

# What is the Difference between an Undergraduate Thesis and a Riddle?

## Parsing the Linguistic and Cultural Structures of Folk Riddling

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**0 Abstract:** In this study, I make two generally unimpeachable observations: (a) folk riddles achieve their characteristic deceptiveness through manipulation of a language's linguistic structures, and (b) individuals transmit riddles through a predictable set of culturally-determined practices. Given these two observations, I argue that folk riddles are simultaneously cultural and linguistic acts. To elaborate: individuals within a speech community share a representation of world knowledge and (a) common language(s). While folk riddling, community members exploit both the world knowledge and the language(s) in order to facilitate deception of one another. Meanwhile, certain performative formulae exist exclusively within the context folk riddling. These formulae emphasize the competitive nature of folk riddling. Competition, after all, is what motivates riddle-tellers to offer deceptive riddle images to riddle-solvers. This study thus constitutes a new entry in the tradition of Pepicello & Green (1984), which was instrumental in bridging the divergences between anthropologists and linguists in the study of riddles. This study differs from others in that it applies the folkloric theory of Burns (1976) and the linguistic theory of Pepicello & Green (1984) to an esoteric collection of riddles from late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century Turkey.

Prior to addressing any particular culture's folk riddles, I arrive at a definition of 'folk riddle': an orally-transmitted image-referent sequence, often consisting of a question and its corresponding answer, being told in the cultural context of a performance or competition, where a riddle-teller provides an image that yields sufficient—though not generous—context for a riddle-solver to identify a referent. With this definition, I distinguish folk riddles from other forms of riddles and orally-transmitted culture (e.g. literary riddles, conundrums, jokes, proverbs, catechistic questions).

Next, I describe how linguists and folklorists separately confront riddles. The general consensus among linguists is that riddles achieve their effect via *ambiguity*. There are two methods for achieving *ambiguity*: metaphor and purposeful manipulation of linguistics (i.e. a language's sentential structure, word structure, syllable structure and sound structure) [Pepicello & Green 1984]. In support of the work of linguists, pragmatists cite violations of pragmatic rules as the source of *ambiguity*. Folklorists, on the other hand, are more interested in the structure of riddle events, which are rule-governed, culturally-mediated occurrences in which members of a community competitively try to outwit one another with folk riddles [Burns 1976, Weiner 1997]. Riddle events tend to consist of multiple riddle acts, where each riddle act consists minimally of a question and answer, but may also include optional formula (e.g. riddle initiation, riddle question introduction and conclusion, period of contemplation, riddle 'buying') [Burns 1976].

This study culminates with an investigation of riddles found in İlhan Başgöz and Andreas Tietze's (1973) *Bilmece: A Corpus of Turkish Riddles*. Despite being transmitted onto a static medium, the riddles contained within the corpus retain vestigial evidence of a previously flourishing riddle culture and exhibit a vast array of *ambiguity*. In this manner, the data extracted from *Bilmece* reinforces my thesis that folk riddling is a cultural and linguistic process.

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# 1 Introduction

*“When first I appear I seem mysterious, but when I’m explained I am nothing serious.”*  
—“A Riddle” [Cohen 1996:294]

Currently, there is not a markedly vibrant folk riddling tradition in American culture. Americans generally regard riddle-telling as a children’s pastime and—perhaps more tellingly—conflate the term ‘riddle’ with ‘joke’ (Dienhart 1998). What is more, riddling is typically a leisure-time activity, as opposed to a “serious” hobby or vocation. For this reason, the academic merits of the study of riddles might not be immediately apparent to individuals who are unfamiliar with folkloric studies. In reality, scholars from the fields of linguistics, anthropology, and folkloric studies have published numerous articles, books, and corpora about *folk riddles* and their transmission. By writing this study, I am contributing to a growing body of scholarship that maintains that a culture’s folk riddling practices—and the folk riddles themselves—can shed light on the culture and the language(s) shared by the cultural community.

As a linguist, my primary concern is justifiably the structure of language and how linguistic structure may be applied to the topic of folk riddling. However, in writing about folk riddles, I would be remiss in not addressing the works of anthropologists and folklorists, who are concerned with the folkloric structure of folk riddling (e.g. who may tell riddles, when riddles may be told, how riddles may be told, and what these qualities of riddling suggest about a culture). Superficially, it may appear that linguistic structure and folkloric structure are not interrelated phenomena. The purpose of this study is to reconcile the perceived divide between folklore and language on the topic of folk riddles.

Every folk riddle exists within two frameworks: a cultural framework and a linguistic framework. The cultural framework establishes a cultural context for riddle-exchange. Within this cultural context, the participants suspend some manners of behavior and adopt new manners of behavior. Thus, the cultural framework distinguishes riddle-exchange from other forms of social interaction. Meanwhile, the linguistic framework governs how information is conveyed during riddle exchanges. Unlike other forms of discourse, where clear expression of ideas is ideal, the interlocutors in a riddling context purposefully withhold information from one another, with the goal of outwitting each other (Pepicello & Green 1984).

Cross-culturally, the goal of outwitting an opponent while folk riddling is universal, but no two folk riddling traditions are the same. In fact, cultural outsiders often find another culture's riddle inventory baffling because they haven't access to the speech community's world knowledge (Kaivola-Bregenhøj 1996). When I speak of world knowledge, I mean how the culture perceives and interacts with world. This includes the culture's inventory of cognitive categories and the body of their beliefs (Weiner 1997). The culture's cognitive categories inform the production of metaphors that are often found in folk riddles. Yet, 'world knowledge' is just as relevant to the linguistic framework, because it also includes the grammars of that culture's languages. Just as riddle-tellers often create new metaphors for the purposes of a folk riddle, they also incorporate words and phrases that are homophonous with other words and phrases into their riddles.

While the riddle-teller should provide enough information that he can reasonably expect the riddle-solver to give the correct response, he must also find a means of

disguising the meaning of his riddle. Numerous scholars [e.g. Pepicello & Green (1984), Burns (1976), and Weiner (1997)] describe this meaning-disguising process as “ambiguity”. While recognizing that semanticists tend to use *ambiguity* to describe a distinct phenomenon from the one described here, I am also inclined to conform to the standard modeled by recently-published scholarship on folk riddles. Therefore, in spite of its shortcomings, I too shall use *ambiguity* to refer to the riddle’s characteristic use of misdirection. Not surprisingly, ambiguity sometimes comes about through the clever use of metaphor; other times, the ambiguity is accomplished through the intentional manipulation of language (Pepicello & Green 1984). To summarize: ***it is insufficient to describe a folk riddle as merely a cultural act or a linguistic act, because folk riddling is a competitive cultural pastime, which demands that community members think and speak in a manner that manipulates their culture’s world knowledge.***

In order to prove this statement, I structure my study in the following way. First, I clarify riddle-related terminology. The term *riddle question*, for example, is a misnomer, because it applies to a set of utterances that includes more than just syntactic questions. Even more important than the connotation of *riddle question* is the connotation of *folk riddle*. Without a comprehensive definition of *folk riddle*, there isn’t any means of substantiating my main argument. For this reason, I delineate precisely what I mean when I speak of *folk riddles*. Next, I address the folkloric structure of riddles and riddle-telling, depending especially upon Thomas Burns’ “Riddling: Occasion to Act” (1976). The folkloric structure of folk-riddling is relevant to this study because, it sheds light on the cultural cues that instruct community members to “think and speak in a manner that manipulates the culture’s ‘world knowledge’.” Then, I identify some

cognitive and pragmatic means of analyzing folk riddles. Works by Weiner (1997) and Weiner & De Palma (1993) are especially illuminating. The fields of pragmatics and cognition relate to my argument because, they are both concerned in part with how the human mind processes information, which is influenced in part by cultural world knowledge. Afterward, I address ambiguity specifically, distinguishing between linguistic and metaphorical ambiguity and establishing that individual riddles can adopt both forms of ambiguity. Finally, to reinforce my notion that folk riddling is both a cultural and linguistic act, I cite one specific culture's folk riddle inventory: that of late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> Century Turkey.

## **2 Thoughts on the Image as ‘Riddle Question’**

When laymen consider riddles, they often distinguish between two utterances: the riddle question offered by the riddle-teller and the corresponding answer attempted by the riddle-solver. I favor the theory that the riddle question and the riddle answer jointly form one unit: the riddle (Dienhart 1998, Pepicello & Green 1984). The reasoning behind this is two-fold. First, the act of riddling is a cooperative one, involving two parties. Therefore, it is correct to define the riddle in terms of both participants. Second, the characteristic ambiguity of folk riddles can exist either within the riddle question or within the riddle answer. Part of the cultural “strategy” of riddling is to incorporate ambiguity seamlessly into the riddle structure (which includes both “question” and “answer”) without being excessively explicit about *how* the riddle is ambiguous.

Yet, the term *riddle question* is misleading, for it appears to suggest that this component of the riddle always takes the form of a syntactic question. If one were to refer to (1) below, it should be clear that this is not the case:

1. A cake pretty on the surface, the inside full of chaff.—Wicked Person  
(Maranda 1971:223)

Moreover, Haring (1974) proposes that idiophones can suffice as riddle images in some cultures. This example from Turkish culture seems to corroborate this proposition:

2. Elem elem, takam takam, çiyim çiyim, uha.— çıkırık  
*String of idiophones—* spinning wheel  
(Basgöz & Tietze 1978:702)

Admittedly, an outsider to Turkish language and culture may find it difficult to recognize how the idiophones in the riddle image relate to the referent *spinning wheel*. I suspect that prosody (in addition to the word forms themselves) contributes to the riddle image's intended effect. Therefore, in copying the riddle onto the static medium of print, the riddle-collectors effectively nullify tone and stress, which are crucial contributors to the riddle's intended effect.

Elli Köngäs Maranda (1971) even documented one particular riddle image-referent sequence which had 9 syntactic variants:

3. Who is the man whose head is on fire, but behind soaking wet?—Pipe
4. Whose head is on fire, but behind soaking wet?—Pipe
5. The man has his head on fire, but his behind soaking wet.—Pipe
6. The man whose head is on fire, but behind soaking wet.—Pipe
7. The man's head is on fire, but behind soaking wet.—Pipe
8. His head is on fire, but behind soaking wet.—Pipe
9. Head is on fire, but behind soaking wet.—Pipe
10. Head is on fire, behind soaking wet.—Pipe
11. Head on fire, behind soaking wet.—Pipe (195)



So, I advise my reader to bear in mind that while I use the terms *image* and *riddle question* synonymously, neither is meant to refer exclusively to syntactic questions but rather to all means of articulating a description of a referent ambiguously. Likewise, I shall use *riddle answer* and *referent* interchangeably.

Regardless of what one calls the riddle image, the most important thing to take away from this is that cultures will tolerate a grand amount of flexibility concerning what constitutes a question in the specific context of folk riddling. This is in agreement with my general argument that folk riddling is both a linguistic and cultural act.

### **3 What is a Folk Riddle?**

So far, I have established riddles as image-referent sequences containing some form of ambiguity. These criteria alone are inadequate for defining the folk riddle. An especially useful method for coming to a complete definition of folk riddles is to describe phenomena which are *not* riddles. First, it is tempting to couch riddles found in literature in the broad category of *folk riddle*. However, these forms of riddles (typically known as literary riddles) are not articulated during socially-mediated performances and competitions, thus eliminating the *folk* in ‘folk riddle’. If one were to apply literary riddles to a folk context, then the riddles could pass easily as folk riddles. (Başgöz & Tietze 1973) Yet, performance alone is not a sufficient quality of folk riddles. As an example, there is a tradition in the Zen Buddhist tradition known as *koan*. In this tradition, a Zen master asks his disciples enigmatically difficult questions, such as (12) on the next page, and the disciples respond to this question after an extended period of time (often lasting days, months, or even years):

12. When not a thought is in one's mind, is there any error there?—As much as Mount Sumeru (Zug 82)

In the case of a folk riddle, the riddle-teller reasonably expects the riddle-solver to find the referent, given the content of the image. A Zen koan operates differently; in order to solve koan, a riddle-solver must engage in deep contemplation that transcends the content of the riddle image. Similarly, catechetical questions accompanied by their corresponding answers are not folk riddles, because students master the answers provided in catechistic dialogues through memorization rather than through the overcoming of ambiguity [Pepicello & Green 1984]. However, ambiguity without the image-referent format does not suffice; thus, despite similarity with folk riddles in content, proverbs are not folk riddles. As evidence of the similarity of content between folk riddles and proverbs, consider (1) and (13) below, where (1) is a folk riddle, while (13) is not:

1. A cake pretty on the surface, the inside full of chaff.—Wicked Person

13. Many a cake is pretty on the surface, though the inside is full of chaff.  
(Maranda 1971:223)

Finally, I have elected not to include “joke riddles” in the category of “folk riddle”; while joke riddles parody the linguistic and folkloric structure of folk riddles, their primary purpose is humor rather than competition. Furthermore, joke riddle questions do not offer adequate information for the riddle-solver to respond. So, (14) is a folk riddle under my rubric, while (15) is a joke riddle.

14. What has an eye but cannot see?—A needle (Pepicello & Green 1984: 27)

15. What is hanging on the wall, is green, and whistles?—A herring that got mounted on the wall and painted green. The riddler made up the whistling part to make it more difficult. (Cohen 1996:297)

Any riddle-solver responding to (15) would require exceptional skill to solve the riddle, given only the content of the image; the riddle-teller's motivation is humor rather than the construction of an ambiguous riddle image. This is not to say that riddles cannot be humorous. On the contrary, I would refer my reader to Ian Hamnett (1976), who aptly distinguished between laughter that greets exclusively comic performance and laughter upon the successful recognition of a riddle's ambiguity. Thus a folk riddle may be defined as *an orally-transmitted image-referent sequence, often consisting of a question and its corresponding answer, being told in the cultural context of a performance or competition, where a riddle-teller provides an image that yields sufficient—though not generous—context for a riddle-solver to identify a referent. As an addendum: the image-referent pair ought to include one or more unclear words or phrases in order to hinder the riddle-solver from simple identification of the referent.* Conveniently, this definition is in compliance with my over-arching argument that both culture and linguistics are fundamental parts of the identity of folk riddles.

Perhaps controversially, this definition does include 'conundrums'. One example of a conundrum is the oft-cited "newspaper riddle" (Weiner 1997, Dienhart 1998):

16. What's black and white and read all over?—A newspaper

As (16) demonstrates, conundrums derive their ambiguity from linguistic processes rather than from metaphorical ones. Narrower definitions of 'folk riddle' [c.f. Taylor 1951] exclude conundrums, with the insistence that the only 'true riddles' are those that utilize a metaphor to bring about ambiguity. Furthermore, some (e.g. Dienhart 1998) suggest that conundrums are often relegated to a lower status than 'true riddles' due to the conundrum's correlation with puns. I disregard such distinctions for two reasons: first, I

value the existence of ambiguity in a riddle more than the means by which such ambiguity is created; second, there are situations in which a riddle's ambiguity is both linguistic and metaphorical (see **section 7**).

## **4 The Folkloric Structure of Riddles**

While **sections 2 & 3** were concerned primarily with the structures of the folk riddle and how the folk riddle differed from other forms of dialogue, this section deals with the cultural context of the folk riddle. The context of the folk riddle is significant, because it establishes a performative milieu for folk riddling. In turn, the performative milieu encourages the actors in a riddle act to enter a riddling mindset—a mindset that strives for the production and resolving of ambiguous utterances.

When anthropologists consider riddles and the practice of riddling, they attempt to answer such questions as: Why do particular cultures riddle? Who may riddle? Are there rules within particular cultures which limit riddling to particular age-groups, sexes, and socio-cultural statuses? Where and when may riddling take place? Is *leisure-time riddling* tolerated by the culture? Can riddling only take place in certain contexts? Are riddles allowed to be told in isolation (as *incidental riddles*)? In *riddling events*, how many parties are involved? Is it possible for parties to consist of more than one person? How do parties exchange roles during *riddling events*? Given the scope of this study, it is not feasible to respond to each of these queries extensively, but I attempt to answer them concisely.

### **4.1 Who, Where, and When?**

Burns (1976) affirms that some cultures allow a limited subset of the community—rather than the whole community—to participate in riddle-telling practices.

Restrictions upon gender and age are the most common, where females and children are either not allowed to be present at riddle-telling ceremonies or are relegated to audience-member status. To give an example of the former situation: one might be reluctant in English-speaking cultures to recite the following two riddles, depending upon one's audience [n.b. if the reader is especially offended by misogyny, I invite her/him to skip (17) and (18) altogether]:

17. What is the difference between a circus and a brothel?—One showcases a cunning array of stunts, while the other showcases a stunning array of cunts. (Seth Kennedy, personal communication)

18. What is the difference between a nun in church and a nun in the bath.—one has hope in her soul, the other has soap in her hole. (Kaivola-Bregenjøj 1996:22)

At the same time, some cultures set aside specific contexts within which it is appropriate to tell riddles. Such *riddle occasions* include in the midst of rituals of passage (e.g. manhood initiations, wedding celebrations, funerals), during courtship (either between a male and his love-interest or between a male and his love-interest's parents), and upon meeting a family member or former acquaintance. Most of the time, riddling is a leisure-time activity. When this is the case, folk riddles are told as part of a competitive performance known as a 'riddle event'. (Burns 1976)

#### **4.2. How?**

[*The entirety of this section is based upon the rubric proposed by Burns in "Riddling: Occasion to Act" (1976). While the format is adapted from Burns (1976), the content of the sample script is my own.*]

There are three parties in a riddle event: the riddler, the riddlee, and the audience. For the sake of consistency, I will only adopt Burn's term for the third party 'audience',

while retaining my preferred terms ‘riddle-teller’ and ‘riddle-solver’ for the other two parties. Depending upon the riddling culture, the audience can be part of the riddle-solver party. This is not a problem, for in such a situation, each party can optionally consist of multiple people. When this is the case, members of the riddling team take turns posing their own riddles. Normally, parties alternate roles in a riddling context, although this varies from culture to culture. Sometimes, each team gives one riddle and then the other team gives one riddle, and so on. A typical riddle act may unfold as follows:

**Riddle-teller:** (a) Riddle me, riddle me, riddle me ree.

**Riddle-solver:** (b) You’re on.

**Audience:** This should be exciting!

**Riddle-teller:** (c) I’ll give you a dollar if you solve this! I’m thinking of a thing. (d) What have eyes but cannot see? (e) If you can’t figure this one out, you must be really dumb.

**Audience:** (f) Oh, that’s a good riddle!

**Riddle-solver:** (g) I require some time to think about it ... (h) C’mon, gimme a hint!

**Riddle-teller:** (i) I knew you wouldn’t know it! (j) You’re time is up! Do you have an answer?

**Riddle-solver:** (k) It’s a hurricane!

**Riddle-teller:** (l) No, try again.

**Riddle-solver:** (m) I give up! Please tell me the answer. You know that I would tell you, if you were ever stumped by one of my riddles.

**Riddle-teller:** (n, o) The answer is ‘potatoes’, stupid! (p) You should pose a riddle now!

**Riddle-solver:** (q) Very well, but I must say that I find your riddle unoriginal.

Needless to say, there are numerous optional formulae in riddle events. Ultimately, the only mandatory parts of a riddle event are the riddle image and the riddle referent.

First, there is an optional riddle initiation. In the sample script above, that would be (a). One party states a riddle initiation in order to gain the consent of a second party to begin riddling. The initiation is also a verbal cue to adopt the riddling mindset, which is

hyper-aware of ambiguity. The second party gives consent to riddle in (b). Alternatively, the second party could reject the initiation as well (e.g. “No, I’m not interested.”) Additionally, the person who articulates the riddle initiation need not adopt the riddle-teller role first. An equally suitable riddle initiation could be “Tell me a riddle,” where the initiator asks his interlocutor to become the riddle-teller.

Pending the riddle initiation acceptance, the parties then agree upon the rules of the riddle event. Sometimes, these rules are implicit. Once the rules are set, the riddle-teller gives a riddle statement, which consists of (c) the riddle statement introduction, (d) the mandatory riddle image, and (e) the riddle statement conclusion. The riddle image requires no further description. The riddle statement introduction and conclusion can fulfill a few different roles. First, they can be a means of promising rewards (e.g. monetary prizes) or punishment (e.g. the ignominy of being *really dumb*) to the riddle-solver. Secondly, they can serve to reinforce the riddle image. Hence, the riddle-teller in the sample script gave a modest hint in stating “I’m thinking of a thing.”

At this point, the riddle-solver and the audience are obliged to confirm the appropriateness of the riddle statement. In the script, the audience affirmed the quality of the riddle (f). Alternatively, the audience or the riddle-solver could have levied an objection regarding the ease or difficulty of the riddle or even the appropriateness of the riddle. Furthermore, the riddle-solver might object that he/she/they already know the corresponding the riddle referent, having heard the riddle before.

Assuming that the riddle statement gains approval, the next phase of the riddle event is the period of contemplation [shown here as (g)]. While some riddling traditions allow for a period of days to transpire, others mandate a near-immediate response from

the riddle-solver. During the period of contemplation, the riddle-teller may optionally taunt the riddle-solver [such as in (i)] and the riddle-solver may request a hint [see (h)]. Eventually, the riddle-teller will demand that the riddle-solver provide a response to the riddle statement [here (j)].

At this point, something note-worthy can happen. The riddle-solver could provide a perfectly reasonable response, just like in (k), but still be “wrong”. Ultimately, the riddle-teller has final say on what the “right” answer is. If the riddle-solver does not realize the “right” answer, there are a few means by which the riddle event may be resolved. On the one hand, the riddle-teller may withhold the riddle answer and pose a new riddle. On the other hand, the riddle-solver could “buy” the answer from the riddle-teller, effectively promising to provide an answer to one of his/her/their own riddles later [as modeled in (m)]. Better yet, the riddle-teller could simply supply the correct answer [as in (n), accompanied by optional taunting (o)] and propose an exchange of riddling roles (p). In rare instances, the riddle-solver may challenge the legitimacy of the provided answer, as in (q).

### ***4.3: Concluding Thoughts on Folk Riddles and Folkloric Structure***

One of the two sub-arguments of this study is that there is cultural framework for riddle telling; individuals transmit folk riddles through a predictable set of culturally-determined practices. As evidence of this, one can observe the rules which govern who may participate in riddling, and under what temporal and spatial contexts. Furthermore, Burns (1976) sheds light on how riddle acts may unfold. This addresses *who* riddles, *where* and *when* to tell riddles, and *how* to tell riddles. Yet, it might also be enlightening to ask *why* cultures have riddle-telling practices. As I acknowledged in **section 3**, folk



riddles are unlike other types of question-answer sequences. Cohen (1996) proposes that this distinction from other forms of dialogue makes folk riddles socially significant. Ordinarily, one poses a question in order to gain information from one's interlocutor, anticipating that the interlocutor might possess this desired information. In the case of folk riddles, one assembles a riddle image in order to introduce one's interlocutor to a new means of interacting with the world (or a novel means of manipulating the language's grammar and the culture's knowledge systems). Clearly, the relationship between riddle-teller and riddle-solver is different from the ordinary rapport between questioner and answerer. (Cohen 1996).

## **5 Pragmatic Rules and Folk Riddles**

Moving on from the folkloric structure of folk riddles, I turn my attention to how people process riddles cognitively, focusing especially upon Weiner (1997) and Weiner & De Palma (1993). Both articles maintain that folk riddles gain their characteristic ambiguity through violations of pragmatic rules concerning ordinary discourse. In this section, I address three topics from the field of pragmatics: salience, accessibility hierarchy, and parallelism. Each one of these three topics is relevant to the overarching argument of this study, because there is an overwhelming focus in pragmatics upon cognitive categories and the attribution of features to those categories. Without a doubt, culture shapes and influences these cognitive categories to no small degree. Yet, the violation of the rules governing cognitive categories is superficially a result of the manipulation of language. Therefore, pragmatics is another lens through which to perceive that folk riddling is both a cultural and a linguistic phenomenon.

## ***5.1 Saliency***

Weiner (1997) defines saliency as the “prominence of a particular [predicate] with respect to a concept to which it does or could apply” (143). One means of producing ambiguity within a riddle is to disregard salient features of a concept within a riddle image. As an example, when discussing the concept of *elephants*, one might mention the predicates “flat-footed”, “prohibitively large”, “grey-colored”, and “mammal”. (19) below completely disregards the “prohibitively large” predicate with respect to *elephants* in order to render the riddle effective:

19. How would one fit four elephants into a VW bug?—Two in the front  
seat, two in the back. (Weiner 1997:145)

In order to solve this riddle, the riddle-solver must put aside one of an *elephant*'s most salient features (i.e. its size) in order to correctly answer the question of *how*. This riddle “works” because English-speaking riddle-participants have been culturally conditioned to be aware of the relative size of an elephant to a human. Since Volkswagen Beetles are built to accommodate humans (and not elephants), it is incredible to believe that there is any means of fitting elephants inside such motor vehicles.

## ***5.2 Accessibility Hierarchy***

The principle of an accessibility hierarchy is that, given a category, certain information is more likely to be associated with that category first in one's mind [Weiner (1997), Weiner & De Palma (1993), Dienhart (1967)]. Under this theory, there are two types of information: context-independent information and context-dependent information. One example of context-independent information is that the quality ‘smelly’ applies to the category SKUNK, regardless of context. Contrarily, one example of

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context-dependent information is that the quality ‘floats’ only applies to the category of BASKETBALL, given the context of ‘water’ (Weiner 1997:145). With the sum of context-independent and context-dependent information, an ordinary human being is equipped with enough information to formulate ad-hoc categories, given a specific need (Weiner 1997). Consider the following riddle:

20. What has four legs and only one foot?—A bed (Weiner 146)

When provided with the riddle image in (20), the riddle-solver might form two ad-hoc categories: FOUR-LEGGED THINGS and ONE-FOOTED THINGS. The riddle-solver must form these categories without very much context; the only context-dependent information comes from the other ad-hoc category. One might assign the qualities ‘locomotive’ and ‘sentient’ to the category FOUR-LEGGED THINGS. Since most FOUR-LEGGED THINGS are animals, ‘locomotive’ and ‘sentient’ are context-independent. Here, animals are high on the scale of accessibility hierarchy, while household furnishings (e.g. beds, chairs, couches, tables) are low.

Meanwhile, one might assign the qualities ‘injured’ and ‘deformed’ to the category of ONE-FOOTED THINGS. Superficially, these two qualities are also context-independent, because most things with feet are animals; it is reasonable to assume that ONE-FOOTED THINGS have lost one or more feet. Simultaneously, ‘sentient’, ‘injured’, and ‘deformed’ are also context-dependent, because the two ad-hoc categories reinforce one another. If a FOUR-LEGGED THING is also a ONE-FOOTED THING, there is more reason to believe that the riddle image describes a ‘sentient’ thing. Likewise, if a ONE-FOOTED THING is also a FOUR-LEGGED THING, there is more reason to believe that the riddle image describes an ‘injured’ or ‘deformed’ thing. While

beds are ONE-FOOTED and FOUR-LEGGED things, the structure of riddle (20) will not lead the riddle-solver to conclude that the referent is clearly a ‘bed’. In other words, ‘bed’ is not high enough on the scale of accessibility hierarchy for either ONE-FOOTED THINGS or FOUR-LEGGED THINGS.

A different process involving ad-hoc categorization and accessibility hierarchy takes place in (21).

21. What has four wheels and flies?—A garbage truck (Weiner & De Palma 1993:184)

Again, two ad-hoc categories emerge: FOUR-WHEELED THINGS and FLYING THINGS. For FOUR-WHEELED THINGS, one is quick to assign the qualities ‘motor-powered’ and ‘locomotive’, based upon context-independent information. Conveniently, the riddle referent ‘garbage truck’ bears both of these qualities. Yet, a garbage truck is not a FLYING THING. Here, the riddle referent is not low on the accessibility hierarchy for FLYING THINGS; on the contrary, it does not exist on the accessibility hierarchy at all.

If one were to substitute the category FLY-BEARING THINGS for the category FLYING THINGS, then the referent of the riddle sequence becomes more apparent. FLY-BEARING THINGS are ‘dirty’ and ‘smelly’, regardless of context. When one overlaps FOUR-WHEELED THINGS with FLY-BEARING THINGS, one of the most immediately accessible objects is ‘garbage truck’. Therefore, the key to solving riddle (21) is determining what the proper ad-hoc categories ought to be. Here, the word ‘flies’ misleads the riddle-solver to believe that FLYING THINGS is the proper ad-hoc

category, when really it should be FLY-BEARING THINGS. The two senses of ‘flies’ exemplify linguistic ambiguity, a topic to which I shall return in **section 6**.

### ***5.3 Parallelism***

In order to comprehend parallelism, consider again the newspaper riddle:

16. What’s black and white and read all over?—A newspaper

Parallelism is process by which the human mind has a tendency to anticipate parallel linguistic and cognitive constructions when presented with a list of three or more attributes. *Black* and *white* are both adjectives and color-terms. Therefore, when one hears [rɛ:d], one expects a third adjectival and a third color-term. Alas, [rɛ:d] is the phonological realization of a participial form of the verb [ri:d], homophonous with the adjectival color-term [rɛ:d].

### ***5.4 Conclusions Concerning Pragmatics and Folk Riddles***

Pragmatically, it is easy to see how folk riddles derive their characteristic ambiguity. Some folk riddles demand that riddle-solvers disregard salient features of an object’s identity; a cultural community tends to ingrain these feature-object correlations into the minds of community members. Similarly, other riddles meddle with community members’ perceptions of which information is most relevant to a cultural category. A third set of folk riddles thrives on the juxtaposition of seemingly similar things which are dissimilar in one or more subtle ways.

As **sections 6 & 7** will demonstrate, there are numerous ways of analyzing the same riddles. In this section, I claimed that riddles (20) and (21) are effective because they flout accessibility hierarchy. Likewise, I claimed that the newspaper riddle

functions because it anticipates parallelism. Yet, these statements only partially explain how folk riddles mislead. The other piece of the puzzle is ambiguity.

## **6 Linguistic Ambiguity**

In this section and the next, I set aside pragmatics in order to focus upon ambiguity. To begin with, I consider linguistic ambiguity. There are two contrasting trains of thought surrounding this form of ambiguity. While there isn't any question that all linguistic ambiguity comes about through opaque semantics, there is disagreement regarding whether or not this is a function of phonology exclusively or of a mixture of phonology, syntax, and morphology. Dienhart (1998) is a proponent of the former point of view, while Pepicello & Green (1984) favors the latter.

### ***6.1 Dienhart's (1998) Similarity Cline***

I describe Dienhart's (1998) approach towards linguistic ambiguity first. One of the premises of this work is that at the heart of linguistically-ambiguous riddles, there is a "semantic script-switch trigger" (104), which is the portion of the riddle that simultaneously refers to two unrelated "scripts", or frames of reference. In (22) below, the semantic script-switch trigger is 'cloak':

22. What is a cloak?—the mating call of a Chinese frog. (Dienhart 1998:105)

'Cloak' refers both to an article of clothing and to a phonetic approximation of how an individual whose phonemic inventory lacks a distinction between /l/ and /ɪ/ might pronounce 'croak'.

Furthermore, Dienhart (1998) elaborates that semantic script-switch triggers can be classified according to similarities in phonetic form between the two contrasting

scripts that the trigger links. Such classification takes place along a *similarity cline*. At one end of this cline is true identity. True identity occurs when the scripts are one-and-the-same; semantic script-switch triggers do not exist when the similarity is true identity. The next level in the similarity cline is *polysemy*, which is sufficient for semantic script-switch triggers. Polysemy exists when there are multiple meanings for one word/phrase. Riddles (23)-(25) are examples of polysemy at work, according to Dienhart:

23. What doesn't ask questions but must always be answered?—A telephone (Dienhart 1998:110)
24. What happened to the terrorist who tried to blow up a bus?—He burnt his lips on the exhaust pipe (Dienhart 1998: 112)
25. Why did the one-handed man cross the street?—To get to the second-hand store (Dienhart 1998: 112)

In (23), the trigger is 'answered'; in (24), 'blow up'; in (25), 'second-hand'. Following *polysemy*, there are instances of *homonymy* and *homophony*. Two scripts are homonymous when they bear the same phonetic and orthographic realizations but are related to separate lexemes. In (26), the homonymy can be found in 'spotted', while in (27), the homonymy exists with 'dressing'.

26. Why couldn't the leopard escape from the zoo.—He was always spotted. (Dienhart 1998: 112)
27. Why did the lobster blush?—He saw the salad dressing (Dienhart 1998:112)

'Spotted' could mean 'bearing spots' or could refer to the past participle of the verb 'spot'. 'Dressing' can be either 'the viscous fluid poured upon salads' or the active participle of the verb 'dress'. Homophony is precisely like homonymy, except that orthographic realizations also differ. An example would be [ɪəd] in the newspaper riddle; having already written about this riddle twice already, I forgo a third description. I feel

that Dienhart's distinction between homophony and homonymy is extraneous in the context of folk riddles, which are part of oral tradition. Orthography ought to be irrelevant. For the purposes of this study, homonymy is a form of homophony.

Following homophony, there is paraphony, which describes situations in which the two scripts have different meanings and slightly different phonological realizations [Dienhart uses the descriptor "near homophony" (1999:109)]. If the two scripts were minimal pairs, then this situation would constitute paraphony, by Dienhart's definition. Riddle (28) below functions upon paraphony, for in careful speech, the phrases 'why are you in so late' and 'wire you insulate' are nearly (though not quite) homophonous. In casual speech, these phrases could be homophonous.

28. What did the electrician's wife say when he came home at 2 a.m.?—  
Wire you insulate? (Dienhart 1998: 177)

Then, in (29), paraphony is observed between 'whine' [h<sup>w</sup>ain] and 'wine' [wain]. In some dialects of English, 'whine' and 'wine' are homophonous as [wain].

29. What did the grape say when the elephant stepped on it?—Not too  
much; he just made a little whine. (Dienhart 1998:177)

Next, there is hahaphony (a term that Dienhart coined), which involves manipulation of morphology, often playing upon pseudo-morphemes and neologisms. Riddle (30)'s 'No-Bell Prize' parodies the highly-lauded 'Nobel Prize' by falsely breaking 'Nobel' into two morphemes.

30. What did they give to the man who invented the doorknocker?—The  
No-Bell Prize (Dienhart 1998:118)

Similarly, riddle (31) falsely breaks the English word 'enough' into the English morpheme 'an' and the French morpheme 'oeuf'.



31. Why does the Frenchman have only one egg for breakfast?—One egg is an *oeuf*. (Dienhart 1998:118)

At the other end of the similarity cline is *dissimilarity*, where the difference between two scripts' phonetic realizations is so profound that linguistic ambiguity is unattainable. Riddles will never function on true identity or dissimilarity.

## ***6.2 Pepicello & Green's Approach***

Pepicello & Green (1984) approaches the topic of folk riddling slightly differently from Dienhart (1998). Most profoundly, the authors speculate that a folk riddle can—and often does—exhibit evidence of both linguistic and metaphorical ambiguity (for more on this, read through to **section 7**). In the case of purely linguistically ambiguous riddles, Pepicello & Green (1984) agree with Dienhart (1999) that the ambiguity is related to phonologically similar forms, but go one step further in emphasizing the linguistic processes (phonology, morphology, and syntax) which result in phonologic similarity. In this section, I discuss phonologically ambiguous riddles (**6.2.1**), morphologically ambiguous riddles (**6.2.2**), and syntactically ambiguous riddles (**6.2.3**) in their own respective subsections. Afterwards, I discuss instances in which the ambiguity is equal parts morphology and syntax (**6.2.4**).

While I (and Pepicello & Green) strive to compartmentalize linguistic ambiguity neatly into discreet sub-categories, I warn my reader that many of the riddles in **section 6.2** are illustrative of multiple processes of linguistic ambiguity creation. Therefore, so-called “phonologically ambiguous” riddles are driven predominantly by one or more phonological processes, but syntactical and morphological processes might also contribute. Similar sentiments also apply towards “morphologically ambiguous” riddles

and “syntactically ambiguous” riddles. In cases where numerous processes influence linguistic ambiguity simultaneously, I simply try to isolate the most dominant process.

### 6.2.1 Phonologically Ambiguous Riddles

Pepicello & Green (1984) posit that there are three types of phonological ambiguity: lexical ambiguity, word stress ambiguity, and word boundary ambiguity. Lexical ambiguity covers instances of polysemy and homophony among lexical items of the same syntactic class. Consider the following three riddles below:

32. Siempre    dic-e            algo    y        no        sab-e            habl-ar;  
       pued-e    corr-er pero    nunca camin-ar.    ¿Qué es?    —El reloj.

Always        say-3.SG        thing and NEG know-3.SG talk-INF  
 be.able-3.SG run-INF but never walk-INF    What Be-3.SG –The watch.

It always says something but doesn't know how to speak; it can run but never walks. What is it?—A watch (Pepicello & Green 1984:145)

33. What's the best cure for water on the brain?—A tap on the head  
 (Dienhart 1998: 105)

34. I know something got hand an' don't wash its face—A clock (Georges  
 & Dundes 1963:113)

What these three riddles have in common is that they are all dependent upon two meanings being associated with one phonological form. For the time being, I disregard the subtleties between polysemy and homophony. Riddle (32) demonstrates this with *dice* ‘says’ and *correr* ‘to run’; riddle (33) demonstrates this with ‘tap’; and riddle (34) demonstrates this with ‘hand’ and ‘face’.

While lexical ambiguity is a fairly common form of phonological ambiguity, there are two other forms of phonological ambiguity that are less common. The first of these is word stress ambiguity. Three folk riddles that manipulate word stress are below:

35. What bird is lowest in spirits?—The Bluebird. (Pepicello & Green 1984:31)

36. When did Moses sleep five in a bed?—When he slept with his forefathers. (Pepicello & Green 1984: 31)

37. Oro           parec-e,           plata   no    es                   (plátano        es).  
 Quéin no    lo                    adivina,       bien tonto es;  
 ya            te    he                   lo                dicho. --    El  
 Plátano.

Gold seem-3.SG silver NEG be-3.SG (plantain be-3.SG)  
 Who NEG 3.ACC.m get quite foolish be-3.SG  
 already 2.DAT have.1.SG 3.ACC.m say-PST-PPL the  
 plantain

It seems to be gold, it is not silver (it is a plantain). Whoever doesn't get it is quite foolish; I have already told you it.—Plantain (Pepicello & Green 1984:146)

What distinguishes (35) – (37) from (32)-(34) is that word stress distinguishes one lexeme from another. By this manner, [ˈbluːˌbəd] and [ˌbluːˈbəd] are both referenced in (35), just as [ˈfoʊɪ.fɑːðəz] and [ˌfoʊɪˈfɑːðəz] are simultaneously referenced in (36). Similarly, the phrasal stress pattern in ‘plata no’ differs from the word stress in ‘plátano’ in (37).

Thirdly, phonological ambiguity can be present in word boundaries. Consider the following two riddles:

38. When is it difficult to get your watch out of your pocket?—When it keeps ticking (keeps sticking) there. (Pepicello & Green 1984:33)

39. How is a man clearing a hedge in a single bound like a man snoring?—He does it in his sleep (his leap). (Pepicello & Green 1984:34)

When one articulates the riddle referents in (38) and (39) quickly, it is easy to see how ambiguity could result. After all, the distinction between [kɪps tɪkɪŋ] and [kɪps stɪkɪŋ] is

fairly miniscule. Similarly, the phonetic similarity between the sibilants [s] and [z] is enough to justify how one could mishear [hr:z lip] as [hr:z slip].

## 6.2.2 Morphologically Ambiguous Riddles

There are three possible means by which morphological ambiguity can unfold. The first of those means is by a process similar to that which results in lexical ambiguity; I shall call this form of morphological ambiguity *true morphological ambiguity*. Three example riddles are listed below:

40. When is coffee like soil?—When it is ground. (Pepicello & Green 1984:37)
41. When is a doctor most annoyed?—When he is out of patients (patience). (Pepicello & Green 1984:37)
42. Which musical instrument should one not believe?—A liar (lyre) (Pepicello & Green 1984:37)

Each of this riddles includes some phonological form which has ambiguous meaning as a result of a morphological process. The verb ‘grind’, for example, has a past participle ‘ground’ [grawnd] which is homophonous with the noun ‘ground’. The noun ‘patience’ can be mistaken for the noun ‘patient’ plus plural morpheme ‘-s’; both have the surface form [peɪ.ʃənts]. The noun ‘lyre’, which is a musical instrument, has the same phonetic realization as ‘liar’, which has the constituents ‘lie’ (a verb related to the telling of untruths) and ‘-er’ (a morpheme which transforms verbs into nouns, roughly meaning ‘one who does x’, where x is the verb being changed): [laɪ.ə].

A second technique towards morphological ambiguity is the provision of false morphologies to given lexical items. Riddles (43) and (44) are exemplars of this process:

43. What kind of bow can you never tie?—A rainbow. (Pepicello & Green 1984:41)

44. What ship has two mates but no captain?—Courtship (Pepicello & Green 1984:41)

The former of these two riddles illustrates how riddles can misleadingly disassemble a lexical item in order to facilitate ambiguity. While etymologically, the morpheme ‘-bow’ in ‘rainbow’ is derived from the lexical item ‘bow’ (i.e. the sense suggested in the riddle image), the meaning of the morpheme ‘-bow’ in ‘rainbow’ does not have a precise correspondence with the meaning of ‘bow’ as a morpheme in ‘bow’. As riddle (44) demonstrates, false morphology can also come about through the usage of homophonous morphemes; the morpheme ‘-ship’ in ‘courtship’ hasn’t an etymological relationship with the ‘ship’ mentioned in the riddle image.

Thirdly, one can accomplish morphological ambiguity through the creation of pseudo-morphemes, which Pepicello & Green (1984) define as a “sequence of phonemes that are homophonous with [a language’s] morphemes but which themselves are devoid of semantic content” (42). Two instances of pseudo-morphemes in riddles are below:

45. What is the key to a good dinner?—A Turkey (Pepicello & Green 1984:42)

46. Agua pas-a por mi casa, cat-e de  
mi corazón. —Aguacate

Water pass-3.SG through POSS.1.SG house, watch-out.IMP.2.SG  
POSS.1.SG heart. —Avocado

Water passes through my house, watch out for my heart.—Avocado (Pepicello & Green 1984:147)

‘Key’ is not rightfully a morpheme of ‘turkey’ in (45), and *agua* ‘water’ and *cate* ‘watch out’ are not meaningful constituents of *aguacate* ‘avocado’.

### 6.2.3 Syntactic Ambiguity

There are three primary types of syntactic ambiguity: phrase structure ambiguity, transformational ambiguity, and ambiguity stemming from the rearrangement of “frozen” syntactic constructions. Phrase structure ambiguity is the driving force behind riddles (47) and (48).

47. How is an icicle like a duck?—Both grow down. (Pepicello & Green 1984:45)

48. When is a boy like a pony?—When he is a little horse (hoarse). (Pepicello & Green 1984:45)

Superficially, one might confuse this form of ambiguity with lexical ambiguity. Yet, the phonologically ambiguous forms in (47) and (48) come about as a result of syntax. For example, ‘down’ can rightfully be in reference to the thick feathers that insulate waterfowl, but the homophonous lexeme ‘down’ is an adverb. Similarly, the noun ‘horse’ is homophonous with the adjectival ‘hoarse’, both being realized as [hɔʊɪs]. In both situations, the syntax of the sentence changes dramatically, depending upon the intended meaning of the homophonous forms.

Transformational ambiguity comes about when the “deletion of some element from underlying structure makes [one] structure homophonous with another, different structure” (Pepicello & Green 1984:48). Riddles (49) and (50) demonstrate transformational ambiguity.

49. What do you call a man who marries another man?—A minister. (Pepicello & Green 1984:48)

50. When is a man like a snake?—When he is rattled. (Pepicello & Green 1984:48)

The ambiguous portion of riddle (49) can be found in the image, which intentionally deletes the prepositional phrase ‘to a woman’. This deletion takes advantage of the polysemy associated with the verb ‘marry’, which can take one direct object or one direct object and a prepositional phrase. Riddle (50) does something a little different. ‘Rattled’ may be interpreted as the passive participle of the verb ‘rattle’ or it may be a little-used adjectival form meaning ‘bearing a rattle.’ The passive sense of ‘rattled’ requires an agent, which is deleted from the surface form.

Lastly, riddle structure can take advantage of idioms, which tend to bear very static syntax.

51. What does a person grow if he works too hard in the garden?—Tired.  
(Pepicello & Green 1984:55)

52. Why does time fly?—‘Cause people are always trying to kill it.  
(Pepicello & Green 1984:105)

Riddle (51) appropriates the idiom ‘grow tired’ and estranges the two parts from one another, placing ‘grow’ in the image and ‘tired’ in the referent. Generally, individual words within phrasal idioms are not separated from one another, which is why this riddle is ambiguous. On the other hand, riddle (52) utilizes two idioms (both related to ‘time’) to construct ambiguity. In the riddle image, one idiom’s “frozen” syntax is retained. Meanwhile, the idiom ‘kill time’ is assimilated into an unfamiliar sentential context.

#### **6.2.4 Mixtures of Morphological & Syntactic Ambiguity**

The following two riddles display ambiguity that arises from a combination of morphological and syntactic processes.

53. When is a boat like a heap of snow?—When it is adrift (a drift).  
(Pepicello & Green 1984:56)

54. Why doesn't the fishmonger have any friends?—his business is to sell fish (too selfish). (Pepicello & Green 1984:56)

The copular 'is' in the referent of (53) can take either an adjectival phrase ('adrift') or a noun phrase ('a drift'). 'Adrift' and 'a drift' are phonologically similar, although one is a word consisting of two morphemes (*a-* and *-drift*) while the other is a phrase consisting of an indefinite article and a noun (*a* and *drift*). Importantly, the morpheme *a-* and the indefinite article *a* are homophonous, just as *drift* and *drift* are; the word boundary in *a drift* aligns with the morpheme boundary in *adrift*.

Similarly, 'to sell fish' and 'too selfish' are homophonous phrases. However, the former is a verbal phrase, while the latter is an adjectival phrase. Unlike (53), the word boundaries in one phrase do not align with the morpheme boundaries in the other. *Selfish* consists of the morphemes *self-* and *-ish*, but the word boundary is *sell* and *fish*.

### 6.2.5 Problematic Riddles

Pepicello & Green (1984) found it difficult to fit riddles (55) through (58) into a discreet category of linguistic ambiguity:

55. What is the difference between a baby and a coat?—One you wear, the other you were. (Pepicello & Green 1984: 35)

56. What is the difference between a ballet dancer and a duck?—One goes quick on her feet, the other goes quack on her feet. (Pepicello & Green 1984:35)

57. What is the difference between a sewing machine and a kiss?—One sews seams nice, the other seems so nice. (Pepicello & Green 1984: 59)

58. What is the difference between a hungry man and a glutton?—One longs to eat, other eats too long. (Dienhart 1998:121)

Two of these riddles [(55) and (56)] utilize minimal pairs, which are word forms that differ with respect to only one phoneme. The other two riddles contain instances of



metathesis, in which one linguistic element (e.g. phoneme, syllable, word) exchanges position with a similar linguistic element in close proximity. Neither the exploitation of minimal pairs nor metathesis fit well into the paradigm that Pepicello & Green (1984) created to compartmentalize linguistic ambiguity; these processes are not properly phonological, morphological, or syntactical. Yet, riddles (55)-(58) fit the definition of folk riddle. Moreover, manipulation of language contributes to the production of ambiguity herein; clearly (55) through (58) are linguistically ambiguous in some way.

The two riddles that exploit minimal pairs demonstrate that Pepicello & Green's (1984) approach works best with homophonous forms, and falls short in cases of paraphony (for Dienhart's definition of "paraphony", see **section 6.1**). I propose that in the case of (55) and (56), it is best to say that the linguistic ambiguity stems from paraphony and therefore does not apply to Pepicello & Green's (1984) paradigm for categorizing linguistic ambiguity. Concerning folk riddles that depend upon the exploitation of minimal pairs, Dienhart (1998)'s description of ambiguity is more illuminating.

Riddles (57) and (58), on the other hand, do exploit homophony. In (57), for example, the riddle structure takes advantage of the homophony (a) between 'so' and the verbal stem 'sew' and (b) between 'seams' and 'seems'. These two homophonous forms do not serve the same syntactic function. Hence, the ambiguity is not lexical ambiguity, by Pepicello & Green (1984)'s standards. At the same time, the ambiguity is not phrase structure ambiguity; metathesis actually rearranged word order within a phrase. Instead, I propose that the ambiguity in question for (57) and (58) is true morphological ambiguity. The verb 'sews' consists of a root 'sew' and a 3.SG morpheme '-s'; the verbal stem

morpheme is homophonous with an adverbial ('so'); the noun 'seams' (consisting of a nominal stem 'seam' plus plural morpheme '-s') is homophonous with the verb 'seems' (consisting of the root 'seem' plus 3.SG morpheme '-s'). In this way, Pepicello & Green (1984) could have accounted for the ambiguity in metathesis-driven riddles like (57) and (58).

### ***6.3 Mediating Two Conflicting Theories***

Dienhart's (1998) and Pepicello & Green's (1984) arguments regarding linguistic ambiguity both have merits and drawbacks. One of the strengths of Dienhart's argument is that it establishes a well-defined hierarchy for describing the varying degrees to which two surface forms can be similar. Even when the similarity cline proves to be inconsistent, the inconsistency can be justified by inter- and intra-speaker variables such as speech register (see example (28)) and dialectal variation (see example (29)). Furthermore, he succeeds in isolating phonetics as the key to linguistic ambiguity. Yet, his weakness is that he prioritizes phonetics before the phonological, syntactic, and morphological processes that lead to phonetically similar surface forms.

Pepicello & Green (1984), on the other hand, succeed in recognizing the processes which lead to similar surface forms. One drawback to this argument is that multiple processes can influence homophony simultaneously; thus, the distinctions between different types of linguistic ambiguity are not as resolute as the distinctions in Dienhart's hierarchy of phonetic similarity. Yet, my intuition tells me that this isn't necessarily a problem; generally, there tends to be a decent amount of overlap between the sub-disciplines of linguistics anyway. There isn't any reason that this overlap shouldn't also exist in analyses of riddles and of ambiguity.

#### ***6.4 Returning to the Overarching Argument of this Study***

While sorting through the numerous manners in which linguistic ambiguity manifests itself, it is remarkably easy to lose sight of the intended argument of this study. My overarching argument is that folk riddling is both a cultural and linguistic act. Just as **section 4** focused primarily upon the cultural sense of folk riddling, this section focused primarily upon the linguistic sense of folk riddling. Recall that folk riddles have a linguistic framework; while riddling, individuals will purposefully produce statements that are not entirely clear. That is, the meaning of a word or phrase within a riddle is *ambiguous*. Ambiguity takes two forms: linguistic and contextual (metaphorical). While both forms of ambiguity relate to the manipulation of language and meaning, linguistic ambiguity especially demonstrates how folk riddling is a linguistic act.

In the next section, it should become clear that ambiguity in general is not an exclusively linguistic matter. Metaphorical ambiguity, after all, thrives upon the production of metaphors. Since metaphors have their origins in culturally-influenced cognitive categories, even ambiguity can be demonstrative of the cultural sense of folk riddling. Furthermore, some linguistically ambiguous riddles are also metaphorically ambiguous. These doubly-ambiguous riddles are perfect examples of how folk riddles are products of both culture and language.

### **7 Metaphorical (Contextual) Ambiguity**

In addition to linguistic ambiguity, Pepicello & Green (1984) addresses contextual ambiguity, which is “ambiguity resulting from cultural tropes that produce, in the riddling context, surprising additional semantic structures for existing words or phrases” (92). Occasionally, these “surprising additional semantic structures” become so

productive that metaphorical senses of words and phrases enter the lexicon. In summary, metaphorical usage becomes polysemous usage. When this is the case, the terms can be described as both linguistically and metaphorically ambiguous. Therefore, riddles such as (59) are arguably purely metaphorical in ambiguity, while riddles such as (60) and (61) seem to be purely linguistic in ambiguity, and riddles such as (62), (63), and (64) exhibit qualities of both metaphorical and linguistic ambiguity.

59. There is something with a heart in its head.—A peach (Pepicello & Green 1984:114)

60. What lock can no key open?—A lock of hair (Pepicello & Green 1984:114)

61. What vegetable is unpopular on ships?—Leeks (Pepicello & Green 1984:114)

62. Dos           niña-s                   en       un            balcón,  
 bail-            ando            al        mismo son.   ¿Qué son?  
 — Los           ojo-s.

Two girl-PL (pupil-PL) on ART.IND balcony dance-  
 ACT.PART to same sound. What Be-3.SG DEF.ART  
 eye-PL.

Two girls (pupils) on a balcony, dancing to the same sound. What are they?—Eyes (Pepicello & Green 1984:150)

63. What has a tongue, and can't talk?—Shoe (Pepicello & Green 1984:114)

64. I have a cock on yonder hill/ I keep him for a wonder/And every time the cock do crow/It lightens, hails and thunders.—A gun (Pepicello & Green 1984: 114)

There are two parts of the riddle image in (59) that lead me to suggest that the riddle is completely metaphorical in ambiguity: 'head' and 'heart'. I have enough familiarity with peaches to know that they are fruits that bear large seeds in their middles and that those large seeds are called *pits*. For day-to-day activities, this degree of familiarity is

sufficient. Yet, for the purposes of solving (59), I ideally would need to be as invested in peaches as the riddle-teller, who spent such an extensive quantity of time (relative to his language community) considering peaches that he concluded that a peach vaguely resembled a head and that the peach's pit was heart-like in some way. Thus, the riddle-teller coined the metaphoric riddle image. As far as I can tell, there is not any linguistic ambiguity to be found in (59). Contrast this with the sense of 'lock' in (60) and of 'leek' in (61); these two examples are straight-forward instances of linguistic ambiguity (see *lexical ambiguity* in **section 6.2.1**). Meanwhile, the ambiguity in (62) is not as cut-and-dry. *Niñas*, for example, is subject to lexical ambiguity, because it can mean 'pupils' or 'little girls'. Yet, the context suggests that the sense should be 'little girls'. Therefore, contextual ambiguity clearly plays a role in misleading the riddle-solver in (62).

Then, in riddle (63), the sense of 'tongue' is debatable. At one point in the history of the English language, the 'tongue' in a shoe was completely metaphorical; some person observed that this specific part of a shoe resembled the organ vital to taste (i.e. the 'tongue') and subsequently applied the metaphor to shoe terminology. At present, however, the metaphorical correspondence between the *tongue* in one's mouth and the *tongue* of one's shoe is less apparent. Therefore, the ambiguity in (63) is also a mix of metaphoric and linguistic processes.

Finally, riddle (64) is controversial. Pepicello & Green (1984) believe that this riddle is metaphorical and that there isn't a trace of linguistic ambiguity, though I would disagree. Their argument is that the *cock* in the image hasn't any relationship to the *gun* in the referent. They overlook the fact that a *cock* is also a mechanism in firearms. I would argue that the sense of *cock* is thus metaphorical in that it displays metonymy

[substitution of a part (the *cock*) for a whole (the *gun*)] but is also demonstrative of lexical ambiguity (confusion of *cock* with the homophonous *cock*).

### ***7.1 Defining Metaphorical Ambiguity More Precisely***

Whereas identification of linguistic ambiguity is a fairly simple process of recognizing homophony, identification of metaphorical ambiguity is much more intuitive. For example, my means of determining that the ambiguity in (59) [reprinted below] was that I did not perceive homophony or polysemy in ‘head’ or ‘heart’:

59. There is something with a heart in its head.—A peach (Pepicello & Green 1984:114)

Regardless, I would prefer a more consistent and structured means of determining when a riddle’s ambiguity is metaphorical. As a foundation, I take for granted that metaphor involves the comparison of two unlike things. Metaphorical ambiguity occurs when one of those things exists in the riddle image, while the other is present in the riddle referent. These two things will have at least one property in common (after all, it is difficult to compare two completely different objects), while having at least one—and often many—differing properties. (Lieber 1976, Köngäs Maranda 1971) The riddle-solver’s object is to sort the similar properties from the dissimilar properties. (Lieber 1976:260)

In order to better explain this properties-objects approach to metaphorical ambiguity, I present the following two riddles below:

65. One pig, two snouts.—Plough (Köngäs Maranda 1971:198)

66. What has golden hair and stands in the corner?—Broom (Hasan-Rokem & Shulman 4)

Riddle (65) compares a pig to a plough. Pigs and ploughs clearly have little in common with one another. Apparently, in Finnish culture (n.b. the source of (65) was a Finn),

both objects are described as *snout-bearing*. *Snoutedness* is a given property that a plough shares with a pig. The shrewd riddle-solver must subsequently pick through the other properties of a *pig* in order to determine others which are shared with the riddle referent *plough*. One could posit that other properties include *found-on-a-farm* and *kicks-up-dirt*.

Analysis of riddle (66) demonstrates that the object to which the referent is compared doesn't need to be named explicitly. In the case of this specific riddle, one is led to believe (mistakenly) that the riddle image describes a *human being*. The properties which *human being* and *broom* share are stated explicitly: *blonde-haired*, *corner-bound*. If the riddle-solver is shrewd, he will eliminate most other properties of *human being* (e.g. *animate* and *fleshy*) in order to conclude that the referent being compared is a *broom*.

Again, however, my approach towards metaphorical ambiguity returns to intuition. Riddle (66) did not explicitly name the referent-object, yet the riddle metaphor functioned nonetheless. Therefore, I must further elaborate that while metaphorical ambiguity comes about through the comparison of two objects, which share some properties and differ with regards to other properties, the referent-object and the properties that the referent-object and image-object share do not need to be explicitly stated within the metaphorically-ambiguous riddle (i.e. inference might be necessary). I cautiously posit that the image-object and the properties by which the referent-object and the image-object differ are mandatory features of the metaphorically-driven riddle. Otherwise, I cannot imagine how the riddle could exhibit metaphorical ambiguity.

## ***7.2 Returning to the Definition of Folk Riddle***

Earlier in this study (see **section 3**), part of my definition of *folk riddle* stated that “[in folk-riddling,] a riddle-teller provides an image that yields sufficient—though not generous—context for a riddle-solver to identify the referent ... the image-referent pair ought to include one or more unclear words or phrases in order to hinder the riddle-solver from simple identification of the referent.” This holds especially true for folk riddles with metaphorical ambiguity. The riddle-solver’s task is to sift through the phrasing of the metaphorical riddle image in order to isolate the helpful words and phrases from the deceptive words and phrases. In order to keep context at a minimum, certain properties of the riddle referent-object will not be disclosed in the riddle image; sometimes those properties are those which the referent-object shares with the image-object, while other times those properties are those which distinguish the referent-object from the image-object.

## ***7.3 How Metaphorical Ambiguity relates to the General Argument***

Unlike linguistic ambiguity, it is fairly clear to see how metaphorical ambiguity fits with my overall argument that folk riddling is both cultural and linguistic. Metaphorical ambiguity results from the attachment of new semantic senses to existing words and phrases. To produce these new senses, the riddle-teller must be able to perceive a similarity in properties between two unlike objects. The culture’s world knowledge influences how the riddle-telling individual perceives the world, including which properties correspond with which objects. As an example, Finns apparently view *ploughs* as *snouted things* (see riddle (65)). To me, an English-speaking American, this idea is absurd. Yet, riddle-telling is a culturally-specific practice; it is not surprising that



some riddles from other cultures won't make sense to me cognitively. Linguistically, I can still recognize that riddle (65) operates upon an unconventional, metaphorical sense of 'snout'.

## **8 Application of Theory: Data from Turkey, From Decades Ago**

With the exception of a few Spanish folk riddles, my data thus far have been English-language data. Admittedly, English is my first language; I feel most comfortable analyzing data from this particular language. Nonetheless, I feel strongly that the structures (linguistic and folkloric) described in the preceding seven sections are universal. To support this assertion, I write about Turkish-language riddles.

### ***8.1 Turkish Riddling Culture***

There is a perception among Turkish people that riddle-telling has become a leisure-time activity, devoid of any significant cultural constraints, pursued predominantly by women and children. This is not entirely unexpected. Since the collapse of the Ottoman Empire, Turkey has undergone rapid urbanization and modernization. (Başgöz 1965) Rural life (and folk culture) often disintegrates as a culture urbanizes.

Not long ago, Turkish riddle-telling culture was much richer. Peasants, for example, would tell each other riddles while laboring in the fields in order to pass the day. (Başgöz 1965) While peasants riddled through the day, soldiers riddled at night, as they guarded the village borders from foreign intruders. (Başgöz 1965) The Turkish educated elite would enjoy highly-structured riddle competitions. These men would generally meet in a coffee house or a similar public location, where they could exchange riddles from sundown to sunup. (Başgöz 1965)

An even more structured riddle context was that of marriage celebrations. Prior to a wedding, members from the groom's and bride's villages would engage in a team riddling competition. Customarily, the bride's village gave the first riddle. The teams alternated until one of them couldn't solve the other's riddle. As a consequence of losing the riddle competition, the losing team must relinquish its village's official flag. This flag was so culturally valuable that individuals were willing to offer money or livestock to reclaim it. (Başgöz 1965)

Clearly, the Turkish riddle-culture was once very vibrant. Turkish people used to riddle at work and at their leisure. Intellectuals and peasants alike used to riddle in Turkey. Furthermore, riddling was most certainly an acceptable pastime for men (rather than primarily for women and children). Riddle-telling was also an integral part of festivals and ritual tradition, and riddle events had repercussions upon the community. (Başgöz 1965)

## ***8.2 Folkloric Structures***

İlhan Başgöz and Andreas Tietze are the editors of a thoroughly-researched corpus of Turkish folk riddles titled Bilmece: A Corpus of Turkish Riddles. The title of this corpus *Bilmece* is a folk-term for 'riddles' in Turkey. This corpus contains roughly 12,200 riddles corresponding to nearly 1,500 riddle images. Most of the riddles contained in Başgöz and Tietze's corpus are republished from previous corpora, and many of the riddles were decades-old when the corpus was published. Despite this fact, the editors insist that the riddles were *folk riddles*. While Başgöz and Tietze derived their data from written sources, the data were originally orally-transmitted.

In fact, there is plenty of vestigial evidence to suggest that the riddles were folk riddles once. One common riddle-image introduction, for example, is *aşık der* ‘the minstrel says,’ as in riddle (67) below:

67. *Aşık der gassap ağlar, ölen davar ağlamaz, öldüren gassap ağlar.—soğan*

The minstrel says: The butcher cries. The butcher dressed in red cries. The sheep that is slaughtered does not cry; the butcher that slaughters it cries.—onion (bulb) (Başgöz & Tietze 1973:549)

This phrase is in reference to minstrels who were among the educated elite that told riddles in coffee houses.

Additionally, the riddle texts retain other forms of riddle-image introductions and conclusions. Many folk riddles in the corpora include promises of rewards for successful solving of riddles and threats of punishment for failure to solve. Often, the rewards and punishments are symbolic [e.g. a Turkish city, a sacred landmark, a religious relic (Başgöz 133)], as in riddles (69) and (70).

68. *Fili fili filmeli, filimin ucu düğmeli. Ya bunu da bilmeli, ya bu gece ölmeli.—Tavuk pisliği*

Fili fili filmeli, my elephant has a button at his end. Either you guess this or you die this night.—Chicken droppings (Başgöz & Tietze 1973:203)

69. *Kertül kertül, kırk köy ver de kurtul!—testere*

Notches and notches. Give forty villages and save your head!—saw (Başgöz & Tietze 1973:635)

70. *Yaşadıkca kısalıboyu; bunu bilsev al yüz.—kalem*

The longer it lives the shorter it becomes. If you guess this you shall have a hundred villages.—pen (Başgöz & Tietze 1973:572)

There are two other riddle-images introductions of interest to me. The first is *ol nedir ki* ‘what is that’, which can function either as a riddle conclusion or as a riddle introduction.

The second is *bir acaip nesne gördüm* ‘I have seen a strange thing’. Riddles (71) and (72) model these two common riddle-image introductions/conclusions.

71. Dört kardaş bir gudiye işer. [Ol] nedir [ki]?—İnek memesi

Four brothers urinate into one pot. What is that?—cow’s udders (Başgöz & Tietze 1973:240)

72. Bir acaip nesne gördüm esgi, pır: iki başı, dört ayağı, sırtı bir.—tosbağa

I have seen a strange thing, a worn out old man. It has two heads, four paws, one back.—tortoise (Başgöz & Tietze 1973:770)

Similar to other riddling traditions, the Turkish folk riddle-culture is tolerant of the riddle-teller taunting the riddle-solver. Therefore, the riddle-teller’s description of the riddle-solver as “the ass of an infidel” in (73) is socially acceptable.

73. Bayir aşağı. Mordur taşağı. Bunu bilmeyen kâfir eşeği.—patlıcan

Down-hill. Its testicle is purple. He who cannot guess this is the ass of an infidel.—Eggplant (Başgöz & Tietze 1973:295)

While riddle statement introductions and conclusions do not contribute to the illustration of the riddle image, they are relevant components to the folk riddle structure, even after the folk riddles themselves apply themselves to the static medium of printed corpora.

### **8.3 Linguistic Structures**

From the Turkish data given so far (riddles 67 through 73), it would be reasonable to speculate that Turkish riddles function more often from metaphorical ambiguity than from linguistic ambiguity. In fact, inspecting the corpus as a whole, this hypothesis proves true. However, it would be false to conclude that there aren’t any riddles whose ambiguity isn’t at least partially linguistic ambiguity. On the contrary, I discuss Turkish riddles which benefit from linguistic ambiguity in Section 8.3.1. Later, in section 8.3.2, I

discuss a handful of metaphorically ambiguous Turkish riddles which I feel translate well into English.

### 8.3.1 Linguistic Ambiguity

The most evident form of linguistic ambiguity in Turkish riddles is lexical ambiguity. Below are four examples of lexical ambiguity at work:

74. Türlü türlü olur/ haylı sulusu olur/ aptala ad takarlar/ uzun boylusu olur.—  
armut  
There are many different kinds; some are very juicy. They give a name to the stupid one. Some are very long.—pear (Başgöz & Tietze 1973:567)

75. Bizde bize biz derler, sizde bize ne derler?—Biz

In our house they call us “us” (an awl “an awl”), what do they call us (an awl) in your house?—an awl (Başgöz & Tietze 1973:85)

76. Değnek ucunda yemiş/ bunu yiyen ölmemiş/ Ramazanda da yemiş/ orucu bozulmamış.—Dayak

Fruit at the end of a stick, nobody ever died from eating it. He ate it during Ramadan, but by doing so he didn’t break his fasting.—A beating (Başgöz & Tietze 1973:99)

77. Yel gelmiş, yanında bir arı kovanı varmış, ısırmayan akrep de size rakam göstermiş—saat

A wind came. Next to it there was a beehive; and a scorpion that does not bite showed you a number.—clock (Başgöz & Tietze 1973:219)

*Armut* (see riddle (74)) is polysemous. Its primary meaning is ‘pear’, though it colloquially means ‘stupid fellow’ (Başgöz & Tietze 1973:824). Likewise, the verb in (76) is polysemous; its primary meaning is ‘eat’, though colloquially it can also mean ‘accept [a beating or a similar violent act] without resistance’. (Başgöz & Tietze 1973:817) Riddle (77)’s *akrep* is also polysemous; while its primary meaning is ‘scorpion’, it is also the term for the hour hand of a clock. (Başgöz & Tietze 1973:818) In

a similar manner, the first person pronoun *biz* ‘we’ is homophonous with the nominal *biz* ‘awl’ (see riddle (75)).

Riddle (77) also thrives upon morphological ambiguity, more specifically pseudo-morphology. *Yelkovan* is the term for the minute hand on a clock (Başgöz & Tietze 1973:818). The riddle image falsely treats *yelkovan* as consisting of two morphemes (*yel* ‘wind’ and *kovan* ‘beehive’) that in fact have no relevance to its meaning. Something similar happens in both (78) and (79) below:

78. O hangi elmadır ki yerden ot gibi biter?—yerelması

What diamond is that which grows from the ground like grass?—Jerusalem artichoke (Başgöz & Tietze 1973:403)

79. Atatay, Matatay/ ince belli kara tay—karınca

[Onomatopoeic]/ A black foal with a slim waist.—Ant (Başgöz & Tietze 1973:78)

*Yerelması* ‘Jerusalem artichoke’ could be a compound consisting of *yer* ‘ground’ and *elma* ‘diamond’. If this is so, then the morphological ambiguity in (78) is actually false morphology and not pseudo-morphology [See section 6.2.2]. Regardless of the specific type of morphological ambiguity, the riddle image deceptively separates the two morphemes from one another. *Karınca* ‘ant’, on the other hand, doesn’t internally consist of the morphemes *kara* ‘black’ and *ince* ‘slim’. Yet, such a false etymology is enticing. If *kara* and *ince* did form a compound, it is possible that (through vowel harmony) the compound would be *karınca*. Nonetheless, riddle (79) similarly divides the riddle referent’s surface form into false morphemes in the riddle image.

Lastly, riddle (81) is an exemplar of syntactic ambiguity. This riddle alters the word order of an idiom (80). Since idioms tend to have frozen syntax, this is the means of bringing about ambiguity:

80. *Leb demeden leblebiyi anlar.*

He understands the word ‘leblebi’ *roasted chickpeas* before one even says *leb*. (Başgöz & Tietze 1973:826)

81. *Ağızda toz toz olur, beş on yerken yüz olur, leb dedim, ver cevabı, ben söylerken söz olur.—leblebi*

In the mouth it becomes dust. You start with a few and they become a hundred. I say *leb*, give the answer! When I talk, it becomes a word.—  
Roasted chickpeas (Başgöz & Tietze 1973:622)

One would use idiom (80) in reference to individuals who are highly attuned to other’s emotions and opinions; this idiom proposes that such a perspicacious individual would understand the word for *roasted chickpeas* before his interlocutor could articulate the first syllable. Riddle (81) appropriates the non-word *leb* from idiom (80) in order to provide a hint towards its solving.

### **8.3.2 Metaphorical Ambiguity**

An overwhelming majority of the riddles in Başgöz and Tietze’s *Bilmece* are driven by metaphorical ambiguity. More often than not, the metaphorical ambiguity exhibited is fairly straight-forward and hardly requires any elaboration. Therefore, I only concentrate upon four riddles in this portion. These four riddles are by no means representative of the diversity of riddles in the corpus. For this reason, I encourage my readers to view Appendix C, where I list some other Turkish folk riddles. Nonetheless, these four riddles are unique in that they require that I reconsider how I define ambiguity, especially metaphorical ambiguity:

82. Ağzı var, dili yok; nefesi var, canı yok; derisi var, kanı yok. Bilin  
Bakalım bu nedir!—Balon

It has a mouth but no tongue; it breathes but is not alive; it has skin but no  
blood; guess what it is!—Balloon (Başgöz & Tietze 1973:88)

83. Kanadı var, kuş değil; boynuzu var, koç değil.—Kelebek.

Has wings, but is no bird. Has horns, but is no ram.—Butterfly (Başgöz &  
Tietze 1973:156)

84. Yapan satar/ alan kullanmaz/ kullanan görmez.—mezar

The maker sells it; the buyer doesn't use it; the user doesn't see it.—Tomb  
(Başgöz & Tietze 1973:762)

85. Yapan söylemez, alan bilmez, bilen almaz.—kalp para

He who makes it doesn't tell; he who takes it doesn't know; he who knows  
it doesn't take it.—false coin (Başgöz & Tietze 1973:312)

Riddle (82)'s riddle image does not have a clearly stated image-object, although one could infer that the image-object is an animal or a human being. The riddle image does disclose three properties which both the image-object and the referent-object have in common, which is helpful.

Riddle (83) demonstrates that the referent-object might be compared with more than one image-object. Therefore, my description of metaphorical ambiguity in **section 7** was insufficient, for it did not take into account that numerous metaphorical comparisons could be made within one riddle. Furthermore, the properties by which the image-objects differ from the referent-object are not outright stated. Instead, the properties by which the image-objects and the referent-object are similar are stated. So, it would seem that metaphorical ambiguity depends upon comparison of the riddle's referent to at least one other object in the riddle image. The riddle image is not required in order to provide an



explicit description of the object(s) being compared to the referent-object. Ultimately, the riddle-image needs only to provide something by which the riddle-solver can identify the riddle-referent. Often, this would be a property by which the image-object differs from the referent-object or a property by which the image-object and the referent-object are similar.

Finally, Turkish riddles often adopt the structure of (84) and (85), where three properties of the referent are stated in the image. Those properties relate to how particular individuals experience or interact with the riddle's referent. While it is not entirely evident why such a formula for the riddle image is so common, one could speculate that three properties is sufficient (though not excessive) context for solving a typical Turkish riddle.

#### ***8.4 Miscellaneous Observations Concerning Turkish Folk Riddles***

There are four other items of interest concerning Turkish riddles which I would like to describe. First, in Turkish folk culture—as in all folk cultures—the riddle-teller is the ultimate arbiter of the “right” riddle image. Thus, the riddle image below has two legitimate corresponding referents recorded in *Bilmece*:

86. Dam üstünde kadi gibi, gözleri var cadı gibi.—kedi

On the roof like a cadi; has eyes like a witch.—cat (Başgöz & Tietze 1973:179)

87. Dam üstünde kadi gibi, gözleri var cadı gibi.—baykuş

On the roof like a cadi; has eyes like a witch.—owl (Başgöz & Tietze 1973:557)

One could speculate that riddle (86) was the *original* image-referent sequent, and that riddle (87) was a new means of interpreting the riddle image. The logic behind this hypothesis is that *kadi* ‘cadi’ and *kedi* ‘cat’ constitute a minimal pair. Turkish folk

riddles do occasionally make light of minimal pairs and near-minimal pairs, as (88) also demonstrates:

88. Tepesi aşağı sarkar, düşerim diye korkar, dudu gibi adı var, şeker gibi tadı var.—Dut

Hangs head-down; is afraid of dropping down; its name is like that of the parrot, it tastes like sugar.—mulberry (Başgöz & Tietze 1973:515)

*Dudu* ‘parrot’ and *dut* ‘mulberry’ admittedly do not constitute a minimal pair, though the similarity of phonetic realization was enough to compare the two lexical items.

Next, there is evidence to suggest that proverbs and folk riddles often impart similar ideas in Turkish culture. Consider:

89. Zenginin malı züğürdün çenesini yorar.

The possessions of the rich tire the tongues of the poor. (Başgöz & Tietze 1973:823)

90. Zenginin elinde/ fakirin dilinde.—Para

In the hand of the rich; on the tongue of the poor.—Money (Başgöz & Tietze 1973:490)

Proverb (89) corresponds closely with riddle (90). Both endorse the idea that people who lack money are going to covet and discuss the possessions (especially the money) of those who are privileged.

Another element of interest is the Turkish riddle-tellers ability to incorporate innuendo into his riddle image, as in (91) below, in which the riddle image seems to be sexual in nature, though in fact it is in reference to an innocuous riddle referent:

91. Efendinin kıllısı hanımın yumuşağına—çorap

The gentleman’s hairy part into the lady’s soft part.—sock (Başgöz & Tietze 1973:693)

While the riddle image seems to refer to sexual union, it is in actuality referring to the fitting of a man's foot into a sock, made traditionally by a woman.

Riddle (91)'s image seemed to be in reference to two things acting in conjunction with one another. Yet, the referent consists of only one object. In fact, throughout this study, riddle referents have consistently referred to single things by themselves. As riddles (92) and (93) demonstrate, there isn't any reason that riddle images can't describe a referent of two or more things in conjunction with one another:

92. Has altın, halis gümüş, paslı pul.—Padişah, askerleri, kulları

Pure gold, pure silver, rusty small coins.—Sultan, his soldiers, his subjects  
(Başgöz & Tietze 1973:887)

93. Mavi atlas üzerinde beyaz güvercin.—Hava, ay

On blue satin, a white dove.—Sky, moon (Başgöz & Tietze 1973:831)

Of these two riddles, (93) is more interesting to me. It would seem that the riddle image in (93) corresponds to a single-object referent. Instead the referent is both *hava* 'sky' and *ay* 'moon'. Contrast this with (92), where one might expect multiple-object referents.

### ***8.5 Conclusions on Turkish Folk Riddling Culture***

All in all, the data derived from Başgöz & Tietze's *Bilmeceler* corroborate my assertions on riddles and riddle-transmission. These texts occasionally retain the traditional riddle statement introductions and conclusions that are characteristic optional structures of a riddle event. Among those introductions and conclusions were promises of rewards, threats of punishment, and taunts. Furthermore, the image-referent sequences exhibited a wide variety of ambiguity—from predominantly linguistic (including phonological, morphological, and syntactic) to predominantly metaphoric. Meanwhile, the data also confirmed that single riddle images can correspond with multiple referents;

riddles and proverbs are capable of conveying relatively the same witty content; and innuendo is as pervasive in Turkish riddle culture as in other riddle cultures. The data even revealed something new about riddle structure: riddle referents may consist of multiple objects.

## 9 Conclusion

In **section 1** of this study, I posited that no two riddling traditions are precisely the same. As an example, it seems unlikely that an American riddling tradition would produce a folk riddle comparing the annual seasons to halves of a pancake, yet there is a Turkish folk riddle that makes precisely this comparison:

94. Bir akıtımam var, yarısı sıcak, yarısı soğuk.—Yazla kış

I have a pancake, half of it is warm, half of it is cold.—summer and winter  
(Başgöz & Tietze 1973:838)

On the other hand, there are Turkish folk riddles whose metaphors and themes I could imagine being applied in American folk riddle tradition, such as (95) and (96) below:

95. Altın apamaz, gümüş tapamaz, o girilince dünya yapamaz.—yumurta

Gold cannot carry it away. Silver cannot find it. Once it is broken, the world cannot repair it.—egg (Başgöz & Tietze 1973:294)

96. Sabah dört ayaklı/ öğle iki ayaklı/ akşam üç ayaklı.—emekliyen çocuk, delikanlı, bastonlu ihtiyar; İnsan.

In the morning it has four feet. At noon it has two feet. In the evening it has three feet.—Infant crawling on hands and feet; man; old man with walking stick (Başgöz & Tietze 1973:858)

Riddle (95) might seem familiar to any reader who is familiar with the Humpty Dumpty nursery rhyme. Likewise, riddle (96) is a thought-for-thought reinterpretation of

Classical Greek culture's "Riddle of the Sphinx" (i.e. the riddle that Oedipus famously solved to defeat the Sphinx at the gates of Thebes).

While it is unlikely that there are any universal folk riddles (i.e. folk riddles that fit within all cultural world knowledge systems), I am certain that there are certain structural aspects to folk riddling that are present in all cultures. I maintain that, regardless of the culture, folk riddling is influenced jointly by culture and language. The primary goal of a riddle-teller in a folk riddling situation is to mislead an interlocutor. The only means of misleading an interlocutor is to incorporate an ambiguous word or phrase into the folk riddle. By 'ambiguous', I mean that the word or phrase in question possesses more than one meaning: the meaning that the riddle-solver has in mind and the meaning that the riddle-teller has in mind. Folk riddling is different from any other form of cultural interaction, because it demands that the participants reanalyze and rearrange their culture's world knowledge, which includes cognitive categories and the grammar of the culture's language(s), in order to produce clever instances of ambiguity. In the process of folk riddling, participants arrive at a new means of viewing the world.

Folk riddling consists minimally of two participants: the riddle-solver and the riddle-teller. Since folk riddling requires both a riddle-solver to provide a riddle image and a riddle-teller to deduce the riddle referent, the correct way to consider a folk riddle is as one structural unit: the image-referent sequence. Moreover, the folk riddle's characteristic ambiguity may emerge within either the image or the referent. This provides a secondary justification for viewing the folk riddle as one structural unit.

In **Section 4** of this study, I concentrated particularly upon the cultural side of folk riddling. Folkloric structure, I argued, establishes a performative milieu for folk

riddling. Cultures condition individuals to adopt a “riddling mindset” at certain times and in certain places. In Turkey, for example, the educated elite would meet in specific coffee houses and on pre-arranged evenings, with the express intention of engaging in folk riddle competitions. More or less, the “riddling mindset” primes the mind to be aware of ambiguity (and transitively how to manipulate the cultural world knowledge).

There are also verbal cues that mark folk riddling contexts as distinct from other forms of communication. In many cultures, for example, there are utterances called ‘riddle initiations’, which are utterances that mark the commencement of a spontaneous riddle event. Following the riddle initiation, there are a number of optional formulae which the riddle participants can articulate, including hints, taunts, threats, and promises for rewards. For example, in Turkish, a common phrase articulated just before the riddle image is *aşık der* ‘the minstrel says’. Furthermore, there are documented instances of rewards, punishments, and taunts being integrated into Turkish riddle structure. Ultimately, the only requisite units for a riddle event are a riddle image and a riddle referent.

Following the description of the cultural framework for folk riddling, I devoted three sections to the consideration of ambiguity. In **section 5**, I addressed specifically how the field of pragmatics contributes to an understanding of ambiguity. Pragmatists think often of cognitive categories and of the attribution of features to those categories. On the one hand, cognitive categories are largely products of the cultural world knowledge. On the other hand, ambiguity only arises when a speaker flouts cognitive categories and their attributes. Sometimes, riddle-tellers purposefully disregard salient predicates of a concept. Other times, riddle-tellers select specific words and phrases that

bring to mind certain categories, even though the words and phrases are in reference to different categories; such situations are deemed violations of accessibility hierarchy. Finally, riddle-tellers can purposefully juxtapose seemingly similar items in sequence with one another, when in fact the items are dissimilar; situations such as this are violations of the principle of parallelism.

**Sections 6 and 7** addressed linguistic ambiguity and metaphorical ambiguity respectively. Linguistic ambiguity stems from confusion between two phonetically similar surface forms. Dienhart (1998) formulated a similarity cline to delineate the varying degrees by which two items must be phonetically similar. In fact, two items might be polysemous, homophonous, parophonous, or even hahaphonous. Pepicello & Green (1984) approached linguistic ambiguity differently; they were more interested in the underlying processes that resulted in similar phonetic forms. Phonologically, there are three distinct processes from which ambiguity results: lexical ambiguity, word stress ambiguity, and word boundary ambiguity. There were also three types of morphological ambiguity: true morphological ambiguity, false morphology, and pseudo-morphology. Finally, folk riddles can be syntactically ambiguous in three manners: phrase structure ambiguity, transformational ambiguity, and ambiguous via the rearrangement of static syntactic structures (i.e. idioms). My readers might also recall that some of the Turkish data in this study were lexically ambiguous, ambiguous through false morphology, ambiguous through pseudo-morphology, and ambiguous through the rearrangement of static syntactic structures.

As **section 7** revealed, however, some linguistically ambiguous riddles are also metaphorically ambiguous. Occasionally, metaphorical senses of words and phrases

become so widely accepted that the novel senses become secondary meanings for polysemous lexemes. Herein, I view ideal exemplars of how folk riddling embodies both culture and language. Originally, the sense was metaphorical; a new sense emerged from the creation of a metaphor—a metaphor which owes its existence to culturally-constructed categories. In time, the lexical item associated with the metaphorical sense becomes polysemous, retaining its original sense and gaining a new productive sense.

Pure metaphorical ambiguity stems from the comparison of unlike things that have at least one property in common. The task of the riddle solver is to separate the similar properties between the two items away from the dissimilar properties. Oftentimes, inference is required to determine the similarities and/or dissimilarities. Critically, of course, one must recall that culture informs the assignment of properties to individual objects. Regardless, sometimes the line between metaphorical ambiguity and linguistic ambiguity requires intuition. This is acceptable, since folk riddles are simultaneously linguistic and cultural acts, which demand that interlocutors think and speak in a manner that plays upon the cultural world knowledge, which includes grammar and cognitive categories.



## Appendix A: Data (The Riddles)

1. A cake pretty on the surface, the inside full of chaff.—Wicked Person (Maranda 1971:223)
2. Elem elem, takam takam, çiyim çiyim, uha.— çıkırık  
*String of ideophones*— spinning wheel  
(Basgöz & Tietze 1973:702)
3. Who is the man whose head is on fire, but behind soaking wet?—Pipe (Maranda 1971:195)
4. Whose head is on fire, but behind soaking wet?—Pipe (Maranda 1971:195)
5. The man has his head on fire, but his behind soaking wet.—Pipe (Maranda 1971:195)
6. The man whose head is on fire, but behind soaking wet.—Pipe (Maranda 1971:195)
7. The man's head is on fire, but behind soaking wet.—Pipe (Maranda 1971:195)
8. His head is on fire, but behind soaking wet.—Pipe (Maranda 1971:195)
9. Head is on fire, but behind soaking wet.—Pipe (Maranda 1971:195)
10. Head is on fire, behind soaking wet.—Pipe (Maranda 1971:195)
11. Head on fire, behind soaking wet.—Pipe (Maranda 1971:195)
12. What has an eye but cannot see?—A needle (Pepicello & Green 1984: 27)
13. What's black and white and read all over?—A newspaper
14. What is the difference between a circus and a brothel?—One showcases a cunning array of stunts, while the other showcases a stunning array of cunts. (Seth Kennedy, personal communication)
15. What is the difference between a nun in church and a nun in the bath.— one has hope in her soul, the other has soap in her hole. (Kaivola-Bregenjøj 1996:22)
16. What has four legs and only one foot?—A bed (Weiner 1997:146)

17. What has four wheels and flies?—A garbage truck (Weiner & De Palma 1993:184)
18. What is a cloak?—the mating call of a Chinese frog. (Dienhart 1998:105)
19. What doesn't ask questions but must always be answered?—A telephone (Dienhart 1998:110)
20. What happened to the terrorist who tried to blow up a bus?—He burnt his lips on the exhaust pipe (Dienhart 1998: 112)
21. Why did the one-handed man cross the street?—To get to the second-hand store (Dienhart 1998: 112)
22. Why couldn't the leopard escape from the zoo.—He was always spotted. (Dienhart 1998: 112)
23. Why did the lobster blush?—He saw the salad dressing (Dienhart 1998:112)
24. What did the electrician's wife say when he came home at 2 a.m.?—Wire you insulate? (Dienhart 1998: 177)
25. What did the grape say when the elephant stepped on it?—Not too much; he just made a little whine. (Dienhart 1998:177)
26. What did they give to the man who invented the doorknocker?—The Nobel Prize (Dienhart 1998:118)
27. Why does the Frenchman have only one egg for breakfast?—One egg is an *oeuf*. (Dienhart 1998:118)
28. Siempre        dic-e        algo    y        no        sab-e        habl-ar;  
 pued-e        corr-er pero    nunca camin-ar.    ¿Qué es?    —El reloj.  
 Always        say-3.SG        thing and NEG know-3.SG talk-INF  
 be.able-3.SG run-INF but never walk-INF    What Be-3.SG –The watch.  
 It always says something but doesn't know how to speak; it can run but never walks. What is it?—A watch (Pepicello & Green 1984:145)
29. What's the best cure for water on the brain?—A tap        on the head (Dienhart 1998: 105)
30. I know something got hand an' don't wash its face—A clock (Georges & Dundes 1963:113)

31. What bird is lowest in spirits?—The Bluebird. (Pepicello & Green 1984:31)
32. When did Moses sleep five in a bed?—When he slept with his forefathers. (Pepicello & Green 1984: 31)
33. Oro parec-e, plata no es (plátano es).  
 Quén no lo adivina, bien tonto es;  
 ya te he lo dicho. -- El Plátano.
- Gold seem-3.SG silver NEG be-3.SG (plantain be-3.SG)  
 Who NEG 3.ACC.m get quite foolish be-3.SG  
 already 2.DAT have.1.SG 3.ACC.m say-PST-PPL the  
 plantain
- It seems to be gold, it is not silver (it is a plantain). Whoever doesn't get it is quite foolish; I have already told you it.—Plantain (Pepicello & Green 1984:146)
34. When is it difficult to get your watch out of your pocket?—When it keeps ticking (keeps ticking) there. (Pepicello & Green 1984:33)
35. How is a man clearing a hedge in a single bound like a man snoring?—He does it in his sleep (his leap). (Pepicello & Green 1984:34)
36. When is coffee like soil?—When it is ground. (Pepicello & Green 1984:37)
37. When is a doctor most annoyed?—When he is out of patients (patience). (Pepicello & Green 1984:37)
38. Which musical instrument should one not believe?—A liar (lyre) (Pepicello & Green 1984:37)
39. What kind of bow can you never tie?—A rainbow. (Pepicello & Green 1984:41)
40. What ship has two mates but no captain?—Courtship (Pepicello & Green 1984:41)
41. What is the key to a good dinner?—A Turkey (Pepicello & Green 1984:42)
42. Agua pas-a por mi casa, cat-e de mi corazón. —Aguacate
- Water pass-3.SG through POSS.1.SG house, watch-out.IMP.2.SG  
 POSS.1.SG heart. --Avocado

- Water passes through my house, watch out for my heart.—Avocado (Pepicello & Green 1984:147)
43. How is an icicle like a duck?—both grow down. (Pepicello & Green 1984:45)
  44. When is a boy like a pony?—When he is a little horse (hoarse). (Pepicello & Green 1984:45)
  45. What do you call a man who marries another man?—A minister. (Pepicello & Green 1984:48)
  46. When is a man like a snake?—When he is rattled. (Pepicello & Green 1984:48)
  47. What does a person grow if he works too hard in the garden?—Tired. (Pepicello & Green 1984:55)
  48. Why does time fly?—‘Cause people are always trying to kill it. (Pepicello & Green 1984:105)
  49. When is a boat like a heap of snow?—When it is adrift (a drift). (Pepicello & Green 1984:56)
  50. Why doesn't the fishmonger have any friends?—his business is to sell fish (too selfish). (Pepicello & Green 1984:56)
  51. What is the difference between a baby and a coat?—One you wear, the other you were. (Pepicello & Green 1984: 35)
  52. What is the difference between a ballet dancer and a duck?—One goes quick on her feet, the other goes quack on her feet. (Pepicello & Green 1984:35)
  53. What is the difference between a sewing machine and a kiss?—One sews seems nice, the other seems so nice. (Pepicello & Green 1984: 59)
  54. What is the difference between a hungry man and a glutton?—One longs to eat, other eats too long. (Dienhart 1998:121)
  55. There is something with a heart in its head.—A peach (Pepicello & Green 1984:114)
  56. What lock can no key open?—A lock of hair (Pepicello & Green 1984:114)

57. What vegetable is unpopular on ships?—Leeks (Pepicello & Green 1984:114)

58. Dos niña-s en un balcón, bail-  
ando al mismo son. ¿Qué son?— Los  
ojo-s.

Two girl-PL (pupil-PL) on ART.IND balcony dance-  
ACT.PART to same sound. What Be-3.SG DEF.ART  
eye-PL.

Two girls (pupils) on a balcony, dancing to the same sound. What are they?—Eyes (Pepicello & Green 1984:150)

59. What has a tongue, and can't talk?—Shoe (Pepicello & Green 1984:114)

60. I have a cock on yonder hill/ I keep him for a wonder/And every time the  
cock do crow/It lightens, hails and thunders.—A gun (Pepicello & Green  
1984: 114)

61. One pig, two snouts.—Plough (Köngäs Maranda 1971:198)

62. What has golden hair and stands in the corner?—Broom (Hasan-Rokem &  
Shulman 4)

63. Aşık der gassap ağlar, ölen davar ağlamaz, öldüren gassap ağlar.—soğan

The minstrel says: The butcher cries. The butcher dressed in red cries.  
The sheep that is slaughtered does not cry; the butcher that slaughters it  
cries.—onion (bulb) (Başgöz & Tietze 1973:549)

64. Fili fili filmeli, filimin ucu düğmeli. Ya bunu da bilmeli, ya bu gece ölmeli.—  
Tavuk pisliği

Fili fili filmeli, my elephant has a button at his end. Either you guess this or you  
die this night.—Chicken droppings (Başgöz & Tietze 1973:203)

65. Kertül kertül, kırk köy ver de kurtul!—testere

Notches and notches. Give forty villages and save your head!—saw (Başgöz &  
Tietze 1973:635)

66. Yaşadıkca kısalıboyu; bunu bilsev al yüz.—kalem

The longer it lives the shorter it becomes. If you guess this you shall  
have a hundred villages.—pen (Başgöz & Tietze 1973:572)

67. Dört kardaş bir gudiye işer. Nedir?—İnek memesi

Four brothers urinate into one pot. What is that?—cow's udders (Başgöz & Tietze 1973:240)

68. Bir acaip nesne gördüm esgi, pır: iki başı, dört ayağı, sırtı bir.—tosbağa

I have seen a strange thing, a worn out old man. It has two heads, four paws, one back.—tortoise (Başgöz & Tietze 1973:770)

69. Bayir aşağı. Mordur taşığı. Bunu bilmeyen kâfir eşeği.—patlican

Down-hill. Its testicle is purple. He who cannot guess this is the ass of an infidel.—Eggplant (Başgöz & Tietze 1973:295)

70. Türlü türlü olur/ haylı sulusu olur/ aptala ad takarlar/ uzun boylusu olur.—armut

There are many different kinds; some are very juicy. They give a name to the stupid one. Some are very long.—pear (Başgöz & Tietze 1973:567)

71. Bizde bize biz derler, sizde bize ne derler?—Biz

In our house they call us “us” (an awl “an awl”), what do they call us (an awl) in your house?—an awl (Başgöz & Tietze 1973:85)

72. Değnek ucunda yemiş/ bunu yiyen ölmemiş/ Ramazanda da yemiş/ orucu bozulmamış.—Dayak

Fruit at the end of a stick, nobody ever died from eating it. He ate it during Ramadan, but by doing so he didn't break his fasting.—A beating (Başgöz & Tietze 1973:99)

73. Yel gelmiş, yanında bir arı kovanı varmış, ısırmayan akrep de size rakam göstermiş—saat

A wind came. Next to it there was a beehive; and a scorpion that does not bite showed you a number.—clock (Başgöz & Tietze 1973:219)

74. hangi elmastır ki yerden ot gibi biter?—yerelması

What diamond is that which grows from the ground like grass?—Jerusalem artichoke (Başgöz & Tietze 1973:403)

75. Atatay, Matatay/ ince belli kara tay—karınca

[Onomatopoeic]/ A black foal with a slim waist.—Ant (Başgöz & Tietze 1973:78)

76. Ağızı var, dili yok; nefesi var, canı yok; derisi var, kanı yok. Bilin bakalım bu nedir!—Balon
- It has a mouth but no tongue; it breathes but is not alive; it has skin but no blood; guess what it is!—Balloon (Başgöz & Tietze 1973:88)
77. Kanadı var, kuş değil; boynuzu var, koç değil.—Kelebek.
- Has wings, but is no bird. Has horns, but is no ram.—Butterfly (Başgöz & Tietze 1973:156)
78. Yapan satar/ alan kullanmaz/ kullanan görmez.—mezar
- The maker sells it; the buyer doesn't use it; the user doesn't see it.—Tomb (Başgöz & Tietze 1973:762)
79. Yapan söylemez, alan bilmez, bilen almaz.—kalp para
- He who makes it doesn't tell; he who takes it doesn't know; he who knows it doesn't take it.—false coin (Başgöz & Tietze 1973:312)
80. Dam üstünde kadi gibi, gözleri var cadı gibi.—kedi
- On the roof like a cadı; has eyes like a witch.—cat (Başgöz & Tietze 1973:179)
81. Dam üstünde kadi gibi, gözleri var cadı gibi —baykuş
- On the roof like a cadı; has eyes like a witch.—owl (Başgöz & Tietze 1973:557)
82. Tepesi aşağı sarkar, düşerim diye korkar, duduk gibi adı var, şeker gibi tadı var.—Dut
- Hangs head-down; is afraid of dropping down; its name is like that of the parrot, it tastes like sugar.—mulberry (Başgöz & Tietze 1973:515)
83. Zenginın elinde/ fakirin dilinde.—Para
- In the hand of the rich; on the tongue of the poor.—Money (Başgöz & Tietze 1973:490)
84. Ağızda toz toz olur, beş on yerken yüz olur, lebdedim, ver cevabı, ben söylerken söz olur.—leblebi (Başgöz & Tietze 1973:623)

- In the mouth it becomes dust. You start with a few and they become a hundred. I say *leb*, give the answer! When I talk, it becomes a word.—Roasted chickpeas (Başgöz & Tietze 1973:622)
85. Has altın, halis gümüş, paslı pul.—Padişah, askerleri, kulları  
Pure gold, pure silver, rusty small coins.—Sultan, his soliders, his subjects (Başgöz & Tietze 1973:887)
86. Mavi atlas üzerinde beyaz güvercin.—Hava, ay  
On blue satin, a white dove.—Sky, moon (Başgöz & Tietze 1973:831)
87. Bir akıtmam var, yarısı sıcak, yarısı soğuk.—Yazla kış  
I have a pancake, half of it is warm, half of it is cold.—summer and winter (Başgöz & Tietze 1973:838)
88. Altın apamaz, gümüş tapamaz, o gırılınca dünya yapamaz.—yumurta  
Gold cannot carry it away. Silver cannot find it. Once it is broken, the world cannot repair it.—egg (Başgöz & Tietze 1973:294)
89. Sabah dört ayaklı/ öğle iki ayaklı/ akşam üç ayaklı.—emekliyen çocuk, delikanlı, bastonlu ihtiyar; İnsan.  
In the morning it has four feet. At noon it has two feet. In the evening it has three feet.—Infant crawling on hands and feet, man, old man with walking stick (Başgöz & Tietze 1973:858)



## Appendix B: Turkish Orthography

I use Turkish orthography consistently throughout this essay, whenever the data were Turkish folk riddles. Below, I give a summary of the Latin alphabet for Turkish and rough IPA equivalents. This summary is based upon Simon Ager (2011).

Vowels		
Capitalized Orthography	Lower Case Orthography	IPA equivalents
A	a	/a/
E	e	/e/ or /æ/
I	ı	/ɯ/
İ	i	/i/
O	o	/o/
Ö	ö	/ø/
U	u	/u/
Ü	ü	/y/
Consonants		
B	b	/b/
C	c	/dʒ/
Ç	ç	/tʃ/
D	d	/d/
F	f	/f/

G	g	/g/, /ʒ/
Ğ	ğ	/uɣ/
H	h	/h/
J	j	/ʒ/
K	k	/k/, /c/
L	l	/l/, /l/
M	m	/m/
N	n	/n/
P	p	/p/
R	r	/r/
S	s	/s/
Ş	ş	/ʃ/
T	t	/t/
V	v	/w/, /v/
Y	y	/j/
Z	z	/z/

## Appendix C: Additional Turkish Riddles

- Dam üstünde/ bitli yorgan.—Yıldızlar  
On the flat roof there is a quilt with lice.—Stars (Başgöz & Tietze 1973:720)
- Her akşam yatan, her sabah kalkan amma hiç uyumuyan nedir?—güneş  
What is it that lies down every night, that gets up every morning but never sleeps?—the sun. (Başgöz & Tietze 1973:734)
- Ben giderim, o gider/ üstümde gölge eder.—şemsiye  
I go he goes; above me he makes a shadow.—Umbrella (Başgöz & Tietze 1973:781)
- Nazlı gitse izi yok; hızlı gitse tos etmez.—gölge  
If it goes gently, it leaves no track; if it goes quickly, it rouses no dust.—Shadow (Başgöz & Tietze 1973:647)
- Durmadan işler heman, durursa ölür insan.—gönül.  
It works without stopping. If it stops, a man dies.—heart (Başgöz & Tietze 1973:384)
- Minarenin üstünde telli horoz öter.—imam  
On the top of the minaret, a crested cock crows.—imam (Başgöz & Tietze 1973:399)
- Üç kolu var, milyonlarca kulu var.—İstavroz  
Has three arms and millions of slaves.—Cross (Başgöz & Tietze 1973:245)
- Kimin süsü, gözümün gözü.—Gözlük  
To some it is an ornament. It is the eye of my eye.—eyeglasses (Başgöz & Tietze 1973:312)
- Biri görür, gözetir; biri işi düzeltir.—Hanım, hizmetçi  
One looks and watches; the other does the work.—Lady of the house, maid (Başgöz & Tietze 1973:887)

## Appendix D: American Elephant Joke-Riddles

Due to the overwhelming emphasis upon English-language data, I have elected not to address a trend in American folk culture, dating to the 1960's: the *elephant joke-riddle*. For reasons that are not entirely clear to me, Americans had a particular predilection with elephants during this time period, which resulted in a large trend of riddles whose common theme was *elephants*. Some of these joke-riddles are just plain absurd:

- How can you tell when an elephant is in the bath with you? The smell of peanuts on his breath (Cray & Herzog 1967:33)
- What did Tarzan say when he saw a herd of elephants coming? Here come the elephants. (Cray & Herzog 1967:31)

Others had the benefit of being topical. One example is the riddle below, which makes light of the Dallas Police Department's incompetence in allowing Jack Ruby, who famously assassinated Lee Harvey Oswald, into their facilities with a loaded firearm.

- What would happen if an elephant walked into the Dallas jail? Nothing; they wouldn't see him! (Cray & Herzog 1967:34)

Hidden among these absurd joke-riddles, there are a few riddles which genuinely fit my established rubric for folk riddles, which depend upon linguistic ambiguity.

- How do you make an elephant float? With two scoops of ice cream, an elephant, some root beer, and a helluva big glass. (Cray & Herzog 1967:34)
- What happened when Hannibal crossed the Alps with elephants? None of the offspring survived. (Cray & Herzog 1967:34)
- What does an elephant have that no other animal has? Baby elephants. (Cray & Herzog 1967:36)

- What did the stream say when the elephant sat down in it? Well, I'll be damned. (Cray & Herzog 1967:36)
- Why do elephants smoke Luckies? They'd look pretty silly smoking Camels. (Cray & Herzog 1967:32)
- How do you prevent an elephant from charging? Take away his credit card. (Cray & Herzog 1967:34)

I will not expend any effort in explaining how these riddles are exemplars of linguistic ambiguity; for I have done so sufficiently with structurally similar riddles in the heart of this study.

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