

## Riddle Coding and lexical Motivation<sup>1</sup>

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It is a well known fact that proverbs and riddles are complementary in the sense that proverbs are affirmative statements which may be seen as answers to unasked questions, while riddles have the form of an (implied) question and an answer (Stojkova 1984, 60)<sup>2</sup>. An illustration of the permeability of folklore genres is offered by a riddle recorded in Macedonia, an Albanian proverb and a Serbian folktale:

1. *Кој го прајт чвека прво мајмун, после арслан, најпосле свиња? Пијанството-виното и ракијата* (Kavaev 1961, 162) "Who makes the human being first a monkey, then a lion and finally a pig? (Intoxication - wine and brandy)".

2. *Rakija sefte të bon lepur, të dytën të bon skile, të tretën të bon derr* "Am Anfang macht dich der Schnaps zum Hasen, beim zweiten Glas wirst du zum Fuchs, beim dritten zum Schwein" (Reiter 1991, 234).

The absence of a strict boundary between folklore genres is made obvious in other ways. In order to be able to guess the answer to some riddles like

3. *Црвен дедо закључен сedit (вино)* "Red grandfather sits locked (wine)" (Kavaev 1961, 172);

4. *Црвен пес закључен сedit (вино)* "Red dog sits locked (wine)" (Kavaev 1961, 172);

5. *Црвен Петре затворен сedit (вино)* "Red Petre sits closed (wine)" (Kavaev 1961, 172);

6. *Nebunul satului în cămașă de lemn (vinul)* "The village madman in a wooden shirt (the wine)" (Bărbulescu and Ghiță 1957, No. 264).

one has to be aware of an understanding of the double nature of wine which is stated in proverbs. Here are the relevant riddles and proverbs like

7. *Виното седи мирно доде е в бачвата* "Wine keeps quiet while it is in the cask" (Reg Botevgrad - Radotina AEIM 967, 1, 52).

8. *Виното не сedit во глата мадро како во шишето* "Wine does not behave in the head as decently as in the bottle" (Kavaev 1961, 23).

9. *Trimi i rakisë asht vetëm ai që s'e pi* "Herr des Schnapses ist nur, wer ihn nicht trinkt" (Reiter 1991, 230).

It has been noticed, on the other hand, that there is a specialization of folklore genres: proverbs concentrate on social relations, while riddles describe the material world surrounding humans (Volotskaja 1983, 188). It is not a

coincidence that our examples of similarity across folklore genres refer to the drinking of wine, i.e. the social function of an object of the material sphere.

The same ubiquitous flow of ideas (world view) feeds riddles, proverbs, folk tales etc. on one hand and the semantic patterns of vocabulary on the other. Metaphor is the key procedure which can structure all these forms and explain at least partly their isomorphism.

According to one theory, a metaphor is a covert simile which establishes an equivalence between its two main constituents on the base of a concept which subsumes both constituents and in such a way defines the terms on which they are being compared. The underlying concepts of metaphors are not directly expressed but have to be discovered through individual efforts (Basso 1989, 291-293). My study of the patterns of motivation in the domain of Balkan vinicultural terminology demonstrated that there are two approaches to the creation of a new term which remain both inside the described triangular framework (two constituents of a metaphor and underlying concept): a term can either be a straightforward reflection of an underlying concept or a metaphorical equation with another term on the base of a shared underlying concept (Mladenova 1994). Metaphors have been found to form the foundation for a number of short folklore genres as well, such as proverbs and riddles (Köngäs Maranda 1971; Lieber 1976; Stojkova 1984, 42).

The underlying concept of a word itself (no matter whether it is the product of word-formation or metaphorization) can be either **formal** or **functional**, i.e. it either refers to what a referent **is**, or to what a referent **does**. Riddles proceed in the same way (Stojkova 1984, 47). There is a category of riddles which explore the tension created by the discrepancy between formal and functional due to the intervention of metaphor<sup>3</sup>. Examples of such riddles are:

10. Уши има, а не чуе (дикелъо) (Štip Stojkova 1984, No. 2105);

11. Зъби има, а не хапе (гребенът) (Reg Plovdiv - Novo selo Stojkova 1984, No. 3073);

12. Няма уста, а колкото му туряш, все яде (огънят) (Reg Grudovo Stojkova 1984, No. 3227);

13. *N-are coarne, și tot împunge; / N-are pene, și tot zboară; / Mai mică decât boul, / Și mai mare decât purecele (albina)* (Gorovei 1898, No. 44).

It is obvious that the pattern works both ways:

(a) X has a trait-which is characteristic of the class *a,b,c...* (formal similarity)- but cannot perform an action which is automatically associated with that class (functional dissimilarity): the two-prong mattock has ears, but it doesn't hear; the comb has teeth, but it doesn't bite. The mattock doesn't have the same kind of ear which serves to animals and humans as an organ of hearing, but it does have a part which is - metaphorically - called "ears" (Gerov 5, 466).

(b) X doesn't possess the trait, which enables the class *a,b,c...* to perform a given action (formal dissimilarity), but it still performs it (functional similarity): the fire has no mouth, but eats anything you give it (burning is metaphorically equated with eating); the bee has no horns, but it butts (stings), it has no feathers, but it flies.

Viewed etymologically, a word is very much like a capsulated riddle. To the bipartite structure of the riddle

question (riddle) - answer (solution)

corresponds the relation between motivation and meaning of the linguistic sign, e.g. В *предачка* 'spinner', derived from В *преда* 'to spin', has motivation 'a female who spins' (BER 5, 634):

'a female who spins' - 'spinner'

But В *преда* is also used of cats with the meaning 'to purr'. Hence a riddle about the cat:

14. *Имам си предачка/и денем, и нощем преде, а нищо не наприда* "I have a spinner / [who] spins day and night, / but has nothing ready spun" (Trojan Stojkova 1984 No. 1157).

Here the cat is coded as a paradoxical female spinner.

As there may be more than one correct solution to a riddle, there may also be more than one linguistic sign with the same motivation, e.g. В *чернило* 'dust-brand' and Rus *чернила*: pl. 'ink' have the same motivation 'that which blackens' (ĖSSJa 4, 152-153). In both riddle and word the attention focuses on the link between the left and the right side of the equation, on their identification. It is social consensus that consecrates this identification and makes possible the functioning of words even after their motivation has been forgotten. Words are created by individual intellectual acts but unless they are adopted by society at large they cannot serve their purpose. Riddles, on the other hand, in order to be riddles, have to remain at the stage prior to general consensus, they have to keep their occasional character. They re-create over and over again with each successful guessing the identification between the left and the right side. One of their ancient functions is to serve as a secret code by means of which initiated (those who know the solution or the context in which it is obvious) or the worthy are distinguished from non-initiated or unworthy (Lekomtseva 1994, 217).

For my ethno-linguistic study of Balkan viniculture I collected systematically any Balkan words and folklore texts (such as proverbs, riddles, rituals, folk-tales etc.) that had to do with the vine, growing of grapes, production and drinking of wine. This made it possible to have simultaneously at my disposal numerous sets of Balkan words and Balkan riddles which had these words either as solutions or as a part of the question. In the process of my work I repeatedly stumbled over an isomorphism between the semantic patterns of vinicultural terms and riddle coding. It will become clear what I mean under isomorphism if I give an example. R *crac, cracă* 'tree-branch' is a loan from В *крак* 'foot, leg'. The image underlying both R *crac, cracă* and В *крак* is that of ramification as one can still see from derivatives like В *прекрачвам* 'to step over, to stride over' *разкрачвам се* 'to straddle'. Romanian riddles preserve the identification of 'leg' and 'branch'. Here human legs are coded as *ramuri* 'tree-branches':

15. *Am / un pom / cu ramurile-n jos / și cu rădăcina-n sus (făptura omului)* "I have a tree with the branches pointing down and the root pointing up (the human being)" (Niculescu 1975, No. 1);

16. *Spuneți-mi acum anume / Ce pom e acel în lume / Care ramurile sale / Toate le are la vale, / Și vinele, rădăcina / Îi stă în sus ca tulpină? (corpul omenesc)* "Now tell me precisely which tree in the world has its branches down and its root up like a tree-stem? (the human body)" (Bărbulescu and Ghiță 1957, No. 330).

This paper will provide some examples of such isomorphism. More are to be found in my study of Balkan viniculture.

The pattern 'something that hangs' > 'bunch of grapes' in our region includes the following terms:

G *κρεμαστάρια* pl 'small bunches of grapes left behind by the vintagers' (Macedonia - Sitochorion AIL), a derivative from *κρεμώ* 'to hang, to suspend'. Borrowed in A *kremastar* 'bunch of grapes' (Mann 1948, 214), AR *cărmăstărŭ* 'grappe (de raisins)' (Papahagi<sup>1</sup>, 275).

В *висул'ка*, *фисулка*, '1) веточка виноградной грозди; 2) маленькая, недоразвитая гроздь' (Bessarabia - Kir'ut'na, Tvardica, Kirsovo BD 10, 67) < *вися* 'to be hanging'.

T *salkim* 'hanging bunch of grapes or flowers' to the family of *salmak* 'let hang down' (Lokotsch No. 1809), Gag *ўзўм салкымы* 'виноградная гроздь "стругупе"' (GRMS 394). Borrowed in В *салкѹм* (Gerov).

Motivation 'something that hangs' has been recorded on the other hand for A *vargor* 'Kette' (über dem Herd) < *var* '(etwas) aufhängen' (Svane 1992, 82 after Çabei), A *kremastar* 'chain with pothook' (Mann 1948, 214).

The motivation of both 'a chain with pothook' and 'a bunch of grapes' as something that hangs brings about the identification through metaphor of the chain with pothook and a bunch of grapes. This identification is at the base of a riddle for a (covered with soot) chain:

17. *Виси мома, не плете, виси грозде, не зоба го?* "A maid hangs, doesn't knit, grapes hang, [he?] doesn't eat it (chain covered with soot)" (Reg Blagoevgrad Stoilov 1914, 79);

18. *Седи мома, не плете се, / виси грозде, не еде се (саждите у коминьо и веригата)* "A maid sits, but it doesn't braid [her hair], / grapes hang, but it is not fit to be eaten (soot in the chimney and the chain)" (Reg Sofia - Busmanci Stojkova 1984 No. 3338);

19. *Малка булка по полите ѝ грозде виси? (коминна и саждите)* "Little married woman, on her skirts hang grapes (chimney with soot)" (E Bulgaria Stoilov 1914, 79);

20. *Виси гроз'е не се зоба? (сажди)* "Grapes are hanging but they are not to be eaten? (soot)" (Reg Mariovo, Reg Prilep Stoilov 1914, 79);

21. *Висет гроздој, а не се зобет (не се за зобење) (сажди)* "id." (Kavaev 1961, 157);

22. *Црни гроздој на дрѣг висет, а не се зобет (сажи)* "id." (Kavaev 1961, 172);

23. *Навесило се грозг'е, ни се яде, ни се пие? (сажди)* "Grapes are hanging but they are neither to be eaten nor to be drunk? (soot)" (Reg Dupnica Stoilov 1914, 79).

This riddle is capsulated in an Albanian term, which cannot be understood outside the pattern discussed here. A *verigë* 'row of grapes on a stalk; small unripe grapes', *veringe* 'cluster of unripe grapes' (Mann 1948, 551), *veringë* 'grape' (Zagori), *verige* (Dumre) 'grappolo d'uva non anchora sviluppato', *verige* 'Traubenbüschel' (Kavajë Svane 1992, 87). The Albanian word is a unanimously recognized Slavic loan (< В *верига* 'chain') and is used to denote among other things 'ring; loop; link (of chain); chain' (Mann 1948, 551), 'die

Hakenkette über einem offenen Herd an der Töpfe usw. aufgehängt werden' (Svane 1992, 86-87).

The pattern 'reins, bridle' > 'grape stalk' can be discerned behind two Albanian terms: A *rrypcë* 'empty grape-stalk' (Mann 1948, 444) : *rryp* 'belt; stripe', cf. *rrypat e frerit* 'reins'; A *fre, frenj* 'grape-stalk; bridle, rein' (Mann 1948, 114, 595) < L *frenum* 'bridle' (Haarmann 1972, 127). A possible explanation of the pattern is offered by the perception of a bridle as something that holds fast the horse and hence the berries of the grape bunch. Reins on the other hand consist sometimes of a chain (as shown by В *верижник* GeroV) and this may well have served as a bridge between this pattern and the pattern 'chain' > 'grape stalk' which is recorded in the same area. The pattern is reflected in riddles:

24. Едѣн кон едѣн грозд гройзе зазобал / от овдеа до Цариград, /от Цариград па до овдеа, —/ па си цел стои гроздот (узда) "A horse started pecking at a bunch of grapes / from here to Constantinople, / and from Constantinople to here, ) / but the bunch is still whole (reins)" (Reg Radomir - Rakovec Stojkova 1984, No. 2592);

25. Зедоф еден грозд грозье, / зобаф, зобаф, пак цел, неиззобан (узда) "I took a bunch of grapes, / pecked at it and pecked at it, but it is still whole (reins)" (Ohrid Stojkova 1984, No. 2593).

The identification of 'reins, bridle' and 'grape stalk' (on the base of the underlying concept chain) explains another riddle for "reins":

26. Сто илици, сто петлици, /сто пъти да речеш /не мойш да погодиш "One hundred buttonholes, one hundred tabs, / even if you say one hundred times, / you wont be able to guess" (Ohrid Stojkova 1984, No. 2594).

The key word here is *петлици*. It reminds of Sln *petlja* 'der Traubenkamm' (Vrbinc 1959, 76); SCr *petlja, peteljka* (RJA 9, 812) *петелька* 'an empty grape stalk' (RSA 3, 662); В *пителка* 'a buttonhole; a small closely knit bunch of grapes' (Reg Kazanlāk — Enina BD 5, 133) belong to CS *\*petl'a* 'loop' (Vasmer and Trubačev 3, 252). A riddle for grapes from the same region uses the word as well:

27. Кусо, кусо Кундане, наредено петлици? "Short, short Kundane, laid out with tabs" (Struga; Ohrid; Reg Bitola - Cer; Prilep; Štip Stoilov 1914, 128).

Since my discovery of isomorphism between semantic patterns and riddle coding was based on the study of a relatively narrow segment of Balkan vocabulary and a thematically limited sample of riddles, I looked for an independent confirmation of the existence of such an isomorphism. And I did find such a confirmation. E. A. Helinski in a paper published in 1994 makes out a case for such an isomorphism between a Finno-Ugric riddle and an Altaic word. He discovered a Khanty riddle (with a parallel in the closely related Mansi tradition) which codes the elk as a forest barn. This riddle throws light on an etymology by A.E. Anikin of a Tungus-Manchu word *\*pāylān* whose descendants denote in various languages the barn, the elk and the constellations Ursa Major and Ursa Minor.

Being found independently in remote language groups, it may be considered proven beyond doubt that riddle-lexical isomorphism exists as a general trend. Etymology and folklore can both benefit from the discovery of this



isomorphism. In riddle-solving the left side (the question) is a given, it is the right side that has to be discovered (the solution). Etymology moves in the opposite direction: it is given the right side (the word) and has to discover its motivation. The project of etymology can therefore be defined as "reading the riddle backwards." It is obviously worthwhile to explore this subject further. The best way to go about it is to analyze in this perspective an entire folklore tradition or a group of interconnected traditions as the Balkan ones. Such an enterprise would benefit from various theoretical and practical achievements in the field of Slavistics and Balkanology. I would like to point out at least some of these.

Riddles are frequently grouped together thematically in published collections according to a classificatory schema that seems to be more or less universal. The sum of riddles circulating in a group in traditional societies mirrors the knowledge of the world that its members hold in common. (Volotskaja 1983, 189). The inventory of riddle solutions corresponds in fact to a pre-scientific anthropocentric classification of the universe with a clear emphasis on cosmological, philogenetic and ontogenetic matters (Toporov 1994, 55-61). Z.M. Volotskaja (op.cit.) proposes a classification of Bulgarian riddles, that could be tested on the material of the other Balkan traditions as well. According to this classification riddle solutions denote referents that (1) belong either to the realm of nature or to the realm of culture and (2) are either situated in the internal or in the external space of the group.

The work done by dialectologists and lexicographers of the Balkan languages makes the next practical step possible: each riddle solution is to be expanded with as many inter-dialect and inter-language synonyms as possible. The sets of inter-dialect and inter-language synonyms are then to be analyzed etymologically in view of the corresponding corpus of riddles. At this stage we can lean on the achievements of etymologists.

The multilingual character of the Balkan region is advantageous because it can probably help clarify an emerging connection between translation and riddle-lexical isomorphism. It is obvious that whoever created the riddles analyzed in this paper was aware of the corresponding semantic patterns and vice-versa. But these patterns (as in the case published by E. A. Helimski) frequently belong to different languages or at least to different dialects of the same language. An eloquent example of inter-dialect translation is provided by a rhyming Romanian riddle:

28. *Am / Doi / Boi / Fac / Război (Stativale)* "I have two oxen, they make war (the loom)" (Niculescu 1975, No. 220).

Should it be considered a coincidence that *R război* means not only 'war' but also 'loom' in dialects other than that in which the riddle was formulated? If we are to return to the function of riddles to distinguish worthy from unworthy, we can see that in our region the authors of this type of riddles were people with experience beyond their local culture and they addressed their riddles to an audience which was expected to have the same kind of broad cultural knowledge.

## Notes

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<sup>2</sup>Cf. Toporov 1994, 39 with further literature about the roots of proverbs in paratactic structures as opposed to riddles which are rooted in hypotaxis.

<sup>3</sup>For an overall typology of riddle coding cf. Golovacheva 1994. The category discussed here is considered on p. 204.

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