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LINGUOSEMIOTIC ANALYSIS OF SPANISH ANIMAL RIDDLES

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Abstract

The article is devoted to linguosemiotic analysis of Spanish riddles about animals and birds. The article discusses the means of language expressiveness in Spanish animal puzzles and analyzes their cognitive parameters and linguosemiotics. The animal world can be considered as an integral and semiotically important part of the geographical space of an ethnos. The study of perception and verbalization of a fragment of the worldview which is associated with the “zoomorphic code” in folklore texts is of particular interest, due to the fact that zoonyms and ornithonyms are categories where features of folklore understanding of reality by an ethnos are traditionally fixed and this is how people get a feeling that they belong to one culture. Linguosemiotic analysis of riddles about the fauna allows us to reconstruct folklore characters of zoonyms and ornithonyms and, based on the typology of these characters, describe animals and birds prototypical for the Spanish language personality.

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Keywords: Spanish riddles, Spanish folklore, linguistic worldview, zoomorphic code, means of language expressiveness.



1. Introduction

The key principle of modern linguistic science is anthropocentrism, focused on the study of man, issues of language and culture interaction, mentality, linguistic consciousness, and the linguistic worldview. The assertion that the national culture is original, unique, has a variety of forms and contents is currently an axiom. The culture of a country or ethnic group cannot be imagined without folklore, which is rooted in the deep past and is the link between the origins of the ethnic group, its past, present and future.

Researchers' attention is turned to folklore texts as a source of folklore worldview as a fundamental part of the conceptual picture of an ethnic group (Chesnokova & Bayo Julve, 2019; Chesnokova & Talavera Ibarra, 2018; Emer 2011; Khrolenko, 2010, 2018; Pimenova 2018).

2. Problem Statement

The article discusses the means of language expressiveness in Spanish animal puzzles, and analyzes their cognitive parameters and linguosemiotics. The materials of the article were Spanish riddles, extracted by continuous sampling from specialized collections, dictionaries of the Spanish language, periodicals, Internet sites, as well as samples of riddles given by 30 native speakers of the Spanish language (the Pyrenees national variant).

3. Research Questions

National-cultural specificity is manifested at all levels of the language, and appeal to the linguistic picture of the world is one of the most productive ways of obtaining extra-linguistic information.

The term “linguistic worldview”, proposed by Weisgerber, is a key concept of modern linguistics, which can be considered one of the “semiotic codes of culture, which is in turn determined by it” (as cited in Chesnokova, 2006).

Sources of linguistic facts that form the ethnic image of the world are folklore texts, which are an ethnospecific reflection and development of multi-genre oral and poetic works, starting from the period of classic folklore search.

4. Purpose of the Study

The purpose of the study is to explore the principles of constructing the Spanish riddle text and categorize riddles according to the animalistic component.

The folklore picture embodied in multi-genre texts universally reflects various models of human existence. It is no coincidence that the folklore worldview can be defined as the transformed world of reality (Putilov, 1977), which is associated with the multiplicity of types of reality perception. The folklore worldview in its content is a reliable objectification of folk knowledge, ideas and assessment of reality. The basic information, represented according to the laws of genres by various linguistic ways and techniques, is folklore information about people's existence in space and time, their outer and inner world, cultural traditions and mentality. Moreover, the riddle chosen as an object of research also performs a didactic function.

5. Research Methods

In the article, we used the linguoculturological method, focusing on detailed explanation of the processes occurring in the minds of native speakers (Kovshova, 2019); the method of semantic reconstruction, which compiles research corpus including all conceptually related language signs, reducing symbolic means to certain semiotic groups with their conceptual components, defining models and reconstructing the underlying foundations of semantics; associative method, as well as the method of linguoculturological and semiotic interpretations, involving the identification of elements of national culture through the parameters of the content of language units: conceptual, figurative, and evaluative.

6. Findings

Riddles as one of the folklore genres, are an integral part of linguistic culture, reproduce mentality and activity of an ethnic group, play an important role in comprehending and interpreting culture as a system in which the past, present and future coexist, leading an ongoing dialogue that relates to folklore as a whole (Chesnokova & Talavera Ibarra, 2018). Riddles proved to be a universal stage in the development of the art of words. Riddles help develop observation, ingenuity, a systematic view of the world and are a means of educating the younger generation. The puzzle appears as a kind of dialogue in which one of the participants must guess and name a word or sentence, made up by the interlocutor in the form of a hint or allegory, using various lexical, stylistic or phonetic constructions (metaphors, puns, etc.),

Researchers who have addressed the genre in question are trying to establish "true" / "genuine" riddles and reconstruct the "mysterious" prototext. An important role is played by the separation of folk and literary riddles. As a rule, folk riddles are considered "genuine". In their works on the riddle, Russian and foreign authors proceed from the fact that the riddle presupposes a question and an answer, pay special attention to the narrative / question, and also try to trace the connection of the hidden subject, phenomenon or action with the way they are presented in the text of the riddle (Mitrofanova, 1978; Permyakov, 1978; Sanzharovsky, 1983).

6.1. The study of riddles in Romance philology

In Spanish, the Russian concept of *загадка* (riddle) corresponds to the lexemes *adivinanza*, *acertijo*, the definition and boundaries of which is understood differently by different researchers. Speaking about the difference between the concepts of *adivinanza* and *acertijo*, we must bear in mind that in the Spanish philological tradition there are many opinions, sometimes opposite, about the content of these two terms. Many scholars have different names for the same linguistic phenomenon. Often these concepts are used as absolute synonyms, as in the dictionary of the Royal Academy of Spanish. *Adivinanza* is a mystery, something that needs to be guessed (*adivinanza: adivinación, acertijo*); and *acertijo*: 1) a riddle that you guess at leisure. 2) a problem difficult to resolve. ("*Acertijo: 1) Especie de enigma para entretenerse y acertarlo. 2) Cosa y afirmación muy problemática*") (Diccionario de la lengua española, 2014).

Casares (1997) in the Ideographic Dictionary of the Spanish Language defines the riddle as a technique consisting in a play on words or using different meanings of the same word as entertainment or to test the interlocutor's wit and ingenuity.

In the dictionary of Moliner (2007) we find the following definition of a riddle: a sentence or poem that, in an allegorical manner, describes a certain concept that the interlocutor is invited to guess for fun.

A fairly accurate definition of the riddle is given in the Dictionary of Modern Spanish: a puzzle or game that consists in finding a clue, solution or hidden meaning of a phrase (Diccionario Clave, 2006)

Although most Spanish dictionaries consider the lexemes *adivinanza* and *acertijo* synonymous, some philologists tend to believe that there are structural differences between the two. So, the researchers of the riddles Fernández and Garfer (1989) in the “Anthology of the riddles of the Spanish language” argue that the concepts of *adivinanza* and *acertijo*, similar in semantic content, have different expressions: for example, *acertijo* is a riddle in prose, while the term *adivinanza* applies exclusively to rhymed riddles. A similar opinion is shared by Machado Alvarez (1882), specifying that *adivinanza* is *acertijo* in verse.

Caballero (1998), however, in the collection "Folk Tales, Riddles, Proverbs and Sayings" put riddles (*adivanzas*, according to the terminology of the author) not only in the category of poetry, but also in prose.

In turn, Morán Bardón (1957) in the book "Riddles" ("Acertijos"), collected 777 riddles, most of which are presented in a poetic form. Morote Magán (2001) considers the terms *adivinanza* and *acertijo* to be absolute synonyms.

Analyzing the speech practices of modern Spaniards, as well as talking to native speakers, we came to the conclusion that the concepts of *adivinanza* and *acertijo* can refer to both poetic form and prose, but they differ in the degree of difficulty in finding a solution. The term *adivinanza* is most often applied to simple riddles for young children.

A vivid example of such riddles is short poems containing a guess in the text:

“Soy un animal pequeño,	Furry little baby,
piensa mi nombre un rato,	This is what I am,
porque agregando una "n"	Call me a M*...
tendrás mi nombre en el acto.	As fast as you can
(el ratón) “	(mouse)
(Fernández, Garfer 1989)	* Riddles hereby were translated into

English by the author in free version translation.

The concept of *acertijos* can be attributed to more complex puzzles aimed at older children and adults.

“Soy fuerte como una roca, pero	Hard as a rock
una palabra puede destruirme,	But for me a word is destructive
¿quién soy?	What am I?
(silencio)”	(silence)
(Fernández, Garfer 1989)	

In this case, it is impossible to linguistically “read” the answer in the text of the riddle; to find it, you must think abstractly.

6.2. Riddles with an animalistic component in Spanish

The specifics of folklore genre are created both by the features of the artistic image of reality, and by what phenomena become the object of this image. Any genre of folk art has its own themes, plots and situations, depicts them in accordance with its own laws, which distinguishes it from other genres, creating its originality.

Riddles do not deal with complex historical and psychological subjects. They carefully examine individual objects and phenomena surrounding people, accompanying them in everyday life. The riddle is the only genre of folklore whose works are devoted to insignificant but constantly present in human life objects and phenomena. For in no genre, except for the riddle, a simple knot in a log or board, window glass, a bucket, a needle, scissors, etc. is of any interest. And the riddle not only deals with all these subjects, but knows how to find poetry in them, turn this everyday life world in a bright system of images, which from childhood instills in a person the desire to look more closely at the world around them, to see beauty in the simplest things.

Pets have traditionally been friends and helpers of people, gave them food and clothes. Wild animals also were a source of food or represented danger. Animals were considered the measure of physical and moral human qualities; patterns of behavior and habits of animals were noticed and transferred to humans, forming zoomorphic metaphors.

Most studies of the lexical-semantic group of animal names were limited to one class of animals. Therefore, it seems appropriate to analyze the names of all the animal classes found in riddles in the Spanish language. Based on the generally accepted classification of animal names, all pivotal components are grouped as follows: domestic animals, wild animals, poultry, wild birds, fish, amphibians, reptiles, insects.

In Spanish, riddles with an animalistic component are a fairly voluminous layer. As part of the study, about 1,500 Spanish riddles have been studied, more than 350 of which were guessed by the name of the fauna.

The analysis of zoonyms shows that the share of various classes of animals is not equal in riddles. In Spanish riddles, the maximum degree of activity is characteristic of the names of insects and their vital functions: 30.5%.

A lot of riddles are about the bee, the hive, honeycombs, honey (5% of all riddles with an animalistic component). They reflect knowledge of the bee life: dominance of the queen in the hive; bee attacking the enemy. There are many riddles about bees in the hives, about honeycombs, honey, and wax. Most often, bees in such riddles are nuns, girls, old women, who embroider, weave, knit a wonderful pattern or prepare flower nectar:

“Un convento bien cerrado,	In a closed convent
sin campanas y sin torres	Without towers and bells
y muchas monjitas dentro,	Hard-working nuns
preparan dulces de flores”.	Are making nectar.

(Fernández, Garfer 1989)

Riddles about ants and anthill are most peculiar. Typical questions about the ant are: “Who is the most industrious in the world?”, “Who is the strongest in the world?”.

“Cargadas van, cargadas vienen Y en el camino no se detienen”.	We will walk a hundred roads with a heavy load, And no obstacles will ever stop us.
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(Fernández, Garfer 1989)

Among the riddles about insects, a large number is about the mosquito. In various combinations, they create more than twenty puzzles and a huge number of options.

Flea riddles point out the color, small size, high jump, and say a lot about catching fleas. In terms of images and their combination, these puzzles are quite inventive.

Riddles about other insects: firefly, butterfly, cricket, wasp are rare. Obviously, people noticed insects that annoyed them in the house and at work in the summer: flies, fleas, mosquitoes, cockroaches, or brought benefits like a bee. People were indifferent to other insects.

A significant layer of animalistic riddles in Spanish is given to the names of domestic animals and pets (19%).

Most attention is paid to the cow which brought food to the peasant family. We discovered three riddles about the bull. Two of them are similar to the riddles about the cow, describing the appearance of the animal.

There are more than 30 puzzles about the cow, its udder, milking. They describe the appearance of the cow:

“Cuatro pataletas, Dos cornicales, un quitamoscas, dos mirabales”.	Four to stand on, Two to poke, One to swish, and Two to scope.
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(Fernández, Garfer 1989)

Riddles about the cow are characterized by diversity and ingenuity.

Riddles about the horse are much fewer than about the cow. Many of them describe the appearance of the horse in the same way as riddles about the cow, and also emphasize its loyalty and help to people.

Riddles about the dog usually note tail wagging, the way dogs lie, its traditional purpose of being the human’s best friend.

“Es animal vertebrado, del hombre el mejor amigo, a veces es cazador y otras un buen lazarrillo”.	I am human’s loyal friend, Have a lot of merits. No one can be my equal Be it long trips or hunting rabbits.
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(Fernández, Garfer 1989)

The cat in Spanish riddles is furry, whiskered, with a tail like a stake, it cleans itself without water, sings songs, its paws are soft, and its claws are sharp:

“¿Qué animal de buen olfato,	I hunt at home,
cazador dentro de casa,	My sharp nose is great.
rincón por rincón repasa	I walk around the house
y lame, si pilla, un plato”.	And watch my prey.

(Fernández, Garfer 1989)

The names of the following domestic animals are also quite often found: rabbit - conejo (2%), mouse - ratón (1.3%), donkey - burro (1.25%), sheep - oveja (1.25%).

The productivity of wild animal names in riddles is lower than that of domestic animals (8%). Of the wild animals, the most attention is paid to the wolf (lobo) due to great damage it inflicts to the peasant farm. Among other wild animal most often found in Spanish riddles, one can single out the bear, the fox, the squirrel, the hedgehog, and the hare.

In terms of the number of animalistic riddles, the class of names of poultry is significantly inferior to the class of domestic animals, but exceeds the class of wild animals; in our material it is 14.5%.

Of the poultry, the preference in riddles is given to the rooster and chicken (rooster - gallo (6.25%), chicken - gallina (3.3%)). Riddles about the rooster note singing and appearance:

“Tengo de rey la cabeza	Not a prince,
calzo espuela pavonada,	But wears a crown;
llevo barba colorada,	Not a horseman,
mi sueño temprano empieza	But wears a belt on the leg;
y madrugo a la alborada”.	Not a guard,

(Fernández, Garfer 1989) But wakes everybody up early.

Hen puzzles are usually about feathers, laying eggs, sitting on eggs, and chickens.

“Adivina, adivinanza	My friend, have a guess
¿quién puso el huevo	Who hid an egg in the grass?
en la paja?”	

(Fernández, Garfer 1989)

An egg in riddles is a house with no windows or doors:

“Mi madre me labró una casa	Mummy built me a house,
sin puertas y sin ventanas,	No windows, no doors.
y cuando quiero salir,	When I want to leave it,
rompo antes la muralla”.	I will break the walls.

(Fernández, Garfer 1989)

The class of wild birds is 7.3% in our sample. Despite a rather large number of riddles with the core component “name of a wild bird”, each core component is used extremely rarely. Riddles are made about

birds that are typical for certain regions of Spain: the parrot (loro), the canary (canario), nest near human habitation (the pigeon (paloma)) or attract attention with a peculiar voice (the cuckoo (cuco)), appearance (the stork (cigüeña)), the woodpecker (pájaro carpintero)), or lifestyle (the eagle owl (buhu)).

Of the free-living birds, two attract particular attention: the swallow (golondrina) and the magpie (blanca). The first one is the messenger of spring and has always been loved by peasants.

In magpie puzzles, colorful feathers and a sharp cry of a bird are noted. The main core components in this class in Spanish are gorrión, tordo, ave, perdiz, corneja, cuervo.

There are many riddles in Spanish about marine life and various fish species. In our research they are 13%. Most riddles relate to fish as such. Metaphorical, figurative riddles are also frequent. The folklore concept of fish makes it an amazing creature:

“Tiene hocico y no es borrico,	Wings but no flying.
tiene albarda y no es de lana,	Eyes but no blinking,
tiene alas y no vuela,	Mouth – no talking,
no tiene patas y anda”.	No legs but walking.

(Fernández, Garfer 1989)

Animalistic riddles also contain names of amphibians and reptiles, the most used of them is the zoononym – the snake (culebra (2%)) and the viper (víbora (1%)).

A quantitative analysis of the core components in the composition of riddles with an animalistic component showed that the names of various classes of animals are represented differently. The names of insects and domestic animals are most actively used. In descending order of use in riddles, other classes can be arranged as follows: poultry, wild animals, wild birds, fish, amphibians, and reptiles.

Expressive means of riddles are rich and diverse. This is explained both by the nature of the riddle, which requires allegory, comparison, accuracy in the use of the word, and the small size of the genre, in which each language element bears a large semantic and figurative-expressive load.

7. Conclusion

One of the urgent tasks of modern Spanish studies is the study of the small-format text of the Spanish riddle using polyparadigmatic methods. The object of our study is Spanish riddles with an animalistic component, incorporating an element that genetically or epidigmatically goes back to the name of the representative of the animal world and has a material expression in zoolexeme.

Spanish animal riddles are built on the paradoxical and axiomatic nature of animal images, reflecting the Spanish archetypal view of the animal world, encoded in language, which, in turn, forms the meta-system of Spanish folklore.

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