

# Are Nahuatl riddles endangered conceptualizations?

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This paper offers a comparative analysis of two corpora of shared riddles from the sixteenth century and present day Nahuatl. Riddles are a form of speech play practiced in Nahua communities since pre-Hispanic times. Conceptualization behind riddles has been preserved, has changed and has also been lost. Analysis will expose the ways of perceiving and thinking in construing the clues of riddles from a cognitive approach based on Blending Theory together with concepts like profile, construal, mental spaces. Socio-cultural information plays a crucial part in establishing domains of knowledge in which meaning relations are established.

**Keywords:** riddles, Nahuatl, blending, conceptualization

## 1. Introduction

Riddles are a pervasive genre in many languages of the world<sup>1</sup> and one that belongs to the pragmatic realm and must be studied with that factor in mind. In general, riddles share the same basic discursive structure: a question and an answer. This dialogical nature implies a speaker and a hearer or audience; riddles can be classified as informal speech. With regard to their structure, questions have to be construed as clues to an enigma. The clues appeal to different socio-cultural domains and seek to trigger a perlocutive effect, that of provoking an answer from the audience. Nevertheless, each language and culture has its own stylistic peculiarities with relation to the formulaic sequences used and the linguistic strategies employed to structure such varying sequences.

Although this article acknowledges the pragmatic realm belonging to riddles, it will not focus on performance, rather it will look into riddles from the point of view of conceptualizations either lost or only found in lingering remnants. The aim is to

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1. Riddles are not found among all speech communities. For example, there are a few riddles in some cultures speaking North American languages but it is not an important genre (Dundes 1967: 58).

analyze from both diachronic and synchronic perspectives the ways in which meaning is construed in riddles. The focus of my work is on the comparison of riddles in the most well-known indigenous language of Mexico, Nahuatl, a Uto-Aztecan language still spoken by 1, 376,026 people (INEGI 2005). Although Nahuatl is the most vigorous and vital language in Mexico today, it is important to keep in mind that many speech registers have suffered modifications or been lost to Spanish, the official language in Mexico, due to the effects of globalization, which include educational, commercial and legal issues.<sup>2</sup>

The aim of this paper is to compare two corpora of Nahuatl riddles using an approach based on Blending Theory. So only a selection from both corpora will be analyzed. The comparison is possible thanks to the existence of written records from the 16th century (Sahagún 1969 [1577]) and the recent fieldwork of Jonathan Amith in the state of Guerrero, México. Other scholars have analyzed and approached Nahuatl riddles from descriptive, comparative, rhetorical, taxonomic and cognitive perspectives<sup>3</sup> (Ramírez et al. (1992); Flores Farfán (1996); Amith (1997); de Pury (1992); Johansson (2004); Mercenario (2009)). My aim is to look into the ways of thinking and their expression in the clues given for the answers necessary to guess a riddle as a means for understanding present-day, past and lost conceptualizations.

## 2. Zazanilli, Sa:sa:ne:hli, Sa:sa:ni:hli

The etymology of the term used for ‘riddle’ in a number of languages shows that in each one the discursive character that riddles have for a specific culture is stressed. For example *hakom kòp* ‘question-word’ in Tzotzil<sup>4</sup> (Gossen 1990: 73–74) underlines the question, Finnish *arvata* focuses on the act of guessing, English *riddle* and German *Rätsel* highlight the act of counseling-guessing (Köngäs 1971: 10). Spanish *adivinar* stresses the act of discovering something difficult or hidden.

The word *zazanilli* in Molina’s dictionary<sup>5</sup> means “consejuelas para hacer reyr” (Molina 1977: 18). It can be translated approximately as “light stories to make someone laugh.”<sup>6</sup> Its meaning is another story; Launey suggests the word can be decomposed as

2. Flores Farfán reports that in Xalitla, a community in the state of Guerrero there are no longer any riddles due to the promotion of Spanish and consequently the displacement of Nahuatl (Flores Farfán 2003: 344).

3. The Sahagun riddles have been analyzed from a cognitive point of view in terms of mapping between domains and kinesthetic images by Mariana Mercenario (2009).

4. *Tzotzil* is an indigenous language which belongs to the Mayan family.

5. The dictionary written in 1571 by a Franciscan priest is the first dictionary in Nahuatl and Spanish.

6. At that time, the word for ‘riddle’ in Spanish, *adivinanza* didn’t have the meaning ‘speech play’, it was related to magic and the possibility to foresee the future.

*za-zan-il-li*. *Za*<sup>7</sup> and *zan* are two particles of qualitative restriction<sup>8</sup> (Launey 1986: 1186), *-il-* is the root of the verb *ilhuiā* ‘to tell’ (*ibd.* 1187) and finally *-li* is the absolutive suffix. Thus the root *zazanil-* would mean something like “finally tell it” and would focus on the challenge to guess the riddle. However, its etymology is still uncertain.

The word *zazanilli* appears in a couplet structure with other nouns like *nenonotzalli* and *tla’tolli*,<sup>9</sup> but due to the scarcity of occurrences we cannot establish the order of the lexemes or the scope of the pairing. I think that the scope of *tla’tolli* must have been more generic and that *nenonotzalli* and *zazanilli* referred to kinds of informal oral speech. There are two occurrences of the word *zazanilli* in Book VI:

- (1) *In iuh ca çaçanilli in iuh nenonotzalli in tiacaoan in quauhtin in ocelo in iaomicque, ca ompa ui in tonatiuh ichan* (Sahagún 1969: VI, 162).

Thus is the light-hearted story, thus is the tale of the brave warriors, the eagles the ocelots, those who died in war that went there, to the house of the sun.<sup>10</sup>

- (2) *Auh nizca in intlatollo in inçaçanilli in iaomicque cioa ioan in mocioaquetzque* (Sahagún 1969: VI, 162).

And here is the tale, the light-hearted story of the warrior women and the women who died giving birth.

For J. Amith, riddles are an expression of verbal dueling and in Ameyaltepec they are called *sa:sa:nehli*, in Oapan *sa:sa:ni:hli* and in San Francisco Ozomatlan the borrowed Spanish word *kwe:ntos* is used (Amith 1997: 141, 150).

### 3. Structure

The structure of all riddles comes down to the same elements: a question and an answer. The main part is shaped by riddling sequences that tend to avoid the referent<sup>11</sup> which is to be perceived and discovered by clues. The concise question ‘what is it?’ has a more predictable and constant structure, formulaic sequences that introduce a sense of play in the establishment of the challenge. The final aim is to get the answer right.

7. The particle *za* “marks the selection of a predicate by exhausting all other possibilities.” (Launey 1986: 1185).

8. *Zan* can be translated by ‘only’, ‘just’.

9. This pairing has been noted by de Pury (1992: 33), but I do not agree with her interpretation that in the couplet *nenonotzalli-zazanilli* the terms are synonyms, nor that the pair *tla’tolli-zazanilli* corresponds to two different concepts.

10. All translations from Classical Nahuatl are my own, unless otherwise noted.

11. By referent I do not mean a real object in the world but a “discursive construct”.

In the Sahagun corpus (SC hereafter) there are three basic formulaic sequences which serve as cues to pose the question. *çaçan*<sup>12</sup> *tlein on*, this opening sequence is present in all riddles in the SC and basically translates to 'what is that?'. The sequence to address the audience was given after the riddle was presented; in essence it is a way to close the question with a challenge.

- (3) *Aca quittaz tozazaniltzin*  
Who will understand our little riddle?

The last sequence is tied to the question posed above and prompts the answer by doubting that the riddle will be answered:

- (4) *tlaca*<sup>13</sup> *nenca*  
But it is pointless

Since only the first six riddles in the SC have the three sequences mentioned, it is very likely that all riddles should have been delivered in more or less the same way, but even so it is hard to tell since we do not have an oral record.

The fact that these three sequences are not found in the remaining riddles can be explained by the need to be more concise, a possible shortage of paper and also by the procedure used for recording the texts.

In the Amith corpus (AC hereafter) there is more diversity. Three different opening formulaic sequences are used depending on the town of origin for the riddle (Amith 1997: 152).

- (5) Ameyaltepec  
*Se: tosa:sa:ne:l, se: tosa:sa:ne:l*  
A riddle, a riddle<sup>14</sup>
- (6) Oapan  
*Se: mosa:sa:ni:ltsi:n ih*  
This is one of your little riddles
- (7) S.J. Tetelcingo and Ahuehuepan  
*Sa:sa:ni:!! te:ntetl!*<sup>15</sup>  
Riddle! big mouth!
- (8) Acatlán  
*mimixtlamotsi mimixtlamotsi*<sup>16</sup>

12. See notes 8, 9.

13. *tlaca'* is employed when the speaker corrects himself (Launey 1992: 334).

14. Translation into English is my own in all data taken from Amith (1997).

15. The word *tetl* 'stone' can be used in an augmentative and pejorative sense (Amith 1997: 153).

16. The translation of this sequence is uncertain (Amith 1997: 152).

But the formulaic sequences shown above are not only opening statements, they are ways of asking and challenging the riddlee to answer.<sup>17</sup>

There is another way of beginning riddles in the corpus collected by J. Amith that cannot be considered to be a formulaic sequence. It is a matter of collocation; the question is placed after the main part of the riddle so that the predication comes first and then the question ‘what is it?’ This way of structuring the riddles may be due to the influence of Spanish. In that language it is usual to make the statement first and then the question.

Finally, the only formulaic sequence that serves as cue for the audience to give the answer of the riddle is *tlinon* ‘what is it?’, and it is always employed after the initial statement.

It is important to emphasize that corpus was collected under different circumstances. The SC corpus is found in the VI book of the Florentine Codex, an encyclopedic account of the social and cultural domains of the Mexica. The collection of these texts was carried out in an environment in which the Franciscan priest Fray Bernardino de Sahagún had several elderly Nahuas as informants; he also had help from natives who had been taught the alphabetic script in writing the 13 books that comprise the mentioned codex. The layout of all 13 books consists of two columns, one of them in Nahuatl and the other in Spanish, although the latter text is not a translation of the Nahua text but a paraphrase. The sixth book is named “Rhetoric and Moral Philosophy” and is comprised of discourses delivered in institutional contexts that contain words of advice: *huehuetla’tolli* ‘proverbs’, *tlatla’tolli* ‘sayings’ and *zazanilli* ‘riddles’. Thus this variant of Nahuatl has been termed Classical Nahuatl given that it refers to the Nahuatl spoken in pre-Hispanic times and is no longer spoken; it has also been termed Documentary Nahuatl to include all written materials that have been preserved.

The SC corpus consists of 46 riddles that can be classified as falling into domains such as animals, plants, body parts and miscellaneous artifacts that are, for the most part, objects common to the social and cultural environment of central Mexico in pre-Hispanic times, for example *nacochtli* ‘ear plug’, *olmaitl* ‘drum stick’, *omichicahuaztli* ‘musical instrument’, *cacaxtli* ‘carrying frame’, *ayacachtli*, ‘gourd rattle’ (Sahagún 1969 [1577]: 237–240).

In the same way, the AC incorporates new objects, artifacts unknown before the Spaniards arrival, many of which have a Spanish name, or more precisely, a loan word integrated into the lexical paradigm of Guerrero Nahuatl, for example: *loboh* ‘balloon’, *tije:ras* ‘scissors’, *kucha:rah* ‘spoon’, *kwe:the* ‘firework’, *seriyoh* ‘match’, *beli:tah*, ‘little candle’, *sapa:tos* ‘shoes’, *kampa:na* ‘bell’ (Amith 1997: 159–189).

Riddles in Guerrero Nahuatl may have a compartmentalization value (Kroskrity: 1992) nevertheless the language employed may be seen as a case of syncretism in the

17. It is important to remember that the AC is an oral corpus recorded in an actual context of production; the challenge need not be expressed linguistically since paralinguistic features also serve as the basis for the challenge.

way that Jane and Kenneth Hill (1999) apply the term to their research in Tlaxcala Nahuatl. This means that although riddles have a distinct frame and “a well demarcated arena of use” (Kroskrity 1992: 303), “ways of speaking” are a continuum (Hill and Hill 1999: 74) in which Spanish and Nahuatl are seen as one language.

The Amith corpus is all based on his fieldwork in the communities of Ameyaltepec and San Agustín Oapan in the state of Guerrero during four and a half years. He also includes riddles from other communities such as Ahuehuepan, San Juan Tetelcingo, San Francisco Ozomatlán and San Juan Acatlán. In the corpus there are 129 riddles classified as follows: Section I trees, plants, fruits and seeds; section II animals and associated things; section III artifacts; section IV body parts; section V miscellaneous things and newly created riddles. Today, riddles are important collective activities for people and are entrenched in the habitual life of the community (Amith 1997; Ramírez et al. 1992). In both corpora riddle objects appeal to everyday things, plants, vegetables, animals, body parts; there are no abstract concepts.

From the number of riddles given above it is clear that both corpora are not even and there are fewer riddles in the SC. This is no obstacle since we will focus on a limited set from both corpora. The selection will be based on shared referents that will allow us to have better grounds for comparison.

Only 12 riddles from the SC and 19 from the AC are analyzed in this paper. This numeric difference is understandable because in the AC there are two or even three different riddles referring to the same object.

The following are important considerations for the comparative perspective presented here:

1. Riddles about objects that have disappeared are not present in the sets assembled for the comparison.
2. Riddles expressing conceptualizations that still hold even though the referents are different in the S and A corpora are not included in the analyzed corpus.
3. In the cases in which there is more than one riddle for the same referent, all of them are included because they show different ways of thinking about the same element.

#### 4. Methodology

The work of Fauconnier and Turner about Blending Theory (2002) and of Fauconnier about Mental Spaces (1994) is the basis for this analysis, so that mental spaces and frames are the basic categories. A mental space is defined as “small conceptual pockets constructed as we think and talk, for purposes of local understanding and action” and frames are structuring elements for mental spaces (Fauconnier and Turner 2002: 40). As for ‘domain’, I follow Langacker’s statement that it can be “any kind of conception or realm of experience” (Langacker 2008: 44).

Blending Theory describes the process of conceptualization. The basic assumption is that mapping between mental spaces will set up a blended space where the construal of the linguistic expression is revealed, so that we have a generic space that contains usual information and that can be projected onto two or more input spaces that have specific information where frames are set and mappings between them occur to establish a blended space in which new meaning is generated. The relations behind the process of mapping established between spaces can be of different types: change, identity, time, space, cause-effect, part-whole, representation, role, analogy, disanalogy, property, similarity, category, intentionality, uniqueness (Fauconnier and Turner 2009). A mental space is installed within a domain and at the same time projects specific frames.

Other concepts used in the analysis include the following: Construal refers to how conceptual content is construed; among construal processes there is specificity, focusing, prominence and perspective (Langacker 2008: 55).

Profiling is a sort of prominence involving the focusing of attention and ‘the selection of a certain body of conceptual content’ (Langacker 2008: 66). Profiling is crucial for the selection of the characteristics that will be transferred to the blended space and is an essential conceptual and cognitive strategy that makes it possible to assemble the real input space and the imagined, perceived or construed input space.

Analogy will be the preferred relation between spaces for the assignation of meaning in riddles or in other terms, in the creation of the blend. The central idea behind analogy is that “an analogy is an assertion that a relational structure that normally applies in one domain can be applied in another domain” (Gentner 1983: 156).

## 5. Shared riddles

Riddles present in both corpora may indicate different construals of the same element,<sup>18</sup> which can be taken as evidence for a changing conceptualization pattern. The same conceptualization can also be present in construing the same element and it will mean that the conceptualization pattern has been preserved because of its use in oral tradition.

### 5.1 The green tomato

Ameyaltepec

- (1) *Se: to-sa:sa:ne:l, se: to-sa:sa:ne:l Se: ichpoka-tsi:n*  
 one POSS1PL-riddle one POSS1PL-riddle one young girl-DIM  
*mlá:k pi:stik i-tlake:n* *a:mi:ltomatl*  
 really tight POSS3SG-clothes  
 ‘A riddle, a riddle a young girl in tight clothes’ ‘it is a green tomato’

18. Elements in mental spaces refer to objects in the world only indirectly, as objects in speaker’s mental representations, real or otherwise (Coulson and Oakley 2000: 176).

Table 1. The shared referents of riddles

Sahagún	Amith
1. tlachinolli “the burnt” (field)	kan otlachinaw “where (the field) is burned” kwak tlachinawi “when (the field) burns”
2. huitzmallotl “the needle”	aújah “the needle” (2 riddles)
3. azcatl “the ants”	tsi:kameh “the ants”
4. chilli “the chilli”	chi:hli “the chile” (3 riddles)
5. atemitl “the nits”	a:tintli/ma:tin “your nits”
6. teccizmamaque “snails”	wilaka “the snail” (3 riddles)
7. aceli “the louse”	ma:stilih “your lice” (2 riddles)
8. cuitlatl “the excrement”	mokwitl “your excrement” (2 riddles)
9. toyac “our nose”	moyekatsol “your nose” toyekatsol “our nose”
10. chichi icuitl “dog droppings”	ikwitl burroh “donkey manure” wa:kax kwitlatl “cow manure”
11. tomatl “the tomato”	a:mi:ltomatl “green tomato”
12. cuezcomatl “granary”	kweskomatl “granary”
13. maxtlatl “breechclout”	mokaltsonmekayo “cord to tie pants”

## Sahagún

- (2) *Zazan tlein on* *Huipil-titich* *tomatl*<sup>19</sup>  
 just what is that? blouse-tight  
 ‘Just what is that? a tight blouse’<sup>20</sup> ‘it is a tomato’

The tomato in both corpora (S) (A) can be perceived as a similar construction. However, due to a profiling effect, the frame within the mental spaces is not composed in the same way. Riddles (1) and (2) set up two mental spaces: a human space and a vegetable space. In the AC riddle there is respectively a young girl in tight clothes and a green tomato in its husk. The mapping between these spaces indicates that the girl corresponds to the tomato and the tight clothes to the husk. There is a one to one mapping on the basis of a perceived structural similarity. “Although there is universal agreement that structural similarity is crucial in analogical processing, at the same time there is a dismaying lack of agreement on exactly what is meant by ‘structural similarity’” (Gentner and Markman 2005: 2).

19. Although it doesn’t have any specification, this vegetable refers to the green tomato since the red one is *xitomatl*.

20. There is a translation of Sahagún’s riddles by Thelma Sullivan. What is it that has a shirt stuck to it? (1963: 135).

In both riddles (1), (2) the process is the same but the profiling effect leads to different construals. In the SC riddle the *huipil*<sup>21</sup> profiles the husk as the defining characteristics of the tomato and in the AC riddle the fact that the tomato is bursting out of its husk. Both riddles prompt the same answer: ‘the green tomato’, but the clue for the AC riddle is more descriptive whereas the SC riddle it is not. Only by cultural inference does a girl appear in the scene, but that information is backgrounded since only women wore this garment (*huipil*) in pre-Hispanic times.

Why a young girl? Because the husk of the green tomato before it ripens really adheres to the tomato and is hard to peel off.

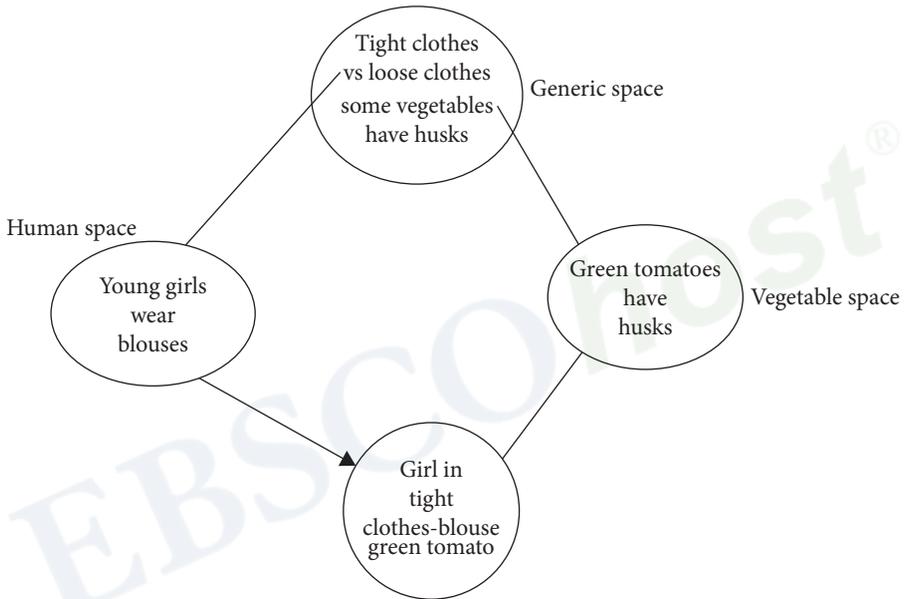


Figure 1.

### 5.2 The burnt (field)

#### Ameyaltepec

- (3) *Se: to-sa:sa:ne:l, se: to-sa:sa:ne:l Se: to-tla:tla:ka-tsi:n*<sup>22</sup>  
 one POSS1PL-riddle one POSS1PL-riddle one POSS1PL-RED-man-DIM  
*ipan se: a:tlawtli ompa cho popoki:t-ok kwa:k tlachinawi*  
 LOC one ravine LOC smoke-LIG-PROG  
 ‘A riddle, a riddle a little man that in a ravine is always smoking  
 ‘when the field is burnt’

21. It is a distinctive piece of clothing, a blouse without sleeves, worn by pre-Hispanic women.

22. Possibly reduplication is a marker for play language (Amith 1997: 156).

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The smoke that comes from a little man smoking, signals a controlled fire in the same way that after a field is burned (a contained fire), the smoke lasts and it comes from different places. Both the smoking and the slash and burn agriculture domains project two mental spaces where the metaphorical relation is between a little man seen as stumps in the field.<sup>23</sup> In the blended space 'little' and 'ravine' function as space builders.

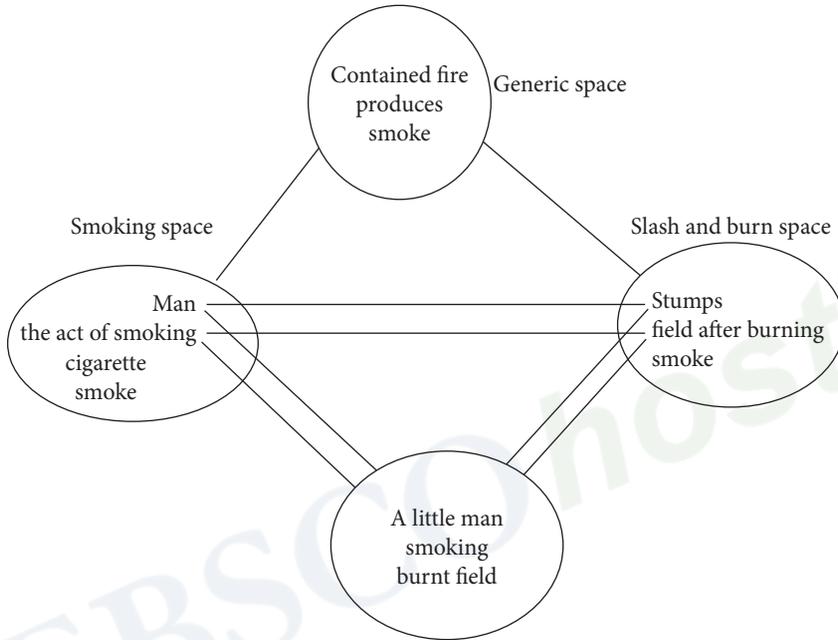


Figure 2.

Sahagun

(4) *zazan tlein on Cuetzalli te-yacana cacalin te-toca-ti-uh tlachinolli*  
 Just what is that? cardinal OBJ-lead Crow OBJ-follow-LIG-go  
 What is that? A red cardinal leads and a crow follows<sup>24</sup> 'the burning'

This is a more complex blend since it requires two generic spaces, the first one, the common knowledge that in the onset of fire the field is seen red and after when the field is burned it looks black. In the second generic space, birds can have different colors, cardinals are red and crows are black. Through reference to the color red, the field and the first bird establish a relation based on having the same property (colors) and in the blend the cardinal is the burning field in the same way that the crow is the

23. J. Amith (1997, 209) reports that the explanation of this riddle given to him was that after burning the field, the stumps went on burning for a long time.

24. "What is a red cardinal going first and a crow following behind?" (Sullivan 1963: 135).

burned field. Another two mental spaces included, the leading and following spaces establish the order of appearance of both birds (relation of time) parallel to the sequence of the fire in the field.

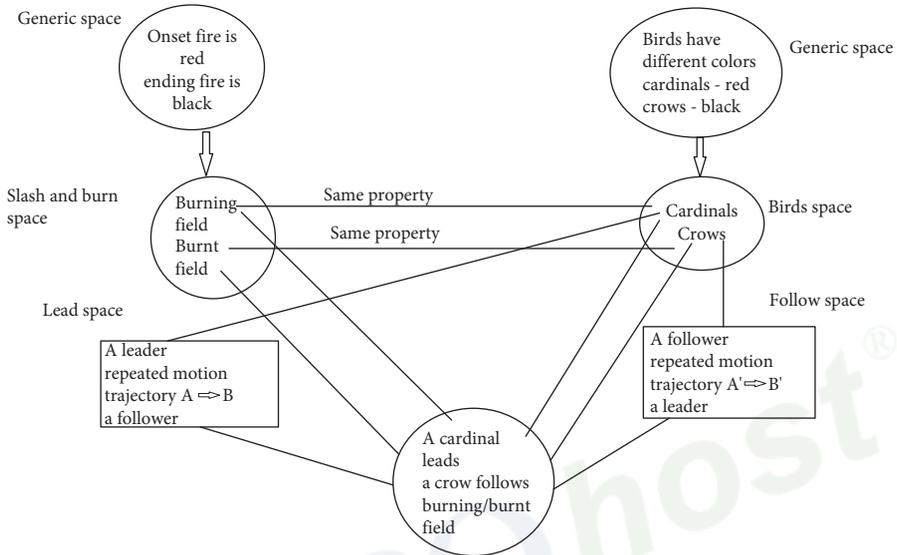


Figure 3.

Acatlán

(5) *Mimixtlamotsi, mimixtlamotsi*

*Ipan se tepetl ompa sow-t-ok se tlakentli kapostik kan otlachinaw*  
 LOC one hill LOC spread-LIG-PROG one cloth black 'where the field was burnt'

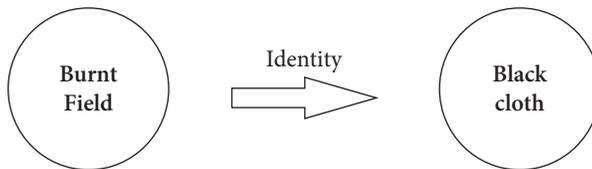


Figure 4.

The slash and burn system for agricultural purposes has been used since pre-Hispanic times and is still a common practice. The survival of this riddle with different construals signals the importance of specific agricultural practices such as this one for the community.

The three riddles (3), (4), (5) have a burned field as element. The scope of the SC riddle (4) is the entire burning event, the moment when the fire starts, the field is red

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and when it finishes burning, it is black. Riddle (3) in the AC profiles the moment when the fire has finished burning and there is a lot of smoke rising from the stumps. Finally the last AC riddle (5) profiles the result of the burning, the black patch that is seen after the burning.

### 5.3 The needle

#### Ameyaltepec

- (6) *Se: to-sa:sa:ne:l se: to-sa:sa:ne:l San se: i:xtē-w aújah*  
 one POSS1PL-riddle one POSS1PL-riddle only one eye-POSS 'it is the needle'

In the case of the needle, it is important to point out that the old word for needle in Nahuatl is lost in the Guerrero area where these riddles come from; the word *aújah* borrowed from the Spanish *aguja* has replaced *huitzmallotl*. We have two riddles for the same element. One of them (7) replicates the conceptualization in the ancient riddle (8), which tells us that it has prevailed since ancient times because of oral transmission.

Riddle (6) makes use of the analogy between the eyes of an animated being that share the same form as the hole or eye of the needle. An analogy relation maps the eyes onto the hole of the needle. In the blended space the word *san* 'only' is a space builder which activates a mental space where the object sought (the needle) lacks an eye in a paradigm where an animated being is expected to have two eyes and having only one is the defining feature of a needle.

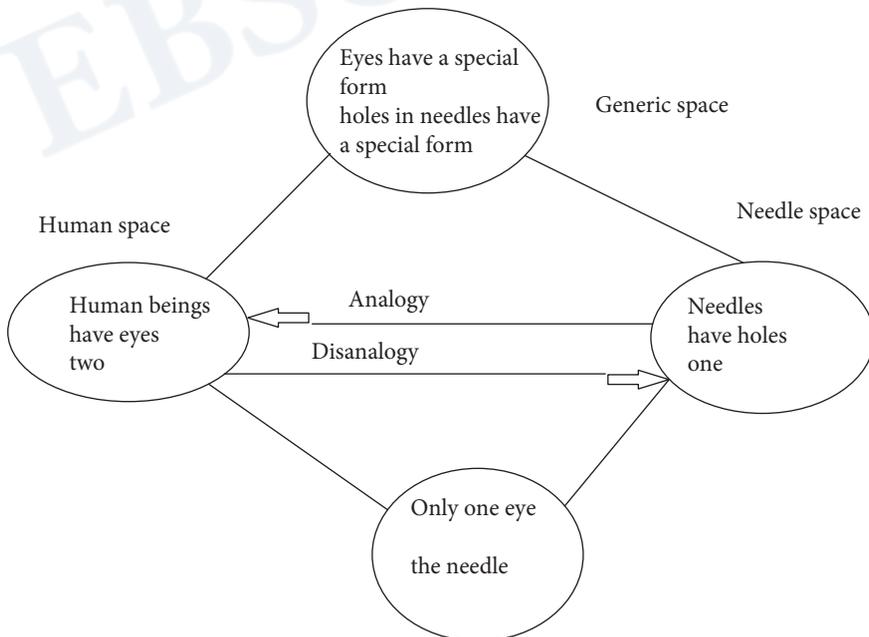


Figure 5.

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## Ameyaltepec

- (7) *Se: to-sa:sa:ne:l, se: to-sa:sa:ne:l Se: to-tla:-tla:ka-tsi:n*  
 one POSS1PL-riddle one POSS1PL-riddle One POSS1PL-RED-man-DIM  
*weka ki-tewila:n-ti-nemi i-kwitlaxkol aújah*  
 far OBJ3SG- drag-LIG-go POSS3SG-intestines  
 ‘A riddle, a riddle a little man that drags his intestines far’ ‘it is the needle’

The needle in this case is seen as a man whose intestines are the thread and the profile is on the activity of dragging along the thread rather than on the form of the needle with its hole.

The same conceptualization present in Guerrero Nahuatl is found in classical Nahuatl: both see the needle as a human being who drags part of himself, his intestines seen as a long thread. The SC riddle is more elaborated in relation to the space where the *cuitlaxcolli* “intestines” are dragged. When the needle is introduced in the cloth, the form it takes is like that of the slope of a hill.<sup>25</sup>

## Sahagun

- (8) *Zazan tlein on I-cuitlaxcol qui-huilana tepetozcatl*  
 Just what is that? POSS3SG-intestines OBJ3SG-dragg hill  
*qui-toca Aca qu-itta-z to-zazanil-tzin*  
 OBJ3SG-follow Who OBJ3SG-look-FUT POSS1PL-riddle-DIM  
 What is it? that drags its intestines through the hill  
 Someone will understand our little riddle?<sup>26</sup>  
*tlaca nen ca uitzmallotl*  
 ‘It is in vain, it is the needle’

Riddle (8) is very interesting from the point of view of the survival of conceptualizations because we can see a direct link between the old and modern versions of the same needle riddle. In contrast, the first riddle from the AC, centering on the eye, most probably is borrowed or adapted from a riddle in Spanish.

## 5.4 The snail

## Ameyaltepec

- (9) *Se: to-sa:sa:ne:l, se: tosa:sa:ne:l Ipan se: kuhtli tlekowa se:*  
 One POSS1PL-riddle one POSS1PL-riddle LOC one tree go up one  
*to-tla:-tla:ka-tsi:n ika i-tambori:tah wilaka*  
 POSS1PL-RED-man-DIM with POSS3SG-drum  
 ‘A riddle, a riddle in a tree, up goes a little man with his little drum’  
 ‘it is the snail’

25. Mercenario says that the relation between the hill and the cloth is given by the diagonal way in which they are perceived (2009: 80).

26. “What is it that drags its intestines as it ambles along the foot-hills of the mountain? “Someone is sure to guess our riddle” (Sullivan 1963: 131).

Ameyaltepec

(10) *Se: to-sa:sa:ne:l se: tosa:sa:ne:l Se: to-tla:tla:ka-tsi:n*  
 one POSS1PL-riddle one POSS1PL-riddle one POSS1PL-man-DIM  
*ki-ma:ma-ti-nemi i-tambo:rah* wilaka  
 OBJ3SG-carry-LIG-go POSS3SG-drum  
 ‘A riddle, a riddle a little man that goes on carrying his drum’ ‘it is the snail’

Ameyaltepec

(11) *Se: tosa:sa:ne:l, se: tosa:sa:ne:l Newa ni-piten-tsi:n*  
 one POSS1PL-riddle one POSS1PL-riddle SBJ1 SBJ1-small-DIM  
*pero no-kal-tsi:n ni-k-wi:ka ipan no-tla:ka-yo*  
 but POSS1SG-house-DIM SBJ1SG-OBJ3SG-carry LOC POSS1SG-body-POSS  
wilaka  
 ‘A riddle, a riddle I am small but I carry my house on my body’ ‘it is the snail’

In the AC there are three riddles (9), (10), (11) centering on the snail that can be analyzed as different construals for the same element. There is a pervasive image of a snail as a man who carries a house and a drum. In the first case the house profiles the same function since houses serve as shelters, while the variant of the drum is more concerned with the form, since the drum resembles the shell of the snail. The foregrounded characteristic of the man is his small size since snails are also small.

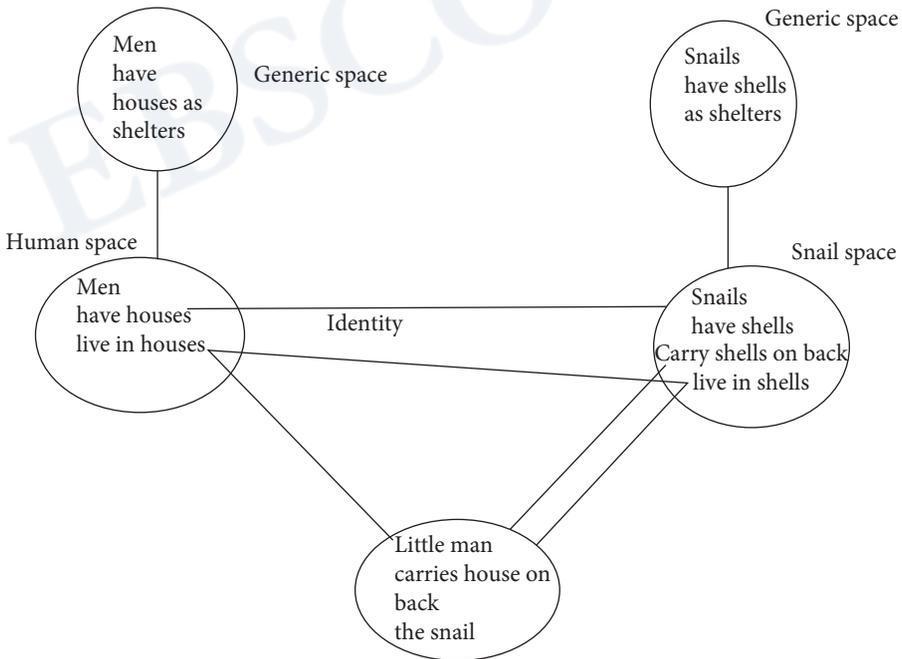


Figure 6.

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Sahagun

- (12) *zazan tlein on Cacatzactli temetz-tica tlacuiloa teccizmamaque*  
 Just what is that black man lead-INS draw/write  
 What is that? A black man that draws with liquid lead<sup>27</sup> 'they are the snails'

In the SC riddle (12) the observation of the snail biology when it moves is profiled since the trail that snails leave when moving is expressed as a trajectory that becomes a drawing/writing space and the slime is liquid lead that fulfils the drawing function. Also present is the identity between a snail and a man specifically a dark skinned man *cacatzactli*.<sup>28</sup> In this case the man is not small since the profiling is on the characteristic motion of the snail and its by-product, the slime.

A Spanish riddle (13) found on the internet is relevant because it is also about a snail. The relevant issue is to compare ways of construing the clues. In this example we see a more descriptive way of posing the riddle, as well as a more elaborated construal. With so many clues the element will be hard to miss by the riddlee since it deploys the image (the carried house), the prototypical attribute (slow in motion), the biological trait (the trail left) and the habitat (the garden).

- (13) *El caracol*  
 www.adinancero.com/adin37.htm  
 The snail  
*Mi casa la llevo a cuestras tras de mí dejo un sendero, soy lento*  
 I carry my house around I leave a trail behind me I'm slow  
*de movimientos, y no le gusto al jardinero.*  
 in motion and the gardener doesn't like me

Body parts are favorite elements for riddles. In the AC riddle (14), the nostrils in the nose frame are profiled. In the hill frame the caves are profiled among many other elements that one can find in a hill. The relation of visual similarity between both spaces produces the image of a nose being a hill with two caves.

## 5.5 The nose

Ameyaltepec

- (14) *Se: to-sa:sa:ne:l, se: to-sa:sa:ne:l Ipan i-puntah se: lo:mah*  
 one POSS1PL-riddle one POSS1PL-riddle LOC POSS3SG-top one hill  
*ompa kah o:me kwe:bah moyekatsol*  
 LOC be two caves  
 'A riddle, a riddle on top of a hill there are two caves' 'it is your nose'

27. What is a little darky who writes with a piece of lead? (Sullivan 1963: 133).

28. This word in Nahuatl derives from the root *catzahua* that means something dirty or shadowy.

- (15) *Se tosa:sa:ne:l, se: tosa:sa:ne:l Ipan se lomah weyak ika*  
 one POSS1PL-riddle one POSS1PL-riddle LOC one hill long LOC  
*on-tlami Ompa kah o:me yeyekako:ntli toyekatsol*  
 DIST-finish LOC be two windpot 'it is our nose'  
 'A riddle, a riddle On a long hill there where it ends, there are two caves'

## Sahagun

- (16) *Zazan tlein on Tepetlamimilolli i-itic a-meya toyac*  
 Just what is that? round hill POSS3SG-inside water-flow  
 What is that? A round hill within which water flows<sup>29</sup> 'it is our nose'

In riddle (15) the two caves have a functional aspect, since air can come out of them. The analogical relation is with an actual kind of cave from which strong air comes out named *yeyekako:ntli* (Amith 1997, 206). In the SC riddle (16) the form is profiled but not in such detail as the AC riddle. It is more important to profile the functional aspect of the nose with mucus flowing from it in the same way that water can flow from inside a hill.<sup>30</sup>

## 5.6 The ants

## San Francisco Ozomatlán

- (17) *T-íá:-s t-íá:-s t-íá:-s ipan se: tlakomohli*  
 SBJ2SG-go-FUT SBJ2SG-go-Fut SBJ2SG-go-FUT LOC one craig  
*ti-k-o-ne:xti:s la:h<sup>31</sup> xi:n-t-ok ye-chi:chi:hli,*  
 SBJ2SG-OBJ3SG-find-FUT really scatter-LIG-PROG beans-red  
 'you are going, you are going, you are going on a little plain you will find that  
 there are a lot of red beans scattered'  
*tli:non? tsi:kameh*  
 What is it? 'they are the ants'

In Riddle (17) there is an analogical relation between the two spaces: ants look like scattered beans when they are in a group. The verb 'scattered' builds a space where the layout of beans is important for the resemblance.

- (18) *Zazan tleino Tlapal-te-pitzactli ayoui te.qua azcatl*  
 Just what is that? red-stone-thin easily OBJ.eat (bite)  
 What is that thin red stone that easily bites people?<sup>32</sup> 'it is the ant'

In riddle (18) the ant retains the capacity to bite as its animate quality and also by a relation of visual similarity takes the attributes of the stone described.

29. What is a mountainside that has a spring of water in it? (Sullivan 1963: 133).

30. In pre-Hispanic times it was believed that hills and mountains were containers of water.

31. It is a reduced form of *mlá:k* (Amith 1997: 198).

32. What is long, hard, and red, and bites people without any trouble? (Sullivan 1963: 133).

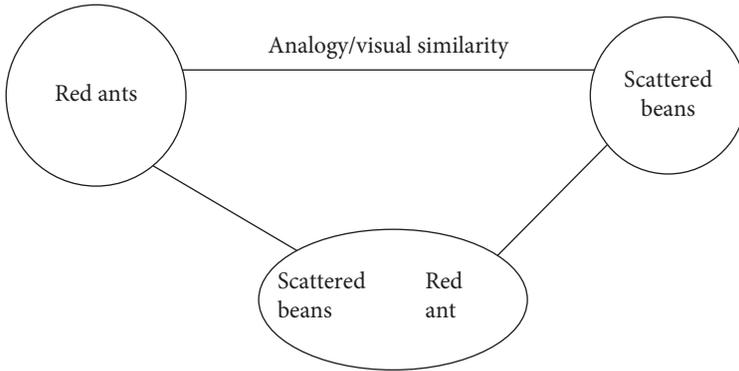


Figure 7.

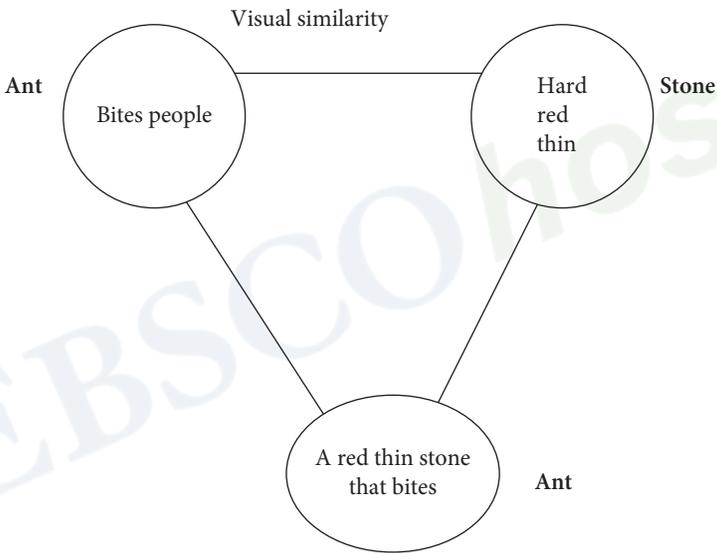


Figure 8.

## 5.6 The chile

### Ahuehuepan

- (19) *Sa:sa:ni:!! Te:ntet!! Se: to-tla:-tla:ka-tsi:n no-nemi:tia ista:k-tsi:n,*  
 Riddle big mouth one POSS1PL-RED-Man-DIM REF-born white-DIM  
*no-we:ilia xoxo:hke, wan miki chi:chi:ltik*  
 REF-grow green and dies red *chi:hle*  
 A riddle! Big mouth!  
 ‘A little man that is born white, grows green and dies red’ ‘it is the chile’

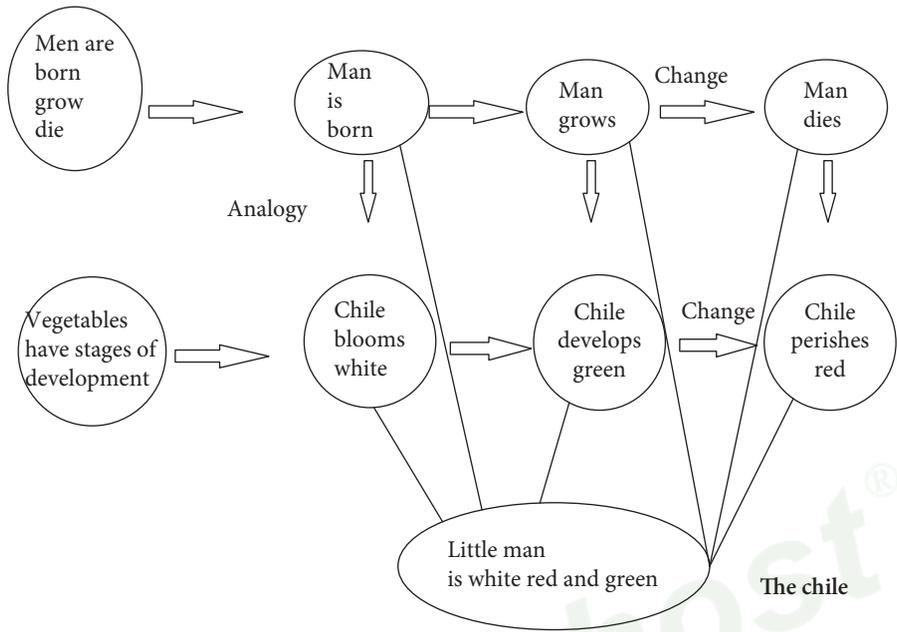


Figure 9.

Ameyaltepec

(20) *Se: tosa:sa:ne:l, se: tosa:sa:ne:l Tlawe:leh ke:n mo-koko:l chi:hli*  
 one POSS1PL-riddle one POSS1PL-riddle fierce as POSS2SG-grandfather  
 A riddle, a riddle  
 It is as fierce as your grandfather 'it is the chile'

*Tlaweleh* 'fierce' is a word that can only be used for human beings (Amith 1997: 194). The chile space and the grandfather space establish an analogical relation based in a metaphorical projection that chile can be fierce instead of spicy (See Figure 10).

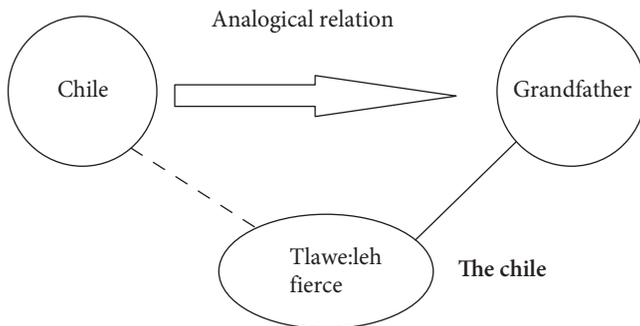


Figure 10.

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Ameyaltepec

- (21) *Se: tosa:sa:ne:l se: tosa:sa:ne:l Kokó:k ke:n mo-koko:l chi:hli*  
 one POSS1PL-riddle one POSS1PL-riddle spicy as POSS2SG-grandfather  
 A riddle, a riddle  
 It is as spicy as your grandfather 'it is the chile'

By the same type of relation, riddle (21) establishes the opposite case. Chile is related analogically to the grandfather but *koko:k* is a word that can only be used to refer to the characteristic piquancy of chile (Amith 1997: 194) so the metaphorical projection on which analogy is based is that grandfathers can be spicy (See Figure 11).

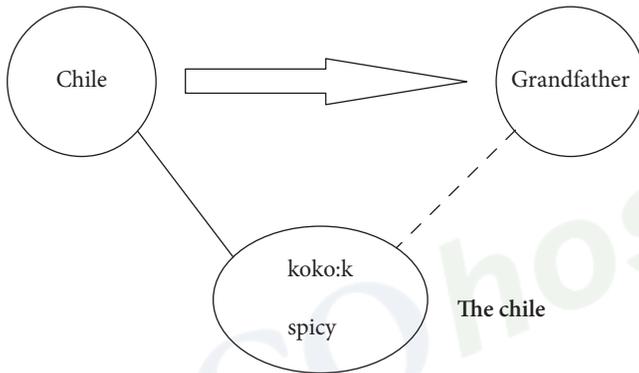


Figure 11.

Sahagun

- (22) *Zazan tlein on chimalli i-itic Ten-ti-ca Ca chilli auh*  
 Just what is that shield POSS3SG-inside full-LIG-be PRED chile and  
*ye in i-ach-yo chimalli*  
 DET POSS3SG-seed-POSS 'it is the shield'  
 What is it that is full of shields in its inside?  
 It is the chile and its seeds are shields

Shields were important elements of warfare and obviously they are no longer present in Nahua communities of today, so riddle (22) is the expression of a lost conceptualization since the AC riddles focus on color and taste as we have seen. The conceptualization in the SC riddle is based on a relation of visual similarity between the form of shields and the form of chile seeds.

## 6. Conclusion

Telling riddles is a surviving communicative practice in some Nahua communities of today. Oral transmission has been the basis for the diffusion and maintenance of Nahua

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riddles. Although riddles as a genre have been preserved and are very much alive, it is clear from the examples shown above that conceptualizations are being lost. It could be argued that they change and stay within native ways of thinking, and some do. However, a closer look at some of them, i.e. the needle, reveals the existence of two construals and a situation in which one could say that the conceptualizations are competing. How much longer will Nahuatl speakers understand that ‘the little man dragging his intestines’ leads to a needle? The pervasive presence of Spanish, the official language, has permeated most of the informal registers in Nahua speaking communities.

In the Sahagún corpus the clues are construed taking into account not only socio-cultural knowledge in the same way as the riddles in the AC; they also embody detailed information about historic, mythic and biological issues. Form and function in the Sahagún riddles cannot be dissociated and they don’t simply rely on color, shape or taste.

The following example (23) expresses clearly how detailed observation of nature is intertwined with cultural processes.

- (23) *Zazan tlein on tepetozcatl quitoca momamatlaxcalotiuh.* *Papalotl*  
 What is it that follows the hill and goes along making tortillas on its back?  
 ‘the butterfly’.

Not only do we have information about how a butterfly moves its wings when it flies but also how butterflies move towards higher elevations and the traditional way in which women make tortillas. In riddles analogical reasoning and visual similarity seem to be the prototypical patterns of conceptualization and the basis for the projection of schematic images as clues for common objects. Blending and mental space theory was crucial in exposing the conceptual processes and meaning nuances involved in the construction of the riddles.

Riddles in Nahuatl must be revitalized and sustained as a vital form of speech play that promotes social identity and solidarity in the community, they have been an ongoing oral tradition since pre-Hispanic times and in them today we see expressions of endangered ways of thinking and conceptualizing.

## Abbreviations

DET	determiner	POS	possessive
DIM	diminutive	PL	plural
DIST	distal	PRED	predicative
INS	instrumental	PROG	progressive
LIG	ligature	RED	reduplication
LOC	locative	REF	reflexive
PL	plural	SBJ	subject
OBJ	object	SG	singular

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# Bodily-based conceptual metaphors in Ashéninka Perené myths and folk stories

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The paper examines a range of conceptual metaphors which serve as key elements of Ashéninka Perené (Arawak) myths and folk tales, and aims at situating them in the context of Amazonian high jungle dwellers' culture. Based on fieldwork conducted in 2009–2011 in lowland Peru, the paper gives a brief outline of the current sociolinguistic status of the language, indigenous economy, and aspects of speakers' cultural beliefs. The bulk of the paper is devoted to the discussion of three conceptual metaphors which underlie oral native texts, namely BODY IS ANIMAL PREY; BODY IS CLOTHING; BODY IS FABRICATION. Seeking to account for the attested metaphors, the paper concludes with a discussion of indigenous conceptual frameworks of cosmocentric animism and perspectivism.

**Keywords:** Ashéninka Perené, bodily-based metaphor, cosmocentric animism, perspectivism

This study<sup>1</sup> focusses on bodily-based conceptual metaphors underlying myths and folk stories of Ashéninka Perené. Ashéninka Perené is spoken in the thirty five hamlet communities in the Perené River valley in Chanchamayo and Perené Districts of Junín Province, Perú. It belongs to the Kampan subgrouping of Arawak, along with other varieties of Ashéninka, Asháninka, Caquinte, Machiguenga, Nomatsiguenga, and Nanti. The language is definitively endangered, matching the profile described by Krauss: "the language has passed the crucial threshold of viability, is no longer being

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