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## **Teaching Fables in the Junior Grades of Primary School**

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### **ABSTRACT**

The aim of this paper is to explore the ways in which fables can help pupils in the junior grades of primary school develop their oral and written skills. It is written from a cognitive perspective within literary studies, focusing on a study of animal characters and morals in fables and researching the cognitive operations that result in hybrid animal characters. It also focuses on the universal character of morals, which can be viewed as an outcome of the process of conceptual integration. Addressing the universal nature of the main characters appearing in fables, as well as the universal issues expressed in their morals, the article looks at several possibilities for follow-up classroom activities. By devising extra activities aimed at developing their pupils' language skills, teachers of Croatian and English can motivate pupils to apply the topics in fables to everyday situations, thus encouraging them to develop their language skills as well as their capacity for judgement, character identification and value formation.

**Key words:** fables, conceptual integration, language skills, moral, animal characters

## **Poučevanje basni v nižjih razredih osnovne šole**

Izvirni znanstveni članek

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### **POVZETEK**

Namen prispevka je preučiti različne možnosti za uporabo basni pri razvijanju govorne in pisne zmožnosti v nižjih razredih osnovne šole. Izhajamo iz kognitivne perspektive v okviru literarnih ved in se osredotočamo tako na analizo živalskih literarnih likov in moralnih naukov kot tudi na kognitivne procese, ki izhajajo iz hibridnih živalskih likov. Ravno tako je poudarjen univerzalni značaj moralnih naukov kot posledica procesa konceptualne integracije. V prispevku so predstavljene različne možnosti za dejavnosti po branju basni v razredu, ki temeljijo na analizi univerzalne narave glavnih likov v basni in univerzalnih tem, ki izhajajo iz moralnih naukov. S pomočjo dodatnih dejavnosti in nalog, katerih cilj je razvijanje jezikovnih zmožnosti, lahko učitelji učence pri pouku hrvaščine kot prvega in angleščine kot drugega jezika motivirajo za uporabo tem v basnih v vsakdanjih situacijah

ter na ta način razvijajo njihove jezikovne zmožnosti in obenem sposobnosti presojanja, prepoznavanja značajev in oblikovanja vrednot.

**Ključne besede:** basen, konceptualna integracija, jezikovne zmožnosti, moralni nauk, živalski liki

## The Origin of Fables

According to the Croatian literary theoretist Milan Crnković, the *fable* can be defined as a story (usually short) in prose or verse in which animals, but also plants or objects, act as the main characters. They possess human properties (the ability to talk, reasoning, aspirations) that are based (in the case of animals) on the nature of the animal in question, i.e. its dominant characteristics - for example the cunning fox - or on the features attributed to them by people, such as the stupid ass (Crnković 1986, 168). Crnković points out that such attribution does not come as a surprise, owing to a strong bond between people and animals throughout the centuries - man carefully observed animals in his attempts to influence the outcome of the hunt, while at the same time depending on animals for food and clothing. The importance of animals for human life was first reflected in the portrayal of animals in cave paintings and, later in history, in the creation of the literary genre of the fable (Crnković 1986, 168). In this manner, stories with animals as the main protagonists were created, the aim of which was often to criticise the ruling classes in times when the great majority of humanity was facing the hardships of slavery and feudal political systems. Animals in those stories, points out Nada Lagumdžija, represented different social classes: the proud but narrow-minded lion represented the ruler, the cunning fox, the citizen forced to survive on their cunning and wit, while the clumsy, greedy wolf stood for the tyrant (Lagumdžija 2000, 16). The authors of fables classify animals according to their dominant characteristics, which has resulted in stereotypical animal characters that interact in a range of situations with a variety of outcomes, whether happy or unhappy (Crnković 1986, 167). Fables teach people to identify with animal characters according to their own dominant qualities, thereby enabling people to grasp the moral of the fable. Projecting human qualities onto animals has been marked in language; thus, for these particular examples, in many languages we can encounter sayings like "cunning as a fox" or "stupid as an ass". While the creation of the former was based on the character of the animal in question, the origin of the latter indicates that a human quality was attributed to an animal (Crnković 1986, 168).

For a long time, the term *fable* was, as asserted Annie E. Moore, applied to the short moralistic stories commonly attributed to Aesop (Moore 1947, 120), who is considered by many literary historians and theoreticians to be the most notable author of fables. According to Nada Lagumdžija, it is not possible to precisely determine whence fables originated; however, there are indications that the first fables appeared on the territory of India and in the eastern Mediterranean,

subsequently spreading to Greece, Rome and, finally, the rest of Europe (Lagumdžija 2000, 16). Crnković outlines that fables particularly flourished in ancient Greece in the works of Aesop, while also stressing several other authors from that period – for example, the Greek authors Fedrus, Babrius, Aristotle and the Indian writer Avian, whose collection of fables titled *Panchatantra* influenced many fable writers later in history (Crnković 1986, 168). The most respected and influential authors of more recent fables are Jean La Fontaine, Gotthold Ephraim Lessing and Ivan Andreyevich Krilov (Crnković 1986, 170 -173; Lagumdžija 2000, 16 -19).

### *The Structure of Fables*

Fables are short narrative stories that consist of two parts: the plot and the moral. The plot is usually reduced to one episode or, more rarely, two or three episodes. The moral may or may not be explicitly stated at the end of the story. It represents the message of the fable, a specific lesson concerning human behaviour.

Moore emphasises that fables have, unlike other genres of literature for children, undergone few changes in regard to their general characteristics (Moore 1947, 121). Most changes concern the morals, which have been “abbreviated, expanded, distorted or omitted, according to the taste and intentions of various editors” (Moore 1947, 121).

Most authors of fables state the moral of the fable at the end of the story, while some writers, such as the Serbian author Dositej Obradović, provide the moral at the beginning of their fables (Lagumdžija 2000, 22). The moral is usually quite short and subtly stated; however, in some authors, for example Obradović, it can even be longer than the plot (Crnković 1986, 169).

### *Animal stories and Pourquoi stories*

According to Lagumdžija, a sharp distinction should be made between fables and *animal stories* (Lagumdžija 2000, 24 – 26). This author allows that the two may share similar themes and motifs, but emphasises that numerous differences also exist between them.

The most striking differences include the length of stories, their structure, the manner in which the characters of animals are portrayed and the way ideas are transferred to the reader. Thus, animal stories tend to be longer than fables and usually consist of more than one episode, while their composition is more complex than that of fables.

The main characters in both fables and animal stories are usually anthropomorphised animals. However, unlike in fables, in which animal characters behave like people and represent various social classes, the characters in animal stories are portrayed realistically and humorously, giving children insight into the animal world by providing information about animals and stimulating readers to learn more about the specifics of particular animals (Lagumdžija 2000, 25).

In her book *Hrvatska poratna dječja priča (Croatian Post-War Children's Stories)*, Dubravka Težak distinguishes between two ways of portraying animals: 1) the anthropomorphised manner, by which animals obtain human features and 2) the

naturalistic manner, which aims to present animals as realistically as possible (Težak 1991, 49 – 52). Thus, animal stories include stories as diverse as those by Beatrix Potter, whose characters are charming and humorous but not portrayed in natural settings, to those by Ernest Thompson Seton, whose protagonists are portrayed partly in a documentary, and partly in an artistic fashion (Crnković 1986, 184).

Opting for a documentary approach instead of an artistic one is a typical feature of another genre - *Pourquoi stories* or *tales* (from the French *pourquoi*, meaning *why*). These are also known as *etiological* or *origin* stories, as they aim at explaining why something is the way it is, e.g. why a snake has no legs or why a tiger has stripes. Thus, in his *Just So Stories*, Rudyard Kipling provides explanations for the origin of some animals and their characteristics (Crnković 1986, 168).

Neither animal stories nor *pourquoi* tales have an allegorical meaning. This is the feature that differentiates them most from fables. While animal stories and *pourquoi* tales provide a poetic and/or semi-documentary insight into the animal world, in which animal characters are anthropomorphised but are nevertheless only animals, fables have a symbolic meaning and portray characters who converse with a purpose. Animals in fables thus represent people and their characteristics, while the story is subordinate to the truth revealed by the fable (Lagumdžija 2000, 25).

#### *The Characters in Fables*

The characters of fables are, claims Lagumdžija, selected on the basis of the specifics of the time and place in which their authors lived. Thus, the animal characters in Krilov's fables are typical of 18th-and 19th-century Russia (e.g. the fox, the wolf, the snake, the sheep ), while in Obradović's fables the protagonists are the eagle, the raven, the fox and the ass, the animals common in 18th-century Serbia. However, as Lagumdžija points out, characters in fables take on universal characteristics and become symbols of universal truths; they speak a universal language, i.e. the language of justice and truth (Lagumdžija 2000, 23).

We intend to focus on the character of the talking animal, which is also common to other genres of children's literature – for example, animal stories, fairy tales, fantasies and short stories. Interestingly, children were not the original target audience of fables – however, the child reader eventually welcomed them because of the child's affinity for animals and ability to find inspiration in them (Verdonik and Resman 2008, 93). In particular, children are amused by the fact that fabular animals can talk and behave like people.

In fables, animals are anthropomorphised, i.e. they exhibit human characteristics and function as symbols of moral characters and types of personality. By familiarising themselves with different types of characters, children realise the differences between people and develop their judgment about desirable and undesirable patterns of behaviour. Fables thus aid children in getting to know the world we live in. Moreover, they help children develop critical thinking and apply this knowledge to various aspects of life.

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*The Character of the Talking Animal: A Cognitive Perspective*

To study the hybrid character of the talking animal from a cognitive point of view represents an intriguing challenge, one we wish to approach by utilising the theory of conceptual integration. Devised by Mark Turner and Gilles Fauconnier in the late 20th century, this theory is based on the notion that metaphorical projections take place between multiple *mental spaces*. Turner and Fauconnier propose a *many-space model* of mapping, in which they define the spaces that take part in the process of mapping or projection from one space to another as “very partial assemblies constructed as we think and talk for purposes of local understanding and action. They contain elements and are structured by frames and cognitive models” (Fauconnier 2007, 351). A *frame* acts as a “package” that organises the elements and relations of a mental space. Thus, mental spaces are designed for purposes of local understanding and action and are narrower than frames, which encompass wide arrays of knowledge (Vidović, 2011: 67). For example, in the sentence *Jack buys gold from Jill*, this mental space can be framed from domains as diverse as TAKING A BREAK FROM WORK, GOING TO A PUBLIC PLACE FOR ENTERTAINMENT, or ADHERENCE TO A DAILY ROUTINE (Fauconnier in Geeraerts and Cuyckens 2007, 352).

Turner and Fauconnier distinguish at least four different spaces: minimally two *input* spaces from different domains of life and two *middle* spaces, the *generic* space and the *blended* space. The generic space possesses elements that both input spaces share --in other words, the common features they possess. The blended space, on the other hand, combines elements from input spaces, thus constituting a structure that is specific in character and which, in many cases, cannot be derived from the input spaces in their original form.

Thus, the hybrid character of the talking animal is the result of projections coming from two different frames or *domains* (as authors such as George Lakoff and Ronald Langacker call them): HUMANS and ANIMALS. We shall attempt to outline the manner of creation of the character of the talking animal on the example of the fox. The character of the fox is the outcome of projections between the input spaces of HUMANS and ANIMALS, with elements common to both spaces taking part in the process of mapping (the perceived sly demeanour of the fox is projected onto the cunning behaviour of certain people, while the sounds that foxes produce are mapped onto the human ability to talk). The generic space results in elements common to both input spaces: an agent behaving in a cunning way producing sounds. The blend is a completely idiosyncratic product: an animal that can talk and that behaves in a way that is typical of cunning people. It exhibits a specific structure not provided by the inputs (Fauconnier 1999, 150):

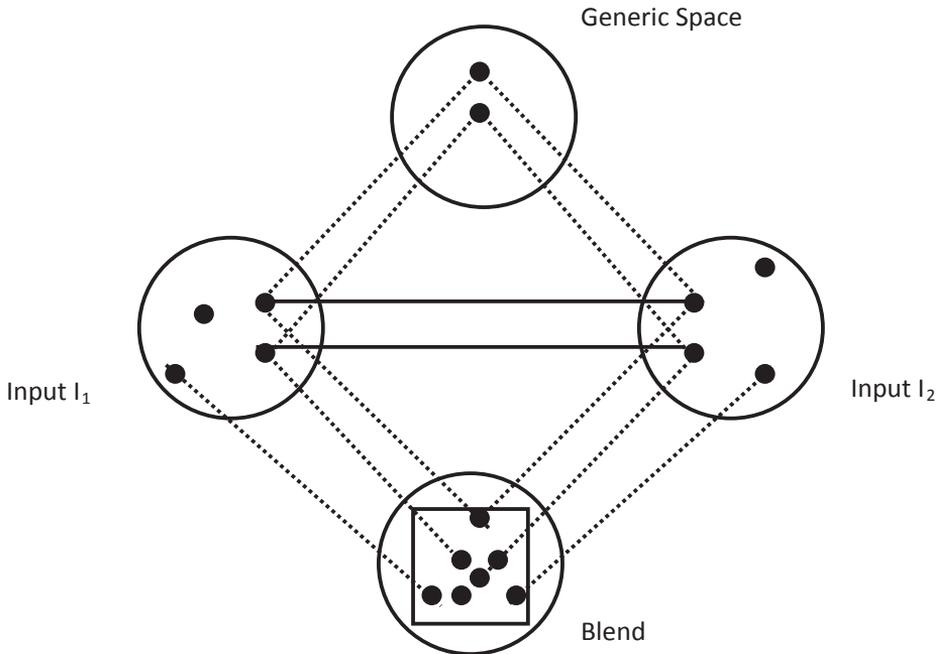


Figure 1

We will continue by illustrating the functioning of the process of blending on several examples of fables that appear in English and Croatian textbooks for the junior grades of primary school. We also aim to draw attention to the universal nature of fabular morals, which function as generic spaces. These express general truths that can be applied to many different life situations.

#### *Studying Animal Characters in Fables*

Fables are offered as extra activities in student's books and workbooks for the third and fourth grades of primary school. Thus, the fable *The Little Red Hen* appears in the appendix of *New Building Blocks 4*, a student's book for the fourth grade of primary school.

The theme of the fable is similar to that of La Fontaine's *The Cricket and the Ant*, with which pupils of the fourth grade of primary school are already familiar (the textbook for the second grade of primary school, *Čitanka* by Ankica Šapić and Jadranka Čajo, contains several fables, one of which is the aforementioned fable by La Fontaine). The main character, the Little Red Hen, is hardworking, while the other inhabitants of the house -- the dog, the cat and the mouse -- are not. Therefore, the Little Red Hen provides food for all the members of the household by planting and reaping wheat and, later, taking it to the mill and making bread out of it. The animals with which the Hen shares the house refuse to help her in these activities. However, when the bread is ready to be eaten, the dog, the cat and the mouse want to eat it. At this stage, the Little Red Hen makes her friends realise the

unfairness of their selfish behaviour; nevertheless, she shares the bread with them. The ending does not correspond to La Fontaine's, where the cricket, after singing all summer long, seeks shelter and food at the ant's place. Unlike the Little Red Hen, the ant refuses to share his warm house and food with the cricket, ironically advising him to dance during the winter in order to keep warm. The character of the Hen is a blend resulting from mapping between the hardworking behaviour of hens (as perceived by people), reflected in how the hen provides food for itself and its offspring, and the behaviour of diligent people who act responsibly and provide for their families. The moral of the two fables is similar and can be summarised in a few words: *Only hard work can ensure a reliable existence*, resulting from the generic space of an agent behaving responsibly towards others, thereby providing for them, while other agents do not behave in the same manner. How to explore the morals in follow-up activities will be discussed below.

Both the Croatian and the English textbooks offer various follow-up activities related to these two fables. In the Croatian textbook, this includes activities aimed at developing pupils' speaking and writing skills, for example, by using suggested adjectives (*happy, sad, nice, boring, angry, curious, surprised*) to describe their feelings whilst reading the fable, as well as motivating them to provide adjectives to describe the characters of the cricket and the ant, selecting the most suitable summary and naming the main characters. The exercises that appear in the same Croatian textbook to accompany La Fontaine's fable *The Lion and the Mouse* present a more challenging task for pupils: one activity asks them to provide opposing characteristics for the lion and the mouse, while the other requires them to provide their common characteristics. A similar follow-up activity can be performed with the fable *The Little Red Hen*. Students can compare the features of the hen, on the one hand, and the dog, the cat and the mouse, on the other. They can be offered a set of adjectives and required to sort them into two groups: those that refer to the opposing characteristics of the animals and those that can be associated with all animals. The first group might include *hard-working, helpful, unselfish* (the hen) and *lazy, selfish, greedy* (other animals), whereas the second group could include *friendly* and *sociable*.

Some of these activities are more creative and require pupils to express their opinions on the ant's actions and to provide a different ending to the story. This is precisely what is done by Nada Iveljić, the author of a different version of *The Cricket and the Ant* that appears in the same textbook just after La Fontaine's fable. The finale of her fable offers a different ending: the ants share their food with the cricket who, in return, entertains them with his song.

The properties that the blends of hybrid animals possess include the animals' physical characteristics and typical behaviour, while those mapped from the human world encompass mental capacities and the ability to talk. These blends are unique in character, and the process of mapping is multi-directional, as illustrated in the diagram in Figure 1, since the manner of creation of these animal characters

is transparent and conspicuous throughout. Since different properties are mapped from input spaces, each such character is specific, depending on the elements that take part in the process. In the example of the fox, this would be the cunning behaviour shared by foxes and sly people, while in the case of the cricket, its laziness corresponds to the easy-going demeanour of some people.

Although each author has the freedom to create his/her own characters, the process of conceptual integration that results in the blend of the talking animal also relies on stereotypes about certain animals that have persisted for centuries. These appear to be culturally universal or nearly so. In this manner, animals have become associated with specific characteristics in various cultures of the world. Thus, the fox in many cultures has been perceived as cunning and quick-thinking, while the wolf has predominantly been viewed as greedy and violent.

By engaging in these follow-up activities, pupils become better acquainted with the hybrid character of the talking animal. They identify the dominant features that characterise animals, which they project from the HUMANS domain onto the ANIMAL domain. Projections can be bidirectional, in which case pupils are able to project the characteristics attributed to animals in fables onto people and to understand their behaviour in situations similar to those in which the characters of talking animals are engaged.

#### *Morals as Generic Spaces*

Morals of fables also represent fertile ground for cognitive studies; thus, contrasting the morals of two or more versions of the same fable can serve as an excellent follow-up activity. The morals of the two versions of the fable *The Cricket and the Ant* are quite different. The moral of La Fontaine's version expresses the idea that the lazy should not be rewarded for their idleness and that only hard work pays off, which makes it similar to the one expressed in *The Little Red Hen*. In contrast, the moral of Iveljić's version of the fable reflects the notion that it is not only those who work, but also those who entertain who are useful.

The activities related to the moral vary in English and Croatian textbooks. In the Croatian textbook *Čitanka* for the second grade of primary school, pupils are required to complete the sentence and reveal the main message of the fable (Španić and Jurić 2006, 67):

*“Dopuni rečenice i otkrij pouku basne.*

\_\_\_\_\_manjeg od sebe, i on ti često može biti  
\_\_\_\_\_.”

*“Complete the sentence and reveal the moral of the fable.*

\_\_\_\_\_ those smaller than yourself, for they can often be your  
\_\_\_\_\_.”

Students should have the freedom to generate and contribute their own ideas, providing that the sentence structure is not changed. The follow-up exercise linked to the fable *The Raven and the Fox* from the same textbook asks pupils to write the moral themselves (Španić and Jurić 2006, 224).

The fable *The Little Red Hen* offers opportunities for numerous follow-up activities. Through these, an English teacher can strive to develop a discussion with his/her students, where they could transfer the idea expressed in the moral to other life situations. In this case, the moral acts as a sort of generic space: it provides scaffolding for numerous similar situations that can occur in life. These could include the example of some pupils constantly copying homework from their fellow students (a dependence similar to that of the dog, the cat and the mouse in *The Little Red Hen*) or of a pupil who does all the household chores in the place of his lazy brother and sister (like the Hen or the Ant). In all these examples the generic space involves the idea of an agent performing an action instead of other agent(s). Thus, each situation creates space for the creation of a new blend, in the form of either fictional talking animals (in fables) or people in real-life situations.

An activity that encourages creativity among pupils is offered as a follow-up activity (Activity D) in the student's book:

*What would you do if you were the Little Red Hen? Why?*

- *I would let my friends eat the bread.*
- *I wouldn't let my friends eat my bread.*

Here pupils are given an opportunity to put themselves in somebody else's shoes. An interesting discussion can follow, in which the pupils should be able to freely express their opinions on whether or not selfish behaviour should be tolerated.

A similar task is offered as a follow-up activity after the fable *Častohlepni vuk* (The Vainglorious Wolf) by Miroslav Dolenc Dravski, which appears in the Croatian textbook for the third grade of primary school, *Hrvatska čitanka*. It tells the story of a self-absorbed wolf who thought he was too strong for the pack of wolves in which he lived. Therefore, he changed sides – first joining the lions, and later the elephants – whom he served like a slave. When he got old, he wanted to rejoin his pack of wolves, but was rejected by his former friends with the explanation that he should live among those whom he had chosen, since he obviously considered them better. A question included in the comprehension section asks pupils to think of an instance of similar behaviour amongst people (*Ima li sličnog ponašanja i kod ljudi? Znaš li kakav primjer?, Engl. Are there instances of similar behaviour amongst people? Do you know of an example?*)

An English teacher can thus make use of the follow-up activities provided in textbooks, or create his/her own activities. The aim of these activities is to help pupils understand how the process of projecting amongst different domains works in practice. With the help of generic spaces, pupils can develop awareness of the universality of the issues contained in the morals of fables.

Aesop's fables offer a good example for introducing follow-up activities connected with the morals of fables. In order to be suitable for young learners of English, these fables should be adapted at three levels: grammatical, syntactical and lexical. Grammatical adaptations should be aimed at replacing past tenses with present tenses, since pupils in the junior grades of primary school are not yet familiar with

past tenses. Syntactical changes would pertain to breaking complex sentences into a set of simpler sentences that are more comprehensible to pupils, while lexical adaptation would encompass changes related to replacing words unknown to pupils with more familiar words.

Here is an example of a fable by Aesop in its original form, which can then be adapted for pupils in the junior grades of primary school through the application of the aforementioned alterations (Zipes 1992, 84).

### *The Viper and the File*

A viper entered a smith's shop and began looking around for something to eat. At last, he saw a file, and after approaching it, he began nibbling. But the file warned him to stop.

"You're unlikely to get very much from me," he said, "especially since it's my business to bite others."

The fable is appropriate in length for third or fourth grade pupils, while at the same time it is not lexically demanding. The past tenses can easily be replaced by present tenses (*entered-enters, began-begins, saw-sees, warned-warns, said-says*). The vocabulary that can be replaced with simpler words could include *approaching* (*coming close*) and *unlikely to get* (*can't get*). Some long sentences can be broken into shorter ones. These include *A viper enters a smith's shop and begins looking around for something to eat*, which can be broken down into two sentences (*A viper enters a smith's shop. He begins to look around for something to eat*) and *At last, he sees a file, and after coming close to it, he begins nibbling* which can also be divided into two shorter sentences (*At last, he sees a file. After coming close to it, he begins nibbling*).

The potential follow-up activities to accompany this fable are numerous. These could include requiring pupils to think of an appropriate moral, asking them to write messages to the viper and to the file, providing adjectives to describe the characters, etc.

While thinking up adjectives (e.g., greedy and inconsiderate for the snake or dangerous but friendly for the file), pupils attribute human characteristics to the main characters of the fable, thus juxtaposing characteristics from different domains of life, HUMANS and ANIMALS, as explained earlier in the text. Although it would be ridiculous to familiarise pupils with the principles of the Theory of Conceptual Integration, they could be helped to understand the manner in which the character of the anthropomorphised animal/ object is created.

Similarly, knowledge related to the functioning of the moral of the fable could arise along the way. The generic space that gives room for the production of morals includes an agent provoking another agent or other agent(s), thereby taking a huge risk. Morals can include various ideas such as *Do not tease somebody who can hurt you; It is dangerous to play with fire; You should not play with your destiny*.

This could lead to an interesting discussion. Pupils can be asked to think of situations in life on to which this generic space can be projected. These could

include the following situations: being cautious when in the company of a stronger pupil, being obedient to a teacher who can punish you for not writing homework and so on. All these exercises primarily develop pupils' oral skills but also their writing and reading skills, since the activities can be performed orally as well as in writing.

### *The Educational Role of Fables*

The question can be raised whether fables are appropriate for children, since they were primarily aimed at an adult audience. Lagumdžija explains that there have been voices that warned of a high dose of irony and bitterness in fables, which is the result of the authors' life experiences--in other words, the experiences of people who got to know life well. La Fontaine was, asserts Lagumdžija, harshly criticised on these grounds by two of his contemporaries, the French philosopher Rousseau and the French poet Lamartine (Lagumdžija 2000, 27). However, there are also those of the opinion that fables are educational, since they evoke feelings of sympathy towards the positive and disapproval of the negative (Svetomir Ignjatović) or simply because they allow children to enjoy their narrative playfulness (Edo Vajnaht), as claimed by Lagumdžija (Lagumdžija 2000: 27).

In a similar vein, Crnković stresses that fables express the wisdom and experience of older, more mature people. He suggests that teachers should not impose the manner of understanding morals in fables on their students, but rather subtly help them form their own views of what is good and what is bad or what is moral and what immoral (Crnković 1986, 170).

Understanding the moral of a fable can represent a formidable task for pupils in the junior grades of primary school (Kwong 2011, 275). However, the difficulties in figuring out the lesson intended by the storyteller should not outweigh the benefits pupils can reap from reading fables. In order to achieve this, the stories selected should be of an appropriate length and possess a dynamic plot, simple and understandable language and interesting animal characters (Lagumdžija 2000, 28).

Children in the junior grades of primary school are able to understand fables since, as pointed out by Lagumdžija, at this age they are already capable of abstract thinking. They therefore do not concentrate solely on the story outcome but are also able to understand motivation. Children aged between 9 and 12 gradually learn the stereotypes related to certain animals. This is the result of projections taking place from the domain of HUMANS onto the domain of ANIMALS. In this manner, animals obtain a symbolic function that results in, for example, the wolf representing greed and clumsiness, the hare symbolising fear, and the lion standing for tyranny (Lagumdžija 2000: 23). At this age children are capable of identifying with characters in fables, judging their behaviour and grasping the story's allegorical meaning (Lagumdžija 2000, 30).

Fables can be particularly appealing to pupils in the junior grades of primary school if we apply these texts to everyday situations and bring them closer to life. By projecting morals, which act as generic spaces, from fables to various areas of

life, children demonstrate their understanding of the allegorical meaning of fables and the general truths expressed therein .

What is more, the Indonesian scholar Abdurrachman Faridi emphasises the formative function of fables. According to Faridi, fables can, alongside other narrative stories such as fairy tales, folk tales, legends and cover stories, help pupils to shape their personality. Thus, claims this author, they can acquire values such as honesty, kindness, friendship, sincerity and togetherness, which they will hold for the rest of their lives (Faridi 2014, 75).

## Conclusion

Fables and wisdom tales are a valuable source of follow-up activities in Croatian and English classes for pupils in the junior grades of primary school. These texts help pupils develop their language skills--especially speaking, reading and writing skills. Teachers have the opportunity to make use of the follow-up exercises provided in textbooks, but can also devise their own activities. Fables also provide fertile ground for the study of the blends of animal characters and morals, which can act as generic spaces. Analysing fables in class can be related to the cognitivist approach in science by widening the scope of the follow-up activities. Such activities would focus on motivating students to express their opinions about the characters of certain animals, to find their common characteristics and select differentiating ones, while at the same time applying the morals to various life situations.

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## Poučevanje basni v nižjih razredih osnovne šole

Basen je kot književna vrsta priljubljena tako med otroki kot med odraslimi. Otroci so basni naklonjeni zlasti zaradi različnih živalskih likov, bolj ali manj eksplicitnih moralnih nauk in univerzalnih tem, ki jih obravnavajo. Ta didaktična književna vrsta je v učbenikih in delovnih zvezkih za drugi, tretji in četrti razred osnovne šole obravnavana in analizirana v hrvaščini kot maternem jeziku in angleščini kot tujem jeziku. Namen prispevka je preučiti različne možnosti za uporabo basni pri razvijanju govorne in pisne zmožnosti v nižjih razredih osnovne šole.

Izhajamo iz kognitivne perspektive v okviru literarnih ved in se osredotočamo tako na analizo živalskih literarnih likov in moralnih nauk kot tudi na kognitivne procese, ki izhajajo iz hibridnih živalskih značajev. Prispevek se naslanja na teorijo konceptualne integracije, ki sta jo v okviru kognitivnega jezikoslovja razvila zlasti Turner in Fauconnier (Fauconnier 2007). Hibridni značaj poosebljene govoreče

živali je razumljen kot rezultat procesa konceptualne integracije. Gre za proces, ki nastaja med mentalnimi prostori, ki vsebujejo številne elemente in strukture, izmed katerih se nekatere preslikajo med mentalnimi prostori v procesu konceptualne preslikave. V tem smislu so živalski značaji dojeti kot »zmesi« (angl. *blends*) iz projekcij med različnimi vhodnimi mentalnimi prostori, ki izhajajo iz dveh konceptualnih domen iz vsakdanjega življenja, in sicer iz domene ČLOVEKA in domene ŽIVALI. Projicirani elementi, ki so skupni obema prostoroma (npr. živo bitje, bitje, ki se oglašča, izkazuje določeno vedenje ipd.), se najprej projicirajo v generični prostor, v katerem se nahajajo elementi, ki so skupni obema vhodnima prostoroma, nato pa v prostor, ki je edinstven in katerega rezultat je hibriden značaj govorečih živalskih likov.

V prispevku so predstavljene različne možnosti za rabo dejavnosti po branju basni v razredu, ki temeljijo na analizi univerzalne narave glavnih likov v basni in univerzalnih tem, ki izhajajo iz moralnih nauk. Moralni nauk lahko razumemo kot generični prostor, ki omogoča različne interpretacije. V tem smislu moralni nauki delujejo kot podporni okvirji za prenašanje idej v različne vsakodnevne situacije, ki pa morajo biti primerne za učenčevo stopnjo razumevanja.

S pomočjo dodatnih dejavnosti in nalog, katerih cilj je razvijanje jezikovnih zmožnosti, lahko učitelji učence pri pouku hrvaščine kot prvega in angleščine kot drugega jezika motivirajo za uporabo tem v basnih v vsakdanjih situacijah ter na ta način razvijajo njihove jezikovne zmožnosti. Obenem pa lahko govorimo o drugih prednostih, ki jih ponuja učenje jezika s pomočjo basni, in sicer razvijanje sposobnosti presojanja, prepoznavanje značajev, razumevanje odnosov in oblikovanje moralnih vrednot.

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