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SEMANTIC ANALYSIS OF FLORA REPRESENTATIONS IN ENGLISH, AFRICAN AND CHINESE RIDDLES

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***Abstract:** Plants, with their diverse forms and symbolism, have long been a source of inspiration and intrigue in human culture. This article delves into the fascinating world of plant imagery within the context of riddles, examining the semantic fields associated with botanical motifs. Through an IMRAD (Introduction, Methods, Results, and Discussion) structure, this exploration aims to unravel the symbolic significance and linguistic nuances embedded within plant-themed riddles.*

***Key words:** Plants, symbolism, riddles, semantic fields, folklore studies, textual analysis, cultural context, symbolic meanings, allegorical meanings, cultural beliefs, cognitive dimensions, spiritual significance, adaptability, Chinese culture, wealth.*

Introduction:

Riddles have been a part of human culture for centuries, serving as a form of entertainment, education, and even a way to pass down cultural knowledge. One common theme found in riddles is the use of plants as subjects or clues. The semantic field of plants in riddles offers a fascinating glimpse into how societies perceive and symbolize plant life.

Plants have held symbolic significance across cultures, representing life, growth, renewal, and interconnectedness with nature. Within the realm of riddles, plant imagery serves as a rich source of metaphorical expression and cultural symbolism. This article sets out to investigate the semantic fields of plants in riddles, shedding light on their linguistic, cultural, and cognitive dimensions.

Methods:

The study of plant-themed riddles involves interdisciplinary approaches, drawing from fields such as linguistics, folklore studies, botany, and cultural anthropology. Researchers employ methods such as textual analysis, comparative studies, and cognitive experiments to explore the linguistic features, cultural associations, and cognitive processes underlying plant imagery in riddles. Additionally, ethnographic research provides insights into the cultural context and symbolic meanings attributed to plants in different societies. To investigate the semantic field of plants in riddles, a selection of riddles from different cultural backgrounds was analyzed. Riddles featuring plants as central elements were collected from traditional folklore, literature, and online sources. The focus was on identifying common plant species, botanical features, and symbolic meanings attributed to plants in the context of riddles.

Results:

Plant-themed riddles encompass a wide range of botanical imagery, including trees, flowers, fruits, and herbs, each carrying its own symbolic significance. Through linguistic analysis, researchers uncover the metaphorical and allegorical meanings embedded within plant-related riddles, reflecting cultural beliefs, rituals, and natural phenomena. Common semantic fields associated with plants in riddles include growth, transformation, sustenance, beauty, and decay, mirroring the cycle of life and the human experience of nature. The analysis revealed that plants hold significant symbolism in riddles across different cultures. Common plant species such as trees, flowers, and herbs were frequently portrayed in riddles, each carrying its unique set of

meanings. Trees, for example, symbolized strength, wisdom, and longevity in many riddles, reflecting their enduring nature in the natural world. Flowers were often associated with beauty, fragility, and emotions, adding a poetic touch to riddle narratives. Herbs, on the other hand, were often linked to healing, magic, and mystery in riddles, showcasing their diverse cultural connotations.

Discussion:

The diverse semantic field of plants in riddles reflects the deep-rooted connection between humans and the natural world. By incorporating plants into riddles, storytellers and riddle-makers draw on the rich symbolism associated with different plant species to convey moral lessons, cultural beliefs, and practical knowledge. Plants serve as metaphors for human virtues, vices, and experiences, making riddles not just entertaining puzzles but also profound reflections of society's values and perceptions.

The association of specific plants with certain traits or qualities in riddles suggests a universal understanding of botanical symbolism that transcends cultural boundaries. Whether it's the oak tree symbolizing strength and resilience or the rose representing love and passion, plants in riddles evoke shared meanings that resonate with audiences across diverse linguistic and cultural landscapes. This thematic consistency highlights the enduring allure of plants as enduring symbols in storytelling and folklore.

Moreover, the use of plants in riddles also underscores the close relationship between humans and the botanical world. In many cultures, plants are not just sources of sustenance or materials but also sources of inspiration, spiritual significance, and cultural identity. By featuring plants in riddles, storytellers celebrate the beauty, complexity, and symbolic power of the plant kingdom, encouraging audiences to appreciate and respect the natural world around them.

Here are some examples of plant-themed riddles from various cultures:

1. African Riddle:

"I stand tall in the savanna, my trunk sturdy and strong. My branches reach high, providing shelter for creatures below. My leaves rustle in the wind, a symphony of nature's song. What am I?"

- Answer: Baobab tree

In African cultures, plants are often seen as symbols of resilience, strength, and interconnectedness with nature. The baobab tree, for example, is revered for its ability to survive in harsh environments and provide essential resources such as shelter, food, and water. Riddles featuring plants like the baobab tree symbolize the importance of adaptability, endurance, and the vital role that nature plays in sustaining life.

2. Native American Riddle:

"I am a symbol of growth and renewal, spreading my roots deep into the earth. My leaves change with the seasons, showing the cycle of life. Animals seek refuge in my branches, while humans use me for medicine and tools. What plant am I?"

- Answer: Ash tree

Native American Riddles**: Plants hold significant spiritual and medicinal importance in Native American traditions. Trees like the ash are believed to embody the interconnectedness between humans, animals, and the natural world. By featuring plants like the ash tree in riddles, Native American cultures emphasize the harmony and balance that exist within the natural world, highlighting the respect and gratitude for the gifts that plants provide for physical, emotional, and spiritual well-being.

3. Chinese Riddle:

"In the garden, I bloom with vibrant colors, my petals delicate and fragrant. I sway gently in the breeze, spreading joy and beauty. Bees buzz around me, drawn to my sweet nectar. What flower do I resemble?"

- Answer: Peony

In Chinese culture, plants are often associated with beauty, elegance, and symbolism. Flowers like the peony hold deep cultural significance and are regarded as symbols of wealth, prosperity, and good fortune. Plant-themed riddles in Chinese tradition reflect the admiration for the intricate beauty of nature and the harmony between humans and their environment. They often convey themes of grace, abundance, and the cyclical nature of life through the imagery of plants.

These plant-themed riddles showcase the diverse cultural perspectives and symbolic meanings attributed to plants across different parts of the world. Plants serve as not just botanical entities but also as powerful metaphors for life, nature, and human experiences in the rich tapestry of riddle traditions.

Conclusion:

Exploring the semantic fields of plants in riddles reveals a tapestry of linguistic creativity, cultural symbolism, and cognitive depth. The semantic field of plants in riddles offers a captivating lens through which to explore the cultural significance of plants in human societies. From ancient myths to modern-day jokes, plants have played a central role in shaping the narratives, values, and imagination of different cultures worldwide. By unraveling the mysteries hidden within plant-themed riddles, scholars gain deeper understanding of human cognition, cultural practices, and symbolic representation. As we decipher the language of nature encoded in riddles, we not only enrich our appreciation of botanical diversity but also deepen our connection to the natural world that sustains us.

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