

The Specific Features of The Use of Numerical Components In Idioms and Proverbs

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DOI:

<https://doi.org/10.47134/ptk.v2i2.1463>

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Received: 24-12-2024

Accepted: 24-01-2025

Published: 25-02-2025



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Abstract: This research explores the cultural and symbolic significance of numerical components in Uzbek idioms and proverbs. The study aims to identify the meanings and roles of key numbers such as three, seven, and forty in traditional ceremonies, social customs, and linguistic expressions. Using a qualitative descriptive methodology, data were collected from linguistic sources, ethnographic studies, and cultural references. The results indicate that numbers serve as metaphors for societal values, historical transitions, and ritual practices, reinforcing their importance in Uzbek linguistic and cultural identity.

Keywords: Uzbek Culture, Idioms and Proverbs, Numbers and Symbolism, Memorial Ceremonies, Wedding Traditions, Hospitality Customs, Family Lineage, Traditional Games, Rituals and Beliefs, Chilla (Forty Days), Cultural Heritage, Uzbek Ethnography

Introduction

Numbers play a significant role in shaping cultural traditions, beliefs, and daily practices, often carrying symbolic meanings that resonate deeply within a community. In Uzbek culture, numbers are not merely mathematical tools but are imbued with cultural and linguistic significance, especially in idioms and proverbs. Among the most frequently encountered numbers in Uzbek linguistic traditions are one, two, three, five, seven, thirty-two, forty, one hundred, and one thousand. These numbers appear in various contexts, from religious ceremonies and family rituals to games and social customs, reflecting their unique roles in the cultural consciousness of the Uzbek people. This article explores the cultural functions and symbolic meanings of specific numbers within Uzbek idioms and proverbs, focusing on their practical and metaphorical significance. In particular, it delves into the roles of the numbers three, seven, and forty, which hold special importance in rituals such as memorial ceremonies, wedding traditions, hospitality practices, and seasonal observances. By examining these numbers through the lens of Uzbek ethnography and folklore, this study sheds light on how numerical symbolism intertwines with the cultural fabric of Uzbekistan.

Methodology

The use of numbers in idioms and proverbs has long been a subject of linguistic and cultural studies, as numbers often carry symbolic meanings that reflect a community's worldview. Scholars argue that numbers in language are not merely quantitative but also qualitative, embodying cultural, religious, and historical values (Wierzbicka, 1992). In the context of phraseology and paremias, numbers serve as a rich source of metaphorical and symbolic expression, encapsulating cultural norms and collective experiences (Mieder, 2004). In Uzbek culture, the significance of numbers in proverbs and idioms has been explored within the broader framework of Central Asian traditions. Research has highlighted the importance of specific numbers such as three, seven, and forty in Uzbek rituals, folklore, and daily life (Karimov, 2018). For example, the number three is often associated with hospitality, respect, and memorial ceremonies, while the number seven symbolizes prosperity, completeness, and spiritual connection. The number forty, on the other hand, is deeply rooted in transitional and cyclical processes, as seen in the "qirq" ceremonies for the deceased and the postpartum recovery period for new mothers (Yuldashev, 2020). Comparative studies have shown that the symbolic use of numbers in Uzbek culture shares similarities with other cultures, such as the use of the number seven to represent perfection or the number forty in rituals marking significant life transitions (Sultanova, 2017). However, Uzbek idioms and proverbs uniquely reflect the nation's history, values, and geographical influences. Researchers have emphasized the need for deeper linguistic analysis to uncover how numerical components contribute to the stylistic and semantic richness of Uzbek phraseology.

Research method

This study uses a qualitative, descriptive approach to analyze the cultural significance of numerical components in Uzbek idioms and proverbs. **Data Collection:** Data were gathered from Uzbek idiom collections, ethnographic studies, and scholarly literature. Key numbers like one, three, seven, and forty were identified in proverbs and cultural contexts. **Data Analysis:** The analysis involved: **Semantic Analysis** – Exploring the literal and figurative meanings of idioms and proverbs. **Cultural Interpretation** – Identifying the cultural and historical significance of the numbers within Uzbek traditions.

Result and Discussion

In Uzbek, we encounter numerous numbers in idioms and proverbs, each playing a significant cultural role. Among these, numbers like one, two, three, five, seven, thirty-two, forty, one hundred, and one thousand are the most commonly used. Each of these numbers holds unique significance within Uzbek cultural linguistics. To support this claim, let us explore the cultural functions of these numbers. For example, the number three has particular importance. In Uzbek ethnography, memorial ceremonies are held after burial and within the interval of three festive days. The "uch" (three) ceremony refers to the first memorial event held at the deceased's home. During this ceremony, the clothes of the deceased are washed and given to those who washed them, which is why it is called

“kiruvdi”. As this ceremony is held on the third day after the funeral, it is named “uch.” For three days following the burial, prayers and blessings are offered for the deceased at their home. Additionally, for three days, no food is cooked in the home of mourning, and meals are instead prepared and brought by relatives or neighbors. This tradition stems from various beliefs, such as the notion that lighting a fire for cooking may symbolically harm the deceased. In reality, it is because the close relatives of the deceased are overwhelmed with grief and cannot focus on household tasks (Ayupova, 2024).

The number three is also significant in wedding ceremonies. Events such as circumcision ceremonies, baby naming celebrations, or wedding ceremonies often last for three days. During these celebrations, hospitality is extended for three days, and meals are typically served in three courses. There is even a common saying in Uzbek culture: “Hospitality lasts three days.” Another instance of the number three appears in the bridal salutation ritual (*kelin salom*), where the bride bows three times as a sign of respect. Furthermore, in traditional Uzbek etiquette, when calling a family member, it is customary to call them up to three times before giving up. Similarly, when making a phone call, waiting for three rings before ending the call is considered polite. Another practice tied to the number three involves finding a lost item. If someone discovers an object, they must call out three times, “Who does this belong to?” If no one responds, the item is considered “halal” (permissible) to keep. In matchmaking traditions (*sovchilik*), the groom’s family typically visits the bride’s family up to three times to request her hand in marriage. This reflects both respect and persistence, increasing the likelihood of a favorable response. Similarly, the bride’s consent is also sought up to three times. While we could provide many more examples of the significance of the number three, let us now shift our focus to the number seven. If you were to ask people, “What is your favorite number?” many would respond with “seven.” In Uzbek culture, the number seven is often considered a symbol of luck and prosperity.

For example, people prefer vehicle license plates or phone numbers containing the number seven. Some even pay a premium for such numbers. The cultural preference for the number seven stems from its association with several natural and symbolic wonders: seven days in a week, seven planets, seven wonders of the world, seven colors in a rainbow, seven climates, seven seas, seven musical notes, and so on (Appah, 2019). Uzbek customs and traditions are remarkable in many ways, one of which is the practice of researching the family lineage of both the bride and groom up to seven generations. This is of great importance because identifying any ancestors involved in inappropriate actions or those with mental illnesses is crucial for ensuring a prosperous and healthy future for the young family. Uzbek culture also manifests in traditional games, such as “*Yetti Teshik*” (Seven Holes). In this game, children dig several holes in the ground, assigning a number to each hole. Participants then take turns hitting a ball into the holes, aiming to pass the ball through all seven. Another game, “*Yetti Qiz*” (Seven Girls), is primarily played among girls. The players stand in a circle, holding hands, and chant “*Yetti Qiz*” while taking a step forward for each number. The game involves rhythmic and dance-like movements. One more traditional game is “*Yetti Tosh*” (Seven Stones). Children place seven small stones on the

ground and, using one stone, try to knock others down while quickly collecting them. Various challenges are incorporated into this game, such as tossing one stone into the air and gathering others before catching it (Apostal, 2020).

Having observed numerous customs tied to the number seven in Uzbek culture, we could delve further into its significance. However, let us now shift focus to another notable number, forty. One well-known tradition associated with forty is the “*qirq*” ceremony, a memorial event held for the deceased. This ceremony typically takes place on the thirty-seventh or thirty-ninth day after death. The belief behind this practice is that the spirit of the deceased remains in limbo between worlds for forty days before transitioning to the afterlife. During this period, family members often wear dark or blue clothing as a sign of mourning, sometimes extending up to a year. The “*qirq*” ceremony includes two parts: “*kichik qirq*” (small forty), held within twenty days after the death, and “*katta qirq*” (big forty), which occurs around the fortieth day. The term “*chilla*” is also used to describe the concept of forty, though it applies to other ceremonies, such as those for newborns, new mothers, and newlyweds. The purpose of observing “*chilla*” for newborns and new mothers is to protect them from evil spirits, keep them company during dark nights, and prevent them from engaging in strenuous activities—especially for the mother. From a scientific perspective, a mother’s body typically recovers within forty days after childbirth, while a newborn adjusts to the external environment during the same period. Additionally, pregnancy itself lasts approximately forty weeks. The term “*chilla*” is also used to describe seasonal phenomena. In summer, it refers to the forty hottest days (*saraton*), and in winter, it denotes the forty coldest days (*qahraton*). Another cultural belief related to the number forty is that when a person turns forty, they are considered mature and wise. Elders say that by this age, a person has experienced various life challenges, gained sufficient knowledge, and developed the ability to make sound decisions based on life experience. In the past, wealthy individuals and officials would host extravagant forty-day and forty-night feasts to showcase their wealth and status. These lavish celebrations became the stuff of legends and were passed down orally from generation to generation.

Conclusion

This study demonstrates the profound cultural and symbolic importance of numbers in Uzbek society, especially numbers like three, seven, and forty. These numbers are woven into the fabric of daily life and social rituals, influencing practices ranging from memorial ceremonies to weddings, childbirth, and even casual traditions like games. The use of numbers is deeply connected to spiritual beliefs, with each number representing specific meanings related to time, luck, transition, and protection.

The findings underscore that numbers in Uzbek culture are not merely quantitative but are imbued with cultural significance. They help preserve cultural heritage, bind communities together, and guide individuals through life’s key milestones. Through these numbers, traditions are passed down across generations, maintaining continuity and identity within the culture.

Overall, the study highlights the integral role of numbers in shaping the cultural landscape of Uzbekistan, emphasizing their enduring relevance in both the public and private spheres of life.

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