

Similarity, difference, and uniqueness in the Hungarian, Macedonian and the Tibetan humorous anecdotes.

Rita Kuzder

Anecdote is a Greek expression. Even by its original meaning (= unpublished) it is a short story not worthy for perpetuation or memorizing, but exactly for this reason people are even more interested in them. The anecdote is an ordinary story, including strange, humorous events which make people laugh, or urges them to laugh on someone.

The anecdote is a short and amusing or interesting story about a real incident or person. By genre it belongs to the short epic form of folklore literature. It is a very old genre, well-known even in the antiquity. The main characters of these stories are mostly different tricksters.

Tricksters are worldwide well-known in the folklore literature. As we can remember the Dutch Till Eulenspiegel, Nasreddin hodja of Asia Minor, the Spanish Lazarillo de Tormes, our Hungarian Peter Csalóka or King Matthias in disguise, and the Macedonian Itar Pejo. In the western literature Akhu Tonpa, the Tibetan trickster was not known that much as the ones mentioned above. But he is tremendously popular in the Tibetan speaking areas – not only in Tibet and in China, but in Sikkim, Ladakh, Nepal and Bhutan as well.

Although these stories are also available in written form, their oral version is much more popular. Their primary function is the entertainment.

According to their punch lines we can distinguish 2 types of them:

- the *waggery* which is a more ancient form of the anecdote, can catch anyone in target, raw, sometimes vulgar in its language, the main point only to have fun at the end.
- the *anecdote* which has higher level in its style, more moderated in its language, its punch line is well formed in case of its language and style.

The aim of this paper is to compare the Hungarian, Macedonian, and Tibetan tricksters. But first, I would like to say a few words about two other famous figures. They are Nasreddin hodja and Till Eulenspiegel.

The tricks and pranks of **Till Eulenspiegel** (died in 1350), were recorded in the 15th century. The oldest text remained was published in 1515. It had many editions across Europe.

Till annoyed others, or perpetrated jokes for revenging something. He wasn't picky in his methods, and often made rough tricks.

He is a folk hero who avenged misdeeds, castigated injustice, and humiliated the aristocratic arrogance. But he is an ordinary prankster, rough and tyke in his words and actions, just like the era and the environment which taste and morals he also accepts. He is obscene and makes quite often abominable, bawdy tricks. Although the obscene joke is not typical for the Tibetan trickster, we can find there this type as well. ([Heavenly shit](#)).

Nasreddin hodja - is a legendary folk character in the Middle East and Central Asia, portrayed as a wise fool, clever simpleton, or instructive prankster. I can say he is the most famous trickster all over the world, well-known from Western-Europe to China.

In the middle of 14th century (around in 1360 AD) he lived in Asia Minor. Being an effendi (Ottoman official), he held a prominent social position. In Tibet he became known as Afanti, this word is a variant of effendi. As the folk hero of the Uyghur tribe, he is also known by this name (the hodja is a teacher, master, honorable man, who made pilgrimage to Mecca).

With his unique naivety, laughable ineptitude, smartness, and ingenious incompetence from behind of which profound wisdom flashes out he became a characteristic type of the Turkish humour.

He appears in thousands of stories, sometimes witty, sometimes wise, but often, too, a fool or the butt of a joke. A Nasreddin story usually has a subtle humor and a pedagogic nature. The International Nasreddin Hodja fest is celebrated between 5–10 July in his hometown every year. 1996–1997 was declared International Nasreddin Year by UNESCO.

Nasreddin stories are told in a wide variety of regions, especially across the Muslim world and have been translated into many languages. Some regions independently developed a character like Nasreddin, and the stories have become part of a larger whole. In many regions, Nasreddin is a major part of the culture, and is quoted or alluded to frequently in daily life. Since there are thousands of different Nasreddin stories, one can be found to fit almost any occasion.

The “[fish soup](#)” is a well-known story which is popular in almost all the folklores, but three of the examined ones for sure.

Now let's turn to the three main tricksters.

First of all, I'd like to say some words about the Hungarian's famous King Matthias (1443-1490). Certainly, there are other tricksters as well in the Hungarian folklore. According

to the legend Matthias has traveled in disguise in the country for checking the rich lords, landowners how they treat the poor.

If he caught the lords on injustice, gave teachings to them. Also, he gave his nobles some didactical lessons, to prove them that they shouldn't scorn the simple, uneducated people, because poverty doesn't mean lack of wisdom ([soup – loaf spoon](#))! And vice versa, he also tested the wisdom of the poor people. ([Smart girl - Prince Marko](#)).

Itar Pejo – the meaning of the name Itar Pejo is: Sly Peter. Hitar Petar or Itar Pejo (Bulgarian: Хитър Петър, Macedonian: Итар Пежо, "Sly Peter") is a character of Macedonian and of Bulgarian folklore. Itar Petar is a poor village farmhand, but possesses remarkable slyness, wit and wile. He is often presented as the "typical Macedonian" and the perpetual antagonist of the rich nobles, clerics and money lenders or the "typical Ottoman" — Nasreddin, whom he always manages to outwit. He is therefore regarded as a strictly positive figure and a hero of the common folk. As a character, Itar Petar first appeared in the 16th–17th century, when Macedonia was still under Ottoman rule. In Macedonia, it is thought that Itar Petar (Itar Pejo) is a native of the region of Mariovo, an opinion not popular elsewhere, and a monument to the character was built in Prilep. It is generally thought, though, that the original Itar Petar lived somewhere in the city of Prilep in Macedonia. In 1873, he was introduced to literature, with Iliya Blaskov publishing several anecdotes involving him. Sometimes Itar Pejo and Nasreddin hodja appears in the same story and make the people foolish together. ([Nasreddin hodja and Itar Pejo are telling lie together](#)).

Akhu Tönpa – while in west (or in Europe) the anecdotes have been put down in written form over the centuries or thousand years, this is not true for the Akhu Tönpa stories in Tibet. Tibetan genre ranging doesn't even exist. They call them simply stories or tales. But now a new generation emerged who had the chance to study in the UK or in the United States. They wrote a New English-Tibetan dictionary, and they created notions for anecdote. Actually, there are two notions for it, one is *lo rgyus thung ngu*, which means literally short story, the other one is *byung ba snying bsdus*, it means literally loved story.

The trickster tales, especially about Akhu Tönpa are very popular among Tibetan people. They are known almost everywhere in the country, by everyone, regardless of age or sex, as they are funny and entertaining. In his name “Akhu” means “uncle” in Tibetan. This term does not only refer to paternal uncles, it is also added to an older man’s name when they are mentioned by somebody belonging to the younger generation. “Tönpa” means “teacher”.

The Tibetans regard him as a reincarnation of Avalokiteshvara (he is the god of compassion) thus justifying his absurd and anti-social deeds. They know well that Akhu Tönpa wanders throughout the country, and for the happiness of people defeats demons disguised as men and tries to make fools wise persons. They also regard him as one of the insane saints, who try to seek after truth and show it to other people, maintaining extraordinary lifestyle and passing the borders of common sense.

Due to their excessive and reverent affection for Akhu Tönpa, many people believe that he once really existed and claim that he came from their own native place. They are proud of him. Even the late Professor Thubten claimed that Akhu Tönpa was from near his native place. Maybe because of this could happen that he has more names in different places, for example one of his names is Nyichoe Zangpo.

The character of Akhu Tönpa as seen in the tales is full of inconsistencies. From one hand he is a sacred being, he is poor, advocates the justice like in the story of “Infected pork”

(KALSANG 1993: 37-46.) (The landlord’s pigs plundered the poor villagers’ fields. The villagers asked Akhu Tönpa’s help. He killed all of the pigs but told the landlord that the pigs died because of some strange diseases. At the same time advised him that he can sell the pork for good price in the market. He carried a carcass of a pig to the city and went around shouting this “come and buy fresh infected pork”. Certainly, bought the meat. On the other day the landlord joined him to see why he could not sell the meat. When he recognized that really nobody wants to buy it the landlord ordered to Akhu Tönpa to clear up the meat. So finally, he could give the pork to the peasants.); He is unselfish and unworldly, lives in vagabondage and brings about riches to people by his supernatural power. On the other hand, he is worldly being, very mischievous like in the story of “As a young monk” (RINJING 1997: 17-19.) (When Akhu Tönpa was a young boy his parents sent him to a monastery to study. After some months he could go to visit his parents, but he quickly returned to the monastery. As he walked into his master’s room, he smelled something good and saw that his master was enjoying a big plate of steamed meat dumplings, in Tibetan called momo. His long journey made him hungry and tired. He wished to share his master’s sumptuous meal. He went up to his master and asked, “Do you know what happened on the trip to my parents?” The master asked “What?” “On the way to my parents, I found a bag full of gold.” Suddenly interested, the master looked up in surprise and gave to him a dumpling, asking him “What happened to the gold?” “I told to my parents that I’m going to take the gold to my master” The greedy master gave him two more momos and pressed on “What happened tell me!” So, it was going this way until Akhu Tönpa recognized that the master’s plate became empty. But

the master still was very curious to know what happened at the end. Akhu Tönpa stretched his arms and said “While I was arguing about the gold with my parents, I suddenly woke up”). He ignores rules of social life and causes disturbances like in the story of “A scolding On New Year’s Day” (KALSANG 1993: 7-20.) (At the Tibetan New Year party Nyichoe Zangpo put a lot of salt in the tea, but without stirring it at all, he filled the landlord’s cup. Then he stirred the tea only a little and filled the cup of the landlord’s wife. Proceeding in this way, he moved down the rows of assembled guests, continuing to stir the tea and serve it. After a little while the landlord noticed that there was no salt in his tea, and he scolded: “There is no salt at all in the tea”. Those seated in the middle rows replied that “There is a little salt in it” then those in the last of the rows said, “The tea is completely salty.” The landlord replied furiously “You fools are speaking nonsense. Get out!” This way he could make happy the servants of the landlord.) He is destructive towards religion, cheats honest but slow-witted people by using sophistry. He is an impostor. Also, he is erotic, indecent, greedy, and gluttonous. He displays his own phallus and often plays woman role. Although Akhu Tönpa is a trickster, does not give us a very bad impression of rascal.

The trickster stories are told by the Tibetans in many different situations and places. For instance, in the evenings before going to sleep, the parents or grandparents tell them to the children, in the school the teachers share them with the students, in winters when there are not so many daily works with the animals and in some other social gatherings. In these cases, the teller’s age or sex is not even important. (According to the Chinese measuring the tellers were: mother, grandmother, grandfather, uncle, brother, friend, teacher, old man, – and the students were listening to them on radio and tape).

In the case of the erotic Akhu Tönpa stories the situation is different. The performer the trickster stories are told by the Tibetans in many different situations and places. For instance in the evenings before going to sleep, the parents or grandparents tell them to the children, in the school the teachers share them with the students, in winters when there are not so many daily works with the animals and in some other social gatherings. In these cases, the teller’s age or sex is not even important. (According to the Chinese poll the tellers were: mother, grandmother, grandfather, uncle, brother, friend, teacher, old man, – and the students were listening to them on radio and tape). To have a better insight into these types of tales let me share with you briefly two famous ones.

1, In the first one Akhu Tönpa flips the nuns’ naivety and stupidity. We know already about him that he likes to appear in woman clothes. “So once he disguised himself as a nun in a nunnery and had sex with a nun. After she become pregnant, the abbess planned to identify

the man masquerading himself as a nun in their midst. She lied in a ditch and the other nuns had to jump over her one by one, making visible their reproductive organs. In preparation Akhu Tönpa tied one end of a string around his phallus and tied the other end around his neck. When he jumped over the ditch, his masculinity was not detected. Being over-confident and thinking that the abbess might still harbor some suspicion that he was a man, Akhu Tönpa decided to jump again. This time, as he jumped the string broke, and his gender was revealed. So, the abbess could get the truth and chased him away from the nunnery.” (RINJING 1997: 30-36.)

2, This second story is more cunning, obscene, point at the nun’s repressed lust, their moral perverted character. “In this story Akhu Tönpa as a magic man cultivate penises in his garden and tries to sell them in the nunnery.....” (RINJING 1997:23-30.)

Tibetan culture is so rich in this type of anecdotes, and they are mostly passed orally. It would be high time to collect and write them down.

Hungarian	Macedonian	Tibetan
King Matthias (Mátyás király)	Itar Pejo (Итар Пежо/Итарп)	Akhu Tönpa (ཨུ་ཏོན་པ་)
1443-1490	16 th -17 th century,	14 th century
anecdote	anecdote	loved story (new term)
Similarity: language, figure, story	Similarity: language, figure, story	Similarity: language, figure, story
Difference: from the variants	Difference: from the variants	Difference: from the variants, and different cultures; sometimes against demons as well
Uniqueness: King Matthias in disguise	Uniqueness: Itar Pejo and Nasreddin hodja in the same story	Uniqueness: „against” Buddhist nuns, erotic stories, A. T. has a supernatural power.