Shona Reasoning Skills in Zimbabwe: The Importance of Riddles

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Abstract

Riddles are important logical tools in the traditional Shona system of education. While Shona riddles have important functions like socialisation and recreation, this paper is focused on the functions of riddles in sharpening one's reasoning skills and quickness of wit, and attempts to show how riddles foster quick mental flexibility on the part of the child as he/she grapples with different possibilities and probabilities in the search for correct answers to given riddles. The process of solving riddles involves logical inference and the justification for answers based on reasoned analysis of the posed riddle. It is for this reason than that we argue that Shona riddles apprentices reasoning skills and ideas that enables a person to comprehend reality.

Introduction

Riddles (*zvirahwe*) are a central aspect of the system of education of the Shona people of Zimabawe. Thus, they are part and parcel of a plethora of ways through which the traditional Shona of Zimbabwe not only sharpened the reasoning skills of the young but also provided recreation to participants. The search for solutions to riddles challenges the Shona child to think abstractly, broadly and deeply while their figurative language gives the child the chance to uncover their meaning through a reasoning process. The answer to a given riddle acts as a conclusion of the logical process and it is often a one word answer which both precise and clear to the participants. In Shona society, riddles promote logical skills and the one who is capable of solving many riddles is arguably more mentally sophisticated than the one who is less capable. That riddles are a permanent feature of the Shona way of life, therefore, uncontested, this prompted Gelfand (1973:5) to commend that "the Shona possess much that is worth retaining and the prospects are that they will save a good deal of it for succeeding generations." Though the tide of Western colonisation and globalisation has swept across the Shona territory, great many aspects of their way of life have been retained and this includes riddles.

The ideal time for posing riddles among the Shona is during the evening around a glowing fire, usually led by an elder when all family members have finished their various chores and are preparing to go to bed. Posing riddles any other time of the day would be considered a nuisance distraction of other important human assignments. For this reason, scholarship takes them as, primarily as a form of recreation rather than a method of instructing the young about important truths about life. However, this paper argues that the core of Shona riddles is their instructive aspect in so far as they endeavour to sharpen the reasoning skills of their apprentices. It, therefore, argues that Shona riddles' primary objective is not recreational but instructional.

Justifying Rationality

The term Shona refers to various linguistic dialect groups who occupy the greater part of Zimbabwe. The northern region of Zimbabwe is occupied by the people of the Korekore dialect that also covers the greater part of the Zambezi valley, the central region is occupied by the Zezuru people, while the eastern part of the country is occupied by the Manyika who also spill over in the western parts of Mozambique. The Ndau people occupy the south of the region occupied by the Manyika people, while the Karanga group is found in Masvingo province. The last group of the Shona people are the Kalanga who occupy the area that is dominated by the Ndebele people in the western part of Zimbabwe. The Ndebele are the Ngoni group that was originally part of the Zulu kingdom of South Africa but fled into Zimbabwe and settled in her western region in the 18th Century after some clashes with Shaka, king of the Zulu people.

There has been a contentious debate between African and Western scholars concerning a case for a legitimate talk of rationality among traditional African societies like that of the Shona people. In light of this, therefore, one cannot talk of rationality among the Shona people in particular without addressing the question of rationality among Africans in general. This debate is often tied to the question of whether African philosophy is possible or exists. According to Ramose (1999), the debate on whether there is African philosophy, could hardly have been initiated by indigenous African people but by western scholarship. Western scholars tended to attribute rationality to western indigenous societies and denied it among traditional African societies including the Shona society. In light of this denial of philosophy among Africans, Ramose (ibid: 2) contends that "the sceptic, unswervingly committed to the will to remain ignorant is simply dismissive of any possibility, let alone the probability of African philosophy." Ramose identifies Hegel (1956), Kant (1959) and Hume (1965) as among the sceptics of the possibility of African philosophy. In line with this observation, Winch (1970:79) asserts that, "reason is singled out as the most essential quality of human beings though it is surprisingly denied to other groups of people especially indigenous groups." Therefore, the exercise of rationality through the riddle posing and answering justifies our contention that rationality is a key attribute of Shona people's culture. Ramose (1999: 42) notes that rationality is one among many qualities considered to be relevant in the definition of a human being that has been singled out, especially by western tradition, as the distinctive quality that is decisive for the inclusion or exclusion of others from membership of homo sapiens. However, he (ibid: 44) is quick to point out that, "…there is no ontological defect among indigenous African people by virtue of which they may be excluded from membership of homo sapiens." It, therefore, follows that the Shona people as one among a plethora of African social groupings cannot be denied rationality since there is nothing substantial that differentiate Africans from people of other continents.

Other scholars have seen the denial of reason among traditional African societies by Western scholars as both unjustified and logically flawed. For Churchland (1984:73), "from the point of view of philosophy of mind, brain activity is a concrete manifestation of rationality among all human beings." This point shows that there is no valid point of excluding other social groups such as the Shona people from the domain of rationality since rationality is a universal attribute of human beings. In addition, Washburn (1975:48) maintains that biological anthropology has demonstrated man's capacity to think through practical problems as a universal phenomenon contrary to the views some scholars. This shows that the denial of reason to traditional Shona society is invalid that lacks rational justification. Sartre (1969:xxxvi) contends that, "intentional reflective consciousness is man's capacity to think about his very act of thinking and this capacity is found among all human beings." Following the above reasoning, it follows that traditional Shona societies were rational and it is the contention of this paper that riddles are among a multiplicity of tools through which rational skills were developed even among Shona children. The Shona people have demonstrated logical skills in the formulation and provision of solutions to riddles. In addition, these logical skills are not only found among adults and but are inculcated into the young thorough riddle posing and answering.

Understanding Shona Riddles

Riddles are an important aspect of Shona culture and their form and content are primarily reflective of their life settings and the challenges that the people face at a given time. Chesaina (1994:14) defines riddles as "…puzzles or word play." This definition shows that riddles involve two main aspects namely, reasoning as implied by puzzles and recreation as indicated by play. For Beuchat (1965:182), the linguistic structure of Bantu riddles, to a greater extent, cannot be translated into English. This is because their linguistic structure are culture and or language bound so much so that they cannot be translated form one language to another and retain their important linguistic features. This is true of Shona riddles. The kind of interpretation that scholars from outside the Shona ethnic grouping have imposed on there are fraught with a lot of distortions in their endeavour to translate them into other languages.

The linguistic structure of riddles can be distinguished from their folkloristic structure. Folkloristic structure refers "…to logical semantic ordering of folklore content and might, for purposes of analysis, be considered independent of linguistic structure" (ibid: 182). For her, one type of folkloristic structure found in riddles is a pattern of contradiction in which the second of a pair of elements of a riddle denies a logical or natural attribute of the first. For her (1965: 182) a Shona riddle, *chine maziso asi hachioni* (it has eyes but it cannot see) would be considered grossly illogical in that the second element "cannot see" negates a natural attribute of the first element, "eyes." For her, therefore, folkloristic structures are not bound by the nature of particular languages as with linguistic structure and can survive translation from one language to another. Thus, for one to grasp Bantu riddles, one must know the language in which the riddle is related in order to guard against distortions that go with translating a riddles from one language to another. In the same manner, those who understand the Shona language can adequately comprehend the philosophical import of Shona riddles without undue distortions.

Riddles are a method of instruction that is crucial in imparting knowledge and sharpening memory and reasoning ability of both the young and the old. Raun in Gelfand (1979) notes, and rightly so that the educational value of riddles because their solutions depends on the child's ability to provide a relevant answers to the posed riddle. For Gelfand (ibid: 131), "…findings confirm that this method of instruction is useful in forming the memory and reasoning powers of the child. In his attempt to solve the riddles, he has to consider different possibilities and probabilities and through repeated questioning, he comes to know many of what is happening around him." Solving a puzzle or a riddle is a source of great intellectual pleasure and it may involve a game in which one child challenges another and the winner is the one who knows most. The asking and answering of a riddle among the Shona has a formula. In this formula, a child or elder may challenge another by inviting him to swap riddles with him by saying *hatiite zvirahwe* (lets us do riddles) and the other answers, *gonera ndakutangira* (honey, I have anticipated you) (ibid). *Gonera*, for Gelfand, points to a hive in a rockfall of honey and thus its implication is that the challenger has many riddles to ask.

The person or group of persons challenged to engage in the game of *zvirahwe* normally starts posing the riddles and it would be the turn of the challenger(s)to ask and the other person(s) answers. The game of *zvirahwe* continues until one of them finds he has no more to ask. When one group or person admits that they no longer have any more to ask, the other group or person claims victory. Thus, in this game, the one who is more knowledgeable leads his side to victory.

Though it is somehow misleading to regard riddle posing as a game, they remain essential for the education of the young. For Gelfand (1979:85), "…a good deal of this informal instruction takes place after the evening meal at the *dare* (men's meeting place) where the grandfather relates stories to the boys or tells them proverbs and what taboos they should know, or asks them riddles. In the sane way the grandmother talks to her granddaughters around the fire place in the hut." Posing of riddles is, therefore, more than just a mere game that takes place between one person or a group of persons and another. They are essentially crucial in sharpening the mind and the thought processes of the participants as well as a useful teaching method. For Gelfand (ibid), the game of riddles helps the young to learn about the existence of social values and equips him with yardsticks to measure them. Through the form of a game where there are two opposing sides, one asking and the other answering at a given point in time, important truths about life are learnt disguised as a game. The entertainment associated with winning or answering a posed riddle helps important truths about life to stick into the minds of the young.

The Logical Import of Shona Riddles

Shona riddles employ skills of reasoning, which fall under the branch of philosophy called logic. Maritain (1979: 109) defines Logic as "…a means to help us reason correctly and efficiently in the attainment of truth." The key component of logic is reasoning. Reasoning is the process by which new conclusions are arrived at on the basis of known statements. Hurley (1995) identifies two types of reasoning used by logicians namely inductive and deductive reasoning. This paper focuses on inductive reasoning as it is closely linked to the reasoning used in Shona riddles. For Govier (2005:292) "inductive reasoning is that in which we extrapolate from experience to further conclusions." The key assumption that governs inductive reasoning is that known cases can provide information about unknown cases. For instance, in the Shona riddle *chitima chemusango* (the wild train) the known case is the train (*chitima)* and the unknown case is the organism that resembles a train. This organisation is a millipede. There is an analogy between a train and a millipede in that just as a train has many wheels, a millipede has many legs. In addition, the divisions in the body of a millepede resemble the couches of a train. Thus, the one who knows the attributes of a train must be able to infer a thing that shares similar attributes with a train.

The type of inductive reasoning used in Shona riddles is, therefore argument from analogy. For Horner and Westacott (2000:66), "an analogy is a similarity between two things or situations, for example, a teenager going to college is analogous to a young bird being pushed out of a nest." This implies that every analogical inference proceeds from the similarity of things in one or more respects to similarity of those things in some further respects. An analogical argument is therefore, one in which it is concluded that two entities, alike in some respects are therefore alike in some other respects. This means that an argument from analogy begins by using one case usually agreed and relevantly easy to understand to illuminate or clarify another, usually less clear case. The basis of drawing an analogy is, therefore, relevant similarity between the cases.

By application, the search for solutions to Shona riddles involves the use of analogical reasoning. The Shona closely observe a relevant similarity between the clue to a given riddle and the answer to the riddle. However the Shona have carefully noted that when two things are considered together, there will always be both similarities and differences between them. To make use of analogical reasoning in the context of riddles, the Shona reflect on both similarities and differences and discern how relevant they are in arriving at the solution to the riddle in question.

Shona Riddles as Trainers of Reasoning Skills

The content of Shona riddles is varied. This makes them quite challenging because for one to be able to successfully respond to them, one must be well versed with a plethora of things in nature and beyond. Such knowledge would make the inference from a known thing as depicted in the riddle much quicker and easier than in a situation in which the recipient of a riddle is ignorant of many things that surrounds him. The range of things that Shona riddles deal in includes natural phenomena, the zoological world, crops, the human body and utensils. These categories are based on the answers to the riddles in the sense that for a riddle to fall under natural phenomena, for instance, the answer to it should point to an aspect of nature. Thus, for a person to come up with correct answer to a riddle, he must be familiar with many aspects of reality, natural and man-made, from which he derives an appropriate answer to a given riddle.

Riddles based on Natural Phenomena

Natural phenomena refer to the totality of the aspects of the universe in general. Riddles based on natural phenomena are those whose answers reflect aspects of the universe. These riddles require the child to observe and discern the important properties of his or her surroundings. These surroundings include the moon, stars, galaxies, mountains, rivers, wind and light. Riddles whose answers are formulated around these features promote reasoning based on the natural environment as the child thinks through possibilities and probabilities in an attempt to come up with a correct answer to a given riddle.

The first riddle under this class is:

Nikodima nemhuri yake
(Nicodimus and his family)

Show that some Shona riddles, just like other aspects of their culture have been affected by foreign influences. This is manifested by the use of foreign words or when the riddle itself describes an object or custom that primarily Western in origin (Beuchat, 1965: 201). In the above riddle, the word *Nicodima* might be a derivation from the biblical figure, Nicodimus who could have come to be known among the Shona through their interactions with Christian literature from the Western world. In this riddle, the Shona child is supposed to use his reasoning skills to infer some natural phenomena that can be roughly likened to a family setting. The answer to the riddle is the moon and the stars.

The analogy between Nicodimus and his family, and the moon and stars demands the child to draw some relevant similarities between the two in order to be certain of his answer. The clue to the riddle is deliberately misleading since the child may first of all propose a real family as the answer to the riddle. Further attempts may take the child to settings such as a bird and its young ones, a beehive or the queen termite and other termites. All these attempts are limited because each of the above mentioned settings could easily be displaced by human activities. The moon and the stars are the most appropriate answer because they are apparently fixed and beyond human action and control. The logic involved in the riddle is that of analogical reasoning and the similarity between the moon and the stars and a human family is a product of observation and precise thinking. The moon stands out outstanding surrounded by a maze of stars just like *Nicodima* with his family members.

The second riddle under this category is:

Munin'ina wangu haasiyani neni
(My young brother/sister is always with me)

The answer to the riddle is a human shadow. Among the Shona, a close bond exists between brothers and or sisters to the extent that it can be likened to the inseparability of a shadow from the object that gives birth to it. The answer to the riddle, the human shadow, is likened to the relationship between someone and his young brother/sister whereby he/she is always in the company of the elder brother. The reasoning skills involved here is that of inference. The child should think of natural phenomenon that is always besides someone in the presence of light and that is a shadow. In the process of drawing the solution to the riddle, the child might think of possibilities such as clothes, body parts and so on but these answers are inadequate since the solution must consist of a whole distinct thing. Logically, the shadow is justified as the most appropriate answer because it is always besides someone provided there is light.

This sharp awareness of the pattern of shadows and the skills of inference educate the Shona child in inductive reasoning skills. In addition, once the child gets the logic behind the connection of the shadow and one's young brother, the child learns to be logically sophisticated. The metaphor used in the riddle trains the child not think in simplistic terms but to be logically analytic.

The third riddle under this particular group is:

Kapoto kaduku kanogutsa mhuri yose
(The small pot whose contents satisfy the whole family)

The answer to the above riddle is fire because a small glowing fire can give warmth to the whole family just as a small pot of food can provide satisfaction to the whole family members. Among traditional Shona society, a fire is lit in the middle of a kitchen. This strategic location of the fireplace is meant to ensure that all family members can gather around it so that they can all get sufficient warmth. The lighting of one fire at a homestead where all family members gather around it is important in cementing close family relationships just as food cooked for the whole family and eaten by all family members achieve a similar objective.

In this riddle, there is an analogy between fire and the contents of a small pot that satisfy the whole family. The emphasis in this riddle is put on the effectiveness of a small but fully glowing fire as sufficient in providing warmth to the whole family in the same way a well-prepared small meal can provide satisfaction to the whole family. In an attempt to find a solution to the riddle, the child might suggest something that is edible or even a real pot. These attempts are clearly defective since they take the riddle literally. The riddle trains the child to go out of the context and think outside the concrete surroundings of the formulation of the riddle.

Fire is likened to the contents of a pot that bring satisfaction to an entire family because fire has the capacity to give warmth to several people at the same time. The deliberate use of the idea of a pot is meant to hide the answer and challenge the recipient of the riddle to think of a plethora of possibilities and probabilities in his search for a correct answer. In the process of searching for the correct answer to the riddle, the child learns to relate the satisfaction drawn from food and that of fire. When the child succeeds in relating these two apparently different things, he learns how to reason analogically. However this reasoning ability is developed in the very task of searching for solutions to riddles since logical skills cannot be trained without performance of specific tasks.

Riddles based on the Zoological World

The Shona also use riddles whose solutions are based on the behavioural patterns of animals to train reasoning skills. This group of riddles requires the Shona child to be aware of the animal world that becomes the basis of inference in his quest to arrive at the correct answer to riddles.

If the child is ignorant of the zoological features involved, he or she cannot draw the required answers. Solutions to this category of riddles are based on the ecosystem or organisms within the ecosystem such as animals, insects and birds.

The first riddle under this category is:

Kamusikana kakasunga chiuno
(The small girl whose waist is tied closely)

In the above riddle, the wasp is the solution to the riddle. A wasp has a very thin waist that is likened to a small girl who has fastened his waist with some belt to the extent that it becomes thinner compared to the either sides of the body. In this riddle, the small girl is being likened to a wasp. However, the use of the idea of a girl is intended to hide the answer to the riddle. In an attempt to find a solution to the riddle, the child might think in terms of a real girl or female animals. The part between the wasp's abdomen and its lower dimension is taken to resemble the girl's fastened waist. In order to come up with the answer, the child should be aware of the anatomical features of a wasp. The inference is based on the link between the girl's fastened waist and the part of the wasp that resembles this. Once the child can relate the two, the answer can be inferred. However, the inference is not one of chance but a thoroughly logical one. In hiding behind the girl, the riddle challenges the child to think in terms of zoology in his quest to come up with the correct answer. Once the answer is given, the logical relationship between the clue to the riddle and its solution enhances the reasoning powers of the child. Physically distinct things (girl's waist and wasp's part) are logically related in the process of analogical reasoning thereby educating the child's reasoning ability.

The second riddle in this class is:

Imba yamai vangu isina musuo
(My mother's hut without a door)

The answer to the above riddle is an egg. However, it sounds illogical to think of a house that has no door. The challenge is, therefore, upon the child to come up with a thing that houses something but has no door. The egg is being likened to a hut without a door because it houses a small chick but has no opening that we can call a 'door.' In traditional Shona society, huts have doors but granaries do not have doors as such but only small openings. The Shona child might first of all suggest a granary as the answer to the riddle but the limitation of this answer is that the small opening is also a small door. However less appropriate answers may be provided as the child tries to search through possibilities but it is important to note that even if the child does not get the correct answer to the riddle he/she learns to reason if the correct answer is provided.

Awareness of the features of an egg is required. Once the child knows that an egg in its natural state has no opening, and then he or she may work towards the solution. The absence of an opening on an egg is likened to a hut without a door. This similarity is not an obvious one but it requires logic to draw the similarity. By so doing, the reasoning ability and the mental sophistication of the child are undoubtedly enhanced.

The third riddle under this section is:

Chitima chomusango
(The wild train)

The solution to the above riddle is a millipede. This riddle may appear relatively easy but there is complexity in imagining something that may resemble a train. If a recipient of a riddle suggest, for example, a snake as the answer to the riddle the answer logically falls short because while the snake may resemble a train in terms of the manner in which it moves, it lacks an important attribute of having legs on both sides of its body just as the train has wheels on both sides of its body. Thus, the link between the two is rejected on the grounds of these dissimilarities.

The likening of a millipede to a train is a product of sharp observation and logical inference whereby the recipient of the riddle has to think deeply in order to come up with something that resembles train but lives in the bush. The child is supposed to uncover this riddle through a pattern of thought by which incorrect answers are eliminated and the correct one identified. Thus, the justification of the analogy between the real train and a millipede is a reasoned one. A train and millipede share a numbers of properties one of which is that their bodies have divisions that enable them to move with relative ease thereby giving them the capacity to negotiate curves. The other common feature shared by a train and a millipede is that while the train has wheels on both sides of its body, a millipede has legs on both sides of its body. In addition, a train moves slowly just like a millipede. However, it is important note that the type of train that traditional Shona were aware of is the steam train whose speed is lesser than of contemporary speed trains. A combination of the above similarities allows the Shona child to apply analogical reasoning in drawing up the most appropriate answer to the riddle.

Riddles based on Crops and other Foods

The third section consists of riddles whose solutions are based on crops and other foodstuffs available in the Shona society. Riddles that fall under this section depend on the child's ability to relate a given riddle to a correct crop or food. Thus, for one to be able to answer riddles under this classification correctly, one has to be well versed with important features of a variety of crops and foods. Accordingly, the child's familiarity with foodstuffs such as sadza, chilli, mealie-cobs, pumpkins and milk are necessary for drawing up solutions to the riddles. However, mere familiarity with food items is not sufficient to provide the most appropriate answer to the riddle since reasoning ability is required in order to draw the required link between the known thing (as contained in the riddle) and the unknown thing, that is, the answer to the riddle.

The first riddle in this section is:

Gomo rinopfungaira mhute
(The misty mountain)

The answer to this riddle is sadza. In this riddle, the task of the recipient of the riddle is to draw similarities between steaming sadza and a misty mountain. For a plate of steaming sadza to be likened to a misty mountain (*gomo rinopfungaira mhute*), it must be a huge one just like a mountain that is engulfed by mist (*mhute*). When the child is challenged to provide an answer to this riddle, he may think of a real mountain or some kind of fire that is producing billowing smoke (*utsi*). However, the real task is for the child to draw an analogy between misty mountain and a steamy huge plate of sadza.

Through a logical process, the child links steamy sadza and a misty mountain. Once this has been done, then a solid logical ground for the answer is provided. While steam and mist are two different gaseous substances, they have a common Shona name *utsi.* The answer to the riddle has a logical basis because a huge share of sadza resembles a mountain and the steam that it produces also resembles mist billowing from and swirling around a mountain. Absence of familiarity with both the mountain and sadza may act as an obstacle to the provision of the correct answer to the riddle. However, it does not follow that familiarity with the two automatically provides an answer to the riddle since some inductive reasoning has to be employed in order to relate *gomo rinopfungaira mhute* and a steamy huge share of sadza.

The second riddle in this category is:

Amai vangu vatsvuku asi kuroya chete
(Though light in complexion, my mother is a witch)

Pepper is the answer to the above riddle. Though among the Shona, women who are light in complexion generally regarded as beautiful, they are often viewed with suspicion because they may have some defective elements in their social dealings. They are often suspected of being witches or prostitutes and this compromises their apparent external attractiveness. The apparent vices of women who are light in complexion are likened to the bitter taste and attractive redness of pepper respectively. Pepper is taken as the solution because it appears attractive to the eye yet it is bitter in terms of taste.

In the above riddle, the child goes through the puzzle by drawing a link between the colour of pepper and the light complexion of a woman. Secondly the child is supposed to link the evil practice of witchcraft that are associated with women who are light in complexion to the bitterness of pepper. On the basis of the above inferences, it becomes clear that the answer to the riddle must be something whose apparent attractiveness is compromised by bitterness. In the reasoning process, the analogy between the light complexioned mother and the pepper is drawn. The answer to the riddle can be justified on the basis of logical inference in drawing up the answer.

The third riddle under this category is:

Amai vangu vanozvara asi havafukidzi vana
(My mother bears kids without dressing them)

A pumpkin plant is the answer to the above riddle. The riddle is hidden in the complexity of likening a pumpkin plant to a mother who does not cover her children. This particular riddle requires the Shona child to draw a similarity between a human female parent and a pumpkin plant. Secondly, the child should narrow the answer to precision by thinking of a plant whose fruits are uncovered. A pumpkin becomes the most appropriate answer because while other plants have fruits in the ground or within the branches but the edible parts are covered, the pumpkin is eaten wholly and its fruits are just on the ground. On the basis of the above similarities, the Shona child can infer the solution to the riddle. While the child should be familiar with pumpkins in order to draw the answer, this similarity is not enough since he or she may not be able to reason through the similarity to obtain the answer. In the process, the child should be able to logically eliminate other possibilities and probabilities on the basis of a coherent pattern of reasoning.

Riddles based on the Functions of the Human Body

The fourth section of riddles has riddles whose solutions are based on the structure and functions of the human body. A riddle that falls under this section requires the Shona child to be a keen observer of the structure and function of the human body. He must also be capable of exercising his reasoning capacity in trying to arrive at the correct answer of a given riddle by relating the known things as contained in riddles and the unknown thing that child has to arrive at by using his wit. The first riddle under this section is:

Ndakatarisa ndikatarisa asi ndikashaya
(I searched continuously in vain)

The answer to the above riddle is the back of one's head. It is logically impossible for one to see the back of one's head except with the aid of some gadget such as a mirror. When one turns in order to see the back of his head, the back of his also changes position to a degree that is equidistant that which the front of his head has moved. Therefore, it is logically impossible for one to see his back.

This Shona riddle challenges the child to identify something that is difficult to see as the solution to the riddle. In the process of reasoning out the solution, the child should think of something that one could search for continuously without finding it. If the child takes what is being searched for as a distinct object to the observer, then he or she might move away from the answer. In addition, distinct objects may probably be found and thereby ending the search.

Secondly, the object being searched for must be analogised to the back of one's head. In traditional Shona society, the absence of mirrors made it impossible for people to see the back of their heads. In the riddle, the child must use the knowledge of a human body to reason out an answer to this riddle.

The second riddle in this section goes:

Mombe dzababa vangu chenachena dzega dzega
(My father's cattle are exclusively white in colour)

Human teeth are the answer to the above riddle. In traditional Shona society, white cattle were rare due to the absence of artificial insemination, cloning or any other means of controlled breeding. In most cases, hard Mashona cattle, the dominant breed, were found with white patches rather than being entirely white in colour. Thus, the contention of this riddle that father's cattle are entirely white in colour is a negation of a traditional Shona belief that there is no beast that has a spotless white skin colour. This scenario adds complexity to the riddle and it challenges the child to think of a thing that is entirely white in colour.

In his search for a correct answer to the riddle, the recipient of the riddle should think of (1) white things and (2) the white things as grouped together. The combination of statements (1) and (2) allows the child to eliminate scattered white things as a possible solution to the riddle. Teeth become the reasonable answer to the riddle because they are all white in colour and are found in their numbers in one's mouth. On the basis of premise (1) and (2), the child can logically infer the answer to the riddle. The reasoning involved is that teeth, being exclusively white, become the most appropriate answer to the riddle. The inferential process of drawing the answer, however, is not an easy one. The child must be familiar with the nature of teeth and be able to link this with white cattle. If this can be done, then the logical basis of drawing up the answer is set. The process of doing this undoubtedly enhances the child's skills to infer the answer to the riddle inductively.

In the process of thinking of the solution to the riddle, the Shona child should think of something that can roughly resemble (1) two cities and (2) the two cities in a state of fighting. The link between statements (1) and (2) enable the child to eliminate less appropriate possible answers. Salisbury and Bulawayo are analogous to two eyelids because they stand facing each other as if they are in a confrontational mood. The 'fighting' brings the child closer to the answer because it is similar to the opening and closing of eyelids. If the child has a mental insight to this, the inference can be drawn and the solution to the riddle is provided. Without familiarity with the behaviour of eyelids and the capacity to infer conclusions from given facts, the child may find it extremely difficult to draw the answer to the riddle. It, therefore, takes some reasoning skills on the part of the Shona child to be able to draw solutions to riddles.

Riddles based on Utensils and other Objects

Answers to riddles in this category are based on objects that are used in the Shona society as utensils or instruments. In order for one be able to respond correctly to riddles under this section, one must be familiar with the functions of objects such as doors, drums, stoves, smoking pipes and axes. On the basis of these objects, the child must be able to link the objects or instruments with the clues provided in the riddles through a systematic reasoning process.

The first riddle in this category is:

Kuyenda humbangu kudzoka humbangu
(When it goes, it makes noisy rumble and when it comes back, it also makes some noisy rumble)

The solution to the above riddle is a door. In traditional Shona society, doors to huts were make using locally sourced material such as wood or combination of reeds and wood. The doors were made without precise measurements and this would result in friction between the door and an often-rugged floor. As a result of the materials used coupled with lack of precise measurements, opening and closing of doors would result in some screeching noise. The recipient of the riddle is, therefore, challenged to think of a thing that makes a screeching noise (*humbangu*) when it 'goes' and 'comes back.'

In the process of drawing up the solution to the riddle, the Shona child must think of something that (1) resembles a moving object and (2) the moving object must have the feature of swinging back and forward. In the process of inferring the answer, the child may first think of any possible objects capable of moving forward and backward. However, the moving object must be capable of not only swinging forward and backwards, but must also make a screeching noise. The second stage of the reasoning process that is invoked by this riddle allows the child to eliminate circular or linear motions because he or she must identify something that swings. After eliminating less appropriate answers to the riddle, the traditional Shona door appears as the most distinctive answer because it produces noise due to friction during the process of swinging. The child certainly requires reasoning skills in order to eliminate less appropriate answer and justify the solution to the riddle.

The fifth riddle in this category is:

Ndakwira mugomo nemuurayi
(I have climbed a mountain with a killer)

The answer to the riddle is an axe. While it defies common logic for one to walk along someone whom he knows to be a killer without any fear of getting killed, the riddle solicits for an answer that confirms this apparent impossibility. The riddle challenges the child to think, not of a real killer but of an instrument that resembles a killer or that can be used to kill. The challenge is upon the child to read beyond the literal context of the riddle and infer an appropriate answer.

In thinking through the solution to the riddle, the child must postulate something that resembles (1) a killer (2) and a killer one can go to a mountain with. The second postulation eliminates several possibilities from the first thereby allowing the child to come up with the solution to the riddle. The traditional Shona axe is the most appropriate answer to the riddle because (1) it kills (2) it can be taken to a mountain (for cutting wood). On the basis of (1) and (2) it logically follows that the axe can is the most appropriate answer to the riddle. In thinking through the solution to the riddle, the child uses his or her familiarity with the axe and the behaviour of a killer to draw a logical analogy to the answer.

Conclusion

This paper has shown that riddles are essential tools of logic that help in forming reasoning skills among traditional Shona people. It argued that riddles are crucial in forming the inductive reasoning skills of the Shona child as he or she works through possibilities and probabilities till the most appropriate answer is found for a given riddle. This involves, among others, logical elimination of inappropriate answers to a given riddle on the basis of a reasoned analogy. Solutions to riddles call upon Shona children to be very keen observers of their surroundings primarily because such knowledge is necessary for one to successfully respond to riddles.

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