THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN formal ambiguity and less literal, metaphorical ambiguity as techniques for riddle confusion has been demonstrated by our riddle continuum and our accompanying discussion. In light of the previous observation that the nature of art is representative and thus comparative, we might now ask whether other traditional forms may be found that draw their vitality from the principles described earlier. An examination of proverbs provides a useful point of departure. Although a systematic presentation does not exist, relationships between riddle and proverb have not gone unnoticed. On the most superficial level, folklorists have labelled both forms “minor genres.” The term minor undoubtedly connoted, at one stage in the development of folkloristics, “less interesting” or “of peripheral concern,” especially when compared to the major genres such as folktale or folksong. Certainly when folklore was a discipline devoted to the examination of oral literature, folk narrative and lyric provided more fertile fields to till. Now, however, most folklorists would disavow this pejorative sense of the term minor. Minor at this point may aptly refer to textual brevity, and in this sense, proverb and riddle are minor. They are among the briefest forms of utterance in the traditional repertoire that utilize the techniques of art as framing devices. That is, both genres are “witty” in the restricted sense that we have employed in this study.
On the other hand, proverb and riddle characteristically are placed in opposition by virtue of the goals of their respective performances. Proverbs seek to reduce confusion through the artful relocation of a real social problem; riddles seek to create fictitious problems, competitive events that intensify social disparity. Let us briefly clarify this point. The proverb in a situation of social conflict is introduced as a device for managing the confusion created therein. It does so, as Burke 1941 has pointed out, by means of classifying the distinct situation into a general category and proposing a strategy for resolving it. Thus, tension arises before the performance event, is addressed through artful means, and is confronted upon the return of the audience (the recipient of the advice) to social reality. The goal of this performance, therefore, is the reintroduction of stasis in the audience.

Thus proverbs seek to enhance sociability. After all, they exist to present to their troubled recipients courses of action that tradition has shown to be apt solutions to recurrent social problems. In order to encourage the acceptance of the advice rendered, our cultural tradition, and apparently most others, have built into proverbs a variety of devices designed to dispell any impressions of individual authoritarianism or direct criticism. Of course, relegating one's particular problem to a general class of recurrent situations signals that this situation is not due to an individual peculiarity, but is widely spread in the given culture. Framing the proffered advice by introducing it with the phrase, "You know what they say," marks the advice as traditional wisdom, thus negating this advice as a personal attack. Proverbs, in fact, seem to employ a number of relocation devices (cf. Abrahams 1972). Certainly metaphor is one of these devices, since it deals with a social situation only by analogy to an imaginary world. In addition, we find that in proverbs the use of abstraction is frequent, as in "Necessity is the mother of invention." We also find the use either of third-person pronouns, as in "He who hesitates is lost," or the use of the "impersonal you," as in "You can't get blood out of a turnip." All of these devices serve to underplay features of difference by means of both linguistic and sociolinguistic mechanisms.
Riddling performances, conversely, are competitive, rather than cooperative, enterprises. Rather than working with the audience to restore proper (i.e., socially functional) perception of a situation, the riddler foists confusion on his audience by a variety of means. Despite the resolution of conflict with the supplying of the answer, riddles seek to generate tension as consciously as proverbs try to ameliorate it. This is true of the social strategies of riddling, as well as of the linguistic strategies we have discussed. In riddling we are allowed, even required, to be rude. There is disparity between the interactants; riddlers are the final arbiters of the answers provided by riddlees. Moreover, outside this particular performance context their judgments would generally be condemned as being excessively capricious. In addition, the norms of expectation for interrogation are inverted in riddle sessions. In nonplayful speech one only imposes questions upon parties he believes capable of providing answers. In riddling, however, the riddler only presents those questions for which he believes riddlees cannot provide answers. Finally, in riddling any textual or contextual clues that might be forthcoming in ordinary talk are submerged and obscured as far as is allowable within the prevailing performance tradition. In essence, riddling thrives on rending the social and communicative bonds between participants.

Though the goals of the performances thus constitute polarities, the means to their respective ends do not. We have established the metaphorical nature of many riddles. Similarly, Abrahams (1976:199) states, “The proverb-sayer appeals, directly or by analogy, to an approved course of action.” Even more explicit is the argument in Seitel 1976:129 that an “Important aspect of proverb use . . . is the metaphorical relationship between the situation presented literally in the proverb and the context situation to which the proverb refers.” Given these similarities, a systematization of the relationships between these forms and their common base, metaphor, should be possible.

Barthes 1964 provides us with a point of departure in his assertion that aphoristic types of discourse are of the metaphoric order. If this is the case, the interrelationships of
metaphor, proverb, and at least a large body of riddles should be demonstrable. To begin, the similarity in structure of the three forms may be arranged paradigmatically in terms of standard semiotic analysis by their correlation to the terms sign, signifier, and signified. Sign designates "the mark of an intention to communicate a meaning" (see Guiraud, 1971:23). All signs are comprised of a signifier (that which refers to or stands for another concept) and the signified (the concept communicated by the signifier). The nature of metaphor, proverb, and riddle as signs can thus be rendered as in figure 27.

With pure metaphor the signifier-signified relation is straightforward, and this relationship is the basis of the paradigm. In the case of proverb, the relationship is also fairly clear and has been outlined by Seitel 1976 in his work, as we have noted. Specifically, Seitel schematizes proverb in terms of "metaphorical reasoning," whereby an imaginary (proverb) situation is applied to a real situation through a process of correlation. This view is supported by Burke 1973.

**Figure 27**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sign</th>
<th>Signifier</th>
<th>Signified</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Metaphor</td>
<td>Figure</td>
<td>Object, Phenomenon</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Riddle</td>
<td>Question-Answer Unit</td>
<td>Mastery of linguistic code</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Proverb</td>
<td>Statement</td>
<td>Strategy</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
For the riddle, however, the situation is somewhat different. The signifier in the case of riddles is the question-answer unit that characterizes the riddle act. We have seen in the last chapter that the signified of riddles is not readily defined, and indeed we will need to distinguish several signata, according to our own analysis. Let us first address the question of why the signified of the riddle is not simply "the answer." Indeed, in some cases this would seem to be true, especially for metaphorically-based riddles. For instance, in the riddle "What's that got its heart in its head? A peach," one might assume a simple relationship parallel to that for metaphor obtains in the riddle structure. There are many instances, however, in which this cannot be true. For example, many riddles are not framed as questions, e.g., numbers 4 and 5 in chapter 6. Such riddles certainly have the illocutionary force of questions, but the signifier is unrecognizable as such outside of a riddling context. Thus it is inappropriate to treat the poem as a signifier and the referent as a signified; the riddle must be treated as a unit to be intelligible.

This argument is strengthened when we consider riddles based on formal grammatical ambiguity. Such riddles clearly do not have a "referent" as a signified. In a riddle question like "Why is coffee like the soil? It is ground," we have evidence for this in two respects. First, the solution to this riddle lies in the grammar of English and depends upon a resolution of morphological ambiguity in the phonological sequence /grawnd/. Second, and more important, the ambiguity on which this riddle turns is found in the answer. Thus the answer is not "a solution" as such; it is rather part of a question-answer sequence that focuses on the pliability of the linguistic code in English. The same is true for examples like "How is a duck like an icicle? Both grow down."

What we need, then, is a relationship of signifier to signified that will encompass both metaphorical riddles and those based on grammatical ambiguity, providing a statement of the signified of the riddle form in general terms. In the case of riddles based on grammatical ambiguity, the signified seems to be the pliability of the linguistic code. That is, such
riddles focus on aspects of formal grammar that may be manipulated for ludic effect. Thus the signified in such riddles is twofold. First, it is the pliability of the grammar itself. Second, it is the actual manipulation, i.e., the riddle act. The same is true in large part for metaphorically-based riddles. Here the twofold nature of the signified is as follows: As we have pointed out, these riddles are concerned with a manipulation of the formal linguistic code. The second aspect of metaphorically-based riddles is, again as with grammatically-based ones, concerned with the riddle act itself, but is more complex in that the manipulation involves the figures of speech we have outlined.

We see, then, that the signified of these two types of riddles are similar. What remains is to distill its essence, if possible. Perhaps as close as we can come to this goal is to point out that the signified of riddles is not an object or situation, but rather the code itself. This means that riddles are metalinguistic, i.e., they are a way of using language to deal with language. In this case “deal with” means “exhibit mastery of.” This metalinguistic view of riddles accounts for the fact that all riddles are highly decontextualized. In order to talk about language, we must first suspend all linguistic context, so that we do not confuse the language we are talking about with the language we are using to talk about it. As we have pointed out, riddles depend upon such suspension of linguistic context. We might mention further that this same suspension of context acts in the social mode to allow reversal of normal power structures, so that in a riddling session it is the riddler who is in authority, whatever his status outside of a session is vis à vis other members of that session.

In an effort to explicate the paradigmatic nature of metaphor, it is useful to characterize the notion of metaphorical description as “variations on a theme.” Despite the difficulties presented by describing metaphor by metaphorical means, this allows us to perceive what happens when we move from denotation to connotation. For example, the term life has been variously described as “a tale told by an idiot,” “a game of chess,” and “a card game.” Though the
emphases are clearly different in the various figures of speech—meaninglessness, strategic challenge, and the interplay of determinism and free will—these topics all contribute to and are enhanced by a single world-view. Thus, we might say that these, and in fact all our metaphors referring to life, constitute a paradigm. Though he made these comments about a single figure of speech, the argument of J. I. Levin that “the poetic attitude toward the world is characterized by the aspiration to seize the perceived object simultaneously from different sides, to catch in a single act of perception and description the varied bonds and relations in which this object functions” (1977:203) accurately describes the nature of such metaphor paradigms.

Riddles, too, constitute paradigms of perception for their referents. Metaphorical riddles referring to man may be used as examples.

1. It first walks on four legs, then on two, then on three legs. *Man.*
2. What tree grows without roots? *Human being.*
3. The tree has only two leaves, what is it? *A man and his ears.*

In riddles 1, 2, and 3 we see a descriptive paradigm that we may label *man.* Though different qualities are called forth in each case, all contribute to the group’s understanding of what it means to be human. These riddle metaphors differ from nonenigmatic figures in that they adhere to what J. I. Levin has called the “riddle principle,” that is, “the principle of deliberately impeded form” that furthers “extricating the thing from the automatism of perception” (1977:203). Ben-Amos (1976:251) emphasizes the automaticity of the bonds and relations in paradigmatic riddle metaphor in his discussion of culture-specific limits on such paradigms. Thus, it might be argued that by deliberately blocking perception (i.e., solution), group members are forced to come to terms with the qualities of humanness that are rehearsed in their traditional verbal arts.

Proverbs, as noted above, classify individual dilemmas into categories of recurrent social problems. Though these problems are of a general nature, and thus each paradigm
must be labelled according to the major maladjustment the proverbs within it seek to redress, each flaw in the social fabric is mended by a slightly different proverbial stitch. Let us take as our examples: “Strike while the iron is hot”; “He who hesitates is lost”; and “A stitch in time saves nine.” Each of these bits of traditional advice has a slightly different orientation, but it is clear that each is intended to address the problems brought on by delaying appropriate action. In terms of interrelationships between verbal art and social conditions, inappropriate behavior serves as a catalyst; the proverb characterizes this behavior figuratively, and the strategy for solving the given problem may be regarded as its referent. Therefore, we have a similar pattern at work as described for the two preceding forms. This similarity may be represented as in figure 28.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Metaphor</th>
<th>Riddle</th>
<th>Proverb</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Life</td>
<td>Man</td>
<td>Problem caused by delaying action</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Referent</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Figure/Trope</td>
<td>1) tale told by an idiot</td>
<td>1) Strike while the iron is hot.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1) game of chess</td>
<td>1) 4 legs, 2 legs, then 3 legs</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2) game of chess</td>
<td>2) What (tree) grows without roots?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3) card game</td>
<td>3) the tree has only 2 leaves, what is it?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4) Pull and Pray</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Figure 28**
In the light of such similarities, we are forced to conclude that differences in these forms lie not in the texts themselves, but in the contexts in which the respective forms are embedded. Let us consider the respective contexts, then, and examine how context plays a major role in the production and interpretation of these forms in their proper use.

In our discussion of the continuum of ambiguity from the formal grammatical type to the metaphorical type, it should be apparent that the definition of ambiguity is much more precise in the former case than in the latter. Thus, as we move away from grammatically-based blocks in riddles, we find that the terms “vagueness” and “metaphorical ambiguity” are characterized as more generally cognitive notions, and thus are less amenable to formal analysis. In view of recent works on metaphor, and of our own discussion, it is possible to discuss some of the strategies involved in our comprehension and appreciation of metaphor in riddles as well as in other genres.

In several recent works from the fields of folklore, semiotics, and linguistics, authors have been concerned with the interpretation that we give to innovative use in language. An examination of three representative works spanning these fields reveals a common focus of concern, namely, the role of context in determining an interpretation of innovative uses of language. By context we designate a number of factors affecting interpretation, including at least surrounding spoken or written material, real-world physical setting, and the social situation involved in the use of innovative language.

Beginning with the narrowest contextual focus, let us consider the work of J. I. Levin 1977. Levin treats metaphor as a figure that “seizes a perceived object simultaneously from different sides,” that catches “in a single act of perception and description the varied bonds and relations in which this object functions” (1977:203). He describes two principles involved in the metaphorical process, the principle of comparison and the riddle principle. The former is used to categorize types of metaphor; the latter is invoked to characterize metaphor as a “deliberately impeded form” that furthers
“extricating the thing from the automatism of perception” (1977:203).

Levin’s principles and categories are reminiscent of many previous works that deal with the metaphorical base of riddles, especially the work of Taylor 1951 and more recently the works of Hamnett 1967 and Glazier and Glazier 1976. His contribution to this tradition lies in his attempt to categorize the structure of metaphor according to contextual properties. Simply put, Levin claims that in any given context there are words that are “normal,” i.e., acceptable, in that context. For example, in the context [I love the — — of forests] the blank may be filled by such words as smell or freshness. Such words are said to be “marked” for this context. On the other hand, there are words that may appear in a context that are not marked for that context, e.g., whispers in the above context. It is precisely when a word (or phrase) that is not marked for a given context appears in that context that metaphorical convention is invoked.

Using the formalization of formal logic, Levin describes several types of situations that require metaphorical interpretation. Such situations include: (1) those where a word is “accentuated and acquires more weight than that attributed by the vocabulary” or (2) a word is joined to another word with which it is not normally associated (e.g., a cheerful lamp). Levin presents other categories, but although his formalism of contextual considerations is unique, it suffers two basic drawbacks. First, the underlying notions of markedness and contextuality that he uses are merely revivals of Prague School theory which is well-known. More important, his formalism, although it provides a focus for his work, does not advance our understanding of how metaphor works; it merely affords yet another classification of form involving a rudimentary semantic theory that is internal to his system.

In a work dealing with metaphor in proverbs, Seitel 1976 focuses on the broader contextual aspects of metaphor in that genre. Drawing on the works of Firth 1926 and Arewa and Dundes 1964, he rightly points out that the metaphor of proverbs must be considered in light of the situations that
dictate its use, effect, restrictions, and significance in speech. Of primary importance for Seitel is the determination of the interaction of culturally defined features in a specific context (which he terms the “interaction situation”). His framework for interpretation of metaphor involves such factors as the relationship of the speaker to the hearer (e.g., age, sex) and the aptness of the analogy between the imaginary world of metaphor (the proverb) and the real, social situation to which the metaphor is applied.

Of importance for our present discussion is Seitel’s description of the proverb (or the metaphor of the proverb) from which he draws the framework for interpretation we have just outlined. He characterizes this use of metaphor as short, traditional, and “out of context.” By “out of context” he means that metaphors, especially proverbial ones, may be inappropriate to a conversation by virtue of syntax or, more commonly, subject matter. Thus, to use the phrase “A stitch in time saves nine” to refer to having one’s car serviced at regular intervals may seem inappropriate, but this use is in fact acceptable and sanctioned within the context of a specific conversation.

Seitel goes on to point out that within the context of a given situation, various elements of a metaphor may be foregrounded, emphasized or literalized. Thus, the phrase “Don’t send a boy to do a man’s job” may be used appropriately in a situation where a child has been asked to perform a task of which he is incapable, in which case the image is applied correctly and literally; metaphor is not invoked. Here the actual physical situation is foregrounded. On the other hand, the same phrase may be used to characterize a situation wherein a person has been assigned a task for which he is incompetent. In this case it is the impotence of a person in a given situation that is focused upon.

Seitel’s work does much to advance our understanding of how we interpret metaphor in the proverb. His work also provides us with an insight into the workings of metaphor in riddles. For both Seitel and Levin, context is a central factor in the interpretation of metaphor. As emphasized by Levin, context must include a wide range of social considerations.
It is this factor of context that is crucial to the use of metaphor in riddling. As we have pointed out, riddling suspends elements of context in order to intensify certain aspects of the linguistic code of language. Riddling sessions depend upon a willing suspension of utilitarian context on the part of the participants in favor of a ludic alternative. Grammatical ambiguity, as we have noted, is difficult to perceive, and thus to resolve, if there is no discourse to provide clues for disambiguation. The same is true for the use of metaphor in riddles. Riddling suspends not only linguistic context, but the serious elements of social context as well. The roles of riddler and riddlee are defined, but the rules of normal conversation are suspended, thus eliminating any contextualization of the riddle metaphor within a conventional, utilitarian locus.

Thus, one may recognize that a given riddle is employing a metaphor as its block element but be unable to solve the riddle. Metaphors arise from negotiations between cognitive frameworks; therefore there is no unequivocable framework within which to place the metaphor in order to interpret it. Further, without a specifiable context, it is in principle impossible to determine which aspects of a riddle metaphor are being foregrounded and are therefore most relevant for solving the riddle.

Yet clearly riddles, whether based on grammatical or metaphorical ambiguity, or on one of the transitional types we have described, are solvable within the confines of a culture. There are strategies, such as those we have noted in our analysis of grammatically-based riddles, that facilitate the perception and resolution of ambiguity in the riddle. For grammatically ambiguous riddles these strategies are fairly well-defined. In the case of metaphorically-based riddles, however, the strategies are more diverse and include a wide range of cognitive concerns, as we have seen. This does not mean that metaphorical riddles defy all attempts at a formalization of their mechanisms of wit, however. For if we again approach metaphor from a linguistic point of view, we find that recent developments in linguistic analyses of innovative
In a recent article in *Language*, Eve and Herbert Clark discuss the kinds of strategies involved in the use and interpretation of denominal verbs (Clark and Clark 1979). Denominal verbs denote those verbs that originate from the use of a noun to denote action associated with that noun, for example *John Houdini'd the lock open* or *He wristed the ball over the net*. Their concern in this article is to define how the use of such verbs is regulated by convention, and how such verbs are able to be interpreted on a particular occasion. Let us now examine some of their arguments and conclusions and consider the relevance of their findings to our study of metaphor and riddles.

The Clarks claim that innovative denominal verbs function by a shifting denotation. That is, every word normally has a fixed denotation or denotations of the type listed in dictionaries. Thus a word like *bachelor*, to use an example made famous by Katz and Fodor 1963, has four denotations: (1) 'an unmarried man,' (2) 'young knight,' (3) 'person with a baccalaureate degree,' and (4) 'mateless breeding fur seal.' Normally the number of denotations is fairly small, but it is at least finite for all words.

This type of fixed denotational expression is distinct from what are called indexical or deictic expressions, which have a fixed denotation but a shifting reference. Thus the pronoun *she* has a fixed meaning of 'female person,' but the specific person to whom it refers—its referent—changes according to contextual features such as we have discussed. In this same way, although *bachelor* is purely denotational, the *bachelor* is indexical in that its referent may change from one use to the next.

The Clarks argue that denominal verbs form yet a third category, which they label "contextuals." They claim that contextual expressions have a shifting denotation, and that the denotation of such expressions is dependent upon context. They propose three criteria for the definition of a contextual. The first is that the possible number of denotations
is indefinitely large. This criterion is inextricably linked with the second one, which is that the denotation depends upon context. Since the possible contexts for the use of a contextual are indefinitely many, so are the denotations, or possible interpretations, of a contextual. The final criterion is one of cooperation between speaker and listener. That is, the use of contextuels demands that the listener take note of the specific context, including such things as previous references, idiosyncratic allusions, unique gestures, and other "momentary relevant facts about the conversation."

Another crucial factor in the use of contextuels, according to the Clarks, is the exploitation of mutual knowledge. They distinguish two types of knowledge in the world, the generic and the particular. The generic encompasses those things that it can be assumed are known by most people. The particular includes those things that people know tacitly and depends crucially upon the individual histories of people. The particular includes esoteric or idiosyncratic information, or even misinformation about the world. They claim that contextuels depend primarily on generic knowledge, and that it is this fact that makes innovative uses of language, like contextuels, interpretable.

Let us pause now to consider what has just been outlined in light of what has been said about metaphor, riddling, and proverb. It should be clear that metaphorical language falls into the category of contextuels. That is, metaphor takes an expression with a literal denotation and, by virtue of context in its broadest sense, foregrounds one or more elements of that expression so that the expression receives a unique interpretation according to context. Thus metaphor involves a shifting denotation of an expression, as determined by context, within the limits of cultural convention. Further, metaphor is crucially dependent upon mutual knowledge, which includes at the most general level a sharing of cultural conventions, all the way to shared knowledge of a fairly idiosyncratic type. One of the limiting forces on metaphor is mutual knowledge, since speaker and hearer must share enough knowledge to enable the listener to discern which features of a metaphorical expression are salient
in a given context. Indeed, a lack of shared knowledge results in metaphors that are meaningless to listeners, and thus relegated to the ill-defined category of nonmetaphors, i.e., attempts at metaphor that fail for some reason.

Thus the Clarks provide a partial definition of the metaphorical trope through their characterization of contextuals, and in so doing also provide some insight into some of the cultural limitations places on what is, and what is not, a metaphor in a culture. But given their criteria for contextuals, we might still seek a set of principles or strategies for interpreting these innovative uses of language. They offer such a strategy by claiming that in using innovative denominal verbs, "a speaker means to denote:

(a) a kind of situation
(b) that he has good reason to believe
(c) that on this occasion the listener can readily compute
(d) uniquely
(e) on the basis of their mutual knowledge
(f) in such a way that the parent noun denotes one role in the state, event or process, and the remaining surface arguments of the denominal verb denote others of its roles." (1979:787)

This strategy, they claim, allows a speaker to interpret an innovative use of a contextual on a particular occasion. We have already dealt with most of the elements of this strategy, but we will now comment at more length on the individual components.

Elements (a)-(e) all deal with the context of an innovative use. Element (a) is focused upon separately in that the situation being denoted has certain cultural features associated with it that determine which elements of the situation are likely to be foregrounded and thus are more susceptible to innovative use. The Clarks use the example of the phase "porch the paper" where our knowledge of the basic relationships between porches and papers allows us to interpret the usage of "porch" as meaning "placed on the porch," rather than, for example, "placed under the porch," under normal circumstances. The element of situation is certainly crucial to our interpretation of metaphor, also since our cultural
knowledge of the salient features of any situation, say cooking a meal, will determine what aspects of the situation are likely to be focussed upon in innovative metaphorical usage and how the resultant figurative usage will be interpreted.

Elements (b) and (c) are concerned with speaker-listener cooperation. First, the speaker must use innovative language in good faith, i.e., in the belief that his innovation is interpretable. Second, he must construct his innovative use of language so that the listener is capable of interpreting the innovation based on stored shared knowledge. The implications for metaphorical usage should be clear in this instance. We must assume that the user of metaphor has a reason for using it and that he has facilitated our understanding of his particular innovative construction by providing us adequate means for interpretation.

Passing over element (e) for the moment, element (f) provides a strategy for interpreting the action indicated by an innovative denominal verb. It assumes that we view a verb as being composed of a proposition or action and a number of arguments, i.e., persons or objects that are involved in or related to the proposition in some specifiable way. Thus a sentence like *Abe gave Mary a pencil* contains a proposition *give* and the arguments *Abe* (subject), *Mary* (indirect object), and *pencil* (direct object). In the case of denominal verbs, one argument must be the noun from which the verb is derived (the parent noun). Thus, for *He wristed the ball over the net*, one argument of the verb *wrist* is the noun *wrist*, which is an instrumental argument indicating manner.

This specific strategy is applicable to metaphor in that the propositions and roles of metaphorical expression must involve a set of relationships that are analogous to a real situation in a recognizable way, thus rendering the comparison of the two frames of reference acceptable. There must be at least a partial one-to-one correspondence between the arguments and/or propositions in the situations being compared, so that the listener can make the appropriate substitutions of arguments and propositions necessary for interpretation of the innovative usage.
Let us now return to element (e), that of uniqueness of interpretation. This element is at once the most interesting and the most elusive. Although unique interpretation is often a goal in the use of denominal verbs, as well as of metaphor, it is in principle impossible to attain. In the case of denominal verbs, unique interpretation is perhaps attainable if the speaker of an innovative verb and his listener have a complete shared knowledge. However, any differences in knowledge between the two, however subtle the nuance, may result in a nonunique interpretation, i.e., an instance in which the message encoded by the speaker is not the same as the one decoded by the listener. To some extent, context will serve to preserve uniqueness of interpretation, but even here, speaker and hearer may have different perspectives.

From the point of view of metaphor, uniqueness of interpretation is a well-known problem. The interpretation of a figure of speech, though grounded in generic knowledge, is notoriously susceptible to the highly personal, emotional, and idiosyncratic nuances that result from individual differences in listeners. Indeed, part of the “experience of literature” is the bringing of particular knowledge (as discussed above) to the work being read (or heard). Since the individual histories of listeners or readers may vary, the particular knowledge that each person employs in interpreting a given image will vary in unpredictable ways. In this way “personal interpretation” is allowed for and literary debate engendered.

Let us expand this last point, since it seems reasonable to ask how metaphor can be a base for genres like the riddle or proverb if it is subject to personalization. In the case of riddles, there is much less appeal to the level of particular knowledge, since metaphorical riddles are framed in such a way as to induce the riddlee to draw on his generic knowledge to recognize the referent being described. Highly idiosyncratic riddles (excluding neck riddles) are generally unacceptable. The performance context of riddles dictates that the imagery of metaphorical riddles be accessible to
anyone who enters the riddling session, and so naturally leads the participants to operate at a generic knowledge level.

The case with proverbs is somewhat different, however. A proverb draws its force not from a performance context as such, but rather from a specific social situation in which it is invoked. Thus one proverb may be applied to a number of different specific situations (or vice versa). Whereas the riddle metaphor depends upon lack of social context for its effect, the proverb metaphor is highly contextualized, and the foregrounded elements of the metaphor are in part determined by the immediate context. As Kenneth Burke 1941:293 has noted, proverbs “name typical, recurrent situations” within a given society. Although each group has a traditional set of recurrent problems that may be addressed by a specific set of standardized strategies (Burke identifies consolation, vengeance, admonition, exhortation, and foretelling, for example), any set of formulae must be finite. The situations causing social friction, on the other hand, are infinite. Therefore, flexibility must be built into any classificatory system if it is to prove useful over the long haul. We shall address this flexibility in detail in a moment.

Burke indicates his recognition of this principle in his discussion of the proverb “Virtue flies from the heart of a mercenary man.” This maxim, he writes, may have a range of applications: “A poor man might obviously use it either to console himself for being poor (the implication being, ‘Because I am poor in money I am rich in virtue’) or to strike at another (the implication being ‘When he got money, what else could you expect of him but deterioration?’). In fact, we could even say that such symbolic vengeance would itself be an aspect of solace” (1941:296). What Burke does not deal with, however, are those factors in the proverb text and context that allow its application to this broad range of social problems.

A general strategy in this regard is suggested by Archer Taylor in his observation that “proverbs develop from the generalization of a simple scene” (1931:142). Rather than adhering to Taylor’s developmental argument, we shall be
content to assert that proverbs draw rhetorical force from the fact that they allow for generalization based upon the image of a simple scene. In other words, a common general truth unites both a particular problematic situation and an imaginary situation that serves to name, i.e., categorize, the real situation.

By way of pursuing this point, consider the proverb "A rolling stone gathers no moss." The basic metaphor, one of change and the resulting absence of permanence, is clear. However, without a context it is impossible to determine whether the statement is positive, e.g., lauding the virtues of independence generated by adaptability to current situations, or negative, e.g., a condemnation of "rootlessness." Only in a specific context can we determine which aspects of the figure are being emphasized (see Dundes 1975). In this way proverb metaphor is clearly a contextual, in the sense used of denominal verbs. However, with proverb metaphor we see a much greater influence of particular knowledge, since the use of a proverb is provoked by an individual's reaction to a specific situation, and this reaction is in large part dictated by the individual's personal history. The proverb metaphor employed by a given person in a given situation, then, allows that person to categorize the situation in a way consistent with his own cognitive framework for dealing with the world. Such subjectification of situations leads naturally to conflicts between persons, since their particular knowledges may have points of différence, or gaps, vis à vis one another. Thus it is that one person may not understand another's use of a proverb in a given situation, even when the rationale is explained.

The metaphor of proverb thus functions as a kind of hedge, or a way of aligning and coordinating one's personal view of the world with any given situation. The study of hedges has both psychological and linguistic (see especially Fraser 1980) bases, but essentially delineates the types of linguistic strategies by which one justifies placing persons, objects, or situations into specific categories. For instance, a sentence like Jack is sort of an atheist could be used to indicate the speaker's opinion that Jack fulfills certain criteria for
being an atheist, although he is not in fact an atheist. The speaker wishes to place Jack into the category of “atheist” and uses the hedge “sort of” to accomplish this. Similar hedges include phrases like “loosely speaking,” “technically,” and “practically.”

Another type of hedge is metaphorical, as when someone says “Ed is a fish.” In this case the speaker does not wish (probably) to assert that Ed is in fact an actual fish, assuming that Ed is a human being. He wishes rather to foreground some aspect of Ed, like his drinking habits or swimming ability, by means of comparison. From the example given, one sees that the comparison could have either a positive or negative connotation, depending on the social context in which it is uttered. It is also possible that the characterization of Ed in the metaphorical hedge would not be acceptable to another person for whom the particular characteristic of Ed being discussed did not bear comparison to any characteristic in that person’s category of fish. That is to say, the criteria for placing a person, object, or situation into any particular category may vary from person to person. This is evidenced in daily life by such differences of opinion as to whether a tomato is a vegetable or a fruit, whether a whale is a fish or a mammal, or whether a certain person resembles a pig in some way. Such opinions are usually supported by both parties involved listing their criteria for “vegetableness,” “fishness,” or “pigness,” and showing how the object being discussed fits their criteria for these categories.

All this is by way of underscoring the fact that the situation, or the aspect of the situation that provokes the use of a proverb may be in some measure idiosyncratic to the user and thus not match the categorization of the same situation by another observer. Thus the categories that a user of a given proverb intends to relate through his use of the proverb may not be related in the same way in another person’s cognitive framework, and so may be lost on that person.