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SAŠA BABIČ

## ANIMAL PREDATORS AS A CHARACTERISING ELEMENT IN SHORT FOLKLORE FORMS

**Abstract:** Language reflects how we perceive our surroundings. Not only does it enable us to describe them but we also use linguistic expressions to express our ideas metaphorically. In view of this, language stores our observations and stereotypes and carries them as a culture that humans continually create and think about (Pitkin 1972; Bartminski 2005; Tolstaya 2015) in different linguistic forms that are passed down from one generation to the next. Using an ethnolinguistic approach and the help of semiotics, we can take a closer look at the deeper structures and meanings of short folklore forms and, moreover, social stereotypes. This article focuses on wild animals in proverbs, riddles and swear words, and their role in characterisation in short folklore forms.

**Keywords:** animal, proverb, riddle, short folklore forms, Slovenia, swearword

### *1. Introduction*

Language is both a means of communication and the cornerstone of our mental, emotional, and social world. Language reflects our conception of the world – not only by giving names to things or events, but also as a collection of experiences, views, and stereotypes, often conveyed through metaphors.

Metaphors are one of the most important rhetorical figures in short folklore forms, which include proverbs, sayings, rid-

dles and swear words, etc. Short folklore forms are structures with relatively fixed and semantically rich expressions (Grzybek 2014: 74–76). They convey experiences (proverbs), knowledge (riddles), prejudices (swear words), but also stereotypes and expected characteristics and events (incantations, prayers). Short folklore forms that name phenomena, beings and objects are connected with ethnography and tangible and intangible folk heritage. Heritage is filled with information about environmental phenomena, including animals both domestic and wild. Short folklore forms often use animals for figurative language, characterisation and stereotyping. They represent “collective symbols” (Bartminski 2009: 17) and we can use them as cultural keywords. Language is intertwined with culture through lexical meanings. By observing how animals are named in short folklore forms, we can predict the human worldview of the animal world. An insight into 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 the characteristics attributed to animals do not always correspond to the facts, as many of them have been invented by society (e.g., the wolf does not change its fur, 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). Many fundamental ideas and insights into nature and animals come from ancient myths and folklore. The tradition accumulated in various forms of folklore may ultimately illuminate a different understanding of ecology, especially in the era of modern technology, using Daniel Botkin’s assertion that ecologists need the help of folklore specialists as a 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).

## ***2. Animals in short folklore forms***

Folklore (also) proves that animals have been observed and further characterised by people worldwide. These observations and beliefs have been documented in folklore forms of various lengths. While most animals mentioned in folklore are from the local environment, it is notable that proverbs also feature exotic animals such as lions or camels in European contexts, often associated with the stereotypes from biblical or oriental tales (Rooth 1968: 286; Williams 1982–1983: 127–129, 131).

The lexemes used to describe acting as a particular animal or a personified animal figure (mammal, bird, insect, etc.) are known as zoosemisms, while the resulting expressions are termed zoonyms, which are polysemantic in nature (Omakaeva et al. 2019: 2532). Consequently, the paremiological depiction of an animal through zoomorphic metaphors, where individuals (men or women) are likened to animals, aligns with the cultural zoomorphic code. This code represents a set of ideas about the animal kingdom where animal representatives serve as symbols or benchmarks for specific characteristics. The transfer of animal traits to humans originates from observations of their external characteristics, behaviours and habits (Omakaeva et al. 2019: 2532).

The animals in short folklore forms typically originate from the immediate environment, such as the homestead and the surrounding woods, with a preference for domestic animals over wild animals (Rooth 1968: 286). The predominance of domestic animals in short folklore forms and of wild animals in fables (animal tales and myths) indicates two distinct categories of folk tradition, each with unique characteristics (Rooth 1968: 187). There is, therefore, a significant difference between the two: while the world of wild animals lends itself to longer genres, where animal motivations are explained and their world is viewed through a human lens, domestic animals seem more familiar and closer to everyday life, thus fitting shorter genres. The world of domestic animals requires no additional explanation. Nonetheless, both domestic and wild animals symbolise different aspects of human personality embodied in their instinctive behaviour (Nuessel 2010: 221).

Slovenian short folklore forms primarily feature domestic animals such as dogs, cats, oxen, cows, donkeys, chickens, etc. The number of units with named predators is smaller and they are not analysed as closely as the units with named domestic animals. This article focuses on the large wild predators listed in Slovenian official documents (<https://www.gov.si teme/velike-zveri/> [17. 1. 2023]): bears (*Ursus arctos*), wolves (*Canis lupus*), and lynx (*Lynx lynx*) – all three of which are protected species in Slovenia. Large wild predators posed a threat to farmers, and were stereotypically seen as strong and difficult to subdue, leading to overhunting (<https://www.gov.si teme/velike-zveri/> [17. 1. 2023]). Social perceptions of these predators are reflected to some extent in folklore, with everyday perceptions primarily evident in in short folklore forms.

The wolf had various meanings and functions in mythology, the folk belief system, rituals (see more in Mencej 2001; Balázsi, Piiranen 2016: 29; Plas 2021: 21), and metaphors. The wolf was considered a taboo animal in (South) Slavic folklore and was believed to exert a magical influence on human life, the weather, etc. (Mencej 2001; Plas 2021). Its role was probably similar to that of the bear, but this is not proven due to a lack of data (Mirjam Mencej, personal communication, September 2022). They were both animals from the “edge of our world”, from the borderlands; animals that could also go to other worlds and guardians of the wilderness, i.e. not of our world (Plas 2021: 191).

The wolf’s significance is seen in its inclusion in life cycle rituals (birth, naming, marriage, death), prohibitions, medicine and demonology, wolf songs, and more (Plas 2021). In Slovenian folklore material, the wolf has mainly been preserved in animal stories and short folklore forms (riddles, proverbs), while the old Slovenian belief system and rituals are more or less forgotten (Mencej 2001). The wolf is one of the most frequent figures in Slovenian fairy tales and fables and appears in various characterisations (Kropej 2015): 1. as a patronising animal (‘ATU 76’, ‘ATU 102’) that exploits its environment for its own well-being; 2. as a predator and threat to the weak (‘ATU 11A’, ‘ATU 123’, ‘ATU 124’); 3. as a helping animal, but one that ends up being outsmarted (usually by a fox, e.g., ‘ATU 79’, ‘ATU 101’, ‘ATU 103’), and, therefore, a victim we can sympathise with – fitting

the proverb: no good deed goes unpunished. In all narrative examples, the wolf is not characterised as a clever animal, but rather as an impatient one that wants everything immediately or is easily tricked.

In fairy tales and fables the bear is a positive figure, but not a clever one: 'ATU 41' (Bear and fox stole the meat); 'ATU 49' (The bear and the honey), 'ATU 89' (The bear waits for fruit in vain), etc. In many Slovenian fables the fox tricks the bear so that the bear is beaten, while the fox remains alive and well ('ATU 3'), or the wolf and the bear are tricked together by the fox ('ATU 15' The Theft of Butter (Honey) by the Godfather's Game), 'ATU 38' (The claw in the Split Tree), etc.

The bear and the wolf can also play the same role in certain fables. For example, in the tale typologised as 'ATU 2' – Fishing with the Tail – a bear (or wolf) is persuaded to fish with its tail through a hole in the ice. When it tries to pull it out or escape, the frozen tail breaks off. Both animals may also appear in 'ATU 9' – The Unfair Partner and the Way a Man Tricks the Animal. This interchangeability, as well as the coexistence of wolves and bears, is also supported by the similar taboo status of the two animals.

The lynx is a protected animal in the Slovenian forests, having been extinct for some time before being reintroduced in 1973. It is an animal rarely seen and may even be mistaken for a wild cat. In Slovenian short folklore forms and tales, the lynx is seldom used as a metaphorical element.

Animals as a metaphorical element in short folklore forms, especially in paremiology, are a fairly well-researched topic. Several important contributions that include wild animals have been published. Anna Brigita Rooth (1968) published an article on domestic and wild animals as symbols and referents in Swedish proverbs. Donald Ward (1987) wrote about the proverbial ambivalence of the wolf. Wolfgang Mieder compiled a collection of proverbs entitled *Howl like a wolf: Animal Proverbs* (1993). Frank Nuessel (2010) focused on semiotic processes involved in animal allusions in proverbial language, etc. Wild animals that are exotic in Europe have been discussed by Jan Knappert (1998) and Anete Costa Ferrera (2017). Dmitrij Dobrovol'skij and Elisabeth Piirainen's (1999) analyzed animal symbolism in language

and culture. Arvo Krikmann (2001) published an article entitled *Proverbs on Animal Identity*, and Outi Lauhakangas (2019) presented a review article on animals in proverbs in previously published articles.

In Slovenian paremiological research, animals have been explored mainly in linguistics and phraseology (Keber 1998, Kolečnik, Nikolovski 2020, etc.). The topic seems to offer substantial material for comparative analyses of Slovenian and foreign languages in BA or MA assignments (Sobočan 2018, etc.), yet most of the analyses have focused on domestic animals.

At the same time, it is evident that most research on animals in short folklore forms has been done in paremiology, while incantations, riddles and swear words have not received as much attention.

### **3. Methodology**

The analysed material consists of Slovenian proverbs from the Proverbs Archive of the Institute of Slovenian Ethnology at the Slovenian Research Centre of the Slovenian Academy of Sciences and Arts (hereinafter referred to as ISN ZRC SAZU). The collection contains 36,461 paremiological units from various sources (both printed and oral), dating back to the 16th century. The riddle material is also from the collection of riddles from the Proverbs Archive of the ISN ZRC SAZU, and consists of 2,381 riddles. The units to be researched were selected using the keywords *medved* [bear], *volk* [wolf], and *ris* [lynx].

Diachronic insight into the relationship between humans and animals is also provided by the application of ethnolinguistics in a broader sense (Lublin School), which allows us to consider language as a social phenomenon (Bartmiński 2005: 159–161). By examining social stereotypes (both positive and negative), we can determine the “world map” – concepts and stereotypes that significantly influence contemporary understanding of interspecies relationships, as well as the anticipated origin of the relationships. Using ethnolinguistics, we will examine proverbs, riddles, and superstitions that have existed for decades or even centuries, focusing on those that contain animal names and look closely at the lexical environment of the names.

#### ***4. Analysis of short folklore forms featuring predators***

The function of animal metaphors in paremiological units is to represent either present or future human behaviour or consequences, whereas in riddles and swear words (used as euphemisms), it is rather a parallelism of characteristics. Named animals are always in “conceptual dialogue” with humans and their actions. This is also evident in Krikmann’s (2001) four categories of functions of “zoo-paremic” paremiological material, based on Estonian material and referring to Matti Kuusi’s international type system of proverbs (Lauhakangas 2001; 2019). The proverbs are divided into the following categories (Krikmann 2001):

- A. Proverbs concerning animal identity.
- B. Proverbs concerning the relationship between people and animals (mostly in a metaphorical sense).
- C. Proverbs concerning the relationships between animals (usually metaphorical).
- D. Proverbs concerning the relations of animals (either metaphorical or non-metaphorical) with non-zoological nature and dimensions.

Slovenian proverbs involving predators can be classified into all four groups, with the wolf being the most productive metaphorical comparative animal. The wolf is the most frequent large wild predator mentioned in Slovenian short forms of folklore. A search through the material yields 309 paremiological units in which the wolf occurs, and three different riddles. It is used as a metaphorical name for a disease (a bladder or skin inflammation), as a characteristic sign for humans (loners), and in musical jargon to denote the unclear, rasping sound of strings (obviously connected with the stereotype of the raspy wolf voice). The metaphorical meanings in the dictionary are connected with bloodthirsty, ruthless, and greedy men. In everyday life, wolf (*Volk*, *Vouk*, *Vovk*) is quite a common surname, though it does not appear as a first name (in contrast to other Slavic languages, where the name Vuk was quite common). Proverbs characterise the wolf as a ferocious, dangerous, vicious, and witty animal, similar to the people or human actions depicted in proverbs. Proverbs

imply the semantic sign of threat, misfortune, or disaster. These proverbs are semantic signs of warning.

The wolf is one of the first dangerous nocturnal wild predators that the Eurasian Indo-European speaking peoples had to deal with, and it also became important as an image or symbol throughout history. The wolf was often conceptually associated with the devil, which can also be illustrated with the phraseme wolf/devil derived from the paremia *lupus in fabula* [the wolf in the story ‘speak of the devil and he will appear’]. The phraseme has a wide distribution, varying in most European languages as either wolf or devil, and showing an obvious parallelism of the concepts of wolf and devil. The wolf is primary, while the devil, as an evil spirit or even concept of evil in popular belief, is a secondary adaptation (Balázs, Piirainen 2016: 40). This adaptation stems from the idea that the devil is furry, has a tail, is dark grey or black in colour, lives in the borderlands, and brings bad luck.

The bear is a predator that appears in only 79 paremiological units and three different folk riddles. “Bear“ is not used as a first name in any version but is quite common as a surname. The metaphorical character of the bear is often associated with its fur. For example, there is the comparative phraseme “to be furry like a bear”, and the euphemism 300 furry bears (a swearword referring to “300 furry devils”). As an animal, the bear is well represented in Slovenian forests, although it is protected as an endangered animal, which is reflected in the phrase “to be protected like a (Kočevje<sup>1</sup>) bear (semantically expressing protection and immunity: doctors are protected like Kočevje bears).

As already mentioned, the lynx is an animal that is rarely seen, so it is not surprising that it is not used often in Slovenian figurative expressions and fairy tales (nor in naming). It is used only in phraseological units such as “to be angry like a lynx”, “to fume with rage like a lynx”, and only in one proverb, if we consider the data from our analysed collection. The lynx does not occur as an element of metaphor in any other form of folklore. Nor are there any tales in the archives of the ISN ZRC SAZU in

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<sup>1</sup> The Kočevje region, with the primeval forest, a UNESCO World Heritage Site, is in southern Slovenia; it is known as Europe’s most complete forest habitat and a home to bears (and also other predators, such as the wolf and the lynx).



which the lynx plays a role. In folklore, the lynx is not a predator that is visible and accepted in the social cognitive system. This is likely because of its hidden life in the treetops (with most slaughtered chickens, sheep, etc. being blamed on foxes).

The material is divided into paremiological units and riddles. The paremiological units are semantically categorised into four groups, the last one containing weather paremias.

#### *4.1. Similarity or even equivalence with the metaphorical implication that man is like a wolf/bear/lynx, highlighting the activities and appearance of a wolf/bear/lynx for semantic needs*

In these proverbs the wolf/bear is personified and the human is not mentioned. Some of the wolf/bear characteristics and activities are imaginary, designed to suit the proverb's semantic needs (wolves do not leave their fur on the ground, wolves also fight with other wolves, bears do not jump, etc.) and are not based on facts. The obvious difference between the paremiological units referring to wolves and bears is in the characterisation: the wolf is characterised as aggressive and carries a negative connotation. The wolf is, therefore, a human that causes harm and is a threat, but not to its own species:

- (1) *Še zmeraj je bil volk volku podoben.* [Wolves have always looked the same.]
- (2) *Vovk vovka ne zakole, pes psa ne vje.* [A wolf does not slaughter another wolf; a dog does not bite another dog.]
- (3) *Volk se z volkam druži.* [Wolves hang out with other wolves.]
- (4) *Puntarske ovce je volk vesel.* [A wolf is glad when a sheep rebels.]
- (5) *Ni treba starega volka klati učiti.* [There is no need to teach an old wolf how to slaughter.]
- (6) *Tudi prešteto ovco volk odnese. / Prosto kozo kmalu volk požre.* [Even the counted sheep can be taken by the wolf. / A goat on the loose is soon eaten by the wolf.]
- (7) *Ne daj volku koze pasti.* [Don't get a wolf to look after sheep.]
- (8) *Kdor odpušča volku, škoduje ovci.* [Whoever forgives a wolf harms the sheep.]

- (9) *Če volk liže jagnje, je slabo znamenje.* [If a wolf is licking a lamb, that's a bad sign.]  
 (10) *Tudi komar bo podrl konja, če mu volk pomaga.* [Even a mosquito will swat a horse if it is helped by a wolf.]

The wolf is the opposite of laziness and shares its prey with those who are interested:

- (11) *Volku ni treba šume kazati.* [You don't need to show the woods to the wolf.]  
 (12) *Volku ni nikamor daleč.* [No place is far for a wolf.]  
 (13) *Poleg volkov so tudi lisice site.* [Even foxes have their fill in the company of wolves.]

But even wolves have their weaknesses – especially hunger and being hurt or caught:

- (14) *Tuljenje napravi volka večjega, kot je.* [Howling makes the wolf seem bigger.]  
 (15) *Enkrat se ujame tudi najzvitejši volk.* [Even the cleverest wolf is eventually caught.]  
 (16) *Kjer se volk valja, dlako pusti.* [Wherever wolves lie, they leave their fur.]  
 (17) *Šibanega volka se niti ovca ne boji.* [Even sheep are not afraid of a wolf that's had a beating.]  
 (18) *Sestradan volk še komarje požira.* [Starving wolves eat even mosquitos.]

Meanwhile, bears are linked with survival – either nutritional:

- (19) *Dokler ima medved še gnilih hrušk, ne boji se lakote.* [As long as the bear has some rotten pears, it won't be afraid of going hungry.]  
 (20) *Ko je medved sit sterdi, daleč okolj smrdi.* [You can smell a long way off when a bear has had its fill.]

or behavioural:

- (21) *V zadregi se še medved skakati uči.* [When in trouble even a bear learns how to jump.]
- (22) *Ni prav, da medved kravo sne, ne prav, da krava v gore gre.* [It is not right that a bear should eat a cow, just as a cow should not go up into the mountains.]

or with old age – coping with wanting abilities:

- (23) *Starega medveda ne naučiš več rajati.* [You cannot teach an old bear how to dance.]
- (24) *Ko se medved postara, postane igračka medvedov.* [When a bear grows old, it becomes the plaything of younger bears.]

Behaviour, such as our attitude towards the actions of others, is metaphorised by the lynx, which symbolises pride:

- (25) *Za tuje napake smo risi, za lastne krti.* [For the mistakes of others we are lynxes, for our own we are moles.]

Attitudes towards the wolf are also obvious from the paremiological units that seem to come from the direct instruction on how to act if a wolf is approaching – the dog might be our only saviour:

- (26) *Kadar je volk v selu, psu ni počitka.* [When there's a wolf in the village, there's no rest for the dog.]
- (27) *Dosti psov še volka uje.* [Many dogs can bite a wolf.]
- (28) *Ko greš volku naproti, pokliči psa.* [When approaching a wolf, call a dog.]

Other social phenomena that are metaphorically linked with the wolf are connected with money and debt:

- (29) *Dolg je hud volk. / Dolgovi so volkovi.* [Debt is a terrible wolf.]
- (30) *Žakelj je nenasiten volk.* [A sack is a voracious wolf.]

4.2. *Comparative proverbs in which the wolf carries the metaphor of the cruel animal, while the bear hibernates; the emphasis is also on the similarity between wolves and dogs, which is presented as a falsehood in the proverb*

These proverbs use comparison to express negative characteristics, hypocrisy and ruthlessness; the paremiological units disclose that when one is “in the company of wolves” one has to obey their rules.

- (31) *Tat in volk sta vsako dobo zrela.* [Thieves and wolves are always ready.]
- (32) *Laskavci so podobni prijateljem tako, kot so volkovi podobni psom.* [Flatterers are like friends, just as wolves are like dogs.]
- (33) *Dolgo nosi volk ljudske kože, pa tudi drugi njegove.* [A wolf wears human skin for a long time, as people do his fur.]
- (34) *Človeški oderuhi so kakor volkovi gluhi.* [Human loan sharks are deaf like wolves.]
- (35) *Če se z volkom družiš, moraš tuliti kot volk.* [If you associate with wolves, you have to howl as they do.]
- (36) *Kdor je sladko ljubezniv s tujimi ljudmi, na domače svoje rad kakor volk renči.* [Those who are all sweet with strange people, usually snarl like wolves at home.]
- (37) *Kdor se poleti preobjeda, pozimi posnema medveda.* [Whoever overindulges in summer, imitates bears in winter.]

4.3. *Proverbs that include human activities and wolves or bears*

In these proverbs, the wolf is metaphorically presented as a wicked and authoritative being, while humans seem to be weak beings that need to be careful and humble:

- (38) *Dvema pastirjema volk lažje ovco ukrade kot enemu.* [It is easier for a wolf to steal a sheep guarded by two shepherds than just one.]

This proverb expresses the incompetence of women, thematising the incapability of protecting the livestock:

- (39) *Kadar baba gospodari, volk mesari.* [When a woman's in charge, the wolf has its fill.]

Human activities involving bears are linked to economic topics, i.e. selling bear fur, and not to bear activities. This shows that the bear is seen as a trophy, and no longer as a being:

- (40) *Ne prodajaj kože, dokler je medved še v brlogu. / Ne prodajaj medveda, dokler tiči v brlogu.* [Don't sell fur while the bear's still in the den.]

The verbs in active form used in the proverbs to describe the wolf's activity include slaughter, devour, growl, take, and lie in wait, while the verbs associated with the bear are milder: eat, grow old, and jump/dance. The latter implies that the bear could be trained (and was trained for the circus), while the wolf was considered an animal that could not be trained (domestication was reserved for the dog).

The adjectives used in proverbs to characterise the wolf include angry, the most cunning, old and whipped, hungry and voracious (glutton). The bear's stereotypical appearance is big and furry.

Comparative phrasemes show the metaphorical meaning and social image of the wolf as a loner (*This man is such a lone wolf*), the bear as a tall and broad-shouldered person (*They're an interesting couple, she's so tiny and he's such a bear*), and the lynx as a furious, cautious and alert animal (*He's as furious as a lynx*).

#### 4.4. *Weather paremias*

The weather paremias differ from the prior categories of proverbs: they are conceptually different, focusing specifically on the weather. Through their observations of the nature and subsequent predictions of future weather, their function narrows down to forecasting. This forecasting is often linked with the behaviour of (wild) animals, demonstrating the human connection with the wild nature.

The behaviour of wolves and bears is most frequently used to express the weather forecast at the end of winter: a sunny and warm February foretells a long winter, so the bear goes deeper into the cave. On the other hand, there is a contradicting weather paremia that the bear goes out of the den if there is nice weather on Candlemas Day. Contradicting paremias are quite common, but considering that we are discussing the weather paremias, which were supposed to observe the physical phenomena (the weather), we could claim that even these paremias do not necessarily reflect reality. Meanwhile, a warm February predicts a bad harvest and the wolf in the barn is preferable to frost in spring:

- (41) *Če je na svečnico [2. 2.] jasno, se medved potukne še bolj globoko, kot je bil doslej. Če je megleno, pride iz brloga na dan in zunaj ostane.* [If it's sunny on Candlemas Day [2<sup>nd</sup> February], the bear will go deeper into its den. If it's foggy, the bear will come out of its den and stay outside.]
- (42) *Če medved pogleda iz luknje na svečnico in vidi, da je lepo, gre ven, drugače pa nazaj.* [If the bear looks out of its den on Candlemas Day and sees that it's fine, it'll come out, otherwise it'll go back in.]
- (43) *Ob svečnici se medved obrne, saj je mimo šele polovica zime.* [On Candlemas Day the bear turns over because only half of winter is over.]
- (44) *Volk ne požre zime.* [The wolf does not eat the winter.] / *Zime pa snega nikoli volk še ni snedel dovolj.* [The wolf has never had enough snow or winter.]
- (45) *Iz vsakega oblaka sneg leti, iz vsakega grma volk preži* [Snow flies from every cloud, a wolf lurks in every bush.]. / *Spòmlad'n snégòu so žit'n vówkòú.* [Spring snow is like cereals for the wolf.]
- (46) *Na pustni torek je bolje videti volka na njivi kot moža v sami srajci.* [On Shrove Tuesday it's better to see a wolf in the field than a man wearing just a shirt.]
- (47) *Bolje je volka v hlevu imeti, kakor pa o svečnici na soncu se greti.* [It's better to have a wolf in the barn than to bask in the sun on Candlemas Day.]

The observation of animals and their behaviour was undoubtedly very important in predicting the weather, and these proverbs also reveal the concept of the wolf: less damage is caused by a wolf – a dangerous animal – in the village than when the weather is too warm in February. The comparison works as an obvious oxymoron. The concept of the bear and winter is related to the bear's hibernation in a cave, not to any possible harm it could do: if the weather is nice, the bear will wake up; if not, it will continue hibernating (although another *paremia* is expressing the bear's wisdom that the warm February foretells the return and persistence of winter). We can speculate that harm is predicted with the bear waking up when it is hungry.

#### 4.5. Riddles

In Slovenian folklore riddles, the bear and the wolf are used as metaphorical descriptions, but in the ISN ZRC SAZU database we cannot find a lynx in them. In most of the analysed riddles, the bear and the wolf are used in the riddle description. The animal appears as a subject with its characteristics directly or indirectly implied: the bear is heavy and would crush the eggs if it stepped on them, so the first riddle uses a contradiction and an unexpected connection. Similarly, there is also a contradiction between the hungry wolf, which is calm, and the satiated wolf, which howls explicitly:

- (48) *Medved po jajcih hodi, pa nobenega ne pohodi. - Luna in zvezde* [The bear walks on the eggs, but does not crush any of them. – The moon and the stars.]
- (49) *Pri nas volka imamo, če mu damo jesti, tuli, če ne, pa molči. Kaj je to? – Ponev.* [We have a wolf at home, if we give it something to eat, it howls, if not, it is silent. What is it? – A cooking pan.]

The contradiction between the wolf without fur in the barn and the wolf with fur that goes out implies the phraseme for the expression of rage – to pull someone out of his/her/its skin [to skin someone alive]. The situation in the riddle contrasts with the expected one, when the wolf in the barn remains intact, while the wolf that goes out is injured by the protecting farmer.

- (50) *Pri nas imamo volka, v hlev gre brez kože, iz hleva pa v koži pride. Kaj je to? – Kruh.* [We have a wolf that goes into the barn without its fur, but comes out of the barn in its fur. What is it? – Bread.]

The predator's strength is thematised in the riddles by speed (the bear) and intimidation (the wolf):

- (51) *Medved prha čez tri breke, klen pertiska, z ritjo bliska? – Kosa* [The bear hurries over three hills, pushes the wooden handle, flashing with its bottom? – A scythe.]
- (52) *V leseni hiši sem bolj miren nego jagnje, v koščeni pa hujši nego volk? – Vino v posodi in v človeku.* [In a wooden house I am more at peace than a lamb, but in a bone house I am fiercer than a wolf? - Wine in a barrel and in a man.]

It is surprising that in these Slovenian folk riddles the bear is used as a metaphor for natural phenomena (the moon and stars) and a tool (scythe), while the wolf serves as a metaphor for kitchen utensils and culinary phenomena (wine, bread, pan).

Such riddles – joking questions or, classified by Vernam Hull and Archer Taylor, as 'witty questions' (Hull, Taylor 1955: 67–77) are based on overtly simple questions and in different versions the animal mentioned can be replaced by 'rabbit':

- (53) *Kam gre medved, ko je dve leti star? – V tretje.* [Where does a bear go when it is two years old? – Into its third year.]
- (54) *Do kje gre volk v gozd? – Do srede.* [How far does a wolf go into the forest? – To the middle.]

The simplicity of the answers to these joke questions can also be based just on changing the animal's gender:

- (55) *Kdo davi kakor volk? – Volčica.* [Who slaughters like a wolf? – The she-wolf.]
- (56) *Ktera zver je nar bolj podobna volku? – Volčina.* [Which animal is just like a wolf? – The she-wolf.]



A logical question makes use of the way the two animals are spelt in Slovenian: wolf (*volk*) and ox (*vol*). The riddle is based solely on the similar spelling, not on a semantic basis:

- (57) *Poznam divjo zver, ki se piše s štirimi črkami; ako jej pa odvzameš zadnjo črko, takoj imaš domačo žival pred seboj. Ugani jo. - Volk – vol.* [I know a wild beast that is spelled with four letters, and if you take away the last letter, you have a domestic animal right in front of you. Guess it. – Wolf vs. Ox.]

The collection of Slovenian folklore riddles does not contain a single true riddle where the actual answer is the name of a predator. The predator is used only in the description. This fact is surprising, although it could be assumed that riddles whose solution was the name of a predator existed at some point, even if they have not been archived. Predators were an important part of farm life and it seems impossible that folk traditions would only slightly incorporate it into their repertoire. On the other hand, this fact could also be due to the taboo status of wolves and bears.

## 5. Conclusion

Language as a means of thought and communication reflects our view of the world. People use it to form both simultaneous structures and relatively stable forms, often categorised as folklore. Folklore consists of common experiences, stereotypes, images and views that are woven together in the context of a situation or narrative. Among many other things, basic ideas about nature and animals also originate in or are reflected in folklore. This article focuses on short folklore forms (proverbs and phrasemes, riddles, and swear words). The aim of the research was to analyse short folklore forms containing (mostly) the names of large wild carnivores – wolves, bears and lynx – as the main character or as a comparative element. Wolves and bears are quite common figures in folklore, while lynx is usually not mentioned. Wolves and bears are often interchangeable in the variations of the same fable. This interchangeability suggests that the bear has been closely categorised with the wolf, possibly due to a shared

concept of taboo. In short, both animals have some very different characteristics in folklore: they live deep in the forest, they come to the human world, and they bring their “chaos and wildness” by “stealing” for themselves what humans have. Although proverbs and phrasemes emphasise different characteristics, in the case of the bear it is the animal’s appearance that is emphasised: when a bear stands on its hind legs, it evokes a strong human attitude, so it is not surprising that a large man with a strong attitude is called a bear. The wolf is used in contexts that concern its character and behaviour: cruelty, slaughtering. Thus, bears and wolves have different characterisation elements in proverbs: the former are based more on visual elements, and the latter more on behavioural elements. Wolves and metaphorically humans are depicted as cruel, slaughtering creatures, while bears are depicted as strong creatures that could also be trained for (human) fun or (ab)use. This was never the case with the wolf. Meanwhile, the lynx is a proud and fiery animal. Weather paremias thematise the behaviour of bears and wolves in nature. Their movements alone in February can be used to predict the weather, i.e. the winter will be either long or not. The database of the Slovenian riddles foregrounds different characteristics: those featuring bears thematise their fur and weight, while those with wolves thematise their howling and a “successful escape”. However, true riddles featuring bears and wolves are based on contradiction and the effect of the unexpected. In swear words, the bear is used as a euphemism instead of the devil (“300 furry bears”), while the wolf often replaces the devil in the phraseme “we were talking about the wolf, and the wolf came out of the woods” (“to speak of the devil”). This conceptual association of the wolf and the bear with the devil again brings up the common connection to the liminal world.

Short folklore forms show us what characteristics the animals discussed in the proverbs had – how humans saw their function in nature. If we look deeper, we can say that the wolf received rather negative metaphorical connotations, while the bear received positive ones, or at least not as negative as the wolf. The stereotypes used in these paremias are wrong in many cases (e.g. the wolf is a loner or leaves its fur where it lies, the bear sleeps all winter, etc.). Nevertheless, even with the help of short folk-

lore forms, we can reach a partial (diachronic) social stereotypical understanding of the wilderness and how it functions, as well as society's worldview, expectations and functioning. However, the conclusions should be taken carefully: folklore has persisted in the society for a long time, and it changes slowly over time. Additionally, the material is written down in different periods, and much of it is left only in the archive. The contemporary worldview is much more complex than presented: observing the discourse about the animal predators and their co-existence in the mostly human world, the remaining short folklore forms and the tales that are re-printed as folklore material for children show an extremely positive attitude towards these animals, although they also emphasize their danger.

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Saša Babič  
Institute of Slovenian Ethnology  
ZRC SAZU, Novi trg 2,  
SI-1000 Ljubljana  
E-Mail: [sasa.babic@zrc-sazu.si](mailto:sasa.babic@zrc-sazu.si)

