

The fox in Slovenian proverbs and sayings

Lisica v slovenskih pregovorih in rekih

The article is based on 103 proverbs about foxes collected in the electronic database of Slovenian paremiological units Proverbs 1.0 on Clarin.si. Slovenian proverbs and sayings about foxes usually depict them as tricksters, and they cover different experiences people encountered with foxes in everyday life. This paper focuses on fox-related proverbs from animal tales and fables. For the most part, the narratives about the fox are mostly international and not merely a reflection of Slovenian creativity. Their origins reflect the influence of foreign literature and art. Yet the proverbs, they don't possess the same international quality, as they use the character of a fox not only to criticise social and ethical conditions, but also reflect common experiences with this predatory animal. Proverbs considered in this paper fall under six international types of folktales.

♦ **Keywords:** proverb, fox, folkloristics, paremiology, fables

V prispevku so analizirani 103 pregovori o lisici, zbrani v elektronski bazi slovenskih paremioloških enot Pregovori 1.0 na Clarin.si. Slovenski pregovori in frazemi pogosto govorijo o zvičajnosti lisice, vendar pa tudi o različnih izkušnjah, ki so jih doživeli ljudje z lisico v vsakdanjem življenju. V tem prispevku bom predstavila pregovore, ki so povezani z nekaterimi živalskimi pravljicami in basnimi o lisici, ki so mednarodno razširjene in niso le odsev ustvarjalnosti v slovenskem etničnem prostoru, pač pa so nastajali pod vplivom tuje literature in umetnosti. Vendar pa pregovori niso tako mednarodni, kajti preko lika lisice niso izražali le kritike družbenih ter etičnih razmer, ampak tudi izkušnje, ki so jih imeli ljudje s to pogosto plenilsko živaljo v vsakdanjem življenju. Obravnavani bodo pregovori, povezani s šestimi mednarodnimi pravljicnimi tipi.

♦ **Ključne besede:** pregovor, lisica, folkloristika, paremiologija, basni

1 Introduction

Proverbs and sayings reflect communicative, metaphoric, semantic and cultural qualities of a specific language or dialect, which naturally dictates certain differences among proverbs of different nations. This is also reflected in proverbs and sayings about animals, or rather in paremiological units in which animals are mentioned. They speak of people's understanding of the animal world, their experiences with different animal species, as well as animal related stereotypes. Proverbs and wellerisms about animals also typically originate in epic and narrative tradition, particularly in fables.

Fox, raynard or vixen, is – it's safe to say – the most common animal hero in the European narrative tradition, particularly in fables, animal tales and parables. And yet – although proverbs can pose as elements of other folklore genres, where they sometimes function as their synopsis – fox related proverbs in Slovenian tradition are fewer than one would expect. In paremiological units, other animals are actually found more frequently than foxes.

Slovenian spoken language has preserved several short sayings about foxes, which are still being used today, including: *Lisici na rep obesiti* / To hang on a fox's tail, *Lisici na rep sestiti* / To sit on a fox's tail, or *Lisici na rep stopiti* / To step on a fox's tail. (Keber 1998: 106, 109). We often say metaphorically: *Potuhnjen kot lisjak* / Sneaky as a fox, *Zvit kot lisica* / Cunning as a fox. (Kropej 2007: 119), also *Lisica – tatica* / Fox – thief, etc.

2 Analysis of Slovenian paremiological units about foxes

The electronic database of Slovenian paremiological units on Clarin.si includes 103 proverbs, wellerisms and sayings about the fox or vixen. In Slovenian language, the word *lisica* is both gender-neutral and gender specific – indicating the feminine gender.¹ This term appears in most proverbs, there are just a handful of examples featuring the male counterpart – *lisjak*.²

Many proverbs portray foxes as cunning animals, sometimes even as tricksters:

[A fox sheds her hair, but does not get rid of tricks]:³

Lesica se dlak zlevi, zvičaj se ne znebi.

Lisica dlako obrije, ne pa lisice.

Lisica izgubi dlako, a vicje ne.

Lesica minja dlaku, ma čud ne.

[A fox only steps on ice once]:

Lesica gre samo enkrat na led.

[A fox escaped from a trap, will not fall into a trap again]:⁴

Lisica iz pasti ušla, v past zopet ne bode šla.

Lisica iz pasti ušla, v past zopet ne pojde.

Lesica, ki je skopcu utekla, se ne ulovi več.

Lisica is pasti ušla, v' past zopet ne bode prišla.

A similar type of this proverb is recorded in 'The Matti Kuusi international type system and database of proverbs': *A fox is not taken twice in the same snare*. And also: *There is no catching the fox twice*. (Source 2).

[An old fox can't be fooled]:

Star lisjak se ne da ukaniti.

[A fox which only knows one hole is ignorant]:

¹ For clarity, proverbs using the gender-free and feminine form will be used female pronouns, and masculine forms will be used with male pronouns, thus reflecting the use of pronouns in the Slovenian language.

² This paper doesn't present all of the 130 Slovenian paremiological units about foxes, but instead focuses on different variants or types of Slovenian proverbs about foxes.

³ Similar to a Greek proverb: 'The fox changes its fur but not its habits.' (Source 1). Gaius Svetonius Tranquillus published a Latin proverb describing a roman emperor Vespasianus: *Vulpes pilum mutat, non mores* (Svetonius, Vespasianus, 16). Published also in the Slovenian collection of Latin proverbs (Maver 2016, 74–75),

⁴ There is a similar French proverb: 'The fox is not caught twice in the same snare.' (Source 1).

Tista lisica, ki pozna samo eno luknjo, je neuka.

[A fox even pretends to sleep, in order to catch a hen]:

Lisica tudi na videz spi, da kure ulovi.

Sometimes, however, proverbs point to the fact that even a sleeping fox won't catch the hen:

[A sleeping fox does not catch a hen]:

Lisica, ki spi, kokoši ne ujame.

Lisica, ki spi, ne ujame kokoši.

Speča lisica ni dobra lovica.

Speča lisica kokoši ne ujame.

Lesica, kadar spi, kokoši ne vjame.

Tudi lisici, če spi, kokoši ne pridejo pod zobe.

Če lisica dolgo spi, nobene kokoši ne ulovi.

Similar proverb is recorded in 'The Matti Kuusi international type system and database of proverbs': *When the fox sleeps no grapes fall in his mouth.* (Source 2).

Some proverbs indicate that a fox can still be caught, despite her slyness or cleverness:

[No matter how cunning the fox, it will get caught in a trap one day]:

Še tako zvita lisica se enkrat ujame v past.

Še največji lisjak se enkrat ujame.

Še tak lisjak se nazadnje ujame.

There are also some proverbs describing characteristic fox behaviour:

[Every fox praises her tail]:⁵

Vsaka lisica svoj rep hvali.

[A fox knows very well where to get food]:

Lesica dobro ve, kje kaj dobi.

Lisica dobro ve, če kaj dobi.

[When does a fox repent, if she eats chicken meat?]:

Kdaj se lesica kesa, ako je kurje meso.

[A fox walks foolishly but arrives wisely]:

Lisica neumno hodi ali pametno pride.

[Even in broad daylight, the fox comes to get the hen]:

Lisica tudi pri belem dnevu po kure pride.

[A fox never steals a hen near her den]:

Lisica nikoli ne vzame kure v bližini svojega brloga.

Lisica ne krade blizu doma.

There is a proverb with a similar meaning recorded in 'The Matti Kuusi international type system and database of proverbs': *The fox seldom preys near home, nor does Satan meddle with his own.* (Source 2).

⁵ There is a similar Italian proverb: 'Let every fox take care of his own tail.' (Source 1).

Some proverbs give advice on how to behave towards a fox and how to catch it:

[What the fox leaves in the trap, one should not take]:

Kar lisica pusti v pasti, za to se ne lasti.

Kar lisica pusti v pasti, tega si ne lasti.

[Do not sell the pelt while the fox is still in the den.]:

Ne prodajaj kože, dokler je lisica v brlogu.

[Whoever wants to catch a fox should hunt it with geese]:

Kdor hoče uloviti lisico, naj jo lovi na gosi.

Some proverbs express long-time experience with observation of foxes in relation to weather phenomena:

[If a fox runs across the ice, the ice will also hold people]:

Če lisica čez led beži, tudi ljudi drži.

Če lisica čez led beži, tudi človeka drži.

Weather proverbs featuring foxes usually rely on fox behaviour:

[If a fox barks a lot in December, a severe winter is to be expected]:

Če prosinca lisica laja, še huda zima prihaja.

Če prosinca zelo lisica laja, huda zima še potem nastaja.

[If the sun rises in a clear sky on Candlemas (2 February), the fox returns to her den]:

Če na svečnico sonce na jasnem vzhaja, lisica še v brlog zahaja.

[Bad weather on St. George's day drives the fox out of her den; but if the weather is nice, she won't come out for a fortnight]:

Sv. Jurja gerdo vreme lisico iz jazbine izžene; če je pa lepo, jo še 14 dni ne bo.

[On St. Gregory's day, the fox steps out the door; if the weather is bad, he is not going back in; if the weather is nice, he goes back home for a fortnight]:

O sv. Gregorju lisjak gre pred duri; če slabo je vreme, nazaj več ne gre; je vreme lepo, gre za štirinajst dni domov.

[After St. Matthias' day, a fox does not go home across ice]:

Po sv. Matiji ne gre lisjak čez led domov.

[If a fox barks, rain is coming]:

Če lisica laja, bode dež.

Some proverbs liken characteristics of foxes to those of women:

[A bridesmaid to a bridesmaid, a fox to a fox]:

Družici družica, lisici lisica.

[Sick women and cunning foxes eat the most chickens]:

Bolne ženice pa zvite lesice narveč kokuš snedo.

[God knows well enough, which fox's-tail to step on]:

Bog že ve, kateri lisici da stopi na rep.

In these cases, characteristics of foxes are compared to characteristics of women, unlike in languages where fox is a masculine noun and 'fox characteristics' aren't

reserved exclusively for women. In ‘The Matti Kuusi international type system and database of proverbs’, for instance, the following proverbs can be found:

The fox may grow grey, but never good.

An old fox needs not to be taught tricks.

You may know the fox by his tail. (Source 2).

3 Proverbs related to folktales

Slovenian proverbs and wellerisms about foxes include several examples, which relate to folk tales and songs. Some of them can even be sourced to fables and fairy tales, which can be classified according to the international tale type index.⁶ These particular proverbs exhibit the strongest connection between animal behaviour and human habits and weaknesses.

The following proverbs are related to fairy-tale types or fables:

[To a fox, grapes that are out of reach are sour]:

Lisici je grozdje, ki ga ne doseže, kislo.

[A fox served a wolf, and lost her fur]:

Služila lisica volku, pa je kožuh izgubila.

[Even clever roosters are eaten by the fox]:

Tudi pametne peteline požre lisica.

[When a wolf mourns, a fox celebrates]:

Kadar vuk žaluje, lisica praznuje.

[Over time, even a fox becomes a monk]:

S časom se tudi lisica pomeniši.

[If a hedgehog visits a fox, the fox must leave]:

Če pride jež gostovat k lisici, mora lisica oditi.

[Usually, foxes cower and hide when an eagle calls]:

Kadar se orel oglasi, se po navadi lisjaki strahopetno skrijejo.

And a wellerism:

[‘There are words,’ said the fox when she found a rosary on the road]:

‘So besede’ rekla je lisica, ko je našla na cesti paternošter.

The proverb *When the fox preaches, take care of your geese* is recorded in ‘The Matti Kuusi international type system and database of proverbs’ (Source 2). It relates to the folktale type ATU 62* Forbidden to Sit in Trees. There is no corresponding Slovenian proverb in Clarin.si database.

⁶ Uther 2004.

In fables and animal tales, which mostly go across borders, there is hardly any animal among the protagonists as popular as the fox. But this is more than just a reflection of the creative Slovenian imagination, as the narratives involving foxes were also influenced by foreign literature and art. It's no secret that the *Panchatantra*, a selection of tales from ancient India, includes a lot of interrelated animal fables in Sanskrit verse and prose, among them many tales and fables about a pair of jackals called Kalila and Dimna. Collections written by Phaedrus, Babrios and Avianus preserved the Aesopian fables, which formed the basis for the European narrative and proverbial traditions. Paremiological heritage and fables were even strongly influenced by the medieval and renaissance epics and subsequent literary sources.

Paremiological units in Slovenian electronic database Clarin.si, related to folktales, start with:

[Grapes out of reach are sour to a fox]:

Lisici je grozdje, ki ga ne doseže, kislo.

A wellerism with a similar meaning is recorded in 'The Matti Kuusi international type system and database of proverbs': '*Sour grapes*' as the fox said when he could not reach them. (Source 2).

This proverb is rooted in the folktale type **ATU 59 The Fox and the Sour Grapes**.

In Greco-Roman mythology, the fox often had negative symbolism, she was caught in a hostile relationship, namely with Dionysus, the god of wine, because foxes were seen as pests which destroy grapevine. Aristophanes and Ovid wrote of her love of grapes (Aristophanes, *Equites* 1077; Ovid, *Fasti* 4, 679–712). The Bible (Vp 2:15) influenced the image of vixens as destroyers of vineyards. In medieval tradition, foxes represent heretic and evil demons, but also a treacherous and unjust ruler, such as Herod. The fable 'The Fox and the Sour Grapes', tells of a fox who cannot reach the grapes and therefore tries to convince others that they are still sour. This tale was already popular in ancient Greece, it is one of the Aesop's fables (Perry 1965, 424, No. 15), and was documented later, around 1200, in *Roman de Renart* (XI, 257–333). In Slovenian folklore, one of its iterations can be found in the fable: 'Lisjak in grozdje' (The Fox and the Grapes), recorded by Anton Kosi in 1894:

One day the fox comes to the grapevine and sees beautiful grapes aplenty. The temptation is great, but how could he reach the fruit? He starts jumping around and climbing the grapevine, but all in vain. The grapes are too high and he can't reach them. Some sparrows are in a nearby elder tree, mocking his futile effort. When he notices this, the fox quickly turns away and says, 'I don't want these grapes, they are too sour and too bitter anyway,' and leaves. When he is gone, the sparrows quickly pick the vine so thoroughly that no fox has to climb the grapevine ever again.⁷

⁷ Slovenian original of this fable is published in Kropej Telban 2015: 154.



Figure 1: The Fox and Sour Grapes, oil on canvas. National Museum of Slovenia.

One of the most ancient fables is classified under the folktale type **ATU *56** The Fox and the Eagle**, and also this fable is another example of proverbs rooted in folktales. The first known version dates back to around 650 BC and is today known as the Archilochus's fable. The plot revolves around a broken agreement between a fox and an eagle. In fox's absence, the eagle steals her cubs, and the fox saves them by threatening to burn the tree with the eagle's nest.

The Slovenian proverb related to this is:

[Foxes usually cower and hide when an eagle calls]:

Kadar se orel oglasi, se po navadi lisjaki strahopetno skrijejo.

This proverb differs from the fable, but highlights the same discordance between foxes and eagles.

Among Slovenian narratives is documented a variant of this fable which was published by Jožef Eržen in 1854 as 'Orel in lisica' (The Eagle and the Fox):

The eagle steals the fox's cubs and takes them to his nest to feed his hatchlings. The fox begs the eagle not to kill her cubs. The eagle on top of a tall oak tree thinks that the fox cannot harm it in any way. So it scoffs at her request. What should the fox do? She hastens and gets some fire, places it near the oak with the eagle's nest, and prepares to set it on fire, nest and all. The eagle, however, fears the fox will destroy its young and returns the cubs unharmed. We have to live in peace, even with those weaker than ourselves, as they could also possibly cause us harm.⁸

Another Slovenian proverb which can be compared to the folktale **ATU 57 Raven with Cheese in his Mouth** is:

[Even clever roosters are eaten by the fox]:

Tudi pametne peteline požre lisica.

A raven (krokar) can be substituted with a rooster or a crow (vran) as protagonist. And the fable goes like this: A fox sees a crow with cheese in its beak. It wants to get the cheese, and asks the crow to sing. Flattered, the crow crows, drops the cheese, and the fox carries it away.

The Fox and the Raven is an Aesop's fable, first documented as early as the 7th century, and is also famous for being an integral part of the Latin epic Ysengrimus (c. 1150). In Slovenian Carinthia, this fable was first recorded by Urban Jarnik as 'Vrank in Lisiza' (The Crow and the Fox) in 1814.

There was a time when a crow took some cheese, hanging out a window, and flew with it to a branch of a tall spruce tree. The fox saw this and wanted some of the cheese. So it bowed and scraped to the crow, saying: Oh, my dear Crow! Who can match you? No bird has feathers like yours. And I don't know of any bird who has such beauty, accompanied by such a lovely voice. I know what I am talking about, your voice is truly the sweetest. The crow, listening to this praise, rejoiced and tried to show off even more, and demonstrate its voice, so it stretched out its beak and cawed. And because it opened its mouth, the cheese fell out. The fast and cunning fox took hold of it and quickly devoured it. The cheated Crow looked down placidly, realising the Fox's words were cunning and disloyal.

The moral: Beware of those who bow and scrape and overly praise, because they want to scam you.⁹

One of other Slovenian variants of this fable was published by bishop, poet and writer, Anton Martin Slomšek, who chose to write it in verse: 'Vrana in lesica' (The Crow and the Fox 1846).

Folktale **ATU 80 The Hedgehog and the Fox (or: The Hedgehog in the Badger's Den)** relates to the following proverb:

⁸ Slovenian original of this fable is published in Kropej Telban 2015: 151.

⁹ Slovenian original of this fable is published in Kropej Telban 2015: 152.

[When a hedgehog comes to the fox's den, the fox must leave]:

Če pride jež gostovat k lisici, mora lisica oditi.

A wellerism with similar meaning is recorded in 'The Matti Kuusi international type system and database of proverbs': *The fox knows many tricks, but the hedgehog one great one.* (Source 2).

This plot is found with Archilochus, as well, in a collection of fables from the 16th century (Laurentius Abstemius, no. 72). In Slovenia, this folktale was first published by Janez Svetokriški in his Sermons (Svetokriški 1691/1991, p. 175).

Anton Martin Slomšek provided another version of this plot in his fable 'Jež in lisica' (The Hedgehog and the Fox). It involves a freezing hedgehog asking a fox for shelter. The fox welcomes him into her lair, but when the hedgehog gets warm, it loosens, and throws the fox out of her lair.

Eight more variants of this folktale have been confirmed in Slovenia.¹⁰

Tales about the **Fox-pilgrim** relate to the following Slovenian proverb:

[Over time, even a fox becomes a monk]:

Sčasom se tudi lisica pomeniši.

And the wellerism,:

['There are words,' said the fox when she found a rosary on the road]:

*'So besede' rekla je lisica, ko je našla na cesti paternošter.*¹¹

This wellerism is unique to the European tradition, and is reminiscent of illustrations and paintings featuring a fox-pilgrim holding a rosary. A fine example of this depiction can be found on the fresco in the church of Saint Ulrich (Sv. Urh) in Maršiči village near Ortnek (in the vicinity of Velike Lašče). It was probably painted by the Croatian master Tomaž from Senj around 1515. A fox as a pilgrim, wearing a cardinal's hat, is the subject of the fresco in the presbytery of this church. There are two pairs of crossed keys on his hat, a sign of the Roman Pope, as well as a shell, a pilgrims' sign. The fox is holding a rosary, and has a pilgrim's bag on his shoulders with a dangling head of an 'accidentally strangled' hen.¹²

Iconography of the fox-pilgrim in Maršiči highlights weakness and expresses criticism of the court and the Catholic Church.

A medieval fable about 'Iisjak Reinhart' (Reynard the Fox) spread to the Slovenian cultural area between the 12th and the 15th century. Reynard represented sententious criticism of society. The German version in particular, the *Reyneke de vos* epic (1498), was

¹⁰ Slovenian variants of the 'Hedgehog and Fox' fable are listed in the Type Index of Slovenian Folktales: Animal Tales and Fables (Kropej Telban 2015: 191–193).

¹¹ This wellerism was collected by Janez Trdina in his manuscript 'Zapiski' 1870–1879 (27 handwritten notebooks). It was published in: Snežana Štabi, Igor Kramberger (eds.), *Podobe prednikov: zapiski Janeza Trdine iz obdobja 1870–1879*. 1–3 Ljubljana: KRT 1987. Book III 'Trezne vinske in pravoverne', p. 715. I am grateful to Rok Mrvič for sharing this information.

¹² For more on this, see Kropej 2015 and Komić Marn 2019.

directed toward the court and the Catholic church, which made Martin Luther describe this epic as a vivid representation of life at court. The French medieval fable *Roman de Renart* was equally scathing.

There were also texts and miniature graphics – leaflets or even playing cards with a fox as the most common central character – circling among people. Most times, the fox preaches to hens, chickens or geese, dressed as a monk and holding a pilgrim’s staff or a rosary. In the time of Gothic and the Renaissance, such scenes were not merely a humorous warning, but also a serious criticism and deterrent against hypocrites holding the highest secular and ecclesiastical positions. During the Protestant Reformation, these sorts of motives were most rampant in places where the reformation movement was at its most powerful.



Figure 2: The fresco of a fox-pilgrim in the church of Saint Ulrich in Maršiči near Ortnek (photo by M. Krojej Telban).

This kind of proverbs about foxes were also recorded in *Speculum exemplorum* (1, 15), and also Janez Svetokriški wrote about a penitent fox in his sermons (*Sacrum promptuarium* 1691–1707), noting that the penitent fox donned not just ‘pilgromski gvant’ (a pilgrim’s attire), but also ‘usnjat kreželjc’ (a leather collar) (Svetokriški 1707: 75).¹³

The influence of the *Reyneke de vos* epic also left an incredibly indelible mark in the central European area, where individual episodes were used as homiletic examples or textbook cases in legal matters,¹⁴ which could be the origin of our own Slovenian wellerism,¹⁵ as the same proverbs could be used in different semantic relations.

Folktales about **The wolf and the fox, stealing the food together (ATU 3, ATU 3*, ATU4)** relate to the following proverbs:

[When a wolf mourns, a fox celebrates]:

Kadar vuk žaluje, lesica praznuje. (ATU 4)

[At wolves’ side, even foxes are sated]:

Vz vuke so i lisice site.

[Shouting at the wolf - they feed the fox]:

Na volka kriče - lisico rede. (ATU 3, 3*, 4).

¹³ Komić Marn 2019: 120.

¹⁴ For more on this, see.: Komić Marn 2019: 126.

¹⁵ For more on this, see: Meterc, Mrvič 2024: in print.

These proverbs are related to folktales which are frequent among Slovenian animal tales, some of them are also included in the folktale index *The Types of International Folktales* (Uther 2004), among them:

ATU 3 **Simulated Injury**: A fox covers its head in blood or mud and scares a beaten wolf, saying that her head has been smashed and her brains are leaking.

ATU 4 **Sick Animal Carries the Healthy One**: A beaten wolf carries a fox, while the fox is singing: ‘The sick carries the healthy!’

ATU 3* **The Wolf Supplies Food for the Fox**: A fox advises a wolf to go into the hen den and sweep out all the hens. When people come, the fox picks up a hen and runs away, while the wolf is caught.¹⁶

Slovenian paremiological tradition also includes proverbs with the fox, not the wolf, getting the short end of the stick:

Hunting with wolves, foxes are always hungry.

A fox served a wolf, and lost her fur.

4 The fox in Slovenian dialectal phraseology

Linguists from the Austrian Carinthia have been researching proverbs and sayings about animals from the Slovenian ethnic territory, as well. Studies by Ludvik Karničar and Tatjana Trampusch focused mainly on sayings, comparative phrases and rhymes among Slovenians living in the Austrian Carinthia. Ludvik Karničar has been researching phraseology of Carinthian Slovenian dialects in Austria, and has only come upon a single humorous rhyme *falerka* (taunt with humorous content) including a fox. It comes from Sele / Zell in Rož / Rosental in Carinthia and also features a fox:

Lisica je vajava, volq j pa tulu, medved j jazbic svam u rit bulu. (Karničar 1994: 120). [Lisica je lajala, volk pa je tulil, medved je jazbecu slamo v rit tlačil.]

[The fox barked, the wolf howled, and the bear stuffed straw in the badger’s butt.]

Similarly, Tatjana Trampusch researched phraseology in spoken language – the Podjuna/Yuantal dialect) among residents of the village Dob near Pliberk in the Austrian Carinthia, and only registered comparatives between foxes and cunning, e.g. a saying about a very cunning person:

[She is cunning like a fox]:

Je z’wi:ta / na’wi:ta k na li’si:ca.

There is also a saying:

Je še ‘to:k lis’jo:k, p’ri:de nə’ba:rt u ‘po:st. [Še tak lisjak se nazadnje ujame.]

[Every fox gets caught eventually]:

There is a popular counting-out rhyme among children:

¹⁶ Slovenian variants of these folktales are presented in Kropelj Telban 2015: 54–73.

[A reynard and a vixen, were drinking mead, there was no mead, they drank water]:

Li'si:ca, lis'jo:k, sta pi:wa me'do:k, me'do:ka ni 'bu:ə, sta 'pi:wa wə'du:ə. [Lisica, lisjak, sta pila medico, medice ni bilo, sta pila vodó.] (Trampusch 1999: 115).

However, as Ludvik Karničar finds, most of these cases can be traced in everyday lives of Slovenians from the Austrian Carinthia but only in dialect. They usually cannot be traced in Slovenian literary lexicography and literature. (Karničar 1994: 126).

5 Conclusion

Many proverbs in use today have been passed down through generations, from century to century. Some proverbs, that were used for many years, are no longer part of today's language and can only be found as records on paper (Babič 2015: 50). Despite the fact that nowadays people rarely include proverbs or sayings about foxes in everyday speech, they have been somewhat preserved, which is corroborated by the case of Slovenian dialects in the Austrian Carinthia, where researchers find dialectal sayings and rhymes about animals with strong similarities to literary units. Nevertheless, associations enable spontaneous creations of variant forms (Trampusch 1999: 125), which may be a further reason why they have persisted to this day.

Proverbs and sayings discussed in this paper, also reflect metaphoric language, as well as semantic and cultural characteristics of the Slovenian language or dialect. According to findings by Saša Babič and Piret Voolaid, paremiological material is international on one hand, but on the other, it can provide not only data on the tangible heritage, but also on specific cultural experiences, views, and concepts. Paremiological units are adapted to each language and society and are used to fulfil the function of (successful idiomatic or metaphorical) communication. (Babič, Voolaid 2023: 388). It seems that the fox has played quite an important role in everyday lives of people living on the Slovenian territory, as relatively many proverbs and sayings have been preserved in comparison to other nations.

While it is true that the meaning and use of specific proverbs can vary in different cultures and environments (Lauhakangas 2013: 218), there is nevertheless a significant level of international integration, especially in the case of proverbs originating from fables and animal tales. However, there are few international proverbs about foxes or even proverbs merely mentioning foxes, when compared with fables, where the fox is a frequent protagonist.

As we can see the fox is a frequent protagonist in folk tales, songs and proverbs as well as in folk art. However, since people used the fox's image to express criticism of social and ethical conditions, their imagination flourished. But they express also their common experience in dealing with this predatory animal in everyday life, and this was often not positive, since foxes often caused damage to the farmers. Narratives as

well as proverbs about foxes were therefore an important part of narrative folklore in previous centuries. But nowadays they are used most often only to express the cunning character of the fox and as the metaphor for the similar behaviour of the people.

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Online sources

Source 1: https://www.uniguide.com/fox-quotes-sayings-proverbs#Fox_Proverbs

Source 2: Proverb types | The Matti Kuusi international type system and database of proverbs (mattikuusiproverbtypology.fi)