

**LINGUOCULTURAL DIMENSIONS IN CLASSIFYING ENGLISH AND UZBEK RIDDLES BY
ANSWER TYPE**

<https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.18784454>

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Abstract: *The present study explores the linguocultural parameters underlying the categorization of English and Uzbek riddles according to answer type. Drawing on a corpus-based approach, riddles were classified based on the ontological status of their referents (anthropomorphic, zoomorphic, phytomorphic, artifact-related, and natural phenomena). The analysis integrates structural-semantic methodology with comparative linguocultural interpretation.*

The results indicate that both linguistic traditions share common cognitive mechanisms, primarily metaphorical conceptualization and analogical mapping, which structure riddle formation. At the same time, typological distinctions emerge in stylistic realization. English riddles display a higher frequency of lexical-semantic play, particularly homonymy and polysemy, whereas Uzbek riddles foreground ethnoculturally marked realia, reflecting agrarian traditions, environmental perception, and everyday material culture.

Thus, the categorization of riddles by answer type reveals both universal cognitive models and culture-specific semiotic encoding, reinforcing the interdependence of language, culture, and conceptualization.

Keywords: *riddle; answer type; classification; structural analysis; semantic analysis; linguocultural characteristic.*

INTRODUCTION

The riddle represents one of the oldest and most universal genres of folklore, attested across diverse cultures throughout the world. As Archer Taylor (1951) observes, “the true riddle compares two entirely unrelated things, attributing the characteristics of one to the other” [11, 37]. In essence, a riddle functions through indirect description, employing analogy to encode an object or phenomenon in a concealed form that requires interpretative effort from the recipient.

The Encyclopaedia Britannica defines a riddle as “a question or statement deliberately phrased to require ingenuity in ascertaining its answer” [3]. As a minor genre

of oral literature, riddles trace their origins to antiquity, with early manifestations closely connected to mythological worldviews and magical-religious conceptions.

Within Uzbek oral tradition, riddles have been transmitted intergenerationally, serving as a means of cultivating intellectual acuity among both children and adults. Similarly, the English literary tradition demonstrates a long-standing engagement with riddling practices, evidenced in early written monuments such as the Anglo-Saxon Exeter Book, which preserves a substantial corpus of riddle texts. In contemporary contexts, riddles remain vibrant in children's literature and popular logic-based games in both linguistic communities.

Beyond their entertainment value, riddles constitute a reflection of collective humor, verbal artistry, environmental perception, and sociocultural experience [7, 47]. The interactive process of posing and solving riddles stimulates logical reasoning and cognitive activation, thereby underscoring their pedagogical and intellectual significance. Scholars highlight their informational, illustrative, didactic, and cognitive functions in fostering analytical thinking skills [1, 33].

Substantial scholarly attention has been devoted to riddle studies. In Uzbek folklore research, Zulfiya Husainova was among the first to systematically collect and publish riddle materials, followed by analytical investigations into their typology and historical genesis [5, 15]. Her research encompassed the examination of thousands of texts, leading to a comprehensive characterization of their structural features, classification, and origins [5, 22].

English riddles have likewise attracted academic scrutiny. Archer Taylor (1951), along with W. Pepicello and T. Green (1984), proposed influential structural and classificatory frameworks for analyzing riddle composition [4, 30]. Contemporary scholarship continues to explore their linguistic, structural, and cultural dimensions, reinforcing the interdisciplinary relevance of riddle studies [10, 66].

Methodology. The study employs comparative, descriptive, componential, distributive, and linguistic analysis methods. First, riddles were classified according to the type of answer (solution). Based on semantic criteria, seven major categories were identified:

1. Human beings (including body parts, kinship, professions)
2. Animals
3. Plants (including fruits and vegetables)
4. Natural phenomena or elements
5. Household objects and artificial artifacts
6. Abstract concepts (time, emotions, states)
7. Letters or words (linguistic riddles)

This classification is primarily grounded in thematic principles proposed in riddle studies, particularly those articulated by Archer Taylor [10, 37; 4, 45] and subsequent scholars. It should be noted that some scholars have classified riddles according to other

criteria, such as their structural form (e.g., simple or complex sentences, dialogic format, etc.) and their pragmatic function (for instance, riddles presented as a problem to be solved or those formulated in an imperative tone) [6, 81]. However, in the present article, the primary focus is placed on analyzing riddles according to the nature of their answers—that is, the type of object or phenomenon to be identified in the riddle.

Analysis and Results

The analyzed riddles were classified according to the type of their answers within the seven principal categories outlined above. Below, these categories and their characteristic features are explained and illustrated with examples.

1. Riddles with Human and Body-Related Answers: This category includes riddles whose solutions refer directly to a human being or to aspects associated with a person, such as body parts, kinship relations, profession,

or personal state. For example, the Uzbek riddle: “Yuzta askar, bitta qo‘mondon, boshi yo‘q bir lashkar” (One hundred soldiers, one commander, an army without a head.) The hidden answer is the head; the “one hundred soldiers” metaphorically refer to the hair on the head.

An English example states: Brothers and sisters have I none, but that man’s father is my father’s son.” (Answer: the son — the riddle describes the speaker’s son.)

As illustrated in these examples, the riddle text indirectly describes a human being or a body part through metaphorical representation, prompting the listener to infer the solution. Riddles concerning humans frequently rely on kinship relations (such as father–son or siblings) or figurative depictions of body parts. This category also encompasses concepts indirectly related to a person, such as shadow (a person’s shadow) or age (e.g., “It increases with each passing year and never decreases” — answer: age).

2. Riddles with Animal-Related Answers: Riddles whose solutions refer to animals, birds, insects, or other living creatures constitute one of the richest categories in both languages. In such riddles, the animal’s appearance, behavior, or sound is figuratively described and presented in a riddle format.

An Uzbek example reads: “Tepa qalpoq, etagi palak, ich-ichiga oladi talay maxluq.”

(Answer: an eagle flying in the sky — it appears like a cap from above and swoops down to seize its prey.) This riddle metaphorically portrays the eagle’s elevated position and hunting behavior.

An English example states: “What has four legs in the morning, two at noon, and three in the evening?” (Answer: a human being, the famous Sphinx riddle — crawling on all fours in infancy, walking on two legs in adulthood, and using a cane in old age.)

Although the answer in this case is human, the description relies on a zoomorphic comparison (crawling on four legs), presented in stages.

In general, riddles in this category may have answers such as snake, rabbit, lion, bird, fish, or spider. For instance, in English: “I have four legs and a tail, but I’m not an animal. I

eat grass and say ‘moo’ — what am I?” The humorous answer may refer to a toy cow or a cow statue filled with hay. Such playful riddles are common in English tradition.

In contrast, Uzbek animal riddles tend to be more traditional in form and typically rely on direct metaphorical comparison that highlights the characteristic features of the animal itself.

3. Riddles with Plant, Fruit, and Vegetable-Related Answers: This category includes riddles whose solutions refer to fruits, vegetables, trees, flowers, or other plants. In Uzbek folklore, riddles about fruits and vegetables are particularly widespread, often depicting crops and produce that play an important role in traditional agriculture.

For example, the Uzbek riddle: “Bozordan bir oldim – uyga ming keldim.” (I bought one in the market — I came home with a thousand.) The answer is pomegranate. The riddle metaphorically refers to the numerous seeds contained within a single fruit.

English also contains plant-related riddles. For instance: “I have eyes but never see, I have leaves but no trunk.” The answer is potato — it has “eyes” and sprouts leaves, yet it neither sees nor possesses a trunk like a tree.

In this example, the potato is described through the anthropomorphic concept of “eyes.” Similarly, in Uzbek riddles, expressions such as “It has eyes but cannot see” may refer to a potato or even a needle.

Overall, plant-related riddles describe flowers, trees, fruits, and crops either through their physical characteristics or in connection with their significance in human life. Such riddles reflect agricultural culture and the people’s relationship with nature [9, 142].

4. Riddles with Answers Referring to Natural Phenomena and Elements: This category comprises riddles whose solutions denote natural phenomena or elements such as the sun, moon, stars, wind, rain, snow, fire, and water. Riddles of this type are particularly prevalent in Uzbek folklore and are often expressed through mythological imagery.

For example, the Uzbek folk riddle: “Bir otasi, bir onasi, necha yuz ming bolasi.” (One father, one mother, hundreds of thousands of children.) The answer is the sky — where the Sun (father), the Moon (mother), and the stars (children) are metaphorically represented as a family.

This riddle reflects ancient cosmological perceptions in which celestial bodies were interpreted in familial terms, thus revealing elements of early mythological worldview [6, 69].

In English tradition, riddles about natural phenomena frequently display poetic imagery. For instance: “They come out at night without being called, and are lost in the day without being stolen.” The answer is stars. Here, the disappearance of stars during the daytime is metaphorically compared to something being “lost” rather than stolen.

Another English example reads: “It flies without wings and crashes without sound.” The answer is snow — it falls silently and appears to “fly” without wings.

Similarly, Uzbek riddles about snow include poetic expressions such as:

“A white carpet covers the world.”

Structurally, riddles concerning natural phenomena often exhibit rhythmic and poetic qualities, employing hyperbole and personification as prominent stylistic devices.

5. Riddles about Household Items and Artificial Objects: This category includes riddles whose answers refer to man-made objects such as household items, tools, clothing, means of transport, and musical instruments.

In Uzbek folklore, riddles concerning household objects are particularly numerous. For example: “O’g’zi bor – tili yo’q, mo’ri bor – tutuni yo’q, o’tin yutib, olov ‘ichadi’.” (It has a mouth but no tongue, a chimney but no smoke; it swallows wood and drinks fire.) The answer is a stove. The riddle figuratively describes the structure and function of the stove through personification.

Similarly, in English: “What has teeth but cannot bite?” The answer is a comb — it has “teeth” but cannot bite.

As observed, English riddles frequently anthropomorphize objects by attributing human body parts (such as hand, teeth, or tongue) to inanimate items. Although such figurative constructions also occur in Uzbek, they are relatively less common. For instance: “Tishi bor – og’zi yo’q.” (It has teeth but no mouth.) The answer is a saw — referring to the serrated edge of its blade.

Riddles about household objects in both languages demonstrate the extent to which people observe and creatively reinterpret everyday items. In English, one may also encounter modern riddles concerning technological devices such as computers or mobile phones. Uzbek traditional riddles, by contrast, are especially rich in references to historical domestic objects such as chests, lamps, and agricultural tools, reflecting earlier stages of material culture.

6. Riddles Referring to Abstract Concepts and States: This category includes riddles whose answers denote abstract notions such as time, death, sleep, dream, shadow, silence, happiness, and similar intangible concepts. Riddles of this type are generally characterized by a higher degree of intellectual complexity.

For example, the English riddle: “What can travel around the world while staying in a corner?” The answer is a postage stamp — it remains in the corner of an envelope yet metaphorically “travels” around the world. Although the solution is a physical object, the concept of travel is expressed indirectly.

Another English example reads: “What gets wetter the more it dries?”

The answer is a towel — it becomes wet while drying something else. This riddle illustrates a paradoxical situation.

In Uzbek, riddles with abstract meanings include: “Hamma ko’radi, hech kim tutolmaydi.” (Everyone sees it, but no one can catch it.) The answer is a dream — experienced visually during sleep but impossible to grasp physically.

Another example states: “O’zi yengil, lekin dunyoda undan og’ir narsa yo’q.”

(It is light in itself, yet nothing in the world is heavier than it.) The answer is a troubled conscience, where “heaviness” is understood metaphorically.

In such riddles, the hidden answer is not a tangible object but rather a psychological or abstract concept. To convey these notions, riddle-makers frequently employ metaphor and contrast (antithesis). For instance, a well-known English riddle about silence states: "Say its name and it disappears." The answer is silence.

Thus, riddles concerning abstract concepts require logical reasoning and often carry philosophical implications.

7. Letter- and Word-Based (Linguistic) Riddles:

In English, wordplay and letter-based riddles constitute a well-developed subgenre within the riddle tradition. The answers to such riddles may consist of a single letter, syllable, or word.

For example, a popular English riddle among children asks: "What letter of the alphabet is an insect?" The answer is the letter "B", whose pronunciation ("bee") coincides with the word for the insect.

Another example states: "What word is spelled wrong in every dictionary?"

The answer is "wrong", since the word itself means "incorrect," creating a semantic play on meaning.

In traditional Uzbek folklore, riddles involving individual letters or wordplay are less common. However, they may appear in modern sources or school-level riddle collections. For instance: "What stands between the sky and the earth?" The answer is the conjunction "and" (or in Uzbek, "bilan"), as it literally appears between the words "sky" and "earth." Such riddles encourage reflection on linguistic form rather than external reality.

Letter-based riddles are not traditionally characteristic of Uzbek folklore, largely because Uzbek employs a phonetic writing system, which limits opportunities for homophonic or orthographic wordplay. By contrast, linguistic riddles are more extensively developed in English, owing to the abundance of homonyms and homophones within the language. Uzbek riddles tend instead to rely more heavily on metaphorical imagery and semantic representation, as phonetic play is relatively limited in the language system [14, 128].

General Comparative Observations

The overall findings based on the above classification indicate that English and Uzbek riddles demonstrate substantial similarity in terms of answer themes. In both languages, the most frequently occurring answer types include household objects, plants and fruits, animals, and natural phenomena. For example, answers such as fire, water, sun, moon, stars, as well as snake, bird, horse, and cow, commonly appear in riddles of both traditions. This is because such entities are familiar and significant in the daily lives of both peoples, making them convenient subjects for riddle creation.

Conversely, answers specific to only one linguistic or cultural environment are less frequent. For instance, while camels appear in Uzbek riddles, they are nearly absent from English ones, as camels are not typical animals in European cultural contexts. Similarly,

animals such as penguins or hippopotamuses may appear in English riddles but are absent from traditional Uzbek folklore.

Additionally, Uzbek riddles may refer to regionally significant fruits such as melons or watermelons (e.g., “It has no teeth, yet it cuts; it has no tail, yet it shakes” — answer: watermelon), whereas such references are rare in English riddles. Thus, each language’s riddle tradition is enriched by its culturally specific realia.

Comparative analysis further reveals both striking similarities and noteworthy differences. Fundamentally, the essence of the riddle genre remains identical in both languages: an object or phenomenon is not directly named but is indirectly represented through figurative description, requiring logical inference by the solver. This characteristic is universal, and as Archer Taylor observed, the art of riddling exists across cultures and exhibits structural similarities worldwide [11, 15].

In summarizing these observations, the classification of English and Uzbek riddles according to answer type allows us to perceive simultaneously the universality and the national specificity of the genre. On the one hand, the presence of shared themes and techniques demonstrates the common cognitive foundations of humanity. On the other hand, subtle distinctions within riddles clearly reflect the influence of linguistic structure and cultural context.

For example, lexical items such as “eye,” “hand,” “tooth,” and “tongue” are metaphorically employed in riddles of both languages (e.g., the eye of a needle, the leg of a table, the hands of a clock). This reflects a universal psychological tendency to conceptualize the world through reference to the human body [7, 78]. At the same time, differences in how such words function in Uzbek and English derive from variations in their respective lexical-semantic systems.

CONCLUSION

The answer-based classification of English and Uzbek riddles has revealed both convergent and divergent tendencies in their structural organization and thematic content. The seven semantic categories identified in this study — human beings, animals, plants, natural phenomena, objects, abstract notions, and letter- or word-oriented riddles — are represented, to varying extents, in both linguistic traditions. Notably, riddles centered on objects, animals, plants, and natural phenomena occupy a prominent position in English and Uzbek folklore alike. This distribution suggests that elements fundamental to everyday human experience — such as the natural environment, sources of sustenance, and domesticated or wild animals — provide the most accessible and productive material for riddle formation. Folk authors characteristically reinterpret familiar entities through unconventional perspectives in order to stimulate curiosity and intellectual reflection.

At the same time, typological distinctions are evident, reflecting differences in linguistic structure and cultural context. English riddles demonstrate a stronger tendency toward lexical and phonetic play, including homonymy, ambiguity, and orthographic humor. In contrast, Uzbek riddles predominantly employ figurative imagery grounded in

observable reality. These variations are closely associated with the structural features of the respective languages and with established traditions of oral performance. Historically, Uzbek riddles have been composed and transmitted in rhythmic and poetic forms, prioritizing semantic coherence and metrical harmony over phonetic wordplay [5, 6]. English riddles, conversely, often evolved within dialogic and humorous frameworks, functioning as interactive question-and-answer exchanges in popular culture [4, 60]. As a result, humorous brainteasers remain widespread in English-language publications and digital media, whereas in Uzbek tradition, despite the inclusion of contemporary themes in modern compilations, classical metaphorical and rhythmically structured riddles continue to predominate [6, 84].

In the context of globalization, the riddle genre not only persists but retains substantial functional relevance. Riddles serve as an effective pedagogical instrument in language education and as a medium for exploring both cultural specificity and universal cognitive patterns. The findings of this research indicate that comparative analysis of English and Uzbek riddles produces insights that extend beyond philology to encompass broader linguocultural interpretation. Each riddle's solution may be viewed as a micro-representation of a community's linguistic heritage and conceptual worldview. Accordingly, further investigation of riddles remains a productive and perspective-rich direction within folklore studies, applied linguistics, translation studies, and intercultural communication research.

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