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## THE FUNCTIONAL-SEMANTIC UNIVERSALITY OF MAGICAL NUMBERS IN UZBEK AND ENGLISH FOLKLORE

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**Abstract:** This study examines the functional and semantic characteristics of magical numbers in English and Uzbek folklore. The research analyzes the symbolic meanings of traditional numbers such as 1, 3, 7, 9 and 40, their compositional roles, and cultural semantics in different genres of folklore. Special attention is paid to the comparative analysis of numerical motifs in fairy tales, epics, proverbs and other oral folklore texts. The findings reveal that magical numbers function as important cultural codes within folk consciousness, shaping the composition of folklore narratives and contributing to their aesthetic and pragmatic impact. The similarity of numerical patterns in English and Uzbek folklore demonstrates a typological universality rooted in common structures of human thinking and mythological worldview.

**Keywords:** magical numbers, folklore, typological universality, mythology, semantics, Uzbek folklore, English folklore

**Annotatsiya.** Mazkur tadqiqotda ingliz va o'zbek xalq og'zaki ijodida uchraydigan sehrli raqamlarning funksional-semantik xususiyatlari tahlil qilinadi. Tadqiqot jarayonida folklor matnlarida qo'llaniladigan 1, 3, 7, 9 va 40 kabi an'anaviy raqamlarning ramziy ma'nolari, kompozitsion vazifalari hamda madaniy semantikasi o'rganildi. Shuningdek, bu raqamlarning ertak, doston, maqol va boshqa folklor janrlarida tutgan o'rni qiyosiy jihatdan tahlil qilindi. Tadqiqot natijalari shuni ko'rsatadiki, sehrli raqamlar xalq tafakkurida muhim semantik yuk tashuvchi madaniy kod bo'lib, ular folklor matnlarining kompozitsiyasini shakllantirish, syujet rivojini ta'minlash hamda tinglovchiga estetik va pragmatik ta'sir ko'rsatish vazifalarini bajaradi. Ingliz va o'zbek folkloridagi o'xshash sonli modellar inson tafakkurining umumiy qonuniyatlari va mifologik dunyoqarash bilan bog'liq tipologik universallikni namoyon etadi.

**Kalit so'zlar:** sehrli raqamlar, folklor, tipologik universallik, mifologiya, semantika, o'zbek folklori, ingliz folklori.

**Аннотация.** В данной работе рассматриваются функционально-семантические особенности магических чисел в английском и узбекском фольклоре. В исследовании анализируются символические значения традиционных чисел, таких как 1, 3, 7, 9 и 40, их композиционные функции и культурная семантика в различных жанрах устного народного



творчества. Особое внимание уделяется сопоставительному анализу употребления чисел в сказках, эпосах, пословицах и других фольклорных текстах. Результаты исследования показывают, что магические числа выступают важным культурным кодом народного мышления, выполняя композиционную, прагматическую и эстетическую функции в структуре фольклорного текста. Сходство числовых моделей в английском и узбекском фольклоре свидетельствует о типологической универсальности, обусловленной общими законами человеческого мышления и мифологическим мировоззрением.

**Ключевые слова:** магические числа, фольклор, типологическая универсальность, мифология, семантика, узбекский фольклор, английский фольклор.

### Introduction

Magical numbers are a phenomenon closely connected with the most ancient mythological ideas, religious beliefs, and folkloric thinking of humanity. Although they initially served as simple quantitative measures, over time they acquired symbolic, sacred, and cultural meanings in folk consciousness. Therefore, certain numbers have become not only tools for counting but also important means of understanding, organizing, and interpreting the world. Such numbers consistently appear in the oral traditions of various peoples, in customs and rituals, architectural monuments, and intangible cultural heritage.

As a product of mythological thinking, magical numbers serve to express the structure of the universe, concepts of time and space, as well as fundamental oppositions such as life and death, good and evil. In folk consciousness they function as cultural codes reflecting the worldview and values of a nation. From this perspective, magical numbers represent both national specificity and universality, since similar meanings and functions can be observed in the folklore of many cultures.

### Literature Review

In Uzbek oral folklore, the numbers 3, 4, 5, 7, 9, and 40 are particularly common. In English folklore, however, the numbers 1, 3, 7, 9, and 12 occur more frequently. These numbers repeatedly appear in fairy tales, epics, proverbs, riddles, rituals, and various paremiological units, carrying distinctive semantic meanings.

From a linguistic point of view, magical numbers are not merely mathematical signs but important elements of the semiotic system. They rise from simple quantitative indicators to symbolic images that shape the internal semantic



structure of folklore texts. Therefore, such numbers should be analyzed not only from grammatical or mathematical perspectives but also through linguocultural, pragmatic, and semantic approaches.

The origin of magical numbers is directly connected with mythological worldviews. In primitive thinking, the universe was perceived not as chaotic but as structured according to certain numerical models. Consequently, numbers became tools for explaining natural phenomena, grouping elements, and organizing reality in ancient human consciousness. The triadic model (sky, earth, underworld), the septenary model (seven heavens, seven regions), and the ninefold model, symbolizing completeness and perfection, frequently appear in ancient myths. Later, these models entered oral traditions and became artistic formulas in folklore.

In folkloristics, the occurrence of magical numbers with similar semantic and functional roles in the folklore of different peoples is interpreted as a phenomenon of typological universality. Such similarities are explained not by direct historical contact between cultures but by universal patterns of human thinking and the archaic foundations of mythological consciousness. Thus, the presence of identical numerical motifs in Uzbek and English folklore is not accidental.

The functional-semantic universality of magical numbers refers to the use of the same numbers with similar symbolic meanings and functions in folklore texts belonging to different languages and cultures. This universality is primarily connected with universal models of human cognition, the global nature of mythological thinking, and the collective character of oral tradition. For example, the repetition of actions three times in both English and Uzbek fairy tales symbolizes the hero's trials and eventual success, while the number seven often represents sacredness, perfection, or the completion of a long process.

At the earliest stages of human development, the formation of numbers from one to ten represented an important cultural achievement. For this reason, they later gained special significance in religious, mythological, and ritual systems. In many cultures certain numbers came to be regarded as "lucky," while others were considered "unlucky" or sacred. These beliefs first appeared in myths, later in rituals, and eventually became firmly established in folklore.

In literary and folkloristic studies, numbers from one to nine are often viewed as units that move beyond denotative meaning and acquire connotative and extralinguistic significance. Such numbers demonstrate both similarities and differences in their semantic functions across different languages. Therefore,



numbers should not be interpreted solely as indicators of dates, time, or quantity, but also as symbolic systems reflecting cultural, educational, and value-based meanings.

In oral folklore, magical numbers frequently perform a compositional function. They organize the development of events, determine the stages of the narrative, and structure the adventures of the hero. A clear example of this is the motif of three roads in Uzbek fairy tales. The hero often encounters three paths: “the road that leads back,” “the dangerous road,” and “the road from which there is no return.” These roads symbolize not only spatial directions but also oppositions such as good and evil, life and death, fortune and danger. The youngest son usually chooses the most difficult path and thereby achieves heroic status.

The traditional motif of three roads originates from ancient Turkic mythological concepts. The universe was interpreted as consisting of three levels: the Sky, the Earth, and the Underworld. Later this worldview was reflected in the compositional structure of fairy tales, demonstrating the deep mythological roots of the triadic model in Uzbek folklore.

In Uzbek epics, particularly in works such as “Alpomish,” “Kuntug’mish,” and “Rustamxon,” magical numbers are widely used. For example, in Alpomish expressions such as “forty days and forty nights,” “forty warriors,” “forty maidens,” “the forty thousand households of the Qong’irot tribe,” “seven years in prison,” “three days,” “three months,” and “three tasks” enhance the poetic strength of the narrative while emphasizing epic scale, the severity of trials, and the grandeur of celebrations. The number forty often symbolizes completeness, abundance, and ritual culmination, while seven indicates trials, waiting, and long duration. The number three functions as the compositional basis for tests, choices, and actions.

In the epic “Kuntug’mish,” the numbers three and forty are also actively used. Expressions such as “forty warriors,” “forty maidens,” “a palace with forty steps,” and “a wedding lasting forty days” occupy an important place in the artistic structure of the epic. Similarly, a three-day deadline, three repetitions, and three directions of movement symbolize the hero’s fateful trials. Likewise, in the epic “Rustamxon,” magical numbers serve as significant poetic elements determining the development of the plot. The number three marks important turning points in the hero’s life. For instance, the description of Sultamxon having three wives highlights the theme of lineage continuity. Rustam’s path dividing into three directions also represents the hero’s choices and trials.

### Research Results





Such triadic motifs function as compositional models determining the fate of the hero in fairy tales and epics. The first stage represents the beginning of trials, the second stage symbolizes the hero's struggle, and the third stage reflects the final victory or achievement of the goal. For this reason, the number three in many cultures symbolizes perfection, completion, and the attainment of happiness.

The number forty, on the other hand, appears in Uzbek epic tradition as a symbol of abundance, power, and celebration. Expressions such as "forty warriors," "forty maidens," "forty days of wedding festivities," and "forty days and nights" help portray events on a grand scale. Thus, the number forty functions as a poetic formula that expands the epic scope of folklore narratives.

Magical numbers are also widely used in English folklore. In particular, the number three frequently appears as a compositional basis in English fairy tales. For example, in "The Three Little Pigs" and "Goldilocks and the Three Bears," the narrative develops according to a three-stage model. This structure ensures the logical progression of the story and makes it easier for listeners to remember the events.

Similarly, the number seven in English folklore is often interpreted as a symbol of sacredness and fortune. Expressions such as "seven seas," "seven years," and "seven days" represent long periods or the completion of a process. These expressions correspond semantically with similar phrases in Uzbek folklore such as "seven years," "seven days," and "seven generations."

Thus, the use of magical numbers in English and Uzbek folklore reveals significant similarities. These parallels are connected with universal patterns of human thinking, mythological beliefs, and traditions of oral creativity.

### **Conclusion**

The analysis demonstrates that magical numbers serve as important poetic and semantic elements in both Uzbek and English folklore. They function not merely as indicators of quantity but as symbolic representations of cultural and mythological perceptions. Within folklore texts, magical numbers structure the narrative composition, regulate the development of events, and express the trials and achievements of the hero.

In Uzbek folklore, the numbers 3, 7, and 40 are particularly prominent, reflecting epic scale, ritual completion, and heroic trials. In English folklore, the numbers 3, 7, and 9 appear frequently and shape the compositional model of fairy tales.



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The use of similar numerical motifs in the folklore of both peoples confirms the functional-semantic universality of magical numbers. This universality is rooted in shared patterns of human cognition and mythological worldviews, once again demonstrating that folklore is a global cultural phenomenon.

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