

Performance, Structure, and Functions of Riddle Game in Həba Community

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Abstract

The Həba (Kilba) live in northern Adamawa State of Nigeria. Həba is the people, while *nya Həba* is the language. The people have many rich verbal arts which include folktales, songs, proverbs, and riddles. This study examines the performance, structure, and functions of riddle games as one of the genres of oral literature. The data for the study was obtained by recording the riddles performed in a natural setting. Some older speakers of the community were interviewed to gather information on the functions of riddle games in Həba community. A descriptive survey was employed for the study to describe, interpret, explain, and discuss the data in its natural state. A qualitative method was therefore adopted to analyse the riddles in the corpus of the study. The result showed that the Həba folk riddles have peculiar organizational and syntactic structures. The organizational structures include invitations to play riddle games, challenging, unravelling, Penalizing, and turn-taking. The analysis of the syntactic structure of the riddles revealed that the riddle acts are highly standard expressions that permit little or no variations. It showed that the art of riddling constitutes part of the ancient educational and recreational systems of the Həba people. In addition, riddling functions as the means of transmitting oral traditions and values of the tribe from one generation to another. As a community art, riddle-telling enhances cognitive development and promotes social cohesion and unity among the children.

Keywords: *Verbal Arts, Riddles, Structure, Education, Entertainment.*

Introduction

Həba is the aboriginal name of the Kilba people, an ethnic nation found predominantly in Hong Local Government of Adamawa State, Nigeria. According to history, the Kilba people were called Həba by the Marghi, Bura, and Babur people, as they too refer to themselves, while the Fulani called them Khoba. The name Kilba therefore, is derived from the word Khoba, which still refers to the same people. The final codification was done by the European colonialists who adopted the initial corruption of the name Khoba. The corruption according to Marja, (2006) occurred when 'Həba' was mispronounced by the Fulani. Həba refers to the people and the language is nya Həba. 'Nya' literally means "mouth" but connotatively it means the language of the people. Therefore, 'nya Həba' means "the language of Həba." Nya Həba varies accentually rather than dialectically. There are more noticeable distinctive ways of pronouncing some words in the language across geographical zones of the Həba land than in grammar and vocabulary. Among the Gaya and Mukwahi for instance, the word for horse is 'tangu, among the Hong, it is 'taku'.

African communities are blessed with rich oral traditions and verbal arts. The most popular African verbal arts are songs; folktales, proverbs, and riddles. Riddle games are played mostly by children. They are puzzling statements or questions having underlying meanings that require critical thinking to unveil. Finnegan (2012) points out that riddles are often closely related to proverbs. She maintains that like proverbs, riddles are expressed briefly and concisely;

they involve analogy; whether of meaning, sound, rhythm, or tone; and the two forms are combined in the proverb riddle. A riddle consists of a noun in the subject position which alludes to something familiar outside the linguistic context. The subject is metaphorically described to allow the audience to think of the referent in the physical, social, or cultural environment.

Madonsela (2020) points out that in Africa, riddles have commonly been considered a type of oral art form and have long been included in the studies of oral literature. As a genre of oral literature, riddle game is a verbal art through which societies' cultural values are transmitted from one generation to another. Riddles also play vital roles in the intellectual and cognitive development of children as they are being introduced to a variety of vocabulary items including the names of animals, trees artifacts, etc. (Awedoba.2000). In every riddle, a particular image serves as the subject of the sentence is described in metaphorical language to provide a clue to a hidden image that a proponent or audience is required to identify.

Material and Method

This study employed a descriptive survey as a research design. Using descriptive surveys enabled the researchers to describe the state of affairs as they were. The riddles in the corpus of the study were obtained from the performance context through recording. Being natives of Həba, the researchers organized riddling competitions in selected towns purposely to collect the data. The riddles were collected through recording with Android phones. The older Həba speakers were interviewed about the meaning of the riddles, especially about the

allusions within the images in the riddles. The riddles were written first in the native language and then translated into the English language. The analysis was done qualitatively to explore, describe, and explain them in their original forms.

Performance and social context of riddle game in the Həba community

Riddling among the Həba is done interchangeably with storytelling. Riddling and storytelling have a common name “pəkətəpəkətiya”, which means the act of telling or saying something strange. Riddling and storytelling are differentiated only based on the actions involved in each form. Storytelling begins with “haḍa, haḍa nwa ya.” It is translated into English as “A long, long time ago”, (which is synonymous with the English opening of storytelling ‘Once upon a time’). The haḍa, haḍa is derived from the opening phrase of storytelling which differentiates it from riddling. A riddle is called Pəkətəpəkətiya mba. The name is derived from the action that allows the failure of a respondent to provide a solution or an answer to a posed riddle. When a respondent fails to provide the solution or answer to a posed riddle by the proponent, he/she is said to have been bound by the proponent. It means the proponent has won and he/she would penalise the respondent. Penalising the respondent is the most humorous part of the Həba riddling game. The ugliest or oldest woman or man in the vicinity is given as a wife or husband to the respondent.

In Həba community, the riddle game is played at night. It is performed in the night by the children and the youths to while away time before going to bed. Playing

games in the daytime is a taboo in Həba land. There is a superstitious belief that horns will grow on the heads of the participants if they break the law. As such, the elder who hears the children playing riddle games in the daytime cautions them by saying, “Ə-əng ma! Tələmo tso kəra hi.” (Be warned! Horns will grow from your heads)” The failure of the children to take heed may result to serious reprimand such as “Did you not hear me? Let me not hear that again!”

Two children or two groups of children play riddle games in Həba community. If it is between two groups, each group chooses a leader, called 'gau'. The gau will choose who poses or answers a riddle. Riddling by two groups, however, tends to be long and rowdy because someone may pose or shout the answer to a riddle without being called upon. Arguments over the structure of a posed riddle or ambiguity are also likely to occur during group riddling. If the game is between two children, they will sit with their supporters about a metre away from each other and the supporters are not allowed to whisper the answer to the respondent, nor are they allowed to pose a riddle. They only cheer or hail their candidates for posing a brilliant riddle or giving a correct answer.

Riddling involves challenging and responding to a puzzled statement or question. A proponent poses a riddle to which the respondent is given three or four chances to think about the answer. The proponent terminates any respondent's prolonged thinking of the solution by setting the grass on fire. Setting the grass on fire is a metaphorical description of terminating a respondent's guesswork. The

proponent does this by saying “A hawu t̄a ya wuu ku sar.” Meaning “I have set the grass on fire.” No solution to a riddle is accepted once the proponent has set the grass on fire. The proponent at this point is said to have bound the respondent and would go ahead to penalise the respondent before unraveling the answer.

In some cultures, the proponent is rewarded if the respondent fails to give the correct answer to a posed riddle. Ikuemonisan (2021), for instance, reveals that among the Ilaje people of Ondo State of Nigeria, the proponent requests the gift of a town and if he is pleased with the gift, he unveils the meaning of the riddle but if he is not pleased, he ‘sits’ on the answer. In H̄ɔba community, the proponent penalises the respondent declaring the man or woman as his/her husband or wife. Riddling at this stage becomes more humorous and entertaining. The proponent would think of the oldest or the ugliest man or woman to give the loser as a wife or a husband. This is followed by laughter if the given wife or husband is indeed the oldest or the ugliest in the vicinity. While the proponent would be delighted, the respondent would be humiliated and vexed. After penalising the respondent, the proponent would unravel the answer and relinquish the floor. On taking the floor, the respondent could riddle to pose to get back at the

Organisational Structure

The riddle game in H̄ɔba community has both organizational and linguistic structures. The organizational structures are the series of actions or steps involved in playing riddle games. The contents of the different organizational structures vary as

different actions are carried out in each. The following are the structures:

a. Invitation

This is first done before the children start the game. The invitation is seeking the consent of whom to play with. It could be a formal declaration of “*Am̄an p̄a p̄ak̄at̄ap̄ak̄atiya m̄ba*” (Let us play riddle game) or a question *Na ea na wo p̄a p̄ak̄at̄ap̄ak̄atiya m̄ba?* (with whom am I going to play riddle game?) If the invitation is accepted, the respondent would say “*Am̄ani*.” (Let us do). After getting the consent of a riddling partner, the proponent goes ahead to say his riddle. The respondent may insist on being the one that would start and the proponent would have no option but to allow him/her to start. When a respondent turns down the invitation, he/she is expected to be polite. The reason for not consenting would be given. It could be “no”, I am tired; I am feeling sleepy or I prefer storytelling.

b. Challenge/Opening

H̄ɔba riddle game in opens with a challenging statement or question. This comes after getting the consent of whom to play with. It is the task that a proponent engages the respondent in to test his ingenuity. The opening would be a concise question or statement that alludes to something familiar in the environment. It could also be a metaphorical description of something that the respondent is required to unravel. Being fixed and concise questions or statements, riddles are drawn from the pool of those memorized by the participants not created instantly. The riddles have unknown authors and are passed from one generation to another. The proponent draws a series of riddles from

memories and poses them to the respondent to answer. The proponent may begin with simple riddles such as “Mi ko nədəda ənə dzana?” (Why are you looking at me like this, you fool?) The answer is *nya mbədə-mbədə* (An opened door) As the respondent gets answers to posed riddles, the proponent would ask more difficult ones such as “Ma ya səya Babər kinda cha; ma ya səya Gabala ki nda cha.” Mi nga? (When I went to Babur, he was there. When I went to Gabala, he was there). Who is he? The answer is “the sun” or “the moon”. The respondent can only solve this riddle if he traces an image that can be seen in the two places “Babur and Gabala.” The sun and the moon are heavenly bodies that can be seen everywhere. The sun and the moon in this context are personified as ‘he’.

c. Unravelling

This refers to puzzling out a riddle and involves scrutinising a posed riddle. The respondent is tasked to think critically about what the object or image in the riddle alludes to. Gulere (2011) refers to this move in riddling as the process of scrutinising a posed riddle by the opponent who has to think quickly and broadly to fix the interpretation desired by the riddler. In Həba community, the proponent and the respondent from the onset would agree on the number of attempts. If the riddling is by the boys, the number of guessing or attempts does not go beyond three attempts. If it is by girls, the number of guessing or attempts would not go beyond two or four attempts. Odd numbers are termed 'masculine' in Həba community, while even numbers are feminine. To puzzle

out or unravel a riddle, the respondent has to think critically about the linguistic structure of the riddle and what has been alluded to in the environment. The entity unfolded in the riddle should be unraveled in a word or phrase. The knowledge of the sociocultural and the physical environment is crucial in unraveling a riddle. Riddling at this stage becomes tense as disputes may arise over the grammatical structure of the riddle or the given.

d. Penalisation

This is done when a respondent fails to give the right answer to a riddle. After the respondent has exhausted the number of attempts agreed upon, the proponent would set the grass on fire. A grass is set on fire when the proponent utters an onomatopoeic word “həw” three times. The respondent has to stop guessing because any answer given after the grass has been set on fire is not valid or accepted. The proponent will shout “*A həwu tə ya huu ku sar*”. *A mbiya nghə tə ya*” (I have set the grass on fire). I have bound you.) “The proponent would penalise the respondent by pronouncing the oldest or ugliest man or woman in the vicinity as the wife or husband of the respondent. Disputes and heated arguments may arise if the solution provided by the proponent is synonymous with one of the guesses made by the respondent. Elders around would then intervene to settle the dispute. If the solution provided by the proponent is correct, the respondent would be advised to concede defeat, while the proponent would be asked to go ahead and pose more riddles.

e. Turn-Taking

Turn-taking comes after a resolution or settlement. The proponent at this point relinquishes the floor to the respondent. On taking the floor, the respondent assumes the position of the proponent, while the proponent assumes the becomes the respondent. At this point, the game would be tough. The proponent would make sure he gets the best of his respondent, while the respondent would make sure he repels. The respondent would think of difficult riddles to pose to get the opportunity to exact sweet revenge. If the respondent fails to answer, he would shout “*Mbiya nghə tə ya. Ngərash mbətla-mbətla ma*” (‘I have bound you, on the ground as doves we are’). He would take his revenge on his opponent by giving him/her a husband or wife. There would be silence because the audience would be eager to hear the name of the wife or husband. If he names one that is very ugly or very old, the laughter would be loud. His supporters would clap for him. At this point, another set of competitors would take the floor, if it is a group riddling.

Syntactic structure

Syntax studies how words are arranged to form larger grammatical units such as phrases, clauses, and sentences. According to Yule (2006), the word syntax came originally from Greek and meant ‘a setting out together or ‘arrangement.’ In this sense, syntactic structure is the arrangement of words, phrases, and clauses forming a sentence. The meaning of a sentence or any expression depends on how the words are patterned to form the sentence. A complete riddle has two parts. The first is the riddle which contains an image presented metaphorically to be puzzled out. The questions or statements are either simple or complex depending on the subject described

metaphorically for the respondent to identify as a solution. The sample riddles collected for this work are presented and analysed for their syntactic structure as follows:

i. Challenge: *Zər Tagwi kəla nya*

Translation: The son of Tagwi without mouth.

Solution: Egg

This riddle is in a noun phrase. A noun phrase usually has a noun as the head which may be followed by a prepositional phrase. In this riddle, the noun head ‘son’ is preceded by a preposition ‘of’ which describes the relationship between it and the noun ‘Tagwi.’ The name Tagwi alludes to egg. The phrase “without mouth” provides a clue to the answer. Although this expression is a noun phrase, it clearly describes an object common in the riddling environment. To puzzle out the riddle, the proponent has to think critically about a thing without mouth.

ii. *Val dā a dla tsaa na məpa.*

Translation: My granary fell together with its cover.

Solution: African blackberry

This riddle is in a simple sentence. A simple sentence according to Thorne (1997) contains just one clause. It consists of one finite verb and is described as an independent clause. Similarly, Kirkpatrick (2010) refers to a simple sentence as a sentence with just one clause. In this riddle, there are two images “the granary” and its cover, which allude to an African blackberry. The fruits of the blackberry tree fall to the ground once they are ripe. The cover in the riddle refers to its lid which

resembles the traditional cover of a granary in Həba community (məpa). The solution is derived from critical thinking about something having a lid-like cover.

iii. Challenge: Kwatam gəf dabə təl ta'iu.

Translation: The princess is lying down, and the king is standing.

Solution: Beans and corn plants

This riddle is in a compound sentence; which expresses ideas. It consists of two or more independent clauses joined by a coordinating conjunction. According to Murthy (2007), a compound sentence consists of two or more coordinate clauses. It means that a compound sentence conveys more than one idea since each coordinate clause has a main verb. The 'princess' in the first part of the sentence alludes to the bean plant, which creeps on the ground. The king in the second part of the sentence alludes to a corn plant in an upright position. The knowledge of agriculture is required to puzzle out the riddle. Mix cropping is common in Həba community. The farmers used to plant beans in guinea corn farm which thrives off on the ground. The beans plant and the corn plant are personified as 'princess and prince'. They are presented in the riddle as if they can lie or stand up like humans.

iv. Challenge: Dəgə dləbwal mar wa

Translation: Playing drums behind the tree.

Solution: defecation

This riddle is expressed in a verb phrase. A verb phrase has a verb as the head, which may or may not be followed by a complement. According to Thorne (1997), a

verb phrase generally has a lexical verb as its main verb. It can be made up of one lexical verb, or one or more auxiliary verbs. The riddle is a euphemism, which is a subtle description of the act of defecation. Mentioning defecation is a taboo in many African societies. In Həba community of those days, one had to hide behind a tree or shrub to defecate. Defecating in the open was considered uncultured and shameful.

v. Challenge: Babasalam kwa dlakə shipəli tə wulea.

Translation: A giant is hanging testis on the neck.

Solution: pawpaw tree.

This riddle is in a simple declarative sentence. A declarative sentence makes a statement. It is a metaphorical description consisting of two images "a giant and a testis". A pawpaw plant is personified in the riddle to make a puzzling statement. To answer this riddle, the respondent needs to know fruits bearing trees in the vicinity. The subject "a giant" refers to the pawpaw plant, while the object 'testis' alludes to its fruits. It describes the size and height of a pawpaw tree, while testis refers to the hanging fruits close to the top of a pawpaw tree.

vi. Challenge: Challalau ga mbəgəlbiya

Translation: Tall, tall up, and break.

Solution: okra plant

The riddle is in an adjective phrase. An adjective phrase contains an adjective as the head. Thorne (1997) opines that an adjective phrase has an adjective as the main word. The adjective 'tall' alludes to the height of the species of okra plant found

in Həba land. The plant grows tall and yields fruits towards the end. The species described has to be bent slightly before the fruits are harvested. This riddle is onomatopoeic as the sound suggests its meaning.

vii. Challenge: Nguli kə ea kwa tsa dang
tə dagər yi

Translation: My kinsmen play drums
through the back

Solution: Crickets

This riddle is expressed in a simple declarative sentence. It consists of three images “kinsmen, drums and back.” Kinsmen as the subject of the sentence alludes to crickets, drum as the object alludes to the wings of the crickets that they use to chirp (make high-pitched sound) while the back is in its literal sense. The cricket's chirp through the wings is metaphorically described as playing the drum.

viii. Challenge: Ya wal nda takulakə ɗa
biya tsa biya voa

Translation: I unrolled my cotton yarn
up to Borno

Solution: Road

The riddle is also in a simple declarative sentence. The two images are alluding to different things. The rolled cotton yarn that is unrolled refers to the road, while ‘Borno’ metaphorically refers to the destination of any road. Borno is referred to because it used to be the most distant trading place for Həba community in those days.

ix. Challenge: Sal kwa nəu mahi'i tufu.

Translation: A man is following five
women.

Solution: heel and toes

This riddle is in a simple declarative sentence. Two images are metaphorically described, the heel and the toes of the foot. The noun phrase “a man” in the subject position alludes to human heel, while five women allude to human toes. The toes seem to take the lead when someone is walking, while the heel follows behind.

x. Challenge: Ku ɗa doɗə dləma, ya
zhang sə'i mba.

Translation: My goats are many in the
pen but the tying rope is one.

Solution: beats/broom

The riddle is in a compound sentence. There are two simple sentences joined together by the contrasting coordinating conjunction ‘but’. ‘The subject of the first simple sentence “My goats” alludes to beads or broom, and “the tying rope” in the second sentence refers to a thread on which beads hang. In the ancient Həba community, women used beads of different colours and sizes either tied on the waist or hanging around the neck. A broom is a common thing in Həba community used by the women for sweeping.

xi. Challenge: Shalla ɗa nya məa; gyang
kwa fiy ya a do təɗə wa.

Mi nga?

Translation: A calabash of mine on the
mountain's brow; the wind blows; but it
does not fall. What is that?

Solution: ears

This riddle is posed in a complex compound sentence. Murthy (2007) refers to a complex compound sentence as a sentence that consists of two or more coordinate clauses and at least a subordinate clause. The riddle veiled only one image (calabash). The first part of the sentence 'My calabash on the mountain's brow' is a noun clause alluding to the human ear. Calabash is a common container in the ancient Həba community. The phrase "the mountain's brow" is a metaphoric reference to the visible front part of the head on which an ear is attached. The remaining two simple sentences describe the object alluded to as fixed, since even blowing wind cannot make it fall.

xii. Challenge: Eak ulula; a hətə eak ulula; a gi tsaku kyo wu ulula.

Mi nga?

Translation: A dry bird took up a dry bird and chopped it up a tree.

What is that?

Solution: A forging tong and forging stone.

This riddle is an example of conundra riddles in Həba community. The Conundra riddle is complex and difficult to solve. This riddle is expressed in a compound sentence that describes two actions performed by the same agent. The expression is a parallelism. Parallelism is the repetition of parallel grammatical elements in writing to create effect. There are two images repeated in slightly different ways. 'Dry Bird' is repeated twice and is performed with two different actions. *A Tong* (a tool used by Blacksmiths for removing iron from the fire) is personified as a dry bird. Chopping

in a try tree refers to the act of hitting the glowing iron being held with a tong on a big stone. Knowledge of the art of forging is needed to give the right solution.

xiii. Challenge: Mi dæg dā ama? Mi dæg d'ada?

Mi nga?

Translation: Why did mother beat me? Why did Father beat me?

Solution: Millstone and its tablet.

This is an interrogative riddle expressed in two related questions. An interrogative sentence asks questions. There are two images of the riddle -mother and father. 'Mother' refers to the millstone, while 'father' refers to the stone tablet used for grinding corn in the ancient Həba community. The two questions have everything the same except the nouns mother and father. The use of parallel structures popularly referred to as parallelism creates a rhythmic flow that appeals to the audience's attention.

xiv. Challenge: Ma ya səya babur, ki nda cha. Ma ya səya gabala ki nda cha.

Mi nga?

Translation: When I went to Babur, there it was! When I went to Gabala, there it was!

Solution: The sun or the moon.

This riddle is in two parallel complex sentences alluding to something familiar in the environment. Everything in the two sentences is the same except the two places 'Babur and Gabala'. The veiled image in the riddle is seen in both places. The parallel structures create rhythmic flow, and

harmonious effect which appeal to the audience's emotions. Babur and Gabala are two different places but the moon/the sun are there. The moon and the sun are personified to draw the respondent's attention to the universal visibility of the sun.

xv. Challenge: Ea kwa ma'i mætlə ea; Par kwa dagə dā, ya a do dæg vanyi ndu nda wa?

Translation: We were walking two of us; the rain was drenching me but it was not drenching the other person.

Solution: You are a pregnant woman.

The riddle is in a compound sentence consisting of three independent clauses. This short narrative has a veiled person to be unraveled. Rain in the riddle is used in the plain sense. The respondent is engaged in critical thinking to identify the unveiled person. The puzzle is founded on the impossibility of two persons walking in the rain but the rain soaks only one. However, indeed, the baby in the womb of a pregnant woman is not drenched by the rain even if she walks under the rain.

xvi. Challenge: Səkəla hi a yi ya sə na. Sə na hi a yi ya sə kəla hi.

Translation: A thing without a leg gave birth to something with a leg. A thing with a leg gave birth to a thing without a leg.

Solution: A hen

This riddle is expressed in two separate declarative sentences which give a short description of a veiled image. In this riddle,

there is no image to provide a clue to the answer. The wordings of the two sentences are the same, except that the subject and the object had their positions swapped. The repetition creates a rhythmic flow and makes the riddle sound poetic. An egg that does not have legs hatches into a fowl that has legs and lays eggs.

xvii. Challenge: Nja ya nyi na mba kər; cha hə kəla mba kər; cha hal na mba kər.

Translation: He was born with a crown. He grew without a crown. He was old with a crown

Solution: The moon

This riddle has three declarative sentences. In each sentence, the same image is veiled. The three sentences describe an image that has different shapes at three stages of life. The veiled image is the new moon, which has a crown-like shape. The crown shape disappears when the moon becomes full, and reappears when it becomes old. The moon is personified in the riddle and is given a royal description

xviii. Challenge: Ma ya liliuu, a yo dər wa.; Ma ya tətənyi, yo dəra.

Mi ya?

Translation: When I am alive, I don't talk. When I am dead, I talk.

What am I?

Solution: Leaf

The riddle is posed in two complex sentences. A complex sentence consists of dependent and independent clauses. The

dependent clauses, “when I am alive” and “when I am dead”, are parallel structures. They create harmonious effects and rhythmic flows that appeal to the listeners’ emotions. A leaf is personified in the riddle. It displays two basic characteristics when wet and dry. Alive in this riddle means wet, while dead means dry. No sound is heard when a wet leaf is stepped on but a sound is heard when a dry leaf is stepped on.

xix. Challenge: Ma njo gwa, kwa shi cha, Ma njo shi kwa gwa cha

Translation: When people are going down, it is coming up. When people are coming up, it is going down.

Solution: back of the head.

This riddle is expressed in two separate complex sentences. Reference is made to the same entity that is veiled in the sentence. The two sentences are metaphorical descriptions of the position of the back of the head as one goes in a given direction and comes back in the same direction. It is in opposition to the direction of the forehead all the time. The parallel structures in the sentence “Going down and coming up” create a harmonious effect on the audience.

xx. Challenge: Mayo ma’i cho n̄u ḍa. Ma ya ta’i.cho ta’i.

Translation: When I walk, it walks. When I stop, it stops

Solution: Human shadow.

The riddle is posed in two separate complex sentences but allude to one thing. The description is not metaphorical but refers to something represented by the pronoun ‘it.’ The respondent is challenged to identify

something that imitates the actions described.

xxi. Challenge: Huḍu ku ta ya, z̄er te ya, heli tsaya.

Translation: I am pregnant. A child is on my back. I have menstruation

Solution: Cotton plant.

This riddle is expressed in three simple declarative sentences which provide brief descriptions of an image. The object alluded to in the riddle is said to be pregnant, nursing a baby, and menstruating. These cannot possibly occur together in the life of a woman. The respondent is required to think critically to puzzle out the riddle. The indigenous cotton plant in the ancient H̄eba community has on it immature bolls, opened bolls ready for harvest, and flowers. These are metaphorically referred to as pregnancy, baby, and menstruation.

Functions of Riddles

Riddling as a verbal art has many functions that differ from one community to another. Riddling games among the H̄eba people used to be one of the oral traditions through which the cultural heritage of the tribe is transmitted from one generation to another. Most of the riddles told are as old as the community itself. The children are the active agents of transmitting these riddles. In H̄eba community, the elders do not play active roles in riddle games. They only intervene if there is a dispute over the linguistic structure of a riddle or the answer to it. Apart from serving as a medium of transmitting people’s cultural heritage, riddling helps the development of the children’s cognitive systems and critical thinking. Mous (2000) opines that functionally, riddles like other genres of

verbal art such as stories, have recreational as well as moral and educational uses.

Entertainment is another obvious function of folk riddles in most communities. Riddles in the Həba community are primarily told to pass the time before the children go to bed. Sharndama (2021) believes that riddling in the Həba community is an important source of entertainment. Before the advent of television and social media, children in Həba families came together to tell stories or play riddle games, especially under the moonlight. Sharndama & Magaji (2011) see riddling as an important family entertainment among the Həba people of Adamawa State of Nigeria. They maintained that there is much fun and laughter associated with riddles as a source of family entertainment. Riddle games also engage the participants in critical thinking and serve as a means of inculcating cultural values in the children. Madonsela (2020) opines that a riddle could be used as a kind of puzzle that needs to be solved, and when used in this way, riddles stimulate children to think about possible solutions. Riddle games, thus expand the participants' knowledge about their sociocultural environments and belief systems.

Discussions and Conclusion

Riddle game among the Həba is played by the children and youth night. The game is played to pass the time before going to bed. It is restricted to night times because the children are expected to do meaningful activities in the day time such as fetching water from the stream or looking after domestic animals. The restriction of riddle games to the night times is enforced by a strong warning that horns would grow on the heads of children who perform riddles in

the daytime. Invitation, challenges, unravelling, settlement, and turn-taking are the obvious organizational structures or moves within the game.

The syntactic structures of Həba riddles consist of simple, complex, compound, and compound-complex sentences. The simple sentences contain subjects that make exophoric references because the images allude to something outside the children's linguistic contexts.

The image in the subject position usually provides clues to the answer to the riddle. It has been observed that the answers to riddles are short. They occur as in one word, one phrase, or a simple sentence. The study also revealed that some of the riddles are brief narratives or descriptions of an image or images that allude to something in the Həba child's environment. Therefore the proponent's brief narration or description is meant to provide clues to the solution.

It was also found that repetitions and parallelisms are prevalent in the riddle and their use creates a rhythmic flow that appeals to the audience. The analysis showed that the syntactic structures of Həba riddles are mostly complex. This complexity is attributed to the fact that a riddle must have a common image or images veiled intentionally in a statement or question for a respondent to unveil.

Finally, the analysis, showed that the structure, performance, and function of riddle games in Həba are uniform across the dialectical regions (Hong, Gaya, Mukwahi, Garaha, and Kwapər) Riddle games among the Həba people have

recreational and educational functions. In conclusion, it was found that riddling the Həba is a means of transmitting their social and cultural values from one generation to another. Riddle games in the Həba community therefore are crucial aspects of entertainment and traditional education.

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