

COGNITIVE AND SEMANTIC ASPECTS OF METONYMY AND SYNONYMY IN RIDDLES

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Annotation: This paper explores the linguistic and semantic significance of metonymy and synonymy in Uzbek and English riddles. As a folkloric genre, riddles employ figurative language to obscure meaning and engage the audience in cognitive reasoning. The findings reveal that metonymy acts as an indirect naming mechanism by linking objects to their functions, attributes, or contextual associations, while synonymy enhances the expressive depth of riddles through alternative lexical forms that preserve or slightly shift meaning.

Keywords: riddle, metonymy, synonymy, semantics, figurative language, cultural symbolism

Introduction: Riddles hold a distinct position in the oral and literary traditions of many cultures, functioning as both amusement and education. They encapsulate collective experience, environmental knowledge, and cultural wisdom through metaphorical and symbolic expression. Within this framework, metonymy and synonymy emerge as crucial linguistic strategies for concealing meaning and enriching expression.

The purpose of this research is to analyze the forms, functions, and cultural implications of metonymy and synonymy in Uzbek and English riddles. The study aims to uncover both universal linguistic tendencies and culture-specific manifestations, thereby revealing how these devices reflect the worldview of each speech community.

The study's relevance lies in three main aspects:

1. It deepens understanding of the semantic mechanisms underlying folklore;
2. It highlights the stylistic and cognitive functions of metonymy and synonymy;
3. It contributes to comparative folklore and linguistics by contrasting two distinct traditions. The novelty of this work rests in its dual focus: it examines synonymy — a relatively underexplored phenomenon in riddles — alongside metonymy, offering a more holistic view of the semantic and stylistic strategies employed in oral literature.

Research and methods: This study applies comparative and semantic analysis to a corpus of Uzbek and English riddles, focusing on metonymic and synonymic constructions. Research Material. The data are drawn from Uzbek folklore (*Husainova, Topishmoqlar*, 1982) and English folklore (*Raine, Riddle Me This*, 1996). Approximately 200 riddles from each language were analyzed, representing both traditional and modern forms. Analytical Framework. The theoretical basis combines insights from cognitive linguistics (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980), semantics, and folkloristics. Metonymy is analyzed according to part-whole, object-function, and symbolic association types; synonymy is examined through lexical, semantic, and stylistic

variation. Procedures. Semantic Analysis: identification and classification of metonymic and synonymic structures. Comparative Analysis: cross-linguistic comparison of Uzbek and English riddles to determine universal and culture-bound elements. Contextual Interpretation: study of cultural and symbolic meanings embedded in linguistic expressions. Validity and Reliability. Multiple sources were cross-referenced, and interpretations were verified against established folkloristic and linguistic works. Qualitative analysis focused on meaning, stylistic function, and cultural context.

Results and discussion: Metonymy in Riddles. Metonymy serves as a primary mechanism for concealment and symbolic representation. Part–Whole Relations (Synecdoche): Uzbek: “*Qora qo‘yim bor, terisini shilib oldim, ichida qizilini ko‘rdim*” (Taruuz — watermelon).

English: “*What has a head and a tail but no body?*” (A coin). Object–Function Relations:

Uzbek: “*Osti imorat, usti imorat, o‘rtasi otashxona*” (Samovar).

English: “*What has keys but can’t open locks?*” (A piano). Spatial and Material Associations:

Uzbek: “*Tepasida yog‘och, ostida temir, o‘rtasida olov*” (Stove).

English: “*What has a ring but no finger?*” (Telephone).

Metonymy reflects cultural realia — Uzbek riddles focus on agrarian and domestic life (bread, plough, tea, samovar), while English riddles highlight urban and mechanical culture (coin, clock, piano, telephone). Synonymy in Riddles. Synonymy adds stylistic richness, rhythm, and ambiguity to riddles. Lexical Synonymy: Uzbek: *kichkina–mayda, katta–buyuk*; English: *big–large, fast–quick*. Stylistic Synonymy: enhances rhythm and poetic quality through repetition and parallelism. Example: “*It glitters, it shines, it sparkles in the dark*” → *a star*. Cultural Synonymy: Uzbek riddles often combine native and Persian-Arabic pairs (*ko‘ngil–dil, yuz–chehra*), reflecting linguistic history; English riddles draw on Old English and French/Latin layers (*kingly–royal, ask–inquire*). Synonymy thus functions as both a semantic and stylistic device, enriching meaning while complicating interpretation. Comparative Insights: Universal Features: Both traditions use metonymy to encode hidden meanings and synonymy to enhance style. Cultural Differences: Uzbek riddles are rooted in agrarian imagery, while English riddles are associated with technological and urban contexts. Stylistic Tendencies: Uzbek riddles favor parallelism and repetition, whereas English riddles rely on brevity and wordplay. Discussion: The analysis reveals that riddles reflect cultural cognition and linguistic creativity.

- Cognitive Role of Metonymy: demonstrates how humans perceive objects through functions, associations, and contexts, not isolation. Uzbek riddles focus on domestic life; English ones mirror modern urban experience.
- Stylistic and Communicative Role of Synonymy: strengthens imagery, rhythm, and interpretive depth. Uzbek riddles use abundant synonymic repetition; English riddles use concise synonymy for wit and compactness.
- Cross-Cultural Implications: metonymy and synonymy are universal yet culture-shaped devices reflecting the environment and worldview of each people.

Theoretical Significance. This study affirms that metonymy and synonymy are core mechanisms of linguistic creativity, not marginal ones. Riddles demonstrate how language uses

these devices in compact, playful, and meaningful ways, linking folklore and modern linguistic theory.

CONCLUSION

Riddles are more than verbal puzzles—they embody cultural knowledge, linguistic artistry, and cognitive strategies. Metonymy functions as a concealment mechanism, referring indirectly through parts, functions, or symbols. Synonymy contributes to rhythmic structure and semantic diversity, enriching the expressive and interpretive quality of riddles. Comparative findings show that, though universal in principle, both devices are culturally conditioned in form and frequency.

Overall, this research contributes to folklore studies, semantics, and cognitive linguistics, demonstrating that riddles offer valuable insight into the creative interplay between language, thought, and culture.

Riddles are among the oldest forms of verbal art, combining elements of language, logic, and imagination. They are typically short texts that present a description of something in a mysterious or indirect way, challenging the listener to guess the correct answer. In English folklore, riddles have been used for entertainment, education, and even social competition.

Metaphor plays a crucial role in the structure and meaning of riddles. It enables the transformation of an ordinary object or idea into a complex verbal puzzle. The riddle's surface meaning conceals its true referent, and this concealment is usually achieved through metaphorical expressions. Understanding the metaphorical nature of riddles helps to reveal the cognitive processes behind figurative thinking and creativity in language. According to the theory of conceptual metaphor proposed by George Lakoff and Mark Johnson (1980), metaphor is not just a poetic device but a fundamental way of thinking. It involves understanding one conceptual domain in terms of another (e.g., *LIFE IS A JOURNEY*). In riddles, metaphor operates in a similar way: an object or idea is described using the language of another, seemingly unrelated concept. For example: I fly without wings, I cry without eyes.”
(Answer: Cloud)

Here, the cloud is metaphorically described through human and animal attributes. The metaphorical mapping connects the **natural phenomenon** (cloud) to the **animate being** (bird or person), producing ambiguity and curiosity. The metaphor invites the listener to interpret the hidden relationship between the two domains.

Ambiguity is a defining feature of riddles, and metaphor is the main linguistic tool that creates it. By transferring meaning from one domain to another, metaphors blur the boundaries between literal and figurative language. In riddles, the use of metaphor often leads to semantic duality — one surface meaning and one hidden meaning. For example: “The more you take, the more you leave behind.”
(Answer: Footsteps)

In this riddle, “take” and “leave behind” are used metaphorically. The listener must reinterpret the literal verbs in a non-literal context to find the correct answer. Such riddles rely on the cognitive ability to decode metaphorical associations and to detect semantic contrasts.

A riddle’s goal is to hide and reveal meaning at the same time. Metaphor serves this dual purpose. It hides the answer under an unexpected image but also gives subtle clues through shared features. The effectiveness of a riddle depends on how cleverly the metaphor connects the known and the unknown. For example: “I am not alive, but I grow. I don’t have lungs, but I need air. What am I?”
(Answer: *Fire*) The metaphor “grow” (typically used for living beings) is applied to *fire*, creating both confusion and recognition. The listener must find the underlying conceptual similarity — growth as expansion — to solve the riddle.

In modern linguistics and language teaching, riddles are used to enhance students’ metaphorical competence. English riddles help learners recognize how metaphor works in meaning construction. Through riddle-solving activities, learners can improve their understanding of figurative speech, idioms, and polysemy.

Metaphors in riddles encourage creative thinking by showing that language meaning is flexible and context-dependent. This makes riddles a powerful pedagogical tool for developing linguistic intuition and cultural awareness. Metaphor is an essential mechanism in the formation and interpretation of English riddles. It operates by transferring meaning between conceptual domains, creating ambiguity, humor, and intellectual challenge. Through metaphor, riddles connect linguistic form, cognitive processes, and cultural imagination.

English riddles demonstrate that metaphor is not merely decorative, but a central part of how humans think and communicate. The metaphorical nature of riddles transforms simple descriptions into creative puzzles that continue to fascinate and educate across generations.

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