

# Oral Arts in the Riffian Amazigh Community: An Analysis of the Importance and Functions of Folk Riddles <sup>□</sup>

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## 1. Introduction

Throughout the ages, riddles have had a substantial importance in peoples' daily lives. Their importance and roles exceed being a pastime activity that is practised by people of different ages as a way of entertainment in their free time. They, in fact, have various functions in the people's cultural and social lives. For instance, they help develop the cognitive skills and the critical reasoning abilities of the riddle tellers and the riddle solvers, they help impart cultural norms and patterns, they contribute to the enrichment and maintenance of culture and society, and more importantly, they contribute to preserving the cultural and language patterns as well as the social lives of our grandfathers.

The present paper, therefore, sheds light on riddles as a genre with a considerable importance in people's lives as the case with other literary genres. It makes use of a corpus of five hundred Riffian Amazigh riddles that I have collected based on a fieldwork using different methods including interviews and observation. Such riddles have not been collected as independent riddle propositions and solutions, but all the elements that intervene in the riddling process have been taken into consideration. This has helped to come up with a reliable analytical account of the importance and functions of the Riffian Amazigh riddles.

## 2. The Riddle as Literary genre

The Riddle can be defined, in its basic sense, as a statement, a question or a phrase that is misleading and puzzling, and it requires some mental efforts in order to be solved. Telling riddles has been an age-old practice for all cultures and communities around the globe. Like other literary genres, riddles constitute an independent literary genre. Hasan-Rokem and Shulman (1996), Bregenhøj (1996), Maranda (1976), etc., maintain that riddles constitute a genre of oral tradition which is important and familiar in most cultures. It is an important genre because it is considered to be available for all. Men, women, children,

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the educated, the illiterate, etc., may all pose and answer riddles when they want to. In addition, 'the riddle, a genre of traditional ...literature, has come to serve as a tool in this coping because it functions as a cognitive device to analyse and evaluate alien cultural introductions' (Maranda, 1976: 133). This genre has been mostly practised as an oral activity and has had considerable importance in people's lives, particularly before the advent of modern day technology.

Various linguists and folklorists have approached riddles differently. Even their definitions vary depending on their formulation of riddles. For instance, in 1943, Taylor proposed a basic general structural definition of the riddle by stating that 'the true riddle or the riddle in the strict sense compares an object to another entirely different object' (p. 129). For him, riddles are primarily based on metaphor which is used intentionally in complicating riddles. For Bregenhøj (1996), riddles are divided in two parts: an image and an answer. The image can either take the form of a question or can be a mere statement. The question may not only be expressed verbally but it may also be drawn, indicated by means of gestures or even drummed (p. 16). Scott (1969) attempts to apply a strict linguistic approach to the analysis of riddles by making use of the existing linguistic theory, especially the approach of Chomsky, and applying it to the study of the riddle as language. He defines the riddle as 'a grammatical unit of discourse, externally distributed within a matrix of longer discourse or of nonverbal behaviour, and internally composed of two obligatory utterance-level units, between which there obtains a partially obscured semantic fit' (1969: 74). Maranda, in her analytical article '*The Logic of Riddles*', embarks on a study of the structural characteristics of riddles. She maintains that riddles, like all signs, consist of signans, the riddle image, and a signatum, the riddle answer (1971: 14).

### 3. The Importance of Riffian Amazigh Folk Riddles

Riddles constitute one of the most important folklore genres that characterise various cultures around the world. Throughout the ages, riddles have had a considerable importance in peoples' daily lives. However, their current use has decreased in comparison to their use in the past decades. This is due mainly to the advent of mass media and information technology as providers of pastime and entertainment. In addition, the building of schools has downgraded the importance of riddling as children busy themselves with their homework and books when they are home as opposed to the past when there was no alternative to killing time except by telling riddles, folktales, jokes and performing other folkloric oral arts. However, though they are not extensively used currently as they used to be, riddles still hold their position as an indispensable oral literature genre. In the Riffian Amazigh context, riddling is still practised by people of all ages. In the geographical parts whose riddles are under study in the present paper, the practice of riddling still goes on but it has decreased in comparison to the past.

From the old ages, riddles had a remarkable importance in many parts of the world. In the last centuries in Finland, for instance, riddles played decisive roles in people's lives as they were posed in order to test the intelligence, acuity, and skills of people. In this respect, suitors were tested for their intelligence by asking them to find out the solutions of riddles before accepting to marry them. 'When a suitor or a young man came to ask for a girl, three or more riddles were posed to him, to test his mind with them, and if he could answer and interpret them, he received the girl, otherwise not, but was classified as stupid and good for nothing' (cited in Maranda, 1976: 127). Continuing in showing the

importance of riddles in Finland, Maranda (1976: 127) quotes Ganander who states that in Finland one takes note that the young folks, boys and girls, test each other still at present with riddles in our province; it is shameful if the other cannot answer three riddles, and they then send her to the yard of shame (*håpiäpiha*), and even wee children know still today how to say to each other, if the companion cannot answer three riddles: 'Go to Hyvölä; may the dogs of Hyvölä bark. Daughter, go to see who is coming there? A poor ragged girl all dressed in rags. A mouse is her horse, a ladle is her sleigh...'

This great importance of riddles in Finland equally paralleled their importance in other parts of the world. This apparently justifies their existence as an oral literary genre that is deeply rooted in the history of mankind. In fact, the existence of riddles as an old and important genre was shown in the old myth of Oedipus and a monster called the Sphinx (Kovecses, 2010: 11). According to this myth, the Sphinx guards the road to Thebes and poses riddles to everyone on their way to this city and she devours them if they fail to provide the right answers to her riddles. As everyone is devoured by this monster, Oedipus arrives in Thebes. The Sphinx asks him the riddle: What is the animal that has four feet in the morning, two at midday, and three in the evening? Oedipus answers: Man, who in infancy crawls on all fours, who walks on two feet in maturity, and who uses a walking stick to support himself in his old age. After having the riddle answered, the Sphinx is defeated and kills herself. Oedipus thus becomes the king of Thebes. Thus, alluding to the use of riddles both in reality in Finland as well as in the myth of Oedipus shows the great importance that riddles had in the past.

Since they are deeply rooted in history, riddles play an important role in the enrichment and maintenance of culture and society. It can be said that any kind of cultural behaviour plays an important role in the existence and continuity of the structure of a society insofar as it contributes to the creation and maintenance of the stability of the social system (cited in Williams, 1963: 100). In addition, the riddle is considered to be an important carrier of meaning and therefore of cultural patterns. As Abrahams (1972: 188-189) makes clear, 'the riddling, and only incidentally the riddles, carry the burden of meaning. It is the riddling process and the riddling conventions and the riddling occasion and the presence of riddlers that produce riddles'. All the elements that take part in the riddling sessions carry meaning. The latter embodies cultural and social patterns of the geographical part in which those riddles are practised. For instance, the riddles that are told in the Riffian community as well as the ways they are practised reveal so many Riffian Amazigh cultural and social patterns. To concretise, a lot of riddles in my corpus show so many lifestyles of the Moroccan people of Rif, especially the lifestyles of our grandfathers. Since the Riffian community was predominantly a rural community, so many riddles show features of the rural life as they involve names of objects and things that are relative to the countryside. A lot of riddles involve names of objects and show certain aspects of the Riffian rural life that do not exist presently. Such objects as *ariĀu* (a place close to the ceiling that people used to sleep on in the past), *timdharġ* (washstand), *txabit* (water jug), etc. were used by the Riffians in the past but remain just as names in riddles and other Riffian oral arts. This shows the great role of riddles as carriers of cultural and social patterns.

Riddles constitute an integral part of people's lives. In their recent study, Gachanja and Kebaya (2013: 194) show that the riddling process, which is common among children in their early days of growing up, constitutes an experience that plays a pivotal role in shaping an individual's adult life. In this respect, they state that 'riddles must be seen as a part and parcel of every person's life more so because they could have experienced them

at some point in their life and might have acquired certain skills through riddling which they have inculcated in their daily life'. For this reason, riddles are very important not only in the children's lives but they are integral to adults' lives as well.

## 4. Functions of Riffian Amazigh Folk Riddles

### 4.1. Didactic Value

One of the primary functions of riddles has to do with their didactic and educative benefits. Riddles contribute greatly to the education and the learning of children either inside or outside the school. Because of their unusual form as opposed to other simple questions, students experience a sense of excitement and pleasure when they involve themselves in riddling. When asked to solve riddles, students enthusiastically search for the suitable clues that would help them solve the unusual mysterious questions and they feel a sense of accomplishment when they decipher the right answer. Even when they fail to solve the posed riddles and the answers are provided to them, they still feel a sense of pleasure making connections between the riddles and their respective solutions. Riddles, thus, prove very useful in raising students' curiosity and creating their interests to experiment with language in an entertaining way in the classroom. They can help students as a result to improve their listening, speaking, reading and writing skills as they can be easily integrated in the curriculum.

At the level of communication, riddles provide stimulating opportunities that encourage students to develop their speaking competencies. In this respect, Buchoff (1996: 667) states that when students engage in riddling, they 'must speak fluently, communicate with accurate pronunciation and diction, organize information logically, and make eye contact with listeners'. She also adds that 'in order to critically analyze the information and respond to the riddle, listeners need to pay careful attention to the oral clues provided. This cycle repeats itself when students, with renewed purpose and enthusiasm, return to reading to locate new riddles that can be shared aloud with class mates' (1996: 667). Helping in the improvement of communication skills leads by extension to improving social skills in general. The latter skills are achieved because the riddling sessions always involve groups of participants engaging in riddling exchanges. The main result of such social skills is the building of solidarity and the sense of teamwork. In this respect, Williams (1963: 106) states: 'as a pattern of behavior, riddling presupposes and tends to foster group solidarity and perpetuity against forces of social stress arising from fear, accident, or deliberate act. Repetition of riddling forms, with their several functions, lends support to individual awareness of the need for balancing of the complex of social relationships'. Riddles, thus, have educational and social benefits as an indirect result of their positive psychological impacts.

Another important educational benefit that people in general and children in particular get from riddles is knowledge, be it geographical, historical, cultural, botanical, etc. In this respect, practising riddles with children helps them expand their knowledge of different aspects of their culture. Through riddles, the Riffian Amazigh children learn the names of plants, animals, insects, the body and its parts, the different objects that are used in the Riffian culture as well as the social and the cultural norms. They, especially the young children, learn also to identify different Amazigh language sounds and learn to distinguish between the accepted behaviour and norms and the undesired ones. Children

can either get this knowledge through riddling either at home with their family, at school with their teachers or out with their friends. They can get more knowledge if they participate in riddling and try to find the correct solutions to the posed riddles than through just listening to riddles being posed and answered. This is, according to Gachanga and Kebaya (2013: 197), due mainly to the fact that they think broadly and broaden their knowledge of their surrounding when they use their minds to search the suitable solutions to the posed riddles. In Gachanja and Kebaya's words (2013: 297),

*the search for solutions to the riddles makes participants to think broadly and broadens the knowledge of the surrounding. Riddles have varied content hence this makes them quite challenging because for one to be able to respond to them successfully, one must be well versed with the plethora of things in nature and beyond. Such knowledge will enable one to make inferences from known things as depicted in the riddles and its intended meaning much quicker and easier than in a situation where the recipient of the riddle is not informed of his/her ordinary surrounding.*

Answering riddles correctly, then, requires the riddlee not only to have a wide range of knowledge of the different things that are related to a particular area, but he has to be very familiar with the general culture of that area as well. Because of their young age, children may not be very knowledgeable about their culture and may therefore find it hard to come up with the right answers of the riddles posed to them. However, engaging in riddling and attempting to answer riddles as well as hearing the riddle answers that are provided by the elderly proves to be very helpful in teaching them about various things. Generally, the Riffian Amazigh riddles deal with and include mainly the names of things that are drawn from the natural world and the daily lives of the Riffians such as animals, crops and human beings, objects used in agriculture and other domains, etc., and the answers to such riddles revolve around these categories.

#### **4.2. Developing Cognitive Skills and Critical Reasoning**

Developing cognitive skills and critical reasoning abilities constitute another important role that riddles play. In fact, all riddles require riddlees to use their reasoning, intelligence, imagination and logic in order to come up with the right solutions to the posed riddles. Though this function can be didactic as well since it constitutes an aspect of the overall educational value of riddles, it can be separated and dealt with as an independent function due to its importance in riddling. In fact, the use of cognitive and reasoning skills is called upon by the riddle solver when he tries to associate between the riddle question (the riddle proposition) and its solution (referent). In the biggest majority of riddles, this association can be based on many skills, namely, analogy and inference. However, there are some kinds of riddles, as is the case with puzzle riddles, whose solutions do not require the two mentioned skills but they require intelligence and cognitive reasoning in general. In addition to such techniques, all riddles involve, to different levels, other skills such as comparing, contrasting, distinguishing objects and phenomena, etc.

Since the riddle proposition and its referent share the same features, riddles resort to analogy as an effective tool that can help find the right solution of the posed riddles.

According to Gachanja and Kebaya (2013: 197), “analogies provide a basis for one to draw conclusion on items based on their relevant similarities’. They add that it is ‘worth noting that in analogical reasoning, both the similarities and differences should be considered within the riddling context in order to discern how relevant they are in arriving at a solution to the riddle in question’. To illustrate this, we consider the following riddles:

1.
  - a. *ar daxər t-tammənt ar bərra t-tyirdənt (taṛumit)*
  - b. From/ inside/ is-honey/ from/ outside/ is-scorpion (cactus fruit)
  - c. Honey inside and scorpion outside (the cactus fruit)
  
2.
  - a. *taṛənt inu t-žna iri inəs iwwəḍ ažənna (taṛnurṭ ḍ dxxan)*
  - b. Camel/ my/ she-is sleeping/ neck/ its/ reached/ the sky (the traditional oven and its smoke)
  - c. My camel is sleeping while its neck reaches the sky (the traditional oven and its smoke)
  
3.
  - a. *yrī ižn u-mṛabḍ ḍ ašmrar u-yrš bu tuwwəṛṭ (tamdžart)*
  - b. I have/ one/ shrine/ is/ white/ does not have/ a door (the egg)
  - c. I have a white shrine that does not have a door (the egg)

Starting with the first riddle, both the riddle proposition and its referent share the same features. *ar daxər t-tammənt* (it is honey from the inside) alludes to the inside of *taṛumit* (the cactus fruit) which contains the sweet component of the fruit. Both the proposition and the referent in this part of the first riddle share the same feature that is sweetness. The second part of the riddle *ar bərra t-tyirdənt* (a scorpion from the outside) shares the same feature with the outside of the cactus tree represented in the fact that both the scorpion and the thin thorns of the cactus tree can hurt. Concerning the second riddle, its proposition shares a lot of features with its referent as well. The proposition *taṛənt inu t-žna* (my camel is sleeping) and its referent *taṛnnurṭ* (the traditional oven) cannot be said to relate to each other unless the descriptive part of the proposition *iri inəs iwwəḍ ažənna* (its neck reaches the sky) is mentioned as referring to the smoke that the traditional oven issues up in the sky. The third riddle requires the riddlee to use analogy in the same way in order to find its right referent. Both the shrine and the referent ‘egg’ share the features of being white and not having doors. In fact, analogy may not be obvious in some riddles; so the riddlee first has to resort to selecting the salient features of the object or situation that make up the riddle proposition and then go on to identify a similar object as a referent or solution of the posed riddle (Finnegan, 1970: 427-428). Despite its unfeasibility in some riddles, analogy remains an important tool the riddlees acquire and use effectively in riddling.

In addition to analogy, riddles resort to inference as another important technique that helps them find the right answers to riddles and by extension sharpen their cognitive and reasoning skills. There are lots of riddles whose answers can be found out on the basis of their inference. According to Gachanja and Kebaya (2013), the categories of riddles that involve inference 'require one to observe and discern various features that characterize his or her surroundings. These include the moon, the stars, the rivers, lakes, and mountains among others. Riddles whose enunciation is on these natural features call upon inferential reasoning' (p. 197). To illustrate this, the following riddles involve this feature of inference:

4.

- a. *tamuṛt inəs t-tazgzawt šar inəs d azuggay iwḍan inəs d iḅarḵanən (dllaḥ)*
- b. Earth/ its/ is-green/ soil/ its/ is/ red/ people/ its/ are black (the watermelon)
- c. Its earth is green, its soil is red and its people are black (watermelon)

5.

- a. *itəg zrrieṭ ur itəg afar (azraf)*
- b. It makes/ seeds/ it does not/ make/ leaves (the juncus plant)
- c. It grows seeds but it does not grow leaves (the juncus plant)

The riddle 4 relies on inference since the components of the referent i.e., watermelon are likened to the components on the earth with which the riddlee is already familiar. The same thing applies to the riddle 5 *itəg zrrieṭ ur itəg afar (azraf)* which requires the riddle solver to use his inferential reasoning in order to infer the referent of the riddle proposition on the basis of his previous knowledge of the plant that has seeds but does not have leaves. This inferential reasoning is an important mental ability that riddle participants acquire and develop through riddle practising.

Each of such techniques as analogy, inferential reasoning, comparison and the general cognitive intelligence may be relied upon in solving certain riddles respectively. However, there are certain riddles which require riddlees to use mostly cognitive mathematical intelligence or most of the previously-mentioned techniques at once in order to come up with the right solutions to the posed riddles. Among such riddles, there are puzzle riddles which are not commonly used in the Riffian Amazigh community as the case with other kinds of riddles. The puzzle riddles differ from other riddles in the sense that they are long, take a comparatively long time and require careful thinking and the use of intelligence in a mathematical way in order to be solved. Such riddles play a more important role in developing cognitive and reasoning abilities of people in general and children in particular. To illustrate, we provide the following puzzle-riddle:

6.

- a. *yaṛna tyat d uššan d rûie nrzru anəssəḍwa ižn ižn maša wa ur itət wa. mux asnəg?*
- b. We have/ a goat/ and/ a wolf/ and/ grass/ we want/ to make them cross/ one/ one/ but/ this/ not/ eat/ this/ what/ we will do?
- c. We have a goat, a wolf and grass and we want to take them to the other side of the river without having any one eating the other. How can we do that?

You have a wolf, a goat, and a bundle of grass on one side of the river. You have to use the boat and cross the two animals and the grass to the other side of the river. However, you have to take only one at a time. So, how would you take them individually to the other side of the river without any harm being inflicted on any one of them? If you leave the wolf with the goat, it would certainly eat it. And if you leave the goat with the grass it would surely eat it as well because goats graze on grass. The riddle solver here has to take time and use his intelligence well before giving the answer. In fact, most of the riddle solvers fail to provide correct answers to such riddle-puzzles. The answer to this riddle puzzle, therefore, is as follows: you take the goat and leave the wolf and the grass. You put the goat on the other side and when you come back you take the wolf across, you leave it in the place of the goat and you bring back the goat. Afterwards, you take the bundle of grass across the river and you leave it with the wolf on the other side. Now, the goat is on one side of the river and the wolf and the grass are on the other side. Finally, you come back and take the goat across to the other side. In this way, you take each one at a time in the boat and you cross them to the other side of the river without any one causing any harm to the other.

### 4.3. Imparting Cultural Norms and Preserving Language Patterns

Riddles constitute an effective tool that teaches acceptable societal and cultural norms, values, and different behaviour patterns especially to children. The Riffian Amazigh community stresses the effectiveness of riddles in educating children about so many cultural patterns that prevail in the community. For instance, we find riddles that tend to instruct children on acceptable norms and values that must be present in family relationships. This is exemplified by the acceptable relationships between a brother and his other brother or sister, or a child and his parents, etc., that are based on mutual respect, understanding and, more importantly, the tendency to stand by each other in the time of need. The Riffian community gives a great importance to the latter value, i.e., helping and standing by each other, especially as a sign of brotherhood among brothers or relatives who share the same blood. There are a lot of riddles that allude to this value. For example,

7.

- a. *asənnan ur tīkəssin? (umas)*
- b. The thorn/ who/ carries it?
- c. Who carries the thorn? (Its brother).

This riddle makes it clear that though the thorn is harmful and hurtful because of being sharply pointed, it can still be carried by its brother, i.e., another thorn like it. The cultural norm and value that this riddle teaches to children is the necessity of brothers to help and stand by each other in time of need. In fact, this riddle is told as a proverb as well, '*asənnan ur tīkəssi yir umas*' (the thorn cannot be carried except by its brother), which reflects the same value.

Strengthening family bonds combines with other noble values such as generosity, sharing and caring for others that the Riffian people try to educate their children on. Riddling is an effective means that indirectly instils such values in children. Among such riddles, we find:



8.

- a. *i-tkkās zgi tēddist inās i-tišš i-tarwa inās (ayllay n u-atay)*
- b. He-takes/ from/ stomach/ his/ he-gives/ to children/ his
- c. He takes food from his stomach and gives it to his children (teapot and glasses).

9.

- a. *nšnin n-xddām x-fās nttat txdām x tarwa inās tarwa inās xdmān x-nay (tayllayt d lkisan d nšnin)*
- b. we/ work/ on it/ she/ works/ on/ children/ her/ children/ her/ work/ on-us
- c. We work for it, it works for its children, and its children work for us (the teapot, glasses and we).

These two riddles show that the parents are altruistic towards their children as they care endlessly about them. It teaches children therefore to respect their parents and care about them in return. It also implicitly teaches them to be generous, thoughtful and cooperative. In addition, such values are equally expressed in the following riddles as well:

10.

- a. *i-ddān ismuddān i-dḡrad i-smunsu midān (yaziḡ)*
- b. he-called for prayer/ he-made other call for prayer/ he-came down/ he-fed/ foreigners (the cock).
- c. He called for prayer and made others call for prayer then came down and fed foreigners (the rooster).

11.

- a. *nḡr-it tikarmin atafāḡ zḡat (lxir)*
- b. Throw-it/ behind/ you will find it/ in front (the good)
- c. Throw it behind you and you will find it in front of you (the good).

These riddles involve the implication of both generosity and religiosity. The latter is expressed in the riddle 10 by the phrase 'he called for prayer' whose personal pronoun refers to the imam of the mosque or *lāfqi*. The reference of this riddle is 'the rooster' and it is compared to the imam of the mosque since both of them go up and produce a sound. The riddle 11 refers to *lxir* (the good) which, from a religious point of view, will be found in the hereafter by the ones who do it, i.e. those who take care of the poor in life will be taken care of in heaven. Such riddles, in addition to many others that make part of my corpus, teach children about different things that relate to their religion, Islam.

Participating in riddling and trying hard to come up with the solutions for the posed riddles allow riddlees to review their knowledge of their social traditions, objects, and all that their social lives and the social lives of their ancestors involve. In a concise note on the importance of riddles, Williams (1963: 106) states that the 'juxtaposition, in riddles, of elements of the known allows the limits of the unknown to be expanded'. In fact, rid-

dling does not only allow the expansion of the limits of the unknown only but, as they are deeply rooted in history, they play a striking role in preserving the cultural and language patterns and the social lives of our grandfathers. As I have shown in the precedent section on the importance of riddles, a lot of Riffian Amazigh riddles show some ways of life, objects, particular social events, etc., that our grandfathers used to have and are no longer in existence today. As stated precedently, examples of such objects that belonged to the past include *zzammaṛ*, *tasraft*, *txabiṭ*, *aritu*, etc. In fact, these are just some examples of objects that no longer exist or used and that are still preserved in riddles. In addition, a lot of Riffian Amazigh words have been preserved in riddles only as they are replaced by their Arabic counterparts in the Riffian Amazigh language that is spoken today. The following are some of the riddles exemplifying such cases:

12.

- a. *i-kka fas i-kka mknas yusad i-smuhrut am u-funas (zzammaṛ)*
- b. He-has been to/ Fez/ he-has been to/ Meknes/ he came/ mooing/ like/ a cow
- c. He went to Fez and went to Meknes and came back mooing like a cow (a musical instrument called *zzammaṛ*).

13.

- a. *àanna t-bədd x iżn tfdənt (tawwəṛt)*
- b. My grandmother/ she-is standing/ on/ one/ toe
- c. My grandmother standing on one toe (the old door standing on a piece of wood).

14.

- a. *aqmmum ines ašt u-qmmum n tadžunt maša t-kəssi xtaṛ zg man t-kssi tsardunt (tasraft)*
- b. Mouth/ its/ same as/ mouth/ of / a sieve/ but/ it-carries/ more than/ it-carries/ the horse
- c. Its mouth is smaller like that of the sieve but it carries more than what the horse carries (the underground traditional silo).

15.

- a. *t-šša t-žžiwən t-ndu x rallas (taqdžžart/ txabiṭ/ taqəmbuṛt)*
- b. It-ate/ it-got full/ it-jumped/ on/ its Mrs.
- c. It ate until it got full and jumped on its Mrs. (the water jug).

A lot of Riffian Amazigh vocabulary terms are preserved in riddles and other oral arts genres such as couplets (izran), folktales, proverbs, etc. The long-standing history and use of such oral arts has helped us preserve a large repertoire of terms that are nowadays extinct in our spoken language.

## 5. Conclusion

The present paper has highlighted the importance of riddles and analysed their main functions. On the basis of the scrutiny and analysis of a corpus of five hundred riddles, the paper has come up with the conclusion that Riffian Amazigh riddles play major importance in enhancing children's and riddle users' intelligence, critical thinking, and other cognitive and mental skills. Some pertinent riddles have been taken out and included in the present paper in order to illustrate the highlighted functions. The major function that Riffian Amazigh riddles cherish is their preservation of the Riffian vocabulary items that are no longer used in our everyday spoken Riffian Amazigh language. Such items can be made use of in the building of dictionaries especially with terms pertaining to nature, agricultural tools, and other ordinary life fields of the Riffian people.

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