

Proverbs about wealth and poverty on social media: Usage and functions

Pregovori o bogastvu in revščini na družbenih omrežjih: raba in funkcije

This paper discusses the under-researched area of the use and functions of proverbs in social media communication. The study focuses on how proverbs about wealth and poverty are used on social media, taking into account the content of messages, user profiles and features, and the characteristics of Slovene proverbs. The corpus-based analysis and interpretation of their use in social media texts reveals that proverbs express mostly negative – critical, moralizing, judgemental – attitudes to both wealth and poverty in different types of social media texts. They serve various pragmatic functions like giving advice, warnings, criticism and expressing emotions. The research contributes to understanding the use of proverbs on social media as a form of social commentary.

• **Keywords:** corpus of texts from Slovene social media sites Janes V1.0, figurative language, paremiology, phraseology, proverbs 1.0 collection, proverbs from the field of human economy, social media, social networks

Članek obravnava slabo raziskano področje rabe in funkcij pregovorov v komunikaciji na družbenih omrežjih. Študija se osredotoča na to, kako se pregovori, povezani z bogastvom in revščino, uporabljajo na družbenih omrežjih, pri čemer upošteva vsebino sporočil, profil in lastnosti uporabnikov ter značilnosti slovenskih pregovorov tega področja. Analiza in interpretacija rabe pregovorov na podlagi korpusa razkriva, da pregovori večinoma izražajo negativen – kritičen, moralizirajoč – odnos do bogastva in revščine v različnih vrstah besedil na družbenih omrežjih. Opravljajo različne pragmatične funkcije, kot so nasveti, opozorila, kritika in izražanje čustev. Z raziskavo želimo prispevati k razumevanju rabe pregovorov na družbenih omrežjih kot oblike družbenega komentarja.

• **Ključne besede:** korpus besedil s slovenskih družbenih omrežij Janes v1.0, figurativni jezik, paremiologija, frazeologija, zbirka pregovorov 1.0, pregovori s področja gospodarstva, družbeni mediji, družbena omrežja.

1 Introduction

Proverbs are a linguistic phenomenon and constitute a treasure trove of a nation's intangible cultural heritage. From a historical perspective they enshrine the wisdom and beliefs of previous generations, and from a synchronic perspective the use of proverbs reflects how their content and messages are perceived and valued in modern society. Although proverbs originated a long time ago, they are still used in modern languages and form a noticeable part of our everyday communication in conversations, newspapers, magazine articles, horoscopes, etc. However, in the 21st century social networks such as Twitter, Facebook, Instagram, YouTube, Tiktok and other

social media such as forums and blogs also seem to be a popular medium for the use of proverbs.¹

The factors influencing the use of proverbs on social media are neither well researched nor explained. This study therefore attempts to fill a gap in the literature by answering the following questions: Does the inclusion of proverbs in dictionary resources affect their use on social media? Is the use of proverbs on social media deliberate and conscious? What types of modifications of proverbs appear on social media? What is the role of proverbs on social media? Is it different from the role of proverbs in other media? Are there differences in the use of proverbs depending on the type of social media?

1.1 Characteristics of proverbs

Although there is no universal definition of proverbs, the essential characteristics of proverbs can be inferred from the following two definitions by Mieder.

Proverbs are short, generally known sentences of the folk that contain wisdom, truths, morals and traditional views in a metaphorical, fixed and memorizable form and that are handed down from generation to generation. (Mieder 1996: 597)

Proverbs contain everyday experiences and common observations in succinct and formulaic language, making them easy to remember and ready to be used instantly as effective rhetoric in oral or written communication. (Mieder 2004: xi)

When discussing their utility and if we aim to comprehend their use and functions on social media, it is important to understand the basic characteristics that make these fixed, mostly metaphorical sentences or microtexts that have been passed down from generation to generation in more or less unchanged form, such a useful means of communication. When it comes to the characteristics of proverbs, various elements and contents are highlighted in linguistic and folkloristic literature (Mieder 2004). For the purpose of our linguistic study, Ulčnik's (2015) discernment of proverb characteristics proves beneficial, as it categorizes them into multiple thematic groups with individual features naturally exhibiting some degree of overlap. They can be separated according to different dimensions or aspects into six levels:

a) On a structural level, proverbs exhibit features such as sentence or microtext structure, relative structural stability with the possibility of variations and modification, and the use of ellipsis.

b) On the semantic level, proverbs exhibit metaphorical meaning, they contain idiomatic expressions and metaphoric elements, and demonstrate the possibility of dual reading (literal and metaphorical). Features like expressiveness, picturesqueness and connotativity put them in the domain of figurative language.

¹ Cf. Mieder (2005) who shows that the frequent use of traditional and new proverbs and also their innovative variations are noticeable in the mass media.

c) On the pragmatic or functional level, proverbs serve as expressions of folk wisdom, convey general truths derived from life experiences, exhibit multifunctionality, offer instructive insights, demonstrate didacticism and perform speech acts.

d) On the stylistic level, proverbs demonstrate a skilful integration of rhyme, alliteration, assonance, personification, hyperbole, parallelism and other rhetorical tools, showcasing not only creativity but also rhetorical efficiency.

e) On the psycholinguistic level, their key features include general knowledge, the retention of units in memory and memorability.

f) On the cultural level, features encompass intergenerational tradition, cultural heritage, unknown authorship and untranslatability.

Based on the basic characteristics, we define proverbs for the purposes of our research as pithy expressions that typically take the form of sentences expressing folk wisdom and universal truths. These expressions use metaphorical language and reflect various life experiences and the culturally relevant values of a particular language community in which they serve communicative functions and perform speech acts, such as reinforcement, disagreement, irony, warning, threat, advice, guidance, apology, encouragement, consolation, conclusion and argument. The secret of their longevity in the language lies in their high and universal communicative value. Thanks to their ability to convey many universal messages that are formally summarised in short sentences, proverbs are a popular language tool for expressing, emphasizing, elucidating, summarizing or arguing in favour of our thoughts, attitudes, opinions and values. Proverbs are stored in our vocabulary, i.e. they are reproduced rather than created in communication. Therefore, both the form and content of proverbs make their use in social media practical and expected.

2 Methods

In our research we used both quantitative and qualitative methods. The analysis was based on data from the Proverbs 1.0 collection, available on the Clarin repository (clarin.si) via the KonText and NoSketch search engines (Babič and Erjavec 2022). The collection contains over 36,200 proverbs extracted from 2,515 bibliographic units spanning more than 400 years, from 1578 to 2010 (Babič et al. 2022).

In this study, we have focused on the proverbs from the field of human economy that are related to wealth and poverty. Although we are aware of the value of discussing the cultural and linguistic interpretations of wealth and poverty, our research is limited to their dictionary definitions in Slovene, where *wealth* primarily denotes the condition of a rich person or a large quantity of material goods, while *poverty* is defined as a severe lack of material goods, a small amount of property or just refers to poor people. Therefore, we conducted an extensive search and selected proverbs

containing the following components: *denar* (money), *kruh* (bread), *bogat* (rich), *reven* (poor), *bogastvo* (wealth), *revščina* (poverty), *bogataš* (rich man), *revež* (poor man), *siromak* (pauper), *sirota* (orphan), *zlato* (gold), *srebro* (silver) and *berač* (beggar). The collection contains 2,051 proverbs and their variants (the distribution of components is illustrated in Figure 1).

We validated the relevance of the proverbs for contemporary use by consulting contemporary dictionaries available on the *Fran portal* (Fran, 2014-)² and by verifying their concordances in the Slovenian reference corpus *Gigafida*³ and the *Corpus of Texts from Slovene Social Media Sites Janes*.⁴ We then conducted a corpus-based linguistic analysis to investigate the frequency of their use and analyse the structure and meaning of the selected proverbs. To gain insight into the specific ways proverbs are used in social media, we compared the frequency of the selected proverbs in two corpora, *Janes* and *Gigafida*. As the corpora were of different sizes, we relied on a statistical calculation that took into account the occurrence of proverbs per million words and their normalized and relative frequency. When analysing the proverbs in the *Janes* corpus, we considered various parameters including the type and characteristics of the social media, the attributes of social network users (such as public profile, gender, etc.), the sentiment of the context (Fišer et al. 2016; Liu 2012) and the correlation between frequency of use and familiarity with proverbs. We interpreted their pragmatic functions in the social media context, categorized according to different types of speech acts, such as advising, warning, criticizing, encouraging and expressing feelings. In the final phase of our analysis, we concentrated on the use of the selected proverbs in contemporary social media, with a particular focus on the discursive interpretation of their functions and any potential socially or politically relevant modifications.

3 Results and interpretation

3.1 Proverbs on wealth and poverty

More than 52 % of Slovenian proverbs that deal with wealth or poverty have the components *denar* (money) or *kruh* (bread) in their structure (Figure 1). This suggests that proverbs often do not speak directly about wealth and poverty, but through the metaphorical use of the words bread and money (Jakop 2022). A comparison between

² The *Fran portal*, version 11.0, combines 45 dictionaries, a linguistic atlas, language and terminological counselling, 14 collections, a total of 764,931 dictionary entries.

³ *Corpus Gigafida* 1.0 includes more than one billion words from various text types such as newspapers (47.8%), magazines (16.5%), internet (28%), non-fiction (3.8%), and fiction (3.5%) (Krek et al. 2019).

⁴ The *Janes Corpus* contains around 200 million words from different types of social media, such as tweets (60%), forum posts (20%), user comments from online news portals (6%), blog posts with their user comments (14%), and conversations and user pages from Wikipedia (2%) (Fišer et al. 2016, Fišer et al. 2020).

the components of wealth (e.g. *bogataš*, *zlato*) and poverty (e.g. *berač*, *revščina*) shows that the proportion of proverbs dealing with poverty is only slightly higher than the proportion of proverbs dealing with wealth (Figure 2). In this context, it should be emphasized that individual proverbs are frequently composed of contrasting elements. For example, *revščina – bogastvo: Revščina ne sili h kraji kakor bogastvo ne odvrača od nje*, (lit. Poverty does not compel theft, just as wealth does not deter from it). Semantically and functionally this intends to establish a moral and didactic opposition between wealth and poverty, as well as between being rich or poor. Slovenian proverbs indicate that people are about as affected, annoyed and intrigued by poverty as they are by wealth. Slovenian proverbs moralise, judge, evaluate and teach both sides to about the same extent.

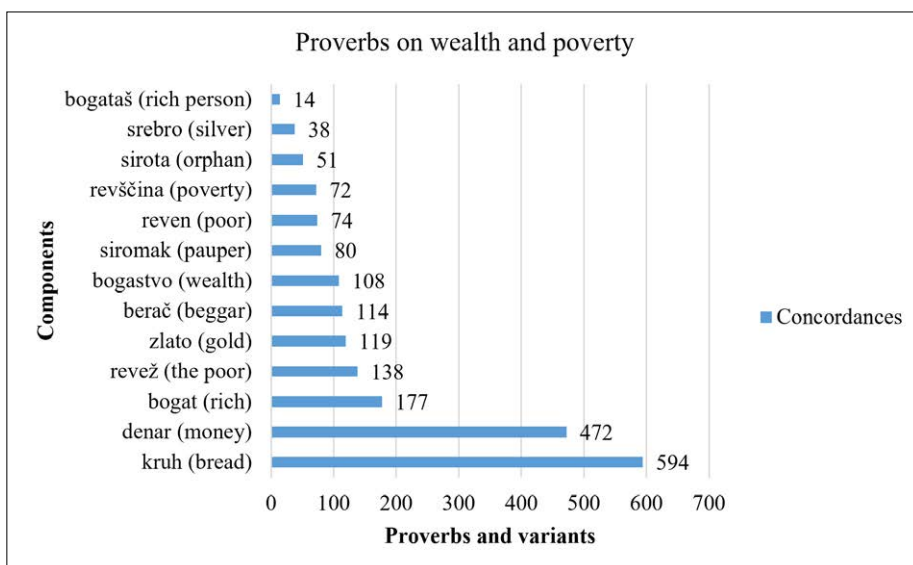


Figure 1: Components and concordances of proverbs related to wealth and poverty in the Proverbs collection.

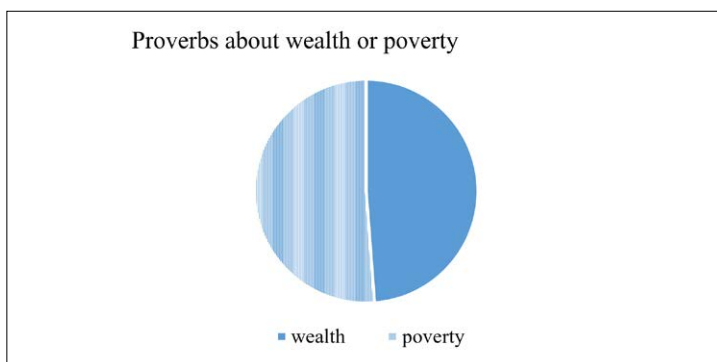


Figure 2: Components of proverbs related to wealth or poverty in the Proverbs collection.

Less than 1% of the proverbs from the Proverbs collection are included in the Dictionary of Standard Slovenian (SSKJ), and they contain seven out of the thirteen components. There are five proverbs with the component *kruh* (bread), two proverbs with either the component *denar* (money) or *zlato* (gold), and one proverb each with the components *revež* (poor person), *berač* (beggar), *sirota* (orphan) and *srebro* (silver). None of the 52 proverbs with the component *revščina* (poverty) that are in the Proverbs collection are included in the SSKJ. Restricting the research to dictionary sources would therefore give the false impression that there are not many Slovenian proverbs related to wealth and poverty, which is by no means true. The results show that collections of proverbs generally offer richer proverbial material than dictionaries, which are primarily focused on defining lexical units. It is therefore essential to promote and maintain the ongoing collection of this folklore genre in all languages, especially in languages spoken by fewer people, to ensure that their intangible cultural heritage is preserved. These findings underline the importance of preserving these cultural expressions for future generations.

3.2 Meanings and functions

The results of the semantic analysis of proverbs indicate that proverbs about wealth and poverty not only address the material aspects of human life but also discuss aspects of spiritual wealth or poverty, moralise on human qualities and the human condition (e.g. generosity, stinginess, frugality, extravagance, laziness, health, happiness, love and satisfaction), interpersonal relationships (e.g. friendship, family and children) and impart teachings about certain external circumstances such as weather phenomena, e.g. *Če sije sonce na božični dan jasno, bo novo leto bogato* (lit. If the sun shines clearly on Christmas Day, the new year will be rich).

Remarkably, the analysis revealed that Slovenian proverbs predominantly cast both extremes – wealth and poverty – in a negative light. Proverbs point to moderation in relation to material goods, for example, *Bog nas obvaruj prevelikega bogastva, prevelike brhkote in revščine* (lit. May God protect us from excessive wealth, excessive beauty and poverty). Very few Slovenian proverbs present great wealth or poverty positively, e.g. *Revščina rodi genije* (lit. Poverty produces geniuses). However, this may vary culturally from language to language. Kholmatova (2022: 172) examined the conceptual and axiological components of wealth and poverty in the Tajik language picture of the world and found that wealth is largely viewed positively, signifying both material and spiritual good. However, she also reports that in the Dictionary of Tajik Proverbs and Sayings the frequency of proverbs with a positive connotation is significantly lower than those with a negative connotation when it comes to the concept of wealth.

Slovenian proverbs about wealth teach us that values such as health, knowledge, freedom, friendship, contentment, generosity, honesty, diligence, modesty, thrift,

prudence, diligence, patience and being loved are worth more than any material wealth, e.g. *Lenoba je mati revščine* (lit. Laziness is the mother of poverty), *Zdravje je največje bogastvo* (lit. Health is the greatest wealth), *Dober prijatelj je boljši kot celo bogastvo* (lit. A good friend is better than great wealth). They warn that wealth is fleeting, while poverty can be long-lasting or even permanent, e.g. *Kdor se danes s bogastvom baha, bo že jutro kruha prosil* (One who boasts with wealth today will be begging for bread tomorrow), *Revščina je tako lepljiva, da se je ne moreš znebiti* (Poverty is so sticky that you can't get rid of it).

Unlike wealth, poverty cannot be hidden, it can be inherited and persist, and it hinders people's quality of life and progress, e.g. *Revščine in kašlja ni moč skriti* (lit. Poverty and a cough cannot be hidden). However, both the rich and the poor are prone to illness and death, e.g. *Revni in bogati smo pred smrtjo enaki* (lit. The rich and the poor are equal before death). Slovenian proverbs suggest that inheritance and large families have a negative impact on economic stability, as inheritance often leads to the dispersion of wealth and impoverishment, e.g. *Bogastvo do tretjega rodu ne pride rado* (lit. Wealth does not often last to the third generation). And also that neither wealth nor poverty makes a person happy, money corrupts both the rich and the poor, e.g. *Težko je biti reven in pošten* (lit. It's hard to be poor and honest).⁵

Proverbs warn against the negative consequences of wealth, such as greed, gluttony, arrogance, pride, covetousness, avarice, corruption and fear. As the proverbs teach us, all these are bad qualities in an individual. Proverbs point out that poverty is caused by laziness, idleness, ignorance, wealth in childhood, litigation, indebtedness and habits such as gambling, drinking and promiscuity, e.g. *Karte in steklenica so prapori revščine* (lit. Cards and a bottle are the banners of poverty). Proverbs warn that love is tested in poverty and that poverty leads to theft and crime, but it also strengthens people, makes them more creative and shows them who their true friends are, something a rich person never knows. In line with Christian teaching, the proverbs moralise that those who have sufficient material means should help the poor, e.g. *Kar daš siromaku, se povrne v nebesih* (lit. What you give to the poor will be returned in heaven), but also convey realistically that good deeds and actions are not usually rewarded with gratitude and do not bring material means, e.g. *Dobrota je sirota* (lit. Kindness is an orphan).

The function of these proverbs is usually to express a statement, a general truth concerning wealth or poverty, e.g. *Denar je sveta vladar* (lit. Money is the ruler of the world). But they can also have the function of weather sayings, as in the case of *Če je april deževen, kmet ne bo reven* (lit. If April is rainy, the farmer will not be poor). Moreover, proverbs can compare, evaluate or hierarchise the phenomenon of wealth or poverty within the system of social, moral and cultural values, e.g. *Denar človeka*

⁵ Cf. Thompson's (2009) analysis of Amharic (a language spoken in Ethiopia) proverbs about wealth. They show the presence of some similar concepts: wealth is unfair, dignity matters more than wealth, etc.

kvari (lit. Money corrupts people), *Bolje je biti berač kot škrt bogataš* (lit. It is better to be a beggar than a stingy rich man), *Poštenje več velja kakor kup zlata* (lit. Honesty is worth more than a pile of gold) or *Kdor zgodaj vstaja, mu kruha ostaja* (lit. He who gets up early will have bread to spare).

3.3 Frequency of occurrence

The data indicates a higher number of proverbs or their variants and modifications in the social media compared to other media, whether online or in print. Among the proverbs that deal with wealth, the proverb *Denar je sveta vladar* (lit. Money is the ruler of the world) is used most frequently in social media. The frequency of the proverb *Denar je sveta vladar* and its variants is three times higher in the Janes corpus than in Gigafida – almost three times higher than in printed texts and almost six times higher than in internet texts within the reference corpus (Figure 3). The proverb is included and explained in the SSKJ. According to paremiological research, this proverb also ranks first in terms of familiarity according to the paremiological optimum. Meterc reports a recognition rate of 99% for this proverb (Meterc 2017). The recent survey showed that familiarity with the proverb seems to be an important factor influencing its use in social media.

We have also confirmed with other examples that the most frequently used proverbs in the social media are those that belong to commonly known proverbs in the Slovene language, although not all of them were included in the dictionary. Although the proverb *Kdor zgodaj vstaja, mu kruha ostaja* (lit. He who gets up early will have bread to spare) is included and described in the SSKJ, we found only one confirmation in the Janes corpus and none in the Gigafida corpus which is surprising since the proverb promotes good work habits. The reason for the proverb not being used much in contemporary Slovene may be due to some socio-cultural changes regarding the value of getting up early, as shown by the recent anti-proverb *Rana ura, slovenskih fantov grob* (lit. Early hours, the grave of Slovenian lads), which comments humorously on the belief that getting up early pays off and reflects diligence by conveying the idea that getting up early is a challenge (Meterc 2020). The use of this anti-proverb in social media is more widespread than that of the original proverb *Rana ura, zlata ura* (Early bird catches the worm) (Justin et. al 2015).

The frequency distribution of proverbs may vary when examining individual examples. For example, the proverb *Ni vse zlato, kar se sveti* (lit. Not everything that glitters is gold) occurs with roughly equal frequency in the social media and in general usage (Figure 4). Upon closer examination of the concordances, we found that the frequency of use in the reference corpus is related to the fact that this proverb was used to translate the title of the movie *Fool's Gold*. This result underlines the importance of taking context into account when analysing proverbs in corpora. However, it is impressive that almost all the proverbs analysed show remarkable differences in usage

frequency between social media and internet texts. Proverbs are far more prevalent on social media platforms, with occurrences ranging from 3 to 9 times higher than in other internet contexts (Figure 4). This suggests that social media features, rather than the internet per se, are the key factor influencing the frequency of use. We have to be careful when interpreting this data, as it depends on which internet texts were included in the corpus. In Gigafida, these are mainly texts from web domains. In corpora that contain more texts from social media, we can expect a higher proportion of commonly known proverbs. It is important to take this into account if the corpus is the source for creating dictionaries or teaching materials.

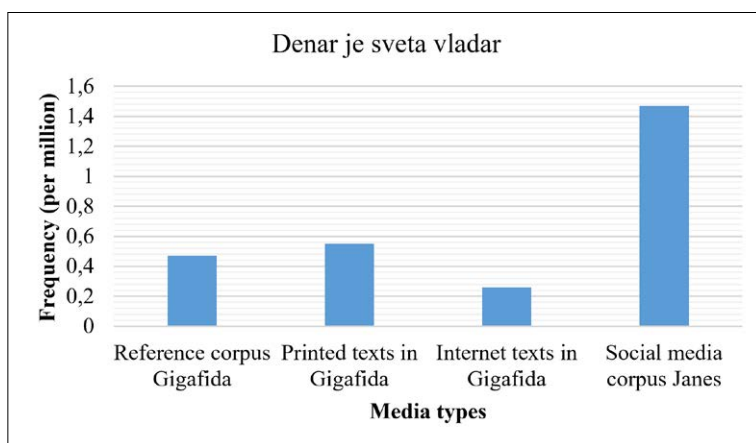


Figure 3: Frequency of use (per million words) of the proverb *Denar je sveta vladar* in different types of media.

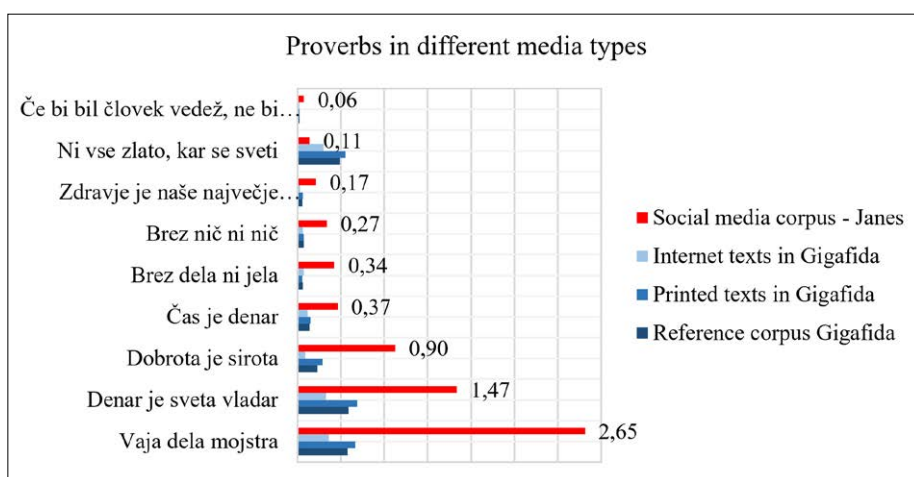


Figure 4: Frequency of proverb use (per million words) in different types of media.

3.3.1 Frequency of occurrence depending on social media type

Social media platforms have drastically changed the way people communicate, share content, interact and collaborate over the last forty years (Ahmed et al. 2019, Biały 2017). Social networks enable global connectivity and international communication flows (Eleta and Golbeck 2014). The nature and purpose of social media is to share knowledge and to communicate and this has a significant impact on the use of proverbs. Social media platforms are a medium that has a direct impact on the rapid spread of a particular proverb across different types of social networks, such as blogs, Facebook, YouTube or Twitter, through retweets, sharing content among Facebook users and so on. Proverbs usually spread very fast (within hours), which means that their use in social media can have a rapid impact on the formation of public opinion on a given topic as proverbs are a means of spreading so-called common knowledge. An interesting discovery (Ebenso et al. 2012) shows that modern technology and social networks such as Facebook provide a new forum for the dissemination and preservation of proverbs, and that traditional proverbs are not just a relic of an unchanging past, but rather an integral part of the contemporary understanding of the world. From a linguistic perspective, social media can also facilitate the rapid actualization of proverbs or their fragments that may have been long forgotten.

In our analysis, we followed the proverb *Kdor jezika špara, kruha strada* (lit. Whoever uses their tongue sparingly, goes short of bread), which a blogger used in the title of his blog post. Users of other social networks shared it on Twitter the same day and at least twice as many did in the following two days. This finding also has implications for marketing strategies, as the expressiveness of proverbs attracts social media users' attention. Users share content, including proverbs, to attract the attention of their social environment or to influence the opinion of others on a particular topic.

Our analysis found that proverbs are commonly used in various types of social media platforms, including popular social networking sites such as Facebook, microblogging platforms such as Twitter, as well as blogs, discussion forums, media sharing sites such as YouTube and comments on news articles and websites. Using the Janes corpus, we empirically examined the use of proverbs in tweets, forum posts, comments on online news portals, blogs and user comments. The relative frequency of use shows that proverbs are most frequently used in comments on web news, followed by blogs and tweets, while they are least frequently used in forums. If we consider the main purpose of online forums, which is for users to exchange opinions on the same topic, it seems that proverbs are more appropriate for comments on static content such as news articles or blog posts, and titles. These types of content, unlike forums, are not meant for dialogue with other users. They are mainly intended for providing one-way responses to static content (Dobrovoljc 2018).

We confirmed the use of all six tested proverbs on all three social media platforms: Twitter, Facebook and YouTube. This indicates that the different types of social media

are equally suitable for the use of proverbs. One might assume that Twitter is less suitable for longer proverbs due to its character limit. However, our results suggest the opposite. Our analysis found that the length of a proverb has no significant impact on its use in social media. Both long and short proverbs are used across different types of social media. The longest proverb in our analysis, which comes from the Bible (Matthew 19:24), *Lažje pride kamela skozi šivankino uho kot bogataš v božje kraljestvo* (lit. It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter the kingdom of God), was used across all types of social media, including Twitter. Proverbs are chosen for their contextual multi-functionality and their ability to convey a message quickly and effectively (collective memory). The communicative power of proverbs is so significant that a tweet or an online comment can effectively convey a message by using a single proverb, a fragment of a proverb, or an innovative modification. Despite being brief, proverbs have the ability to effectively convey a complete idea or message. In addition, by using a proverb the person distances themselves from what is being said. Distance and the authority of ‘general opinion’ are very important elements that influence the use of proverbs on social networks. In this respect, proverbs in social media adhere to two cooperative principles (Grice 1975): the maxim of quantity, which mandates conveying enough information without redundancy (‘Do not make your contribution more informative than is required’), and the maxim of relevance, which requires the message to be contextually applicable (‘Make your contribution relevant’). Due to their conciseness, proverbs serve as a functional linguistic tool in the social media, allowing users to express and affirm their thoughts, opinions, beliefs and values in just one sentence. This is also supported by the findings concerning the situation of the Uyghurs, showing that blogs and comments often used veiled language such as metaphors, sarcasm and humour, or references to traditional Uyghur proverbs and cultural practices, to express subversive political communication in an indirect way (Clothey et al. 2016). Our results are also in line with some other findings on the use of proverbs in Arabic tweets, which show how Twitter enables individuals everywhere to spread their ideas around the world (Al-Wehaibi and Khan 2015).

3.4 Gender and sentiment

Both men and women use proverbs on social media. Although the number of male users in the Janes corpus is larger than the number of female users (about 60% men), the proverb *Denar je sveta vladar* was used slightly more often by women (based on its normalised frequency). (Figure 5).

Based on our corpus data analysis, we found no evidence to support the claim that women talk more about money on social media than men. It would therefore be wrong to make such an assumption. However, we found that women tend to use certain proverbs more often than men, as in the case of the proverb *Vaja dela mojstra* (lit. Practice makes perfect), which is not related to the topic of wealth and poverty and which we

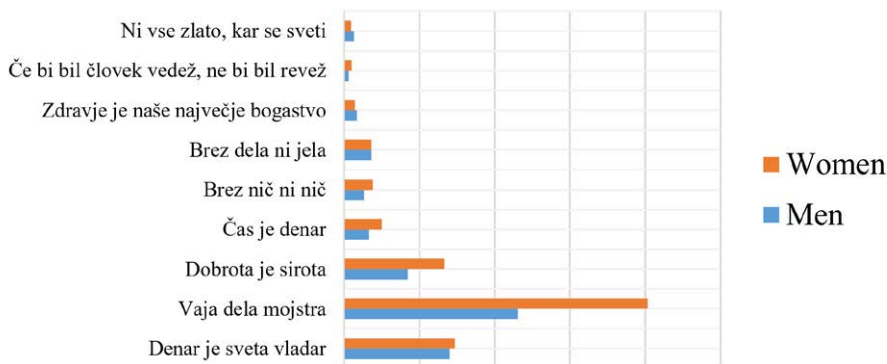


Figure 5: Use of proverbs according to gender.

only use as a control in our analysis. Our analysis of nine proverbs showed that six of them had a slightly higher percentage of female users. Further research would be needed to confirm and interpret this phenomenon. The study by Hussein (Hussein 2009) has shown that gendered ideology is discursively formulated in some Ethiopian, Kenyan and Sudanese sexist proverbs.

The sentiment in which a particular proverb is used could be an indicator of the contexts in which users employ proverbs, whether in positive or negative contexts. We have noticed differences among proverbs. For example, the proverb *Denar je sveta vladar* (lit. Money is the ruler of the world) is predominantly used in texts with a negative sentiment, where users comment critically on phenomena such as bribery, greed, capitalism, power, profit, development and even the winner of the Eurovision Song Contest, implying that money can buy victory, which is judged as immoral. The proverb appears in social media in the context of current issues related to financial aspects in politics, healthcare, justice, education, business, sports (football, etc.), banking, the military, the Church, love, the automotive and pharmaceutical industries, and so on. When the proverb is used in these contexts, it serves to highlight corruption and to evaluate it negatively. Using a proverb emphasises the moral and ethical implications of such actions. This suggests that proverbs play an important role in conveying social values and reinforcing ethical behaviour.

All the examined proverbs from the realm of wealth-poverty predominantly carry negative sentiments when used in social media. An exception is the proverb *Dobrota je sirota* (lit. Kindness is a beggar), which is predominantly used in texts that carry a positive sentiment. However, deeper analysis of the corpus material has shown that the proverb is mainly used to express irony or sarcasm, i.e. as a negative comment on a topic. Sentiment recognition is particularly difficult in tweets and therefore not entirely

reliable because they contain insufficient context. The user often suggests a positive or negative sentiment in social media texts with the help of emoticons, punctuation, modifications, and so on.

We can generally say that proverbs referring to wealth and poverty appear in social media primarily to support a negative textual atmosphere, as an outlet for expressing anger, frustration, grievances and other negative emotions. This maintains the primary rhetoric of wealth and poverty in proverbs, which as Sandoval (Sandoval 2006) argues, ‘serves particular moral goals and functions to order, justify, and even prevailing social arrangements that embrace matters of economic practice and distribution’ (Holloway 2008).

3.5 Variations and modifications

Among the proverbs analysed, we observed a greater number of variations and modifications in their use on social media than in their general use in traditional media discourse. Compositional modifications are often used to update proverbs with modern lifestyle elements. For example, the proverb *Kdor jezika špara, kruha strada* (lit. Whoever uses their tongue sparingly, goes short of bread), which means that ‘if you are too careful with your words and don’t speak up when necessary, you may miss opportunities to earn a living or improve your situation’ undergoes contemporary modifications in the context of social media: *Kdor lajka/retvita špara, kruha strada* (lit. Whoever fails to give likes or make retweets, goes short of bread). The components *lajk* (like) and *retvit* (retweet) are employed instead of *jezik* (which means both ‘language’ and ‘tongue’ in Slovene). What is more, the use of an emoticon with a tongue can replace the word component: *Kdor 🗑️ špara, kruha strada*. Such modifications of proverbs in the social media can serve to express a socially relevant issue in an expressive way. The above findings highlight the adaptability of proverbs to changing social and cultural circumstances, ensuring their continued relevance and efficacy in imparting wisdom, teaching and transmitting social values.

One of the important contextual features we found in our material, both in social media texts and in general language use, is the employment of textual introducers (Čermák 2005). This is where proverbs in texts are introduced with phrases such as *kot pravi pregovor, rek* (lit. as the proverb says, as the saying goes), *pravijo* (lit. they say, it is said). In social media, however, many examples exist where statements are not actually established proverbs. Instead, users want them to function as such, serving as expressions of wisdom or as thoughts that are socially endorsed within a broader framework, as a source of collective wisdom and authority. References to other paremiological systems are also common, e.g. *kot pravi kitajski/latinski/nemški/nizozemski pregovor* (lit. as the Chinese/Latin/German/Dutch proverb says). This finding suggests that the use of proverbs by social media users is a conscious choice.

4 Conclusion

Proverbs are ready-made mini-texts carrying powerful, universal messages that enable social media users to effectively express their opinions and beliefs. According to their inherent characteristics, proverbs offer users the opportunity to quickly verbalise their thoughts and share them with others. This makes proverbs a valuable tool for communicating on social media, where brevity is crucial for the successful communication of ideas and opinions. Social media has certain characteristics that influence the use of proverbs, including interactivity, creativity, content sharing, virtual community building, socialisation, global reach and internationality.

Our research has shown that proverbs are used more frequently in social media than in other media. Put simply, you are more likely to come across a proverb or its modification when using a social network than when reading a printed or online newspaper or magazine.⁶ However, the use of proverbs in social media is influenced by several intertwined factors, such as general familiarity with the proverb, the context and the current social circumstances. The inclusion of a proverb in a dictionary is not a guarantee of its use in social media and even the absence of a proverb in a dictionary does not necessarily exclude its use in social media.

The use of introductory devices shows that users consciously choose proverbs to add an element of collective behaviour, approval and support to their public message. Current social media issues influence the modification of proverbs. Proverbs on social media are often accompanied by additional para-linguistic elements, such as emoticons to increase the clarity of positive or negative sentiment or just as creative language play. The role of proverbs in social media is to attract attention with expressed general opinions and thus influence the public opinion of other social media users. It is also noticeable that socio-political and culturally relevant messages are highlighted and spread with the help of proverbs.

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⁶ The study (Granbom-Herranen, Babič, Voolaid 2015) which examines the use of proverbs in contemporary Estonian, Finnish, and Slovenian newspaper contexts and in everyday use found out that proverbs are used there as rhetorical tools, but that the Slovenian newspaper included many fewer proverbs than the Estonian and Finnish ones.

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