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## Clothing in proverbs: Between symbol and meaning

### Oblačila v pregovorih: med simbolom in pomenom

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Short folklore forms are a genre of everyday speech: they capture material or content from everyday life, not only from the world of objects and existence, but also from values and understandings of the world. Clothes are an indispensable part of our everyday life. They are such an important part of our existence that they also have great economic significance, which is why the appearance of different items of clothing can also be traced in folklore forms. This paper presents an overview of clothing items and the crafts connected with making them in Slovenian proverbs and their connection with symbolic meanings. The specific cultural horizon of life in the past will be covered through analysis and interpretation, and will also reveal social and cultural stereotypes, images and concepts related to the economic image of society.

♦ **Keywords:** proverbs, clothing, crafts, everyday life, metaphors, symbols

Folklorni obrazci so zvrst vsakdanjega govora: zajemajo snov iz vsakdanjega življenja, ne le iz sveta predmetov in bivanja, temveč tudi iz vrednot in razumevanja sveta. Oblačila so nepogrešljiv del našega vsakdanjega življenja. So tako pomemben del našega bivanja, da imajo tudi velik gospodarski pomen, zato lahko pojavljanje različnih oblačil zasledimo tudi v folklornih žanrih. V prispevku je predstavljen pregled oblačil in z njihovo izdelavo povezanih obrti v slovenskih pregovorih ter njihova povezanost s simbolnimi pomeni. Z analizo in interpretacijo bo zajeto specifično kulturno obzorje življenja v preteklosti, razkriti pa bodo tudi družbeni in kulturni stereotipi, podobe in pojmi, povezani z gospodarsko podobo družbe.

♦ **Ključne besede:** pregovori, oblačila, obrt, vsakdanje življenje, metafore, simboli

## 1 Introduction

Language can serve as a lens through which we can explore the culture and ideology of a nation. Disciplines that study language, such as ethnolinguistics and paremiology, offer valuable insights into this complex subject. It is indisputable that proverbs and sayings serve as precise reflections of a nation's way of life, traditions and other distinctive characteristics. Embedded within a language's memory, they encapsulate the everyday realities that a nation has encountered over centuries. Not just proverbs but also other folklore genres reveal rich ethnographic details, ranging from various tools and attire used in daily life to the unique features of the geographic environment, encompassing landscapes, climates, flora and fauna. Folklore genres, being rooted in everyday speech and taking substance from everyday life, reflect not only the tangible elements of the material world but also the beliefs, values and understanding of the world at the time when they were created, transmitted and used. Sayings and proverbs stand out from other short folk genres as potent echoes of societal values and beliefs (Bobkina 2004; Babič 2015).

Clothes and clothing culture are a very important element of everyday life. Clothes not only reflect an individual's taste, personality, social status, profession, age and gender, but also other cultural and economic factors (Gordon 2013; Miller 2016: 29). They are such an important part of our lives that they also have great economic importance. This is why various items of clothing and other aspects connected with making clothes can be traced in various folklore genres.

Clothing and the textile industry were even more important in the past. Historically, clothing served as a powerful marker of social status, wealth and identity. In many societies, including the one present on Slovenia's ethnic territory, sumptuary laws regulated what individuals could wear based on their social class or rank (Vilfan 1949; Baš 1970.). Clothing styles, fabrics and accessories can be seen as communication tools, as they indicated one's occupation, affiliation with a particular group or community, or religious and cultural norms, and not only social class but also marital status (Barnard 2005).

Some clothing items have had strong symbolic meanings, mainly because of their role in marking both social and marital status, as well as local or even national affiliation. For example, red clothing and shoes were a long-standing privilege of the aristocracy (Gordon 2013: 152–153), while various head coverings like *šaplji* and *parte* in the Slovenian rural environment were worn by unmarried girls. The symbolism of the *avba*, a special type of bonnet worn by women after getting married, has even been captured in the phrase 'to get under the *avba*,' meaning to get married (Žagar 2004: 19). Clothing has played an important identifying role, not just for individuals but also for entire nations. Certain items of clothing have become significant symbols of national belonging through the creation of national, regional or ethnic costumes (Eriksen 2004; Knific 2010) like the Slovenian national costume, the Norwegian *bunad*, the Bavarian-Austrian *dirndl*, and many other traditional costumes.

Many elements of traditional clothing carried symbolic meanings in their colourings, patterns, embroidery and accessories, as they often represented specific aspects of local traditions and beliefs. As some researchers have noted, certain colours may symbolize fertility, prosperity or spirituality, while specific motifs reflected cultural narratives or folklore. Under certain circumstances, clothes could also have magical properties (Doljak 2013: 73–75; Sedakova 2016).

Before the industrial revolution, textile production was primarily artisanal and localized, as ethnographic data shows. Communities often had their own traditions in textile manufacturing, with skilled artisans handcrafting fabrics, garments and accessories using traditional techniques. The textile industry provided livelihoods for numerous artisans, weavers, dyers, tailors and seamstresses, contributing to local economies and cultural heritage (Geramb 1934; D'Orlandi and Perusini 1988; Makarovič 2007 etc.).

The textile trade played a central role in the economy over a long period of time and in many cultures. Textiles were among the most valuable commodities traded

along ancient trade routes such as the Silk Road, and the demand for luxury textiles, such as silk, but also cotton, wool and linen drove commerce and cultural exchange between distant regions, facilitating economic growth and cultural diffusion (Bogansky 2013; Beckert 2014). The rise of urban centres and industrialization during the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries transformed the textile industry profoundly. Innovations such as the spinning jenny, power loom and mechanized textile factories revolutionized production methods, leading to the mass production of textiles and causing a decline in localized artisanal production and thus also the variety of regional types of clothing that had been worn until then. This industrialization of textile manufacturing reshaped urban landscapes, fuelled population migrations and transformed social and economic structures. The growth of the textile industry during the industrial revolution also brought significant social and labour challenges. Factory workers, including many women and children, often endured harsh working conditions, long hours and low wages. This led to labour movements, trade unions and social reforms aimed at improving working conditions, advocating for workers' rights and addressing issues of labour exploitation and inequality (Spielvogel 2005: 583–608). Overall, the historical influence of clothing culture and the textile industry on everyday life and the economy is characterized by the interplay of social, economic, technological and cultural factors, shaping societies and the course of history.

In this article, the terms phrasemes and proverbs refer to multi-word, relatively established and also semantically transferred linguistic units. We should not view phrasemes and proverbs as forms that have remained fixed over time. As will be shown in the article, in many cases the phraseological structure allows for the existence of variants, as well as certain morphosyntactic changes and modifications. Just as the form of phrasemes could change over time, so could their meaning. Some units found in the collection of proverbs stored at the Institute of Slovenian Ethnology are no longer relevant today due to changes in lifestyle, customs and the circumstances related to textile production, which has led to a loss of the connection with the representation that motivated the phrase (Jakop 2022: 130–133). On the other hand, some proverbs have remained important because they allow dual interpretation, both literal and metaphorical.

Proverbs are important carriers of cultural connotation and content, which can be more or less expressed or obscured and may change over time. In this sense, paremiology and phraseology units can also be seen as cultural heritage, keepers of social memory and indicators of the social conceptual world, as they often contain cultural content and can be indicators of changing social circumstances and cultural norms and values (Babič 2020: 125–127; Jakop 2022: 130). They therefore store information about the functioning of society and of the changes that transform it over time.

Through the study of clothing culture per se and its echoes in language, especially in folklore and phrasemes, we can not only gain insights into the economic, social, political and cultural conditions in which people lived in a certain period, but also the

symbolic meanings and beliefs connected with it, as demonstrated through research into other aspects of everyday life and their reflections in proverbs (Babič 2018; Babič and Voolaid 2023). In this article, we will look at what individual textile elements that appear in proverbs indicate, both as elements of everyday life in the past and as an echo of a past craft and form of manufacturing.

## 2 Methodology

The research was conducted on the collection of proverbs of the Institute of Slovenian Ethnology at ZRC SAZU, which was digitized in the project entitled Traditional Paremiological Units in Dialogue with Contemporary Use. The collection contains 35,706 units and is fully digitized and accessible on the Clarin.si repository.<sup>1</sup>

The research started with a random search for words connected with clothing pieces that appear in well-known Slovenian proverbs, e.g. clothes, shoe and shirt. Here are some examples:

*Navada je železna srajca (Habit is an iron shirt)*

*Brez muje se še čevelj ne obuže (Without an effort even a shoe can't be put on)*

*Obleka naredi človeka (Clothes make the man)*

These proverbs are part of the three hundred best known Slovenian units (Meterc 2017).

The second stage was conducted more systematically. The presence of certain words related to clothing culture was checked. For example, words connected with the manufacture of clothes and technology (sewing, spinning, spinning wheel, distaff, etc.), the professions (tailor, seamstress, weaver), raw materials (linen, wool) and fabrics (linen, velvet, silk). Searches were also conducted for names of clothing items and parts of clothing, from general items, such as coats, skirts and shirts, to more specific items such as gloves, socks or even parts of clothing, like pockets.

Most of the proverbs we found were connected with general items of clothing or concepts related to dressing. Meanwhile, proverbs that included specific words, such as the names of pieces of clothing, techniques or materials that were strongly present in the past, e.g. cotton, blouse, scarf, lederhosen, could not be traced.

## 3 Analysis

Six words were found that appeared in more than fifty units: obleka (Eng. clothes; 89 units), čevelj (Eng. shoe; 68 units), srajca (Eng. shirt; 60 units), žep (Eng. pocket; 53 units), hlače (Eng. trousers; 52 units) and klobuk (Eng. hat; 50 units).

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<sup>1</sup> Proverbs (a collection of Slovenian proverbs): <https://www.clarin.si/ske/#dashboard?corpname=pregovori>.

The large number of proverbs that contain these pieces of clothing is mainly due to a large number of variants. These proverbs are among the most well-known proverbs in the Slovenian language and there are therefore many variants that share the same linguistic structure. Here are a number of variants of the Slovenian version of the proverb *Clothes make the man*:

*Obleka naredi človeka. / Obleka dela človeka. / Obleka res naredi človeka. / Obleka stori človeka.*

The last three mentioned items of clothing that have the most appearances, žep (Eng. pocket), hlače (Eng. trousers) and klobuk (Eng. hat), have a greater number of semantic variants. We can see this in the example of a few units of proverbs that contain the word ‘pocket’.

*Mrtvaška obleka nima žepov. (A mortuary gown has no pockets.)*

*Vsak žep ima svoje dno. (Every pocket has a bottom.)*

*Vsak gleda za svoj žep. (Everyone looks after their own pocket.)*

*Puhla glava, prazen žep. (Empty head, empty pocket.)*

#### 4 Textile crafts in proverbs

Even today, clothing culture and the textile industry intersect with various aspects of our everyday life and the economy, shaping consumer behaviour, social dynamics and even the economy and environmental issues. The textile industry is still one of the largest and most diverse industries in the world, producing and selling clothing, fabrics, yarns, fibres and other products. In the past, it played a significant role as a driving force behind the Industrial Revolution that started in the middle of the 18<sup>th</sup> century. Moreover, until the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, local non-industrial production on the territory of present-day Slovenia was also important and was closely connected to self-sufficiency. Certain processes were part of the domestic economy on farms, such as preparing wool and linen fibres for further use. Craftsmen and women, such as weavers, seamstresses, tailors and cobblers were regular visitors who went from house to house. This was especially typical of certain regions until the early 20<sup>th</sup> century (Makarovič 2007, 2009, 2011).

The significance of textiles and textile crafts, their deep connection with everyday life, and their integration into economic currents, have been gradually woven into Slovenian proverbs. This is evidenced by around 800 proverbs found in the Proverbs collection of the Institute of Slovenian Ethnology at ZRC SAZU. Research into Slovenian proverbs has shown that all aspects of clothing and textile production can be found in proverbs, including fibres, crafting tools, artisans, names of garments and also parts of garments.

Although the majority of textile-related proverbs contain names for clothing items, there are also some mentions of craftsmen. A small number of proverbs mention seamstresses, tailors, shoemakers/cobblers and weavers. Textile crafts were a significant

portion of all the crafts in the past. As many as 14–18% of all craftsmen made or sewed clothes, or were specialized in making special pieces of clothing such as underwear, corsets, ties, etc., between the two world wars (Cerar 2003: 158).

*Pri šivilji ni svile kupovati. / Od mojškne židanje draga. (Don't buy silk from a seamstress.)*

*Krojač naredi gospoda. / Krojači so naredili že precej velikih gospodov. (A tailor makes a man.)*

*Naj čevljar pri svojem kopitu ostane. / Čevljar ostani pri svojem kopitu! (Let the cobbler stay at his last).*

*Brez mandranja ne zleze tkalcu platno na berdo. (No linen is made without hard work).*

Proverbs not only describe the specific characteristics of professions, but also their attributed qualities and their status in society, such as the notion that buying fabric from a seamstress is expensive, that they are exploiters like innkeepers or that a well-made garment bought from a tailor makes a gentleman. They also encapsulate the seasonal aspects of professions such as shoemaking and weaving, or certain seasonal tasks related to textile production. For instance:

*Ko kukavica zapoje, je tkavec ob delo svoje. (When the cuckoo sings, the weaver stops working.)*

*or Kolovrat pozna, da nismo klali. (The spinning wheel knows we did not slaughter.)*

These probably indicate that the spinning wheel was more in use when there was not a lot of additional work, such as slaughtering animals and preparing meat, during the winter.

Ethnographic data describes the seasonality of work, such as spinning, flax processing and weaving. For instance, spinning was primarily the work of women and girls, often done during winter evenings, especially in January and February, all over Europe. This task had an important social aspect, as women frequently helped each other. It was not uncommon for the activity to conclude with dancing, feasting and general socializing (Novak 1964: 248; Makarovič 2007: 22; Gordon 2013: 123). Collective spinning typically ended around the time of 'pust' (Carnival), which is reflected also in the proverb

*Kadar se začne post, vrzi preslico v gozd. (When fasting begins, throw the distaff into the forest.)*

These are borderline paremiological examples, as they offer concrete instructions about what a person must do, rather than ethical-moral guidance, which is typical of proverbs.

Specific tools are also associated with textile production, such as the loom, distaff and spinning wheel. These are all tools needed for preparing yarn and later fabric:

*Vsaka preja pride v statve! (Every yarn goes into the loom!)*

*Kolovrat, skrinja in povesmo – nevesti najlepša pesem. (Spinning wheel, chest and bundle - the bride's most beautiful song.)*

*Pripravi vreteno in preslico in Bog ti bo poslal lan. (Prepare the spindle and the distaff, and God will send you flax.)*

The proverbs also contain terms related to the basic tools and gadgets connected with clothes-making, such as the needle and thread:

*Sito očita šivanki, da ima luknjico. (The sieve accuses the needle of having a hole.)* and

*Prej pojde kamela skozi šivankino uho, kakor nevoščljivec v nebeško kraljestvo. (It is easier for the camel to go through the eye of a needle, than for an envious person to reach the heavenly kingdom.)*

Thread is commonly mentioned in European folklore and primarily symbolises the connection between the worlds of the living and the dead, as well as the arrival of children's souls into this world, and death or their departure back to the other world. The motif of spinning or the association with yarn, thread, balls of yarn, wool or spinning tools is connected to various mythical beings, which are usually female. This is understandable as spinning has always been in the female domain (Mencej 2010).

In the collection, most of the proverbs that mention threads are a metaphor for something very thin and fine:

*Niti ženske zvijače so finejše, kakor predivo svilene gosenice. (The threads of a woman's cunning are finer than the thread of a silken caterpillar.)*

A similar metaphor is also used in proverbs that refer to someone's fortune or property:

*Premoženje gre curkom dol, po niti pa gor. (Assets go down in spurts, but up by a thread.)*

*Imetje se po niti nabira, po vrvi zapravi. (Possessions are gathered by a thread and wasted by a rope.)*

*Dolg pride po vrvi, odhaja po niti. (Debt comes by rope and leaves by thread.)*

In European folklore the thread is often connected with the perception of human life or destiny. In ancient mythology we can find stories about the Moirai, the spinners who wove the destinies of human lives. The Greeks understood fate and its phases, such as misfortune, marriage, old age, illness, or death, as threads spun by the gods or the Fates. Similar motifs can also be found in other European mythologies. For example, there are old Slovene stories about the Sojenice or Fates, which suggest similar beliefs (Kropej 2008: 237–240; Mencej 2010: 160–162).

Traces of the connection between spinning and fate are also evident in language. For example, the Slovenian saying 'presti niti človekove usode' means spinning determines someone's fate (SSKJ 2014). The connection between thread and illness is even more explicit in numerous variations of proverbs, which suggest that disease comes quickly but healing is often more difficult and takes longer.

*Bolezen gre v človeka z vozom, iz človeka po niti. (The disease goes into a person by cart, and leaves the person by a thread.)*

*Bolezen po vrvi, zdravje po niti. (The disease by rope, health by a thread.)*

*Zdravje curkom doli, po niti gori. (Health goes down in a stream and up by a thread.)*

The proverbs also mention the fabrics and raw materials that are used for producing textile fabrics. Although yarn and its symbolism are revealed to a greater extent in other folklore forms, the logical connection of high-quality yarn with high-quality fabric is most strongly expressed in Slovenian proverbs. The collection contains some variations of the proverb 'As the yarn is, so will be the linen' in the form 'Kakršna preja, tako bo platno' or 'Kakor preja, tako platno'.

The raw material is important for producing first the fabrics and then the clothes. For many centuries, flax and wool were the primary materials from which clothes and other textiles were made. Archaeological findings testify that the deliberate cultivation of flax and the breeding of sheep for wool were an important source of income for some places in the Alpine region, and integral parts of textile production since prehistoric times (Gleba and Mannering 2012; Grömer 2016). Wool and flax were also an important part of the Slovenian peasant household economy for many centuries. The peasant population in Slovenia produced woollen and linen fabrics mainly until the arrival of industrialization in the middle of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Until then, people had mostly made their clothes and other textile products at home, but the development of the textile industry and technological innovation in the 19<sup>th</sup> century led to the mass production of textiles in factories. This led to a breakthrough in the way textile products were manufactured and people began buying products that were produced in factories (Makarovič 2007: 33).

Linen fabrics continued to be produced for longer by the Slovenian peasant population than woollen fabrics. Due to the general shortage during the world wars, people again began growing and spinning flax to make textiles in some places in the middle of the 20<sup>th</sup> century (Makarovič 2007: 21, 2009: 23).

*Lan je lan, z njim je posla leto in dan* (*Flax is flax, there is work with it all the year round.*) says the proverb and thereby articulates the reality of making linen. Early flax is sown in March and late flax is sown in May, when the early flax has already grown. In June the early flax is harvested and plucked, thrashed to remove the seed pods, retted and prepared for scutching. The late flax is harvested in August, and in the summer linen textiles woven during the winter are bleached and softened. In November it is time to dry the flax, scutch it and comb it, and then spin it over the winter until February. Then the cycle is repeated (Makarovič 2007: 22).

Just how important flax and linen were for the Slovenian peasant household economy is expressed by the proverb *Najlepši zakladi so za gospodinjjo, če ima s platnom napolnjeno skrinjo*. (*The most beautiful treasures are for the housewife if she has a chest filled with linen.*) Desire for good linen is also reflected in the following weather proverb: *Svečnica lep, jasen dan, leto nam dobro bo za lan*. (*Candlemas a beautiful, clear day, we will have a good year for flax.*)

The breeding of sheep for wool is also reflected in a proverb, which articulates the basic difference between breeds bred specifically for meat and wool, and dairy breeds: *Dobra ovca da malo mleka, pa veliko volne*. (*A good sheep gives little milk, but much wool.*)

Silk is also mentioned, in addition to wool and linen. *Raševine ne šivamo s svilo* (*We don't sew rags with silk*), says one of the proverbs. It is clear from the proverbs that silk is a valuable material that is almost equivalent to gold and the two appear together in one of the proverbs: *Rajši knez v razcapani ciganski obleki kakor sluga v zlatu in svili!* (*Better a prince in tattered gypsy clothes than a servant in gold and silk!*).



But there is also the proverb: *Ni vse svila, kar je svilnato. (Not everything that is silky is silk)*, which is similar to the proverb *Ni vse zlato, kar se sveti (Not everything that glitters is gold)*. The following proverb also shows that it was (and still is) a valuable and expensive material: *Svila in žamet pogasita ogenj na ognišu (Silk and velvet put out the fire in the fireplace)*. This probably means that beautiful clothes spoil a woman and distract her from caring for her family and home, or that money brings other priorities and the family is no longer in first place. However, we can also understand this proverb as criticising people who get money quickly and for whom presenting luxury on the outside is more important. This could be so important for them that they run out of funds for their basic needs. In both cases the proverb indicates the great value of silk and velvet fabrics.<sup>2</sup> In fact, in some regions silk was so highly valued and in such demand that it was used as a form of currency and means of payment like gold or money (Hansen and Rong 2013). Throughout history, silk was considered a precious textile that was reserved for the aristocracy, and its use symbolised authority and power. Although silk production in Europe began as early as the 7<sup>th</sup> century AD (the ancient Greeks and Romans were known as importers of silk from China), throughout history silk was always seen as a luxury that only the wealthiest could afford (Callava 2018). Silk and velvet are therefore primarily metaphors for wealth in these contexts.

Velvet produced from silk fibres is also a symbol of wealth in proverbs. However, proverbs comparing wit and wisdom to velvet argue that the former are worth more: *Pamet je boljša kakor žamet. (Wisdom is better than velvet.)* (Meterc 2020). We can see that the proverb can also express the meaning that it is better to be smart than rich. This could be seen as a criticism of the elites who can afford silk, but what good are silk and money if you are stupid? *Riches serve a wise man but command a fool*<sup>3</sup> says an English proverb, which suggests that wealth is only beneficial if one has the wisdom to use it properly. There is also a biblical proverb, which states that it is better to be poor and wise than to be a rich fool, from which these proverbs may have derived: *Better a poor man who walks with integrity than a fool whose lips are perverse.*<sup>4</sup> This suggests that the Slovenian proverb is actually biblical and adapted to the Slovenian context of life and language.

## 5 Clothes in proverbs

Slovenian proverbs do not only mention various aspects of textile production but also clothes. Various items of clothing that are mentioned also have a metaphorical meaning, which helps to construct a wider field of connotations. The most frequently mentioned word in proverbs is *obleka* - clothes, suit or garment.

<sup>2</sup> Velvet was historically made of silk fibres, but is nowadays more commonly made of cotton or synthetic fibres.

<sup>3</sup> <https://quoterich.com/list-proverbs-foolishness-wisdom>.

<sup>4</sup> <https://biblehub.com/nlt/proverbs/19-1.htm>.

Clothes play a vital role in many aspects of our daily lives, such as interpersonal relationships, social situations and in the professional environment. They are important in establishing an individual's mood, commanding respect and often create first impressions (Hutson and Rodriguez 2016). The importance of nice clothes that help make a good impression is also reflected in the proverb: *Obleka (ne) naredi človeka.* (*Clothes (do not) make the man.*) The Latin form of the proverb *vestis virum faciti*, meaning *clothes make the man*, was recorded by Erasmus of Rotterdam, the Dutch humanist, Catholic theologian and philosopher in his work entitled *Adages* in 1520 (Atkins 2017). The proverb expresses that clothes are essential for a person's appearance, dignity and reputation, and are also an identification element (Meterc 2020).

There are also proverbs, which express the idea that beautiful clothes cannot hide an unpleasant character, a person's nature, or turn a bad person into a good one:

*Kdor nima v srcu lepote, ga tudi lepa obleka ne polepša.* (*Whoever lacks beauty in the heart, even beautiful clothes do not make them beautiful.*)

*En madež pokvari tudi najlepšo obleko.* (*One stain ruins even the most beautiful outfit.*)

Just how highly valued and important neat, clean, socially acceptable clothing is in western culture can be seen in the following proverbs:

*Obrabljena obleka ima malo ugleda.* (*A worn suit enjoys little reputation.*)

*Lepa obleke ne more vsak nositi, čeden pa mora vsak biti.* (*Not everyone can have nice clothes, but everyone must be decently dressed.*)

People are expected to dress appropriately, and above all to be well-presented if they want to be accepted. Dirty clothes and dirt are generally undesired by society.

Clothes and dress can metaphorically indicate something new and interesting, but not for long because they are like interesting news, the novelty of which quickly wears off as new events unfold or as time passes:

*Še iz vsake praznične obleke je nastala vsakdanja.* (*Every festive suit becomes an everyday suit.*)

*Lepa obleka kratko traja.* (*A beautiful dress does not last long.*)

In proverbs and other short folklore forms, we can also detect gender divisions and stereotypes (Babič 2018). Trousers are often a metaphor for men, but also a symbol of power and control in the family and in other relationships.

*Kjer žena hlače nosi, si mož kruha prosi.* (*Where the wife wears the trousers, the husband begs for bread.*)

*Gorje možu, ki mu je žena slekla hlače.* (*Woe to the husband whose wife took off his trousers.*)

Skirts and aprons are items of clothing that are distinctively connected with women. They are not just metaphors for women but also symbols of motherhood:

*Majhni otroci te cukajo za krilo, veliki pa za srce.* (*Small children tug at your skirt, while big ones tug at your heart.*)

*Mati mora imeti velik predpasnik, da pokrije vse napake svojega otroka.* (*A mother must have a big apron to cover all her child's mistakes.*)

## 6 Weather proverbs and clothes

Weather proverbs form a special group of proverbs that is in no way connected with dressing or the production of textiles and clothing. They indicate weather phenomena but quite a number of clothes items are mentioned in them including skirts, caps, hats, and coats. These items of clothing are not meant to be worn. Instead, they symbolise weather phenomena such as fog, wind, clouds over peaks, etc. This personification is based on the principle of conceptual similarity: a hat covers the head, a cloud covers a mountain, a fog hugs us like a cloak, etc.

*Če se sveti nad Gorico, je Italijanka dvignila krilo. (If it (the sun) shines over Gorica, the Italian woman has raised her skirt.)*

*Če ima Šmarna gora kapo, bo dež. (If Šmarna gora has a cap, it will rain.)*

*Če je Martinov plašč v meglo zavit, bo vsak od nas še zime sit. (If Martin's coat is shrouded in fog, all of us will get tired of winter.)*

Meanwhile, the mention of gloves, fur, coats and shirts on a particular day indicates or predicts warm or cold weather. These items of clothing are connected with direct predictions, with the shirt being a light garment and gloves being winter clothing. However, gloves are not as warm as fur, which is the warmest and most prestigious garment.

*V februarju rajši vidim na polju volka - kakor hoditi v srajci moža. (In February, I'd rather see a wolf in the field than a man walking in a shirt.)*

*Svetega Lovrenca v rokavicah, svetega Jerneja v kožuh. (Saint Lawrence in gloves, Saint Bartholomew in a fur coat.)*

These proverbs show the importance of clothing in everyday life, emphasising its self-evident presence and adaptation to changing weather conditions. In weather paremias, the protective function of clothes is emphasised. For example, the mention of warmer clothes indicates colder weather, as it is evident that such clothing protects against the cold and retains body heat. At the same time, specific clothes can also symbolise particular weather conditions precisely because of their protective properties.

## 7 Conclusion

Words and textiles are inextricably linked. In English this connection is even clearer, as the word text actually derives from the Latin *texere*, which means 'to weave'. Words and symbols have been written on or in textiles for centuries. Silk was a medium for written documents in China in ancient times; in medieval Europe people got to know Bible stories from huge tapestries hung in churches and other public and private spaces; from at least the 17<sup>th</sup> century women have stitched verses about morality, virtue and family piety into their needlework (Gordon 2013: 216–217). In the period spanning some 150 years, from the French Revolution to 1930, an original form of folk art emerged

and flourished in the countries of Central Europe. Various types of embroidered napkins were produced to adorn walls and tables. The pictures on these works of art were complemented by proverbs that expressed the moral values of the family and society of that time (Villani 2016). Meanwhile, colourful, commercially printed wrap garments known as kanga (also referred to as lesò, kikoy or pagne), which combine imagery and proverbs, are popular among married women in East Africa. These clothes are often used by women as a form of coded expression, conveying messages through both the words and images displayed on the fabric (Gordon 2013: 212–215).

The very existence and number of proverbs mentioning items of clothing, crafts or other elements related to the manufacture of clothes show us the importance of these material goods in everyday life in the past. They reveal the specificity of textile crafts, including clothing and fabric production, and the seasonal timing of certain steps (e.g. spinning was mostly done in winter). They also indicate techniques such as weaving and sewing and mention tools that are used in various phases of textile production, such as the distaff used for yarn production, the loom for fabric and the needle for making clothing. Proverbs also reveal the great value and appreciation of quality clothing products, highlighting the importance of precise craftsmanship by weavers, tailors and seamstresses, the use of good materials, such as wool and linen, and the high value of quality fabrics like silk and velvet.

Certain clothes also have a clear identification role, which was probably established through history by the regulations that limited and prescribed clothing according to social class for a long time. As a result, gold and crimson red are still seen as symbols of aristocracy, while velvet and silk symbolise wealth. Over time, other symbols were also developed, which reflect different social identities. For example, blue shirts or collars became associated with city office workers, and the *avba*, a Slovenian folk head covering, became a symbol of married women. Different materials are associated with specific occasions: silk for festivities, coarse linen for everyday use, finer, more expensive materials, often embellished and embroidered, for celebrations, and cheaper, heavier, rougher and sturdier materials for daily use. This distinction further separates the everyday from the holidays.

The clothes mentioned in the proverbs, especially in the weather paremias, allude to their properties, such as protecting the body from the cold, while also personifying them as weather phenomena. Some items of clothing serve as symbols for individuals and their roles in society. For example, the skirt and apron metaphorically represent motherhood, and the suit signifies not only a person, but often an upper class man.

The analysed proverbs actually express all the economic, social and cultural spectrums that are connected with textile production, clothing use and also the symbolic meanings of garments.

If we return to the proverb that appears most often in the collection of proverbs and its dual nature: *Clothes make or don't make a person*, the answer is clear after analysing all the proverbs connected with textile and clothing production. There is no

longer any doubt regarding whether clothes define an individual or not. Through the lens of proverbs, clothes are undeniably a symbol for humanity, and even civilisation and its norms. The mention of clothing or attire often goes beyond the literal sense and carries deeper, symbolic meanings.

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