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Relational Numerical Hybridity in English and Uzbek Proverbs: Parallelism and Contrast as Semantic Mechanisms

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ABSTRACT

This article examines relational numerical hybridity in English and Uzbek proverbs, arguing that meaning emerges primarily from interaction between numerals rather than from the isolated symbolism of single numbers. Building on paremiology and cognitive linguistics, the study develops a relational model that distinguishes numerical parallelism (proportional symmetry, balance) and numerical contrast (opposition, thresholding, amplification), as well as mixed configurations that yield hybrid semantic unity. A qualitatively analyzed bilingual corpus of thirty proverbs demonstrates that numerals function as cognitive operators: they compress cultural reasoning into scalable patterns of evaluation, inference, and moral judgment. Cross-linguistic comparison shows universal tendencies (e.g., comparison as evaluation, escalation as intensity) alongside culture-specific preferences, particularly Uzbek reliance on culturally salient intensifiers such as seven and forty. The findings contribute to cognitive paremiology by formalizing how relational numeral structures encode argumentation-like meanings (evidence > hearsay; preparation > action; reciprocity > obligation).

Keywords: Numerical hybridity; proverb semantics; parallelism; contrast; cognitive linguistics; paremiology; English; Uzbek; symbolic numbers; relational meaning

1. INTRODUCTION

Proverbs are among the most compact and socially durable linguistic forms. Their durability depends on a distinctive communicative economy: proverbs package evaluation, instruction, and cultural memory into short, reusable patterns. In this economy, numerals are not decorative. They provide a particularly efficient way to structure judgment: by encoding comparisons, thresholds, and proportionality, numerals make abstract evaluation "computable" in everyday reasoning.

Research has long recognized the symbolic dimension of numbers in folklore and phraseology, yet a persistent limitation remains: numerals are often treated as independent symbols (e.g., seven as completeness), rather than as elements that generate meaning through relational configuration within a proverb. However, many proverbs contain two or more numerals – "one-two," "one-hundred," "one-forty" – where the proverb's core meaning is inseparable from numerical interaction. In "once bitten, twice shy," the meaning is not "twice" as a symbol; it is the transition from a first event to a second behavioral state. In Uzbek *Yettio'lchab, birkes* ("Measure seven times, cut once"), the proverb is not a celebration of seven alone but a ratio that encodes rational procedure.

This paper therefore proposes a relational approach: numerical hybridity arises when multiple numerals co-construct a single evaluative proposition through parallelism (symmetry/proportion) and contrast (opposition/escalation). The goals are:

1. to define relational numerical hybridity as a semantic phenomenon;
2. to classify bilingual data by interaction type;
3. to explain how numerals operate as cognitive operators;
4. to compare universal and culture-specific tendencies in English and Uzbek proverb traditions.

2. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

2.1. *Paremiology and structural meaning*

Classical paremiology treats proverbs as culturally grounded, formulaic units that function as "ready-made" arguments in discourse. Structural approaches emphasize that proverb meaning is often relational: parallel constructions, oppositions, and proportional schemas organize the inference (Permyakov). Functional approaches stress pragmatic force: proverbs act as evaluative tools in interaction (Mieder). Interpretive folklore traditions view proverbs as "mini-theories" of culture, compressing shared assumptions into short forms (Dundes). These traditions jointly motivate a focus on how internal structure – especially parallelism and opposition – produces meaning.

2.2. *Cognitive linguistics: metaphor, scaling, and inference*

Cognitive linguistics explains how language encodes structured reasoning. Conceptual metaphor theory (Lakoff & Johnson) shows that abstract evaluation is grounded in embodied patterns such as scale, balance, and force. Numerals instantiate these patterns efficiently: they impose order on experience by creating scalar relations (1 vs 100), threshold effects (2 vs 3), and procedural ratios (7:1). In proverb comprehension, numerals can cue fast inference: "more" becomes "stronger," "earlier" becomes "better," "double" becomes "increased caution." Thus, numerals often operate as cognitive triggers for pragmatic reasoning.

2.3. *Symbolic semantics of numbers as culture-loaded resources*

Number symbolism is real but must be operationalized. In many traditions:

- **1** encodes unity, baseline, minimal sufficiency;
- **2** encodes duality, cooperation, comparison;
- **7** often indexes completeness/rightness;
- **40** frequently serves as endurance/exaggeration marker;
- **100/1000/million** often function as extreme-scale intensifiers.

Yet symbolism alone is not an explanation: symbolic values become semantically productive when they enter relations (ratio, escalation, threshold). The paper therefore treats number symbolism as a resource activated by relational structure.

2.4. *Hybrid semantics and "relational numerical hybridity"*

In hybrid semantics, unified meaning arises from interaction among heterogeneous components in a single construction. Numerical hybridity is defined here as follows:

> Relational numerical hybridity: a proverb-level semantic configuration in which two or more numerals interact (via parallelism, contrast, or both) to yield a single integrated evaluative meaning not reducible to the independent meanings of the numerals.

This definition shifts the analytic target from "What does seven mean?" to "What does seven–one mean as a relation?"

3. METHODOLOGY

3.1. *Research design*

A qualitative comparative linguistic approach combines:

- **Semantic analysis** (function of relations: proportion, threshold, escalation),
- **Cognitive interpretation** (scales, balance, experiential transformation),
- **Linguo-cultural comparison** (symbolic salience, preferred intensifiers).

3.2. *Data selection*

A bilingual corpus of 30 numerical hybrid proverbs (English and Uzbek) was compiled from paremiological collections and phraseological practice. Inclusion criteria:

1. At least two numerals present (explicitly or via conventional numeral quantifiers such as hundred, thousand);

2. The proverb's meaning depends on numeral interaction, not mere numeral presence;
3. English-Uzbek comparability in function (advice, warning, evaluation).

Examples include: "Once bitten, twice shy" (contrast), "Measure seven times, cut once" (parallelism), "Two heads are better than one" (parallelism), *Bir kuntuzbergangaqirqkunsalomber* (hybrid reciprocity + exaggeration).

3.3. *Analytical procedure*

1. **Structural identification**: mapping numeral relations (comparison, ratio, escalation, threshold).
2. **Classification**: Parallel, Contrast, Hybrid.
3. **Cognitive interpretation**: metaphorical schemas (scale/balance), pragmatic inference (warning/advice).
4. **Cultural interpretation**: culturally salient numerals (7, 40), conventional hyperbole (100/1000).

3.4. *Validity*

Validity is supported by consistent criteria, cross-linguistic checks, and triangulation across semantic, cognitive, and cultural dimensions.

4. RESULTS

4.1. *Parallel numerical hybridity: proportional reasoning and epistemic hierarchy*

Parallel configurations instantiate a "balanced" logic: numerals set up proportional evaluation or epistemic ranking.

(1) **Two heads are better than one** / Ikki bosh birboshdanyaxshi
Relation: 2 > 1 (cooperation > individual).
Cognitive schema: MORE AGENTS → MORE COGNITION.
Unity: the proverb functions as a compact argument for collaboration.

(2) **Measure twice, cut once** / *Ikki o'lchab, birkes*; (3) *Yettio'lchab, birkes*
Relation: preparatory acts outweigh final act (2:1; 7:1).
Cognitive schema: BALANCE/PROPORTION → RATIONALITY.
Cultural layer: Uzbek often intensifies the ratio with seven to strengthen normativity.
Unity: procedural logic: "increase checking → reduce irreversible error."

(4) **One today is worth two tomorrow/** *Bugungibirertangiikkidanafzal*
Relation: 1 (certain present) > 2 (uncertain future).
Cognitive schema: CERTAINTY > POTENTIAL (temporal evaluation).
Unity: a risk-management principle expressed as numeric inequality.

(5) **One eyewitness is worth ten hearsays/***Bir ko'rganyuzeshitgandanyaxshi*
Relation: direct evidence outranks indirect reports at amplified scales (1>10; 1>100).
Cognitive schema: SEEING → KNOWING (epistemic priority).
Unity: numerals build an epistemic hierarchy: evidence-based reasoning.

Parallel types thus encode proportional wisdom and graded epistemic trust, often strengthened by culturally conventional magnitudes (10, 100, 1000).

4.2. *Contrast numerical hybridity: transformation, thresholding, and moral inference*
Contrast configurations use numeral opposition to encode experiential change, moral responsibility, or categorical limits.

(6) **Once bitten, twice shy / Bir kuyganikkipuflaydi**
Relation: first experience → second behavior shift.
Cognitive schema: EXPERIENCE → CAUTION (learning).
Unity: numerals map stages of transformation: event1 produces disposition2.

(7) **Fool me once, shame on you; fool me twice, shame on me.**
Relation: responsibility shifts with repetition.
Cognitive schema: REPEATABILITY → AGENCY ACCOUNTABILITY.
Unity: a moral calculus: "first deception blamed outward; second blamed inward."

(8) **Two wrongs don't make a right**
Relation: addition of negatives does not yield positive.
Cognitive schema: MORALITY AS ARITHMETIC (non-compensatory ethics).
Unity: numeric composition denies justificatory logic.

(9) **Two is company, three is a crowd**
Relation: threshold from acceptable to excessive.
Cognitive schema: MORE → TOO MUCH (social optimality).
Unity: numerals create a categorical boundary rather than a scale.

Uzbek contrastive examples often amplify pragmatic force via culturally salient exaggerators: *Bir kunlikishqirqkunlik gap* ("one day's work-forty days' talk") encodes disproportion between act and social discourse; the "40" functions as a culturally stabilized intensifier, but crucially its meaning depends on contrast with "1".

4.3. *Hybrid numerical unity: reciprocity, capacity constraints, and efficiency vs impossibility*
Hybrid types combine proportional and contrastive reasoning, producing multi-layered meaning.

(10)**Kill two birds with one stone** / *Bir o‘qbilanikkiquyonniurmoq*
Relation: 1 resource → 2 outcomes (efficiency).
Unity: a positive optimization principle (maximize outcomes).

(11)***Bir qo‘ltiqqaikkitarvuzsig‘mas. Ikki qo‘chqorningkallasibirqozondaqaynamas.***
Relation: 1 container < 2 targets (capacity constraint).
Cognitive schema: CAPACITY LIMITS → GOAL SELECTION.
Unity: contrast (insufficiency) plus parallel mapping (1 vs 2) yields pragmatic realism.

(12)**Bir kuntuzbergangaqirqkunsalomber**.
Relation: 1 act of generosity → 40 acts of acknowledgment (reciprocity + exaggeration).
Cultural layer: “40” intensifies social obligation.
Unity: ethics of gratitude constructed as disproportional reciprocity.

(13)**Bir kishi – ming kishiuchun, ming kishi – birkishiuchun.**
Relation: 1↔1000 reciprocal obligation (chiasmic symmetry).
Unity: solidarity encoded as balanced mutual responsibility.

Hybrid proverbs show that numerical hybridity can encode social norms (gratitude, solidarity), cognitive constraints (capacity), and strategic optimization (efficiency).

5. DISCUSSION

5.1. *Why relationality matters*

Treating numerals as isolated symbols obscures the core mechanism of these proverbs: their meaning is produced by numeric relations that resemble compressed argumentation. In parallel types, numerals implement proportional reasoning; in contrast types, numerals encode transformation or thresholds; in

hybrid types, numerals integrate multiple inferences into a single evaluative stance.

This is why a proverb like Once bitten, twice shy is not "about two," but about stage-shift and learning.

5.2. *Parallelism vs contrast as cognitive operators*

Parallelism functions as a cognitive operator of balance and optimization. Ratios (2:1; 7:1) encode procedural rationality, while scalar magnitudes (1 vs 100) encode epistemic superiority. Contrast functions as a cognitive operator of transformation and boundary-setting: it maps the change from $state_1$ to $state_2$ or marks where "enough" becomes "too much." Importantly, the two mechanisms are not mutually exclusive; proverbs often exploit both to build stronger pragmatic force.

5.3. *Symbolic numbers: Activation through relation*

Symbolic semantics plays a supporting role: seven and forty are culturally salient in Uzbek, and large magnitudes (hundred, thousand, million) are conventional hyperboles in many languages. But symbolism becomes semantically operative when relationally activated – seven gains argumentative force in contrast to one; forty gains moral force in scaling from one. Thus, symbolism is best modeled as cultural weighting applied to relational structures.

5.4. *Universal vs culture-specific tendencies*

The cross-linguistic comparison suggests universal cognitive patterns: comparison structures evaluation; escalation amplifies intensity; thresholds categorize social acceptability. Culture-specific tendencies appear in numeral choice and preferred intensifiers: Uzbek proverb tradition often mobilizes seven and forty as culturally conventional amplifiers of thoroughness and obligation; English shows strong reliance on contrastive patterns in pragmatic caution and responsibility (e.g., once/twice schemas). These tendencies likely reflect different rhetorical habits in folk reasoning and the conventional salience of particular numerals.

5.5. *Contribution to cognitive paremiology*
This study contributes by formalizing a Relational Numerical Hybridity Model:

Parallelism → proportional reasoning → normative rationality
Contrast → transformation/thresholding → pragmatic evaluation
Parallelism + Contrast → hybrid semantic unity → cultural-cognitive norms

The model reframes numerical proverb semantics as a domain of relational inference—a compact "folk logic" where numerals structure judgment similarly to premises and conclusions.

6. CONCLUSION

Numerical hybridity in English and Uzbek proverbs is best explained as a relational semantic phenomenon. Multiple numerals interact to create coherent evaluative meanings through parallelism (balance, proportion) and contrast (transformation, thresholds), often combined into hybrid unity. Numbers operate as cognitive-cultural operators that compress reasoning about evidence, risk, gratitude, solidarity, and decision-making. Future research may extend the model to additional languages, test processing predictions experimentally (e.g., faster inference for ratio-based proverbs), and map diachronic shifts in culturally salient numerals.

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