

**SCTCMG 2021**  
**International Scientific Conference «Social and Cultural Transformations in the Context of**  
**Modern Globalism»**

**LEXICAL EXPLICATION OF PHYTOMORPHIC CODE IN**  
**KALMYK RIDDLES AND THEIR RUSSIAN TRANSLATIONS**

Omakayeva Ellara Ulyaevna (a)\*, Alimaa Ayushjav (b), Kichikova Nadezhda Andreevna (c),  
Dzhambinova Nadezhda Sadrykovna (d), Sanzhiyeva Danara Klimovna (e)

\*Corresponding author

- (a) Kalmyk State University named after B.B. Gorodovikov, 11, Pushkin Str., Elista, 358000, Republic of Kalmykia, Russia, [elomakaeva@mail.ru](mailto:elomakaeva@mail.ru)
- (b) Institute of Language and Literature, Mongolian Academy of Sciences, 54a, Peace ave., Bayanzurkh district, Ulaanbaatar, 13330, Mongolia, [alimaa\\_mgl@yahoo.com](mailto:alimaa_mgl@yahoo.com)
- (c) Kalmyk State University named after B.B. Gorodovikov, 11, Pushkin Str., Elista, 358000, Republic of Kalmykia, Russia, [esperes@list.ru](mailto:esperes@list.ru)
- (d) Kalmyk State University named after B.B. Gorodovikov, 11, Pushkin Str., Elista, 358000, Republic of Kalmykia, Russia, [sawh@mail.ru](mailto:sawh@mail.ru)
- (e), Municipal General Education Government Institution Krutogorovskaya Secondary School Kamchatka Krai, Sobolevsky district, Krutogorovsky village, Russia, [danara1977@mail.ru](mailto:danara1977@mail.ru)

### Abstract

Kalmyk riddles are distinguished by thematic diversity due to the nomadic way of life of the Kalmyks in the past. This study is devoted to the issues of studying the lexicon and syntax of the Kalmyk floristic riddles published in paremiological collections, various lexicographic sources and collected by famous orientalists through the prism of theoretical understanding of the problem of relationship between the language and the culture. This approach will contribute to a deeper understanding of the ethnic perception peculiarities of the Kalmyks. The riddles reflect the unique view of the Kalmyk ethnos on the environment, the nationally specific experience of understanding the world. Riddles about obsolete items of nomadic life are quite difficult for modern people to perceive. Many words have passed into the category of archaisms and historicisms. Here, the background knowledge of native speakers, knowledge of the phytomorphic code, knowledge of the floristic cluster of the language picture of the world can be of great support. Therefore, special attention is paid to the structural and lexical and semantic features of this thematic group of Kalmyk riddles, in particular, the identification of key lexical elements denoting the Kalmyk realities of nomadic life, as well as the enigmatic structure of the riddle text and the principles of guessing. The designations of the realities of the plant world form a phytomorphic cluster of the Kalmyks' linguistic picture of the world. The empirical material for this study was the riddles recorded by famous collectors and researchers of Kalmyk folklore..

2357-1330 © 2021 Published by European Publisher.

*Keywords:* Cultural code, Kalmyk language, names of flora, riddle text, Russian



This is an Open Access article distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution-Noncommercial 4.0 Unported License, permitting all non-commercial use, distribution, and reproduction in any medium, provided the original work is properly cited.

## 1. Introduction

The semantic structure and logic of the riddle has always attracted the attention of researchers (Anikin, 1957, 1981; Bogatyrev, 1971; Cook, 2006; Dandes, 2003; Kenges-Maranda, 1978, 1984; Lazutin, 1977; Levin, 1978; Maranda, 1971; Nikolaeva, 1994; Pepicello & Green, 1984; Tsivyan, 1994; Toporov, 2006; Tolstaya, 2010; Zhurinsky, 1989, etc.).

The nature of the riddle continues to remain a mystery to this day. That is why it is so difficult to define it. Disputes about whether one should know the answer in advance or look for it in the process of guessing continue to occur. It is interesting to note that the term “riddle” has different names in the Mongolian languages: in the modern Kalmyk language the riddle is called *teelurte tuul* meaning the ‘narration with an answer’, in Buryat it is called *taabari* – the ‘answer’, in Khalkha-Mongolian it is called *onsogo* (*onsogo taavar*) – the ‘answer’. In any case, one has to guess something mysterious.

As the key features of the text of the riddle, scientists call allegory and metaphoricity. The riddle gives an allegorical description of an object or phenomenon of reality “on the basis of the similarity between the hidden object and the one that replaces it in the riddle” (Bogatyrev, 1971, p. 82). The sought-after objects are the objects of extra-linguistic reality. Taylor’s classification of riddles is based not on a hidden, coded object of reality (enigma), but on the figurative component of the riddle (Taylor, 1951). Riddles develop a primary juxtaposition given in a dummy word, where “an object, which is failed to mention, is presented descriptively by pointing to one, less often two of its features. The image is built on the basis of highlighting some conspicuous feature” (Anikin, 1957, p. 164).

Solving riddles required knowledge of reality, nomadic lifestyle, and natural phenomena. The riddle developed the mind, ingenuity, observation. It taught how to perceive the world in all its versatility. It is no coincidence that the Mongolian proverb says *Onsogo khelsen hun tsetsen, Onsogo taasan hen ternees tsetsen* meaning ‘Wise is the one who asked the riddle, but that person is wiser who guessed it’.

In 2007, the collection *Proverbs, Sayings and Riddles of Kalmyks of Russia and Oirats of China* (compiled by Todayev) was published. It was prepared based on the expeditionary materials and archival research collected by the compiler during the linguistic expeditions to study languages and dialects of Mongolian peoples in China in 1954-1957 (Todaeva, 2007).

In 2011, Birtalan first published the texts of riddles in Balint’s notes in facsimile, Latin transliteration and translation into English. Gabor Balint wrote down 23 riddles among the Kalmyks and included them in his manuscript under the title *‘täilyätä tūli’* (*təəlhtə tuul*) meaning ‘a narrative with a guess’. Modern Kalmyks know a slightly different name for this folklore genre – *‘tālwrtā tūl’* (*təəlvrtə tuul*). In any case, these are synonyms. The nouns *teellh* and *teelur* have the following meanings: 1) ‘explanation, commentary, and interpretation’; 2) ‘guess, solution; the answer to the riddle’. They are derived from one verb *teel* – ‘to explain, guess, solve’ with the help of different suffixes – *-lh-* and *-vr-*. By the way, Kotwicz cites both terms for the riddle in “clear writing”: *tailyatai tūli and tailbartai tūli*. The riddle is a poorly investigated genre in Kalmyk folklore studies. In Kalmyk folklore studies, separate articles are devoted to the scientific understanding of riddles (Erdnieva, 2017; Seleeva, 2013; 2014; Ustieva, 2009). Even less studied is the language of riddles, i.e. a unique linguistic phenomenon.

## 2. Problem Statement

The genre definition of a riddle is an independent research problem. As a working definition, the consideration of traditional riddle as a folklore mini-text with a question-and-answer structure was taken. The riddle consists of two parts: the enigmat-answer (the “sought-for” word denoting denotata) and the enigmator-question (the description of the substitute for the enigmatic object). Moreover, one enigmator can have several enigmat and vice versa. The question part of the riddle requires decoding. In another words the riddle must be solved. Perhaps the riddle served as a dichotomy marker of *evre/kher* meaning ‘friend/foe’ in the traditional Kalmyk society.

## 3. Research Questions

The object of this research is the Kalmyk floristic riddle as a mini-text. It seems important to identify the role of vocabulary in the development of the flora-like system of the Kalmyk “enigmatic” tradition as a component of the all-Mongol nomadic worldview. This will be a contribution to the reconstruction of the worldview of native speakers and the corresponding fragment of the Kalmyk linguistic picture of the world.

## 4. Purpose of the Study

To determine the semantic relationship between the enigmator (the enigmatic text) and the enigmat (the answer), it is necessary to identify the lexical composition of both parts of the riddles, to compose the vocabulary separately. The aim of the research is to identify and characterize the thematic groups of the words found in the enigmat and enigmator parts of the floristic riddle.

## 5. Research Methods

In the course of the study, the methods of ethnolinguistic analysis were used, which were previously tested on the material of color-denoting and toponymic vocabulary (Omakayeva, 2009, 2012).

## 6. Findings

In the process of ethnolinguistic analysis of the text of the riddle, the concept of a code (in our case it is plant) is used. The cultural code is a “net” spread by the culture around the world. The culture also divides the world into segments, categories, and structures (Krasnykh, 2002). The socializing and didactic functions of the riddle are associated with the problem of assimilating codes.

The codes of Kalmyk riddle are conventionally divided into three groups:

1) Natural code associated with substantive cluster, i.e. “natural facts” (geographical or landscape subcode; floristic (phytomorphic) or plant subcode; zoological (zoomorphic) or animalistic subcode; body or anatomic subcode).

2) Parametric code associated with the “parameter” cluster (coloristic or color subcode, numerological or numerical subcode, etc.).

3) Cultural code associated with the “material and spiritual culture” cluster (economic subcode, artifact subcode, social subcode, gastronomic or food subcode, architectural subcode, etc.).

Thus, biomorphic riddles can be distinguished, including zoomorphic and phytomorphic ones. The phytomorphic subcode of a culture is associated with human ideas about flora.

We refer to the “natural facts” cluster as biolexemes, that is, the names of the animal (zoolexeme) and plant (florolexeme) world. The names of plants are often used to create a figurative characteristic of both the person himself and related objects, concepts, and phenomena. A typical feature of riddles is the definition of any property, quality, or detail of what is described.

In the corpus of Kalmyk riddles, the main method of encoding an object is metaphor. In a metaphorical image, ordinary things are presented in a completely new light. Metaphorical coding of enigmata can be based on replacing the name of the encoded phenomenon / object based on its similarity to another phenomenon / object. The enigmatic object is often disguised as a plant, be it a flower or a grass.

- **badm tsetsg** – ‘lotus’: *Baakhn nuurt badm tsetsg hanqkhna* (təgts) ‘In a small lake there shines lotus’ (lamp); *Barun biid – badm tsetsg* (gerin ezn) ‘On the right side (of the yurt) there is a lotus flower’ (the owner of the yurt) (Todaeva, 2007);
- **tsetsg** – ‘flower’: *Zun biid – zurkn tsetsg* (gerin ezn em) ‘On the left side (yurts) there is a flower of the heart’ (the hostess of the house) (Todaeva, 2007);
- **shuura** – ‘sedge’: *Shukhud – Shuura* (shin irsn ber) (Kravchenko, 1940) ‘In the corner’ there is a sedge’ (newly made daughter-in-law).

This riddle in Basangov’s collection is given under No. 263. The following question may immediately arise: What is the connection between the daughter-in-law and the sedge? The Kalmyks are the nomadic people whose main wealth was four types of livestock (sheep, cows, horses and camels). Therefore, the nomad was always near the water bodies. On the soil rich in moisture, many herbs grow, including sedge. Therefore, it is no coincidence that sedge, rich in moisture, is mentioned in this riddle, as well as the newly arrived daughter-in-law in tears.

- **sharlzhn** – ‘weeds’: *Sharlzhna yozurt sharh shakha* (arat) (Kravchenko, 1940) ‘In the roots of the weeds there is a light yellow alchik’ (fox).

A number of florolexemes recorded by us are included in the thematic subgroup “Names of Trees”. Let us consider some of them.

One of the florolexemes belonging to the category of frequency is the *modn* hyperlexeme meaning ‘tree’. For example, in the text of one riddle it is said that under a tree (*mIodn*) there is a uvula (*khoolyn kuukn*), in another riddle it is about a cradle (*olge*) hiding under a tree (*modn*), in the third riddle a finger is associated with the tree: *Hatllkhna amnd hantskhn modn* (*khoolyn kuukn*), i.e. ‘Lonely tree at the crossin’ (uvula); *Bok modyg bəgrkh seekhn, Bəkunin duug sonskhd səəkh* (əlgətə kəvyn) meaning ‘It is nice to throw a strong tree. It is nice to hear a mosquito’ squeak (a child in a cradle); *Aralzhn-saralzhn modnd altn eməl tokhata* (*biltsg*) meaning ‘A golden saddle put on a branchy tree’ (ring on the finger).

Some of the Balint riddles are known from other folklore collections. In the publication of Balint’s riddles, the last riddle is given under No. 3 in two versions: 1) *Araljñ-saraljñ modnd Altn eməl toxata*; 2) *Arwyr-sarwyr modn Altn eməl toxātē* (c. 45).

In Kalmyk riddles one may come across the names of the following trees: *burhsn* – ‘willow’, *zandn* – ‘sandal’, *yashl* – ‘buckthorn’, *agch* – ‘maple’, *kharha* – ‘larch’. This diversity is associated with Dzungaria, the historical homeland of modern Kalmyks, on the territory of which these trees grew.

In this context, the interest is raised by florolexema *sandal*, which designates two different plants from the sandalwood family: *Pterocarpus santalinus* and *Santalum album*. As for the white Indian sandalwood (*Santalum album*), which grows only in southern India, Indonesia and the Malay archipelago, it is in danger of extinction.

*Pterocarpus* sandalwood belongs to a fairly numerous group of red dye trees (35 species) growing in the southeast of Asia, Australia, the island territories of the Pacific Ocean, Africa and Latin America. It is a small evergreen tree with a deep red wood. The name of this tree is often found in the texts of the Kalmyks’ oral folk art: in the heroic epic *Dzhangar*, songs, and proverbs. Florolexeme *zandn* can be referred to in folklore texts as a mythical tree, for example, in a Kalmyk folk song this word is used precisely in this sense: *Halvr zandn bolad, halglzh zuudndm uzgdñach* ‘I see you in my dreams like a mythical sandal’.

In the Kalmyk riddles the following example was found: *Zamin khooch zandn burahar tuuzh* (tolha samlkh) – ‘The monastic shepherd ran the sheep with a sandal rod’ (comb the hair); *Ehr zandn modn arvn khoir salata, Arvn khoir saladn hurvn zun ulushg almn unzhzhana* (zhil, sarmud, ødrnud) – ‘The sandal tree has twelve branches. On these twelve branches, there are more than three hundred apples’ (the year, months and days (Todaeva, 2007).

It should also be noted that such florolexemes as *agch* meaning ‘maple’, *kharha* meaning ‘larch’, *burhsn* meaning ‘willow’, *yashl* meaning ‘buckthorn’: *Agch aahin kev seekhn* (chire) – ‘The shape of a maple cup is beautiful’ (face); *Altn kharha kantskhn khadasta* (kymni kiisn) – ‘Golden larch with a single nail’ (navel); *Burkhan burhsar huidkh* (nud chirmkh) – ‘To lash your idol (burkhan) with willow twig’ (to blink); *Uutar duurn yashl* (mahla dotr beesn kukl) – ‘Leather bag full of buckthorns’ (braid under the hat); *Barana ard bag yashl* (arhmzh; kuukn kuune tevg) – ‘There is a buckthorn behind the trunk with belongings’ (a rope; girl’s braid) (Todaeva, 2007).

Among the names of other plants in Kalmyk riddles, the lexemes *hulsn* meaning ‘cane’ and *ovsn* meaning ‘grass’ are most often encountered. Since childhood, every Kalmyk was aware of the anatomy of humans and animals, therefore, such words as *sakhl* (beard), *kiisn* (navel), *chire* (face), etc. often appear in the answers to such riddles. So, in the riddles, the eyelashes “put on” a mask of cane, and a beard a mask of grass. Here the comparison is based on external similarity: *Erg deer – ervhr øvsn* (sahl) – ‘On the hill there is a sparse grass sticking out’ (beard); *Togrg nuurin kovəd toguled hulsn urhzh* (surmsg) – ‘A reed has grown around a round lake’ (eyelashes). The names of not only the plants themselves, but also their parts are actively used in the texts of the riddles (*buchr* – ‘branch’, *zhahaml* – ‘stem’, *bura* – ‘vine, khamtkhasn – ‘leaf’): *hatlhna amn deer – hanikhn bura* (khoolyn kuukn) – ‘At the beginning of the ford there is a lonely vine’ (uvula); *bura – Ahud – altn bura* (hol) ‘In the space there is a golden vine’ (river); *Khoir ik khamthasn unzhzh beene* (chikn) – ‘There is pair of large leaves hanging’ (ears); *Eædrhne tsaad biid* – / *Erə holta zhahaml* (khoolyn kuukn) – ‘On the other side of Astrakhan’ / Small green stalk’ (uvula) (Todaeva, 2007).

The dendrological names were found in the enigmatic part of the Kalmyk riddles; partitive designations (parts of a plant) and names of wild-growing herbs. The answers are represented by such lexical clusters as: 1) somatisms (eyelashes, ears, uvula); 2) landscape vocabulary (water bodies); 3) gender anthropolexics: *ber* (daughter-in-law), *kovun* (boy); 4) subject vocabulary of material culture: *tsogts* (lamp), *olge* (cradle), *biltsg* (ring); 5) temporal vocabulary: *zhil* (year), *sar* (month), *odr* (day).

Based on the material presented in this article not only monolexemes, but also phrases appear as an enigmat of riddles. Here is an example: *Zhirhne tsa æçirn ball tolhata hən (terene tolha)* – ‘Behind the mirage there are sixty yellow-headed sheep’ (**ears of wheat**). This riddle reflects the Kalmyks’ idea of wheat ears as 60 yellow-headed sheep. The correlation of “sheep” and “ears” is based on the metaphorical model of zoofact and phytofact, which is so close to nomads. Implicitly, this riddle reflects the view of the nomads at the surrounding endless space covered with ears of wheat as if filled with sheep, since the number 60 marks the century.

## 7. Conclusion

The plant names in riddles reflect not only the ontological properties of botanical realities, but also archetypal ideas about the flora. Florolexemes play an important role in the reconstruction of the corresponding fragment of the linguistic picture of the world of the nomad Kalmyks. The practical significance of the study is that its results can be used for a comparative analysis of the texts of floristic riddles belonging to different ethnocultural traditions, as well as for studying other thematic classes of Kalmyk riddles.

## Acknowledgments

The study was supported by 2020 intra-university grant No. 1120, Kalmyk State University named after B.B. Gorodovikov.

## References

- Anikin, V. P. (1957) *Russian folk proverbs, sayings, riddles and children's folklore*. Uchpedgiz.
- Anikin, V. P. (1981). Metaphor in riddles. *Artistic means of Russian folk poetry: Symbol. Metaphor. Parallelism* (pp. 53–66). Moscow.
- Bogatyrev P. G. (1971). *Questions of the theory of folk art*. Iskusstvo.
- Cook, E. (2006) *Enigmas and Riddles in Literature*. Cambridge University Press.
- Dandes A. (2003). *Folklore: semiotics and/or psychoanalysis* (pp. 30–42). United humanitarian publishing house.
- Erdnieva, E. V. (2017). Comparison in Kalmyk riddles. *Kalmyk University Bulletin*, 3(35).
- Kenges-Maranda, E. (1978). The logics of riddles. *Paremiological collection: Proverb. Riddle* (pp. 249–282). Nauka, Chief ed. east lit.
- Kenges-Maranda, E. (1984). *Theory and Practice of Riddle Analysis* (pp. 47–60). Science.
- Krasnykh, V. V. (2002). *Ethnopsycholinguistics and cultural linguistics*. Gnosis.
- Kravchenko, I. I. (1940). Kalmyk proverbs and riddles. *Soviet Ethnography*, 3, 177–184.
- Lazutin, S. G. (1977). Metaphor in riddles. *Questions of poetics of literature and folklore* (pp. 34–49). Voronezh.
- Levin Yu. I. (1978). Semantic structure of riddle. *Paremiological collection* (pp. 283–314). Nauka, Chiev. ed. east lit.

- Maranda, E. K. (1971). The logic of riddles. *Structural Analysis of Oral Tradition*, 189–232.
- Nikolaeva, T. M. (1994). *Riddle and Proverb: Social Functions and Grammar. Research in the field of Balto-Slavic spiritual culture. Riddle as text* (pp. 143–177). Indrik.
- Omakayeva, E. U. (2009). Colorative image of ethnic culture: lingua-color picture of the world and basic chromatic vocabulary in Mongolian languages (problem statement). *United Kalmykia in United Russia: Through the Centuries to the Future*, 269–276. Dzhangar.
- Omakayeva, E. U. (2012). Toponymy of Xinjiang as a reflection of the Oirato-lingual culture of the region: ethnolinguistic aspect. *Bulletin of Kalmyk Institute for Humanitarian Research RAS*, 4, 162–174.
- Pepicello, W. J., & Green, T. A. (1984). *Language of riddles: new perspectives*. The Ohio State University Press.
- Seleeva, Ts. B. (2013). On Kalmyk riddles: on the problem of comparative typological variability of numerical riddles in the folklore of the Mongolian peoples. *Mongolian studies*, 6, 71–93.
- Seleeva, Ts. B. (2014). Variation of Kalmyk folk riddles. *Oriental Studies*, 3, 151–156.
- Taylor, A. (1951). *English Riddles from oral Tradition*. Cambridge University Press.
- Todaeva, B. Kh. (2007). *Proverbs, sayings and riddles of the Kalmyks of Russia and the Oirats of China*. Elista: Dzhangar.
- Tolstaya, S. M. (2010). *Semantic categories of language and culture. Essays on Slavic Ethnolinguistics*. Moscow.
- Toporov, V. N. (2006). Towards reconstruction of “enigmatic” prototext (about the language of the riddle). *Research on etymology and semantics* (Vol. 2, pp. 471–483). Book. 2. Indo-European languages and Indo-European studies.
- Tsivyan, T. V. (1994) The answer in the riddle: the solution to the riddle? *Research in the field of Balto-Slavic spiritual culture: A riddle as a text* (pp. 178–214).
- Ustieva, I. S. (2009). Thematic composition and genre specificity of Kalmyk folk riddles. *Bulletin of the Institute for Comprehensive Research of Arid Territories*, 2(2), 136–140.
- Zhurinsky, A. N. (1989). *Semantic structure of riddle: Non-metaphorical transformation of meaning*. Nauka.