

VARIATIONS IN FOLK SONGS

by Dr. László Vikár

One of the most striking differences between melodies preserved in written form and the songs handed down by word of mouth lies in the fact that while the former have only one authentic form, the songs of the folk tradition may be encountered in many authentic versions. Individual compositions receive their ultimate form right in the moment of their creation and should be respected as such from that time on by every performer. There is, however, no restriction of this kind in the world of folk songs. In the intact surviving folk tradition songs may change apparently freely, but as a matter of fact they are modified according to specific inherent rules, by a lot of people and in many directions. Thus it can be claimed with good reason that a melody more deserves to be called folk song, the more variants it has. Any existence confined to an unchangeable state bears in itself the signs of fading. Accordingly, it seems a pity to capture, perhaps for all time, the shape and spirit of folksongs in a printed collection. Wherever songs still form an organic part of the life of individuals and communities, where they go through continuous changes to a smaller or greater extent, where they are revived in occasional improvisation, folk tradition is very much similar to a giant tree with immense roots and tremendous foliage.

The desire to change is a basic human striving. Just as we ourselves develop steadily, so we require to experience change and progress in our environment. "No one can wade through the same river twice", and similarly, not being machines we cannot say or sing anything in exactly the same manner twice. Monotonous repetition is something inhuman and can only be made tolerable through variations.

Ancient civilizations favoured the "varietas delectat" principle and the people of our time proclaim it even more loudly. This accounts for our striving for steady alteration, whether it is conscious or unconscious, purpose oriented or casual, *l'art pour l'art*, irrespective of whether we are governed by emotions or reasoning.

When analyzing folk songs, it is of the utmost importance to examine their variants because these provide the basis for recognizing various styles and types, for finding out which are the most typical melodies characteristic of certain traditions. At the same time they give us the certainty which only a large number of variants can guarantee, that we have selected a musical material worth while teaching, or as we call it the authentic musical mother tongue. In connection with folk songs we can speak of rhythmic, melodic and form variants and in many cases we have to analyze the text modifications and changes, what is more, the development experienced in the style of performance. The picture is composed of many shades and colours and the same could be said of this extremely far-reaching task. But as you can penetrate into a matter only if you have the material to be examined at hand, the present short lecture can hardly undertake more than to draw attention to facts and to indicate some of the generalities.

Like every activity aimed at creating order, the systematic arrangement of folk songs strives at classifying the material in such a way that the identical or at least similar items should be placed the closest possible, while the diverging ones far from each other and that between these two extremities a certain graduality could be observed, whenever feasible. The variants arranged according to definite aspects will then create certain cores which facilitate orientation to a great extent. Systematic arrangement has been a decisive component of the somewhat

more than seven decades long folk music research in Hungary. This has proved to be of great assistance both in the orientation within our own material and in the comparison with the folk music of the neighbouring and the related peoples. As it is well known, Zoltán Kodály and Béla Bartók examined their song material using two different systems and expected to gather the variants as they actually did by applying diverse approaches to the problem.

Bartók had taken as his starting point the collection of Lutheran church melodies of the 19th century, compiled by Johannes Zahn, in which the song material was arranged according to the number of lines and syllables. It was this system which Bartók improved and extended later on and adapted to the specific requirements of Hungarian folk songs. He disclosed his procedure of classification in detail in his book entitled "A magyar népdal" (Hungarian Folk Song) published in 1924 and summed up the rhythmic variation possibilities of Hungarian folk music in the following six points. Note that they can occur separately or jointly.

- These are: 1/ augmentation
- 2/ diminution
- 3/ reduction
- 4/ increase
- 5/ repetition
- 6/ interjection

Kodály established his system on the model of the Finn Ilmari Krohn and arranged his collection which reached about 30,000 items by the end of his life on the basis of the line-ending, i.e. the cadential note. His idea was namely that the line-ending notes are the most stable and at the same time most characteristic notes of a melody. Thus these notes guarantee more than anything else that the similar variants will be placed close to each other. The assessment of melody variants is always a subjective matter as confessed unanimously by all great masters of folk music research, for there are no completely objective criteria of the similitude of melodies. In general, there are a great many variants between "A" and "B", just as there are different shades of grey until one reaches white or black and very often two researchers will have a different opinion of the case. The same melody line will be qualified "A" variant by one, while another will assign it a place among the "B" variants. Between these two variants no strict boundaries may be established. In principle, without having a concrete example in mind it is even difficult to decide what is more important, e.g. the beginning or the ending of a melody line. To what extent can the transposition be considered as a variant, especially if, as usual, this goes together with some kind of modification. Should the deviations of the rhythm be taken into consideration and if so, to what extent, when we look for variants of the melody? These and similar questions cannot be answered unambiguously.

Pál Járdányi, when working on the establishment of the final order of the Hungarian folk songs for publication, had to face these difficulties time and again and was compelled to decide in the case of thousands of variants. He concentrated above all on the melody movements, more precisely, on the direction of the movement and the position of melody parts as compared to each other. He defined the sequence of the melodies on the basis of the identical or similar movement of the whole melody and subsequently, that of the parts.

It seems appropriate at this point to demonstrate some melody patterns and the examples pertaining to it. It is self-explanatory that the patterns indicating the melody movement are not precise, they only show up the main trends and leave the minor deviations out of consideration. Just as for example the expression "descending melody line" does not mean that the given tune is really always descending. A melody line can still be descending, even if there can be

found from time to time permanent and sometimes smaller ascending parts. Járdányi differentiated in the following main forms of movement Hungarian folk music material.

- descending
- ascending
- convex
- concave
- convex and concave
- concave and convex

This analysis which intends to render assistance to an easier recognition of variants is not a system set up in advance but something which was born out of the recognition of the peculiarities of the Hungarian material. It is thus highly probable that its application to the investigation of other folk music material could only be restricted. We know of musical traditions where this system would prove to be completely useless because it would be unsuitable to look for or show up any kind of melody pattern in melodies of a narrow range. Furthermore, it can be taken for granted that the frequency of various melody patterns is not identical either. One thing is sure, i.e. that the convex arch surpasses all others. To this the following sub-divisions should be added:

- abruptly ascending and slowly descending
- slowly ascending and abruptly descending
- convex arch with two climaxes of identical height
- convex arch starting in midheight and ending deep
- convex arch starting deep and ending in midheight
- the middle of the convex arch rests long in the height

Our experience shows that this melody pattern is strongly represented in the Anglo-Saxon folk music tradition as well.

Beside the rhythmic and melodic variety of the folk songs the manifoldness of forms also deserves attention. There is a vast scope of possibilities starting from the endless repetition of one single pair of bars which is equally characteristic for the songs of the north American Indians, certain Finno-Ugrian and Siberian peoples or the children's game songs of any region up to the completed forms of 6-8 lines, frequently represented in the Anglo-Saxon or French music tradition where refrain is a common feature. There is little doubt that in the folk music tradition of Europe or that of European origin the four-line tune remains the commonest type, which, even if not European as far as origin is concerned is by all means the dominating form there. The connection to this form of European classical music, such as the four-part sonata or the symphony structure can be, of course, easily established so that the mutual interdependence and influence of folk music and composed music is well to be observed in this field, too. Or much more the expression of a very common human way of expression should be supposed here, for which three is insufficient and five too much, thus there arises the need for a unit easy to remember and which, when necessary, is divided and repeated, where all four lines may differ but nevertheless one or two lines will most certainly be repeated. Accordingly, a four-line verse does not consist of four but only of three and in many cases even of two different musical elements. The investigation of the variants of repetitions e.g. in the four-line tunes yields very instructive results. We shall arrive at a very astonishing outcome of international comparisons if we chose from the 15 possibilities of the four-line melodies the most characteristic ones. These possibilities are:

Tunes of one element (A) = AAAA

Tunes of two elements (AB) = AAB, AABA, ABAA, AABB, ABAB, ABBA, ABBB

Tunes of three elements (ABC) = AABC, ABAC, ABCA, ABBC, ABCB, ABCC

Tunes of four elements (ABCD) = ABCD

Upon analyzing nearly one thousand Canadian English folk songs it turned out that five of them are the dominating ones, i.e. AABA and ABBA, ABAC, AABC and finally ABCD. It is not by chance that the first two formations are to be found in Hungarian folk music of the newer type, too. As in the case of these two folk music traditions a genetic relationship is out of question. This phenomenon can much more be explained by the circumstance that these verse structures are the expressions of some kind of general human sense of proportions, not bound to any nation. Both a closing with returning to some previous melody pattern, and the appearance of new musical elements, e.g. in the middle of the melody or perhaps in the third line, follow equally a classical principle. It is at the same time understandable that e.g. the ABAA or ABBB formations play a much lesser role as both of them are contrary to the rules of the golden section or to classical repetition.

The interchange of melody lines opens up possibilities for unique form variants and it occurs sometimes, that due to it, important historical relationships come to light. I should like to give you a Hungarian example. For a long time we had thought that the widely known folk song "Fekete föld termi a jó búzát" is one of the most archaic Hungarian tunes as the descending fifth construction of A^5A^5AA formula suggests this idea. But since another variant of the same folk song was found which is of the AA^5A^5A type, a form, which is typical of the later style, opinions greatly differ. The relationship between the two types is, however, undoubtable. Kodály suggested that in such a case we have simply two different sections of the $A^5A^5AAA^5A^5AAA^5A^5AA$ line, which appear at the straightforward singing of several stanzas. Although we don't attach such a great importance to the text of the folk songs as many a compiler of collections who classifies melodies according to text, we cannot leave them out of consideration. Variation of texts is an everyday phenomenon and is much more conscious than the melody variation. Changes in the melody are often not realized either sung or listened to, while the substitution of one single word by another calls forth immediate reaction. It is very frequent to find names exchanged or the mentioning of lad instead of lass, brown hair instead of fair hair. With lyric songs not connected with any special occasion it often occurs that complete verses having an identical number of syllables are inter-changed. Not so with the ballads where the text and the melody belong more organically together.

In every folk tradition there are periodically fashionable, widely used and varied texts. It is quite natural that everybody reshapes these a little according to his own personality or the requirements of his environment. For example, in Hungary the case is very popular of the girl who fell into the threshing-machine. This story is known in almost every village; what is more, people even insist on its having occurred right in that community or in the neighbouring village. It is also valid for the text that the more variants it has, the more alive it remains.

The performance style of the folk songs is not sufficiently known yet. Besides concentrating on "what" to collect we spent little time on observing "how" the collected material is performed, although this latter is also an important component of tradition. Photos, films and videotapes can greatly assist us in this. The whole character of a dance melody changes if it is sung in a sitting position just as a rubato melody may lose its natural, free rhythm if sung by *many* together.

Performance on the stage may incite dangerous distortions. On the stage a faultless, rehearsed, spectacular production is required. Thus it often happens that people who would sing with exemplary simplicity otherwise, start to behave in a completely unnatural way under the influence of flash-lights, audience and unusual environment; some get afraid, others overdo their roles. Singing folk songs is not primarily mass entertainment. It has only lately become one, and in so doing it has lost much of its simplicity.

The absolute pitch of the tunes, the timbre of the performance, the posture of the performing person as well as the small accompanying movements open up a wide variety of possibilities for variation. He who is familiar with the folk music of a region from books only will be surprised when one day he gets to know it in a live performance. This experience I gathered twenty years ago in China.

The enumeration must be finished here while knowing that the topic itself is inexhaustible. The examination of variants can be commenced but never completed once for all. Folk music and folk songs are some of the most ancient, most natural and beautiful manifestations of the human soul and they keep changing with their creator. They meet such basic human needs for expression which—there is no use denying it—are latent in all of us. It is unfortunate that many are unaware of these needs and the satisfaction which the experience of folksong would bring to them. Our task is to call attention to it.

Participation de Jacquotte Ribière-Raverlat au panel sur “Les variantes dans les chansons folkloriques”

COMMENT FAIRE LE LIEN ENTRE LE TRAVAIL DE FOLKLORISTE ET CELUI DE PÉDAGOGUE?

Pour illustrer mes idées, j’ai délibérément choisi des variantes musicales d’un même texte littéraire, les chansons de rossignol, et plus précisément le sujet du “Rossignol conseiller”:

“Rossignolet du bois,
Rossignolet sauvage,
Apprends-moi ton langage,
Apprends-moi-z-à parler,
Apprends-moi la manière
Comment il faut aimer.”

Ce type de chansons compte parmi les plus anciennes; on trouve ce sujet déjà traité par les troubadours, puis au XVe siècle (recueil de Gaston Paris) et au XVIe siècle (livre de Pierre Attaignant). Les chansons de rossignol sont répandues dans toutes les provinces françaises et l’on en trouve de nombreuses et très belles variantes au Canada français (Cf. entre autres les recueils de Marius Barbeau).

Ces chansons ont en général un tempo lent et les rythmes sont très libres. La mélodie, souvent très ornée, ne comporte pas de refrain et tout son charme tient à la couleur du mode utilisé: quelquefois le mode majeur mais le plus souvent les modes éolien, dorien, le mélange éolien-dorien et il y a quelques exemples de mixolydien.

En comparant ces différentes variantes, puis en mettant en valeur les ressemblances et les différences, le pédagogue peut très facilement trouver matière à des exercices d’audition et de lecture, et cela en fonction du niveau de la classe dans laquelle il travaille, en fonction du point technique qu’il cherche à approfondir à un moment donné de la progression pédagogique (élément rythmique, mélodique, modal), et ainsi il amène les enfants à l’analyse musicale.

1er exemple: Sur différentes formules initiales, il peut donner les rythmes et faire trouver les sons:

Haut-Quercy
 Jura
 Aveyron
 Pyrénées

2ème exemple: Sur d'autres formules initiales, il peut chanter deux tournures mélodique semblables mais dans lesquelles les rythmes diffèrent:

(avec anacrouse)		Pyrénées
(sans anacrouse)		Hautes-Alpes
(petite note de passage qui amène le rythme à double croche)		Jura
		Bourgogne

3e exemple: On peut également faire lire successivement ces différentes lignes mélodiques (deuxième phrase de la chanson)

et faire constater:

a/ que la tournure mélodique est de plus en plus ouverte

1, t, d r m

1, t, d r m f

1, t, d r m fi s

On compare alors les échelles mélodiques, les modes.

b/ que toutes ces phrases commencent de la même façon ensuite de façon différente.

et évoluent

Cela peut alors servir de base à un moment d'improvisation:

Ainsi, on part d'une réalité folklorique, la vie d'une chanson par ses variantes, on passe par la créativité chez l'enfant et l'on peut aboutir tout naturellement à l'idée de Variations sur un thème donné chez les compositeurs, c'est-à-dire à ce qui doit rester notre but: la musique.

Participation of Tanimoto Kazuyuki, Sapporo, Japan, in the panel discussion on "Variations in Folk songs".

Variants in folk music neither constitute the form of theme and variations as found in art music, where modification is provided by ornamentation and elaboration on a given musical theme nor do they simply constitute the introduction of improvised details into certain musical material. Variants constitute the substantial body of folk music itself. The generally accepted concept of folk music as such, can be defined as a music which has anonymously entered into

the heritage of a local or national community and which for many generations has been submitted to the process of oral transmission. It seems to me that it is necessary to add an extra stipulation to this widely accepted qualification of folk music and that is that there occurs perpetual variation in the material. I want to prove that variations or variants really constitute the essential character of folk music by showing a few examples and examining their significance.

Example (1) comes from Ainu in Hokkaido, Japan. The melody is one of their festive songs called Upopo. Example a) shows a typical melody observed in several communities. Example b) shows individual variants within a specific community. And Example c) shows variants obtained as a result of the repeated singing of a certain individual. Example (2) shows three samples collected from a single Gyliak (Nivkhi) informant in Siberia. It is almost impossible to determine which one is the representative model among the countless varying versions. Here, every variant is a representative model and the model constitutes the whole body of variants together. Variation is a natural feature of folk music.

Both Ainu and Gyliak are tribes, and their cultures are not necessarily similar to those of more advanced ones. Folkloric transmission reflects the social and cultural change of the community and obtains its vital force from variant differentiation.

Variants of folksong are almost unmeasurable but they take certain definite forms. For instance, in Example (1), all the variants begin on the note Do, (or Mi) and end on the note Do (or La). The note Sol never begins or finishes the melody. In Example (2), the starting note is always Re and the ending note is Do. The note La never begins or ends the melody. The fixed state of the beginning and ending note demonstrates the existence of a tonal system with a firm frame structure within a given community. So long as a group of variants stays within the boundary of one and the same homogeneous community, the frame structure of the tonal system retains its shape.

But when oral transmission crosses the boundary line of a heterogeneous community, the inherent tonal frame is metamorphosed into different shapes. When a certain feature of a culture is transplanted into another culture, certain modifications are needed to make it adapt to the new cultural system. Folk music follows the same pattern. In this case the transformation takes the form of theme and variations.

Example (3a) is a Japanese military song widely sung in the eighteen-twenties. Example (3b) is a Mongolian folk song collected by a Swede researcher in 1928 and published in 1943. The melodic lines are almost the same, but the tonal system has been changed.

Example (4a) is a famous Scottish folksong, but the melody as sung by a Japanese, is shown in example b). The Scotch snap characteristic, which appears in the original melody is non-existent in the traditional rhythmic patterns of the Japanese. Therefore the rhythmic pattern has been transformed into a regular dotted rhythm which is more natural to the Japanese sense of folk rhythm.

Because of their pentatonic nature, Scottish melodies have been widely accepted into Japanese culture and the famous "Auld Lang Syne" was adapted into a national text book of music compiled in the eighteen eighties. The Japanese sing them as if they were typically original Japanese songs. But in the process of assimilation certain changes took place, particularly in the rhythmic patterns.

The style of variants depends on the nature and character of the song; whether it is to be sung as a solo or by a group, by adults or by children. In other words, the style of the variants is affected by the circumstances in which the song is to be sung.

Japanese folk songs, similar to the Hungarian, can be divided into two chief styles — *Tempo Giusto* and *Parlando*.

(Tape I—II)

The former is less melismatic, has clearer rhythmic articulation, a narrow tonal range, and motive repetition. In contrast, the latter is more melismatic, less rhythmically articulated, has a wider tonal range and is structurally more or less indefinite. The differences derive from the fact that the *Tempo Giusto* type of folk songs are mainly associated with group songs of labour and dance, while the *parlando* type is mostly sung by an individual, where personal feeling and emotion is more stressed than in the former. Personal feeling is culminated in the melismatic inflection.

Thus, the melismatic element in the *parlando* type melody is not secondary to the melodic structure but vital to the core of the melody. Naturally, the attention of both singer and listeners is focused on the melismatic elements as individual expression is most vividly reflected in this part. In this type of melody, the melismatic form alters with the changing of words or verses. In this sense the relationship between melody and text is constant and homeostatic. On the contrary, in the *tempo giusto* style, where there is less melismatic inflection, the relationship between melody and verse is less constant, i.e. the changing of words seldom causes any alteration in the melodic part.

These two types of Japanese folk song represent both extremes. In actual practice, communal folksongs for adults are usually flavored by personal empathy and in consequence many hybrid forms come into existence. But in the case of game songs for children, the dominating style is that of *tempo giusto* and no melismatic inflection can be observed since children's games are categorically governed by *esprit de corps* (group spirit).

By comparing the variants of Japanese children's play songs, we can see how the structure of the folk tonal system changes. Example (4) shows variants of a play song where a large group play a game called "Decide It".

Example (5)

The most striking feature between A and B is the difference of the note Mi (A) and Ma (A). This change can often be observed in Japanese children's songs.

Traditional Japanese folk music is based on a tonal system using 4 types of tetrachord each having a perfect 4th as its frame, plus one middle tone, as shown in example (6a). The combination of these tetrachords yield 4 different scales as shown here in example (6b). We use the term "tetrachord" for these notes but in some other systems it is called a "tritone".

The melody of example (5a) is based on the 2nd species of the perfect 4th frame plus middle tone, adjoining the lower nuclear note with a minor 2nd interval. The melody of example b) is based on the 3rd species of the tetrachord which has a perfect 4th frame interval with middle note of major 2nd adjoining to lower nuclear note.

Mutation between the 2nd and 3rd species is frequently observed but mutation which includes the first species is very rare. Frequent mutation means that two tonal systems become akin with each other. Let us go back to example (6) to see this in detail.

Every typical Japanese melody has the common feature that "All successive three-note melodies end on the middle note." That is, when a melody comprises of three notes, let us say Do-Re-Mi, the middle note, Re, takes the function of the nuclear note. If we apply this rule to the conjunction of two tetrachords, note G of two possible nuclear notes, remains as true nuclear note. Thus the 2nd and the 3rd species has a common nuclear note as G—G—C. But in the case of the 1st and the 4th species, the order becomes C—F—C, a different allocation of nuclear notes.

Example (7)

The Japanese accept such mutation quite naturally without any feeling of contradiction. This can be compared to the European practice of changing the minor into a major mode or vice-versa without changing the melodic shape.

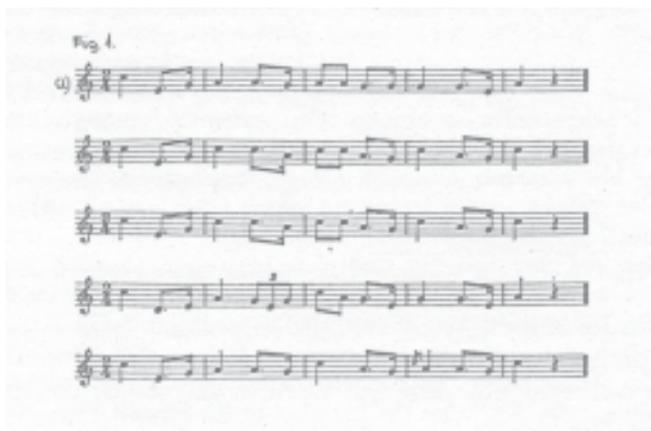
Many songs not based on traditional tonal systems are sung by Japanese school children and example (8) shows one of them.

The first 4 measures of the example are based on the first species of tetrachord junction. As shown in example (9), the rest of the melody looks as if it is based on the 3rd species of the tetrachord. It seems to show melodic movement based on the nuclear note, G. But the melodic contour is actually based on the major scale lacking its 4th and 7th notes (Fa and Ti) using F as the tonic. Such a scale is not an inherent part of Japanese music. When European music was adapted into Japanese school music in the eighteen-forties, the European major mode was combined with the traditional penta-scale. This hybrid mode has the characteristics of an anhemitonic or tonal penta-scale without the traditional nuclear function. This hybrid scale was used for many school songs and secured its stand in the tonal feeling of the Japanese. Now the scale is not limited to school songs but is widely used in the field of popular music.

Example (10) is a children's ball-bouncing song. a) is based on a new hybrid scale and b) is based on the 1st species of traditional tetrachord structure.

Here I want to quote a small portion of Béla Bartók's treatise on the purity of species in music. He says, "The contact with different types of culture not only brought forth the hybridization of music but also gave impetus to the creation of a completely new style. Of course it went side by side with the continuation of the older style music which as a result greatly enriched the whole culture."

As I have pointed out, folk songs gain their vital energy from the variants themselves. Significant problems arise when trying to standardize folksongs and children's playsongs in order to use them as teaching material. It means that one particular variant has to be singled out from the many, and sanctioned as the orthodox one. When using these folk treasures as teaching material for schools, the concept of variants in folk music should be fully recognized and the possibilities of presenting them with all their essential vitality should be carefully examined.



b)

c)

北秋田 Fig. 4. 川向いの若い者

1957年

1962年

1963年

Fig. 3.

a)

Abu Chinggis
Our ancestor Chingis Khan.

Ten male voices (d♯)

b)

Comin' Thro' the Rye

Fig. 4.

Lively

a)

If a bod-y meet a bod-y, Com-in' thro' the rye,
If a bod-y kiss a bod-y, Need a bod-y cry?
Ev-'ry las-sie has her 'lad-die: Nane, they say, ha'e I; Yet
a' the lads they smile on me, When com-in' thro' the rye.

故郷の空

大和田建樹 作詞
スコットランド民謡

元気よく

b)

申うぞははれてあきかぜあき
 すぎゆくみずにあきはぎたれ
 つきかけおちてすずむしなく
 たまなすつゆわすすきにみつ
 おもえばとかしこきおのそらあ
 おもえばにたりこきおののべあ
 あわがちはははいかにかわす
 あわがはらからたれとあそぶ

p
mp
mf
f

Fig. 5.

せむせのよいよいことしのぼたんわよいぼたん - せむせのよいよいことしのぼたんわよいぼたん
 ことしのぼたんわよいぼたん - せむせのよいよいことしのぼたんわよいぼたん

Fig. 6.

1) 2) 3) 4)

a)

b)

坊やはよい子だ

Fig. 7.

(東京)

a)

ぼうやはよいこだ ねんねしな
あやまこえて さとへいた
でんでんたいこに しょうのふえ

ねんねの おもひは どこへいた
さとの おみやに なにもろた
おやがり こぼしに ふりつづみ

坊やはよい子だ

(東京)

b)

ぼうやはよいこだ ねんねしな
あやまこえて さとへいた
でんでんたいこに しょうのふえ

ねんねの おもひは どこへいた
さとの おみやに なにもろた
おやがり こぼしに ふりつづみ

