

Animals as a Stereotyping and Characterising Element in Slovenian Name-Callings

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The article discusses deeply rooted linguistic comparisons as stereotypical images in the form of name-callings. A very common element of these comparisons are animals as living beings with their own characteristics, living in a common environment: A human characteristic is compared to a prescribed, but not necessarily intrinsic, characteristic of a particular animal. The characteristics ascribed to animals are socially stereotyped and disseminated as generalised images using a metaphorical language that form so-called collective symbols.

• **Keywords:** ethno-linguistics, short folklore forms, language, name-calling, animal

Članek obravnava zakoreninjene jezikovne primerjave kot stereotipne podobe v obliki vzdevkov. Zelo pogost element teh primerjav so živali kot bitja s svojimi značilnostmi, ki s človekom živijo v skupnem okolju: človeška lastnost se primerja s predpisano, a ne nujno intrinzično lastnostjo posamične živali. Živalim pripisane lastnosti so družbeno stereotipne in se kot posplošene podobe razširjajo v metaforičnem jeziku in ustvarjajo t. i. kolektivne simbole.

• **Ključne besede:** etnolingvistika, folklorne oblike, jezik, vzdevek, žival

Introduction: Language and culture, stereotypes and animals

The aim of the article is to show how the imprint of society's worldview and stereotypes can be seen in such, sometimes even overlooked short forms, as nicknames. With this discussion is presented the interweaving between language and culture, and their circular interactions.

Language is not only a means of communication in everyday social contexts. With and through language, we also observe and think about the surrounding world; words are carriers of meanings embedded in a social context. With the researching language we can discuss the "cultured view of the world" as it is expressed with the linguistic signs (Kržišnik, 2005: 67). From the cognitive point of view, "language is not an objective mirror of the world, but it rather reflects the way we construe the world, reality, and society" (Dąbrowska, 2023: 39), therefore language is even an element of socialisation – with language we also share social stereotypes, values, and worldviews. In this context we can claim that language is a fundamental building block of our mental, emotional, and social world. Researching it thus reveals a social worldview, the images and concepts of a certain society.

Our mental, emotional, and social worlds co-create our culture, which is perceived as a system of symbolic communication (Lévi-Strauss, 1974), where the symbolism can be expressed (also) in stereotypes. The stereotype is inevitably linked with generalization, which governs also polysemy, inference patterns, novel metaphorical language, and patterns of semantic change, all of which are the ground base for the system of conventional conceptual metaphor (Lakoff, 1992: 205). The stereotypes are defined within a so-called kinship system according to the components (connotation (for example, soft mammals vs. scaly reptiles), sex (for example, women's tears vs. men's tears), colour (for example the meaning of black colour vs. white colour), family etc.); for each system one might ask what relationships are expressed, what connotations – positive or negative – they carry in the following relationships (Lévi-Strauss, 1974). Therefore, it does not surprise that stereotypes are often expressed as structures, which are mentally represented in terms of metaphor; these metaphors are a cognitive phenomenon and present mental mappings (Deignan, 2008: 287), influencing how people think (Gibbs, 1996), therefore we can perceive the described also as concepts.

Animals in short folklore forms are presented as a stereotype, i.e. generalised image of phenomena expressed in a word, and often form the “metaphoric construal of a concept” which in “some contexts results in a concept that is independent as a temporary representation apart from source domain information” (Gibbs, 1996: 314). The meaning of a given expression reveals not only inherent properties, but also our human subjective construal of it (Dąbrowska, 2023: 39), the conceptualisations are not necessarily according to the objectivist truth: Linguistic worldview is based on the cognitive function of the sign (ex. word, proverb, riddle) – it invokes the cultural aspects of language and its relation to the speakers' mentality.

Stereotypes are an important part of language, since they give people the feeling of security and adaptation. Stereotypes are a generalised image of the reality of specific observations (Schaff, 1984); they can be a stereotyped image of a sun, a tree or a sheep, or a stereotyped abstract concept or worldview of a phenomena. They are not meant to facilitate truth knowledge in an intellectual manner – they can “vary from a true index to a vague analogy” (Lippmann, 1961 [1922]) – but to prolong one's life and make it easier: with stereotypes even communication is made easier, sometimes even more manageable. Lippmann defined stereotypes as “preconceptions”: “We are told the world before we see it. We imagine most things before we experience them” (Lippmann, 1961 [1922]). These preconceptions can govern the whole process of perception, they are often rigid and involve valuation and emotional attitude. That is why stereotypes usually have a negative connotation, nevertheless as a part of a language they show how speakers construe the world, reality, and society: the meaning of a given expression reveals not only the inherent properties that reside in the entity or situation, but mostly our human subjective construal of it (Dąbrowska, 2023). Stereotypes can be detected in any everyday language, but as extensive concepts are especially condensed

in folklore; the genres that pass between generations can contain the longest concepts and stereotypes which persist in society. Even the smallest memetic units can bring forth telling metaphorical meanings.

Name-calling as a part of the short folklore forms and folkloristics

Language is one of the most important mediums in folklore: it expresses cross-generational (even very old) conceptions, metaphors, and observations. Folklore is shaped into more or less given forms, especially short folklore forms, which are characterised by the limited length and the high level of figurative language (including personification, metonymy, ellipsis, etc.) used intentionally. Short folklore forms like proverbs and riddles¹ are considered as authoritative conceptions – as wisdom inherited from our predecessors – that are usually highly metaphorical, i.e. they use figurative speech that describes an object or action in a way that is not literally true, but helps to explain an idea or make a comparison (Babič, 2015). Shorter expressions, like greetings or name-calling, use mostly metaphor, metonymy and ellipsis. The basic definition of metaphor is that it is a figurative language, though for folkloristics, more useful is the psycholinguistic definition of the metaphor as a specific mental mapping that influences a good deal of how people think, reason, and imagine in everyday life (Lakoff, Johnson, 1980; Gibbs, 1996: 309; Kövecses, 2015). In the field of folkloristics (similarly as in ethnolinguistics, psycholinguistics, and cognitive linguistics), metaphors are part of everyday communication, and as such they are passed between the generations. As the folklore adopts the images and understanding of everyday life into its language, plots and messages, it also influences the perception of it. Many concepts, especially abstract ones, are mentally represented, structured and delineated (Dąbrowska, 2023: 41), where we must add also the concept of the way – how to express something. The expressiveness most surely increases with metaphoricality, therefore it is used also in the fixed folklore forms like swearwords, nicknames, even greetings, etc. These can be also observed as metaphorical expressions based on stereotypes, linked to the first semantic level, which refer to a linguistic realization of a “cross-domain mapping in the conceptual system”, that is conceptual metaphors, such as *theory is a building* (we build and construct, or demolish theories), *love is a journey* (the relationships hit a dead-end street, or the couple split up and went their separate ways ...) etc. (Lakoff, 1992), or in our case *a human is an animal*.

Name-calling is a common communication practice; it ranges from affectionate nicknames to insults and mocking, from intimate relationships to relationships that cannot

¹ The linkage between proverbs and riddles can be seen and argued also by the trespassing from one genre to the other, when the text of the riddle question becomes a proverb or vice versa (see Hasan-Rokem, 1974).

be considered as close. Nicknames are often given by the characteristics that is (by the stereotypical view) common to the targeted person and the metaphorical phenomena, for example a person is called an oaf if they are clumsy, boorish, inconsiderate. If the function of affectionate nicknames is to emphasize cuteness and the caring relationship, insults are used for mocking and excluding someone from the group of “us” (Šrampf Vendramin, 2019). Nicknames are not often a part of research within folkloristics, usually because of two reasons: first being that they frequently consist of a single word used metaphorically, and therefore are not considered as a representative genre in folklore; second that the nicknames are quite often very individualistically chosen, e.g. to call a spouse “pumpkin” or “mouse” is usually linked with the personal set of expressions. Nevertheless, every society has a set of nicknames that is rather general and known widely, some are even lexicalized and included in dictionaries. This set of nicknames is linked with stereotypes on what is good and what is bad, what is fast or what is slow, etc. Many of the stereotypes are linked with animals – in the manner how society perceives them – and they are further used according to the learned stereotype, and not according to the knowledge.

Zoofolkloristics

All folklore includes the imprint of the surroundings, the observations and the experiences. That is why the chosen elements can be observed in a relatively fixed context or use. Animals were, and still are, the everyday companions of the human being, therefore it is not surprising that the observations and convictions regarding the animals were recorded in folklore forms of various lengths. Most of the animals mentioned in folklore are from the immediate environment, although we must point out that some of the material also includes “exotic” animals such as lions or camels, which are associated in the folklore material with stereotypes either from biblical or oriental tales.

Animals in folklore are the focus of a relatively newly-founded academic discipline (Golež Kaučič, 2015, 2023), zoofolkloristics. Its theoretical and analytical discourse is focused on enabling insight into changes and human attitudes towards animals in folklore as well as in ritual practices; many of the research ideas base on ancient myths and folklore tradition (Golež Kaučič, 2015: 7–8). Zoofolkloristics deals with animals in folklore: how some animal was seen in the past and how it is seen today. Diachronic research can show traditions and cultural practices (Golež Kaučič, 2015: 9, 2023: 19, 36), but also concepts that have been “frozen in time”. Zoofolkloristics is focused on various genres, yet mostly on folk tales and folk songs. Separately, merely as an element, animals were discussed in phraseology with the goal of showing the diversity of the animals in the phrasemes, rather than their characterisation.

Naming the animals in different contexts and (metaphorical) functions in folklore results in two different meaning-makings: anthropomorphism (Lockwood, 1989),² where human characteristics are given to animals by “humanising nature” (ex. birds fall in love), and zoomorphism, where animal characteristics are given to the human (ex. fast as an eagle) (Visković, 1996: 36). Anthropomorphism is the most frequent kind of animal representations in folklore (Golež Kaučič, 2023: 68), though Crist (2000: 161) emphasises the more complex understanding: the perception of the nature – human border is zoomorphic by indirectly revealing the animal face of human society. A special type of morphology are “zonyms”, as geographical, settlement, and personal names (Visković, 1996: 36). Omakaeva et al. widen the term “zonym”, i.e. zoomorphic name, to both common lexemes and proper names of animals, and proposes the term “zoosemism” for the polysemous lexemes that denote “acting as the name of a certain animal (mammal, bird, insect, etc.)” (Omakaeva et al., 2019: 2532).

The lexemes denoting representatives of the animal world are termed as “zoomorphic lexemes”, they are usually polysemantic, i.e. have multiple meanings (Omakaeva et al., 2019: 2530–2532). Therefore, the image of name-calling of an animal based on a zoomorphic metaphor, when a person (man or woman) is compared to an animal, is associated with the zoomorphic code of culture. It is a set of ideas about the animal world whose representatives are as symbols or standards for certain characteristics. The transfer of animal characteristics to humans developed from the observation of their external characteristics, behaviours, habits. Zoosemism is therefore defined as a metaphorical category of human zoomorphism³ (Omakaeva et al., 2019: 2532). All the described quite often appears in folklore genres, no matter the length or genre. Zoosemisms co-create the (con)text in folklore and present some of the most important (metaphorical) expressions. They are also one of the topics of zoofolkloristics (Golež Kaučič, 2015).

Animal nicknames are metaphorically convincing, and they, as Ingold put it, expose “close ontological equivalence of humans and animals” (Ingold, 1994: XXIV). The equivalence in name-calling is conveyed mostly with anthropomorphisms.

Methodology

The analysed material is from the collection of proverbs at the Institute of Ethnology ZRC SAZU (Babič et al., 2023), the Dictionary of Slovenian Language (SSKJ, 2014), the repository Giga Fida (Krek et al., 2019), and gathered from the fieldwork on the

² Lockwood (1989) names five different meaning-makings which reveal perception of animals in different narratives, but for the needs of this article we focus on the given two (the first and the fifth).

³ In the article, zoomorphism is discussed also with analogy to fauvism, animalism, totemism (Omakaeva et al., 2019: 2531).

topic of the nicknames. Units in the databases were searched by the keywords marking animals on the first semantic level (ox, cow, donkey, bear, wolf, etc.). Keywords were chosen on the basis of Slovenian language use in the contemporary time: I used the common nicknames (insults as well as affectionate nicknames) denoting animals on the first semantic level, and established what stereotype the animal is marked by. The analysis is based on the folkloristic approach of collecting and description, as well as ethnolinguistic and conceptual linguistic approach in the interpretation.

Anthropomorphisms and zoomorphisms as characterisers in nicknames

The contemporary nicknames that use animal naming are animal signs, whereby the metaphoricity is exposed from the characteristics given to the animals by people. Nicknames are part of expressive speech acts; with them the speaker expresses their mental state and emotions towards the addressee (Jakop, 2014: 158). Contemporary meaning is to be obtained by examining the metaphors underlying the nickname, motivated by various contextual factors, e.g. the gender of the user of the nickname and discourse registers in which the phrase occurs. The structure of the metaphor of these nicknames occurs between the domain of [A HUMAN BEING] and [AN ANIMAL], and determines the schematicity levels of these mappings into conceptual metaphor [HUMAN BEING IS AN ANIMAL].

The extension of the meaning derives from, as well as proves, the social stereotype of the animal's characteristics (Dąbrowska, 2023: 40), such that a strong, hairy man is characterised e.g. as “a bear”, “being like a bear” (*biti kot medved*), exposing the characteristics of strength, size, strong posture and hairiness. The metaphor is here linked solely to the appearance. The property of strength is also linked to the ox, while the extended connotation of this metaphorical nickname is also lower intelligence, coarseness, clumsiness (whereas the bear has no psychological characterisation in metaphoric use). Both nicknames, relating to ox and bear, are in Slovenian language used exclusively for males.

On the other hand, “being like a wolf” (*biti kot volk*) marks the semantic field of loneliness, also in the metaphorical dictionary sense; it characterises only the male gender and such a man is a loner, often misunderstood by the community, a person only partly socialised, carrying secrets. The wolf is considered as a being that unconsciously leaves marks where it stays. “Where the wolf lies, it leaves its fur” (*Kjer volk leži, dlako pusti*),⁴ a characterisation that can be replaced also with the donkey “Where the donkey lies, it leaves its fur” (*Kjer osel leži, dlako pusti*). In the figurative language stands the difference that the wolf is considered a smart, dangerous animal, while the

⁴ The wolf does not leave behind fur in fact, this social prediction is mistaken.

donkey is considered stupid; therefore, the variations are used contextually – if one is talking about a person considered smart having left a trace, chosen will be the wolf metaphor, whereas a careless foolish person leaving traces is metaphorically marked as a donkey (see also further).

The cunning animals are the fox and the bird. The fox in Slovenian is gendered: *lisica* (female fox) and *lisjak* (male fox); both marking a sly, daring and shrewd, but at the same time a hypocritical, scheming, even greedy and lustful animal (Kropej, 2007: 115); similarly goes for the bird: *(p)tica* (female) and *(p)tič* (male). These animals are used for both genders, nowadays usually with some humorous connotation, marking a person that has a knack of turning things to their own benefit. Intelligence is part of being witty: the fox and, in this context as a counterpart among domestic animals, the donkey, are considered relatively intelligent animals that learn from experience: “The fox/donkey step only once on thin ice/do not step twice on thin ice” (*Lisica/osel gre samo enkrat na led*). On the other hand, “donkey” is also a personal insult, usually male coded, marking foolishness and recklessness.⁵

The bird is considered a free being, and therefore carefree in life, which is apparent already from the phraseme “to live free as a bird”. Society sees birds as animals that live a good life, emphasizing liberty. They go wherever they please, they find food on the ground or in the bushes, they are quick and agile; all these connotations can be found in the phraseme “to live as a bird on a branch” (*živeti kot ptička na veji*), i.e. to have a good, free life.⁶ The bird goes with the wind, which emphasizes some sort of (over-)adaptation to the circumstances (“he goes with the wind” (*gre z vetrom*)). Nevertheless, as a nickname, “to be a bird” is linked either with weirdness (“he is an odd bird” (*on je čuden tič*)) or being a witty person (“she is such a birdy” (*ona je ena taka tica*)). The nicknames “foxy” and “birdy” imply also some sexual connotations – a woman attributed these nicknames is presumably young and attractive.

The lynx is characterised as an angry creature, which is detected in the comparative phraseme “as angry as a lynx” (*besen kot ris*). The corpus of Slovenian written standard language gives 124 results, which shows quite regular use still. In parallel we find anger-themed comparison also with the tiger (2 results), the bull (2 results), dog (6 results), snake (2 results), and even viper (2 results).⁷ In general, the lynx is very rarely presented in folklore, also in short folklore forms, presumably because it was very rare to observe it and its habits, yet nevertheless represents and metaphorises the angry subject who even “hisses as a lynx in anger” (*piha kot ris od jeze*).

The mouse is connected with two characterisations: one is connected to its size, i.e. to be as small as a mouse, to its quietness (linked to its quiet motion: “to be as silent

⁵ A clear example showing a binary social view, often adjusted to the context.

⁶ This set phrase is often also used ironically and negatively nowadays; nevertheless, the implication to the free, good life is obvious even in the background of the ironical use.

⁷ Available at <https://www.clarin.si/skelog/#dashboard?corpname=gfida20> (19.2.2024).

as a little mouse” (*biti tih kot miška*)), as well as to its cheerful disposition when there is no threat (“When the cat is not at home, the mice dance” (*Ko mačke ni doma, miši plešejo*)). We can find characterisations of a mouse rather in short folklore forms,⁸ while nicknames are used mostly as an affectionate calling, for example “you are my little mouse” (*ti si moja miška*) used quite often for baby girls. Transfer was partly made also to young attractive women. A notorious case of such use of this nickname with a sexual connotation was in May in 2015, when a former Slovenian president shouted “*To mi deli, miška mala!*” (“Give it to me, little mouse!”) during an all-Slovenian high school dance event. This exclamation was voted as the most sexist remark of the year.

The snake as a symbol is represented in almost all mythologies, it tends to be associated with fertility, earth, the female reproductive force, water, rain on the one hand; and the hearth, fire (especially heavenly), as well as the male fertilizing principle on the other. In Slovenian folklore the metaphorical meaning is linked mostly to the Bible – it is presented as an evil, treacherous animal. Snake as a nickname is a pejorative for an insidious human, especially women. It is often accompanied with the adjective “treacherous snake” (*izdajalska kača*). The expression, based on the human understanding of the snake’s behaviour is the *razkačiti se*⁹ with the meaning ‘to be very angry’, which might be explainable from the snake’s warning action when it feels endangered.

Bugs are mostly unwanted animals, even in present day. They arouse disgust, society tries to keep them away from populated areas. Therefore, it does not surprise that bugs such as the louse or its nits denote strongly negative characteristics. A louse is a worthless, exploitative individual, and is often even gradated with the adjective “lousy louse” (*ušiva uš*). The nit (*gnida*) likewise marks an insignificant, worthless person which ought to be removed. Not surprisingly, at the dawn of his infamous “final solution”, Adolf Hitler stated that Jews should be “exterminated as lice”, as well Jews were called also as rats which are even nowadays stereotyped as dirty low beings (Agamben, 1998: 114).

Bugs such as lice, cockroaches or flies were in the folk context used for name-calling of the other, usually from some nearby village, as in “Tolmin louse” (*tolminska uš*), “cockroaches” (*ščurki*) for the inhabitants of Vrba, Gorenjska, “flies” (*mušice*) for those of Godovič and Koseze. There is no reliable data why these name-calls became current, but they evidently mark rival villagers as worthless, or at least lower on the social value scale.

If thus far we discussed mostly wild animals, it should be emphasized that domestic animals are also often used as nicknames. Feral animals are supposedly free from the human world, but domestic animals live in the human world (Thompson, 2019: 60).

⁸ For example in the Slovenian riddle: “Tall as a house, small as a mouse, bitter as gall yet delicious to all” – Walnut.

⁹ The very approximate literary translation would be “to be angry as a snake”.

Although the domestic animals were/are part of the homestead and cherished, livestock especially tends to be characterised as beings of lower intelligence. They are robust, sturdy, showing no manners, and slow in learning.

Cattle, i.e. cow, ox, or bull are nicknames that are labelled as lower colloquial language according to the Dictionary of Slovenian Language. The signs, i.e. words are gendered, and they are metaphorically used as gender-targeted nicknames: cow¹⁰ (*krava*) is always female, bull (*bik*) and ox (*vol*) are always male. These signs connote an uneducated human, a stupid and obtuse person, all of them are insults. On the other hand, a bull and an ox also metaphorically mark a strong man, and having a cow's eyes connote that a woman has big eyes with long eyelashes.

Horse (*konj*)/mare (*kobila*) is a metaphor for a big, clumsy man/woman. A mare has the additional connotation that such a woman is manly in her appearance.

The nickname donkey (*osel*) also connotes a "brainless, stupid human" (SSKJ, 2014). It is a pejorative language and used as an insult, usually for males. This characterisation appears also in Slovenian fables, where the donkey is always the stupid animal (Kropej Telban, 2015: 21). The stereotyped low intelligence in the metaphorical meaning is in opposition to the paremiological unit "A donkey doesn't step twice on thin ice" (*Osel gre samo enkrat na led*), where it is emphasised that the donkey might be naïve, but it learns fast.

Pig (*pujs*, *prašič*) pejoratively denotes a sexually aggressive man, and/or a dirty person (often a child). The first level characterisation is linked with the pig's habit of rolling in the mud, which is from human perspective dirt. On the second level, where the speech or acts of a man are characterised as obscene or dirty, it is again linked to the pig as an unclean animal. The salacious behaviour is therefore not the behaviour of a pig but rather a dirty behaviour; if dirt is a part of the pig's characterisation, then dirty behaviour is attributed to that animal. The phraseme "to be drunk as a pig" (*biti pijan kot prašič/prase*) is rather linked to clumsy slow movin of a person; the expression denotes strongly drunk men.

Goats and sheep are herd animals, as such they are understood as animals without their own will, requiring a shepherd. Goat (*koza*) as an insult for a woman denotes a stupid, rude, stubborn woman. As a nickname it is often set with an adjective such as "stupid goat" (*neumna koza*), or even as hyperbole "goatish goat" (*koza kozasta*). As a nickname for a man, a goat is a stupid, unserious or raunchy person ("The old goat won't leave her alone" (*Stari kozel ji ne da miru*)). It is usually used in a phrase with the adjectives stupid and old. Thompson emphasizes that "horny old goat" refers exclusively to men, and links it with the hyper-masculine great god Pan and the later-assigned to cultural representations of Satan (Thompson, 2019: 59).

¹⁰ Set phrases and proverbs, conversely, generalise the sign to both genders: "to be drunk as a cow" (*biti pijan kot krava*), where the stereotype of slow, swaying movement of a bovine is metaphorically transferred to an inebriated human.

Sheep (*ovca*) is an expressive word for the meek, obedient human. It is not gender-marked. People called sheep lack their own conviction. In the nickname “black sheep” (*črna ovca*), negative connotation exposes a subject standing out of the common, regular, expected. To be a black sheep in the family denotes being a bad, embarrassing family member. The colour black denotes a devilish colour, and something that is not stereotypical: among white sheep, black ones are rare and immediately noticeable.

Breeding birds show similarities with livestock: hen (*kura*) is a woman that is confused, unintelligent and ignorant of consequences. A rooster (*petelin*) is a man that is loud and boastful, fancying himself better than others. Both hen and rooster are also linked with looks: these metaphors are attributed to people that place a lot of attention on their appearance.

Discussing birds as nicknames, we cannot overlook the parrot (*papiga*) and the nightingale (*slavček*), which are used for nicknames with specific characteristics: a parrot is a person that keeps repeating what someone else says, while a nightingale is a person that sings beautifully.

Nowadays, cats and dogs are mostly pets; we don't see many stray cats or dogs which are taken into shelters. Cat (*mačka*) as a nickname is used for a clever, attractive, usually young woman. The nickname is often used in a sexist context. On the other hand, dog (*pes*) denotes a vicious or violent person; the nickname could be interchangeable with the devil. Domesticated animals also offer a way to discuss human sexuality in ways particularly close to home, yet still distinct from the human world. It is especially visible in the common name of one of the most common sexual positions (Thompson, 2019: 59). However, in contrast to the Slovenian historical viewpoint, from the paremiological units the dog is nowadays labelled as “man's best friend” (see also Babič, 2024), while a female dog is characterised as a mean, lascivious woman, i.e. a bitch (*kuzla*) is primarily encountered as an obscene insult for a woman (Thompson, 2019: 59).

Positive nicknames

If most of the animals are used as a negative name-calling in colloquial language, there are still some animals used for a positive name calling. These animals are usually either small (even offspring), soft and harmless, or very working. Positive name callings are used for an affectionate naming or for praising someone's effectivity.

A person considered “an animal” is one of great capability; this marks a relentless person displaying great strength that can be either physical or mental. Usually, it is used in sports. It carries a positive connotation, applied as a compliment: a sportsman is called “an animal”/“a beast”, related to animal, when they are considered formidable.

There are some animals that are marked only with positive characterisers, such as “ant” or “bee” denoting a good/diligent person (despite being insects). Observation of

their work and selfless input elevated these animals almost to the “heroic” stage on the work-value scale – they do everything for their community, for the common wellbeing, they even risk their life for others: therefore, calling someone a busy bee or a good little ant characterises the person as diligent, focused, productive, a person that gives their best for the good of everyone else.

Offspring animals of mammals, especially furry soft ones like the kitty (*mucka*), bunny (*zajček*), little mouse (*miška*) are coded as cute or adorable, used as an affectionate nickname. They often relate to little girls. They might also be applied to young women, usually in a sexualized manner where these nicknames lose positive connotations and acquire sexist ones (as already mentioned earlier). These characterisations are linked to the age, innocent look, maybe even naiveté as a characteristic of the offspring or at least youngsters. The attributes are anthropologically predictable, concerning neoteny: large eyes and soft features are interpreted as beautiful, even irresistible, predictably so that the parents or even communities do not ignore the offspring but rather take care of it.

Discussion

Language is the storage and carrier of the culture with which mankind continually creates and engages in reflection about itself. It carries stereotypes and concepts that are, in condensed manner, embedded in folklore in particular. Short folklore forms use many metaphors for expressing various connotations, therefore they use stereotypes as generalised images of phenomena utilized for characterisations or descriptions of actions. Nicknames are one of the shortest, usually one-word folklore forms, or even only a part of folklore figurative language. They consist of a semiotic circle of meanings with its own rhetorical weight: from the pejorative to the affectionate. Nicknames express the relationship towards a person, as well as signs to the connotation carried by the nickname. This occurs at the second denotative level, the metaphorical level revealing the stereotypes attributed to the first denotative level, i.e. to the signified. This article has focused mostly on the Slovenian nicknames created by using animals’ names, further used as a zoomorphism or anthropomorphism. Zoomorphism in the analysed material is used mostly when evaluating appearance: to be hairy as a bear refers solely to the visible characteristics; while anthropomorphism is used in the material when intelligence, psychological characteristics or behaviour of animals are in focus the human characteristics and behaviours are given to the animals, although these are obviously wrong: calling someone a wolf because they are a loner, although wolf is not a solitary, but pack animal, or calling a woman “foxy”, which bases on the imagined behaviour of the fox, not realistic one, is a comment on the perceived behaviour of both, women and foxes/men and wolves (Thompson, 2019: 58). This is

“establishing a link between the behaviours of human and nonhuman animals [...], the cultural binary and its effects further back, ultimately to its mythological origins, in order to illuminate how representation of the “alluring beast” or “distant beast” connects to “human-animal” division” (Thompson, 2019: 58). The deeper we are trying to explain zoo- and anthropomorphism, the more it shows that on certain level they become so intertwined that we cannot divide them; but we certainly cannot deny our anthropocentric view (Golež Kaučič, 2023). Could this prove the Crist’s (1999) thought that we are revealing the animal part of society with zoomorphism? Our passing of the border between nature and culture obviously brings out the parallels, and our effort to move away and to move closer to the nature and the nonhuman-animal world.

The majority of the Slovenian nicknames are conceptually and nominally the same, or at least similar, as in all Indo-European languages (Gura, 1997: 122, see also Thompson, 2019): a cow or an ox denotes a person of poor intellect, a fox(y) is a young, witty or/and sexually attractive woman, etc. Analysis of the material quickly shows that domestic animals are conceptualised as stupid, clumsy animals, although they were also the part of “our world” and daily life on the farm, helping society survive. Domestic animals were trained to obey and to be dependent on the human, they were surveilled and overpowered daily. Due to this, society has characterised these animals as inferior species with low or no intelligence. These animals are seen as obtuse, often clumsy, dirty, immoral. Somewhat surprising when taking into account the human dependence on these animals and at the same time the human restricting of the animals’ choice or decision making. Thompson (2019: 58) explains domestic animals as liminal figures, both us and not us, neither civilised nor wild, “their own placement sits uneasily in this balance: the idea of ‘taming the wild beast’ represents both the domestication process, and the process of civilizing ourselves”.

Nicknames based on the names of wild animals present “the other”, are coded with liminal behaviour (wolf, fox), and in that manner even a free world (birds). Freedom is a phenomenon that is linked to the wild in the conceptual metaphor [THE WILD IS FREE] in the phraseme “to run/to live wild and free”. From that point of view, wild animals are others, that which is non-domesticated, and carry both marks: of beings that can live as they want but as well are not appropriate for our socialised society. We cannot abide with them, understand them or live with them side by side. Feral animals can only be hunted (in that manner, we can also understand the slang use of language when young boys are going “to hunt young women”: young women are wild and will require domestication). Especially the human-mating language reflects society’s fantasies as well as the educated wish to overpower the primal, feral and uncontrollable in other people (as well as in ourselves), similarly as in hunting. When the wilderness is under control and not independent anymore, it turns into “stupid, meek, intellectually feeble” phenomena requiring our care. In this context it seems that society understands all the care-requiring beings as less intelligent.

On the other hand, most of the bug-like animals cause disgust in human beings. These are not understood as wild animals but rather as the animals from the “base world”, even “hell”¹¹ (worms, lice etc.), easily dispatched because of human size and strength. Nevertheless, these animals appear in recurring manner, society cannot get rid of them, they are pests. They are used as a nickname for the most despised persons, or even the inhabitants of such neighbouring villages with which the community is in competition (for whatever reason).

With livestock, the connotation is mostly negative; emotional name-calling motivates phrasemes like *to be a dairy cow*, or *even a blind hen can find a seed*, etc. (Jakop, 2014: 159).

Conclusion

Human culture is based on the repression of individual instinctive desires. Thus, the ideas grounded in the sense of “othering” emanate and reflect our culture much more than reflecting the actual lives of animals (Thompson, 2019: 61). Human characterisation of animals is not experiential; it is instead based on the fantasy and apparent connections that society has superficially attributed. Considering the animals’ nicknames, the answer to the respective questions of Alan Dundes’ (1980: 19) “Who are the folk? We are!” and Tok Thompson’s (2019: 14) “Can animals be the ‘folk’ as well?”, is rather: no, animals are not treated in society as the folk or that they could not have its own folklore, they represent the other. Although domestic animals were, and still are a big part of our society, members of the family or farm, according to the analysed material they are characterised as “others” in western society, as a being in the liminal world between our socialisation and the wilderness; in western society where the anthropocentrism is rampant (Golež Kaučič, 2023: 31), feral animals are the “other” belonging to wilderness or even to the lower world and therefore cannot be part of us. Domestic animals as liminal beings carry a negative connotation and are used for negative characterisation, while feral animals are used either for nicknames that carry the connotation of formidable, even dangerous (“animal”, “bear”), or divergent behaviour – from the stereotypically expected. Bugs, with the exception of some social insects, tend to carry connotations of disgust and aversion. Wilderness in itself is generally associated with freedom. Those animals that are used as positive metaphors are acknowledged either as highly productive, or highly likable (e.g. puffy offspring). Most stereotypical images and connotations are based on superficial observations of the animals (e.g. bees, ants, wolf), therefore, the stereotypes of animals used for nicknames are often mistaken in characterising the true features the animal.

¹¹ The connection between worms and the underworld is frequent also in worldwide mythology.

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Živali kot stereotipizacijski in karakterizacijski element v slovenskih poimenovanjih

Članek obravnava način (so)bivanja med ljudmi in živalmi, kakor je vpisan v človeški jezik: jezik odseva družbo. Pogost element človekovega izražanja je primerjanje z različnimi (okoliškimi) pojavi. Primerjave se lahko utrdijo,

prevzamejo funkcijo metafore in dobijo trajno obliko, hkrati pa so očitno zakoreninjene v stereotipnih, tj. posplošenih družbenih podobah. Stereotipne podobe se oblikujejo tudi kot folklorne oblike, v vsakdanjem jeziku kot folklorni obrazci (frazemi, pregovori, pozdravi, kletvice, žaljivke itn.). Opazne so tudi v enobesednih metaforah, ki označujejo človeka.

Živali so pogost element v kratkih folklornih obrazcih – kot bitja s svojimi značilnostmi, ki s človekom živijo v skupnem okolju: človeška lastnost se v folklornih obrazcih in oznakah primerja s predpisano, a ne nujno intrinzično lastnostjo posamične živali. Živalim pripisane lastnosti so družbeno stereotipne, posplošene in se kot take v obliki posplošene podobe (konceptualizacije) razširjajo v metaforičnem jeziku in ustvarjajo t. i. kolektivne simbole.

Človeške stereotipne karakterizacije živali večinoma ne temeljijo na izkušnjah, temveč na domišljiji in navideznih povezavah, ki so jih ljudje izpeljali iz površnih opazovanj. Analiza vzdevkov v slovenskem jeziku je pokazala, da živali niso obravnavane kot del naše družbe. Čeprav so domače živali bile in so še vedno člani družine, kmetije, so okarakterizirane kot »druge«, saj so v liminalnem svetu med našo socializacijo in divjino, medtem ko so divje živali »druge«, pripadajo divjini ali celo nižjemu svetu in zato ne morejo biti del nas. Domače živali kot liminalna bitja imajo negativno konotacijo in se uporabljajo za negativno karakterizacijo, medtem ko se divje živali uporabljajo bodisi zaradi vzdevkov s konotacijo nepremagljivosti, celo nevarnosti (žival, medved), ali zaradi drugačnega vedenja, ki ne ustreza stereotipnim pričakovanjem vedenja. Žuželke, na primer, nosijo konotacijo gnusa in prezira. Hkrati je divjina izenačena s svobodo.

Živali, ki so uporabljene za pozitivne prispevke, so priznane kot zelo produktivne ali kot zelo simpatične (večinoma kosmati mladički). Večina stereotipnih podob in konotacij temelji na površnem opazovanju živali (npr. čebele, mravlje, volk), zato stereotipi živali, ki se uporabljajo za vzdevke, pogosto napačno označujejo prave lastnosti živali.