

## **Contextual Analysis and Documentation of Normative and Linguistic Aspects of Riddles among Afran Qalloo Oromo**

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**Abstract:** Riddles in Oromo are among the children's oral traditions that serve as the bearers of virtuous behaviors in their society. They contribute, by way of entertaining, to the proper growth and development of children which nurture them to be active and creative constituents of their society. Nevertheless, riddle got very low attention and little is being done to ensure that this genre of oral literature is preserved as part of long-living indigenous education system. This research aimed to document Oromo riddles with their underlined and diverse human experiences, knowledge, artistic expression, creativities, philosophical thoughts, linguistic features and imaginations of the society. Available and purposive sampling methods, structured and non-structured interview, both participatory and non-participatory observations, focus group discussion, and text collection were used to gather data, which were analyzed qualitatively. The fundamental procedures of riddles have been described as they are used in contextual settings. Thematically, their elements, social values, artistic thinking, and experiences of the society, philosophical thoughts and linguistic features have critically been examined. And results are found to indicate riddles in Oromo carry moral value and wisdom which are reliable and relevant to the children's development and nurture them to be active and creative members of the society. The researchers, thus, recommend that relevant stakeholders need to come and act together to document, sustain and enhance the values of Oromo riddles.

**Keywords:** Linguistic feature; Normative lesson; Oromo riddles; Social value

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## 1. Introduction

Oral tradition is the bearer of moral values or norms with diverse themes that help children for personal development, normative lessons, linguistic and sociolinguistic skills. Some of the genres of oral literature include oral narratives, songs, proverbs and riddles created by people and handed down to the posterity through the generations and can speak to us and to our children (Chesaina, 1994: viii). The experiences of such oral traditions have been inculcated specially into the children right from the very beginning at the grassroots level where children should actively exercise human moral values (harmony, love, respect, unity, etc) as determinant factors for future generation. Knowledge of moral values are supposed to be originated from small ancestral groups and transmitted to posterity providing the generation with medium of learning (Enoch, 1995: 81). Through the investigation of such values, the community would be provided with vital knowledge and wisdom for social groups which assist them to perform meaningful roles in the community's development and keep enhancement of social norms.

Currently, the prevailing dearth of moral values is observed to affect the generation from actively engaging in many developmental activities. Enoch (1995: 80), for instance, commented that the major problems attached to problems of authority and economy in the former two centuries was found to be the absence of moral values that affect the generation. Indigenous value promoters also argue that due to the less attention they give to moral values, it is difficult to liberate the youth from advocating unpromising and even harmful "Western" traditions and get them focused on their social values. Consequently, there is great threat on the continuity of oral tradition. Riddles, the bearers of various societal values and ethical lessons, significantly solve behavioral problems of the children, and promote or nurture their personal and social developments. Besides, values imbibed in riddles shape the children to be active, creative and logical thinkers. The values encompassed in the riddles are also helpful to regulate relationships among children and their reference groups, and children's relationships with their parents. More importantly, such folk traditions serve the children as the foundation for their psychosocial, personal, cognitive developments, means of entertainment for enhancing their linguistic skills.

In the contemporary informative generation, the issues of children are becoming topical as they will be the societies' central nation building forces. They determine the survival, progress and the future of society and societal norms. Accordingly, oral traditions and folk knowledge in Oromo society have been so vital to healthy and overall development of the children. In line with these, most works so far have been done are very shallow. A few anthropologists, art historians, and non-specialist researchers on the area of Oromo oral traditions (Megersa, 1998; Bitima, 2004; Kedir, 2008) treated issue of children in fragmented manner and their studies received little attraction from the public. Yet, some researches tried to present a compressive view of oral traditions focusing on issues of children. For example, Boru (2017) discussed Guji Oromo folktales giving functional interpretation on the bases of reflecting the norm and moral codes and depicting the socio-cultural, socio-economic and socio-political functions. Jaleta (2013) explores everyday life of Guji

Oromo children in rural context and their participation in performance; interpretation and transmission of oral tradition that help them to learn and process children's social world.

Nonetheless, there are hardly any works done on children's oral tradition in the study area. The absence of proper document seems to be one of the constraints for perpetuating oral traditions especially among the young generation. In this regard, Sumner (1996: 2) argues that the absence of Oromo written literature or language in the past makes it an ideal one to study Oromo oral literature. Even the existing sources of written Oromo traditions articulated both the status of written Oromo traditions and the situations that the Oromo people have sustained over decades and centuries (Tolessa, 2012). This shows the scarce documentations and investigations of this field of study which entails subsequent and urgent systematic actions, calling for thorough investigation and analysis of Oromo oral traditions like riddles at specific setting.

In Oromo society, there are different contexts in which issues of children are seriously taken into consideration. In the Gadaa system, the two primary consecutive age sets/*gaam'oma* (0-8) and *dabballoomaa* (9-16) deal with issues of children emphasizing their roles in the society. Depending on children's level of maturity, several oral traditions can be related at these two age groups. During this time, children enter into the active Gadaa age-set and included in Gadaa to exercise different duties and responsibilities invaluable for their proper growth. Because Gadaa tradition enforces children to get trained in music and folk arts for rich experiences (Haile, 2009: 57), they are assumed to learn good experiences and knowledge through adequate exposure to oral knowledge ultimately discharging certain roles in various social and cultural contexts. On the other hand, Oromo society considers children as their prominent fortunes, and hence, demands oral traditions-riddles and folktales, to express their love, happiness and their respect to children. They use them in various aspects-to nurture their children, make them keen observers, enthusiastic, skillful and active participants in speech events.

This study is intended to promote the significances and thoughts of the society on the potential significance of riddles in local setting by creating further awareness on issues of children from the view of developing their psychological maturity, environmental and socio-cultural knowledge, cognitive ability and linguistic skills. The poor status of the current documentation and studies on oral traditions, observed by the researchers, asserted for more focused if not exhausted, textual documentation of Oromo riddles in the study area. In view of this, the general objective of this research is to document riddles in their contextual settings for further preservation of the imbibed oral wisdom from the perspective of normative lessons and linguistic features.

The word 'riddle' originated from old English word 'redan' meaning 'to guess', 'to interpret', and finally 'to seek solution' that help as the source of knowledge (Berndt, 2006: 425). The Oxford Senior Dictionary also defined riddle as "question or statement designed to test imaginary or give amusement in finding its answer or meanings sometimes puzzling or mysterious". Riddle is also "a puzzling problem or

question; an enigmatic, saying or speech statements or query phrased as to require ingenuity to discover its meaning” (Harry, 1972: 324). As Cuddon (1979: 574) states “riddle is an ancient and universal form of literature, in common set form consisting of a puzzle question: the equivalent of a conundrum or an enigma”. The above definitions of riddle communicate three central themes: the analyzing of problematic and mysterious speech genres, solving of problems logically, and communicating the messages meaningfully. So exposing children to the riddles could enable them to develop various skills: critical thinking, active participation in communicative events, creative rationalization, socialization, etc.

Riddle is one of the common and short forms presented in opening and closing formula and problem solving activities. This genre is supposed to be the earliest children’s oral tradition with major intention to educate the children providing them with care and exposing them to various lessons (Bukonya, 1994: 55). Accordingly, different societies have different types of riddles: simple and complex riddle, riddle song, chain riddle, riddle analogous and riddle play. Whether simple, complex or other forms, the primary purposes of riddles are to develop children’s critical thinking, their language and socio-linguistic skills, their logical thinking and educating the children normative lessons. So in the process of searching expected answers to the riddling questions, children expand their imagination and problem solving abilities. Before arriving at the right answers, they also enthusiastically undergo and discover the puzzling and imagine questions touching upon incidents and events in the cosmic order for conceptualization of riddles in the target community).

The main and most frequent purposes of riddle are engaging children in pedagogical lessons and leisure-time entertaining activities. As Sutton-Smith, Mechling, Johnson and McMahon (1999: 163) outlines in pedagogic riddling, adults play the roles of teacher and the children play the roles of student through riddles. In the pedagogical aspect, children’s riddles are employed by parents to make their children curious and active listener deciphering the knowledge very quickly. The children could also share ideas and questions with their peers outside the context of the riddles in wider social interaction. Doing so, they acquire language and socio-linguistic competences which are fostered through interactions made among children (Trucker, 2009: 12). Linguistic skills include phonological, grammatical phrases and clause structures and patterns used by children in different speech situations. When the children adjust what they say and the means of expressing it in the situations of turn taking interactions, they develop their sociolinguistic skills. Furthermore, children adopt, adapt and consistently maintain speech events which are appropriate to the condition of speech topics.

The pedagogical lesson or value of riddle is helpful in such cases as teaching how children talk, serving as source of their intellectual discipline, to train the children’s minds, to develop their perceptual and descriptive skills, to test their wit and competence in culture specific values, etc. (Sutton-Smith *et al.*, 1999: 162-64). Accordingly, the primary goal of leisure activity riddling is to entertain the children.

Thus, leisure-time riddling between children and adults is developed in the vicinity of the home at the moment when the practical obligations of the participants are limited. Normally, parents need to ensure their children's speaking ability and some forms of relationship they should maintain through riddles both at home and at school (Bukenya, 1994: 53). To do so, parents have to expose their children to the use of connected speech like in linguistic skills, children's dynamic knowledge and broad language skills, sub-skills and specific units. Bukenya (1994: 53-55) identified 5 of such themes which are summarized as follows.

**Language competence skills:** the mastery of children's first language is well promoted using riddles. This starts from the practicing of pronunciation and progresses to the level of children's practicing their mastery of variety of connected speech in language. These connected speeches are assumed to promote fluency and competence of the children including their speaking skills, sound system, listening skills, sentence structures, and new logical concepts related to the language, etc. Thus, language competence skills involve all primary skills consciously or unconsciously consider other skills.

**Observational skills:** from the earlier time, people had been relying widely on observational skills in their day to day activities like food gathering, traveling, planting, dancing, herding, hunting and defense in order to be keen observer of the nature and natural phenomena. Riddles also make the children to be curious observer of the (a) nature: insects, plants, animals, human life etc. (b) phenomena: water, vegetation, night and day, seasons etc., and (c) structure of objects: size, shape, density, color etc. In doing so, children observe and understand domestic and wild life, their behavior and natural events from various perspectives.

**Normative skills:** children need to know and understand the norm or ethical values of their society's right from the early childhood. Children of different age group have to know their communities' acceptable and non-acceptable behaviors based on standard cultural norms. Here, the adults' interference in the riddling processes is very important to socialize children, enhance communal beliefs/practices, train them on social taboo and civilization, etc.

**Memory and intellectual skills:** people with good memories and intellectual abilities are considered as the libraries of the community. Such person keeps all the great deeds and events of the community they recited from the attentive observation they have in different social gatherings. These people are also supposed to be the custodian of the community's folklore. The knowledge they acquire result from their predisposition to different folkloric genres right from their early childhood. In this case, riddle is supposed to be powerful tool to catch children's attention and maintain their lasting memories. Parents demonstrate about their ancestral genealogy, past achievements, logical or philosophical thinking that enhances children's memory and intellectual capabilities.

**Entertainment skills:** in general, oral traditions for children like storytelling, riddling, songs, dances and wrestling, etc. have been serving as the means of entertaining. The entertainments are associated with some sorts of competition, exercise for body fitness, and other outstanding events exercised by the community.

When children get engaged in such genres for entertainment and relaxation, they amuse themselves during various sessions. Presently, riddles are widely relied as the means of entertaining and hence need to be linked with co-curricular activities, media broadcasts, provision of education and recreations.

Riddles are characterized by different forms. These forms are riddle-jokes (for humorous events), riddle parodies (ridiculed establishing riddle), riddling question (to identify the referent) and joking questions (humorous punch, verbal and non-verbal riddles) (Trucker, 2009: 23). Although riddle is similar to proverb in terms of forms and contents, the two genres vary in their occasional style. They are similar in forms for their conscious and brief presentation of messages, rhyme and tonal nature even the two forms are sometimes combined as proverb-riddle. On the other hand, the content of riddle often evokes of minor and childish interest as important subject of studies in oral literature; sometimes riddles have close connection with other forms of literary expression like enigmas, dilemma tales, and stories (Finnegan: 1973:426). This writer discovered that the riddles in African society vary from simple form of phrases or statements to some well-known objects expressed in more or less valid languages.

The various African riddles, including that of the Oromo, are also known in terms of their questioning and answering form and brevity. Coming to the modality, most riddles are presented in interrogative routine incorporating some forms of solving ambiguous events (Trucker, 2009: 24). This act involves dynamics of power in which the asker have full authority to tell the answer to the respondent or to judge the questions. However, to develop the critical thinking ability of the respondents, the asker gives ample time for the respondent so that s/he could examine various issues related to the riddle in question till the final answer.

The context and interactional situations are very important in the studies of various folklore genres including riddles. In spite of the difficulty in answering riddle questions in depth, in folkloric and anthropological literature, riddles are addressed replying to the when, where, how and with whom questions (Sutton-Smith *et al*, 1999:61).

The riddle is proceeding by some sorts of open formula held between the asker or challenger and the respondents. If the respondents fail to respond the correct answer, the challenger asks him/her to provide him/her with imaginary market/s that serves as the source of progress and interaction of the riddle. Hence, in most African countries, parents enhance the children's use of riddle in both schools and at home to increase their exposure to speech acts and to ensure their speech competences (Bukonya, 1994: 53), and these are promoted in riddle session (encompasses riddle acts and some sort of organization). Riddle session is a "series of riddle acts, possibly combined with other performance material and its organization to be described in terms of three key points" (Sutton-Smith *et al.*, 1999: 162). The three key points are (a) role relationships among the participants, (b) the conjoining of the interactional units that make up the sessions, and (c) restrictions or expectations influencing the selection of acts in one session relative to selection procedures in other sessions.

## **2. Research Methods**

### **2.1. Descriptions of the Study Areas**

The research area covered two districts, i.e. Haramaya and Chiro, from East and West Hararghe zones respectively. The sites were selected to integrate both rural and urban traditions. The data from both areas are also assumed to provide rich experiences and knowledge of the people on oral traditions. For obvious reason and by consensus, the more one moves from the geographic center to the periphery is the more one can come across local clans with diverse culture and traditional practices which may get little scholarly attentions. Hence, the research areas are supposed to provide diverse and undiscovered values attached to the subject.

Majority of the people living in the two districts belong to Ituu and Humbannaa, and Afran Qalloo (the four Qalloo) clans and their religion is predominantly Islam. Afran Qalloo, the most known name in the area, includes clans like Alaa, Baabbilee, Daagaa and Oborraa. Cash crop production, trading and to some extent animal rearing are the major economic activities. Especially, the first two economic activities, fused with ‘jimaa’ ceremonies like *ijabanaa* (eye opening chewing ceremony), *barcaa* (advanced chewing ceremony), and *cabsii* (chewing ceremony followed by alcoholic drink), facilitate the interaction among people and create a peculiar and strong social bond among the people. The jimaa ceremonies usually attract people who have similar jobs, views or who have been friendly from childhood. The ceremonies are vital in the secular and religious lives of the people. In enhancing social relationship and harmony, the free and extremely open nature of the society and their strong bonds of friendship create various opportunities to carry out conversations helpful for experience sharing in oral tradition among the group.

### **2.2. Research Approach**

The research approach used is a qualitative ethnographic one encompassing a range of philosophies and specific techniques including in-depth interviews, participant and non-participant observations, focus group discussions, and document analysis. Such data are core components in folkloric documentation and for the preservation of folk heritages in questions (Prasad, 2008:4). Loshini (2012:1) also stated that ethnographic research method helps in studying society’s beliefs, their interactions and behaviors involving participation and observation over a period of time upon giving interpretation to the data.

### **2.3. Theoretical Framework**

The functional theory identified by Dorson (1963) is used in the study. This theory is commonly used by anthropologists and ethnographers to describe the traditions of indigenous societies in various settings and use the data for several applications (Hicks and Gwynne, 1996: 49). It helps to explain children’s folklore for the immediate need within the family especially by examining or probing into their significances and values. Functions of riddles like maintaining good relationships, creating and enhancing harmony, increasing interaction among children and parents are important aspects of riddles.

#### **2.4. Data Sources and Sampling Technique**

The data for the research were gathered from community elders, village leaders, cultural think tanks, religious leaders (sheiks), Abbaa Gadaas and children using both available and purposive sampling techniques. Attempts were also made to balance the number of participants based on their cultural knowledge and tradition of the local people via information obtained from contact persons at various elicitation stages. The video data captured during riddle performance at six familyhood (two from rural area and one from urban area) in the two research district, interviewing 15 male and 6 female (half from both research areas) as well as the text collected at different sites were interpreted. Events were also captured upon riddle performance (riddler- respondents) interaction in contextual settings. Coordination was made with district Culture and Tourism office along management lines in the hierarchy through collaborative folkloric research projects. So the strong relationships and communication made with these experts and individual participants at different levels paved the way for easy access to the data. Their concerns and advice provided opportunities to actively engage with stakeholders.

#### **2.5. Data Collection Methods and Procedures**

Structured and non-structured interview, focus group discussion, participatory and on-looker observation, and text collection were employed as data gathering methods. Each method either helped to get people's general feeling towards children's riddles, to understand the riddler-respondent interactions in series of field works and to get people's opinion and comments. Upon capturing the nature of interaction and communicative events, discussions were held among children (riddle players) and their parents (riddling facilitators). Different sessions were held in natural and induced natural settings and were followed by elicitation sessions. Contexts were provided in such a way that the parents and the children were made to gather at different settings to increase the degree of interactions. Observations were used to describe the types and styles of performance, and their procedures as well as the existing norms.

#### **2.6. Data Analysis**

The data were transcribed, classified, and analyzed using the method of 'content analysis -the method in which the contents of communication events were studied for their authenticity or meaning. This method also helped to make inferences about background, characteristics and effects of a communication objectively and systematical (Stemler, 2001). Approach to content analysis quoted by Prasad (2008: 4), as formulated by Harold (1972), can be expressed by six key questions: "who says what, to whom, why, to what extent and with what effect?" Upon the analysis of the data, attempts were made to analyze these questions in the contextual settings.

### **3. Results and Discussion**

The keen observation on the general delivery of riddles, the exhaustive interview conducted with stakeholders and close discussions made with key informants of the



community show the existence of abundant riddles having different lessons in the study area. However, two contrasting views are identified on the current status and ways of transmitting riddles: (a) the existence of various opportunities to use riddles more than any other time and (b) the less attention given to the documentation of riddles owing to various reasons. Yet irrespective of sex, geographical location, family background, 6-18 years old children do actively use and recite riddles to express normative, socio-cultural and linguistic issues among others. Children rely on riddles to get out of dizzy mood, entertain themselves, maintain good communication with their peers, pass society's traditions to the junior children, justify children issues, etc.

In the subsequent section, riddles are annotated, transcribed, translated and presented for discussion in terms of the what of riddles, their styles of performance enhanced upon delivery, sub-generic classifications, structure, content, contextual functions and the thoughts behind them.

### 3.1. Riddle (*Hiiphoo* or *Hiibboo*<sup>1</sup>)

As all informants agreed, including riddles, all forms of children's oral wisdom are important both in rural and urban areas of the study area. As one of the informants explained such oral tradition is popular both in rural and urban sites from time to time due to the strong interaction among peoples of the two areas, their mobility, and peoples' love of their culture. He also added they are the means by which people express their identities, maintain social values and integration, give their children division of labor and enhance their norms. The most resourceful oral traditions in the study area include riddles, narratives and proverbs. Yet, *hiiphoo/hiibboo* is the most prominent children's oral tradition. It is delivered in the form of questioning and answering; highly sophisticated genre in developing children's linguistic skills, increasing their perception abilities, intellectual capabilities, critical thinking, creativity as well as their oration and recitation skills. Riddles also teach children precious social values and are usually delivered by children to the children while adults are acting as facilitators and audiences in a very limited context at night. This time is more appropriate for riddling as children are free of works and cope up with detailed of riddling events in concentration until dinner is reserved. Riddle played out of context during the day results in an insult *hiibboon gyyaa hin jiru, gobaan siyaadiru* (there is no riddle playing during the day, let a spear pierce you). This norm seems to limit the expansion of riddles to some extent. The examples of riddles are indicated at the on setting stage in the subsequent subtopic.

### 3.2. Procedural Performances of Riddles (*Hiibboo*)

*Hiibboo* is performed in some sort of sequenced procedures and with opening and closing formulae. The procedural chains of riddles are basically coherent and highly organized having their own peculiar performance nature. The steps involved can be classified as the on setting, the progressive and winding up stages. In the on setting

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<sup>1</sup> Refers to riddle in Afaan Oromoo

stage, while the children are invited to summon and sit either in linear or spherical positions around fireplace, invited parents and youth in the family, lying on hand-made carpet, take part in facilitating and listening to the riddler, and the listener/respondent acts the riddle out dialogically confining to specific rules outlined below.

**Riddler:** Hiibboo (Hiiphoo)-let me deliver my riddle (for attention seeking).

**Respondent:** Hibbakka (hibib)-let me receive your riddle (for attention giving).

**Riddler:** Hiibbakkaa Rabbirraa taatee naafis siifis taatee, haajaan waltaatee, ajaa'iba Rabbii dachiin garaa qabdi, naaf beeki(We managed to entertain playing a riddle by the will of God. I and you feel very comfortable in playing the riddle. Our objectives are in harmony. Incredibility of the art of God, the earth gets conceived. Just search and tell me the correct answer).

**Respondent:** Tells the answer. It is sugar beet.

**Riddler:** Approves the answer and appreciates the quick response the respondent gave.

It is obvious that for both secular and religious lives, Oromo society is restricted to the faith and willingness of Waaqaa/Rabbii (God) in the above riddling. Waaqaa is believed as source of all things in the cosmic order. Therefore, everything is stated in reference to Waaqaa (Rabbii). That is why, in the above riddling, it is said "hiibbakkaa Rabbirraa taatee..." (We managed to entertain playing a riddle by the will of God). The riddling continues if the respondent fails to provide the appropriate answer. At this juncture, the thinking of a respondent about things of the cosmic order becomes strong and gets expended. S/he engages in creative rationalization with regard to all beings in the cosmic order or habitats assumed as reasonable answers. Still, if the respondent fails to arrive at the right answer, s/he asks the riddler the guiding questions to deduce the semantic field for the possible areas to discover the answers as follows.

**Riddler:** Hiibboo/Hiiphoo/ let me deliver my riddle, (riddle)!

**Respondent:** Hiibbakka /hibib/: Let me receive your riddle, (riddle)!

**Riddler:** Hiibbakkaa Rabbirraa taatee naafis siifis taatee, galgala oli, ganama gadi, iyyaafadhuu naaf himi (We managed to play the riddle by the will of God. I and you feel comfortable with playing the riddle. It moves up during the night. It moves down in the morning. Just interrogate and tell me the answer).

**Respondent:** I don't know the answer. I should search and interrogate it. Can I?

**Riddler:** Yes, you can search and arrive at the answer.

**Respondent:** Is it a wild beast or a domesticated animal?

**Riddler:** None of the two.

**Respondent:** Is it living being or nonliving being?

**Riddler:** It is non-living being.

**Respondent:** Is it aquatic or arboreal habitat?

**Riddler:** It is neither of the two habitats. Dullumfattee (couldn't you get the answer)?

**Respondent:** Ee dullumfadhe (Yes, I couldn't get the answer)?

**Riddler:** Haayaa, biyya naaf kenni (all right, give me a country)

**Respondent:** Haramaayaa siif kenne (I gave to you Haramaya)

**Riddler:** Haramaayaa magaalaa bareedduu argadhee waa hunda argadhee, deebiin isaa Kofoodha (I get Haramaya, a beautiful town. Having this, I get everything. The answer is trouser).

After all the domain restriction that helps the riddler to get the correct answer, still the respondent may fail to find out it. Finally, a riddler is expected to ask a respondent to provide him or her with imaginary market or country. If one is not interested to provide the imaginary market/country, he or she can refuse and seek for change of a better market/country. The market/country is assumed to be a place where every attractive thing is available so that the riddler can afford. After accepting a market, in Afran Qalloo tradition, the expected respondent does not articulate the feedback in rhythmic poem which is the thematic, artistic and with full of wisdom or thought at progressive stage. This gap of knowledge is created due to the replacement of Oromo oral wisdom by Islam value system and this indicates a paradigm shift. However, some individuals of the area who have had experiences of Tuulamaa and Maccaa Oromo traditions claim that the riddler expresses his or her own view in rhythmic poem whose general content is wishing everything good for him or her and everything bad with no norm governing (Text 1 and 2 below). The rhythmic poems are said in a fast moving and melodic tune. Instances of such rhyming poem are as follows.

**Text 1:** Rhythmic response at progressive stage without norm governing

<b>Riddler:</b> Na hobaasi	Let you provide me with the drink
<b>Respondent:</b> Dhugi	Here it is, take the drink
<b>Riddler</b> Situ baksee, natu dhuga	You filter the butter, I drink it
Bishaan koo calala,	My water is clean
Dubbiin koo marara	My talk is attractive
Ofii goree buleen,	I escape the night to some one's house
Si goraarra bute	I push you along the thorny bush
Kan koo madaalatti	I feed in prominent tool
Kan kee qadaadatti	You feed in container's cover
Jimmaan sidhaqeen,	I took you to Jimma
Jirmaan sidhahe.	I pushed you against the trunk
Guutuu manaa siyaabsise,	I chased you till the apex of the hat
Duutuu namaa sitaasise	I proved you to be a nonsense person
Gufuu gugguufuu jala bahi	Pass under the steady hindrance
Otoo dhuuftuu ganna bahi,	May you suffer in farting during the summer
Muka baddaa baadhu	Carry the wood from the highland
Luka fardaa nyaadhu	May you consume the foot of a horse
Gufuu balbalaa ta'i,	May you be stumbling block of the door
Harreen sitti haarigattu,	Let the donkey scratches her skin against you
Xuwwee galgalaa ta'i	May you be the washing container used at night
Nadheen sittaadhiqattu,	Let the women serve/d you to wash their cavity
Handaqiirra ciisi	Sleep on a hide

Albaatii gaddhiisi	Release the diarrhea there
Onborii naanna'i	Go round the yard
Hudduudhaan raamma'i	Let your buttock get rotten
Fardi hindannabsu	The horse can't gallop
Kana caala sinarrabsu	I don't insult you any more
Waraabessi adda booqaa,	A white forehead hyena,
Qabee siyaafolloqsu	Catches and eats you away
Deebiin isaa kofoodha	The answer is trouser

One may feel that the above insulting deviates from the culture and norm of the society. However, it is rather assumed as the means of educating children various lessons from different dimensions. These include teaching tolerance, making them active and creative thinker, serving for forming retaliation not to be beaten in the future, to develop children's oration skills and critical thinking ability right from childhood. At the same time, the insult may also remark the ancillary status of the loser, who has lost the riddle. Doing so, they would prepare themselves for duties and responsibilities in the later age and adult lives. As indicated at events of progressive riddling stage, the riddler ends up the narration after receiving an imaginary market or country. Then, the negotiation is arrived between the riddler and the respondent exchange roles and act out the next round riddling. The respondents start to challenge as a revenge addressing unique questions in similar rhythmic poems. There are cases in which the rhythmic poems are acted out hastily by melodic tune until the respondent said *saanqaa Waaqaa jala seene* (I hide myself behind the door of God). Below is an instance of the riddle governed by safuu (norm) of Oromo religion in respect or fear of Supreme Being, Waaqaa.

**Text 2:** Rhythmic response at progressive stage with governing norm

<b>Riddler:</b> Haramayaa dhaaphee	Being in Haramaya
Maalan dhaba	I do not lack anything.
Shittoo shittoon kan kooti.	Items having good odor belong to me.
Cittoo cittoon kan keeti,	Items having bad odor belong to you.
Gama koo mi'eessaa dhaabee.	I plant a tree with good odor in my side,
Gama kee hadheessaa dhaabee,	I plant a tree with bad odor in your side.
Gama koo gundoo dhaabee,	I put a winnower in my side,
Gama kee gingilchaan dhaabee	I put a sifter in your side,
Malkaa gaaraa ba'i,	Got to the valley up the hill,
Qaamaan daaraa ta'i,	May your body be covered with dust,
Tulluu didibbee ba'i.	Climb up the mountain which lack forest.
Nama Waaqni jibbe ta'e,	Be a person who is abandoned by God.
<b>Respondent:</b> Saanqaa Waaqaajala seene	I hide myself behind the gate of God
<b>Riddler:</b> Fardi hindanabsu	The horse doesn't well gallop,
Ani hinarrabsu	I don't insult you anymore.
Hundee migiraa	As that of the root of the grass,
Hundeen nu fira	We came from one genealogical line.
Deebiin isaa kofoodha.	The answer is a trouser.

In text 2 above, the riddler is found insulting the respondent with full freedom as much as he/she can before the two individuals come to terms. This form of progress poetic insulting through riddler-respondent interaction, cannot remain active until the two people come to negotiation upon riddler's answering the questions. The norm or *safuu* of Oromo religion is used as norm governing in which case the riddler abstains from insulting the respondent in case s/he misses the correct answer. Such hard and fast rhythmic poem carried on by riddler with the main purpose to test his /her creative ability in poetic verses within a short second until the respondent says *saanqaa Waaqaa jala seenee*. Hearing such statement, the riddler automatically stops insulting the respondent any more. This makes the riddle to be concluded in a harmonious way wherein the participants value the glory of Waaqaa.

### 3.3. Classification and Analysis of Riddles (Hiibboo)

The classifications and analysis of riddles can be presented in two different ways. These are the classifications based on structure and content or function. Classification of the riddle in this manner is so good that the children can acquire various linguistic elements and examine values and wisdom communicated through riddles. The structural classification dominantly helps the children to learn linguistic skills (like phrase, clause, sentences, parts of speech), sociolinguistic skills (turn taking interaction, speech acts, maxim of speech quantity, quality, relevance and trustfulness); and language skills (speaking, listening, oration) etc.

On the other hand, content or functional classification enables the children to distinguish thematic categories of things, semantic fields/domains, lexical items, subjects of creativities, philosophical and logical thinking and assists the children to get acquainted with social values (harmony, honesty, respect, free and democratic interaction). They also learn different historical, educational, entertaining lessons, socio-cultural practices, society's worldview and cosmological phenomena. The content and functions of riddle also lay the foundation to analyze the nature, scope, wisdom and significance of oral communication events. In the subsequent titles, attempts have been made to elaborate certain classifications and analysis of riddles.

### 3.4. Structural Classifications and Analysis

Structural classification is examined based on the types of riddling questions. The two known structural classification of riddles are (a) simple and compound riddles and (b) complex riddles. The first riddle types are related by simple or compound sentences and their answers are words or phrases. Based on riddling questions, this category can be either, positively and negatively compared, double denial, numerically expressed riddles; riddles focused on very mysterious events and riddles associated with places and materials. These kinds of riddles are easily manipulated and understood by children. Children use them widely and they are the most productive ones. Complex riddles are composed of two or more sentences or riddling questions. Alternatively, they have also more than two answers. Unlike the simple riddles and its forms, the complex riddles are very limited and are not commonly produced by children because of their complex nature. However, sometimes matured

children and adults are involved in riddling them or they guide the children in the riddling process. The above two categories and their sub-classifications are presented in the subsequent texts. In positive comparison, one object is expressed in terms of two similar attributes or two objects are described in terms of similar features through comparison.

**Text 3: Riddles presented in positive comparison form**

<b>Riddle</b>	<b>Response</b>
Jalaan ni xuqa, gubbaan ni xinniqa	Maashoo
In the bottom it pushes up; at the top it overflows	Lantern
Adda nyaateet bookkisa, nama rafe dammaqsa	Dibbee
It eats in unique way and roars; it awakens one.	Drum

Some riddles are presented in the form of negative comparison. In this case, one object is characterized in terms of two similar attributes or features. Alternatively, two objects are characterized in terms of similar features/attributes through comparison.

**Text 4: Riddles presented in negative comparison form**

<b>Riddle</b>	<b>Response</b>
Ani qal'aadha, namni jagnoome na hinxuqu	Shiboo elektirikaa
I am thin, famous person is not daring enough to attack me	Electric wire
Galgala oli, ganama gadi	Kofoo
It is taller than people at night, shorter than people during day	Trousers
Laaltu, dhagaa; nyaattu, dhadhaa.	Mixaaxisha
When you look, it is a stone; when you eat, it is butter	Sugar beet

There is the dual denial form of riddle. This category of riddle includes riddles which are identified by two or more negations. They are marked either by negative prefix (hin-un-) or the entire idea stands for negative senses.

**Text 5: Riddles presented in dual denial form**

<b>Riddle</b>	<b>Response</b>
Shok hinjedhu, sokok hinjedhu, ce'ee bahe.	Yaada
It doesn't move; it doesn't make noise, it rushes out.	Idea
Bishaan osoo hinroobiin burqe, otoo hingoggogiin dhume	Imimmaan
Water comes without rain, which is lost without getting dry	Tear
Ilkaan hinqabuu dheedhii nyaachuu hindadhabu	Lukkuu
It does not have a teeth, it does not fail to eat grains	Hen
Haadhas hinfakkaatu, abbaas hinfakkaatu	Gaangoo
It neither seems its mother nor its father	Mule

The other form of riddle is riddle which is associated with places and materials used by people. Hence, upon riddling the riddler refers to houses, hills or mountain, plots of land, and materials used by people. The responder tries to analyze the things directly or indirectly making an association with place names and objects.

**Text 6:** Riddles associated with places and materials**Riddle**

Manneen kiyya gaara gubbaa jiru  
 My houses are up the hill  
 Maasii bal'aa keessa shumburaa facaase  
 I saw a chickpea in a huge field  
 Jibichi kiyya gurraachi siree keessa gangalata  
 Our black calf is rolling in the bed  
 Abbaa guddaan gaararra taa'ee dabtara bana  
 The clumsy father up the hill opens exercise book

**Response**

Uuruu  
 Nostril  
 Urjii  
 Stars  
 Injiree  
 Lice  
 Billaacha  
 Butterfly

The riddles associated with mysterious objects are the other category of structural form. Although the major focuses of riddles in this category are issues of very mysterious events that the children entertain with and develop various imaginations with the main purpose of solving mysterious events, they are not mutually exclusive in terms of their structure.

**Text 7:** Riddles associated with very mysterious objects**Riddle**

Afaaniin nyaata afaaniin udaana  
 It consumes and removes the waste in its mouth  
 Garaa haadhaa keessaa baatee kan haadha rukuttu  
 She beats the abdomen of her birth-giving mother  
 Anoo asin sikaa'ee maaltu achiin sibaase?  
 I put you nearer, who takes you afar?  
 Fayyaan duutuu ilaaltee, duutuun fayyaa ilaalte  
 The living looks at the dead, the dead looks at the living  
 Jiraa du'aa baadhatu, du'aa jiraa baadhatu  
 The living carries the dead, the dead carries the living;

**Response**

Baaburii  
 Millstone  
 Kibriita  
 Match  
 Dabaaqula  
 Pumpkin plant  
 Lukkuu fi killee  
 Hen and egg  
 Farda, kooraa, nama  
 Horse, saddle, a person

The other category of riddles is numerically expressed riddle. This includes riddles which are related to events, incidents, practices, etc. and are quantitatively measured and counted by number. Such kinds of riddles can also be complex riddles.

**Text 8:** Numerically expressed riddles**Riddle**

Muka guddaa damee 12 qabu, dameen 1 baala 30 qaba  
 A tree has 12 branches, 1 of its branches has 30 leaves  
 Aabbo ijoollee 5 qaba; 5 nu wal bira jiraatu  
 The old man has 5 children, 5 of them live in the neighbor  
 Hiriyoota lamaan walfakkaattu, waliin deemti  
 The two similar friends walk together

**Response**

Waggaa, baatii fi guyyaa  
 Year, month and day  
 Qubee  
 Fingers  
 Kophee  
 Shoes

There are two forms of complex riddles. These are riddles which are composed of two or more questions and answers, riddles which have one question and two or more answers and riddles addressed by two or more questions but which have one answer. Such kinds of riddles are rarely available and very often used by children. Sometimes

the adults and the youth can narrate them from their memory. Both are presented in the texts 9 (a) and 9 (b) below.

**Text 9 (a):** Complex riddles involving two or more questions and two or more answers

**Riddle**

Barcuma dheeraa hondoloqaa/The long wide stool  
 Warra qaalluu sabakataa/the disordered Qaalluu family  
 Namicha laagaa adii /The man with a white throat  
 Eeleen koo bal'oo/My oven is wide  
 Ijolleen koo baay'ee /My children are plenty  
 Bukoon koo qal'ate /My dough is soft  
 Jiraa du'aa baatu/ The dead carries the living one  
 Du'aa jiraa baatu /The living one carries the dead  
 Wayita bitan gurraacha / When bought, it is black;  
 Wayita fayyadaman diimaa / When used, it is red;  
 Wayita gatan adii / When thrown away, it is white.

**Response**

Eege horii /Cattle's tail  
 Garaacha, / Intestine.  
 Moora horii/Cattle's latex  
 Samii / Sky  
 Urjii / Star  
 Rooba / rain  
 Farda, kooraa fi nama  
 A horse, a saddle, a man  
 Cilee / Charcoal  
 Ibidda / Fire  
 Daaraa / Ash

**Text 9 (b):** Complex riddles with one question, two or more answers and vice versa

**Riddle and Answer**

Asiin gaara / this side is a hill.  
 Achiin gaara /that side is also a hill  
 Jidduun boombiin dhohe/ In-between the  
 gun get exploded  
 Deebii/Answer: Dhuufuu / Fart

**Riddle and Answer**

Asiin gaara /this side is a hill  
 Achiin gaara /that side is also a hill  
 Jidduun faras magaalaa /In-between  
 there is a bus station  
 Deebii/Answer: Shuroo Aannanii /  
 Porridge

Riddle: Waa jaha dinqii!/ The six incredible things!

Deebii/Answer: Hiddii rooba malee gabbatu/ the thorny bush tree get developed well without rain drop

Bishan hoofan malee deemu;/The water flows on the bank without any push

Lafa dhisan malee diriiru; /The land gets stretched without an agent

Waaqa utubaa malee dhaabbatu; /The sky erecting without a pillar

Qoree qaran malee qaramtu;/ The sharpened thorn without one sharpening it

Huummoo dhukkuba malee aadu;/ The ostrich gets moaning without illness

Bofa miilla malee lo'u;/ The snake dragged without foot

**3.5. Content and Functional Classifications**

Classification of riddles based on their contents and functions are related to the analysis of riddling questions and their answers. The vast areas of contents of riddles holds together things of the cosmic order in which children get inputs by expanding their imaginations, getting motivation towards creativity and critical thinking, acquiring intellectual and cognitive knowledge, insisting on general and specific skills etc. The potential content areas where riddles touch upon include objects/tools,



living and non-living beings, concrete and abstract things, natural phenomena and imaginative thinking etc.

Both the contents and functions of riddles are complementary and their questions and answers cannot be understood exclusive of their functions. Hence, the common functions of riddles are related to entertaining and educating. For example, from riddling questions and answers, children develop mechanism of challenging, art and style of speech, logical reasoning against or for premises, creativity in counter attack in speech, debating etc. They are mainly means of educating and entertaining children in such context, especially in areas where modern way of educating and means of entertaining children are limited.

The cognitive, affective and psychomotor skills of children can also be reinforced through process of riddling while educating and entertaining children. In this regard, children develop various language skills and sub-skills that make them sharp or help them to be matured enough in social interaction and socialization process. They develop language competence, observation, norm, memory and intellectual skills. Though there are various content areas of riddles as demonstrated in riddling answers and riddling questions stated in different texts above, the major ones having great impact in daily lives of the children and used by adults in different ways are outlined below.

**i. Semantic domain (fields):** for any language learner, identification of semantic domain is the primary focus to know a language and its structure. Analyzing the answer for riddles, there are various semantic domains or fields with various attributes, features and qualities useful for the children and the parents for providing various educational and linguistic lessons. The basic semantic fields with their prototype observed through the analysis of answers of the riddles include: plant and animal species, animals with different habitats, types of crops, furniture and kitchen tools, parts of the body, food varieties, natural phenomena, kinship terminology, etc. These aspects of the contents of the riddle are helpful especially for the children to develop their collocating skills, their concept formation, lexical production and sense relation among words. The children also learn parts of speech, forms of sentences, their functions, and various forms of sentence structures especially by examining riddling questions.

**ii. Philosophical lessons:** after having input from semantic domains, children must conceptualize things in the real world and develop their own ways of philosophical thinking and concept formation. Thus, the riddling questions enable the children to broaden their philosophical and logical thinking. In the processes of searching answers for the riddling questions and insulting one another, the participants discover and imagine different phenomena or things from various dimensions. They think of the shapes and size of objects, the colors and physical appearances of objects; they identify their functions and the merits and demerits of things; they learn the habitats, behaviors, advantages and disadvantage of objects. They rationalize things to be addressed by leading questions and try to deduce various related phenomena, objects, things, step by step and arrive at the correct answers through logical reasoning and concept formation. They examine things which are explicitly or implicitly stated,

things related symbolically, metaphorically, analogically, thematically, etc. in terms of their logical and categorical relationships. In dealing with diverse matters in the entire situation of riddle session and procedures, the participants develop their rational and philosophical thinking from various angles.

**iii. Values and cultural norms:** the society in general and the children in particular have been shaped by specific norms imbibed in a wide culture. Likewise, riddles are one way of expressing cultural and the underlined social norms. They provide the children with invaluable values and normative lessons learned in daily interaction through riddling. When communicating through riddles, children discover ethical and unethical norms, taboos, cultural expressions, cultural foods and clothes, etc.

Added to that, they impart the past history and tradition of their society; they get chance to share one another knowledge and experiences of the society at the levels of *maatii* (family), *ibidda* (lineage), *balbala* (clan), *lammii* (major clan), *gosa* (tribe), *sanyii* (ethnic), *biyya* (country) and finally *Oromummaa* (Oromoness). During this time, the relationship, socialization process, sense of self-esteem and consciousness of one's ethnic identities are upheld.

Consequently, children love their language, culture, and develop sense of belongingness and can have national and societal feelings and attachments. The functions of riddles in restoring the values and social norms enable the children to get rid of socially unethical customs and get familiarized with acceptable social norms. These contribute a lot towards making the children rational and ethical citizens; riddles are also helpful as the determining factors in their later ages and for the development of citizens as a whole.

#### **4. Conclusions and Recommendations**

Knowledge and wisdom imparted through oral traditions like riddles achieve multidimensional roles: normative, linguistic, education and entertaining roles. Being the indigenous knowledge and wisdom of the society, riddles have been utilized as realizable and relevant sources of knowledge with the main purpose of guiding children towards understanding the social values and linguistic skills. Riddles also describe societies' world outlooks, carry secular and religious beliefs, enable children to make use of their experience and give sense to the world, help them attack bad behavior and reinforce good behavior. Despite this, many of the Oromo oral traditions have not been properly and systematically studied. The existing works are fragmented and are devoid of scientific documentation. This results in the limited uses and low expectation of oral knowledge and wisdom among the society.

The Afran Qalloo and other clans of Oromo in Hararghe are unique in terms of exchanging views and expressing their ideas using oral tradition whether or not they live in rural and urban areas. Anyone can watch this socialization during jimaa ceremony which attracts as many people as possible across age, sex, economic, social and political background. This communal ceremony, which is practiced among different social segments, creates good opportunities for the materialization of orally transmitted traditions as sources of knowledge and means of teaching children. Riddles could serve as source of moral education equivalent to, and sometimes

greater than the normative lesson they learn at school in subjects like ethical education. This can be seen in terms of transmitting realistic lessons in the day today life of the society, serving as source of artistic principles and means of expressing people's living conditions spatially and temporally.

Riddles in the study area are widely available in theory but scarcely found in practice. Even, the existing ones help the community to teach the children in multiple ways. They are sources of children's cognitive, social and psychological developments. They used as means of educating children about the arts, wisdom, norms, socialization process, critical thinking, creativities, oration and linguistic skills. They also teach the children basic skills in language, memory and intellectual, entertainment, normative, observation and linguistics. Parents rely on specific riddle to criticize children, express their love, appreciate them, attack and control misbehaving, shape and train them about social norms, teach their history and culture, train them in secular and religion practices. Inculcating such lessons and virtues into children ultimately results in producing children who are having sense of belonging, supportive, hopeful, active and productive citizens. Therefore, riddles could be studied either separately or independently at various levels of the society to empower the cultural groups, promote their language and traditions and supplement modern formal education.

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