# The Changing Style of Jewish Humor in the Second Half of the 20th Century

## Arie Melnik[*] | Yuval Nov[**]

**Abstract**

Jewish humor in the 20th century is a continuously changing form of entertainment. In the shift of Jewish centers, from the Polish "shtetles" to urban centers in the US, the humor changed in two ways. First, the humor acquired a more general tone. In the process, the thematic <u>subjects</u> of jokes kept changing. Jewish related jokes were omitted but jokes on general subjects remained.

A second change occurred in the first half of the 20th century with the shift from vaudeville to the Catskills and to the radio and TV shows and to comedy clubs. The <u>structure</u> of jokes changed. In particular, the size of the stories was reduced and punchlines were emphasized. This emphasis on general subjects and fast-pace moving punchlines created a Jewish humor style.

Here, we focus on the changes in content and in length of standard jokes originating in the second half of the 20th century. In this work we compare the length of new jokes to the length and subject matter that were commonly used at the beginning of the 20th century. We use statistical analysis to compare a sample of 800 jokes delivered by professional comedians in the second half of the century with an older set.

**Keywords:** Jewish humor, jokes, change, 20th century, comedians, statistical analysis

## Introduction

Jewish humor in the 20th century is a continuously changing form of entertainment. It is full of stylistic eccentricities. In the shift of Jewish centers, from the Polish "shtetles" to urban centers in the US, the humor changed in two ways. First, the humor acquired a more general tone. Following the wiping out of the Yiddish-speaking communities, the creative source of this humor was transplanted into English and Hebrew. In the process, the thematic <u>subjects</u> of jokes kept changing.

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Classical mother-in-law jokes or marriage-broker jokes remained, and twists on prayers or language expressions were omitted.

A second change occurred in the first half of the 20th century with the shift from vaudeville to the Catskills and to the radio and TV shows and to comedy clubs. The <u>structure</u> of jokes changed. In particular, the size of the stories was reduced and punchlines were emphasized. This emphasis on general subjects and fast-pace moving punchlines created a Jewish humor style that is universally loved and often recited by Jews and non-Jews alike.

Here, we focus on the changes in content and in length of standard jokes originating in the second half of the 20th century. In this work we compare the length of new jokes to the length and subject matter that were commonly used at the beginning of the 20th century. We use statistical analysis to compare a sample of 800 jokes delivered by professional comedians in the second half of the century with an older set.

The rest of the paper is organized as follows. In the next section we describe the transformation over time that occurred in the US to the ways Jewish humor is presented. Section 3 briefly outlines the style of jokes and their main subjects. This is followed by a review of the desired length of jokes and funny stories. Section 5 contains the data selection procedure and describes the characteristics of the two samples. Section 6 summarizes the statistical test. Section 7 contains the empirical results which confirm that the narrative of Jewish jokes became shorter in the 20th century. In section 8 we discuss the results and outline possible explanations for these findings. Section 9 concludes.

## 1. The transformation over time

Standard jokes are composed of a short story (narrative) and a punchline. Knowing, or anticipating, the familiar framework of a story means that we absorb quickly the lesson it contains. Our mind is open to the message given the structure of the tale. If the story, instead, ends with an unanticipated outcome, it sounds funny. The mere "out-of-line" result creates a laugh. Jokes are, for the most part, stories that begin in a familiar fashion but end with a twist.

The twisted ending relies on the story. Jokes work well when we are familiar with a basic story. In the past, stories were long if the audience did not understand

well the building blocks of the basic situation. In the 19th century set-up, when the story was about a less familiar subject such as long-distance traveling and out-of-house dining, the story had to be longer in order to be understood. At that time Jewish jokes on a non-religious subject were fairly long.

In the 20th century, especially in the US, Jews became familiar with the ways of the external (non-Jewish) world. They came out of the cultural ghettos and into the open. As a result, the format of the traditional stories became short. Two processes occurred: first, secularization, and second, an internalization of the social norms of the general public. In the rapid pace of city life there is no time to ramble. One has to stick to the point in order to gain the attention of the audience. Jewish humor changed and the preparatory stories of the 19th century were not necessary. Instead, a succinct approach was taken. Comedians left out the non-essential parts. The prose became focused and led straight to the punchline.

## 2. The roots of Jewish jokes in the end of the 19th century

Jewish humor, as Oring (2010) refers to it, is a relatively modern phenomenon[1]. It begins only in Europe in the 19th century. During the 19th century, most jokes focused on the internal life of the community and other daily practices. For Jews, at the time, telling jokes was a central activity in community life. Towards the end of the 19th century jokes were a common source of entertainment of the Jewish community, and several "professional" comedians emerged to provide them[2].

Jokes are generally short stories with a funny and unexpected twist at the end. The stories deal with known life occurrences, such as religious practices, human conflicts, raising children, and business transactions. They were passed first orally from one generation to the next. Later on, written text emerged and circulated. Funny stories about strange-real life experiences were told and re-told. Some of these jokes are still funny today when re-dressed in modern language.

Often, we fail to realize how these jokes change thematically and in their length over time, even when their core remains the same. The characters may change but the moral stays on. The modern teller of a funny story reinforces the old

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[1] Ruth Wisse (2013), however, places the origin of Jewish humor, in the 18th century.
[2] The discussion of the social role of "badchanim", "Maggidim" and storytellers in the 19th century is not a part of the present article.

punchlines while changing some of the elements of the stories. The protagonists in traditional jokes stay the same over time. They are stupid, clever, beautiful, ugly, rich, poor, kind, cunning, hard-working, lazy, young, old, etc. These actors are usually superficial and nameless, such as "Jewish princess", "stepmothers", "absent minded professors", "rabbis", and "aircraft pilots". As a matter of fact, the hero or heroine can be any of us[3].

As noted, most Jewish jokes start with the protagonist leading an ordinary life in an ordinary environment (e.g., eating in a restaurant, riding a plane, or playing golf). They are in a set-up that we can easily identify. The situation may even be familiar from personal experience. Then, the very act of crossing from the expected to the unexpected creates a comic effect. They demonstrate that changes are possible if we look at a given situation in a different way.

Some of the power of Jewish jokes lies in the narrative device that precedes the punchline. Over the 20th century the narrative became shorter, because the set-up became familiar to most people. If we all know the situation, there is no need to recount it in a long story. Thus, the jokes are getting shorter.

### 3. Length of jokes and subject portfolio

As noted by Oring (2010), a joke evokes laughter because it demands a sudden mental switch that tends to precipitate laughter. The rearrangement is only possible if the punchline is sudden. The surprise created by the punchline is the essence of success. Thus, the punchline must come at the end of the text, in order to provide the abrupt and surprising effect.

So, even if the tale may be funny, the punchline is the essential component. As a matter of fact, the two components of a joke (story and punchline) are inseparable. Overall, there are longer jokes and shorter jokes. Most jokes are single-episodic by nature. The length of the narration depends on the actual description that needs to be conveyed, but it must lead to a punctual end. Cohen (1999) and Rappoport (2005) agree that a joke without a punchline is no joke. At best, it is a funny tale.

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[3] The jokes also use polarized characters, such as smart or stupid and no specific setting (e.g. a train, an airport terminal, a bar etc.). All these settings are immediately understood by all of us. Sanitized real world stories are often striped of the original complexities.

There are several types of jokes, but here we concentrate on so-called standard jokes, that is, jokes that end with a punchline[4]. While the story part has been analyzed by Limon (2000), Chiaro (2006) and Hockenson (2006), the notion of a punchline remains mostly intuitive. It must be sudden and must create a cognitive reorganization in the mind of the audience.

Researchers such as Critchley (2002) and Oring (2010) also note that there is a required brevity element that plays a part. It seems that jokes' brevity is needed to control information and even to restrict it in order to prevent information overload. Reduction of overload enables the listener to grasp the relations between the abrupt conclusion and the exposed narrative. If the narrative is too rich, the listener may be unable to recall the essential information necessary to contrast when the punchline is delivered.

There is no agreement on the desired length of a standard joke. Despite the danger of an over-developed narrative, brevity is not the sole means of controlling information. Often, brevity would not result in better jokes. There should be some upper limit to the length of a joke narrative, but we do not know what it is. A proper narrative can be evaluated only after its punchline is revealed. To put a heavy emphasis on the narrative may tip the weight of the joke away from the punchline. It takes a real professional, such as Buddy Hacket, Murray Amsterdam, or Alan King, to tell long jokes while keeping the story right for the punchline.

Of course, there are limits to the length of the narrative in the construction of a joke. What these limits are, however, remains open and depends on the skill of the professional comedian that delivers them. In the following analysis we view the length of a joke as an empirical phenomenon.

## 4. The data

For the statistical analysis that follows we used only standard jokes. A standard joke has two components: a story and a punchline. We do not include riddle jokes, such as elephant jokes, and lightbulb-changing jokes. These jokes are structured as a series of questions and answers. The humor lies in the incongruous propositions that are outside the realm of reality. Riddles are thus containing unreal situations that are not

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[4] Critchley (2002) notes that the combination of narrative and punch "let you see the familiar de-familiarized and the real becomes surreal".

encountered in everyday life. Therefore, the traditional familiarity of a story does not exist. The answer to the riddle constructs an absurd image. Similarly, we do not include insults and curses (in the style of Don Rickels), and twists on proverbs and clichés. We also avoid "rules for living" and "top-ten lists" that are often included in stand up deliveries[5].

In order to analyze what happened to Jewish humor over time, we compiled two samples of jokes. The <u>first</u> sample, which we called "old", is based on jokes from the book of Alter Druyanov (1934, volumes 1 and 2). According to Druyanov, most of these jokes were assembled from books and other media that were published over the period 1880-1930. Specifically, we use a sample of about 1,250 jokes on different subjects. The subject definitions are as suggested by Druyanov. A detailed frequency table is provided in the appendix. The <u>second</u> sample, which we called "new", covers the period 1950-2000, and contains about 800 jokes, delivered by twenty professional comedians. They are listed in the appendix[6].

Looking at the Table of the "old" sample, we observe that about half of the subjects are strictly Jewish in nature. Peddlers, beggars and misers, Schnnorers, Gabbais, Rabbis, Preachers, Hassidim, Mitnagdim, Fools, Converts, Matchmakers and more are subjects that were hardly understood by non-Jews at the turn of the 20th century.

In order to understand the background, one must assume that the audience of the early 20th century knew well Yiddish language terminology as well as parts of the Bible and the Talmud. These are clearly jokes that, at the time, required familiarities with Jewish food (concepts of dietary laws) and Jewish holidays such as Yom Kippur and Passover. Also, listeners had to know Jewish daily practices (Tefillin, Kriat Shma, Kadish) and weekly habits (Shabbat songs). In the early days of the 20th century the

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[5] Riddle jokes and funny clichés come and go in waves. Even absurdities eventually become trivial and lose some of their initial fun. Empirically they are usually not included in the programs of professional comedians.

[6] The jokes are taken from written forms used by the following standup comedians: Murray Amsterdam, Buddy Hackett, Shelly Berman, Jack Carter, Alan King, David Brenner, Jack Benny, Red Skelton, Myron Cohen, Andy Kindler, Don Rickles, Jackie Mason, Rodney Dangerfield, Mark Maron, Judy Gold, Milton Berle, Henny Youngman and George Burns. Some of the jokes were used by more than one comedian. We eliminated jokes that appear more than once in order to avoid double counting.

comic routine addressed the Jewish crowd. It relied upon general sociological and cultural knowledge of the target audience: the Jewish community itself[7].

Looking at the Table of the "new" sample (in the appendix) we observe that very few (only two or three) of the subjects are strictly Jewish. As a matter of fact, most of the subjects cover general activities with no particular religious reference. Issues such as encounters with policeman, resolving traffic violations, arguing at the reservation counter of an airport, corresponding with children who are at college etc. These are all regular activities that the audience is familiar with: Financial transactions such as taking a mortgage loan, coping with high price at restaurants, trying to fight overeating, paying taxes, resolving marriage difficulties, and so on. All these are general subjects. The deep Jewish component is drastically diminished and general subjects become dominant.

Each of the samples, "old" and "new", is divided into subjects. In addition, they are grouped into four length categories. We use the following length categories, or slots: LL is a long joke; in print it takes more than 15 lines. L is an ordinary length; in print it takes 10-14 lines. S is a shorter joke; in print it takes 5-9 lines. SS is a very short joke; in print it takes 1-4 lines[8].

In the two tables of the data appendix we also note the frequency of style. Under column "6" we list the most frequent style, that of simple environmental storytelling. This style is by far closest to the classical definition of a standard joke. Under column "7" we group stories in the monologue style. Under column "8" we list a frequency of short statements, and column "9" includes unidentified styles.

## 5. The statistical test

Each joke was classified into one of four possible groups, according to its length: "very short" (SS), for jokes extending over 4 lines or fewer; "short" (S), between 5 and 9 lines; "long" (L), between 10 and 15 lines; and "very long" (LL), 15 lines or more. These groups are *ordinal*, i.e., they satisfy SS < S < L < LL.

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[7] Such knowledge remained fresh, also in the early days of the borsht belts' summer holidays in the 1920's and 1930's.

[8] The above definition of lengths is for Hebrew or Yiddish jokes (in the old set). In the new set the definition of length is about 20% longer, due to language adjustments. For example, a very short joke is 1-5 lines. And the regular short joke is 6-12 lines.

To test whether there is a difference in joke length between the two periods, we use the two-sample Mann-Whitney U test (also called the Wilcoxon-Mann-Whitney test). This test is non-parametric, i.e., it does not assume that the data follow any specific distribution, and is therefore more robust than the well-known two-sample t test, which assumes that the data are normally distributed. The Mann-Whitney U test only requires that all observations are independent of each other, and that they are expressed on the same ordinal scale; both requirements are clearly satisfied in our case.

The final result of the statistical test is a number called "the p-value," which ranges between 0 and 1. A relatively high p-value (traditionally, a p-value above 0.05) indicates that there is little evidence in favor of the hypothesis of different joke lengths in the two periods. Conversely, a low p-value supports the hypothesis of difference in joke length in the two periods. For more details on the Mann-Whitney U test, see Rice (2006).

## 6. Empirical results

We first compared the length of the old jokes (1880-1930) to the length of the new jokes (1950-2000), using all available data. The joke length distribution in each of the two periods is shown in the following graph.

**Graph and table 1: joke length distribution in the two periods**
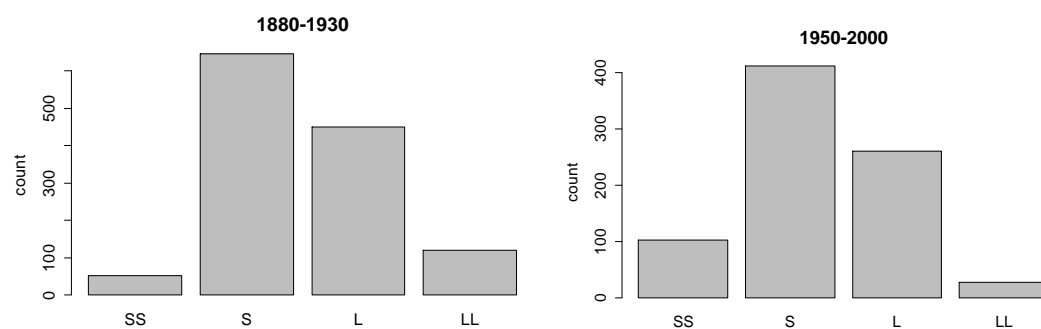


| Period | SS | S | L | LL |
|--------|----|----|----|----|
| 1880-1930 | 53 (4.2%) | 645 (50.9%) | 450 (35.5%) | 120 (9.5%) |
| 1950-2000 | 103 (12.8%) | 411 (51.2%) | 260 (32.4%) | 28 (3.5%) |

As the graph and the table show, there is little difference between the two periods in the percentage of the jokes belonging to either of the two intermediate length groups, S and L: for example, in the 1880-1930 period, 50.9% of the jokes were classified as S, whereas the corresponding figure in the 1950-2000 period is 51.2%. In contrast, the two extreme length groups, SS and LL, exhibit a more significant difference between the two periods: the percentage of the SS jokes more than tripled, from 4.2% to 12.8%, and the percentage of the LL jokes dropped by more than a half, from 9.5% to 3.5%.

The change in joke length is formally confirmed by the Mann-Whitney U test. The p-value of the test is $p < 0.0001$, indicating in a strong, statistically significant manner that the jokes in the 1880-1930 period tend to be longer than the ones in the 1950-2000 period.

It is possible that the jokes are getting shorter because in the new list (see appendix) the classical Jewish subjects are reduced in numbers. That is, strictly Jewish jokes that are directed inwards (as was the case in the 19th century) are longer than the later jokes. In order to test this hypothesis, we eliminated classical Jewish subjects – peddlers jokes, beggars and misers jokes, Gabbai (warden) jokes, Rabbis jokes, preachers jokes, jokes about Hasidim and Mitnagdim, jokes about ignorant and uneducated, jokes about conversion to Christianity, jokes about matchmakers, and jokes that reflect issues between man and god. All in all, we eliminated 10 categories from the 1880-1930 sample, and conducted the same statistical test again. The frequency results are shown in Table 2 (note that the 1950-2000 data has not changed):

**Table 2: joke length distribution in the two periods, with traditionally Jewish categories eliminated from the 1880-1930 period**

| Period | SS | S | L | LL |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1880-1930 | 33 (3.8%) | 456 (53.0%) | 302 (35.1%) | 70 (8.1%) |
| 1950-2000 | 103 (12.8%) | 411 (51.2%) | 260 (32.4%) | 28 (3.5%) |

Overall, the results of the comparison between the two periods after eliminating the abovementioned 10 categories are similar to the results based on the full data (Graph and Table 1). There is a substantial increase over time in the percentage of the SS

jokes, little difference in the two intermediate groups, S and L, and a substantial decrease in the percentage of the LL jokes. The Mann-Whitney U test yielded again $p < 0.0001$, indicating that the old jokes become shorter over time regardless of the "Jewishness" of their subject matter.

### 7. Discussion of the results

So, the shorter narrative that prevailed in the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century is <u>not</u> due to the subject mix. It is probably due to a general trend which is partly a response to changing technology and partly to general social environment[9]. In the two decades following 1870 the number of newspapers in Britain grew from 150 to 1,500. A similar trend occurred in the US. Due to oil and gas lamps, people read more and the growing number of newspapers required change in the delivery style.

Space was costly in the news media, so columnists of the early decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> century had to resort to a more succinct style. The new class of columnists (including humor columnists) grew quickly and had more influence on matters of culture. Critics on all subjects had to write in short style. In the US, some of them had a sharp sense of humor. We are referring to authors such as George Ade (1866-1944), Arthur Baer (1897-1969), Irwin S. Cobb (1876-1944), Finley Dunne (1869-1936), Oliver Herford (1836-1935), H. L. Menken (1880-1956), and James Thurber (1894-1961).

Other Americans that adopted the short humor narrative were theater figures (writers and actors) such John Barrymore (1882-1942) and Caroline Wells (1872-1942). Some of their humoristic barbs are still used today. The same trend, of shortening stories occurred in the first decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> century in Britain. Writers such as Samuel Butler (1832-1902), journalist Keith Chesterton (1874-1936), Lord Thomas Dewar (1864-1939) and poet William S. Gilbert (1836-1911) belong to this group.

Later on, the new media, radio, became popular in the 1930's. Its business plan, based on selling commercials (i.e. airtime), required economizing of time. It was inappropriate to skip commercial announcements if the joke or a story lasted more

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[9] Let's go back to 1859 when oil was discovered in Titusville, Pennsylvania. The oil output in 1860 was 2000 barrels and in 1870 4 million barrels. The world adopted oil lamps for domestic use. As a result people read more.

than three and a half minutes. So participants had to adopt a short and crisp style of delivery in radio shows. Thus, the format of the traditional news stories became short. Comedians had to follow this constraint as well. The internalization of the social norms of the general public meant that the subject mix changed as well. In the rapid pace of city life there is no time to tell long stories. Comedians had to stick to the point in order to maintain the attention of the public.

The introduction of television shows in the 1950's required even more attention to the time constraint and sponsorship. News stories became short almost to the point of lengthy headlines. Overall the preparatory stories of the beginning of the 20th century were no longer necessary. Instead, a succinct approach was adopted. The requirements of radio and later on television translated to short attention span of the listeners. It meant that non-essential parts of the prose had to be left out and wherever possible led straight to the punchline.

## 8. Conclusions

Jewish humor was conceived originally in the Yiddish language and in the religious set up. In its early stages, the emphasis was on proverbs, anecdotes and short stories. Many of the stories were based on the peculiarities of the Jewish society and religion. The humor part of the stories was concentrated in the punchline at the end.

Since the beginning of the 20th century, Jewish humor acquired a more general tone and the subject of jokes changed. Jokes about Jewish religious subjects were replaced by general subjects. A second change that occurred during the 20th century was that the length of the stories was reduced, jokes became shorter. We use statistical analysis to document these changes. We compare a sample of 800 jokes delivered by professional comedians in the second half of the century with an older set of about 1,200 jokes that were listed at the beginning of the century. The statistical analysis used in the paper confirms both trends.

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**Data Appendix**

<u>A:</u> frequency data: 1880-1930 observations

Source: Druyanov (1934)

Note 1: the columns of length are grouped into four categories: LL includes long jokes, more than 15 lines in print; L is an ordinary length. It takes 10-14 lines in print. S includes shorter jokes, 5-9 lines. SS is very short jokes, 1-4 lines

Note 2: in the columns of style, "six" list the simple story telling, column 7 contains monologue style, column 8 include short statements and column 9 includes an unidentified style

**B:** frequency data: 1950-2000 observations

| Subject | Total | Length | | | | Style | | | |
|---------|-------|----|----|----|----|----|----|----|----|
| | | LL | L | S | SS | 6 | 7 | 8 | 9 |
| police / legal | 26 | - | 12 | 13 | 1 | 22 | 2 | 1 | 1 |
| actors / authors | 26 | - | 16 | 10 | - | 21 | 5 | - | - |
| Age | 27 | - | 3 | 17 | 7 | 14 | 4 | 9 | - |
| transportation (cars, air) | 27 | - | 8 | 16 | 3 | 13 | 7 | 6 | 1 |
| Appearance | 27 | - | 6 | 15 | 6 | 9 | 6 | 12 | - |
| Arguments | 27 | - | 9 | 16 | 2 | 13 | 9 | 4 | 1 |
| Children 1 | 26 | 2 | 5 | 17 | 2 | 14 | 5 | 7 | - |
| money/banking | 25 | - | 3 | 21 | 1 | 11 | 7 | 6 | - |
| sports (golf, baseball) | 27 | - | 7 | 16 | 4 | 15 | 3 | 7 | 2 |
| employment / work/ business | 27 | 2 | 8 | 16 | 1 | 18 | 6 | 2 | 1 |
| tourists / vacation | 27 | 1 | 5 | 18 | 3 | 12 | 7 | 8 | - |
| Family | 27 | - | 4 | 20 | 3 | 14 | 8 | 3 | 2 |
| Politics & Campaign | 33 | - | 4 | 22 | 7 | 20 | 4 | 9 | - |
| Restaurants | 27 | 1 | 5 | 15 | 6 | 16 | 3 | 7 | 1 |
| at college | 24 | - | 2 | 15 | 7 | 14 | 4 | 6 | - |
| Committee | 20 | 3 | 3 | 6 | 8 | 12 | 6 | 1 | 1 |
| MD doctors | 25 | 1 | 9 | 11 | 4 | 14 | 10 | 1 | - |
| Pets | 12 | 1 | 4 | 5 | 2 | 9 | 2 | 1 | - |
| smoking/drinking | 13 | - | 7 | 5 | 1 | 13 | - | - | - |
| the economy | 23 | - | 10 | 7 | 5 | 17 | 4 | 2 | - |
| General Jewish subjects | 27 | - | 10 | 16 | 1 | 17 | 7 | 3 | - |
| Religious Jewish subjects | 26 | 1 | 11 | 9 | 3 | 18 | 6 | 3 | - |
| business / insurance | 24 | 3 | 9 | 10 | 2 | 16 | 6 | 2 | - |
| judge / lawyer | 20 | - | 4 | 14 | 2 | 10 | 8 | 2 | - |
| children 2 | 22 | - | 7 | 10 | 5 | 18 | 1 | 3 | 1 |
| marriage / family | 23 | 1 | 6 | 11 | 5 | 14 | 3 | 5 | 1 |
| not cataloged | 27 | 2 | 14 | 10 | 1 | 26 | - | 1 | - |
| legal / police | 24 | 3 | 10 | 9 | 2 | 23 | - | 1 | - |

| | | | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| religion / preachers | 13 | - | 6 | 4 | 2 | 8 | 3 | 2 | - |
| Psychiatrists | 9 | - | 7 | 1 | 1 | 9 | - | - | - |
| Romance | 13 | - | 3 | 8 | 2 | 10 | 1 | 2 | - |
| Speaker | 20 | 1 | 10 | 7 | 2 | 13 | 5 | 2 | - |
| Taxes | 6 | - | 1 | 4 | 1 | 5 | - | 1 | - |
| Classified Jewish | 26 | 2 | 13 | 10 | 1 | 24 | 1 | 1 | - |
| various subjects | 13 | - | 5 | 8 | - | 13 | - | - | - |
| tourists 2 | 13 | 1 | 7 | 5 | - | 13 | - | - | - |

Source: various books and news media publications

Note 1: the columns of length are grouped into four categories: LL includes long jokes, more than 15 lines in print; L is an ordinary length. It takes 10-14 lines in print. S includes shorter jokes, 5-9 lines. SS is very short jokes, 1-4 lines

Note 2: in the columns of style, "six" list the simple story telling, column 7 contains monologue style, column 8 include short statements and column 9 includes an unidentified style

**C:** List of Performers

Eddie Cantor, 1892-1964 (Edward Israel Iskowitz)

Jack Benny, 1894-1974 (Benjamin Kubelsky)

George Burns, 1896-1996 (Nathan Birnbaum)

George Jessel, 1898- 1981

Myron Cohen, 1902-1986

Henny Youngman, 1906-1998

Milton Berle, 1908-2002 (Mendel Berlinger)

Morey Amsterdam, 1908-1996 (Moritz Amsterdam)

Red Skelton, 1913-1997 (Richard Bernard Skelton)

Rodney Dangerfield, 1921-2004 (Jacob Rodney Cohen)

Jack Carter, 1923- (Jack Chakrin)

Buddy Hackett, 1924-2003 (Leonard Hacker)

Shelley Berman, 1925- (Sheldon Berman)

Don Rickles, 1926- (Donald Jay "Don" Rickles)

Alan King, 1927-2004 (Irwin Alan Kniberg)

Jackie Mason, 1923- (Yacov Moshe Maza)

Joan Rivers, 1933-2014 (Joan Alexandra Molinsky)

David Brenner, 1936-2014

Andy Kindler, 1956-

Judy Gold, 1962-

Marc Maron, 1963-