

I HAVE A CERTAIN CHILD...RIDDLES IN CHUMBURUNG

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Riddles are an understudied feature of language from a linguistic point of view, probably because they are deemed to be only for children. This study of riddles in the Chumburung language of Ghana looks first at their structure, then at the cultural relevance of many of them. Riddles are often told following one another grouped together by similarity. This study then suggests that metonymy (or sustained metaphor) is a general feature of such groups. The possible functions of riddles are mentioned. In conclusion, the study suggests some ways in which riddles in the mother tongue could be used in education without diminishing their fun.

Les énigmes constituent un champ de recherche peu étudié en linguistique, probablement du fait qu'on les considère comme un domaine de prédilection réservé aux enfants. Dans cette étude sur les énigmes en chumburung, une langue du Ghana, l'auteur retrace dans un premier temps leur structure, ensuite la pertinence culturelle de beaucoup d'entr'eux et mentionne en outre leurs fonctions éventuelles. Les énigmes se racontent souvent l'un après l'autre en étant regroupés selon leur similitude. Cette étude suggère qu'une caractéristique saillante de tels regroupements est la métonymie (ou une métaphore soutenue). Pour conclure, l'étude suggère des pistes d'utilisation des énigmes issus des langues maternelles dans l'enseignement sans pour autant diminuer leur côté ludique.

0. INTRODUCTION: RIDDLES ACROSS SPACE AND TIME

“The business of naming began with the Creation; the business of deceiving began soon after.” So begins Kevin Crossley-Holland in his introduction to his translation of *The Exeter Book Riddles* (1979), a collection made in about 800 AD in the Anglo-Saxon language, the ancestor of modern English.² Here is number 47 in Crossley-Holland's translation. [Answers are in the footnotes.]

A moth devoured words. When I heard
of that wonder it struck me as a strange event
that a worm should swallow the song of some man,
a thief gorge in the darkness on some great man's
speech of distinction. The thievish stranger
was not a whit wiser for swallowing words.³

Did you manage to work it out? Probably not. It may be from another culture, or it may be that you'd just never heard it, or anything like it, before, so had no clue as to how to interpret it. You were expecting to be deceived, but since you knew it was a riddle, you might either have laughed or groaned at the answer. In fact people are still arguing about the answer to some of these Exeter Book Riddles!

Examples of riddles are recorded much earlier. One example is in the Biblical book, Judges 14.5-18, and dates from around 1400 BC. Samson asks his wedding companions to solve this:-

Out of the eater, something to eat;
out of the strong, something sweet.⁴

¹ Sadly the author died on 7th July this year. A tribute to her can be found on Page 119.

² Exeter is a cathedral town in England, and it was Bishop Leofric who left his book to the Cathedral library.

³ A bookworm, that is a worm that chews books. “The meaning is metaphoric - the riddle expressing skepticism of an oral culture in the face of a literacy revolution.” (Wikipedia, Riddles)

⁴ Samson had seen a dead lion with a honeycomb in its carcass.

Samson knew that his companions would not be able to solve it. However, his bride inveigled the answer out of him, and then told them. When they gave him the answer, he responded again with a metaphoric saying.

Another old riddle comes from Greek mythology, told by the playwright Sophocles (496-406 BC). King Oedipus's town was plagued by the Sphinx, a creature with a woman's head and breasts, a lion's body, and a snake's tail, who devoured people who tried to pass unless they could solve this:-

What is it that has one voice and yet
becomes four-footed and two-footed and three-footed?⁵

When Oedipus solved the riddle correctly, the Sphinx killed herself. But again, she had not expected that anyone could answer it.

Both the Samson and the Sphinx riddles are what Taylor (1951/1977) called neck-riddles, that is your neck or life depends on the answer. Taylor's collection of riddles in English is magnificent and seminal. According to Hamnet (1968), "Archer Taylor ... began the painstaking task of ... codifying and pigeonholing with a dexterity that typified an age when genius was regarded, in Jane Ellice Hopkins's immortal phrase, as being 'an infinite capacity for detail'." Here is no. 21 of Taylor's African riddles. Unfortunately we only have it in English, and hence do not know whether it is Yoruba, Bantu or Afrikaans.

They tell him to sit beside the fire, he sits beside the fire;
they tell him to sit in the sun, he sits in the sun;
they tell him to wash, he says, 'Death comes'.⁶

To come up to date, a very common riddle in English is:

What is black and white and red all over?⁷

This is based on a pun: two words with the same sound but different spellings - homophony. Such riddles are sometimes called conundrums (or language riddles) as opposed to what Taylor called "true riddles", although myself I feel that all riddles are conundrums, especially if you can't work them out! Dienhart (1999) analyses English puns along a cline from polysemy, through homonymy, homophony, paronymy and onto what he laughingly calls hahaphony!

Africa too has many riddles, but unfortunately, in the past they were often just listed with no analysis. Hamnet (1968) even says that Nakene (1943) "regards the decline in the popularity of riddling (in his culture) as a cause of delinquency among young people"! Here are a few Sotho riddles from Hamnet's paper.

A man hunting animals who leaves those which he killed behind
and comes back with the living ones.⁸

They come and they go.⁹

⁵ Man, he crawls on four limbs when a baby. then walks on two legs, and finally needs a walking stick.

⁶ Salt

⁷ A newspaper. You hear "red" but it is pronounced the same as in "Yesterday I read a newspaper". This emphasises that riddles are normally oral expressions.

⁸ Someone killing lice with his finger nails. Bryant (1990) quotes a similar riddle, which the classical Greek poet Homer (about 700BC) is reputed to have been so chagrined not to be able to answer that he died!

⁹ Eyelids.

The white chief's young men who stand in a line.¹⁰

From these it can be seen that some riddles relate to animals, some to body parts, and some to cultural or relatively modern objects.

In this paper, I will explore the context of telling Chumburung riddles, followed by an analysis of their structures. I will look at some that are hard for outsiders to understand because of their cultural details. The answers will then be addressed, and reference made to the metaphoric nature of riddles. Groups of riddles suggest that not only is each a metaphor, but groups are metonymic in that the metaphors they employ work together to say something more than the individual metaphors do. I will then look at some of the suggested functions for riddles. Finally I will mention some ways in which Chumburung riddles could be used in education.

1. THE CHUMBURUNG CORPUS OF RIDDLES

1.1 COLLECTING THE CORPUS

Most of the 94 riddles we collected were obtained in our early years of language learning among the Chumburung people of Ghana.¹¹ My husband and I were doing Bible translation and literacy work, and riddles were one of the forms of folklore that people encouraged us to listen to and understand. Story-telling sessions were held in the evening time, when the meal was over. At that time, from 1976-1982, there was no electricity in the area at all - or television. People would take it in turn to tell stories, and if the flow dried up, someone would suggest riddles.¹² Many riddles were collected and published in the mother-tongue in *Dɔŋkɔ* and others (1981, revised 1987).

1.2. OPENING A RIDDLING SESSION

As Dienhart (1999) says, "In Africa, the telling of riddles often follows a very definite pattern with the riddler announcing his intention to tell a riddle and the riddlee announcing his willingness to listen to it." The formula to open a Chumburung riddling session is to say "**Mboreŋ**?" to which we all reply "**Aŋ e yɔ**" which means "Let's go!" The etymology of the opening word is debatable. People say it comes from the Akan:Asante language which is a dominant one in Ghana. But the morphemes are **m**, a plural or mass noun prefix, plus **bɔ** which means "to be", plus **leŋ** which means "hard or difficult". (The change from **l** to **r** is consistent with phonological rules.) So it could mean "some difficult things", which is very close to "riddle".

After this opening exchange, the speaker will give a riddle and the listeners will try to answer it. He or she will then give another, and on and on, until someone butts in with their own to be solved. Often riddles come in groups, the introductory frame being similar. People respond, but they do so more by knowing the answer than by working out the logic.

¹⁰ Telegraph poles.

¹¹ Chumburung is spoken in Northern and Volta Regions of Ghana by about 65,000 people or more. There is vowel harmony in Chumburung, with the following vowel phonemes in the +ATR set, **i**, **e**, **o**, **u**; and the following in the -ATR set, **ɛ** (= **ɪ**), **ɛ**, **ɔ**, **ɔ** (= **ʊ**). The vowel /**a**/ is in both sets. The letter **ŋ** is used for phonetic [ŋ] and /**ny**/ for the palatal nasal. The digraphs /**ky**/ and /**gy**/ are pronounced like English /**ch**/ and /**j**/ respectively.

¹² I have not heard or heard of riddles being used in rituals in Chumburung as suggested by Bryant (1990) who referred to Sir James Frazer and his famous book, *The Golden Bough*.

2. THE STRUCTURE OF CHUMBURUNG RIDDLES

I will now investigate the structure of a Chumburung riddle, under the headings of the head, the body and the tail. This rather neatly matches the image of the Sphinx, and the sting is in the tail!

2.1 THE HEAD

Some Chumburung riddles start with an introductory clause or frame which tells you it is a riddle which is coming, although not all do this. This frame introduces a mini-story, and acts not only like the introductory frame of a folk-story (which is “My story goes...”), but incorporates the next sentence of such a story which is typically of the form “There was once a woman who...”

I will call this frame of a riddle the head. There is no consistent head, but frequently riddles make believe the speaker has relatives who are the participants in the mini-story, for example:

- (1) **N se a kowe ane-ɔ, waagya koŋko kpeŋ si ne ane a buŋ.**
My father PST bear us-TEMP, cloth one only on which we PST wear.
When our father bore us, we had only one cloth between us.¹³
- (2) **N de mo keegyɪ ko. Mo ya suŋ mɔ, ɔ maa yɔ,**
I have.STAT my child certain. I CONDIT send him, he FUT.NEG go,
amɔ mo a da mɔ kuŋu-ro.
unless I PST beat him head-on.
I have a certain child. If I send him (on a message), he won't go unless I hit him on the head first.¹⁴
- (3) **N na a kowe agyi asa. ɔbɛɛ koŋko e moŋ bo-ro,**
My mother PST bear children three. Person one CONDIT NEG be.there,
bo maa taare a bo sorɔ tɔsorɔ.
they FUT.NEG able that they carry.SUBJ headload.
My mother had three children. If one is not there, they can't carry a headload.¹⁵

Other heads make believe that the speaker was a participant in the mini-story, for example:-

- (4) **Mo a yɔ mo saa-ana aye** I went to my father-in-law's house
(5) **ŋ yere mfee** I stand here
(6) **Mo a yɔ maŋ ko** I went to a certain town

Heads such as “My mother had a girl” and “My father had a horse” occur frequently in Taylor's book, but we need to bear in mind that although he quotes only riddles in English, many of his examples are from the Caribbean, where the English is slightly different. For example, number 662, from the Antilles,

My mother have a girl, each baby she make is twins.¹⁶

¹³ **Abwaye** ‘maize.’

¹⁴ **Kadangyi** ‘a nail.’

¹⁵ **Kaswee** ‘a fireplace’ (which comprises three stones to support a cooking pot).

¹⁶ Plum (a fruit from a tree)

Having dealt with the head, let's look at the body.

2.2 THE BODY

The body is the main part of the riddle. A fictitious person or object is given, and the implication is that it is a metaphor for a different person or object which is the answer. Riddles according to Hamnet (1968: 6) “embody a metaphor, just as any metaphor can be reconstructed as a riddle (c.f. Aristotle, *Rhetoric* 3.2).”

Chimombo (1987) cites several riddles from Malawi where there is no introductory phrase but a personal name is employed within the body, such as “Miss Lucy is noisy”, with the answer, “an aeroplane”. This variety has not been recorded in Chumburung.

Just a couple of Chumburung riddles use the pronoun “I” within the body where there is no head. The speaker becomes the main character in the mini-story. For example:-

- (7) **Mᵒ ē kyaa na bᵒ maa laᵅ akᵒyē.**
 I PRS dance and they PRS.NEG beat drum.
 I dance but they are not drumming.¹⁷

This riddle is in the form of two clauses. The more normal type would be head + simple clause, such as:-

- (8) **ᵒ yere mfee ᵅ kee mᵒ bawᵒrē kebᵒ.**
 I stand.STAT here I see.STAT my lover neck.
 I'm standing here looking at my lover's neck.¹⁸

- (9) **N se de mᵒ kraᵅ kᵒ. Ma taare a m bᵒᵒ.**
 My father has.STAT his mat certain I.PRS.NEG able that I roll.up.SUBJ
 My father has a certain mat. I can't roll it up.¹⁹

According to Dienhart (1999), “The riddle is often given in a question form, particularly today in the English-speaking world. More specifically, many ‘modern’ English riddles take the form of a *wh*-question (that is, a question introduced by such items as *why*, *when*, *where*, *what*, *how*).” Very few Chumburung riddles are actually phrased as questions. Here is one that does. In this case, it is the listener who is the participant in the mini-story.

- (10) **Fᵒ ē yere gyerᵅ fᵒ maa sᵒwē mᵒ aaa?**
 You FOC.STAT stand banyan-tree you PRS.NEG carry-on-head me QU
 How come you are standing under a banyan tree but not carrying me on your head?²⁰

The following examples have no head and are simple statements of a completed event or state for the listener to guess.

¹⁷ **ᵒᵒᵒᵒᵒ** ‘a farmer’

¹⁸ **Ebᵒᵒᵒᵒᵒ** ‘smoke’

¹⁹ **Kpa** ‘path or road’

²⁰ **Kibunogyi** ‘doorway’

- (11) **Nan̄kəŋ nan̄kəŋ a dēe kēbēe.** (12) **Kidembrawee dəŋ Lee se.**
 Twisted twisted PST climb hill Shea-butter lies.STAT Volta.Lake on
 A very twisted thing has climbed a Shea-butter lies on the Volta Lake.²²
 hill.²¹

Shorter headless riddles may comprise just a nominal phrase.

- (13) **Maŋ kēmaa-ro asepeŋ.** (14) **Sere mane na mō daakōre.**
 Town every-in yam.mounds Solomon and his loincloth
 Yam-mounds in every town.²³ Solomon and his loincloth.²⁴

Note that either the subject or the object (even if only implicit) of the body of the riddle is an item which is going to be compared with something else, but it will only have a few features of it. The yam-mounds, the loincloth, the twisted thing, the shea-butter and the mat are almost false clues - it's the rest of the riddle that might give you the answer. As Taylor says, "A man is compared to a tree or a horse; and a road, a ladder, a pumpkin vine, the seasons, or a hundred other objects are called a man." Hammet says concerning the Samson riddle that "The clues provided in the descriptive element(s) seldom furnish enough evidence for the answer to be definitely gathered from them."

By far the most common type in Chumburung state some kind of anomalous situation within the body.

- (15) **N se a dēe mō kraŋa ko. Fə ya dēere, fə moŋ kee**
 My father PST climb his horse certain. You CONDIT look, you STAT.NEG see
mō ayaa.

its legs

My father rides a certain horse. If you look at it, you will not see its legs.²⁵

There is also a type in Chumburung in which the body contains an ideophone (ID) or possibly nonsense words, and the answer is more complex than a simple phrase, such as:-

- (16) **Paasee, paasee yeerrrr.**²⁶ (17) **Ke taa piŋpiŋ, ke taa yeekō.**
 It take.SUBJ ID, it take. SUBJ ID.²⁷

I presume that the ideophones in (16) represent the noise of the animal chewing something. In (17) the ideophones are used in a normal sentence, but I have not seen

²¹ **Katōrōrō** 'a piece of the burnt grass etc', which are blown upwards after burning the bush.

²² **Akatō na akposan̄kēe** 'the eyes and the sleepy dust in the corners'. Although local people insist that **Lee** was the name of the River Volta before the Lake was flooded, it looks to me as if it is just a transliteration of 'Lake'. However this is the only example in Chumburung where the name of a town or other geographical feature seems to have been anglicised. This is in contrast to what Chimombo (1987) states for Malawi.

²³ **Agyeran̄ta** 'graves'

²⁴ **Basa na fe** 'needle and thread'

²⁵ **Koree** 'canoe'

²⁶ **Gyono maa wō dubwaye, mō-ō mō abəŋ-nō a fwiiri** 'A dog doesn't use a chewing stick, and yet its teeth are white.'

²⁷ **Kelan̄tan̄ na nkyu** 'a basket of water'

these particular ideophones used elsewhere in the language. I presume that **piŋpiŋ** means ‘something’ and **yɛɛkɔɔ** means ‘nothing’.

I have now dealt with the structure of the head and the body, that is the riddle itself. But what of the answer, the tail?

2.3 THE TAIL

Taylor (1951) divides his riddles into 11 categories, including Living Creatures, Several Animals, a Person, Plants, Things, Enumeration of Comparisons (such as Big, Round), Enumeration in Terms of Color, and Enumeration of Acts (such as Having, Motion, Hearing). He must have chosen to categorise the riddles and not the answers because, with his wide coverage, he often found more than one answer. He merely alphabetises, but does not categorise, his answers. However he does say, “In European riddling, ... the themes (he means the answers) of riddles are found almost exclusively in the vicinity of the farmer’s house.” Further, they are often taken from the woman’s world, that is household objects.

The Lozi riddles of Zambia are divided by Gowlett (1971) according to the answers into Natural Phenomenon; Animals and anything pertaining to them; Plant-life, Foods etc.; People; The Human Body and its attributes; and Manufactured Objects.

The answers to the Chumburung riddles I have looked at so far have mostly been well known objects within the culture, ranging from maize to needle and thread. In fact although the heads of Chumburung riddles use family relatives, only two of the answers are People. The rest of the answers I have categorised as Animals, Plants, Body parts and functions, Objects, and Troubles. This resembles Gowlett’s kind of categories rather than Taylor’s exhaustive list, but I must point out that none of these is an ethno-category, but are made by the analyst.

The Animal category in Chumburung has 18 examples, and is mostly made up of small animals, various kinds of ant, a dog (appears twice), a bird, a fish, an earthworm and a snake.

The Plants, with 17 examples, include pawpaws, spear grass, a thorn tree, yam tendrils, and a cola-nut.

The Objects, with 37 examples, range from lorry, canoe and road, to include a nail, a drum, a clothes’ calabash, trousers, a sandal, water (in several), a needle and thread, and one’s shadow.

The Body parts and functions category, with 13 examples, falls into two parts, which for ease I will call clean and unclean! The clean ones (9 examples) include the eye (twice), hair and head, the thumb, and a scar. The unclean ones (6 examples) deal with the private parts, urine and faeces. Apart from one, these were not told to me, but added by local people when the book went into reprint. Hamnet cites Leach (1964a) and Douglas (1966) that taboos serve the function of demarcating the boundaries between the conceptual categories of a classificatory system. He says Leach says “It has been suggested that bodily excretions are objects of taboo at least partly because they ...[are] ambiguous in so far as they are part of a person’s body and at the same time separate from him.” Myself, judging from the one such Chumburung riddle I heard, it was told by a teenager with just the same embarrassed smirk as would be given if told by an English child!²⁸

²⁸ This same riddle occurs in Gowlett’s list of Lozi riddles from Zambia!

Bryant (1990), writing of English riddles throughout the ages, says, “Owing to the natural propensity of the riddle form to be used to depict harmless objects in an apparently obscene way, riddles have also been used by many other authors (a surprising number of them from clerical backgrounds!) to titillate, shock and scandalise those who hear them.” Whole collections of bawdy riddles were still flourishing in the 1800s. I have not found this form where it is the body of the riddle that is obscene, in Chumburung. Only those where the answers are mildly offensive.

In a sense, one of the People category could also fit here, the riddle being about incest. This was also told me as a proverb (Proverb 73 in Demuyakor (2000)).²⁹

- (18) **Leṅkreṅ kaase nkyu e bḡ daṅ kaṅ ḡkema,**
 Thorn.tree under water CONDIT possess niceness mouth how.much,
ḡ maa nya mmo a ḡ nuu.
 you FUT.NEG. get any that you.SUBJ drink.

No matter how sweet the water under a thorn-tree, you will not get any to drink.³⁰

The other answer in this category of People is a farmer.

And the last category I have called Troubles which number 7. It includes hunger and suffering, as well as anger, intoxication and death.

If the hearers do not already know the answer, when they hear it, they will go through the process of working it out. This results in the laugh or the groan. “Seeing the point” is important both to the listener and to the teller. Hamnet quotes Koestler, “The hearer of a joke will not be amused if he is a purely passive listener, but only if he repeats intellectually the process by which the joke is made.” Some riddles however come with a longer answer than just the phrase needed. In some cases that I have recorded, this might have been just for my benefit, but in some, especially the ones with ideophones, it must be the normal answer. One example is:-

- (19) **M paa nkyu m paa nkyu nkyu beya.**
 I hit.STAT water I hit.STAT water water down.
 I keep hitting the water.³¹

So now I have looked at the head, the body and the tail of the riddle. Before I move on to a deeper insight into the answer, let’s just ask, How do riddles compare with proverbs?

2.4 RIDDLES AND PROVERBS COMPARED

Hamnet says that “Some Sotho riddles can be easily transposed into proverbs. Thus, ‘a tree on which all birds sit? - A chief’ could with complete conformity to both the form and the content of Sotho proverbs become ‘a chief is a tree on which all birds sit.’ ”

Strangely enough the only Chumburung riddle, apart from the thorn tree one, that seems to parallel a non-riddle form is:-

- (20) A big tree has fallen ID in the place for fetching water.

²⁹ For further information on Chumburung proverbs see Hansford (2003).

³⁰ **ḡ pekyee** ‘your sister’

³¹ **Kakingyi. ḡ i ḡe kakingyi, ḡ i ḡe nkyu pwee a ḡ dee ḡe kakingyi.** ‘A fish. If you cut a fish, you cut water before you cut the fish.’

The answer is also “a chief”, because “a big tree has fallen” is the euphemistic way in which the death of a chief is announced. This meaning is also known in Akan:Asante.

Thus, whilst it may be true that some riddles can be converted into proverbs, this does not often occur in Chumburung, and in fact proverbs have far more deep meaning than most riddles. The ability to quote a proverb in conversation is much harder, because it requires a knowledge of many human situations from which general principles can be deduced. Chumburung proverbs are not told in sequence, but one may occur at the end of a story. Riddles however are often told within a story-telling session, and being easier to remember than a full story would be, are often given by the children present who are thus able to participate more fully.

3. THE CULTURAL RELEVANCE OF THE ANSWER

It will be seen that some riddles have almost none of what I will call *elaboration*. Solomon and his loincloth are two objects which are equated with the two objects, needle and thread. Some have more elaboration such as (21), because whilst the teeth are inside the mouth, it is not strictly necessary to add that they are white, although it is one further feature of teeth, and is used in riddles from elsewhere.

(21) White chickens in a hen-house.

As I said earlier, sometimes these extras can be false clues. On the other hand,

(22) I went to my in-laws’ house, and they gave me a calabash to go to the river
(to get water). I couldn’t find its mouth.”

compares a spherical calabash to an egg by shape, and contrasts them in that the egg has no opening. But the addition of the idea of taking it to the river elaborates the mini-story, and is not only more picturesque but more culturally specific. Taylor indicates that the egg is often the answer to a riddle worldwide, but seldom what he calls “the means of comparison.”

Example 20 is similarly fascinating.

(23) I don’t have legs, but I walk wearing my Kente-cloth. If I am tired of it,
I take it off and leave it wherever I want.

Kente cloth is an expensive brightly-coloured Ghanaian strip-woven cloth, and is the traditional dress for Ashante men, being worn rather like a Roman toga, and often slipping off the shoulder and needing hoisting. The answer to the riddle is a snake. The comparison of the coloured cloth to the snake’s skin, which it can shed, is a particularly cultural feature. It may be that this riddle is told elsewhere, but here it has been given a local feel.

Some riddles, says Hamnet, need extensive explanation to a foreigner. So one in Sotho, “An ox from my mother’s bridewealth with a lump in its belly - the grindstone and millstone” equates grinding corn (women’s work) with a grindstone (the lump) on top of the millstone (the ox) which seems to be part of the bridewealth! “The ‘point’ of the riddle does not depend upon the (native) respondent’s ability to solve it -... but in the recognition of a subtle, even far-fetched, congruence between items which when ordinarily regarded might seem to be either antithetical or at least disjointed.”

Similarly example (24) needs much interpretation for the outsider.

(24) **Yaa yoo yaa** ³²

³² **Ayii a yaa-ᵛ, kabey e yaa aaa? Daabii.** ‘When trees shed their leaves, does a palm tree? No.’

This is incomprehensible to us. It rests not only on a pun, but a specific dance that the women do, in which they clap loudly and sing songs where the refrain is a variety of such syllables, and they are hence known as **yaa yoo yaa** songs! The word **yaaa** is normally a response to greetings, and **yooo** indicates that you agree with or have understood what someone said, and is often used by the audience during story-telling. (The extra letter in each case indicates a further lengthening of the long vowel.) However **yaa** also means “to shed leaves”. Hence the idea of trees shedding leaves. This would fit Dienhart’s categories of both homophony (**yaa** and **yaaa**, **yoo** and **yooo**) and homonymy (the riddle changing what was an exclamation into a verb). I guess it also fits his hahaphony category! We have found very few puns at all in Chumburung. This could be that they are not used much by Chumburung, or it could be that we have personally missed the connections.

4. RIDDLES AND ANSWERS

4.1 RIDDLES WITH THE SAME ANSWER

Some riddles are somehow better, more apt than others. Take the two riddles (13) (whose Chumburung form has been given in Section 2.2), “Yam-mounds in every town”³³ and (25).

(25) Balls of soap in every town.

The answer is the same. Yam-mounds are piles of earth in which yams are planted so that rainwater can run off and not rot them. Soap is home-made in grey balls of 3 inches diameter. When sold, these will be stacked up in piles. But to me at least, the former is much more apt because both riddle and answer involve earth.

Similarly examples (3) (whose Chumburung form is given in Section 2.1) “My mother gave birth to three children. When one of them is not there, they can’t carry a headload”³⁴ and (26) both have the same answer. For myself, I prefer the former, because the function of the stones is clearly brought out.

(26) We are three children dancing in the arena, and if one goes out, the two who are left are confused.

Another set of examples where the answer is the same, maize, are:-

(27) A woman went to town wearing thirty cloths.

(28) A chief sits in his room while his beard remains outside.”


A similar riddle was (1) (whose Chumburung form was given in 2.1) “When my father bore us, we had only one cloth between us.” Now (27) and (1) are similar in that they deal with the wrapping, although one deals with the whole cob and one with the seeds. (The word for seeds and the word for children are the same in Chumburung, although it is not actually used in the riddles, only inferred.) But (28) is an example of an in/out ambiguity, dealing with what is outside the wrapping. These comparisons could be mapped like this:-

Table 1

woman	/	(many coverings)
-------	---	------------------

³³ Graves

³⁴ Fireplace

chief		corn/maize	(silk outside)
children			(only one covering for all)

All these comparisons with maize are listed by Taylor for English proverbs along with several others.

4.2 SIMILAR RIDDLES, DIFFERENT ANSWERS

Sometimes it is the riddles which are similar and the answers different. Example (29) is all about hearing news from afar, but the answer to (30) deals with the means of hearing. It also has a local flavour in that Gurubi is a Chumburung town, and Accra is the capital of Ghana more than 300 kilometres away.

(29) He hears the news of towns, but doesn't go there.³⁵

(30) I sit in Gurubi, I can't see Accra but I hear the news of Accra.³⁶

4.3 GROUPS OF SIMILAR RIDDLES

Sometimes when riddles are being told, groups of riddles follow in sequence because of some related idea. Dienhart (1999) quotes someone as saying that "intertextuality occurs any time one text suggests or requires reference to some other identifiable text or stretch of discourse, spoken or written." Take (31) and (32) Although they have different creatures as their answers, the linkage is to storey-buildings (Ghanaian English for any building with more than the ground floor).

(31) A man's forehead doesn't have eyes, but he is building a storey-building³⁷

(32) I built a tall storey-building, but when rain came, it all fell down, so in the dry season I will build it again.³⁸

The group of two riddles (5) (whose Chumburung form was given in Section 2.2) "I am standing here looking at my lover's neck."³⁹ and (33) are similar in that their heads are the same. I wonder if there are more in the group that I have never heard!

(33) I am standing here looking at my lover's breasts.⁴⁰

The biggest group however is the one dealing with naughty children! The head is "I/My father have/has a child." The body contains some action that the child will not do, unless something happens first, usually being beaten. Example (2) cited in Section 2.1 says, "I have a certain child. If I sent him (with a message), he won't go, unless I beat him on the head."⁴¹ The following examples are similar.

³⁵ Ear

³⁶ Radio

³⁷ Earthworm

³⁸ Anthill

³⁹ Smoke

⁴⁰ Pawpaws

⁴¹ Nail

- (34) I have a certain child, however if you give him a cloth to store, when you come to get it again, you have to beat him on the stomach before he will give it back to you.⁴²
- (35) I have a certain child. If I send him (with a message) he won't go unless I get up, and then he will follow me.⁴³
- (36) I have a certain naughty child in my house. If you don't beat him, he will not cry. If you beat him, he will cry.⁴⁴
- (37) I have a certain child. If I don't squeeze him, he won't cry.⁴⁵
- (38) I have a certain child. No matter what I do, he won't laugh, unless I step on his stomach first.⁴⁶
- (39) My father has a certain child. If you send him (on a message) he will go, but not come back."⁴⁷

The examples (2) and (34-38) were told in a sequence, but (39) was only added when the book was revised.

4.4 THE RELEVANT ATTRIBUTES OF THE ANSWER

For the above group of riddles, the answers are about things that don't work. These can be mapped thus:-

Table 2

	<i>Answer</i>	<i>Reason</i>
naughty child	nail	(won't go)
	clothes' calabash	(won't open)
	shadow	(won't go away)
	lorry	(will cry if beaten)
	variable pitch drum	(will cry if squeezed)
	trap	(won't laugh)
	stone	(won't come back)

This can be simplified to the metonymy NAUGHTY CHILDREN ARE THINGS THAT DON'T WORK.

It was Lakoff and Johnson in publishing their seminal work, *Metaphors We Live By* (1980), who alerted us to the ubiquity of groups of metaphors, otherwise called metonymys. An example would be sentences such as "If you don't *support* your argument with *solid* fact, the whole thing will *collapse*" as quoted in Palmer (1996: 222). Here an argument is being compared to a building, or as the metonymy AN ARGUMENT IS A BUILDING.⁴⁸ "A connection is established by which the basic structure of buildings is mapped onto the structural features of arguments." The

⁴² Clothes calabash. This is a large sphere, cut in half with the lip of the bottom cut thinner so that the other half can form a lid, which might stick.

⁴³ Shadow

⁴⁴ Lorry

⁴⁵ A variable-pitch drum - it has strings on the outside and you press it under your arm whilst drumming on one end.

⁴⁶ Trap

⁴⁷ Stone

⁴⁸ The most famous of such metonyms is ANGER IS A BOILING LIQUID. (See Hansford (2005:138) discussing this metonym and also many body metaphors in Chumburung.)

source domain is buildings, the target domain is arguments. Palmer goes on to say that all metaphorical mappings are partial. The traditional type of definition of metonymy is “the name of an entity is used in place of the the entity itself.” (Crystal 1994: 250). In riddles we find that only some attributes of the riddle are mapped onto the answer.

In the above group of riddles, the attribute of children that they will not always obey is the only one mapped. Neither their smallness nor their multiplicity are mapped. But in the example of the answer corn/maize I gave earlier, it is the multiplicity which is mapped. Let’s look at “children” rather than “a child”. (Not all of these have been quoted previously.)

Table 3

		<i>Answer</i>	<i>Reason</i>
children	—————	fireplace	3
children	=====	wheels	4
		yam in pot of water	several
		ants	many
		death	some of many
		pepper	many
children	—————	seeds of a certain tree	several seeds
		corn/maize	many seeds
		brush	many bristles
		fingers	several
		barrel	with waist

Here only the multiplicity is mapped. The metonymy is CHILDREN ARE MANY THINGS.

5. SUMMARISING THE MAPPINGS OF RIDDLES AND ANSWERS

Returning to the idea that the Chumburung answers fall into specific categories, (People, Animals, Plants, Objects, Body parts and functions, and Troubles), these could be called target types. I will divide the Chumburung source types into the same categories. This would give us mappings such as animal > plant, or person > body part. This is illustrated by the chart below (in which I have omitted riddles with ideophones in them, leaving a total of 81), where the vertical axis is the source type and the horizontal is the target type.

Table 4

	animal	body part	object	person	plant	trouble
animal	1	3	2	1	2	
body part			1		2	
object	3	4	10	2		1
person	6	3	22	1	7	2
plant	1	4	1	1		
trouble			1			

From this it can be seen that object > object is quite common (10), i.e. one object is compared to another object. The most frequent mapping however is person > object (22).

It was found earlier that both the ear and a radio were answers to riddles which used a human pronoun. Chumburung also has riddles where the body involves a person with no legs, a farmer, an old woman, pregnant women, elders, a man with no eyes, and a man wearing a loincloth. In traditional grammar this would be described as personification. But one could equally make the metonymy PEOPLE ARE OBJECTS, which would account for why so many riddles in many languages across the globe say, "What am I?"

6. THE FUNCTION OF RIDDLES

So, riddles are answering a question, even if only implied. We need next to try and find out why people even indulge in riddling sessions. What is their function?

6.1 THE PRESENT

I said earlier that Chumburung riddles answer more by knowing the answer than by working out the logic. This is consistent with what Hamnet quotes from Blacking (1961) for Venda of South Africa that "Riddling emerges as a competitive game for young people, in which what matters is the number of riddles a contestant knows. It has no importance as an intellectual or cognitive exercise."

Hamnet quotes Williams that Dusun (Indonesia) riddling "canalises social conflict into harmless channels, teaches rules of social conduct, interprets and explains natural phenomenon, and permits the discussion of some feared and imminent crisis." The unclean riddles that appeared in the revised Chumburung book didn't fit any of the functions suggested by Williams, despite Leach and Douglas's comments.

Others however see riddling as purely an activity of young people, in which adults are only mildly interested and amused. Bryant (1990) queries why there has been a decline in riddling in modern, industrial societies, whilst it flourishes in the Third World. He comes up with the interesting conclusion that interest in riddles "seems to coincide with seasons of intellectual awakening." I'm not certain Bryant would say in 2009 that there has been a decline in riddling in industrial societies, because with the arrival of the internet, one sometimes receives lists of new jokes or riddles from friends. In this case it is ease of communication that is the spur.

Could it be that now that Chumburung has been written, and reading in it is being taught in some schools, and there is a book of riddles in Chumburung for adults, this is a good time for known riddles to flourish and new ones to be formed? Let us look at what could be usefully done within schools.

6.2 THE FUTURE

Ishengoma (2005) makes a good case that riddles serve an educational purpose among the Haya of Tanzania in a variety of ways. He says, "These include stimulating mental capacity, developing critical thinking and expanding children's geographical, historical, botanical and zoological knowledge by exposing them to various referents." His best example is from the fact that riddles in that culture are often performed in a competitive setting, and the winner is notionally given a certain village as a prize. This encourages children to know where the villages or towns are, and what their relative status is. So much for geography. But I see no clue from his examples as to how it could help their historical knowledge. I also feel that the botanical and zoological aspects of a culture are probably best learned in situ, out on the farm, assuming this is a rural setting. Others before have doubted that there is any value at all in riddles, it being considered merely a children's pastime. Ishengoma however believes that Haya

riddles have educational value, and asks “How can riddles be used to support a form of education rooted in African daily experiences?” Unfortunately he gives no further suggestions. He also asks, “How can we integrate riddles... into primary school curricula?” This seems a more practical approach.

6.3 CAN CHUMBURUNG RIDDLES BE USED IN EDUCATION?

So would I want riddles studied in Chumburung schools? Firstly we need to be careful - studying something in school can kill it for plain enjoyment! None of Ishengoma’s arguments seem to apply to Chumburung. However the idea of something competitive would clearly be welcome in a school setting. This could either be done just by having a riddling session orally in the mother-tongue lesson to see who is best, but could also be done in other ways, boys versus girls, one class against another, and so on. This should happen at the stage when children are just beginning to appreciate a joke. In English this would be around the age of 7 or 8, but if the local language is taught, but is not the language of instruction, it could be that it needs to be a year or so later. If the children are able to read the local language well enough, a riddle could be put on the blackboard for the class to ponder. I would suggest that the teacher decide on a fixed number to teach the children. Once they all “know” these, the teacher could put up an answer and get them each to write the riddle! The next step might be for them to read a book with more riddles. This could be a good exercise in cross-referring, so long as the answers are put at the back! Children in turn could suggest some that they hear in other contexts. But it needs to be remembered that riddling is essentially a social activity, one riddle sparking off others.

7. CONCLUSION

In this brief study of Chumburung riddles, I have looked at their structure, from fairly simple noun phrases through to ones with an introductory frame which brings a personal touch to them, with a fuller sentence following. Some riddles might prove difficult for an outsider to understand, either because of cultural differences or the use of ideophones. I have made mappings from riddle to answer which demonstrate again the personal feel to these mini-stories. It has been seen that it is expected that the answer cannot be guessed, and that simply knowing the answer or recognising its aptness is what provides the fun.

Most of the functions of riddles as suggested by others do not seem to apply to Chumburung riddles. However that is no reason for other linguists to ignore them when doing grammatical analysis, or for speakers of that mother-tongue to omit them in books or school programmes in the future.

I leave you with a riddle of my own devising. “My father had certain children. If you asked them a riddle, they didn’t know the answer.”⁴⁹

ABBREVIATIONS

CONDIT	Conditional	PRS	Present
FOC	Focus	PST	Past
FUT	Future	STAT	Stative
ID	Ideophone	SUBJ	Subjunctive
NEG	Negator	TEMP	Temporal Past
QU	Question		

⁴⁹ You didn’t teach them in school!

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