

Linguopoetic and Linguocultural Specificity of Magical Numbers in Uzbek and English Folk Tales

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ABSTRACT

This article presents a comparative analysis of the linguopoetic and linguocultural specificity of magical numbers in Uzbek and English folk tales. It examines the semantic, linguopoetic, linguocultural, and functional features of numbers 3, 7, 9, 12, and 40. Particular attention is paid to the ways in which magical numbers function as stable poetic units, symbolic expressions, traditional formulaic elements, and cultural codes in folklore texts. The analysis demonstrates that magical numbers participate in the organization of plot and composition, create repetition and rhythm, strengthen hyperbolic expression, and convey culturally significant meanings. The findings show that in Uzbek folklore numbers are mainly associated with ritual, educational, symbolic, and culturally specific meanings, while in English folklore they reflect individual trials, cosmic order, and Christian and European mythological concepts. The comparative analysis also reveals that numbers 3 and 7 demonstrate universal linguopoetic features, whereas numbers 9, 12, and 40 more clearly reflect national and cultural specificity.

Keywords: Magical numbers, folklore, Uzbek fairy tales, English fairy tales, linguopoetics, linguoculturology, national specificity, semantics, mythology, cultural code, universality, poetic function.

INTRODUCTION

The national characteristics of magical numbers are primarily determined by the religious beliefs and mythological perceptions of each people. From a linguocultural perspective, magical numbers reflect the worldview, collective memory, religious beliefs, customs, traditions, and cultural values of a particular linguistic community. For example, while a system of numbers formed on the basis of an Islamic worldview predominates in Uzbek folklore, numbers associated with Christianity, ancient Germanic mythology, and Celtic traditions are more frequently encountered in English folklore. In Uzbek folk tales, numbers such as 3, 7, 9, and 40 and their derivatives (such as 14, 18, 41, 90, and 99) have mainly emerged under the influence of the religious and mythological perceptions of Turkic peoples, whereas in English folk tales, the numbers 3, 7, and 12 have received particular attention under the influence of Christianity and European mythology. These differences demonstrate that magical numbers possess not only national-semantic significance but also important linguocultural functions, serving as cultural codes through which the worldview and national mentality of the people are represented.

In particular, magical numbers in Uzbek folk tales are closely associated with Islamic, Sufi, and Eastern mythological views. The numbers 7, 40, and 9 are deeply rooted in the collective consciousness. From a linguopoetic perspective, their repeated use in folklore texts contributes to the rhythm, repetition, formulaic structure, imagery, and semantic expressiveness of the narrative. The number 40, in Uzbek folk tales, is manifested through combinations such as “forty days,” “forty Chiltans,” “forty days” of wedding celebration as a symbol of “completeness,” “trial,” and a “sacred period.” At the same time, these numerical combinations function as stable linguopoetic units, intensifying the figurative and emotional impact of the fairy-tale text. This number does not occur in English fairy tales in the same manner, which demonstrates a distinctive feature of Uzbek national thinking and its linguocultural specificity.

Another important aspect is that numbers in Uzbek folk tales are often used for moral and educational purposes. For example, expressions such as “knowing seven generations,” “three pieces of advice,” “nine virtues” are directly associated with upbringing and education. Such numerical expressions demonstrate the linguocultural representation of traditional Uzbek values, while their repetitive and formulaic use contributes to the linguopoetic organization of the folklore text. In living folk speech, exact arithmetic numbers are generally not used to mean “many”; instead, traditional numbers expressing this concept are employed. For example, expressions such as “seven robbers,” “forty young men,” “forty nights and days of wedding celebration” [10: 50]. Thus, magical numbers operate simultaneously as quantitative units, linguopoetic devices, and linguocultural codes, through which the semantic, aesthetic, and national-cultural characteristics of Uzbek folk tales are conveyed.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

Analysis of materials from Uzbek folk tales demonstrates that the number 7 occupies a special place in the system of widely used magical numbers and, while possessing universality, also carries a national-cultural code, that is, it reflects the specific characteristics of Uzbek culture in numerous expressions and examples of oral folklore. From a linguocultural perspective, the number 7 represents elements of the Uzbek people's collective worldview, traditional beliefs, customs, and cultural memory. From a linguopoetic perspective, its repeated occurrence in fairy-tale texts contributes to the formation of stable poetic formulas, rhythmic repetition, imagery, and symbolic meanings. The reasons for the widespread use of the magical number 7 are associated with the special significance traditionally attributed to the number 7 in Uzbek folklore and customs. Ancient beliefs concerning the sacred number 7 have been preserved in proverbs such as “Measure seven times and cut once” and “The orphan's right will dry up seven rivers,” in riddles such as “Short and tiny in stature, it has seven layers of clothing,” in legends associated with place names such as “Yettisuv,” “Yettiqashqa,”

“Yettikechuv,” “Yettisoy,” and “Yettiqiz,” and in folk beliefs concerning the “Seven Robber Stars” in the sky. These examples demonstrate that the number 7 functions not only as a quantitative element but also as a linguocultural code preserving traditional Uzbek perceptions of the world. At the same time, its recurrence in different genres of oral folklore reveals its linguopoetic productivity and its ability to create figurative, rhythmic, and symbolic effects.

The system of poetic images such as “seven generations,” “seven ancestors,” “seven forefathers,” “seven fathers and grandfathers,” “seven brothers,” “seven sisters,” “seven companions,” “seven robbers,” “seven thieves,” “seven divs,” “seven witches,” “seven messengers” is based on the magical properties of the number 7. These combinations represent stable linguopoetic units in which the numerical component intensifies imagery and contributes to the traditional formulaic character of folklore discourse. At the same time, they embody culturally specific concepts related to kinship, social organization, supernatural beings, and traditional beliefs, thereby functioning as linguocultural markers. Since the number 7 is one of the magical or mystical numbers of Uzbek folklore, it has been considered sacred since ancient times. Folklore played an especially significant role in making this number so close to the hearts of the people and deeply integrated into everyday speech and folk perceptions associated with various spheres of life.

In English oral folklore, magical numbers have mainly developed under the influence of Christianity and European mythology. In particular, the number 3 is widely used in English folklore as a symbol of sacredness and perfection. This phenomenon is directly connected with the Biblical concept of the “Holy Trinity” (Father, Son, Holy Spirit). From a linguocultural perspective, the number 3 therefore reflects Christian cultural concepts that have become embedded in English folklore. Furthermore, because the number 3 is also widely used in the folklore of other peoples, it is regarded as a universal semantic sign, and this has been substantiated above with numerous examples. From a linguopoetic perspective, the repeated use of three-part structures contributes to the

organization of the plot, repetition, rhythm, and gradual development of events.

Along with the number 3, the number 7 is also one of the most widespread and deeply rooted numbers in English folklore and possesses various symbolic meanings not only as a universal sign but also as a national-cultural code. The number 7 expresses the complete cycle of an event and represents a model of completion and perfect order, a concept that can be traced back to the Biblical tradition of the creation of the world in seven days. The number 7 is associated with concepts concerning the structure of the universe and can be used as a model expressing cosmic harmony. In fairy tales, it is also widely used as a symbol of magic, the supernatural, plurality, and a period of transformation. These meanings demonstrate the linguocultural specificity of the number, while its repetitive use in formulaic expressions and narrative structures demonstrates its linguopoetic function.

In English folk tales, magical numbers are more closely associated with individualism and personal trials. For example, the hero's undergoing "three or seven trials" demonstrates his personal maturity. From a linguopoetic perspective, the repetition of three or seven trials creates a predictable narrative pattern and strengthens the dramatic development of the plot. From a linguocultural perspective, this pattern reflects the cultural representation of individual achievement, personal development, and overcoming difficulties. This phenomenon indicates that individual freedom and personal achievement occupy an important place in the English mentality. In English folklore, the numbers 3 and 7 are also frequently involved in rituals. For example, in some customs, there is a belief that repeating something three times (three times) brings good luck. This demonstrates that the number has a firmly established position in national culture. One of the important factors determining national specificity is mentality. Mentality is the way in which a people perceive the world, and it is expressed in fairy-tale texts through symbolic numbers. Thus, magical numbers function simultaneously as linguopoetic devices and linguocultural signs,

connecting the structural organization of the fairy tale with the worldview of the community that created it.

In Uzbek folklore, including fairy tales, the number 40, which is one of the most frequently used numbers, possesses special symbolic and mythopoetic significance. It is not merely a quantitative sign, but a semantic unit expressing concepts such as “a long period of time,” “trial,” “plurality,” and “sacredness.” From a linguocultural perspective, the number 40 is closely connected with Uzbek and broader Turkic-Islamic beliefs, rituals, customs, and traditional perceptions of time and spiritual development. From a linguopoetic perspective, its repeated occurrence in expressions such as “forty days,” “forty bridegrooms,” “forty girls,” and “forty nights and days” creates hyperbole, repetition, rhythm, and an epic sense of scale within the fairy-tale narrative.

The genesis of this number can be traced back to the religious, mythological, and ritual concepts of ancient Turkic peoples. The number 40 is also regarded as a symbol of divinity, maturity, and purification. One of the well-known Turkish writers, ElifShafak, also discusses the special significance of the number 40 among Turkic peoples in her book *The Forty Rules of Love*, providing examples: she states that “a forty-year-old man” (a symbol of social and personal maturity) is also considered to be at a beautiful age for a woman, and that in Sufism a person spiritually awakens at this age; moreover, the postpartum period and the period during which a newborn adapts to the environment encompass “forty days” (a symbol of purification and perfection). It is also stated that, for the purpose of cleansing the world from evil and beginning a new life, the world was flooded for “forty days” (a period of transformation, transition to a new stage, trial, and patience); that Jesus (peace be upon him) secluded himself in the desert for “forty nights and forty days”; that Muhammad (peace and blessings be upon him) received revelation concerning his prophethood at the age of “forty”; that Buddha meditated (performed *dhikr*) under a linden tree for “forty days” (a period of trial and patience); and that the age of “forty” (personal maturity and perfection) is considered auspicious [4: 125].

Among Muslims, the significance of the number 40 has been further strengthened by the fact that the Prophet Muhammad (peace and blessings be upon him) received revelation at the age of “forty,” that the number of his followers was initially “forty,” and that “one-fortieth” of a person’s property is given as *zakat*. In addition, according to the abjad calculation, the numerical value of the letter *mim* in the name of the Prophet Muhammad (peace and blessings be upon him) is equal to “forty,” which further increases the significance of this number. Among shamans, there is also a belief that a person’s soul leaves the body “forty days” after death. Beliefs such as *qirqichiqishi*, which still exist today, can be traced back to these religious views. According to our traditions, “forty days of mourning” are observed in memory of a deceased person. This period is considered a time for relatives to overcome the hardship of separation, pray, and bring peace to the soul of the deceased. In addition, there are beliefs that members of a mourning household should not eat eggs until the deceased’s “fortieth day”, and that in the Sufi tradition *chilla* means spending “forty days” in solitude without leaving the house, devoted to worship and prayer.

If we also pay attention to fairy tales, the number 40 expresses a long period or completion, a great trial, and victory. This number symbolizes patience, courage, and spiritual elevation. Its repeated use in Uzbek fairy tales demonstrates both its linguocultural significance, as a representation of traditional beliefs and ritual concepts, and its linguopoetic significance, as a means of creating hyperbole, repetition, temporal extension, and epic scale. Since it constitutes an inseparable element of important speech units reflecting the uniqueness of our culture, the use of the number 40 in Uzbek folk tales is significant. For example, in the tale ‘Forty Bridegrooms,’ numerical combinations such as “forty bridegrooms,” “forty girls” occur.

There was once a king who had forty sons (very many, countless);
...the king began searching for forty girls (very many, countless)
for his forty sons; ...you have forty daughters; ...I have forty
daughters. I will give all of them to forty brothers who were born

of the same parents. The old woman also said that her own king had forty sons" [8: 66-67].

...if I give a feast for forty days and marry my daughters to you, you will become my sons and remain here. A wedding celebration lasted forty days in the city, and the heroes married the king's daughters" [11: 15]. (From the tale 'The Three Brave Brothers')

The king rejoiced, took his daughter into his arms, and hugged her; overcome with happiness, he began to cry again. Then he held a wedding celebration for forty nights and forty days (quantitative combination)"* [11: 15];

Zuhra mourned for forty days (a period of trial, a long period) in order to observe the mourning for her beloved Tohir. Zuhra said: 'Today is the fortieth day since Tohir died. Let my father give me permission to go and see the grave'" [11: 15]. (From the tale 'Tohir and Zuhra' [7: 44]).

Give me a forty-day (a period of trial, a long period) deadline; if I cannot teach your parrot to speak during this period, punish me as you see fit" [9: 95]. (From the tale "The King and the Parrot").

We can also analyze the participation of the most active numbers 40, 7, and 9 and the levels at which they are used in another Uzbek folk tale, 'Rustam,' as an empirical example. For instance,

"If your wife gives birth to a son, we will not show him to you until his forty-day confinement is over," they said. "When the time came, after nine months, nine days, and nine minutes, Malika gave birth to a son." [11: 34]

"A promise is a promise; I will not see the child for forty days," he said. "When Semurg counted, it had been seven days since Zol was born" [11: 34]

Zol reached the age of fourteen beside Semurg and learned knowledge. He became equal to those who had studied for forty years. [11: 34]

When his wife became pregnant and reached seven months, the weight of the child caused the woman's foot to sink one span into the ground... [11: 34]

Rustam was born, and forty wise men, led by Semurg, washed and sewed Malika's cradle with deer's milk. [11: 34]

"There is no girl this beautiful in the seven climates; the old man must have deceived me by saying otherwise," he thought to himself. [11: 34]

When Rustam was seven steps away from reaching Suhrob, he gave up his life [11: 34]

Again, the numerical combination "forty days" occurs in two places, expressing a period of trial and hardship:

"Barzo, the son of Suhrob's wife Zavvora, reached the age of seven." "In the seventh month, Rustam came from Zabul and the battle began." "...Barzo became angry, struck Rustam once, and pushed him seven steps backward." [11: 34]

The number 40, which serves as an indicator of the Uzbek national-cultural code, is also widely used in the tale 'Qilichqora.' For example,

"If we do not meet within forty days, Yulduzsanaar will count the stars and know everything about me," he said [11: 34]

"Take an apple in your hand, go up onto the platform and sit there; I will bring everyone from the age of seven to seventy before you. Then you will hit this young man with the apple and we will begin the wedding. ...After the wedding lasting forty nights and forty days was over, they brought the bridegroom a complete set of ceremonial clothes." [11: 34]

"I have two conditions. Whoever fulfills them will receive my daughter. First, I have a drum inherited from my father; whoever can break it with one kick will fulfill the first condition. Second, I will sow millet on forty camels over seven tanobs of land, and

whoever can put that millet into forty camel-loads of sacks will fulfill the second condition.” [11: 34]

“The old woman had also lived for three hundred and sixty years, and every day she ate as if she consumed forty cauldrons of pilaf. The girl said: ‘Grandmother, according to our custom, the dead are placed in a coffin and kept for forty days’” [11: 34]

“Thus, King Ko‘ktemir captured Khalchaoy, decorated the old woman with ornaments equal to her height, placed forty maidservants before her, and entered Khalchaoy’s presence” [11: 34]

The cited examples clearly demonstrate that magical numbers in Uzbek folk tales possess a complex linguopoetic and linguocultural nature. The number 40, in particular, functions as a cultural marker through which traditional concepts of time, ritual, social relations, spiritual purification, trial, and completion are encoded. At the same time, its repetition in fixed combinations contributes to the poetic organization of the narrative, creating hyperbole, rhythmic recurrence, semantic emphasis, and traditional formulaic patterns. Therefore, the analysis of magical numbers from both linguopoetic and linguocultural perspectives makes it possible to reveal not only their symbolic meanings but also their role in transmitting national worldview and cultural memory through the language of folklore.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

The cited passages clearly demonstrate that the number 40 has multilayered linguopoetic and linguocultural functions in Uzbek folk tales. First, 40 is used not as a quantitative unit, but as a symbol of plurality and completeness. Combinations such as “forty sons,” “forty daughters,” “forty maidservants” do not express an actual number, but rather a perfect social composition, that is, a complete group. From a linguocultural perspective, “forty” functions as a cultural code denoting collectivity, social completeness, and traditional Uzbek perceptions of quantity.

From a linguopoetic perspective, the repetition of the number in parallel combinations contributes to the rhythm, formulaic structure, and expressive intensity of the fairy-tale text. Second, combinations such as “forty days,” “forty nights and forty days” do not simply measure time, but express a prolonged, significant, and ritual process. For example, designating a wedding, mourning, or period of trial by “forty” enhances the social and ritual significance of these events. Thus, the number functions simultaneously as a semantic unit and as a linguocultural marker of traditional rituals and worldview. Third, the motif of a “*forty-day deadline*” reflects a trial and a transitional stage (initiation). The hero must demonstrate his abilities within this period, which creates dramatic tension in the structure of the tale. In this case, the number performs a linguopoetic function by organizing the temporal development of the plot and increasing suspense. Fourth, in these examples the number “forty” appears in the collective consciousness as a sacred and liminal (threshold) number. It marks important points in life cycles such as completion (wedding), transition (trial), and conclusion (mourning). Therefore, in the given texts, the number “forty” functions not as an ordinary arithmetic unit but as a universal poetic device semantically expressing “plurality,” “completeness,” “long duration,” and “ritual significance.” At the same time, its recurrent use demonstrates how a numerical unit can become a linguocultural code and a stable linguopoetic element within the traditional structure of Uzbek folklore.

According to some sources, the number 12 is considered one of the important magical numbers in Uzbek oral folklore, expressing order, perfection, and cosmic harmony. It often signifies a complete cycle of time and space (for example, the 12 months of the year and the 12-hour system of the day). Therefore, in fairy tales and legends, it is also used as a symbol of completion, systematicity, time, and order (twelve months, twelve knights). Likewise, in English folk tales and European traditions, the number 12 marks trials, groups of heroes, or the number of important events, serving to construct the plot in an orderly and balanced manner (for example, motifs such as 12 knights, 12 tasks, and 12 brothers acquire national

characteristics). In the Biblical text, the number 12 appears as an important symbol representing sacred order and the cosmic system [12: 36-39]. In particular, the twelve apostles chosen by Jesus Christ were not an accidental number, but a symbolic continuation of the model of the twelve tribes of Israel, which occupied an important place in ancient Jewish traditions. From this perspective, an inseparable relationship emerges between number and religious system: an old religious order is reinterpreted and continued in a new form. As a result, the number 12 becomes not only a sign of historical tradition but also the structural foundation of a new religious system. Linguoculturally, this demonstrates how the same numerical symbol acquires culturally determined meanings within different religious and historical traditions. Linguopoetically, the recurrence of twelve creates symmetry, structural balance, and compositional completeness in the narrative.

Furthermore, through this number, a certain hierarchy and order are established within the religious system; that is, each apostle is interpreted as an element of a system performing a specific task and function. Thus, the number 12 appears as a universal symbol expressing completeness, systematicity, and internal harmony [3: 190-195]. This aspect makes it an important sign not only in religious but also in broader cultural and semiotic contexts. The following examples demonstrate how the number 12 occurs in fairy tales and contributes to enriching their content. For example, from the tale ‘The Maiden Who Seeks her Brothers’:

- “The twelve brothers” (a symbol of family and social structure)
- “The girl who went in search of her brothers” – “the twelve brothers are transformed into ravens.”
- “Seven (twelve) brothers have a younger sister...”
- “because their younger sister has plucked twelve flowers” (cosmic completeness) from an enchanted garden, the brothers are transformed to ravens [1: 153].

In another version of the tale, “One sister and six” (seven, eleven, twelve) brothers [1: 153] “Twelve beautiful nieces” [1: 153] are mentioned. In this passage, the number 12 appears not as a simple quantity, but as a linguopoetic and mythopoetic symbol expressing completeness and a perfect system. The image of “twelve brothers” represents an entire family unit and a complete social structure, thereby forming the main dramatic chain of the plot. From a linguocultural perspective, the image reflects traditional concepts of family unity, social organization, and cultural order. In addition, the number 12 is associated with motifs of transformation (turning into ravens), trial, and restoration, expressing the idea of the disruption of cosmic order and its subsequent restoration. This confirms that in English folklore the number 12 symbolizes completeness and balance.

In J. Jacobs’s collections of fairy tales, *English Fairy Tales* and *More English Fairy Tales*, which constitute the primary basis of our analysis, the number 12 is encountered in several places. For example, numerical units such as “twelve months” “twelve golden pillars” and “twelve o’clock” occur and express symbolic indicators such as cosmic order, a period of trial, and limitation. Their repeated use also performs a linguopoetic function by creating conventionality, repetition, structural symmetry, and symbolic coherence within the fairy-tale narrative. For example, “Tom knew not what to do for a weapon; his whip would be but little good against a monstrous beast twelve foot (symbolic intensification, hyperbolization) in length and six foot about the waist” [6: 18] (From the tale ‘Tom Hickathrift’).

“Now the grand hunting party comes back, and the castle upon the twelve golden pillars (perfect order and cosmic harmony) had disappeared, to the great disappointment of those gentlemen as did not see it before” [6: 18]. (From the tale ‘Jack and His Golden Snuff-Box’) – Now the great hunting party returns, and the castle built upon “twelve golden pillars” had disappeared, greatly disappointing those gentlemen who had not seen it before.

“Till midnight all goes well. As twelve o’clock (threshold, magical time, transformation, the end and beginning of a cosmic cycle) rings, however, the sick prince rises, dresses himself, and

slips downstairs” [5: 64]. (From the tale ‘Kate Krackernuts’) – Everything goes well until midnight. However, when the clock strikes twelve, the sick prince rises, dresses himself, and quietly goes downstairs.

In the study of the aforementioned folklore texts containing magical numbers, we can determine that these elements embody such components as myths, cosmogonic ideas, concepts of the structure of the world, ancient symbolic images, epic composition, the heroic model, repetitive formulas, traditional structures, ancient songs, traditional poetic patterns, and formulaic repetition. These features demonstrate that magical numbers are not merely semantic elements but also important linguopoetic devices through which traditional formulas, repetition, rhythm, hyperbole, symbolism, and compositional symmetry are created. At the same time, their meanings are determined by the cultural worldview of the people and therefore represent significant linguocultural markers. In general, magical numbers play an important role in shaping the compositional structure of English folk tales. They organize the hero’s adventures, enrich the plot dramatically, and reflect the ancient worldview and mythological perceptions of the people. In this respect, magical numbers perform an important semantic, linguopoetic, structural, and linguocultural function in the poetic system of English folklore.

CONCLUSION

Based on the analyses above, the following conclusions can be drawn: magical numbers are important symbolic units reflecting national culture and mentality in English and Uzbek oral folklore. Although the same numbers may possess universal characteristics, their semantic interpretation and functional significance are determined by national features. From a linguopoetic perspective, magical numbers contribute to the organization of plot, repetition, rhythm, hyperbole, symbolism, formulaic expression, and compositional completeness. From a linguocultural perspective, they encode the religious beliefs,

traditions, rituals, worldview, mentality, and historical-cultural experience of a particular people.

In Uzbek folklore, magical numbers mainly appear in Islamic-Sufi, ritual, and educational contexts, whereas in English folklore they are used in connection with Christianity and individualistic views. The difference is also visible in the poetic realization of numerical symbols: Uzbek fairy tales frequently employ numbers as traditional formulaic and ritual-poetic elements, while English fairy tales often use them to structure individual trials, transformations, and stages of the hero's development. Thus, the same numerical unit may have a universal semantic basis but acquire different linguopoetic realizations and linguocultural meanings in different folklore traditions.

Studying the national specificity of magical numbers is important for understanding cultural codes in oral folklore. Their analysis from the perspectives of linguopoetics and linguoculturology makes it possible to reveal not only what a particular number means, but also how its meaning is artistically constructed in the text and how it reflects the cultural worldview of the people. Even in the folklore of other peoples, there are considerable typological similarities; that is, while the numbers 3 and 7 are universally repeated in similar ways, numbers such as 9, 12, and 40 can demonstrate national differences.

Thus, magical numbers in Uzbek and English folk tales should be regarded as multifunctional linguistic, poetic, and cultural units. Their semantic content is realized through the interaction of language, poetic structure, mythology, ritual traditions, and national worldview. Consequently, the study of magical numbers from a linguopoetic and linguocultural perspective provides a broader understanding of how folklore encodes cultural identity and how universal symbolic elements acquire distinctive national meanings in different linguistic and cultural environments.

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