

## The Classification and Structural Analysis of Siswati Riddles

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**ABSTRACT** This paper focuses on the type, structures, content, techniques, and classification of Siswati riddles. The short phrase and concise statement types of riddles are analyzed for broader knowledge on social system of the Swazi nation. The analyses will look at both oppositional and non-oppositional riddles. The techniques of riddling will encompass the figure of speech and specific grammatical analysis of augmentatives and diminutives. The range and scope of the riddles as a form of entertainment, teaching and learning tools are expected to be fully explicated. Their part in the molding of the child's language, intellectual skill development and merging the child into the social and customary patterns of his or her people will be highlighted. The choice of contents is wide-ranging as it touches upon comprehensive topics. Their logical and rational range is unlimited. They are didactic and ethical in quality and determination. Riddles sum up the amassed moral and theoretical experiences of generations. Their powerful wit and striking appropriateness make them valuable like all folkloric aspects. The structural and functional approaches are vital for this discourse.

### INTRODUCTION

Riddles are vital in the manifestation of culture. Every nation keeps to its culture. By ethos and beliefs we mean all the synthetic symbols and language as a tool of communication. They form a significant part of verbal tradition in Siswati culture because they divulge the astuteness and proficiencies of the nation in an entertaining manner.

Riddles deal with every facet of life. They occupy a distinct locus in the community and national life of Emaswati from the prehistoric era to date. They contribute to the advancement of Siswati language. They are a game which contains a grain of truth, in that they are based on something that actually exists, and whose form and shape is immediately recognized as soon as the appropriate answer is given. The use of one's wit and skill, powers of observation and experience in general, may result in a correct identification of the intended object.

There is a close connection between the riddles and proverbs. This is because they are both based and contain to a greater or lesser degree, a grain of truth. Secondly, they both originate from a thorough and accurate observation of man and animals, including the physical world

around them. However, in the proverb, it is usually for a much wider application, significance and universal. In the riddle, the truth is deliberately disguised, only an accurate description thereof being given; while in the proverb, it is stated as such, with no attempt to disguise it. To the game of puzzling and guessing, it is given a humorous twist and angle, while the proverb, being meant for wise counsel, is free from such colouring and thus retains its basic truth in a pure and undisguised form.

Guma (1983: 39) gave this view:

*Riddles are a test of wit, in which one member quizzes another or other by providing them with an obscure yet accurate clue in the form of description of the intended object with a view to getting them to guess and puzzle it out.*

Hadebe (1978: 1) asserted that there are many words that are used to describe riddles. The most common one is the noun, *siphicaphicwano* (riddle) which is formed from the verb *-phica* (which is reduplicated in the form of the verb *-phica*). The verb, *phica* means trick, entrap, and treat craftily as explained by Doke and Vilakazi (1964: 660). Other words for the riddle in Siswati are: *Siphico*, *imfumbe* and *imphicabadala*.

The word, *imfumbe* (hidden or secret) is derived from verb, *fumba*, meaning to hide in this

context. Imphicsbadzala is a compound word which is formed by the verb, *phica* (entrap) and labadzala (aged old people).

Doke (1947: 117) defined a riddle as:

*An indoor game indulged in around the fire at night, describing something in obscure metaphor and calls for the exercise of intellectual skill in answering it.*

Riddles are folkloric aspects that are found all over the world. Riddles are found amongst all Africans and they are divided into content and types or categories.

### RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The concept structural organization denotes the total of relations between the elements of a text. Structuralism is therefore, the model and technique of examining the relations between the parts of the whole. Ferdinand de Saussure, a Swiss linguist, is known as the founder of this model who argued that language is a system of signs and that it had to be approached synchronically and not diachronically. In other words, language has to be seen as a complete system at any given moment and not as representative of a phase in the historical development of language. The structural approach is one of the essential approaches to the study of theory and applied literature.

Hawkes (1977: 17) stated that:

*Structuralism is fundamentally a way of thinking about the world which is predominantly concerned with the perception and description structures. The elements or system of communication become meaningful when they are brought into a relationship with each other. These various structures cannot be studied in isolation.*

Structuralism emphasizes that any single item is not meaningful if it is looked at in isolation. Martin and Nakayama (2013: 60) defined interpretive approach as follows:

An approach to intercultural communication that intend to apprehend and describe human behaviour within specific cultural groups based on the assumptions that

- (1) Human knowledge is subjective
- (2) Human behaviour is innovative rather than determined or easily anticipated.
- (3) Culture is formed and preserved through communication.

The focus of this approach is to comprehend and designate human experience and behaviour. Both structuralism and interpretive approaches are selected to complement each other in this folk discourse.

### Theoretical Analysis on Riddles

During the game of riddling, there are certain actions that are observed. The game occurs during certain times of the day and certain values are attached to the game. The common introduction to riddles is as follows: *Ngiyakuphica, ngikuphica ...* (I riddle you, I riddle...). The adults do take part in teaching the young ones this particular pastime. Old women usually have simple riddles whilst old men often have difficult ones. Riddles are engaged in at certain times specifically when herding cattle, collecting firewood fetching water and sitting around the fire place.

The introductory frame elements are the formula that are used in introducing riddles.

- The introductory frame element is:  
*Ngiyakuphica* (I riddle you)
- Denominative kernel element is:  
*Ngani* (by what?)
- Descriptive kernel element is:  
*Ngetinyawo tenhlanti* (by the feet of the fish)
- Concluding frame element is:  
*Yini leyo?* (what is that?)

The whole frame element would look like this: *Ngiyakuphica. Ngani? Ngetinyawo tenhlanti. Yini leyo?* (I riddle you. About what? By the feet of the fish. What is that?). The Siswati game of riddling constitutes a form of entertainment and a game which is normally played inside a hut. This is a game in which young folks of the village indulge in while sitting around the fire at night, when household chores and other everyday duties have been completed. The time of evening is selected solely on the grounds it is the time during which people can afford to relax and indulge in pastimes. In a riddling exercise the question and the answer are pronounced by the proponent and respondent, thus the riddle revealed as reciprocal genres. Reciprocity of action in this regard is illustrated by the relationship that exists between the proponent and the respondent, which also emits reciprocity in terms of a question and answer relation. One person is normally a representative of a group who offers himself

as a challenger or proponent and another person who is a representative of another group to come out as a respondent.

Another reason why riddles are narrated in the evenings is also because of the taboo that if folktales or riddles are narrated during the day, the narrator would grow horns. This is the socio-cultural belief which has made folktales and riddles to be narrated in the evenings. In practical terms riddles cannot be narrated during the day because of work chores. When people are sitting they spend most of their time enjoying the game. The main functions of the riddles are entertainment and intellectual skills development. By hiding the characteristics of an object, the mind of the young is taught to look for the right answer which is hidden; therefore, the intellect of the young is sharpened.

Riddles serve to teach the young about the environment because in order to get an answer, they have to know the objects around them. Riddles also serve to bring people together as a social unit. Members of a family learn the norms and how to behave towards one another.

### The Structural Features of Siswati Riddles

#### Grammatical Analysis

The riddles begin with the adverbial formative *nga* – (by) for example *ngemfana* from *nga + umfana*. The person who presents the riddles may leave out the adverbial formative altogether. For example:

**Siphico** : *Ngikuphica ngetimbambo telive.*

**Impendvulo** : *Tindlela.*

**(Riddle)** : I riddle you by the ribs of the earth.

**Answer** : They are the paths).

There is a relative construction in most riddles for example:

**Siphico** : *Ngemuntfu wami lesimujuba inhloko sinatse ingati yakhe.*

**Impendvulo** : *Libhodlela.*

**(Riddle)** : By my person whose head we cut out and then drink his blood

**Answer** : It is a bottle).

#### The Phrase Type

There are riddles which are phrase type. The riddles are presented by giving a brief

description which is often a possessive phrase, for example:

**Siphico** : *Tinyawo tenhlanti.*

**Impendvulo** : *Emanti.*

**(Riddle)** : The feet of a fish.

**Answer** : it is water).

#### The Concise Statement Type

The statement of the riddle is expressed in a concise manner so that the meaning of the metaphor of the riddle is of a hidden nature. A metaphor is put in a short expression:

**Siphico** : *Umfundisi wami lodla emacandza.*

**Impendvulo** : *Ligwababa.*

**(Riddle)** : My pastor who eats eggs.

**Answer** : It is a crow).

The comparison of the crow to the pastor is based on the similarity in the white colour of the collar.

#### Non-oppositional Riddles

In non-oppositional riddles the focus is on object and referent. The answer and the topic of the descriptive element are identical, for example:

**Siphico** : *Yini lehlala emantini?*

**Impendvulo** : *Inhlanti.*

**(Riddle)** : What stays in the water?

**Answer** : It is a fish.)

What stays in the water is identical with fish. The topic is, *yini?* and the descriptive elements, *lehlala emantini* (stays in the water) have similarities with the referent which is, *inhlanti* (fish).

#### The Oppositional Riddles

In antithetical contradictive opposition, one of the descriptive elements opposes the other element or elements by words or actions, for example:

Topic	1 <sup>st</sup> element	2 <sup>nd</sup> element
<i>Ngemuntfu wami</i>	<i>lewutsi nawumbita angasabeli</i>	
By my person	who when you call never responds	
3 <sup>rd</sup> element	4 <sup>th</sup> element	5 <sup>th</sup> element
<i>Noma asedvutane</i>	<i>Noma asekudzeni</i>	<i>Kodywa ete kuwe</i>
Whether near	or far	but comes to you

***Imphendvulo : Inja***

**Answer** : A dog

The contradictive opposition riddles results when the second pair or any of the pairs of descriptive elements is a denial of the natural attribute of the first.

Topic	1 <sup>st</sup> element	2 <sup>nd</sup> element
Ngebanfu bami By my people	labakha indlu yeludzaka who build a mud house	ngaphandle kwemanti without water

***Imphendvulo : Umuhlwa nesidvuli***

**Answer** : It is termites and an ant-heap

The causal contradictive opposition is the type of riddle in which the first descriptive element consists of an action performed by an object or upon an object. The second descriptive element and others explicitly deny the expected or natural consequence of the action contained in the first descriptive element.

Topic	1 <sup>st</sup> element	2 <sup>nd</sup> element
Yini What	ledla inyama eats meat	Ingakhuluphali? but it does not get fat?

***Imphendvulo : Ummese***

**Answer** : It a knife

Nkosi (1994: 24) looked at the riddles from the two indigenous expressions, namely; proverbs and idioms.

***Riddles from Proverbs and Idioms***

There is a relationship between riddles and proverbs. They are all traditional verbal expressions. Riddles can lead to proverbs. For example:

**Siphico** : Yini lewela umfula ugcwele?

**Imphendvulo** : Lihlo / liso.

**(Riddle** : What crosses an over flowing river?

**Answer** : It is an eye).

The proverb from this riddle is, *liso liwela umfula ugcwele* (the eye crosses a full river).

***Techniques of Riddling***

The techniques are devised to hide the true referent of the riddles.

***Animate for Inanimate Objects***

The lifeless objects are attributed the characteristics of a living object, for example:

**Siphico** : Ngelihhashi lami lelingeke  
lihambe umsila ungekho.

**Imphendvulo** : Inalithi.  
**(Riddle** : By my horse which cannot  
go if there is no tail

**Answer** : It is a needle).

The needle which is a lifeless object is given the characteristics of a horse which is a living object.

***Inanimate for Animate Object***

**Siphico** : Ngesitimela sami lesimnya-  
ma lesinemasondvo lasigidzi.

**Imphendvulo** : Lishongololo.  
**(Riddle** : My train which is black and  
has a million wheels

**Answer** : It is a millipede).

The millipede is given the characteristics of a lifeless object through a moving object like the train.

***Personification***

Hadebe (1978: 40) personifies the objects, for example:

**Siphico** : Ngendvodza lehamba igcu-  
ma.

**Imphendvulo** : Sicoco.  
**(Riddle** : By a man who walks by jump-  
ing

**Answer** : It a frog).

***Animal Metaphor***

There is a tendency to make lifeless objects the animals, which we can call animal metaphor.

**Siphico** : Inkunzi lendiza emoyeni

**Imphendvulo** : Indiza.  
**(Riddle** : A bull which flies in the air  
**Answer** : It is an aeroplane).

The aeroplane is compared to an animal, the bull.

***Augmentatives***

The objects are made to appear very big whilst in reality they are small.

**Siphico** : Ngamakoti wami lotitsand-  
za kakhulu untjintja kanen-  
gi ngelusuku lunye.

**Imphendvulo** : *Lunwabu.*  
**(Riddle)** : My bride who loves herself very much because she changes her clothes many times a day

**Answer** : It is a chameleon).

The chameleon is compared to a bride who is bigger than the chameleon. The chameleon changes its colour like bride who change her clothes.

#### **Diminutives**

**Siphico** : *Ngesikhukhukati sami lesinemantjwele lamanengi, lesihamba kusihlwa.*

**Imphendvulo** : *Inyanga netinkhanyeti*  
**(Riddle)** : My hen which has many chickens, which moves at night.

**Answer** : It is the moon and the stars).

The moon which is a big object is compared to a small object like the hen and the stars are compared to the chickens.

#### **Different Riddles for the Same Referent**

The sun is compared to a lifeless object the ball:

**Siphico** : *Ngelibhola lami lelitsi uma lichamuka kusuke konkhe endleleni.*

**Imphendvulo** : *Lilanga*  
**(Riddle)** : My ball when it comes everything gets out of the way

**Answer** : It is a sun

The stars are compared to the following objects:

#### **Children**

**Siphico** : *Ngebanfwana bami lekuye kuchamuke uyise babaleke, kodywa bahlale nenina*

**Imphendvulo** : *Tinkhanyeti.*  
**(Riddle)** : My children who run away to the stay with their mother when their father comes.

**Answer** : The stars).

#### **Cows**

**Siphico** : *Ngetinkhomo tami letalahlekwa kodywa lengingakwati kutilandza ngobe tiseveni lekungafinyeleleki kulo.*

**Imphendvulo** : *Tinkhanyeti*  
**(Riddle)** : My lost cattle which I cannot fetch because they are an unreachable country.

**Answer** : The stars).

#### **The Classificatory Features of Siswati Riddles**

##### **Natural Phenomena**

**Siphico** : *Ngelidlelo lami leliluhlata.*

**Imphendvulo** : *Sibhakabhaka.*  
**(Riddle)** : My green field.

**Answer** : It is the sky).

##### **Vegetable World**

**Siphico** : *Ngesambulela sentsaba.*

**Imphendvulo** : *Likhowe.*  
**(Riddle)** : The umbrella of the mountain.

**Answer** : It is a mushroom).

##### **Animal World**

**Siphico** : *Ngemuntfu wami lombetse letimhlophe.*

**Imphendvulo** : *Lilandza / Umtheshane.*  
**(Riddle)** : By my person who is wearing a white dress.

**Answer** : It is a white heron).

##### **Human Being**

**Siphico** : *Luhubhu lwaBhejane.*

**Imphendvulo** : *Umuntfu lonemanga.*  
**(Riddle)** : Luhubhu, son of Bhejane.

**Answer** : A liar).

**Siphico** : *Umuntfu lowela umfula ugcwele.*

**Imphendvulo** : *Liso.*  
**(Riddle)** : A person who crosses a full river.

**Answer** : It is an eye).

##### **Human Life**

This section comprises the following subsections:

##### **Domestic Utensils**

**Siphico** : *Ngemajaha lamatsatfu latfwele sidlokolo.*

- Imphendvulo** : *Libhodvo.*  
**(Riddle)** : Three young men who carry a hand plume.  
**Answer** : it is a pot).

#### Writing and Reading Materials

- Siphico** : *Ngensimu yami letjalwa ngesandla ivunwe ngemehlo.*  
**Imphendvulo** : *Incwadzi.*  
**(Riddle)** : My field which is planted by hand, but is reaped by eyes.  
**Answer** : It is a letter).

#### Long Riddles

Riddles have patterns and characteristics in their structure. There is drama when they are presented. The link between the proponent and respondent is evident. The examples of long riddles:

- Siphico** : *Indvodza lenganyakati noma simo selitulu sinemimoya lenemandla levunguta kakhulu, ima itsi phuhle, umoya uwise imitsi netindlu, konakale lokunengi kepha yona kunjengekutsi libalele nje, ayinyakati nakancane.*  
**Imphendvulo** : *Indlebe.*  
**(Riddle)** : A man who does not shake even when the weather is very windy, he stands upright. The wind fells trees and houses, causes much havoc, but with him, it is as if it is clear, he does not shake at all.  
**Answer** : It is an ear).  
**Siphico** : *Ngelijaha lelivunule emasudi lamane. Licala ngalemhophe, liyajika lifake leluhlata, liyaphindze lingena kulebovu lligcine selfake sukasambe wensudi lebubendze kumamatseke noma ngubani loyibonako.*  
**Imphendvulo** : *Lijikijolo*  
**(Riddle)** : A young man who wears four suits. He starts by persisting on a white one, he then changes to a green one, thereafter he turns and

wears a red one, and lastly he wears a special brown suit, when he has worn that one you see everyone who sees him smiling.

- Answer** : It is a blackberry).

#### RESULTS

Riddles are rich in imagery. The figures of speech for comparisons that are dominating these folk sayings are metaphor, personification, allusion and simile. The sound devices that are frequently used are consonance, assonance, onomatopoeia and rhyme. There are figures of speech that appear to contain opposing ideas such as antithesis, irony, satire and sarcasm. Exaggeration and understatement in riddles are displayed by hyperbole, litotes, innuendo and euphemism (Lutrin and Pincus 2007: 40-43). The languages used in riddles are expressed by Abrams (1995: 64) as follows:

*Figurative language is a departure from what speakers of a particular language apprehend to be the standard meaning of words, or the standards meaning of order of words, in order to achieve some special meaning or effect. Such figurative were long described as primarily ornaments of language, but they are integral to the functioning of language and in fact indispensable not only to poetry, but to all modes of discourse.*

Riddles entail various context of communication that reflects interpersonal, intrapersonal, persuasive and intercultural dimensions.

Ngomane (2013: 17) described these folk sayings as follows:

*Tiphicaphicwano tiyinkhulomo yebantu legabe ngemakhono lamahle lafanako nalehlukene. Tisuselwa etinganekwaneni, etibongweni, etinanatelweni nakulokunye.*

*(Riddles are people's oral discourse multi that skilled techniques. They are derived from folktales, praise clan praise and other folk poetry)*

They promote culture, indigenous knowledge systems and social transformation. The language used in riddles is appropriate for the development of critical language awareness. Their significances of interpreting social life, social realities and social values are evident when they are looked at from various perspectives. They are oral compositions, art creations and pure form of aesthetic arts that are limited to a specific temporal and spatial settings.

Most researchers have concentrated on riddles as entertainment games and that has deprived them their educational and social functions which deserve appreciation and exploration. Steinberg (2011: 152) viewed the significance of culture during riddling discourse as follows:

*Mainly African and Eastern, have a different set of values. They see the family, not the individual, as the basic social unit. These cultures value interdependence among individual.*

The functions of riddles are evident when they develop the values of when they develop the values of independence, co-operation and high esteem. Okpewho (1992: 239) expressed his view on function:

*Although they (riddles) have attained some status of excellence through long use and bear the same mark of sensitive observation of life and nature as the proverb, they are used primarily for entertainment or play. The fact that riddles are vital for entertainment does not mean they are regarded as peripheral in the cognitive growth of the youth playing them.*

They enhance cognitive development and verbal skills. The relationship between the proponent and respondent is solicited during the process of riddling. Sebate (2001: 98) noted that:

*In the analysis of the structural essence of the riddle, we have discovered that in the process of riffling a question is posed and the respondent provides a correct answer or solution to the riddle. In doing this the respondent proves himself or herself to be a worthy member of the society in which he or she lives because he or she is able to share cultural knowledge with the peers in the community.*

The respondent derives happiness in knowing that he or she can solve the problem posed in a form of a riddle and becomes confident and worthy cultural community. During the process of riddling, the metaphorical structural and cultural pattern of these stylized verbal puzzle are becoming evident.

## DISCUSSION

Riddles, proverbs and idioms are all classified as folk sayings. The major reasons for studying riddles in particular are that they are verbal lore which develop in learners a sensitivity to use the language in a more refined, symbolic, figurative and literary manner. They broaden

learners' horizons and culture parameters by deeply highlighting the ideas, ideals, ideologies, issues, principles, policies and beliefs. They encapsulate and incorporate the socio-cultural values of this literary genre. They are a rhetorical device that focuses on the themes and messages. Riddles address various types of questions and answers that are logical, sequential and comprehensive. They are enigmatic, meaning that a problem in which a solution is metaphorically expressed and non-dramatic in nature referring to questions or answers that rely for their effect are punning. These folkloric aspects are significant because of their functions in everyday situations and meanings. They deal with different aspects of life, objects, body parts, animals, human behavior and artifacts.

## CONCLUSION

Riddles occupy a special position in the social life of the Emaswati nation because of their functions of offering entertainment, developing the language skills, pursuing knowledge acquisition, bringing about social unity and group cohesion. They deal with every aspect of life in a detailed and accurate manner. Their significance is noted in both formal and informal education. They are fundamental in social reality as they reflect culture, norms, values and social systems of the nation.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

It is recommended that riddles should be integrated in all academic disciplines from foundation phase to tertiary levels. More research on the classification, categorization, function, significances and structural analysis is needed to solicit language development and scientific approaches. The language acquisition skills that are reflected in these narratives need to be highlighted for total cultural and social development of the society. A research on various types, techniques of riddling, integration with other genres and formal educational value are warranted.

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