



ARTISTIC AND COMPOSITIONAL FEATURES OF UZBEK AND ENGLISH RIDDLES: A COMPARATIVE-TYPOLOGICAL STUDY

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Annotation: The article examines the artistic and compositional organization of Uzbek and English riddles from a comparative-typological perspective. Riddles are treated as compact folklore texts in which an object is deliberately concealed through metaphor, comparison, personification, paradox, enumeration and sound patterning. The analysis focuses on the relation between the riddle image and its answer, the internal sequence of descriptive clues, rhythm and rhyme, syntactic compression, dialogic formulas and culturally marked imagery. The study shows that both traditions employ a common cognitive mechanism: a familiar object is redescribed through another semantic domain, creating a temporary contradiction that is resolved by the answer. At the same time, Uzbek riddles more frequently activate images connected with traditional dress, agriculture, household utensils and bread culture, whereas English riddles often rely on household architecture, tools, mechanisms and concise interrogative formulas. These differences demonstrate how a universal folklore genre acquires nationally specific aesthetic forms.

Keywords: riddle, Uzbek folklore, English folklore, composition, metaphor, poetic syntax, typology, image.

Introduction

Riddles belong to the oldest and most stable genres of oral tradition. Their durability is explained by a combination of cognitive play, aesthetic pleasure and communicative interaction. A riddle does not name its referent directly; instead, it constructs an indirect verbal portrait that invites the listener to reconstruct the hidden object. In this respect, the genre unites language, logic and artistic imagination. Uzbek and English riddles have developed in different historical and cultural environments, yet they display striking structural similarities. This makes them especially productive material for comparative typological analysis.

In folkloristics, Archer Taylor demonstrated the richness and international distribution of riddle motifs, while Robert A. Georges and Alan Dundes emphasized the structural relation between a descriptive element and a referent that is apparently incompatible with it [1; 2]. Elli Köngäs Maranda later showed that riddle logic is built through analogy, metaphor, binary opposition



and semantic reversal [3]. Uzbek scholarship also has a substantial tradition of collecting and interpreting riddles. Zubayda Husainova systematized Uzbek riddles and drew attention to their thematic diversity, poetics and social function [4; 5]. These approaches make it possible to study composition not simply as external form but as a mechanism that organizes concealment and revelation.

The aim of this article is to identify the major artistic and compositional models shared by Uzbek and English riddles and to determine the nationally specific devices through which those models are verbalized. The method combines comparative description, structural analysis and elements of linguocultural interpretation. The examples are drawn from published collections and commonly attested folklore types; the emphasis is on recurrent models rather than on isolated texts.

At the deepest level, the composition of a riddle consists of two correlated parts: the encoded description and the answer. The first part creates difficulty; the second removes it. However, the answer is normally absent from the performed text until the listener produces it. Consequently, the surface composition is incomplete, while the communicative composition is complete only through interaction. This feature distinguishes a riddle from a simple metaphor. A metaphor may remain open-ended, whereas a riddle presupposes a recoverable referent and therefore has an implicit closing element.

In both Uzbek and English traditions, the encoded description usually selects only a few salient properties. These may include shape, color, number, movement, location, function or relation to other objects. The artistic effect arises because these properties are transferred into a different semantic field. For example, the Uzbek riddle “Пак-пакана бўйи бор, етти қават тўни бор” presents the onion as a small human figure wearing many layers of clothing. The answer is not stated, but the vertical shape and layered structure are converted into anthropomorphic imagery. A comparable English model describes an onion through “many coats” or “many skins.” In both cases, the compositional principle is identical: OBJECT → HUMAN/CLOTHING metaphor. Yet the Uzbek word “тўн” introduces a more locally marked image of traditional outerwear, giving the same structural pattern a different aesthetic texture.

This structure can be represented as three compositional stages: selection of a perceptual feature, figurative recoding, and interpretive resolution. The first stage anchors the riddle in reality; the second deliberately displaces the object into another semantic domain; the third restores the link between description and referent. The artistry of the genre depends on the balance between opacity and solvability. If the image is too transparent, the riddle loses



tension; if it is too remote, the communicative game breaks down.

Metaphor is the central constructive device of both Uzbek and English riddles. It compresses a complex comparison into a brief image and allows ordinary objects to be perceived from an unusual angle. Uzbek riddles are particularly rich in metaphors drawn from agrarian life, food, livestock, clothing and domestic space. The well-known type “Бир парча патири, оламга татири” conceptualizes the moon through the image of a round flatbread. The resemblance is primarily visual, but the image also activates a culturally familiar object associated with everyday life and hospitality. Thus, the riddle performs two functions at once: it conceals the moon and simultaneously encodes a fragment of material culture.

English riddles also use food and domestic images, but many traditional and later popular types exploit houses, doors, keys, clocks, bottles, needles and other objects of everyday technology. A formula such as “What has a neck but no head?” creates an anthropomorphic transfer in which the bottle is described through a human body part. The paradox is produced by combining a human attribute with the absence of another expected attribute. The image is compact because the listener supplies the missing conceptual frame. Such riddles demonstrate that artistic composition often depends on culturally shared knowledge rather than on extended description.

Personification is especially effective when natural phenomena are represented as human actors. Uzbek poetic riddles may describe rain or water as a tall girl moving, glittering or wearing ornaments. Here movement, sound and reflected light are recoded as bodily action and jewelry. English folklore likewise personifies wind, sun, moon, fire and time, but frequently in short question-answer forms. Typologically, the shared mechanism is personification; aesthetically, the difference lies in the preferred inventory of images and the degree of narrative elaboration.

The compositional integrity of a riddle is strengthened by sound organization. Uzbek riddles frequently use parallel lines, end rhyme, internal rhyme, alliteration and repeated syntactic patterns. Parallelism helps divide the hidden object into a sequence of clues, while rhyme makes the text memorable and suitable for oral transmission. In short poetic riddles, each line may add one new feature: size, movement, sound or location. Because the answer is withheld, the accumulation of clues creates a gradual narrowing of interpretation.

English riddles can also be rhymed, but a large proportion of widely circulated forms are built as one-sentence questions. Their compactness is achieved through ellipsis and syntactic symmetry: “What has X but not Y?”, “What goes up but never comes down?”, or “What can travel but has no feet?”



Such patterns are compositionally productive because they can generate many variants. The opposition between possession and absence, action and impossibility, or appearance and function creates a small logical puzzle inside a fixed grammatical frame.

Uzbek riddles often prefer nominal chains and descriptive clauses in which the verb is reduced or omitted, especially in proverb-like forms. English riddles likewise use ellipsis, but the interrogative frame is more visibly grammaticalized in many modern types. Hence, the two traditions share syntactic economy while differing in the most frequent surface realization. This difference should not be interpreted as absolute; both poetic and prose riddles occur in each tradition. It is more accurate to speak of tendencies in selected corpora.

Another important compositional device is enumeration. The riddle may present several parts of an object separately and force the listener to reconstruct the whole. Body-part terms are especially productive: head, eye, mouth, neck, hand, foot and tooth can refer metaphorically to tools, vessels, plants or mechanisms. The same is true of animal imagery. Georges and Dundes' structural approach is useful here because the riddle often joins a positive attribute with a negative or contradictory specification [2]. The listener solves the text by identifying an entity that satisfies both elements in a nonliteral sense.

Uzbek riddles frequently arrange clues in paired or repeated syntactic units. A line may establish the image, a second line intensify it, and a third line provide a decisive but still indirect feature. English riddles often use a sequence of short clauses introduced by "I have," "I can," or "I am," creating a first-person object voice. Although the grammatical forms differ, both traditions employ progressive disclosure. This is an important typological similarity: the answer is approached by controlled accumulation, not by random description.

The order of clues is aesthetically significant. General features usually precede distinguishing ones. A riddle may first evoke a broad category—something round, small, bright or moving—and only later add a feature that limits the possible answers. This sequencing produces suspense. In orally performed riddles, the teller can also manipulate rhythm and pause, turning composition into a temporal process. Thus, the structure of the text and the structure of performance reinforce each other.

The comparison shows that the most stable structural mechanisms are universal or at least widely shared: metaphorical substitution, contradiction, personification, part-whole transfer, enumeration, parallelism and the final act of decoding. National specificity appears primarily in the lexical material



selected to realize these mechanisms. Uzbek riddles often draw on objects such as тўн, патир, қозон, қозик, тандир, от and other elements of traditional domestic or agrarian life. English riddles, depending on period and corpus, frequently activate house architecture, tools, containers, clocks, keys and mechanical objects. These lexical choices preserve traces of historical experience.

The same referent can therefore receive different figurative “clothing.” The moon may be imagined through bread, a plate, a coin or a lamp; an onion may be a many-layered person; a needle may be described through an eye; a bottle through a neck. Such variation demonstrates that riddle composition is both cognitive and cultural. Cognitively, people recognize similarity across domains. Culturally, they choose comparison objects that are familiar, salient and aesthetically meaningful within their environment.

The historical-aesthetic value of riddles lies precisely in this double nature. A short riddle can preserve archaic vocabulary, obsolete household objects, traditional measurements, social relations and mythological traces while remaining understandable through its formal logic. When a culture changes, some riddles disappear, while others adapt by replacing old objects with new technologies. Therefore, the riddle is not a fossilized genre; it is a flexible compositional model capable of continual renewal.

Conclusion

The comparative-typological analysis of Uzbek and English riddles reveals a common artistic grammar of concealment. Both traditions organize the riddle around the tension between a figurative image and an unstated answer. Metaphor, personification, paradox, enumeration, syntactic compression, rhythm and patterned repetition function as the main compositional devices. Their interaction creates a compact text in which each word carries both descriptive and game-like value.

The differences are most visible in the cultural repertoire of images and in preferred surface forms. Uzbek riddles often preserve ethnographically marked vocabulary and elaborate poetic parallelism, while English riddles frequently employ concise interrogative constructions and logically sharpened oppositions. These are tendencies rather than rigid boundaries. The general conclusion is that riddle composition provides a useful model for studying how universal cognitive operations are transformed into nationally specific verbal art. Further research may expand the corpus and quantify the frequency of particular compositional types in historical and contemporary collections.



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