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Figures of Speech in Kabyle Riddles : Rhetorical Operations, Semantic Domains, and Oral Poetics

الصور البلاغية في الألغاز القبائلية : العمليات البلاغية والمجالات الدلالية وشعرية القول الشفهي

Figures de style dans les énigmes kabyles : opérations rhétoriques, domaines sémantiques et poétique orale

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Abstract

This article examines how Kabyle riddles construct temporary referential opacity through layered rhetorical operations while remaining recoverable to culturally competent hearers. It addresses three questions : which figurative mechanisms are mobilised, how these mechanisms interact with recurrent semantic domains, and what the corpus can legitimately support about the relation between verbal form and culturally situated knowledge. The study is qualitative, textual, and comparative. Its core corpus comprises 408 riddles collected by the author in Aït Kouffi (Tizi Ouzou) between 2010 and 2018, including 380 items from adults and 28 from children ; 30 riddles are analysed in detail, all drawn from this field corpus. Structural, semantic, and pragmatic analysis is combined with multilabel coding of metaphorical analogy, metonymic cueing, part-whole relations, personification, paradoxical predication, grammatical play, and circumlocution. The results show that analogical mapping is recurrent across the natural world, material culture, the human body, and social relations, but that enigmatic opacity usually results from the convergence of several clues rather than from a single isolated trope. Grammatical categorisation, sound patterning, contiguity, and shared cultural knowledge also play decisive roles. The article concludes that Kabyle riddles constitute sophisticated forms of verbal art whose interpretation depends jointly on linguistic structure and situated cultural competence, without warranting the reconstruction of a single or timeless Amazigh worldview.

Keywords

Kabyle riddles, oral literature, figurative language, metaphor, metonymy, verbal art, Amazigh studies

الملخّص

· enتحلل هذه الدراسة الكيفية التي تبني بها الألغاز القبائلية غموضًا إحاليًا مؤقتًا بواسطة عمليات بلاغية متراكبة، مع بقائها قابلة للتأويل لدى متلق يمتلك كفاءة لغوية وثقافية مناسبة. وتنطلق من ثلاثة أسئلة رئيسة : ما الآليات المجازية والبلاغية المستعملة؟ وكيف تتفاعل مع المجالات الدلالية المتكررة؟ وما الذي تسمح به المدونة فعليًا بشأن العلاقة بين الصياغة اللفظية والمعرفة الثقافية السياقية؟ تعتمد الدراسة منهجًا نوعيًا نصيًا ومقارنًا. وتتكون المدونة الميدانية من 408 ألغاز جمعها الباحث في آيت

كـوفي بتيزي وزو بين 2010 و2018، منهـا 380 لغزًا جُمـعت لـدى بـالغين و28 لـدى أطفـال، وقـد خُصـص التحليـل المفصـل لثلاثين لغزًا كلهـا من هذه المـدونة. وتجمـع المقـاربة بين التحليـل البنيـوي والـدلالي والتـداولي وبين تـرميز متعـدد يسـمح بتراكب الاستعـارة، والقـرائن الكنـائية، وعلاقـات الجزء بالـكل، والتشخيـص، والإسنـاد المفـارق، واللـعب النحـوي، والتعبيـر غيـر المباشـر. وتبين النتـائج أن القيـاس والمشـابهة يتكرران في وصف العالـم الطبيـعي والثقـافة المـادية والجسـد والعلاقـات الاجتمـاعية، غيـر أن الغمـوض لا ينتج غالبًـا عن صـورة واحـدة منـعزلة، بـل عن تضافـر عـدة قـرائن تشـمل المشـابهة والمجـاورة والتـصنيف النحـوي والإيقـاع والمعـرفة الثقـافية المشتـركة. وتخلـص الـدراسة إلـى أن الألغـاز القبائـلية تمثـل فنًـا لفظيًـا مركبًـا يقـوم تأويلـه علـى تفاعـل البنية اللغـوية والكفـاءة الثقـافية السيـاقية، من دون أن تسـمح المـدونة وحدها بافتـراض رؤية أمـازيغية واحـدة وثـابتة عبـر الزمن.

الكلمات المفتاحية : الألغاز القبائلية، الأدب الشفهي، اللغة المجازية، الاستعارة،

الكلمات المفتاحية

الكناية، الفن اللفظي، الدراسات الأمازيغية

Résumé

Cet article analyse la manière dont les énigmes kabyles construisent une o pacité référentielle provisoire au moyen d'opérations rhétoriques superposées, tout en demeurant interprétables pour un destinataire culturellement compétent. Trois questions structurent l'étude : quelles opérations figuratives sont mobilisées, comment s'articulent-elles aux principaux domaines sémantiques, et jusqu'où le corpus permet-il d'établir un lien entre forme verbale et savoir culturel situé ? La démarche est qualitative, textuelle et comparative. Le corpus de terrain comprend 408 énigmes recueillies par l'auteur à Aït Kouffi (Tizi Ouzou) entre 2010 et 2018, dont 380 auprès d'adultes et 28 auprès d'enfants ; 30 énigmes, toutes issues de ce corpus, font l'objet d'une analyse détaillée. L'étude combine analyses structurale, sémantique et pragmatique avec un codage multilabel distinguant analogie métaphorique, indices métonymiques, relations partie-tout, personnification, prédication paradoxale, jeu grammatical et circonlocution. Les résultats montrent que l'analogie structure de façon récurrente les descriptions du monde naturel, de la culture matérielle, du corps et des relations sociales, mais que l'opacité énigmatique procède le plus souvent de la convergence de plusieurs indices. La catégorisation grammaticale, la sonorité, la contiguïté et les savoirs partagés jouent également un rôle décisif. L'article conclut que les énigmes kabyles

constituent un art verbal complexe, dont l'interprétation associe structure linguistique et compétence culturelle située, sans autoriser pour autant la reconstruction d'une vision amazighe unique ou intemporelle.

Mots-clés

énigmes kabyles, littérature orale, langage figuré, métaphore, métonymie, art verbal, études amazighes

Introduction

Riddles occupy a distinctive position within oral verbal art because they depend on a controlled imbalance between recognition and concealment. A successful riddle does not merely hide an answer : it provides a description that is sufficiently constrained to be solvable while reorganising familiar properties in an unfamiliar form. This combination of opacity and recoverability makes riddles especially useful for the study of figurative language. Their brevity concentrates lexical choice, analogy, sound patterning, grammatical categorisation, and culturally shared knowledge into a small textual space, while their question-and-answer organisation also presupposes an interaction between a poser and a respondent.

Within Kabyle oral literature, riddles belong to a broader repertoire that includes poetry, tales, proverbs, songs, formulaic speech, and other genres transmitted and recreated through performance. Their value is therefore not exhausted by the idea of a linguistic game. In the settings described in the source corpus and in published Kabyle collections, riddling is associated with collective occasions, intergenerational exchange, memory, observation, and verbal skill. These functions should nevertheless be distinguished from what the present article can directly demonstrate. The material analysed here consists primarily of riddle texts and their solutions ; it does not constitute an ethnography of complete riddling sessions. Claims about pedagogy, social cohesion, or ritual value are consequently treated as contextual propositions to be supported by field documentation or by the specialist literature, rather than as effects measured by this study.

The analytical problem addressed here is deliberately precise : how do Kabyle riddles construct an indirect description of their referent, and which rhetorical operations make that description simultaneously misleading and interpretable ? The corpus foregrounds metaphor, metonymy, synecdoche, personification, paradox, oxymoron, euphemism, and circumlocution, but these labels cannot be applied mechanically. A single riddle may combine several operations, and some examples are better explained by structural analogy or paradoxical predication than by a single inherited category. The analysis therefore makes the classification criteria explicit and distinguishes linguistic evidence from broader cultural interpretation.

The distinction matters because the riddle's enigmatic force often lies in relations rather than in isolated words. Similarity may connect the eyes to pearls, a cloud or mist to a garment, or the mouth to a cave. Contiguity may foreground an adornment, a component, or an effect associated with the target. Personification may recast a plant, fruit, tool, or architectural element as a human agent. Grammatical gender may become a resource for paradoxical narration, as in the riddle whose referent receives differently gendered names at successive stages. In other cases, the apparent contradiction is resolved by recognising that a word is being used in a local figurative sense. These mechanisms can overlap, and their interaction is analytically more informative than an exclusive one-label taxonomy.

The article also keeps the cultural dimension in view. The riddles repeatedly draw their vehicles and clues from agriculture, mountain ecology, domestic architecture, weaving, food storage, the human body, kinship, and religious or social imagery. Such recurrences show that interpretation depends on situated cultural competence : a respondent must recognise not only a lexical form but also the shape and use of a loom, the appearance of a plant, the organisation of a house, or a conventional association. Yet this dependence on local knowledge does not justify moving directly from a finite corpus to claims about a single, stable 'Amazigh worldview' or the 'deep structures' of Berber thought. The safer conclusion is that the corpus documents locally meaningful modes of description and categorisation whose broader distribution can be tested comparatively.

Three research questions guide the analysis. First, which figurative and rhetorical operations are mobilised in the Kabyle riddles examined here, and how can their classification be made explicit ? Second, how do these operations interact with recurrent semantic domains such as the natural world, material culture, the body, and social relations ? Third, what can the corpus legitimately support about the relationship between figurative form, cultural knowledge, and the poetics of riddling once claims requiring frequency counts, performance data, or wider comparative evidence are separated from textual analysis ? These questions preserve the focus on stylistic sophistication while setting a clear evidential threshold for each level of interpretation.

The contribution is therefore twofold. Empirically, the article makes a substantial body of Kabyle riddle examples available in transcription and English translation and relates them to published collections. Analytically, it proposes

a disciplined reading in which metaphor, metonymic cueing, part-whole relations, personification, paradoxical predication, and circumlocution are treated as potentially overlapping strategies for constructing opacity. This approach helps explain why riddles can be simple in form yet dense in interpretation, and it places Kabyle material within international work on riddles and verbal art without dissolving its linguistic and cultural specificity.

1. Theoretical and Analytical Framework

1.1. Riddles as form, interaction, and verbal art

The riddle has been approached from folklore, linguistics, anthropology, literary studies, and pragmatics. Structural definitions have emphasised the relation between a descriptive proposition and a referent to be identified, notably in Köngäs Maranda's (1969) structural analysis of riddle form, while performance-oriented approaches have shown that the meaning of a folkloric form also depends on the social event in which it is used. Abrahams (1968, 1972) and Abrahams and Dundes (1972) helped establish the riddle as an object of literary and folkloristic analysis rather than a minor amusement. Georges and Dundes (1963) likewise proposed a structural perspective on riddles, and later work has continued to examine how form, genre expectations, and performance interact. Bauman's (1975) account of verbal art as performance is particularly useful here because it prevents the written transcription from being mistaken for the whole communicative event.

This literature has a direct methodological consequence. The transcribed riddle is treated here as a textual artefact that can be analysed for lexical, semantic, and rhetorical organisation, whereas claims about the social event of riddling require contextual evidence. A metaphor involving a tool may encode knowledge of that tool, for example, but its possible pedagogical usefulness does not by itself demonstrate how it was taught, who learned from it, or how frequently it was performed.

Riddle scholarship also cautions against defining the genre exclusively through one formal template. The Kabyle examples discussed here often use a conventional posing formula such as Graɣ-ak-tt-id ('I pose it to you'), but the enigmatic relation is not reducible to the interrogative frame. What makes the sequence recognisable as a riddle is the combination of genre framing, semantic misdirection, a culturally licensed answer, and an expectation that

the hearer reconstruct the intended relation. The answer is therefore not an arbitrary solution added after the fact ; it is the interpretive key that reveals which features of the description were relevant.

1.2. Figurative meaning : similarity, contiguity, and layered categorisation

The analysis draws on conceptual metaphor theory, especially Lakoff and Johnson (1980), to describe recurrent mappings between domains. Conceptual metaphor provides a productive vocabulary for relations based on similarity, embodied experience, and conventional association, but it must be used at the appropriate scale. A poetic riddle metaphor is not automatically evidence for a broad conceptual system, and a single image does not establish the prevalence of a mapping across a community. Kövecses's (2020) work on the contextual variability of metaphor reinforces the need to attend to local usage and discourse setting rather than assuming uniform conceptual structures.

The analytical distinction between metaphor and metonymy is especially important. Metaphor typically organises understanding through resemblance or cross-domain mapping ; metonymy relies on a relation of contiguity within a conceptual frame, such as part for whole, producer for product, container for content, or a salient associated feature for the target. Synecdoche can be treated more narrowly as a part-whole relation. In riddles, however, an expression may exploit both similarity and contiguity. A descriptive phrase can evoke the target through physical resemblance while another clue points to a part, location, effect, or associated object. The analysis therefore permits co-classification rather than forcing every item into a single exclusive category.

Personification is treated as a particular form of mapping in which a non-human referent is presented through human agency, bodily attributes, kinship, occupation, or social action. Its occurrence is analytically clear when a plant 'lets down its hair', a fruit is represented as a parent with many children, or the components of a loom are made to stand, sleep, or sing. Such formulations can be culturally resonant without requiring the analyst to infer an 'animistic worldview'. The textual fact is anthropomorphic representation ; any stronger claim about cosmology needs independent ethnographic support.

Paradox and contradiction require a similarly careful vocabulary. An oxymoron, in a strict rhetorical sense, usually involves the compact juxtaposition of apparently contradictory terms. Several Kabyle examples instead build a

contradiction across an entire proposition : an entity is said to have milk yet cannot be milked, to have wings yet not fly, or to answer while remaining silent. 'Paradoxical predication' is therefore a more accurate umbrella term for these cases. The contradiction is not nonsensical ; it directs the hearer toward a non-default sense of one or more predicates.

Circumlocution designates indirect description through a longer or less direct formulation. Euphemism is more specific : it implies that the indirect form mitigates a socially sensitive, taboo, offensive, or threatening expression. Because the corpus does not systematically document speakers' reasons for choosing each expression, the label euphemism is reserved for cases in which a mitigating function is supported by context. A metaphorical description of a waterskin as a boar, for instance, is vivid indirection, but it is not euphemistic merely because it avoids naming the waterskin.

1.3. Kabyle and Amazigh scholarship

The analysis is anchored in work on Kabyle and Amazigh oral literature, including published riddle collections by Boulifa (1913), Genevois (1963), Attab and Amrane (1994), Allioui (1990, 2005), Khalfa (2003), and the author's earlier research (Tabti, 2008, 2019). Galand-Pernet (1998), Haddadou (2003, 2009), Kaouas (2004), and related scholarship provide broader linguistic and literary contexts. This literature is valuable for its attention to form, lexicon, transmission, and cultural specificity, while the present article maintains a strict distinction between what is documented in the Aït Kouffi corpus and what derives from comparative Amazigh materials.

This distinction is particularly relevant for terminology. Several Kabyle labels for riddles are documented alongside designations from other Amazigh varieties. The comparative inventory retained here is restricted to forms traceable to published sources, and Annex 3 records the regional groupings and bibliographic provenance used in the comparison.

2. Corpus and methodology

The study is qualitative, textual, and comparative. Its core material consists of riddles collected by the author during fieldwork in Aït Kouffi, a Kabyle-speaking village in Tizi Ouzou, between 2010 and 2018. These materials belong to the larger corpus assembled for the author's doctoral research (Tabti, 2019). Published riddle collections are used only as comparative resources, notably Boulifa (1913), Genevois (1963), Attab and Amrane (1994), Khalfa (2003), Allioui (2005), and Haddadou (2009).

The field corpus comprises 408 riddles collected by the author in Ait Kouffi (380 items from adult informants and 28 items collected from children), between 2010 and 2018. The two sub-corpora are numbered independently in the author's doctoral dissertation (Tabti, 2019) ; item numbers below are given with an explicit sub-corpus label wherever an example is drawn from the children's sub-corpus, to avoid any ambiguity between the two numbering series. The 30 riddles analysed in the present article are drawn exclusively from this field corpus ; the author confirms that none of the examples discussed here is reproduced from the published comparative collections cited below (Boulifa 1913, Genevois 1963, Attab and Amrane 1994, Khalfa 2003, Allioui 2005, Haddadou 2009), which were used only for contextual comparison in the author's doctoral research (Tabti, 2019).

Provenance is recorded at item level. Every riddle analysed in Sections 5 and 6 carries its thesis corpus number and, where necessary, its sub-corpus designation. This protocol distinguishes primary field data from comparative published materials and allows readers to identify the evidential basis of each example.

All thirty examples analysed in this article originate directly from the Aït Kouffi field corpus. Twenty-nine belong to the adult sub-corpus (380 items) and one — the riddle about the ear in §5.2 — to the children's sub-corpus (28 items). None of the thirty analytical examples is reproduced from the published comparative collections ; those collections are used for contextual and terminological comparison only (Tabti, 2019).

The riddles are transcribed using the author's Latin-based transcription system, documented in the doctoral dissertation (Tabti, 2019) and inspired by conventions current in Berber linguistics rather than by a formal INALCO standard. The inventory is as follows : consonants b, d, f, g, k, l, m, n, r, s, t, z are noted as in French ; emphatics are noted v, ẓ, ṭ, ḍ, ṛ ; labiovelars b°, g°, k°, q°, x° ; sibilants j, c (French ch) ; velars ɣ, x (kh), q ; uvulars ɛ, h ; affricates o (dj), č (tch), ţ (ts) ; geminated (tense) consonants are noted by doubling the letter ; semi-vowels w, y ; vowels a, i, u, with e for the neutral vowel. This inventory is applied consistently throughout the article and reproduced in Annex 2.

All French and English translations of the riddles are the author's own. Literal renderings are retained where they are necessary to make the figurative mechanism visible ; more idiomatic wording is used only when it does not erase the clue-answer relation. The translations have not been inde-

pendently validated by a second linguist, a limitation taken into account in the interpretation.

Three complementary levels of analysis are maintained. Structural analysis considers formulae, syntactic organisation, parallelism, and the relation between clue and answer. Semantic analysis examines the relations that make the clue interpretable, especially similarity, contiguity, part-whole structure, grammatical categorisation, and semantic contrast. Pragmatic analysis is limited to contextual information actually supported by field documentation or specialist literature : the interactional role of the posing formula, the expectation of a response, and the cultural knowledge required to recognise particular tools, plants, practices, or social images.

Coding the figures of speech follows an explicit decision rule. A metaphor label is used where the central clue depends on perceived resemblance or cross-domain mapping ; metonymy where an associated element within the same frame gives access to the target ; synecdoche only where a demonstrable part-whole relation is central ; personification where non-human entities receive human properties or roles ; paradoxical predication where apparently incompatible properties become coherent once a figurative or grammatical reading is found ; circumlocution where the referent is described indirectly without the stronger claim of taboo mitigation. More than one label may apply to the same riddle. This multilabel procedure better reflects the layered construction of the examples.

The analysis is interpretive rather than quantitative. No inter-coder reliability procedure was applied and no frequency table is used to support claims of statistical prevalence. The article therefore avoids statements such as ‘metaphor is the most prevalent figure’. What the examples support is a qualitative claim : metaphorical analogy is recurrent and structurally productive across several semantic domains. The full coding protocol is made explicit in Annex 4 so that future work can test it on the complete corpus.

Data integrity is addressed through item-level provenance and the exclusion of personal identifiers from the published examples. The collection dates from 2010-2018 and belongs to the author’s doctoral field corpus (Tabti, 2019). No retrospective ethics approval is claimed. The article reports only the textual material and corpus identifiers necessary for scholarly verification ; the provenance and limits of reuse are summarised in Annex 5.

3. Kabyle Riddles : Designations, Functions, and Cultural Context

3.1. Designations and definitions

In the Kabyle language, riddles are designated by various terms that reflect their regional diversity and functional multiplicity. The most common designations include timseɛraq (singular : timseɛraqt), timesbibbay (singular : timsbibbit), and, in some regions, timsefra (singular : tamsefrut), as well as timsalin or timsal (singular : tamsalt). These terms, while referring to the same discursive genre, carry subtle semantic differences that reflect the cultural understanding of the riddling practice.

The term timseɛraqt is etymologically related to the verb eɛreq (to mislead, misplace, confuse, disorient, divert, deflect, hijack, lead astray, hint, allude). This connection highlights the allusive nature of riddles and their reliance on indirect reference.

The author relates timsbibbit to the root bib (to bear, hold, convey, support, shoulder, sustain), interpreting the form through the figurative burden placed on a respondent who fails to solve the riddle. In the absence of a dedicated lexicographic demonstration within the present corpus, this relation is treated as an ethnolinguistic hypothesis rather than as an established etymology.

Tamsefrut is similarly related in the author's analysis to efru (to resolve, solve, settle, or clear up), a connection that foregrounds the interpretive task of reaching a solution. Here again, the relation is retained as a motivated lexical interpretation rather than presented as a definitive etymological derivation.

Across the broader Amazigh-speaking regions, riddles are known by various designations : tamḥajit, tamacahuṭ, tiḥiǧǧa, timfusin in Chaoui, tinfas, tinfusin, timnzriwt, tawafitin, tinqifin, tuqniwin in Rifian, tiɣuniwin, umiyn, tumiyen, tumiyt, bbalḥ in Tachelhit and tunzart/ tunéart, timzuren, cimzurin, tanfust, iggi, iggiten, taggoren, maslo, masloten, tamaslut, semmektu in Tuareg regions.

These regional forms are not offered as an unsourced inventory : the Chaoui and Moyen-Atlas forms (tamḥajit/tiḥiǧǧa and related variants) are documented in Ardouz and Bentolila (1986) and in Haddadou (2003) ; the Rifian and comparative dialectal forms of tanfust/tinfas are documented in the same volume (Bentolila, dir., 1986) ; the Tachelhit forms are documented in Destaing (1920) and in Derkaoui (1986) ; and the Touareg forms (tunẓart,

timzuren, cimzoren, iggi/iggiten, maslo/masloten) are documented in Drouin (1986) and in Azdoud and Peyron (1995). Forms not traceable to one of these sources have been removed from the list rather than retained as unsourced comparative material.

Taken together, these forms document lexical diversity across Amazigh-speaking regions. No claim is made here about their frequency or cultural salience beyond the distribution attested in the cited sources ; the comparative provenance is summarised in Annex 3.

Conceptually, a Kabyle riddle can be defined as a verbal formula that presents an enigmatic description of an object, action, or concept that the listener must identify. This description typically relies on figurative language that simultaneously reveals and conceals the subject through various rhetorical strategies. A frequent structure follows a question-answer format, where the riddler poses the enigma, often prefaced with a conventional opening formula such as "Graɣ-ak-tt-id" ("I pose it to you"), and the respondent attempts to provide the solution.

3.2. Social functions and performance contexts

Tabti's field documentation (2019) and the specialist literature associate Kabyle riddling with several functions beyond entertainment. Riddles were traditionally performed during evening gatherings bringing together family members and, in some settings, neighbours, particularly during winter periods when agricultural activity slowed. Gatherings around the hearth (lkanun) are described as contexts of intergenerational exchange in which cultural knowledge could circulate.

Functions commonly attributed to Kabyle riddling in the source context and the specialist literature include the following :

- Pedagogical function : Riddles can operate as verbal exercises engaging observation skills, analogical thinking, and problem-solving abilities, particularly among children. Their clues draw on knowledge of the natural environment, traditional crafts, social norms, and material culture.
- Social cohesion : Collective riddling can create shared experiences and reinforcing cultural knowledge. The cooperative and competitive aspects of riddling sessions promote social interaction across generations.

- Linguistic development : Riddles expose participants to poetic and figurative uses of language, expanding vocabulary, and developing metalinguistic awareness.
- Cultural preservation : Through their content and form, riddles preserve verbal representations of cultural values, material practices, and shared knowledge ; the corpus demonstrates this documentary potential without measuring its actual transmission effects.
- Entertainment : The playful and challenging nature of riddles provides entertainment, particularly during periods of diminished agricultural activity or during social gatherings.

The performance frame described for many Kabyle riddles involves a dialogic exchange between the riddler and audience. The riddler presents the enigma, and listeners attempt to solve it, with successful solutions often rewarded by social recognition or the right to pose the next riddle. In traditional settings, riddling sessions might follow specific protocols, with certain riddles reserved for particular occasions or restricted to specific age groups.

3.3. Cultural and historical context

The practice of riddling in Kabyle communities has evolved within specific historical and cultural circumstances that have shaped both its form and content. Traditionally embedded in the cyclical rhythm of agricultural life, riddling sessions provided intellectual stimulation during winter evenings when outdoor work was limited. The content of riddles reflected the material culture, environmental knowledge, and social structures of agrarian Kabyle society.

Colonial history, post-independence social change, urbanisation, changing social routines, and heritage movements form an important background to the evolution of riddling practices. Because the present study is not based on a dedicated diachronic dataset, these processes are treated as historical context rather than as causal explanations established by the corpus itself.

Contemporary research on Amazigh-language oral literature also develops within a changed institutional setting. Tamazight is recognised by the Algerian Constitution as a national and official language (Constitution of Algeria, 2020, art. 4). This context has contributed to the visibility of Amazigh-language research and pedagogical initiatives, although the present corpus does not measure the extent to which traditional performance settings have declined or been transformed.

Despite these transformations, riddles remain relevant in contemporary Kabyle society, though often in adapted forms. Educational programs, cultural festivals, and media initiatives now incorporate riddles as emblematic expressions of Amazigh cultural identity. Such adaptation can be read as evidence of continuing recontextualisation while raising questions about authenticity and the changing functions of riddling in modern contexts.

4. Rhetorical Operations in Kabyle Riddles : Forms and Functions

4.1. Metaphor : Conceptual mappings and analogical thinking

Metaphor is especially recurrent in the examples examined here, serving as the fundamental cognitive mechanism through which enigmatic descriptions are constructed. In Kabyle riddles, metaphorical constructions typically establish unexpected connections between disparate semantic domains, creating the conceptual challenge that must be resolved by the respondent.

The metaphorical process in Kabyle riddles often involves mapping physical properties of one domain onto another, as exemplified in this riddle :

> Graɣ-ak-tt-id : Snat tɛeqqucin deg uẓeṭṭa, mi medlent d abrid s aẓekka. (I pose it to you : Two pearls on a weaving, when they close, it is the path to the grave.)
> Answer : Tiṭ (Eyes) [Corpus Ait Kouffi, 2010-2018, thesis n° 195]

This riddle metaphorically conceptualizes the eyes as "pearls" and the eyelashes as "a weaving." The effectiveness of the metaphor lies in the resemblance between the lustrous, delicate nature of pearls and the eyes, as well as the structured, fine arrangement of a weaving and the eyelashes. Additionally, the closing of the eyes is metonymically linked to death, reinforcing the enigmatic and poetic quality of the riddle.

Another example demonstrates how metaphorical mapping can engage with celestial and terrestrial imagery :

> Graɣ-ak-tt-id : Tamazirt, teççur d ibawen, ur ssawḍeɣ ad d-kkseɣ yiwen. (I pose it to you : The field is full of broad beans, yet I cannot pick a single one.)
> Answer : Igenwan d yitran (The sky and the stars) [Corpus Ait Kouffi, 2010-2018, thesis n° 250]

Here, the riddle compares the sky to a field and the stars to broad beans, creating a striking visual analogy. The vastness of the sky resembles an open field, while the scattered brilliance of the stars mirrors the dispersed pattern of beans in a cultivated land. The impossibility of reaching the stars, just like picking beans from an untouchable field, enhances the enigmatic and metaphorical depth of the riddle.

These examples illustrate how Kabyle riddles use metaphor as a poetic and interpretive device, transforming ordinary elements into descriptions whose solution depends on recognising a structured resemblance.

Kabyle riddles frequently employ metaphors based on :

- Anthropomorphic mappings : Attribution of human characteristics to non-human entities
- Zoomorphic mappings : Attribution of animal characteristics to non-animal entities
- Structural mappings : Based on physical resemblance in shape, size, or configuration
- Functional mappings : Based on similar actions or purposes
- Sensory mappings : Based on shared sensory qualities (color, sound, texture)

The interpretive complexity of these metaphorical constructions varies considerably, from relatively transparent analogies to highly abstract conceptual mappings that require sophisticated cultural knowledge to decode.

4.2. Metonymic cues and part-whole relations

While metaphor operates through similarity, metonymy and synecdoche function through contiguity, where one element stands for another based on spatial, temporal, or conceptual proximity. In Kabyle riddles, these figures create enigmatic descriptions by highlighting a part, quality, or associated element of the object to be guessed.

An example originally classified as synecdoche is better treated cautiously as a structural metaphor with possible part-whole cueing :

> Graɣ-ak-tt-id : Aɛrqub n uffal, Zerriɛa-s d uzzal. (I pose it to you : Umbrella plant field, whose seeds are metal.)
> Answer : Aqerdac (The weaving loom card) [Corpus Ait Kouffi, 2010-2018, thesis n° 7]

The "field" evokes the wooden surface through structural resemblance and the "metal seeds" evoke the teeth through a second analogy. If a part-whole reading is retained, it concerns the relation between the teeth and the complete carding implement ; the figurative wording itself is primarily analogical rather than a straightforward synecdoche.

Metonymy frequently appears in riddles about body parts, where a distinctive feature stands in for the whole :

> Graɣ-ak-tt-id : Ɛuɛɛu, iɛelleq lullu. (I pose it to you : A piece of flesh sporting a jewel.)
> Answer : Ameẓẓuɣ (The ear) [Corpus Ait Kouffi, 2010-2018, thesis n° 13 — children's sub-corpus]

Here, the ear is approached through a bodily description and through the associated earring. The relation between ear and adornment is metonymic, while the overall formulation remains a circumlocutory description.

Another example illustrates a metonymy based on the association between an object and one of its characteristic elements :

> Graɣ-ak-tt-id : Snat taɛwinin, umi zzint tqecḍatin. (I pose it to you : Two springs, adorned with twigs.)
> Answer : Allen (The eyes) [Corpus Ait Kouffi, 2010-2018, thesis n° 192]

In this riddle, the springs (taɛwinin) provide an analogical image for the eyes rather than a strict metonymic substitute. The connection is based on the shared characteristic of fluidity, as eyes can shed tears just as springs produce water. Additionally, the phrase adorned with twigs evokes eyelashes, reinforcing the association between the two.

The relation is based on a perceived similarity between water issuing from a spring and tears issuing from the eyes ; it is therefore better analysed as metaphorical analogy, with the twigs supplying a second visual clue for the eyelashes.

Metonymic and part-whole cues are effective when they direct attention to an associated component or property without naming the complete referent. In the Kabyle examples, however, such cueing often operates alongside resemblance. The analysis therefore distinguishes a relation of contiguity from a merely peripheral descriptive detail and allows metaphor and metonymy to coexist where the wording supports both.

4.3. Personification : Attribution of human qualities

Personification—the attribution of human qualities to non-human entities—is recurrent in the examples concerning natural phenomena and inanimate objects. It creates interpretive incongruity by presenting non-human referents through human characteristics, actions, or relationships.

A classic example of personification appears in this riddle about the diss (a kind of esparto grass, adles, used in Kabylie for the production of wickerwork objects and for covering huts. It is also used, ground, to heal non-purulent wounds) :

> Graɣ-ak-tt-id : Ibedd ɣef wecruf, Yebra-d i wrefruf. Tiririt : adles. (I pose it to you : At the edge of the precipice, it lets down its long hair.)
> Answer : The diss. [Corpus Ait Kouffi, 2010-2018, thesis n° 85]

This riddle personifies the diss as a person letting down their hair. The poetic description conveys the plant's physical appearance as it grows in ravines and precipices, giving it the illusion of cascading hair. By attributing human action and bodily imagery to the plant, the riddle creates a recognisable visual analogy without requiring a broader claim about the relation between nature and human perception.

Another example demonstrates personification through social interaction :

> Graɣ-ak-tt-id : Lqed-is anect n lbunya, Arraw-is ɛaddan miyya. Tiririt : taḍemmant. (I pose it to you : No bigger than a fist, but it has more than a hundred children.)
> Answer : The pomegranate. [Corpus Ait Kouffi, 2010-2018, thesis n° 147]

Here, the pomegranate is personified as a parent with numerous children, the 'children' corresponding to the many seeds contained within the fruit. The riddle relies on a familiar kinship schema to render numerical abundance memorable. The textual evidence supports this anthropomorphic mapping ; possible fertility symbolism would require independent ethnographic evidence.

Personification often occurs together with metaphor and paradoxical predication, producing multi-layered constructions. The combination is analytically useful because a non-human entity may first be mapped onto a person and then characterised through a social role, body part, or action. The resulting image can be culturally resonant without requiring the analyst to extrapolate a comprehensive worldview from the individual riddle.

The recurrence of personification in riddles about natural phenomena shows that bodily and social experience can serve as a productive descriptive resource. The textual evidence supports an anthropomorphic mode of representation ; it does not by itself establish a general cosmology or an animistic theory of the environment.

4.4. Paradoxical predication and grammatical play

Paradoxical predication creates interpretive tension by presenting apparently contradictory or impossible scenarios, forcing the listener to resolve the logical tension through creative interpretation. In Kabyle riddles, these figures function as powerful devices for obscuring the subject while engaging the respondent in active cognitive processing.

Consider this paradoxical construction :

> Graɣ-ak-tt-id : Illul-ed d win, yuɣal d ṯṯin, yemmut d win. (I pose it to you : It was born male, it became female, it died male.)
> Answer : Iniɣem (Dried fig) [Corpus Ait Kouffi, 2010-2018, thesis n° 107]

The riddle presents an apparent contradiction by narrating a change in grammatical gender across differently named stages of the referent. This paradox is resolved when we recognize that the fig receives different names in Kabyle depending on its stage of maturity : aqerquc (interrupted maturation, masculine), tabexsist (ripe fig, feminine), and iniɣem (dried fig, masculine). The effect depends on the grammatical gender of the successive Kabyle nouns ; it is wordplay on lexical categorisation rather than a claim about biological sex.

: Paradoxical constructions also appear in riddles about natural elements

> Graɣ-ak-tt-id : Tesɛa ayefki ur teṯṯeẓẓeg, tesɛa afriwen ur teṯṯafeg. (I pose it to you : It has milk but is not milked ; it has wings but does not fly.)
> Answer : Taneqelṯ (Fig tree) [Corpus Ait Kouffi, 2010-2018, thesis n° 280]

This riddle employs two connected paradoxical predications to describe the fig tree : its sap resembles milk but is not produced in the way an animal produces milk, and its leaves are metaphorically called “wings” in Kabyle, yet they do not serve the function of flight. The contradictory attributes create an enigmatic quality while accurately describing the fig tree’s unique properties.

Apparently incompatible predicates can also structure riddles about less tangible phenomena :

> Graɣ-ak-tt-id : Iggul ur d-ineṭṭeq, yerna yeṭṭar-ed lmanṭeq. (I pose it to you : He swore to keep silent, but (when questioned), he responds.)
> Answer : Ahu (Echo) [Corpus Ait Kouffi, 2010-2018, thesis n° 90]

This riddle employs paradoxical categorization, presenting the echo as something that is both silent and responsive. The contradiction is resolved by recognizing that an echo does not produce speech on its own but rather repeats sounds, creating the illusion of answering while remaining inherently voiceless.

Paradoxical predication can encourage metalinguistic reinterpretation by making a literal reading temporarily impossible. The solver must identify which term has a non-default sense, which grammatical category is being exploited, or which property is only apparently contradictory. This is a textual and interpretive effect ; claims about broader metacognitive development would require a participant-based study.

4.5. Circumlocution and strategic indirection

Circumlocution and, where a mitigating function can be demonstrated, euphemism function as strategies of indirection, describing subjects through roundabout expressions or deliberately vague terminology. In Kabyle riddles, these figures serve both to obscure the subject and to navigate culturally sensitive topics through socially acceptable language.

Circumlocution appears in examples concerning death, bodily topics, animals, and ordinary objects. Where an indirect formulation concerns a potentially sensitive subject, a euphemistic function is possible, but the present corpus does not document the speaker's pragmatic motivation in every case :

> Graɣ-ak-tt-id : "Axxam adeyqan, Ur nesɛi ṯṯwiqan." (I pose it to you : A house with no windows, cannot be entered.)
> Answer : "aẓekka" (The grave) [Corpus Ait Kouffi, 2010-2018, thesis n° 32]

This riddle employs circumlocution to address the concept of death and burial without direct reference to the grave. The description of a "house without windows" metaphorically represents the tomb, allowing discussion of a potentially taboo subject through indirect language.

A further example shows why indirect description must not automatically be equated with euphemism :

> Graɣ-ak-tt-id : "Ilef, Yeguni ṛṛef." (I pose it to you : A boar under the gutter.)
> Answer : "ayeddid" (The waterskin) [Corpus Ait Kouffi, 2010-2018, thesis n° 99]

This riddle represents a waterskin through a zoomorphic metaphor, using indirect language to describe an everyday object in a poetic and non-literal way. The indirect framing transforms a mundane subject into an enigmatic verbal image ; no taboo-mitigating function is demonstrated here.

Indirect description also appears in riddles about ordinary animals and objects :

> Graɣ-ak-tt-id : "Ibedd di tizi, Yessawal a zizi !" (I pose it to you : Standing on a hill, it calls out 'cousin' !)
> Answer : "ayaziḍ" (The rooster) [Corpus Ait Kouffi, 2010-2018, thesis n° 84]

This riddle uses an indirect, animated description of the rooster. The wording obscures the referent while foregrounding posture and call. The interpretation is therefore limited to the textual mechanisms directly observable in the item.

Taken together, these examples establish that indirection is structurally productive in the riddle genre. Some circumlocutions may also have euphemistic functions, particularly around death or bodily topics, but such a pragmatic motivation is accepted only where performance context or speaker commentary supports it.

5. Semantic Fields and Conceptual Domains

5.1. The natural world and ecological knowledge

Kabyle riddles frequently draw on the natural world as both subject matter and a source of figurative language. The examples connect plants, animals, weather, and celestial phenomena to images drawn from agriculture, clothing, domestic life, and the body. This distribution is compatible with the environmental knowledge of the communities in which the riddles circulate, while the article restricts itself to the associations actually represented in the corpus.

Flora and fauna constitute primary subjects in many riddles, often described through vivid imagery and anthropomorphic metaphors :

> Graɣ-ak-tt-id : "Jebdeɣ amrar, Yenhezz wedrar." (I pose it to you : I pulled the rope, The mountain shook.)
> Answer : Taxsayt (Pumpkin) [Corpus Ait Kouffi, 2010-2018, thesis n° 129]

This riddle plays on the physical characteristics of the pumpkin. The "rope" evokes its long, trailing stem, while "mountain" magnifies the mass of the fruit. The image is grounded in agricultural observation ; claims about the pumpkin's economic or dietary importance require separate documentation.

> Graɣ-ak-tt-id : "S ufella d adɣes, Ɣer daxel d iɣes." (I pose it to you : From the outside, colostrum, Inside the bone.)
> Answer : Tayni (Date) [Corpus Ait Kouffi, 2010-2018, thesis n° 206]

This riddle contrasts the soft outer flesh of the date with the hardness of its stone. The comparison to colostrum supplies a sensory and alimentary analogy. The analysis is limited to this observable contrast ; broader symbolism concerning nourishment would require contextual evidence. The example remains relevant whether the fruit is locally cultivated or reaches Kabyle communities through exchange.

These examples show how environmental referents are described through culturally available sensory and material analogies. Broader symbolic meanings are retained only when supported by field commentary or published sources.

Meteorological phenomena frequently appear in Kabyle riddles, which often employ paradox and personification to reflect the lived experiences of mountain dwellers :

> Graɣ-ak-tt-id : "Abernus n Belɛajuṭ, Yeẓḍan mbla taḍuṭ." Tiririt : Tagut ; aɣəmɣum. (I pose it to you : The burnous of Belɛajuṭ, woven without wool.)
> Answer : The fog, the mist. [Corpus Ait Kouffi, 2010-2018, thesis n° 28]

This riddle likens fog to a burnous (a traditional woollen cloak), highlighting its pale colour and its capacity to envelop the mountains like fabric. The comparison is grounded in visual observation of a mountain environment.

> Graɣ-ak-tt-id : "D amellal am urekti, Ma yafeg, yeṭrusu, yeṭṭali." Tiririt : Adfel, ameččim. (I pose it to you : White like dough, it flutters up and down.)
> Answer : The snowflake, snow. [Corpus Ait Kouffi, 2010-2018, thesis n° 56]

The riddle captures the lightness and movement of snowflakes through a comparison with white dough and fluttering motion. Its interpretive value lies in the perceptual analogy itself, which can be established directly from the wording without generalising an additional symbolism to Kabyle culture as a whole.

These riddles render meteorological phenomena through images drawn from familiar objects, movement, and social experience. They therefore document close observation and culturally available analogies ; ecological ethics or prescriptions about living in harmony with nature should not be inferred from the figurative form alone.

Celestial bodies and temporal cycles provide rich material for riddles that employ paradox and spatial metaphors :

> Graɣ-ak-tt-id : "Lḥara nnig medden, Ur ṭṭizdiɣ yiwen." Tiririt : Igenni, tignewt. (I pose it to you : A house above people, No one inhabits it.)
> Answer : The sky, the celestial vault, the firmament. [Corpus Ait Kouffi, 2010-2018, thesis n° 139]

This riddle portrays the sky as a vast dwelling above human habitation. Its effect depends on spatial metaphor and the impossibility of ordinary occupancy. The analysis does not infer a spiritual or religious meaning unless such a reading is independently documented.

> Graɣ-ak-tt-id : "A ţaya tcerreg aẓeṭṭa, Medleɣ allen tɛedda." Tiririt : Tansebt. (I pose it to you : There it is, melting the loom, I closed my eyes : it vanished.)
> Answer : The shooting star. [Corpus Ait Kouffi, 2010-2018, thesis n° 25]

This riddle captures the fleeting appearance of a shooting star through a rapidly disappearing visual image. The present analysis remains at the level of the attested figurative relation and does not treat a specific religious explanation as part of the item unless independently sourced.

Celestial imagery is salient among the examples presented here and combines perceptual observation with cultural interpretation. Such riddles can transmit names and associations related to the sky and seasonal experience, although their pedagogical effects would need to be investigated directly rather than presumed from content alone.

5.2. Material culture and traditional technologies

Elements of material culture and traditional technologies are prominent among the examples discussed here. These riddles describe tools, domestic implements, architectural elements, and craft techniques through memorable figurative relations, thereby preserving verbal representations of practices and objects.

Household implements frequently appear as solutions to riddles employing personification and metaphor :

> Graɣ-ak-tt-id : Yeqqummec iḥezzem, Yesseblɛ izrem. (I pose it to you : Kneeling and girded, It swallows a snake.)
> Answer : tafeggact, taftilt n zzit (the oil lamp) [Corpus Ait Kouffi, 2010-2018, thesis n° 359]

This riddle describes the traditional clay lamp through the image of a kneeling, girded figure consuming a snake, the snake corresponding to the wick. Personification and functional analogy jointly obscure the referent while preserving a recognisable feature of the lamp's operation.

Traditional household tools are often described through metaphors drawing upon distinctive sounds and actions :

> Graɣ-ak-tt-id : Beddeɣ nnig n tzeqqa, Sliɣ i wbeqqa. (I pose it to you : Leaning over the room, I heard slaps.)
> Answer : aɣerbal (the sieve) [Corpus Ait Kouffi, 2010-2018, thesis n° 35]

The sieve is presented through the sound associated with its use. The clue preserves an acoustic feature of the tool and can be read as an instance of indirect functional description rather than as evidence, by itself, of intergenerational technical transmission.

Items for water storage feature in riddles employing animal imagery :

> Graɣ-ak-tt-id : Ilef, Iɛelleq sdaw n ṛṛef. (I pose it to you : A wild boar, Hanging from the eaves.)

> Answer : ayeddid (the goatskin water bag) [Corpus Ait Kouffi, 2010-2018, thesis n° 98]

This riddle conceptualises the filled waterskin as a wild boar through a resemblance of shape and specifies its customary hanging position. It therefore combines zoomorphic metaphor with a locational clue to a traditional storage practice.

Architectural elements feature in riddles employing structural metaphors and personification :

> Graɣ-ak-tt-id : Ṛṛebɛa dlen, Ṛṛebɛa bedden, Mya d mya ṭṣen, Ma ṯṯaklit, tɛus fella-sen. (I pose it to you : Four cover, Four stand, A hundred and a hundred sleep, While the black slave keeps watch over them.)
> Answer : axxam (The house) [Corpus Ait Kouffi, 2010-2018, thesis n° 164]

This riddle maps the components of the traditional Kabyle house onto human postures and roles. The English rendering 'black slave' reproduces a historically charged expression in the corpus data and is retained only as a philological translation of the cited wording, not as the analyst's descriptive vocabulary. The image personifies the darkened hearth or fire as a sentinel.

Riddles about traditional crafts also describe technical components through figurative relationships :

> Graɣ-ak-tt-id : Sin ẓzlen, ṭṭsen, Sin rsen bedden, Sin cennun gara-sen. (I pose it to you : Two are stretched out and sleep, Two stand upright, Two, in the middle, sing together.)
> Answer : azeṭta (the loom) [Corpus Ait Kouffi, 2010-2018, thesis n° 175]

This riddle personifies the components of the traditional vertical loom through their positions and functions. The beam rollers are "sleeping," the uprights are "standing," and the reeds are "singing" as they move up and down during weaving. This personification reflects cultural conceptualizations of craft technologies while encoding practical knowledge about the loom's structure.

Everyday objects used for personal care appear in riddles employing paradoxical descriptions :

> Graɣ-ak-tt-id : Lliɣ deg-s, Ur kcimeɣ deg-s. (I pose it to you : I was in it, But without entering it.)
> Answer : lemri (the mirror) [Corpus Ait Kouffi, 2010-2018, thesis n° 144]

This riddle captures the paradoxical experience of seeing oneself represented in a mirror without physically entering it. The solution resolves the apparent contradiction by distinguishing optical presence from bodily location.

The concentration of tools and domestic objects in these examples shows how material culture supplies a rich inventory of shapes, sounds, postures, and functions for riddle construction. In historical terms, the riddles also preserve verbal representations of technologies whose everyday familiarity may change over time. This documentary potential is distinct from a measured claim that the riddles themselves transmitted technical competence.

5.3. The human body and social relations

Riddles concerning the human body and social relations form a distinct group in the material discussed here. They often combine several rhetorical operations, using architecture, pastoral imagery, occupations, kinship, and contrast to describe familiar but intimate referents.

Anatomical riddles frequently employ metaphors and personification to describe bodily organs and functions :

> Graɣ-ak-tt-id : Snat tɛaqqucin deg uẓeṭṭîa, Mi medlent, amzun d aẓekka. Tiririt : tiṭṭucin. (I pose it to you : Two pearls on a weaving, When they close, it is like a tomb.)
> Answer : The eyes. [Corpus Ait Kouffi, 2010-2018, thesis n° 194]

This riddle metaphorically presents the eyes as pearls and the eyelashes as a woven structure. The closing of the eyes supplies an additional association with death, so the item combines visual analogy with a culturally intelligible consequence of eyelid closure.

Parts of the body are often described through metaphors drawing upon architectural imagery :

> Graɣ-ak-tt-id : Ifri izemmen, Yeldi, banen-d izamaren. Tiririt : imi, tuɣmas naɣ uglan. (I pose it to you : Closed cave : Opened, it reveals the lambs.)
> Answer : The mouth and teeth. [Corpus Ait Kouffi, 2010-2018, thesis n° 89]

Here, the mouth is metaphorically conceptualized as a cave, with the teeth personified as lambs. The metaphor captures both the physical structure of the mouth (enclosed space) and the appearance of teeth (white like lambs) through familiar pastoral imagery.

Riddles about body parts often employ occupational metaphors to describe their function :

> Graɣ-ak-tt-id : Aɛacra n ṭṭelba, S telwaḥin dima. Tiririt : iḍuḍan d waccaren. (I pose it to you : Ten clerks,
> Constantly equipped with wooden tablets (for the Quran).)
> Answer : The fingers and nails. [Corpus Ait Kouffi, 2010-2018, thesis n° 05]

This riddle represents the fingers as Quranic scholars and the nails as their wooden writing tablets. The comparison draws on a culturally recognisable educational image to describe the number, alignment, and pairing of fingers and nails.

Contrasting qualities provide metaphorical frameworks for describing bodily functions :

> Graɣ-ak-tt-id : Sin ferḍen, Sin berḍen. Tiririt : iḍuḍan d wanzaren. (I pose it to you : Two clean, Two have diarrhea.)
>
> Answer : The fingers and nostrils. [Corpus Ait Kouffi, 2010-2018, thesis n° 177]

This riddle employs contrasting states of cleanliness to describe the relationship between fingers and nostrils, using somewhat crude humor to encode observations about bodily functions.

Anatomical riddles make bodily organs and functions available to figurative description through culturally familiar images. They can provide a socially recognisable way of talking about the body, but the present textual corpus does not measure educational, social, or developmental effects ; those functions require performance or participant data.

The field corpus contains no directly elicited example in the present selection whose solution is a sexual organ. This absence cannot by itself be attributed to modesty, because the study does not include a systematic elicitation protocol designed to test that hypothesis. Some riddles nevertheless contain possible sexual connotations while referring to ordinary objects :

> Graɣ-ak-tt-id : D aberkan am inissi, Sseg°rayen-t medden i ymensi. Tiririt : aqerdac. (I pose it to you : Black like the hedgehog, It is taken after dinner.)
> Answer : The carding tool. [Corpus Ait Kouffi, 2010-2018, thesis n° 46]

The density of anatomical imagery shows that the human body is a productive domain for riddle construction. Calling the corpus an "anatomical encyclopedia" is best understood as a metaphor for this lexical richness, not as a claim of systematic encyclopedic coverage.

6. Analytical Synthesis

The examples analysed in the preceding sections support a qualitative rather than frequency-based synthesis. Analogical mapping is recurrent across all three major semantic domains represented here : natural phenomena are described through agriculture, clothing, kinship, or bodily images ; tools and architectural elements are represented through human posture, animals, or cultivated space ; body parts are recast as pearls, springs, caves, lambs, scholars, or other culturally recognisable entities. These mappings do not simply ornament an otherwise literal proposition. They are the mechanism by which the referent is displaced from its ordinary category and made available through a different descriptive frame.

A second result is the importance of layered clues. Several riddles cannot be adequately described by a single trope. The eyes may be pearls while the eyelashes are weaving ; an ear may be a piece of flesh while the earring supplies a metonymic clue ; a carding tool may be a field whose metal teeth become seeds ; a loom may combine posture, sleep, standing, and song. The interpretive task consists in discovering a configuration in which several apparently incongruous predicates become jointly coherent. Multilabel analysis therefore gives a better account of the riddle's internal architecture than exclusive classification.

Third, the corpus demonstrates the role of grammatical and lexical knowledge alongside imagery. The dried-fig riddle depends on the grammatical gender of different lexical designations at successive stages, not on an ontological change in the object. The fig-tree riddle depends on local or figurative extensions of 'milk' and 'wings'. The echo riddle depends on the distinction between initiating speech and returning it. In each case, the solution reassigns the predicates to a less obvious but linguistically licensed interpretation.

Fourth, semantic domains matter because they organise the knowledge required for solving. Recognition of a loom, carding tool, oil lamp, waterskin, house, sieve, pumpkin, fig tree, fog, or particular plant presupposes familiarity

with material and ecological contexts. The riddles therefore preserve lexical and descriptive knowledge even when they are not treated as direct evidence of a pedagogical outcome. Their documentary value lies partly in the fact that the clue-answer relation keeps objects, practices, and names within a network of memorable associations.

A final result of the re-examination concerns the scope of inference. Recurrent examples are sufficient to establish sophisticated figurative organisation and culturally situated verbal artistry, but they do not, without a complete coded inventory and comparative design, quantify the distribution of figures or demonstrate a single conceptual system across Amazigh communities. Restricting the scope of inference strengthens rather than weakens the contribution.

Tableau 1. Analytical operations, representative examples, and functions in the riddle

Analytical operation	Representative examples	Function in the riddle
Similarity / metaphor	pearls-eyes ; field-sky ; fog-burnous ; cave-mouth	Reframes the referent through physical, sensory, or functional resemblance.
Contiguity / metonymic cue	ear-earring ; component-whole relations in tools	Provides access through an associated element within the same frame.
Personification	diss as hair ; pomegranate as parent ; loom components as agents	Assigns human body, kinship, posture, or action to non-human referents.
Paradoxical predication	fig-tree milk/wings ; echo answering while silent ; mirror presence	Creates an apparent contradiction resolved by lexical or situational reinterpretation.
Grammatical play	successive names of the fig with different grammatical genders	Uses linguistic categorisation itself as the source of opacity.
Circumlocution / indirection	grave as windowless house ; rooster described through posture and call	Avoids direct naming ; euphemistic function requires separate evidence.

7. Discussion

The Kabyle material is consistent with a broad finding in riddle scholarship : the genre exploits a tension between semantic fit and categorical mismatch. The respondent is guided toward the answer by features that are real enough to be recognisable but are framed through a category that makes the object

initially difficult to identify. Structural approaches to riddles explain the organisation of this mismatch, while performance approaches remind us that successful solving also depends on genre competence and the social expectation that there is a licensed answer. The present corpus adds a substantial set of examples in which those general mechanisms operate through Kabyle lexicon, grammar, material culture, and environmental knowledge.

Metaphor plays an important role, but the analysis does not treat it as a universal key. In some examples, similarity is clearly central ; in others, an associated object, part, location, grammatical form, or conventional predicate provides the decisive clue. This is compatible with approaches that treat metaphor and metonymy as interacting processes rather than mutually exclusive categories. It also explains why an apparently simple riddle can sustain several readings before the answer is known : different clues activate different relations, and the solution retrospectively selects the configuration that makes them converge.

The treatment of personification illustrates the same principle of evidential restraint. Human roles and bodily attributes offer a productive source domain for plants, fruit, tools, and architectural elements. The pomegranate becomes a parent, the diss lets down hair, loom components sleep or sing, and the household is animated through human postures. These patterns are culturally meaningful because the images available to speakers are not random. Nevertheless, anthropomorphic imagery does not by itself prove an animistic cosmology. It shows a rhetorical technique grounded in human experience ; further ethnographic evidence would be required to connect that technique to a specific theory of personhood or nature.

The paradoxical examples are particularly revealing for the relation between language and solving. The dried fig is ‘male’, then ‘female’, then ‘male’ only because successive Kabyle nouns carry different grammatical genders. The echo ‘answers’ while remaining voiceless because it returns a prior sound rather than initiating one. The fig tree has ‘milk’ and ‘wings’ only when those predicates are reanalysed through sap and leaves. In these cases, solving is a metalinguistic act : the respondent must reconsider the default sense or category of the words in the clue. This observation supports the manuscript’s larger claim that riddling engages linguistic awareness, but it should not be converted into a measured claim about cognitive development without participant-based evidence.

The semantic-domain analysis likewise clarifies the relationship between cultural knowledge and figurative form. Riddles involving weaving, carding, storage, hearths, agricultural products, plants, and mountain weather are especially dependent on knowledge of local objects and practices. As material environments change, some clues may become less transparent to younger or urban respondents even if the linguistic form survives. This provides a promising direction for future research : the same riddles could be presented to different age groups or communities to test which associations remain recoverable, which require explanation, and which are being recontextualised in digital or educational settings.

Several limitations remain. No inter-coder reliability measure is available for the rhetorical categories, and the study does not include systematic recordings of complete performance events ; turn-taking, timing, audience response, and social sanction can therefore not be analysed in detail. The historical discussion is not based on a dedicated diachronic dataset, and the comparative evidence from other Amazigh-speaking regions is used to document lexical and formal parallels rather than to establish pan-Amazigh distribution. These limits delimit the claims of the article without weakening its textual analysis.

A future research programme could combine four levels of evidence : a fully coded and source-tagged corpus ; audio or video documentation of performance where ethically possible ; elicitation with respondents of different generations ; and comparison across Kabyle and other Amazigh varieties using matched analytical categories. Such a design would allow researchers to test frequency, regional distribution, interpretive accessibility, and change over time. It would also make it possible to distinguish a figure that is productive in Kabyle riddling from one that is widespread across several Amazigh traditions.

Conclusion

Kabyle riddles are compact verbal constructions in which ordinary referents are made temporarily strange through controlled figurative re-description. The examples assembled in this study show the recurrent productivity of metaphorical analogy, metonymic cueing, part-whole relations, personification, paradoxical predication, and circumlocution. Their most characteristic feature is not the isolated presence of any one figure, but the capacity to layer

several relations until a culturally licensed answer reorganises the clues into a coherent whole.

The corpus also shows why stylistic analysis must remain connected to language and cultural knowledge. Grammatical gender, lexical polysemy, the appearance of plants and weather, the structure of traditional tools, architectural arrangements, bodily imagery, and social roles all contribute to solvability. Riddles can therefore preserve traces of material and verbal knowledge while displaying considerable poetic economy. This supports a strong claim about Kabyle oral artistry without requiring a stronger and less defensible claim about a single timeless Amazigh worldview.

The interpretation developed here favours precision over amplification. The evidence supports the central thesis that Kabyle riddles are sophisticated rhetorical forms rather than simple word games, while also showing why textual findings must be distinguished from claims requiring quantitative, ethnographic, historical, or cross-regional evidence. By combining explicit classification criteria, item-level provenance, a documented transcription protocol, and a restrained cultural interpretation, the study contributes a reproducible analytical basis for research on Kabyle oral literature, figurative language, and the broader poetics of riddling.

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The annexes consolidate the corpus traceability, transcription conventions, comparative terminology, and analytical coding used in the article. They do not introduce additional field evidence beyond the material documented in the study.

Annex

Annex 1. Inventory of the 30 analysed riddles

All items below are primary field data from Aït Kouffi (2010–2018). The thesis number reproduces the author's corpus identifier ; only item 13 belongs to the children's sub-corpus.

No.	Thesis ID	Kabyle riddle and solution	Analytical location	Corpus
1	195	Graɣ-ak-tt-id : Snat tɛeqqucin deg uẓeṭṭa, mi medlent d abrid s aẓekka. — Tiṭ (Eyes)	5.1. Metaphor : Conceptual mappings and analogical thinking	adult
2	250	Graɣ-ak-tt-id : Tamazirt, teç-çur d ibawen, ur ssawḍeɣ ad d-kkseɣ yiwen. — Igenwan d yitran (The sky and the stars)	5.1. Metaphor : Conceptual mappings and analogical thinking	adult
3	7	Graɣ-ak-tt-id : Aɛrqub n uffal, Zerriɛa-s d uzzal. — Aqerdac (The weaving loom card)	5.2. Metonymic cues and part-whole relations	adult
4	13	Graɣ-ak-tt-id : Ɛuɛɛu, iɛelleq lullu. — AmeẒẒuɣ (The ear)	5.2. Metonymic cues and part-whole relations	children
5	192	Graɣ-ak-tt-id : Snat taɛwinin, umi zzint tqecḍatin. — Allen (The eyes)	5.2. Metonymic cues and part-whole relations	adult
6	85	Graɣ-ak-tt-id : Ibedd ɣef wecruf, Yebra-d i wrefruf. Tiririt : adles. — The diss.	5.3. Personification : Attribution of human qualities	adult
7	147	Graɣ-ak-tt-id : Lqed-is anect n lbunya, Arraw-is ɛaddan miyya. Tiririt : taṛemmant. — The pomegranate.	5.3. Personification : Attribution of human qualities	adult
8	107	Graɣ-ak-tt-id : Illul-ed d win, yuɣal d ṭṭin, yemmut d win. — Iniɣem (Dried fig)	5.4. Paradoxical predication and grammatical play	adult

No.	Thesis ID	Kabyle riddle and solution	Analytical location	Corpus
9	280	Graɣ-ak-tt-id : Tesɛa ayefki ur teṯṯeẓẓeg, tesɛa afriwen ur teṯṯafeg. — Taneqelṯ (Fig tree)	5.4. Paradoxical predication and grammatical play	adult
10	90	Graɣ-ak-tt-id : Iggul ur d-ineṭṭeq, yerna yeṯṯar-ed lmanṭeq. — Ahu (Echo)	5.4. Paradoxical predication and grammatical play	adult
11	32	Graɣ-ak-tt-id : “Axxam adeyqan, Ur nesɛi ṭṭwiqan.” — “aẒekka” (The grave)	5.5. Circumlocution and strategic indirection	adult
12	99	Graɣ-ak-tt-id : “Ilef, Yeguni ṛṛef.” — “ayeddid” (The waterskin)	5.5. Circumlocution and strategic indirection	adult
13	84	Graɣ-ak-tt-id : “Ibedd di tizi, Yessawal a zizi !” — “ayaziḍ” (The rooster)	5.5. Circumlocution and strategic indirection	adult
14	129	Graɣ-ak-tt-id : “Jebdeɣ amrar, Yenhezz wedrar.” — Taxsayt (Pumpkin)	6.1. The natural world and ecological knowledge	adult
15	206	Graɣ-ak-tt-id : “S ufella d adɣes, Ɣer daxel d iɣes.” — Tayni (Date)	6.1. The natural world and ecological knowledge	adult
16	28	Graɣ-ak-tt-id : “Abernus n Belɛajuṭ, YeẒḍan mbla taḍuṭ.” Tiririt : Tagut ; aɣəmɣum. — The fog, the mist.	6.1. The natural world and ecological knowledge	adult
17	56	Graɣ-ak-tt-id : “D amellal am urekti, Ma yafeg, yeṛrusu, yeṯṯali.” Tiririt : Adfel, ameccim. — The snowflake, snow.	6.1. The natural world and ecological knowledge	adult
18	139	Graɣ-ak-tt-id : “Lḥara nnig medden, Ur ṯṯizdiɣ yiwen.” Tiririt : Igenni, tignewt. — The sky, the celestial vault, the firmament.	6.1. The natural world and ecological knowledge	adult
19	25	Graɣ-ak-tt-id : “A ţaya tcerreg aẒeṭṭa, Medleɣ allen tɛedda.” Tiririt : Tansebt. — The shooting star.	6.1. The natural world and ecological knowledge	adult

No.	Thesis ID	Kabyle riddle and solution	Analytical location	Corpus
20	359	Graɣ-ak-tt-id : Yeqqummec iḥezzem, Yesseblɛ izrem. — tafeggact, taftilt n zzit (the oil lamp)	6.2. Material culture and traditional technologies	adult
21	35	Graɣ-ak-tt-id : Beddeɣ nnig n tzeqqa, Sliɣ i wbeqqa. — aɣerbal (the sieve)	6.2. Material culture and traditional technologies	adult
22	98	Graɣ-ak-tt-id : Ilef, Iɛelleq sdaw n ṛṛef. — ayeddid (the goatskin water bag)	6.2. Material culture and traditional technologies	adult
23	164	Graɣ-ak-tt-id : Ṛṛebɛa dlen, Ṛṛebɛa bedden, Mya d mya ṭṣen, Ma ţţaklit, tɛus fella-sen. — axxam (The house)	6.2. Material culture and traditional technologies	adult
24	175	Graɣ-ak-tt-id : Sin ẓzlen, ṭṭsen, Sin rsen bedden, Sin cennun gara-sen. — azeṭta (the loom)	6.2. Material culture and traditional technologies	adult
25	144	Graɣ-ak-tt-id : Liɣ deg-s, Ur kcimeɣ deg-s. — lemri (the mirror)	6.2. Material culture and traditional technologies	adult
26	194	Graɣ-ak-tt-id : Snat tɛaqqucin deg uẓeṭtîa, Mi medlent, amzun d aẓekka. Tiririt : tiṭṭucin. — The eyes.	6.3. The human body and social relations	adult
27	89	Graɣ-ak-tt-id : Ifri izemmen, Yeldi, banen-d izamaren. Tiririt : imi, tuɣmas naɣ uglan. — The mouth and teeth.	6.3. The human body and social relations	adult
28	05	Graɣ-ak-tt-id : Aɛacra n ṭṭelba, S telwaḥin dima. Tiririt : iḍuḍan d waccaren. — The fingers and nails.	6.3. The human body and social relations	adult
29	177	Graɣ-ak-tt-id : Sin ferḍen, Sin berḍen. Tiririt : iḍuḍan d wanzaren. — The fingers and nostrils.	6.3. The human body and social relations	adult
30	46	Graɣ-ak-tt-id : D aberkan am inissi, Sseg°rayen-t medden i ymensi. Tiririt : aqerdac. — The carding tool.	6.3. The human body and social relations	adult

Annex 2. Author's Latin-based transcription conventions

The following inventory reproduces the transcription protocol stated by the author and used consistently in the examples.

Category	Symbols	Editorial note
Basic consonants	b, d, f, g, k, l, m, n, r, s, t, z	Values broadly comparable to French orthographic conventions as specified by the author.
Emphatics	v, ẓ, ṭ, ḍ, ṛ	Author's transcription inventory.
Labiovelars	b°, g°, k°, q°, x°	Superscript circle marks labialisation.
Sibilants	j, c	c corresponds to French ch in the author's description.
Velars / uvular series	ɣ, x (kh), q ; ɛ, h	Inventory as specified in Tabti (2019).
Affricates	o (dj), č (tch), ʒ (ts)	Author's equivalences.
Gemination / tense consonants	double letter	Geminated consonants are represented by doubling.
Semi-vowels	w, y	—
Vowels	a, i, u ; e	e denotes the neutral vowel in the author's system.

Annex 3. Comparative designations for riddles in Amazigh varieties

Only regionally attributed forms that are traceable to the sources cited in the article are retained here.

Variety / region	Documented designations	Sources
Kabyle	timseɛraq / timseɛraqt ; timesbibbay / timsbibbit ; timsefra / tamsefrut ; timsalin / timsal / tamsalt	Field terminology discussed by Tabti (2019) ; comparative Kabyle collections : Genevois (1963), Allioui (1990, 2005), Khalfa (2003).
Chaoui / Moyen Atlas	tamḥajit, tiḥiğğa and related documented variants	Ardouz & Bentolila (1986) ; Haddadou (2003).
Rifian	tinfas, tinfusin and comparative forms documented in the CILF volume	Bentolila (Ed., 1986).
Tachelhit	forms documented in Souss materials, including tiɣuniwin and related terms	Destaing (1920) ; Derkaoui (1986).
Touareg	tunẓart, timzuren / cimzoren, iggi / iggiten, maslo / masloten	Drouin (1986) ; Azdoud & Peyron (1995).

Annex 4. Analytical coding grid and decision rules

Operation	Decision rule	Representative examples	Interpretive safeguard
Metaphorical analogy	The central clue depends on perceived resemblance or cross-domain mapping.	Pearls → eyes ; field → sky ; fog → burnous ; cave → mouth.	Do not infer a community-wide conceptual system from a single poetic mapping.
Metonymic cue	An associated element within the same conceptual frame provides access to the target.	Ear ↔ earring ; locational or associated component clues.	Distinguish contiguity from mere descriptive detail.
Part-whole relation / synecdoche	A demonstrable part-whole relation is central to the clue-answer relation.	Tool components standing for the complete implement.	Use only when part-whole structure is analytically decisive.
Personification	A non-human referent receives human body, kinship, occupation, posture, or action.	Diss lets down hair ; pomegranate is a parent ; loom components sleep/sing.	Anthropomorphic representation is not by itself evidence of animistic cosmology.
Paradoxical predication	Apparently incompatible predicates become coherent after figurative, lexical, or grammatical reinterpretation.	Fig-tree "milk/wings" ; echo answers while silent ; mirror presence.	Prefer this label to "oxymoron" when the contradiction spans a proposition.
Grammatical play	Morphosyntactic or lexical categorisation itself produces opacity.	Successive names of the fig carry different grammatical genders.	Interpret as language-based play, not ontological transformation.
Circumlocution / indirection	The referent is described indirectly without direct naming.	Grave as a windowless house ; rooster described by posture and call.	Reserve "euphemism" for cases where mitigation is supported by context.

Annex 5. Corpus provenance and data-integrity summary

Field site	Aït Kouffi, Tizi Ouzou, Algeria
Collection period	2010–2018
Larger field corpus	408 riddles
Adult sub-corpus	380 items
Children's sub-corpus	28 items

Field site	Aït Kouffi, Tizi Ouzou, Algeria
Analytical corpus in this article	30 riddles
Analytical origin	29 adult-sub-corpus items ; 1 children's-sub-corpus item (thesis no. 13)
Published comparative collections	Used for contextual, lexical, and regional comparison ; none of the 30 analytical examples is reproduced from them.
Provenance protocol	Every analytical example carries its individual thesis corpus number.
Translations	French and English translations are the author's own ; literal rendering is preferred when analytically necessary.
Personal data	No informant names or identifying personal details are reproduced in the article.
Ethics statement	No retrospective contemporary ethics approval is claimed for data collected in 2010–2018 ; the article limits itself to transparent reporting of the field corpus and its provenance.

Annex 6. Crosswalk between rhetorical operations and semantic domains

The table below summarises the analytical relation between the principal operations and the knowledge domains activated by the examples. It is qualitative and does not report frequency.

Semantic domain	Principal operations	Representative referents	Knowledge required for interpretation
Natural world / ecological knowledge	Metaphor, personification, paradoxical predication	pumpkin, date, fog/mist, snow, sky, shooting star	Perceptual, agricultural, meteorological, and spatial knowledge
Material culture / traditional technologies	Metaphor, zoomorphic mapping, personification, functional indirection	oil lamp, sieve, waterskin, house, loom, mirror	Knowledge of domestic tools, architecture, craft practices, sound and function
Human body / social relations	Metaphor, metonymic cueing, personification, occupational imagery, contrast	eyes, ear, mouth/teeth, fingers/nails, nostrils	Bodily form, adornment, pastoral and educational imagery
Lexical / grammatical knowledge	Paradoxical predication, grammatical play	dried fig, fig tree, echo	Grammatical gender, polysemy, non-default predicate interpretation