Bedanokova, Gavrilova, 2019: 28).

#### 4. Results

We will consider some forms and methods of analysing feature films of the comedy genre with university students in the academic course “Family Education in Russian Feature Films” (Chelysheva, 2025).

The study of family relationships in media education based on comedy films and media representation (Bazalgette, 2009) includes studying the historical and socio-cultural contexts. Teaching a student audience can be based on the criteria proposed by E.V. Zhelnina and L.N. Galiullova: “the presence of conflict situations – the presence and frequency of quarrels between spouses in the plot, misunderstanding of each other; relatives’ pressure – the imposition of their own opinion, influence on the decision-making of spouses by relatives; lack of spending time together – rare presence of spouses next to each other; restriction of personal freedom – this criterion is associated with the prohibition of the spouse by the husband/wife to manage their capabilities based on their own desires; lack of trust in each other – that is, lack of confidence in themselves and in their other half; inability to make concessions – inability to come to a common opinion due to unwillingness to agree with the spouse” (Zhelnina, Galiullova, 2019: 72-73).

To complete this task, the audience is asked to analyse the relationships between the characters of a Soviet or Russian comedy feature film of the students’ choice, based on choosing one of the options:

1. Relationships between the spouses.
2. Parent-child relationships.
3. Relationships in the family as a whole.

After completing the task in subgroups, the students are supposed to prepare and present the characteristics of family relationships in comedy films of a certain period. Then the results are presented and discussed during the general discussion. A mandatory condition for completing the task is providing argumentation of the stated position, evidence, describing specific examples from the selected comedy film, explaining the relationship of a particular model of family relationships with the socio-cultural situation in the country.

Another option for this task may be the media education technique “work in pairs”. The activity consists in presenting a comparative description of the criteria for feature films by different directors or created in different years, identifying the representation features and specifics of the family images in a comedy media text.

Much attention in media studies should be paid to analysing parent-child relationships in feature films on family issues. To understand this phenomenon in comedy films, students are asked to fill in Table 1. They are to identify the causes of the conflict between parents and children, its resolution in the film and other options for resolving the family conflict. This activity is focused on media technology, thus allowing students to identify the presentation specifics of the problem in question in comedy feature films.

**Table 1.** Parent-child relationships in comedy feature films of the Soviet and post-Soviet periods

Title of the feature film	Resolving parent-child conflict		
	The cause of the conflict in the parent-child relationships	The way out of the conflict chosen by the film characters	Possible options for resolving the family conflict
...	...	...	...

As practice shows, filling in this table allows students to address the causes and consequences of conflict situations in parent-child relationships, identify the main factors that influence their occurrence and resolution; define family education styles that contribute to or, conversely, hinder adopting constructive decisions. It also develops their analytical skills when studying an audiovisual media text of the comedy genre.

While examining family images in comedy films of different years, the educational potential of the comedy film genre should be also taken into consideration. This task is given to students to draw their attention to media language. The activity includes analysing audiovisual media texts from the point of view of their educational potential. For this purpose, students discuss the educational function of comedy films using different questions.

Here is a list of questions and tasks for analysing the comedy film *Love and Doves* (1984) created by V. Menshov.

1. What means did the film makers use to show the family relationships in in Kuzyakin's family?
2. Can the Kuzyakins be called a friendly family? What signs help you determine this?
3. What is the style of communication between the parents and children in the film? What words and expressions are used by the film makers in the comedy genre?
4. Describe the main character traits of the film protagonists. Which of them are most typical for comedy films?
5. Try to predict how the adult family life of Lyuda, Lenya, Olya will develop. Argue your position, giving examples from the key episodes of the film.
6. What linguistic means did the film makers use to show the atmosphere in the families of the main characters?
7. What educational means are used in Kuzyakin's family? Justify your answer with some examples from the film.
8. How do family education methods affect the microclimate in the main characters' family?
9. What family values are key for the characters in the film? Which of them are, in your opinion, the most important?
10. What expressive means did the film makers use to convey the communication style in the families of the main characters? Which of them do you think are the most effective and relevant today?

Discussing the issues allows students to consider not only the family relationships presented in the feature film, but also to expand their knowledge on issues of family education models, responsible parenting, etc.

The media education concept – media categories can be addressed in the hermeneutic analysis of comedy audiovisual media texts by referring to the characteristics of families presented in comedy films of the period under study. For example, you can ask your students to search for comedy films that show different types of families: 1. Single-parent family. 2. Young family. 3. International family. 4. Large family. 5. Dysfunctional family, etc.

Then the students are to describe the selected family type, define its characteristic features, factors influencing family well-being, family values, traditions, interaction of this family, family upbringing, emotional microclimate, etc.

Another aspect of analysing comedy films about family and family education is identifying plot stereotypes. According to the definition offered by A.V. Fedorov, “media stereotypes (from the Greek words *stereos* – solid and *typos* – imprint) are usually understood as schematic, average, familiar, stable ideas about genres, social processes / events, ideas, people, dominating in media texts intended for a mass audience” (Fedorov, 2012: 138).

In order to complete this task, we use the scheme proposed by A.V. Fedorov (Fedorov, 2012: 139). In Table 2, we will present an example of completing this activity based on a comparative description of two film characters – Roma's fiancé and his will-be father-in-law – Boris Ivanovich from the comedy film *Gor'ko! / Bitter!* (2013), directed by Zh. Kryzhovnikov.

**Table 2.** The structure of plot stereotypes in comedy media texts (based on the comedy film *Gor'ko! / Bitter!*, 2013)

Characters	Significant change in characters' lives	Emerging problem	Search for the problem solution	Problem solution or return to stable life
Naive, poor character Roma	Conflict with the parents about the upcoming wedding	It is impossible to refuse the parents as they fully provide for the event	Selling a car given by the parents. Deceiving your parents to hide his plans	Reconciliation with the parents after the scandal at the wedding when the deception was revealed
Cunning rich man/official	Upcoming wedding of his daughter. Desire to look	Refusal of future newlyweds to organize a	Making a strong-willed decision	Reconciliation after the conflict and fight at the wedding

Characters	Significant change in characters' lives	Emerging problem	Search for the problem solution	Problem solution or return to stable life
Boris Ivanovich	decent in front of his colleagues and guests	wedding party according to the scenario proposed by their parents	contrary to the interests of the newlyweds	

While doing the students turn to the plot analysis of the comedy media text about family to find out that the main conflict, which acts as a trigger for the situation occurring in this film, lies in the unwillingness of the younger and older generations to come to an agreement, to meet each other halfway, resolving the situation constructively.

Based on the key concept of media audience in applying hermeneutic analysis of comedy films about family and family education, the teacher can give students a creative activity aimed at identifying the target audience of films of different years. For this, students are asked to select and justify their choice of Soviet and Russian comedy films, which, in their opinion, can be used for discussion with schoolchildren and/or parents on the topic of family. After selecting the films, students justify their choice, select information about the chosen film, determine the format of the future event (parent conference, class hour, individual work with the family concerning parent-child relationships, etc.).

Students get interested in analysing comedy films about family, for example, when they are involved in doing a creative-imitation task, during which they present their version of the continuation or change of a famous film story (at the student's choice) while preserving the comedy genre. This activity is done in subgroups and is based on the key concept – media agency. After that, you can arrange a competition for the best plot of a comedy film with a forecast of the success of this film among a mass audience; students think out a place for filming, collect funds, etc. Then the results of the work done are discussed and assessed in the student audience.

The presented activities with comedy audiovisual media texts on family issues can be used both in media studies and integrated as separate elements in the study of courses or subjects related to education and psychology.

## 5. Conclusion

Thus, developing value attitudes about family traditions and family education in the younger generation based on Russian feature films about family is a pressing issue in the present-day socio-cultural situation.

Watching Soviet and Russian films, the audience has an opportunity to become familiar with the system of values, traditions, and models of family education that are presented in audiovisual media texts of different years.

Analysing feature films addressing family and family education, including comedies, helps to expand university students' awareness of using methods and technologies for including media education both in specially organized media studies (extracurricular activities, electives, etc.) and in courses or subjects as integrated parts.

Thus, film studies focused on family issues in a student audience, do not only solve the main goals of media education such as developing analytical thinking skills, creative imagination, improving the skills to search, interpret media texts, creatively use the possibilities of the media, etc.), but also reveal the potential opportunities for using feature films in building university students' future professional trajectory for educating the younger generation, forming value ideas about family, family relationships, etc.

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