

The importance of riddles in the YAKA Society

MAZUNDA PASI Oscar

ABSTRACT

Despite the massive cultural shift in Africa owing to the impact of colonialism and globalization, folklore has remained resilient and retained its place in most societies in Africa, and by extension, the Yaka society. Riddle as a genre of folklore has equally survived technological advancements and has continued to play great roles in shaping the life and actions of Yaka people. Riddling is carried out by the Yaka people mostly at night after a day's work and play significant roles which are both latent and manifest. It is fallacious to believe that riddles are an exclusive preserve of children because it is performed by people of all ages, gender and social status; and plays educative, social, intellectual and cosmological roles. It is therefore not out of place to encourage its continuous practice even beyond the Yaka cosmology. This paper therefore takes a look at the importance of riddles in Yaka cosmology using the functionalist theory as its framework. Data for this study is collected orally from native speakers of Yaka language within the Camp-Luka municipal of Kinshasa city. Findings from the analysis of the collected riddles show that riddles are functionally dynamic to YAKA people and serve the purposes of entertainment, memory training and didacticism among others.

Key words : Riddle, definition, yaka language and culture

RESUME

En dépit de la disparition culturelle massive en Afrique, due à l'impact de la colonisation et de la mondialisation, le folklore est resté résilient et a une place importante en Afrique en général et dans la société Yaka en particulier. La devinette a technologiquement survécu et continue à jouer un rôle assez important pour peindre la vie et les actions du peuple Yaka. Le jeu de devinette chez le peuple Yaka se fait la nuit, après le petit boulot. Son rôle est manifeste et latent. Il est faux de croire que les devinettes sont réservées aux enfants seulement, elles sont aussi l'œuvre des humains de tout âge, genre et statut social. Ainsi, elles (devinettes) jouent un rôle éducatif, social, intellectuel et cosmologique. Nous encourageons donc sa pratique, même au-delà de la cosmologie Yaka.¹

Ce travail sert à considérer l'importance des devinettes Yaka, surtout la cosmologie Yaka, utilisant la théorie fonctionnaliste comme soubassement. Les données viennent des Yaka du camp LUKA, à Kinshasa. Surtout des Yaka qui maîtrisent la culture Yaka, ceux qui viennent des villages. Les découvertes faites à partir des analyses de devinettes récoltées montrent que les devinettes Yaka sont fonctionnellement dynamiques pour le peuple Yaka et servent à s'amuser, à assurer une fonction de mémoire et à enseigner les bonnes mœurs.

Mots clés : Devinettes, définition, langue Yaka et culture

¹ *MAZUNDA PASI Oscar is a junior lecturer at the Business College of Kinshasa, "HEC-KINSHASA", Democratic Republic of Congo.

INTRODUCTION

Riddles play both latent and manifest roles in the Yaka society but seem not to engage enough scholarly attention by Yaka folklorists. Linguistic attention has been beamed on other genres of folklore like proverbs and folktales and it seems there is a conspiracy against the Yaka riddles. This notwithstanding, riddles are valuable to the Yaka society in their own right. We opine that this neglect might be connected to the fallacious belief that riddles are primarily a preserve for children. This however does not take away the validity of the genre in almost all African societies.

Few genres have such a long tradition, both oral and written, as the riddle. Different types of riddles have continued to interest people from one era to the next, because they are a voyage into the unknown. They are an invitation to embark on an adventure that either brings delight, amusement and gratification at discovering the right answer, or humiliation and vexation at being led astray.

Riddling is an exchange of words in which people are deliberately misled because the “right” answer is sometimes completely unexpected. Riddling is not, however, a general knowledge quiz. Seemingly fulfilling the criteria in the riddle question does not necessarily yield the guesser the pleasure of a correct answer. In the riddling game, with rules from random analogy, arriving at the right answer is most often arbitrary.

Riddles have been described in many ways, and their definition depends on their elements, sometimes called “parts”. Let us begin with a working definition that says: “A riddle is a traditional, fix-phrased verbal expression consisting of two parts, an image and an answer, and a seeming contradiction”. For example, “A house full, a yard full, Couldn’t catch a bowl full.— Smoke”. “Fix-phrased” should be understood in relation to “free phrased” genres of folklore such as folktales and legends in which the content is more fixed than the actual expression. I’ll be supplementing this basic definition later.

Riddles are known to have existed since way back in time, for the first documents date back to ancient cultures of India, Palestine, Mesopotamia and Greece. Religious poetry such as the Rig Veda and the Old Testament incorporate riddles. Most languages also have a word for riddles, because as a genre, riddles belong in all cultures to the archaic stratum of folklore. These words represent the emic category, i.e., tradition bearers’ own classification. Few genres have enjoyed such marked shifts in prestige as the riddle. Many celebrated writers and scholars have both invented and drawn inspiration from riddles; in the 17th century, they used to produce poetry of distinction. The contemporary riddles reminiscent of jokes do not, by contrast, enjoy such high esteem.

I here wish to concentrate on the true or the ordinary riddle, which is the best-known of the old riddles. When Archer Taylor used the term “true riddle” in 1943, he gave it the synonym “the riddle in the strict sense”(Taylor 1943, p.129). This makes us wonder whether the concept “riddle” could be reserved exclusively for this traditional genre. Ulla Lipponen wrote in 1995: “The joking riddle genre is nowadays very productive, drawing on the old trick question formulae and yielding a rich lore of many kinds relying especially on linguistic play with words” Other well-known genres go by such varying terms and definitions as joking questions, visual riddles, wisdom questions, puzzles, parody riddles and literary riddles, but they are not of focal interest to me here.

Among the Greek, Oedipus had to solve the riddle of the sphinx. The birds of Aristophanes regarded the lives of men as so many riddles. Aristotle, in his *Poetics*, sums it up: “the very nature of indeed a riddle is this, to describe a fact in an impossible combination of words (which cannot be done with the real names of things, but can be with their metaphorical substitutes)”. From the foregoing, it can be seen that the idea of riddling is as old as man himself. Riddling began right from creation and has evolved into what is obtainable today. Consequently, we can look at a riddle as a statement or question that offers a puzzle to be solved. It involves critical thinking on the part of the reader or listener in order to figure out the answer. Gunner (2000) sees a riddle as an enigma and enigmas, according to him, employ the use of allegorical or metaphorical devices and they require critical thinking on the part of the listener to derive an answer.

The general opinion of linguists is that linguistics is the scientific study of language. It seeks to describe succinctly the structural properties of language and to understand their interactions, how they change and how they serve the broader functions of language as a tool of communication embedded in human physiology, cognition, interaction, society and culture. Folklore on the other hand deals with the traditions, legends, myths, songs, dances, customs, beliefs, attitudes, lifestyles, riddles and other forms of cultural expressions of a society or community. The fact that folklore is expressed orally makes it linguistic in nature. These forms of cultural expressions are passed down from generation to generation through the instrumentality of language. Language is therefore the instrument through which folklores are expressed with each community having its own language or dialect. Folklore and linguistics can therefore be said to be inseparable phenomena since the former uses the later for its expression. Folklore can therefore play a significant role in language preservation generally. It is a powerful tool and holds an immense value for language preservation. It is worthy of note here that folklore is just a way of language preservation among many. Folklore embeds linguistic features in all its forms of oral traditions, songs, poems, proverbs and riddles and these preserves vocabulary, grammar and pronunciation in their natural, spoken form. All these are expressed through language.

DEFINITION

Although scholars debated the basic elements of the riddle for a long time without making any reference to the answer, it is impossible to define a riddle conclusively without including this. I shall here be limiting myself to some main definitions.

The first well-known definition of the riddle was made by Aristotle in *On Rhetoric*, in which he calls attention to the similarity between the riddle and the metaphor: “Good riddles do, in general, provide us with satisfactory metaphors: for metaphors imply riddles, and therefore a good riddle can furnish a good metaphor”. The same link with the metaphor is evident in certain other definitions, too (such as Paris 1877; Potter 1950). The second recurring line of thought stresses the irreconcilable contradiction occurring in riddles, a feature that was likewise noted by Aristotle: “The very nature indeed of a riddle is this, to describe a fact that in an impossible combination of words (which cannot be done with the real names for things, but can be with their metaphorical substitute . . .)”.

Crystallising the inherent characteristics of the riddle has not proved easy. André Jolles pinpointed something fundamental about the nature of the riddle and its special language in his

classic “Einfache Formen” (1929): “The riddle opens and closes at the same time; the way the riddle encrypts is such that it simultaneously contains and conceals, holds and withholds”. Archer Taylor wrote in 1938 that riddle research was still in its beginning. A few years later, Taylor proposed the following definition, which he limited to the most common type of riddle, the true riddle. When he had identified the “positive” and “negative descriptive elements” contained in the riddle, he continued his analysis of true riddles by saying that “a true riddle consists of two descriptions of an object, one figurative and one literal, and confuses the hearer who endeavours to identify an object described in conflicting ways”. Taylor’s attempts to define the true riddle have been considered to cover too narrow a field.

The positive and negative descriptions did not always correspond to the material. On the other hand

Taylor’s definition was too loose, for there are many riddles in the English Riddles from Oral Tradition anthology of 1951 that do not satisfy his criteria for a true riddle. Robert A. Georges and Alan Dundes worked to find a definition that was broad enough to include traditional texts while at the same time narrow enough to exclude other materials whose morphological characteristics indicated that they were specimens of another genre². For their method they chose structural analysis, because in their opinion, the definitions based on content and style had proved inadequate. The choice of minimum unit for analysis was important; like Robert Petsch³² and Archer Taylor, they called this unit “the descriptive element” consisting of a topic and a comment. The topic is “the apparent referent; that is, it is the object or item which is allegedly described”. Comment on the other hand is “an assertion about the topic, usually concerning the form, function, or action of the topic”. Georges and Dundes³ modified their definition to read: “A riddle is a traditional verbal expression which contains one or more descriptive elements, a pair of which may be in opposition; the referent of the elements is to be guessed”.

A third scholar analysing the riddle tradition from a structuralist point of view was Charles T. Scott, and he regarded the analysis of Georges and Dundes as a serious attempt to define the riddle as a genre. He did, however, take an extremely critical attitude to the basic unit of analysis, the descriptive element, which despite all attempts by scholars does not operate at structural level. The result was, in his opinion, unsatisfactory⁴. And it has to be said that the model of Georges and Dundes does concentrate on the opposition between the descriptive elements to the exclusion of the other properties⁵. Lee Haring³⁶ notes that the structural scheme proposed by Georges and Dundes may be more useful as a classifying device than for definition. The reason is probably that the definition concentrates only on the question part and does not make any allowance for the answer. Michael L. Chyet³⁷ has, however, successfully made a few additions to the concepts of Georges and Dundes and proved their serviceability in analysing riddles from the Arabic-speaking area.

² (Georges and Dundes 1963, p. 113).

³² (Petsch 1899, pp. 48–50).

³ (Georges and Dundes 1963, p. 113).

⁴ (Scott 1965, pp. 17–19).

⁵ (Saarinen 1991, p. 11).

³⁶ (Haring 1974, p. 294).

A closer analysis of the riddle definition involves on the one hand researchers' attempts to isolate, define and classify the devices used by the riddle and on the other criticism of their attempts. Researchers tend not to build on ready definitions and instead aim at a new definition, while criticising the old. W. J. Pepicello and Thomas A. Green adopted a more linguistic approach than previous researchers. They set out to examine riddles as "verbal art from a linguistic perspective" and "to build toward a characterization of the genre as an integration of formal linguistic and culturally aesthetic strategies". They underline that in no culture, and especially so in English, do riddles go unanswered. They stressed the ambiguity of riddles that must also be allowed for in analyses; this significant feature may occur both in the linguistic form of a riddle and its context.

Not a single riddle definition has yet gone into general circulation, and many a scholar has felt the need to express terminological reservations and to create a personal definition within the context of the culture under study. Is it, we may ask, possible or even expedient to seek a universal definition? It is often the case that only some of the riddles in a cultural or linguistic area fit such a definition, based as it is on the materials of researchers representing different cultures. It might be better to examine the essential points to be taken into account in making a definition, and this is in fact just what Pepicello and Green, for example, did.

I quote here Joel Sherzer(2002), who notes the metaphoric aspect of riddles and continues: Riddles

"occur in a question-and-answer format in which the question is enigmatic and challenges the answerer to figure it out. The question is mystifying, misleading, or puzzling, posed as a problem to be solved or guessed, something difficult to understand. The answer is surprising but clever. At the same time, a riddle is a kind of definition or description whose referent must be guessed". Sherzer has here rid himself of the structuralist and linguistic definitions of the 20th century and, even when examining the content of riddles, arrived at a result that covers many of the factors describing riddles and their use. Dan Pagis further adds to the definition the main characters in the riddling process and the tension between them: a riddle must have a social function as a competition between the riddler and riddlees.

The image is "difficult and enigmatic, yet containing the clues needed to decipher it".

Riddles have been studied in many cultures, and their definition and identifying features are thus also culture-specific. It has been argued that riddles "can provide a useful indication of cultural norms and world view". Defining riddles must work from the basic premise that the answer must not be too easy, but the riddlee must ultimately be able to find the answer in accordance with the rules of the game and be able to accept it as fitting in his or her culture.

YAKA PEOPLE AND LANGUAGE

2.1.1. The Yaka people

The Yaka are an African ethnic group found in southwestern Democratic Republic of the Congo, with Angola border to their west. They number about 1000,000 and are related to the Suku people. They live in the forest and savanna region between the Kwango River and the Wamba River. They speak the Yaka language). (Yaka people, Encyclopaedia Britannica)

Their oral tradition states that Lunda arrived in Kwango in the 17th century and found people who were part of the kingdom of Kongo. (Marc Kapende:2012). Yaka was a title of honor given to the warriors of the kingdom of Kongo and this word can be found in the following Kongo

sentence from the descendants of M'panzu : " « Beto, mayaka mbata; mayaka mpunza, mayaka mbele. »"(Translation: « We, we catch the blows, arrows and swords. » (that the enemies throw at them).

The colonial Portuguese called them Jagas, and their name may be derived from the Kikongo verb Kuyaka which means "to grab, to take, to hold" referring to the warriors of the kingdom of Kongo and later referring to the invaders.(Anthony A., Louis G.(2010).

2.1.1.2. History

2.1.1.2.1. Exodus to Kwango Region and establishment of the Yaka kingdom

King Kasongo led the exodus of the Lunda westward around the 17th century, the most organized expedition towards the conquest of the Kwango region in the kingdom of Kongo. Some Lunda had already preceded this. These Lunda conquerors were endowed with three major qualities: diplomacy, sociability and the organization, which enabled them to found the **Yaka kingdom** in the seventeenth century, harmoniously integrating the pre-established Kongo nations. The Lunda used this "soft power", more than fighting, to favour the union of the two peoples, Lunda and Kongo, under the kingdom Yaka. Ethnologists and sociologists unanimously agree that, throughout Belgian colonial history, this kingdom was one of the best organized and Especially the most resistant to Western penetration.(Roland O. et al.(2001).

The name Yaka is a title that the Kongo gave to their warriors. Upon the arrival of Lunda, the kingdom of Kongo was already weakened by Portuguese incursions. Thus, the resistance that the Lunda find in the Kwango region is that of the isolated local tribes Kongo, including the Mbala, Tsamba, Hungana, Pindi, Ngongo, rather than that of a United Kongo kingdom. The Lunda, these "biluwa", or foreigners, which Nothing resisted on their passage, capable of catching bullets and arrows, were also called "Iluwa" (foreigners) or Bayaka (Catchers of the balls and the arrows). Both the Lunda that arrived and the kongo warriors had similar traits, hence the exact titles being given to them.(ibid 2001).

The Lunda, who had an interest in integrating into their political organization the local tribes who had not fled the invasion or who did not want to fight, had in turn adopted the identity "Yaka" which, in addition to conferring on them a title of nobility of the "invincible", integrated them better In their new country.

They had also gradually adopted the Kongo language (hence the Kiyaka language being spoken amongst them, an offshoot of Kikongo). Much more, Lunda chiefs married Kongo women. The offspring identified themselves as Yaka rather than Lunda. Thus, the Yaka appellation had established itself as a generic identity Of the Lunda and Kongo inhabiting territories area under the authority of the Kiamvu Kasongo-Lunda, namely the territories of Kasongo-Lunda, Kenge and Popokabaka.

The Lunda of Nzofu later came in the territory of Kahemba retain the Lunda identity and language. As for the territory of Feshi, they emigrated there in the middle of the 18th century from the Basuku, a group of Kongo, who disassociated themselves from the power of Kiamvu Kasongo-Lunda and whose leader "Meni Kongo" refused to submit to the authority of the latter. Some other Kongo groups: the Mbala, Tsamba, Hungana, Pindi and Ngongo, etc. Had already emigrated to the Kwilu, leaving behind them, brothers and sisters who, together with the Lunda, composed the Yaka kingdom.

The five territories that make up Kwango are therefore a binational space, Kongo and Lunda. The reconciliation is thus the end of the wars of conquest between Kongo ethnic groups and the Lunda in Kwango was sealed by a ceremony and a particular ceremony in which the chief Meni Kongo representing of the original Tsamba clans of Feshi and the Lunda chiefs were to share the parrot, dog and cat raw meat. At the end of this ceremony, the representatives of two nations buried their war weapons and promised peaceful coexistence forever. The Kongo and the Lunda of Kwango have lived in perfect harmony since the beginning of the 19th century.

2.1.1.2.2. Contact with the Europeans powers

When the administration of Leopold II arrived in Kwango after their establishment in Bas-Congo, Kwango was an organized kingdom; The power of Kiamvu Kasongo-Lunda was legitimized and respected by all the peoples, Kongo and Lunda. It was also well represented on the whole kingdom that stretched from Kasongo-Lunda to Popokabaka through the present territory of Kenge. Peace between the Bayaka (Kongo and Lunda under the power of the Kiamvu Kasongo-Lunda), their brothers, the Basuku of Meni Kongo in the Feshi and the Lunda of Nzofu in Kahemba.

It was therefore not by default of hospitality that the agents of the Belgian administration came up against a refusal in Kwango. They represented a power that could not coexist easily with the existing political power.

According to Crawford Young, the Lunda empires in Kwango and Katanga had understood that colonial occupation was an aggression to repel and fight. The other groups, apart from a few scattered revolts including that of Bapendé, had behaved as if the exploration and occupation of their spaces by strangers were normal. (C. Young, 1965: 295-6).

2.1.1.2.3 The resistance Of Kiamvu against the European power

By the year 1890, a skilled administrator named Dhanis came to negotiate his acceptance with King "Kiamvu" Tsiimba Nkumbi. It was not even with his replacement of the name of Dussart who sought to impose the Leopold administration on Kwango even by force. It was then that in 1892 and 1893 there were two wars ranked between the two armies, that of the Kiamvu Tsiimba Nkumbi and that of the Leopoldian administration in which there were considerable losses on both sides. If the principal Belgian agent perished in the first war of 1892, the one which followed in 1893 with a greater reinforcement of soldiers of the public force saw the assassination of the Kiamvu Tsiimba Nkumbi. It was also the beginning of the destabilization of the kings, but not that of the kingdom or the resistance. In fact, the kings who were enthroned after this revolting event showed themselves more intransigent with respect to submission to the power of whites. Thus, faced with repression, they had the choice either to go into exile with their brothers, the Lunda of Angola, or to undergo forced relegation to Banningville(BDD) or elsewhere. Mulombo kings Désiré Nkulu and Chief Munene Nkenzi were deported respectively, while the Kiamvu Muana Koko Kodia Puanga found refuge in Angola in 1915. After the two bloody wars of 1892 and 1893, when the Kwango was militarily armed, the resistance assumed passive form. This took many forms, ranging from the subtle violence by leopard men "Masiona" to civil disobedience and the refusal to serve any power of oppression, to participate in any enterprise or to obey any colonial injunction. It was this passive resistance that continued throughout the colonial era until independence. When in 1908, Leopold II ceded

the Congo to Belgium, the colonial administration, to whom the narrative of the resistance Yaka had already been made, tried to occupy the Kwango by force, but she stumbled upon the civil resistance whose main manifestation was the refusal of cooperation with the colonial agents. Even after the assassination in 1893 of the Kiamvu Tsiimba Nkumbi, under which open resistance was waged, the Bayaka continued civic resistance. Because of the unfortunate incidents of the conflict, and after 2 years of colonial military siege, the colonial mission in Kwango was abandoned. By way of punishment and fear that the Kwango hindered the colonial work and wished to overthrow the sovereignty of the Congo, in the hands of the colonial administration, which in turn forced to administration to put the Kwango on hold; Which meant that no development project could be undertaken. This did not prevent the Bayaka associating themselves with nationalists message of Lumumba, due to their strong presence in Kinshasa, only a century later, they heavily precipitate in the movement of independence, especially as the party that brought them together "LUKA "(The Kwangolese Union for Freedom and Independence) which had as its main objective the independence. The Bayaka, by their strong mobilization in Kinshasa, contributed strongly to the events that precipitated the independence of the Congo in 1959 - 1960

The root cause of the Bayaka's denigration

If the Bayaka have a history so glorious, where is the disparagement they are subjected to? The denigration of the Bayaka was originally the work of the colonial agents. The latter, after having abandoned the Kwango, were to create the division to better establish their authority in neighbouring Bas-Congo and Kwilu. Afterwards, they began spreading propaganda about the Bayaka, claiming them to be "warriors and savages", as they did not accept western civilization. This became the means of dividing and reigning. This is how, from the machinations of colonialists, stereotypes stick to the identity of Yaka, especially in Kinshasa, the capital, where all the tribes of the Congo eventually meet. Nevertheless, as can be seen in the writings of sociologists And Belgian ethnologists, the colonial administration recognized the organization and dynamism of the Bayaka. As all slanderous statements are made away from Kwango, or whispering, the Bayaka have imperturbably pursued their traditional activities in all areas: art, craftsmanship, construction, hunting, fishing and agriculture.

The Bayaka fell victim to their exceptional resistance to colonial oppression and exploitation. Those of the Kwango, have among other things, resisted fiercely efforts of "pacification" of the Force Publique and Leopold II's administration.

2.1.1.3. The socio-political organization and Religion

The Yaka people are a matrilineal society that includes patrilineal lineage as family name. (Michael Lamberk; Andrew Strathern 1998).

Their villages have chiefs, who are recognized by the Congo government as a political office. (University of Iowa Museum of Art 2012).

Their Traditional Religion has the concept of Ndzambyaphuungu, or a Creator God who resides in the sky, but this creator is not a part of their celebrations or rituals. The religious practices and ceremonies are instead directed towards the Bambuta or the spirits of the ancestors, and

these are also part of healing dances during illnesses.(Michael Lamberk; Andrew Strathern ibidem).



A carved Yaka Tambour (drum).

The Yaka farm cassava, sweet potatoes, and corn as staple source of food, and supplement this with fish and game meat. They have traditionally hunted with the help of hunting dogs. In contemporary times, they are also migrant workers in urban areas.

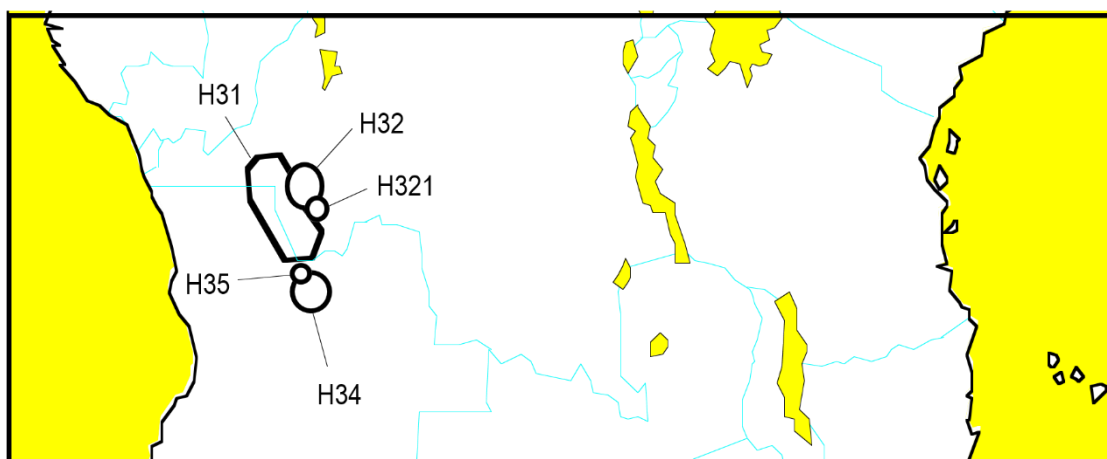
The Yaka are notable for their arts and handicrafts. They make statues, portraits, baskets, carved objects, masks, tools for cooking, building, hunting, fishing or entertaining with additions of instruments such as drums. Their masks are bulky, distinctive with upturned noses and eyes shaped in the form of globules. These masks were frequently used in various Traditional Religion ceremonies. Their sculptures called Mbwoolo and their carved slit drum called Mukoku are regionally famous and used in ritual dances.

2.1.2. Yaka Language (H30)

The third edition of the Cambridge Advanced Learner's Dictionary says that language is a system of communication consisting of sounds, words and grammar, or the system of communication used by the people of a particular country or profession. Since language is defined like this, this research attempts to explain some aspects of Yaka language as it relates to the topic.

Yaka, also spelled Iaca and Iyaka, is a Bantu language spoken in the Democratic Republic of Congo, mainly in former Bandundu province (Kwango) and Angola. There are four dialects, Yaka proper, which comprises 99% of speakers, and Ngoongo (distinct from West Ngongo language), Pelende, and Lonzo.(NUGL(or New Updated Guthrie List) Online compiled by JOUNI F. M. 2009).

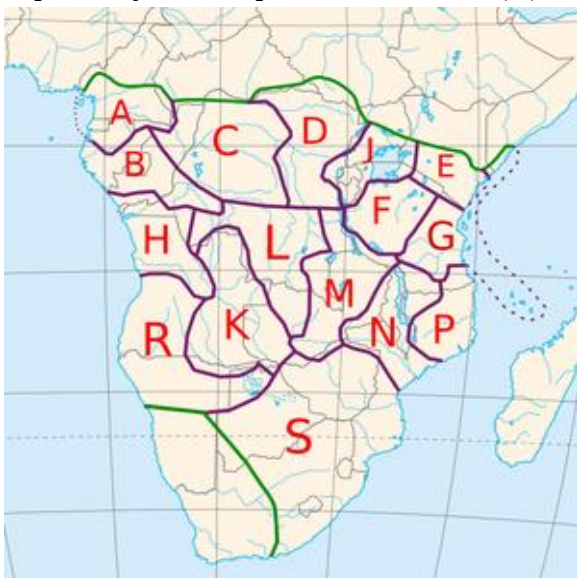
H30 : Yaka Group



H31 Yaka ^{yaf}, Kiyaka, incl. Ngoongo ^{noq}, Pelende ^{ppp}, Lonzo ^{lnz}

H32 Suku ^{sub}

Yaka is a conventionally classified as belonging to the H30 linguistic Zone among the 16 zones proposed by New Updated Guthrie List) (2009).



The sixteen Guthrie Bantu zones

NATURE OF YAKA RIDDLE

The Yaka riddle, called BINGANA is a short expression or utterance which may be in plain language or language that is poetic. The riddle sometimes comes in form of questions and calls for a response or utterance like the riddle itself. The riddler usually begins by posing the utterance “NTA ” and the audience must respond “TOMA” before he poses his riddle. The conversation goes like this:

1) Riddler : Nta

2) Riddler : Nta

Audience : Toma

Audience: Toma

Riddler: kadia mani wele
(He eats and

Riddler : Pangi-a-lufua (a friend of death)

Audience : Nzenza (visitor)

Audience: kilu(sleep)

The audience is thus expected to provide the solution to the riddle if they know the answer but if they do not know, they concede defeat and allow the riddler to tell the answer. The interlocutor concedes defeat by saying “tsokueni ye matandi ye meno” (I don’t know) or “tusokueni ye matandi ye menbo” (we don’t know) as the case may be. The response may be a single word, longer phrase or a sentence that accords with the syntactic pattern of the riddle. The expected response is meant to be discovered taking into account the clues that have been provided but more often the interlocutor is expected to remember the customarily approved answer or else concede ignorance and wait to be told the answer. Some require intelligence, maturity and wisdom to settle the enigmatic circumstances they contain. Only elders and advanced children find the solutions. Since the language is not plain, most riddles are metaphors or imageries. People analyze the riddle and make the interpretation. The response or solution can be whole ideas, words, propositions or explanation from the audience. In the statement, ‘tseki ya nkeki, mahata lawu’ or ‘a small bush with many villages’. The response is an interpretation, that is, a bush is the face, the villages are eyes, nose and mouth. Another example of this category is “ye ngeye ye mene botata benda ku putu”, literally meaning, ‘you and I, our fathers went to Europe’. The answer is you and I have no father. As a comment, going to Europe was to ‘die’.

Harries (1971), quoted by Awedoba (2000) comments that “... riddle is an exercise in the association of ideas based on close observation of natural life”. Awedoba continues that “that association confines to nature but applies also to ideas about the supernatural and about what could not possibly be visible”. For the Yaka riddles, there is semantic fit between the riddle precedent and the sequent. Some of the figurative elements involved are straight forward for all to see. For example, ‘sodidia Nzambi-a-pungu wa-bunda mole’, or ‘God’s farm with two parcels’. The response is ‘tangwa yen gondi’, the sun and the moon. For the Yaka riddle, there is semantic fit between the riddle precedent and the sequent. Some of the figurative elements involved are straight forward for all to see. Example in the riddle, ‘nti wambata makaya mole’ (a big tree with two leaves). The statement put differently is asking which tree has two leaves. The answer is the head or ‘ntwa’, a part of body with only two ears (explanation). Another riddle, ‘hata dia tunga mfumu nzambi kadifuako’ (God’s village cannot be destroyed). The answer in Yaka cosmology is the sky (‘zulu’).

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

This work adopts the functionalist’s theory credited to Malinowski. This is a theory that insists on the function of an oral rendition in the society. The theory proposes that any performance that does not function to the benefit of the society that produces it is useless. Proposed by Bronislaw Malinowski and A.R. Radcliffe-Brown, they emphasize on the function of any art form in the society. Considering the fact that this work explores the functions that riddles play in Yaka cosmology, this theory becomes apt for the study.

A keen look at this riddle reveals that; like many others in Yaka society, the riddle can play three functions : To entertain, educate, therapy.

Importance of Yaka Riddles

The ingana or bingana (plural) play important roles to the Yaka people irrespective of the gender, age and social standing. Some of roles riddle play in the Yaka society are discussed below.

Entertainment

To the Yaka people, the primary function of riddle is entertainment. It affords the people leisure time to laugh off some stress and amuse themselves. According to Finnegan (1970), the primary purpose of riddles to the Yaka people is amusement. Families usually gather in different households at night, prior to bedtime, to amuse themselves with riddles. This avails them the opportunity to relax, laugh and make merriment after a day's hustling and bustling. Riddles are sometimes organized as competitions between households or groups and folks come to be entertained by the riddlers. However it is organized, be it competitive or not, the entertainment value of this genre of folklore among the Yaka people cannot be underestimated.

Memory Training

Riddles help in memory training especially to the children. Most Yaka riddles have answers that are universal and are not expected to be changed. These answers are expected to be memorized and given to the appropriate riddles anytime the need arises. Consequently, children are encouraged to always remember the correct answers to these riddles. This trains their memories to be able to recall events even beyond riddling. This is in contrast to Harries' (1971) assertion that the motive for riddling is not in any way didactic. The Yaka riddle, just like riddling anywhere, emphasizes on recall of associations.

Memory training and semantic roles are tackled by De Beir (1975 = 297) "the yaka child knows the persons, the animals and the things individually,...."

This sometimes leads to multiplicity of responses in certain riddle. Example can be seen in the riddle below: Dum dum weke. The riddle has multiplicity of answers. The riddle is onomatopoeic signifying the sound of a liquid being poured from a jerry can. Thus, when the riddle is posed, any liquid can go for an answer. The answer can therefore be "water in a jerry can" or "oil in a jerry can". Whatever the answer, children are expected to memorize all the associative answers and give them appropriately.

Didacticism

Children, and even adults, learn through the process of riddling. Awedoba is of the opinion that riddles are based on the critical observations of the environment in which the society finds itself. This includes the physical environment, human society, its organization and how that society operates, how animals and other living organisms behave, the relationship of divinity to man and the physical environment. This kind of knowledge can be acquired through riddling. Take the riddle below: 'kima kiniosi bakabulakioko' (a thing that cannot be shared). The answer is nkeeto (wife). The explanation of the riddle is that no matter how beautiful one's wife is, you cannot share her with another person. There is a moral lesson : the prostitution is prohibited, so is the adultery

Children are introduced to a variety of vocabulary items through riddles in the Yaka setting. The act of riddling introduces children to names of animals, trees and artifacts including the numerous onomatopoeic words that abound in African culture with their meanings and uses. These words are very important in Yaka language because they provide the means for expression of shades of meanings that conventional words like the regular nouns, adjectives, adverbs alone are inadequate to convey.

The knowledge of human anatomy can be gained through riddling. Members of the human body feature prominently in Yaka riddles and are exposed to the children. Cooperation of members of the human body can be seen in the following riddle; batu bole bele mu nzila, batu bole bamuene manga, batu bya bameti mu nti, batu makamutatu ye bole badidi manga, literally meaning, two men saw the mangoes in a tree, four people climbed up the tree, and thirty-two ate the mangoes. The answer is two legs, two eyes, two legs and two arms, thirty-two teeth, that is, two eyes see the fruit, two legs and two arms combine to pluck the fruit, and are “eaten” by thirty-two teeth.

Similarly, in the riddle, “lutula kuenu gana sani ketibue, iyukutako” (Nomatter how much you put in my plate, it will never be full). The answer is “tuu” or “ear”. The ear is never full no matter how much it hears. These types of riddles teach the people, especially the children, parts of the human body and their functions.

Furthermore, just as Miller (2020) says, riddles can support children’s problem solving, logic and critical thinking skills. If riddles are wrestled with for a period of time, they can help in concentration, focus and brain dexterity. They improve children’s comprehension and creativity while also bonding people together as a result of working together to achieve desired results. It will therefore not be out of place to call riddles the diamond within the Yaka setting.

CONCLUSION

Riddle as a genre of folklore is a statement or question that offers a puzzle to be solved. It is called “ingana” by the Yaka people and is mostly carried out in the night after retirement from the day’s work. During these times, families gather in compounds to perform the act either as competition among members of a household or between one household and another. There is a belief in many quarters that riddling is meant for children but studies have shown that not only children engage in the act in Yaka, although majority of the participants are children. Riddles are carried out as prelude to storytelling and sometimes as form of interlude after a long time of storytelling. Riddles have functional aspects and the audience is expected to be armed with the universally accepted answer whenever a riddle is posed.

Among many roles, riddles are highly entertaining in nature. They afford the people the opportunity to relax, laugh and amuse themselves. Children’s memories are also trained at retention of concepts and ideas. Almost all Yaka riddles have socially approved answers and it is expected of the children to memorize these answers and offer them appropriately. Furthermore, riddles help the people especially the young have a grasp of new concepts such as body parts and their uses as they work in harmony to achieve results. New words are also learnt through riddling especially onomatopoeic words which do not have their equivalence in normal speech. Children are exposed to quick thinking ability and this transcends to their ability to think quickly and solve worldly problems when the need arises

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