

THE ANALYSIS OF SOMATISMS IN ENGLISH RIDDLES

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Gadoeva Mavlyuda Ibragimovna

(DSc of the English Linguistics Department, BSU, Uzbekistan)

Tel.:914486759, gmail: gadoeyevamavlyuda59@gmail.com.

Yodgorova Laylo Bakhtiyorovna

(a master student of BSU, Uzbekistan) Tel.:883011218, gmail:

yodgorovalaylo528@gmail.com



Abstract: This article deals with the study of somatisms and their usage in English riddles. The article is devoted to examine somatisms and their meanings used in English riddles.

Keywords: somatism, riddle, culture, language, meaning, metaphor, antithesis

About: FARS Publishers has been established with the aim of spreading quality scientific information to the research community throughout the universe. Open Access process eliminates the barriers associated with the older publication models, thus matching up with the rapidity of the twenty-first century.

Introduction. Somatisms - body parts are of great importance in linguistic researches. The term somatism is derived from the Greek word "soma" which means body. Somatisms are available in the vocabulary of all languages, there is not a single language word-stock that does not constitute words expressing body parts. This word was first used by the Estonian language researcher F. Vakk, according to him: "Somatisms belong to one of the oldest layers of phraseology and constitute the most used part of any vocabulary."¹³

A person begins to perceive the world around him/her by understanding his/her body parts. As V. Gak wrote: "A person is egocentric, he sees the center of the universe in himself and reflects the universe in his own image."¹⁴ Somatisms are nouns that express the meaning of human or animal body parts. A person has the ability to observe and study objects in the surroundings with the help of body parts, and the emergence of words representing body parts can be traced back to the ancient period of human civilization. That is why they exist in the vocabulary of all languages from ancient times to the present. It is difficult to imagine human speech without somatisms, they have a high frequency of use in the process of communication. Many scientists have used the word "instruments" to describe somatisms. Yashmanova calls somatisms "initial instruments" due to their role in the building relations with the world in which people live.¹⁵

Somatisms play an important role in expressing the feelings and thoughts of language users, in various social situations. Metaphorical use of the names of body

¹³ Вакк.Ф.О. Соматические фразеологии в современном эстонском литературном языке: Автореф. дисс... канд. филол. наук.-Таллин, 1964.

¹⁴ Гак.В.Г. Языковые преобразования. – М.: Школа Языки русской культуры 1995.

¹⁵ Яшманова В. А. Инструментальность и субъективно-объективные отношения // Теория функциональной грамматики. СПб, 1992. С. 178.

parts is common in daily communication among people. In this case, somatisms can express the feelings and messages of the speaker, not in their own sense, but in another sense.

Main part. To get acquainted with the culture of a nation, to understand the values of this nation, it is necessary to study the oral folk art of the people. They reflect the social, economic and political way of life that the people have formed over the centuries. The existence of somatisms in the samples of oral folk art shows the high degree of its frequency in the speech. Riddles are one of the genres of folklore, which reflect the unique national culture and values of this people. Riddles, like other genres of folklore, show folk wisdom. They are considered the invaluable wealth of the nation, they are the spiritual heritage of the people, which can also express the cultural identity of them. In riddles, the words are used in a figurative sense, and a person, object or situation is hidden in them, and the listener must find the answer of the riddle by using his/her intellectual ability. Riddles increase children's vocabulary, sharpen their minds and enrich their imagination, and also encourage them to think about life and the events occurring in it. Riddles can be dedicated to various topics. Through riddles, the listener's intelligence is tested, the level of ingenuity is determined. In short, the listener's wisdom is tested through riddles. They have an entertaining character as well. They can be short proses or poems intended to make one to think rationally to find out the implied meaning.

The emergence of first English riddles is traced back to the Old English period (450-1066) In some sources the periodization can differ such as it can denote the usage of language spoken or written in England before 1100. It is also called the Anglo-Saxon period. During this period, different events took place in the history of the country and they had an impact on the history of English language. Riddles appeared in the old English period have given the name Anglo-Saxon riddles by scholars. Riddles are internationally widespread feature of oral literatures and scholar have no doubted that they were traditional to old English culture.¹⁶

*Ic eom wunderlicu wiht wifum on hyhte
neahbuendum nyt; nægum sceþþe
burgsittendra nymthe bonan anum.
Stapol min is steapheah stonde ic on bedde
neodan ruh nathwær. Neþeð hwilum
ful cyrtenu ceorles dohtor
modwlonc meowle þæt heo on mec gripe
ræseð mec on reodne reafath min heafod*

¹⁶ Andy Orchard, "Enigma Variations: The Anglo-Saxon Riddle-Tradition," in *Latin Learning and English Lore: Studies in Anglo-Saxon Literature for Michael Lapidge*, ed. by Andy Orchard and Katherine O'Brien O'Keefe, 2 vols (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2005), I 284-304.

*fegeð mec on fæsten. Felep sona
mines gemotes seo þe mec nearwað
wif wundenlocc. Wæt bið þæt eage.*

*I am a wondrous creature for women in expectation,
a service for neighbours. I harm none of the citizens
except my slayer alone.*

*My stem is erect, I stand up in bed,
hairy somewhere down below. A very comely
peasant's daughter, dares sometimes,
proud maiden, that she grips at me,
attacks me in my redness, plunders my head,
confines me in a stronghold, feels my
encounter directly,
woman with braided hair. Wet be that eye. (Onion)*

This example is taken from the Exeter book that is supposed to have been originated in the late of 10th century AD. Over ninety riddles can be found in this manuscript. Here 3 somatisms are used in this riddle. Head is denoting the removal thick part of the onion while hair and eye are used in their own senses. It has proven the fact that the usage of body part terms were common during that period.

The following example also has words defining human body parts in its composition.

What can run but never walks, has a mouth but never talks, has a head but never weeps, has a bed but never sleeps? (A river)

Lexical stylistic devices are commonly used in English riddles. In the example of the riddle given above one of the figures of speech antithesis is used. Oppositions are depicted here. A mouth and a head, words denoting human body parts are used in a figurative sense. The river cannot possess a mouth and a head in their strict or realistic meanings. A mouth is metaphorically used in this example and it defines the place where the river enters the ocean. In monolingual dictionaries of English head of the river is defined as noun phrase denoting any of various annual rowing regattas held on particular rivers.

What has a head, a tail, is brown, and has no legs? (A penny.)

Body part head denotes the front side of the coin and tail denotes the back side of the coin. This riddle also has antithesis because the head and the legs are opposed here. This one gives also information about currency of the country.

*It walks on four legs in the morning, two legs at noon and three legs in the evening.
What is it?(Man)*

In this riddle four legs denote hands and legs of a man to crawl in his early age, he learns to walk with his legs in his middle age, he uses a can or walking stick in his old age.

*I am always hungry,
I must always be fed,
The finger I touch,
Will soon turn red (Fire)*

The finger is a somatism that denoting its strict sense in this example. If a person touches to the fire it causes his/her finger to turn red because of the burning.

*Ripped from my mother's womb,
Beaten and burned,
I become a blood thirsty killer.
What am I? (Iron ore)*

A womb is representing the meaning of the mine here. The meaning is transferred by metaphor.

*Take me and scratch my head.
What once was red,
Is black instead.
What am I? (A Match)*

Here the somatic word head is used in the meaning of top part of a match not used in the meaning of a body part.

*What has an eye **but** cannot see? (A needle)*

In this example antithesis, a figure of speech which contrasts ideas, opinions or words in one sentence. Having eye and not being able to see are 2 ideas opposed to each other.

*A skin have I,
More eyes than one.
I can be very nice
When I am done.
What am I?(Potato)*

Inversion can be seen in this example. A skin is used in the meaning of the outer layer of the vegetable here. An eye is in the meaning of a reproductive bud in a potato.

*All about, but cannot be seen,
Can be captured, cannot be held,
No throat, but can be heard.(Wind)*

Again we can see the antithesis in the riddle given above. The word throat is hinting to the voice of the wind.

I am the hole in the night,

the ever watchful eye.

I return in a cycle,

to enlighten the sky. (The moon)

When a person looks at the sky he might feel that being watched by the moon that is why the somatism eye is metaphorically used here. These examples shows that personification is commonly used in riddles. Personification is a figure of speech that gives human characteristics to nonhuman things. Here is another example:

Each morning I appear to lie at your feet,

All day I will follow no matter how fast you run,

Yet I nearly perish in the midday sun. (Shadow)

In this riddle, feet somatism refers to human feet in its denotative meaning.

What has a neck and no head, two arms but no hands? (A shirt ,sweater or jacket etc)

A listener naturally is apt to think of living creatures when he/she hears the somatic words neck, head, arms and hands but they are referring to inanimate object.

Conclusion. Thus, the research conducted in the article on the analysis of the somatisms allow us to summarize some results. Somatisms are “initial instruments” of mankind to perceive the outer world. Riddles are representation of distinct aspects of culture. The frequent usage of somatizms in English riddles shows that the body part terms are of great importance. They can mean something different from their ordinary meaning.

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