

TEACH YOUNG BIRDS TO SING LIKE THE OLD BIRD: THE SYMBOLIC MEANING OF BIRDS IN SLOVENIAN SHORT FOLKLORE FORMS

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Birds are present in everyday life, in forests, parks, cities, in fields and on playgrounds, by rivers and at entrances to stores, etc. Their ubiquity in human everyday life all through history leads to “birds” developing metaphorical meanings and producing powerful stereotypical images, which also motivate wider conceptual meanings. This article focuses on the lexeme *ptica* “bird” in Slovenian short folklore forms, its stereotypical representation and its metaphorical meanings. The ethnolinguistic approach will provide insight into the characteristics ascribed to birds as well as personifications and metaphorical transfers in short folklore forms, i.e., it will show what the bird symbolizes.

Keywords: proverb, riddle, ethnolinguistics, folkloristics, animal, bird

Short folklore forms are part of folk intangible heritage which is linked through vocabulary to material heritage. They are relatively fixed structures which are semantically very rich (Grzybek 2014: 74–76). They transmit experiences and beliefs (proverbs), knowledge (riddles), prejudices (swear words), and, depending on the speaker’s intentions in various communicative situations, they also transmit stereotypes and expected characteristics or events. Short folklore forms are folklore texts with a relatively fixed and a very short structure, a single sentence or several sentences. They include greetings, swearwords, proverbs, riddles; even verbal charms and prayers are part of short folklore forms; all relatively fixed texts and most of them relatively short in length (Stanonik 2001; Babič 2015). Although these genres may seem very different, their common characteristic is that the topic must be expressed in a few words, which means that metaphorical and conceptual meanings present an important role in structuring their semantics. Short folklore forms

present us with an “artistic picture of everyday life” (Užarević 2012: 11) not only in literature, as emphasized by Užarević (2012), but also in everyday communication, as a folklore moment (Babič 2015: 14–16). They contain the “image of the world”: an intersection of parts of place, time, quality, quantity, ethics, aesthetics, social relationships, different value systems etc. The linguistic message contains complex information and retains the original context of understanding, allowing them to be understood only in a specific context (Užarević 2012: 18–19). These structures are closely connected with culture; therefore, the language-culture relationship is an important part of anthropological research.

Vocabulary in short folklore forms is linked with tangible and intangible folk heritage and preserves vast amount of cultural and historical information. Heritage and zoomorphic vocabulary is filled with information about environmental phenomena, including animals, both domestic and wild. Short folklore forms often use animals figuratively, for characterisation and stereotyping. They represent “collective symbols” (Bartmiński 2009: 17) and we can use them as cultural keywords; especially because language and culture are universal, semiotic and highly organised systems; they are both transmitted in a specific environment, rather than being inherited biologically (ibid.: 11). Language is intertwined with culture through lexical meanings, in other words, “language can be treated as an aspect or repository of culture, something that embraces, expresses and gives breath to culture” (ibid.: 12). By observing how animals are named in short folklore forms, we can predict the human worldview of the animal world. An examination of short folklore forms reveals what stereotypical traits were attributed to animals and what the culturally specific behaviour towards them was; what human traits were attributed to wild animals and what animal traits were attributed to humans; how these traits intertwined and linked stereotypical wilderness and civilisation. It should be noted that characteristics attributed to animals do not always correspond to facts, as many of them have been invented by society (e.g. *Vsaka ptica rada leti tja, kjer se je izvalila* [Every bird likes to fly to where it was hatched], etc.).

The analysis of short folklore forms is also relevant to contemporary ecology. When considering the development of human cultures, folklore is essential when thinking about animals in the context of ecology (Bulleit 2005). Tradition accumulated in various forms of folklore may ultimately lead to a different understanding of ecology, especially in the era of modern technology, to use Daniel Botkin’s statement that ecologists need the help of folklore specialists as their foundation. However, the argument that animal behaviour is the same as human behaviour is inaccurate: animals engage in certain behaviours to survive and reproduce, while humans engage in behaviours similar to those of animals, but their motivation is different (Nuessel 2010: 224).

LANGUAGE, CULTURE, AND SHORT FOLKLORE FORMS

Folklore (also) proves that animals were observed and characterised by people throughout the world. Their observations and beliefs were recorded in folklore forms of various length.

Most animals mentioned in folklore belong to the immediate environment, although we must point out that proverbs also include “exotic” animals such as lions or camels, which are associated with stereotypes from biblical or oriental tales, and some even directly from the Bible (e.g. the Book of Proverbs or Gospels).

Referring to animals in different contexts and with different (metaphorical) functions results in two different types of meaning-making: anthropomorphism, when human characteristics are given to animals, i.e., “humanising the nature” (e.g. *birds fall in love*), and zoomorphism, when animal characteristics are given to humans (e.g. *as fast as an eagle*) (Visković 1996: 36). A specific type are “zoonyms” as geographical, settlement and personal names (ibid.). Omakaeva et al. further discuss the term “zoonym”, i.e. a zoomorphic name, which is used to refer to both common lexemes and proper names of animals, and proposes the term “zoosemism” for polysemous lexemes that denote “acting as the name of a certain animal (mammal, bird, insect, etc.)” (Omakaeva et al. 2019: 2532).

Lexemes denoting representatives of the animal world are termed “zoomorphic lexemes” (ibid.: 2530), they are usually polysemantic, i.e. have multiple meanings (ibid.: 2532). Therefore, the paremiological image of an animal based on a zoomorphic metaphor – when a person (a man or woman) is compared to an animal – is associated with the zoomorphic cultural code. It is a set of ideas about the animal world whose representatives are used as symbols or standards for certain characteristics. The transfer of animal characteristics to humans took place based on observing their external characteristics, behaviours and habits. Zoosemism is therefore defined as a metaphorical category of human zoomorphism¹ (ibid.). All this is relatively frequently found in folklore genres, regardless of their length or specific type. Zoosemisms co-create (con)text in folklore and are one of the most important (metaphorical) ways of expressing it.

Animals in folklore are the focus of a comparatively recent academic discipline (Golež Kaučič 2015), zoofolkloristics. Its theoretical and analytical apparatus is focused on providing insight into the changes in and human attitudes towards animals in folklore and in ritual practices; many research ideas are based on ancient myths and folklore traditions (Golež Kaučič 2005: 7–8). Zoofolkloristics deals with animals in folklore: how an animal used to be seen in the past and how it is seen today. Diachronic research can point to traditions and cultural practices (ibid.: 9) as well as concepts that have been “frozen in time”.

In many short folklore forms animals are not *like* persons, they *are* persons or, in the words of Tim Ingold, the “ontological equivalence of humans and animals” (Ingold 1994: XXIV) is metaphorically convincingly expressed. Equivalence in proverbs and riddles is expressed mostly using anthropomorphisms, where they are both allegoric as well as applied (where we can try to determine what it means to be a member of the same or different species) (Lockwood 1989: 41–56).

¹ In the quoted article zoomorphism is also discussed with analogy to fauvism, animalism, totemism (Omakaeva et al. 2019: 2531).

A culture is perceived as a system of symbolic communication (Levi Strauss 1974), where symbolism can (also) be expressed in stereotypes. Animals in short folklore forms are presented as a stereotype, i.e. a generalised image of a phenomenon, expressed through words. A stereotype belongs to the cognitive function of a linguistic sign, that of representing, symbolically, extralinguistic objects and phenomena. It appears both when the objects belong to the real world and when they are “intentional” entities, images of culture which constitute a second reality (Bartmiński 2009: 13). A stereotype is inevitably linked with generalization, which also governs polysemy, inferences patterns, novel metaphorical language and patterns of semantic change, all of which are the basis for a system of conventional conceptual metaphors (Lakoff 1992: 205). Stereotypes are defined within a system of associations based on components (e.g. connotation, sex, colour, etc.). For example, in the case of animals, components of the system of associations refer to their appearance and behaviour, thus, a bear is hairy, a mouse is grey, birds fly with their own flock, etc. For each system, one might ask what relationships are expressed, what connotations – positive or negative – they carry in the following relationships (Levi Strauss 1974). Therefore, it comes as no surprise that stereotypes are concepts which are often expressed as structures and mentally represented in terms of metaphor and that metaphors are a cognitive phenomenon and present mental mappings (Deignan 2008: 287) which influence how people think (Gibbs 1996).

Animals in short folklore forms often form “metaphoric construal of a concept” which in “some contexts results in a concept that is independent as a temporary representation apart from source domain information” (Gibbs 1996: 314). The meaning of a given expression reveals not only inherent properties but also our human subjective construal of it (Dąbrowska 2023: 39), conceptualisations are not necessarily formed according to an objective truth. A linguistic worldview is based on the cognitive function of the sign (e.g. a word, proverb, riddle); it invokes the cultural aspects of the language and its relation to the speaker’s mentality.

Animals in short folklore forms usually come from the immediate environment – from the homestead and the surrounding forests, and the short folklore form prefers domestic animals to wild animals (Rooth 1968: 286). The predominance of domestic animals in short folklore forms and of wild animals in fables (animal tales and myths) shows that we are dealing with two different categories of folk tradition, each with its own characteristics (ibid.: 187). There is therefore a significant difference between the two.² The world of domestic animals requires no additional explanation. Nevertheless, both domestic and wild animals symbolise different aspects of the human personality embodied in their instinctive behaviour (Nuessel 2010: 221).

² While the world of wild animals lends itself to the longer genres – in which the motivations for the animals’ actions are explained and their world is viewed through a human lens – domestic animals seem more familiar and closer to everyday life, and thus lend themselves more to shorter genres.

Overall, by investigating short folklore forms, the article deals with one part of social stereotypes of the bird (using only the general term). The genres selected for the study were proverbs and riddles, as a representative of common, but not everyday language.

The study is based on the collection of Slovenian proverbs from the Institute of Slovenian Ethnology ZRC SAZU, which is digitised and available on the Clarin.si repository³, a collection of Slovenian riddles⁴, and dictionary descriptions⁵. The search included all paremiological units and riddles which contain the element “ptič / ptica / tič / tica” [= bird], i.e., a general term for the bird. As the aim of the study was to focus only on the general image, the search term did not include specific bird species, which exhibit different positive or negative characteristics (e.g. an eagle is a magnificent and brave bird, a swallow brings spring and bright days, a pigeon is an symbol of peace, a magpie is a thief, a nightingale is a symbol of beautiful singing, etc.). The search terms also included words which metonymically refer to the general group of birds, including bird body parts, i.e. “beak”, “feather”, “wing”, or bird-related actions, like flying, nesting, etc.

The discursive analysis was based on ethnolinguistic statements showing how language and culture are intertwined, and on dictionary descriptions and textual examples which co-create figurative meaning. The analysis included literal wordings as well as their interpretation, for which a cultural competence in the researched language was necessary; that is why the article focuses only on Slovenian, as this is the author’s mother tongue.

“BIRD” IN SHORT FOLKLORE FORMS

A bird is a sign that, on the first level, denotes an animal with feathers and a beak; it may fly, but not necessarily. The denotatum “ptica” [=bird] etymologically originates as the Church Slavonic рѣtica, рѣтиштѣ, Cro., Serb. ptica, ptič, tič, Rus. ptica, Czech pták. Protoslavonic *рѣtica, *рѣtitъ, *рѣtakъ etc. and relates to *рѣtā (Rus. PSI рѣта “ptica”), *рѣтъ, which might originally denote * “small animal, offspring, child” (Snoj 2016). The original meaning of the Proto Slavic root *рѣ was “young”, while the Indo-European root *pυ- denoted “very small” (Skok 1988: 64). Therefore, the image is originally linked to its size if we rely on the reconstruction of the word and does not include any other characteristics like feathers or the beak.

The modern Slovenian word can be used in both grammatical genders, male “ptič/tič” and female “ptica/tica” (in both genders in Slovenian, as well as Croatian and Serbian; the second word is only a colloquial shortened version of the first one), where both terms are connotatively neutral when used of the animal. The dictionary first-level meaning is an

³ Proverbs (a collection of Slovenian proverbs): <https://www.clarin.si/ske/#dashboard?corpname=pregovori>.

⁴ Slovenian Riddles: <https://isn2.zrc-sazu.si/sl/zbirka/zbirka-slovenskih-folklornih-ugank>.

⁵ Dictionaries of the Fran Ramovš Institute of the Slovenian Language at the ZRC SAZU: <https://isjfr.zrc-sazu.si/en>

animal with wings, a beak and feathers, verbs connected with first-level semantics are to sing, to chirp, to shriek,⁶ to fly, to peck.

The metaphorical meaning of “*ptica/tica//ptič/tič*” is a cunning person; the female version also denotes a loose, worthless woman. This implication is also obvious from the proverb *Lepe ženice so rade zvite tice*. [Beautiful women are often cunning birds.], which means that beautiful women often seduce men in order to get something. The metaphorical meaning of the shortened version, *tič* is linked to the male sexual organ, where the image behind it is linked to the rooster, its beak and its upper body movement (which can also be found in other languages like English, German, Italian etc.).

Today, the notion of the bird is stereotypically linked with generalised signifiers like “feather” and “wing”. Slovenian uses the word “*krilo*” [wing] for a skirt and a moving part of a door or a window. The concept is linked with being protected under/behind a wing (Snoj 2016), which can also be seen in the idiom “*vzeti pod svoje krilo*” (lit. take under one’s own wing) which means “to take care of somebody” (for example, *Med odraščanjem ga pod svoje krilo vzamejo starosta Paul Cicero (Paul Sorvino) ter njegova pomočnika* [When he was growing up, Paul Cicero (Paul Sorvino) and his assistants took them under their wing.]).⁷ Let us also mention the contemporary sports term of left and right wing in football or handball team formations, which protect the team from both sides, as well as wings denoting two halves of “an entire system”, like “*pljučna krila*” (lit. lung wings) “lungs”. The idiom “*dati krila/dobiti krila*” [to give/get wings] (*Pohvala mu je dala krila / njegova domišljija je dobila krila* [lit. The praise gave him wings / his imagination got wings]) means that “someone enabled somebody to become successful or to win / succeed or to be in a full swing”. Here, wings imply giving power, strength, and freedom to seize the potential, to succeed and to be happy. On the other hand, the idiom “*krila so zrasla komu*” [lit. someone grew wings] means “to become successful”, although it is often also used with a negative connotation that the person became too haughty.

The beak figuratively denotes a person’s mouth, usually with an expressive connotation (*Drži kljun* [lit. Hold your beak] “be quiet”).

⁶ The sound birds make seems to be very a important part of our acoustic environment, as seen from various terms for different bird sounds. It is worth noting that even the imitation of bird sounds, i.e. whistling, had an important role in communication: from the sign of relaxedness and a good mood to communication with animals (for example whistling to the dog, cattle etc.) or even between people: “whistled language is a method of communication that uses whistling to simulate and articulate words; the melody and articulation of the whistled sound became a semiotic sound for the phenomena that had to be communicated. This practice developed as a result of the steep mountains and rugged topography in Turkey, which required the local population to find an alternative way to communicate across long distances” (it was also granted UNESCO’s Intangible Cultural Heritage label: <https://ich.unesco.org/en/USL/whistled-language-00658> [21 April 2023]). Communication using whistling was not found and studied only in Turkey, but on almost every continent, e.g. in Greece (Stein 2017), India (Singh 2017), Alaska (Spitzer 2005), Southern Africa (Shosted 2006), Oceania (Amha et al. 2021), etc.

⁷ <https://www.clarin.si/ske/#dashboard?corpname=gfida20> (accessed 20 January 2023).

Feathers are conceptually linked with importance and pride “bahati se s tujim perjem” [lit. flaunting someone else’s feathers]; the image behind this idiom is that of a peacock with rich and colourful feathers, however it has to be emphasized that the idiom originates in Aesop’s fable about borrowed feathers.

Proverbs, idioms and riddles as lexical structures are constructions, and they semiotically create a sign with a metaphorical meaning: proverbs get it from the context, whereas riddles require a solution. All short folklore forms are polyfunctional, polysemantic and heterosituative: polyfunctionality and polysemanticity refer to the fact that one and the same text may serve different functions and may represent different meanings, while heterosituativity signifies that a proverb or riddle can convey different meanings depending on the situation in which it is used (Grzybek 2014: 164).

Proverbs as well as riddles are “signs and at the same time models of various typical situations” (Permjakov 1979: 8). If proverbs are about giving an instruction, the riddle is about what remains unresolved; although the closeness of these two folklore forms shows their close interrelation and transitivity between them: a proverb can become a riddle and a riddle can be transformed into a proverb (*Padla globoko, skoči visoko. (Voda) [Falling deep, jumping high. (Water)]; Ti mene v blato, jaz tebi zlato. < Noge v blatu, glava v zlatu. (Pšenica) [You throw me into mud, I give you gold. < Legs in mud, head in gold. (Wheat.)]*). Proverbs are also closely connected with all other genres (Grzybek 2014: 166), not only in use, but also through their origin.

PROVERBS

A proverb is defined as “a short, generally known sentence of the folk which contains wisdom, truth, morals, and traditional views in a metaphorical, fixed and memorisable form and which is handed down from generation to generation” (Mieder 1993: 24); it consists of at least one descriptive element (non-oppositional) or two or more descriptive elements (which may be either oppositional or non-oppositional; Mieder 2004: 6). The collection of Slovenian proverbs includes 323 proverbs (including variants) with the element bird, specifically, ptica (131) / tica (25) / ptič (102) / tič (65).

The general term “bird” most frequently appears in proverbs which are semantically linked to the concepts of kinship, (not) belonging, difference or similarity. Belonging is recognised by stereotypical attributes like feathers, voice, nesting. Belonging is different depending on the animal in question: *Po glasu ptica, po šapi lev se spozna.* [A bird is recognized by its voice, a lion by its paw.]; *Ptice se s krepelom ne lovijo.* [Birds do not prey on the mockingbird.]; as well as in by different species of birds: *Kakršno gnezdo, takšna ptica.* [Like nest, like bird.]; *Ptico po perju spoznaš.* [You know a bird by its feathers.]; *Kakor ptica, taka pesem.* [Like bird, like song.]; *Ptiči ne pojejo vsi enako.* [Birds do not all sing the same.]; *Slavec je ptica in ptica je sraka, a slavec prepeva in sraka le kraka.* [The

nightingale is a bird and the magpie is a bird, but the nightingale sings and the magpie only caws.]; *S kakršnimi ptiči letaš, s takšnimi boš ujet.* [With what birds you fly, with such birds you will be caught.]; *Vsaka ptica leti k svoji trumi.* [Every bird flies to its own flock.]; *Čim starejši je ptič, tem težje se loči od svojega perja.* [The older a bird, the harder it is to separate it from its feathers.]; *Ne jemo vsake tice, ki leti.* [We don't eat every bird that flies.]

The nest as the birthplace and the point to return to symbolises kinship: *Kjer se tica rodi, v tisto gnezdo najraje leti.* [Where the bird is born, that is the nest it likes to fly to.]

Birds' speed is appreciated in proverbs; to be fast, agile and efficient is a desirable characteristic in society, and the metaphor is based on observing quick birds and transferring and recommending the same trait to a person: *Mala tica prepelica – bode vpeha konja in junaka.* [Quail, a small bird, can outrun a horse and a hero.]; *Zgodnja ptica ujame črva.* [Early bird catches the worm.]; *V premislekih bodi podoben polžu, v dejanju ptici.* [Be like a snail in thought and a bird in action.]

Work is considered one of basic human activities. Although what was considered work has changed during history, the conceptual characteristic that has persisted is the work's connection with survival. In such constructions, birds refer to freedom, and being relaxed, without relinquishing the possibility of a good life: *Ptice pod nebom ne sejejo in ne žanjejo, pa vendar živijo.* [Birds under the sky do not sow or reap, yet they live.]

In contrast, some proverbs imply that work is something that we are born with, like birds are born with the capacity to fly: *Človek je ustvarjen za delo kot ptiči za letenje.* [A human has been created to work like birds have been created to fly.]. A stereotypical view of birds with regard to work is that birds do not work, therefore they are free and can freely fly around the world, which is not possible for a human.

Birds also symbolise a festive food, i.e., a food that one has to work hard to get, because catching a bird may be difficult: birds are fast and difficult to catch. The proverb signifies that we have to try hard to obtain anything worthwhile: *Pečene ptice nikomur same ne priletijo v usta.* [Roasted birds do not fly into anyone's mouth by themselves.]

The habitat of birds, nest and bushes presents different metaphors. Although nests may represent someone's home and origin, when connected with birds they refer to something temporary, because birds stereotypically choose a new spot for a nest every year: *V lanskih gnezdih ni več ptic.* [There are no more birds in last year's nests.]

On the other hand, bushes present a place of gathering, either by already being in bushes or coming there to get something: *Ena tica iz grma, v grm deset./v grmu deset.* [One bird leaves the bush, ten come into /are in the bush.]

Domesticated birds are usually kept in a cage. A cage is perceived as an obstacle to free movement, even a prison. This notion is based on the idea that a bird symbolises a free animal, and being caged, one cannot be happy: *Ptica v kletki je kot riba brez vode.* [A caged bird is like a fish without water.]; *Ko ptica zbeži iz kletke, se noče več vanjo vrniti.* [Once a bird escapes from its cage, it refuses to return to it.]

The following proverb rests on an opposition contrasting outward appearance and the ability to make something really good: *Najgrši ptiči najlepše pojejo*. [The ugliest birds sing most beautifully.]. The idea is probably linked to a bird's colours, for example a nightingale is grey without any eye-catching colours, one can hardly notice it, but it is recognisable by its song (a jay, on the other hand, is considered a beautiful bird, but with a terrible scream).

Moreover, as we can read in an internationally recognised proverb, even birds can move in two extremes of a place, marked as high and low, where high / up as a conceptual metaphor refers to something very good, and low / down something very bad (Lakoff and Johnson 1980: 16): *Ptica, ki visoko leta, nizko obsedi*. [A bird that flies high, sits low.] The idea behind it is linked to birds of prey, like buzzards, which can fly very high, but are often seen sitting in the middle of fields.

WEATHER PAREMIAS

Weather proverbs or paremias are categorised as a separate group of short folklore forms: they imitate the structure of proverbs, but their function is not to metaphorically communicate ideas, but to predict the future season, weather, and harvest, or to mark the passage from one season to another. Weather paremias of prediction usually use current weather conditions (temperature, clouds, wind, rain, etc.) or the behaviour of animals in the surrounding area. Observation mostly focused on wild animals: their behaviour was a sign of the future, especially in a transient time, either seasonal (Spring, Summer, Autumn, Winter) or from the folk calendar (for example, Candlemas or Christmas). Birds and their migration in the autumn are a sign of a mild or harsh winter: *Če ptice pred Mihaelom* [29. 9.] *odletijo, slabo letino oznanijo*. [If the birds fly away before Michaelmas [29 September], it is a sign of a bad harvest.]; *Če ptice selivke pred Mihelom ne odlete, se pred božičem ni bati zime*. [If migratory birds don't fly away before Michaelmas, there's no need to fear winter before Christmas.]; *Zima bo huda, če se ptice zgodaj selijo na jug*. [Winter will be severe if birds migrate south early.].

Another date in the folk calendar is Candlemas (2 February), when fat birds are a metaphor for the warm season which has come too early, when birds can find enough food (after starving during the winter), but it also means that the harsh winter will come back: *Če ptič' in jazbeci debelijo, z hudem mrazom nam protijo*. [If birds and badgers grow fat, they threaten us with bitter cold.]; *Če so o svečnici* [2. 2.] *ptiči rejeni, sušca bodo gotovo zmedljeni*. [If birds are fed on Candlemas [2 February], the groundhog will surely be confused.]; *Če ptiči ujeti so tolsti, mastnati, bo dosti snega še in mraza prestat*. [If birds are caught fat and greasy, they will have to endure a lot of snow and cold.].

Spring is predicted on St Gregory's Day (12 March) and the beginning of a fertile season. The prediction is expressed with birds coming out of bushes and frequent sightings of them. Birds are also known to have eggs in the spring, so the sign is linked with their mating: *O sv. Gregorju* [12. 3.] *se ptiči pare*. [On St Gregory's Day [12 March], birds mate.].

Birds are also mentioned as a metaphor for snow in weather paremias: *Bele ptice letajo, malo kruha obetajo*. [White birds fly, little bread they promise.], where the movement in the air and colour link them to snow. This weather paremia is not explicitly linked to a time of year, however, we can link it to the end of November, when another weather paremia mentions snow: *Andrejev* [30. 11.] *sneg, z žitom kreg*. [St Andrew's Day (30 November) snow fights with grain.]. This proverb has the same semiotic meaning as the previous one that mentions birds: snow at the end of November means a bad grain harvest in the following year.

RIDDLES

Riddles consist of a description and a solution; the description, although often highly metaphorical, fits the solution (which must also always be approved by the riddler). The metaphor in the description is based on a characteristic or a functional similarity. Slovenian riddles may contain the term “bird” in the question and the solution.

RIDDLES MENTIONING THE BIRD IN THE QUESTION

Bird body parts are often used in the metaphorical description. Bird body parts are so unique that they can function as a descriptive element in the question. The similarity between a chest lid and a wing, to be more precise, figuratively referring to the upper part of a chest, is the metaphorical element which unifies the following riddle: *Čudna ptica, ima štiri noge, pa le eno perut?* – *Skrinja*. [A weird bird, it has four legs and only one wing? – A chest.]. The similarity between a pear and puffy bird feathers was noticed and exploited in the following riddle about the pear, with the question explicitly denying that the solution is a bird: *Perje ima, tič ni, rep ima, miš ni; krono ima, Bog ni?* – *Hruška*. [It has feather, but it is not a bird, it has tail, but it is not a mouse, it has a crown, but it is not God. – A pear.]. Referring to a bird by using its body parts is achieved by mentioning its beak and tail: *Drobno je za eno roko, kljun jeklen, rep lanen?* – *Šivanka in sukanec*. [It is small for one hand, its beak is steel, its tail is flax? – [Sewing needle and thread.]

In the following riddle, combining a bird's activity (singing) and its body part (beak) emphasizes the image of the bird in the question, although the activity linked with the bird (singing) is denied by the fact that the bird is missing its stereotypical bird body part, the beak, which may also be interpreted as a metonymy for a bird: *Vu gori se seče, dimo se dovleče, lepo popeva, a kljuna nema.* – *Gusle*. [It is cut in the mountains, brought home, it sings beautifully, but has no beak. – A fiddle.]

Riddles also refer to birds in the question as animals, but this is an element of deception. In the following examples the activity of flying as a stereotypical bird activity is what

connects the riddle to birds; however, the solution reveals links to other animals – most of these riddles are connected with bees, and one, metaphorically, with a water drop: *Poznaš ptico, ki sladi potico?* – Čebela. [Do you know the bird that makes a cake sweet? – A bee.]; *Štera ptica je sladka, pa deno ni za jesti?* – Čmela. [What bird is sweet but it is still not food? – A bee.]; *Poznaš ptičico, ki okoli cerkve leti in pravi: tu notri pa moje gori?* – Bučela. [Do you know the little bird that flies around a church and says: here inside my own thing burns? – A bee.]; *V vodi živi, riba ni; po zraku leti, ptica ni; pod zemljo rije, krt ni.* – Vodena kaplja. [It lives in water, but is not a fish; it flies in the sky, but is not a bird; it digs underground, but is not a mole. – A water drop.]

The following riddle describing the year and its temporal division is based on birds' habitat, i.e. the nest, and bird offspring: *Jeden dob ima dvanajst vej, na vsakoj veji štiri gnezda, a v vsakom gnezde sedem ptičev i vsakomu ptiču je drugače ime?* – Leto. [One oak tree has twelve branches, there are four nests on every branch, there are seven birds in every nest and each bird has a different name. – A year.]. It seems that the image behind the riddle with the bird and its habitat in the question could also be connected with the idiom *Čas leti*. [Time flies.] which could also be explained as “time moves fast as a bird, when it is moving, i.e. flying through the air”. The image is well established in European languages including Slovenian, and proves that ethnolinguistic images can move through different folklore genres.

The following riddle mentions a bird in the description, and its solution is the species of bird referred to by how it sounds: *Katera ptica izgovarja svoje ime?* – Kukavica. [What bird says its own name? – The cuckoo.]. This riddle is the only one in the archive that is so explicit and, in a way, self-referential: it just asks about a more explicit definition of the animal.

RIDDLES WHERE THE SOLUTION IS THE BIRD

Riddles where the solution is a bird focus on the description of the animal's activity, i.e. feeding, singing, living. The archive does not contain riddles describing a bird's appearance in general (although there are riddles which describe the appearance of specific species of birds, e.g. a crow).

One of the activities referred to in the description is stealing: *Imam veliko sodov polnih zrnja, pa pridejo tatje, prebijejo sode in ukradejo zrnje?* – Mak na njivi in ptiči. [I have many barrels full of grain, but thieves come and break through the barrels and steal the grain? – Poppies in the field and birds.]; *Pridejo – ne pridejo, ne pridejo – pridejo. Kaj je to?* – Ob času setve: če pridejo ptiči, ne pridejo semena v novi obliki iz zemlje, če pa ne pridejo ptiči, pridejo semena. [They come – they don't come; they don't come – they come. What is it? – At sowing time: if birds come, seeds don't come out of the ground in a new form, but if birds don't come, the seeds do.]

A bird is also described as having an easy life: *Kdo nima v svojej hišici ne stola ne mize, pa vendar sladko počiva, ugodno sedi in je? – Ptica v kletki.* [Who has neither chair nor table in their house, yet sweetly rests, comfortably sits, and eats? – A bird in a cage].

The description focusing on singing as one of the prime and most stereotypical activities is seen in the riddle: *Kdo so bili prvi pevci? – Ptice.* [Who were the first singers? – Birds.]

The following riddle deals with a bird's beginning of life, i.e. hatching – in contrast to the birth of a mammal: *Ni rojen, ni dojen, pa vendar živi? – Ptič.* [Not born, not breastfed, yet alive? – A bird.]. The riddle is an expression of the society's wonder about such a different beginning of life.

JOKING QUESTIONS

Joking questions are a type of riddle that require a humorous solution. In comparison with a true riddle, the humorous question does not require being solved, rather the humorous function is in the logic and the simplicity of the solution, which is supposed to be surprising. The characteristics referred to are again stereotypical flying and singing, and the beak is the body part that is mentioned: *V ktero stran letijo ptiči v jeseni? – Za kljunom.* [Which way do birds fly in autumn? – Following their beak.]; *Zakaj so ptičice najboljše pevke? – Zato, ker svoje pesmice najboljše znajo.* [Why are birdies the best singers? – Because they know their songs best.]. The questions are not metaphorical, rather, they are literal, and the solutions in both riddles are logical. The logical and relatively simple solutions are the punch line in the moment of riddling, provoking a humorous effect. Both questions are based on the stereotypical image of a bird migrating and singing beautifully, although the reality is that not all birds migrate or can even fly, and that not all birds sing (beautifully). These two examples show the importance of the stereotypical image in short folklore forms: conceptual patterns that depend on social stereotypes influence the cultural expression of ideas, i.e. conceptual metaphor expresses as well as reproduces cultural stereotypes, even ones that no longer hold today.

DISCUSSION

In Slovenian folklore, birds play an important role, often embodying various symbolic meanings and cultural representations; the symbolism of birds in Slovenian folklore is diverse and intriguing, encompassing both positive and negative aspects. They are not only seen as creatures of nature but also as messengers, omens. Their behaviour and calls are believed to convey important information about the future or events about to unfold: for example, the swallow brings happiness, the owl announces the death; fat birds in February forecast a cold spring. They may also be seen as supernatural beings (for

example, a soul transforms into a bird). Birds are often portrayed as wise and knowledgeable beings; their ability to fly high in the sky and their association with the heavens give them a sense of superiority and insight (for example, the owl, in particular, is considered the embodiment of wisdom and secret knowledge), as well as speed and agility (as is obvious from proverbs) in Slovenian folklore, folk songs link them with humour, love and happiness (Podjed 2021: 112). Most specific symbolic meanings are linked with a specific bird species, for example the swallow is connected with love, the swan with cleanliness, the raven with death etc. The statement that birds have seeped “into every pore of human culture and accompany us at virtually every step” (Germ 2006: 6; Podjed 2021: 113) holds true. This can be observed in short folklore forms and particularly in paremiological units, as the image of an animal based on a zoomorphic metaphor, when a person (a man or woman) is compared to an animal, its activities, behaviour, looks ... It is associated with the zoomorphic cultural code, the transfer of animal characteristics to humans which takes place based on observing their external characteristics, behaviours and habits.

This article focuses on the general terms for birds: *ptica / tica / ptič / tič* [bird] and its body parts or activities in short folklore forms, especially in proverbs (323 examples), and riddles (17 examples). The analysed material provided insight into social stereotypes concerning the bird (as a general animal category) and showed how the bird is presented in the Slovenian language. A bird's appearance primarily refers to its wings, beak and feathers. When used metaphorically, the wings imply giving power, strength, and freedom to seize one's potential, to succeed and to be happy. The beak figuratively denotes a person's mouth, usually with an expressive connotation. The feathers are conceptually linked with value and pride. The prevailing activities related to birds in short folklore forms are flying, singing, stealing; the bird is presented as happy, cunning, fast and free. The habitat referenced in short folklore forms is bushes and sky, which also represents freedom (flying free in the sky represents the utmost freedom and happiness), while a caged bird is seen as an imprisoned figure. The bird is admired for its speed and used as a role model in proverbs: to be as fast as a bird is the ideal, which is educationally set in proverbs.

Proverbs use birds to express ideas semantically linked with the concepts of kinship, (not) belonging, with differences or similarities: birds with the same feathers, differences in song, going back to one's home nest and flying with one's own flock all refer to the generalised perception of the animal. It is a stereotype that the short folklore forms use to express ideas figuratively and copy them into the human world. Birds are also signs: their behaviour and action are a way of forecasting the weather in weather paremias. Riddles use the external appearance of birds for a deceptive description: wings and feathers, flying are referred to as the general activity; and the bird as the solution is linked with activities such as stealing, easy living, singing etc. When looking at humorous questions, solutions mentioning birds are simple and refer only to the most stereotypical and expected characteristics.

Considering all the stereotypes in the analysed material it is obvious that the bird presents a positive figure in the animal world: it presents wittiness, fast movement, happiness

and freedom; the bird is a sign of something known and predictable, and even when used in forecasting the weather, it warns the society of something that is not very favourable. The bird is an animal that a human being takes as an ally.

IN LIEU OF A CONCLUSION

Birds have long captured our collective imagination, symbolizing freedom, beauty, and wisdom. Short folklore forms associated with birds offer timeless insights into various aspects of life, ranging from seizing opportunities and choosing companions wisely to the pursuit of freedom and efficiently setting goals, to setting limits and astute thought when the riddles link together different associations. These short folklore forms act as a bridge between the natural world and human experiences, reminding us of the interweaving of human life and the so-called wilderness; human observations condensed in short folklore forms show enduring stereotypes which were important to society and set as a model for action. We admire birds for their freedom, speed, wittiness, they have a bold beak and beautiful feathers, they are presented as the society's ally and helper – figuratively and literally.

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KAKO PJEVA STARA PTICA, NAUČI PTICE PJEVATI: SIMBOLIKA PTICE U SLOVENSKIM JEDNOSTAVNIM OBLICIMA

Ptice su prisutne u našoj svakodnevici: u šumama, parkovima, gradovima, poljima i igralištima, uz rijeku, na ulazu u trgovinu itd. Budući da su kroz povijest ptice bile sveprisutne u svakodnevnom životu ljudi, jasno je da će "ptice" imati metaforička značenja kao i izrazite stereotipne predodžbe, koje će motivirati i šira konceptualna značenja. Ovaj se članak bavi leksemom "ptica" u slovenskim jednostavnim usmenoknjiževnim oblicima, stereotipnim prikazom ptica kao i metaforičkim značenjima. Etnolingvistički pristup pružit će uvid u karakteristike koje se pripisuju pticama kao i u personifikacije i metaforički prijenos koji se javlja u jednostavnim oblicima, odnosno pokazat će što sve ptica simbolizira.

Gljučne riječi: poslovice, zagonetka, etnolingvistika, folkloristika, životinja, ptica