



**Akbar KAZAKBAYEV<sup>a</sup>** 

<sup>a</sup>*Department of Arabic Language and Literature (Al-Azhar Chair)  
International Islamic Academy of Uzbekistan, Tashkent, Uzbekistan*

*E-mail:* [Kazakbayev2011@gmail.com](mailto:Kazakbayev2011@gmail.com)

## FUNCTIONAL AND SEMANTIC FEATURES OF NUMERALS IN THE STRUCTURE OF PHRASEOLOGICAL UNITS

**Abstract.** *This article is devoted to the study of the linguocultural, semantic, and ethnolinguistic features of numerals within phraseological units. The research analyzes the denotative and connotative meanings of numerals, their role in reflecting national culture, and the psychological, stylistic, and expressive significance of phraseological units as a whole. Drawing on the theoretical frameworks of Glazunova (2000), Chepasova (1998), Telia (1996), Maslova (2001), Wierzbicka (1992), and Lakoff and Johnson (1980), the study examines how numerals function not merely as grammatical categories but as linguocultural and ethnolinguistic components embedded in the conceptual system of human cognition. By analyzing the universal cultural characteristics of numerals and the emotive-expressive dimensions of numeral-based phraseological units in Arabic, this article contributes to linguocultural, ethnolinguistic, and phraseological research.*

**Keywords:** *phraseological units; semantics of numerals; linguoculture; ethnolinguistics; connotation; denotation; emotive-expressive component; Arabic phraseology; cultural symbolism.*

### INTRODUCTION

Language is an essential means of reflecting and preserving national culture: it expresses people's worldview, mentality, experience, and values (Sapir, 1921:8; Whorf, 1956:212). From this perspective, numerals in linguistics are studied not only as a grammatical category but also as a linguocultural and ethnolinguistic component. In modern linguistics, numbers constitute a conceptual system of human cognition, a universal concept, and an important component of spiritual culture (Maslova, 2001:34). Numerals reflect the relationship between language and culture – certain numbers carry specific cultural or religious significance in various societies – while from an

ethnolinguistic point of view they express the cultural and ethnic identity of different peoples (Wierzbicka, 1992:17–19).

This multicategorical nature of numerals is particularly significant in the context of phraseological units, where numbers acquire figurative, connotative, and evaluative meanings that extend far beyond their literal numerical values. For example, the number seven holds particular significance in many cultures: it appears in the seven-day week, the seven wonders, and in religious contexts such as the seven heavens. The number eight in Chinese culture symbolizes happiness and prosperity due to its phonetic similarity to the word for “wealth.” The study of how numerals function within phraseological units thus provides a productive intersection of grammatical analysis, semantics, linguoculturology, and ethnolinguistics (Lyons, 1977:204; Fillmore, 1982:111).

The present article aims to examine the functional and semantic features of numerals in the structure of phraseological units, with particular attention to the Arabic phraseological tradition. Its objectives are: to establish the linguocultural and ethnolinguistic dimensions of numeral semantics; to analyze the connotative structure of numeral-based phraseological units; to examine the role of evaluative, emotive-expressive, and figurative components in phraseological meaning; and to assess the ethnocultural parameters of numeral imagery in Arabic phraseology.

## METHODS

This study adopts a theoretical-analytical approach, drawing on the methods of componential semantic analysis, linguocultural analysis, and ethnolinguistic comparison. The analytical framework integrates the theoretical contributions of Russian phraseological scholarship – including Glazunova (2000), Chepasova (1998), Kunin (1984), Vinogradov (1977), and Telia (1996) – with the cognitive-semantic and linguocultural frameworks of Maslova (2001), Wierzbicka (1992), and Lakoff and Johnson (1980). Illustrative examples are drawn from Arabic phraseological units containing numerical components, analyzed through the lens of frame semantics (Fillmore, 1982) and the Sapir-Whorf hypothesis of linguistic relativity (Sapir, 1921; Whorf, 1956). The study proceeds from the general theorization of numeral semantics through the analysis of connotative structure to the specific ethnocultural features of Arabic numeral phraseology.

## RESULTS

Numerals as multidimensional linguistic categories. A historical perspective demonstrates that individuals performing specialized functions have long understood the significance of numbers. Numbers possess their own “language,” often functioning as keys to hidden meanings. According to statistical observations, individuals engaged in number-related professions tend to exhibit higher levels of cognitive activity than others. From this, it can be inferred that numbers represent a relative degree of precision and are used for specific purposes. In phraseology, their function is to express broad meanings concisely: expressing meaning through numbers is often more economical than through words, and phraseological units are used to convey a large amount of meaning with minimal linguistic effort, thus saving time and enhancing communicative efficiency (Kunin, 1984:87).

Substantive phraseological units and predicative features. According to Glazunova (2000:112), substantive phraseological units, unlike the author’s metaphorical word usage, reflect one or several characterizing meanings, enabling them to potentially realize an entire set of predicative features. Metaphorical expressions are typically based on the author’s individual creative imagination and are often used only once; they are personal and original and may not become widespread. Substantive phraseological units, by contrast, reflect widely accepted and commonly recognized descriptive meanings. For example, the phraseological unit “iron nerves” adds a descriptive meaning (resilient, strong) to the concept of “nerves,” thereby conveying a more complete understanding of a person’s patience and endurance.

The dependent lexemes within a phraseological unit not only restrict the scope of numerals but also modify their semantic parameters. Traditional aspects of the realization of dependent words in phraseological units transform into qualitative components. The interrelation of numerical meanings is also manifested in other structural and morphological types of phraseological units (Vinogradov, 1977:140–145).

Connotation as a structural component of numeral-based phraseological units. For phraseological units that are semantically oriented toward numbers but metaphorically linked to human characteristics, connotation may be considered an important structural component – defined as “a set of semantic layers that provide additional information

relative to the denotative meaning” (Telia, 1996:84). These semantic layers encompass additional meanings beyond the primary meaning, including emotional and stylistic nuances. For example, the expression “his head is in the sky” has a denotative meaning related to physical position, while its connotation expresses emotional states such as happiness or satisfaction. Similarly, the expression “a pure heart” carries a denotative meaning referring to the physical organ, while its connotation expresses additional meanings of purity, sincerity, and kindness.

The evaluative component and sociolinguistic dimensions. All components of connotation in phraseological meaning – evaluative, expressive, emotional, and functional-stylistic – typically appear together and form an integrated whole, though in some cases they may occur in different combinations (Telia, 1996:86–89). This ensures the richness and complexity of the semantic structure of phraseological units and allows them to generate diverse shades of meaning in discourse.

The evaluative component – the approving or disapproving evaluation inherent in the meaning of a phraseological unit – is central to its connotative status due to its sociolinguistic nature. Concepts of good and evil, positive and negative values, vary across civilizations and historical periods; even within the same society, individuals may evaluate the same phenomenon differently, despite the existence of commonly accepted viewpoints (Wierzbicka, 1992:143–145). Consequently, phraseological meanings often include positive or negative evaluative elements. In interpreting phraseological units, negative, positive, and neutral components are usually distinguished, regarded as expressions of socially established evaluations. The associative-figurative connection underlying indirect phraseological nomination not only facilitates adequate decoding of meaning but also stimulates corresponding evaluative and emotional responses in the recipient (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980:91).

The mechanism of numeral transformation in phraseological formation. According to the concept proposed by Chepasova (1998:73–75), when a phraseological unit is formed on the basis of a non-phraseological expression, each word within the structure loses its original semantic core while retaining specific semantic features (semes). These semes then contribute to the emergence of a new semantic core within the phraseological unit. In this process, numerals acquire a new function, actualizing the most characteristic

features of quantity from a human perspective – such as modes of movement, lifestyle, habits, external characteristics, and practical uses of sound activity. In the formation of the individual meaning of a phraseological unit, these patterns transform into semes that reflect new features and characteristics of a person (Chepasova, 1998:76).

Ethnocultural parameters and the Arabic phraseological tradition. The ethnocultural parameters of language preserve the historical memory of the Arab ethnic mentality at the level of phraseological unit formation, even though they may change over time (Maslova, 2001:62). In the semantics of phraseological units containing numerical components, the emotive-expressive component occupies an important place. These components are realized in speech by reflecting interpersonal relations that convey psychological meaning. Imagery and connotation, in turn, are regarded as constant elements at the level of language units. Different interpretations of numerical imagery are largely rooted in ethnic psychology; in Arabic phraseology, these interpretations evoke similar emotional responses among Arabic speakers and are expressed through linguistic means such as intonation, intensity, and kinesics, as well as through the semiotic system representing the limits of quantitative actions in Arab culture.

## DISCUSSION

The analysis presented in this article confirms that the study of numerals in phraseological units requires a genuinely multidimensional approach that integrates grammatical, semantic, linguocultural, and ethnolinguistic perspectives. The theoretical framework developed by Teliya (1996) for the analysis of connotative structure, Chepasova's (1998) mechanism of semantic transformation in phraseological formation, and Glazunova's (2000) analysis of substantive phraseological units together provide a comprehensive set of tools for the investigation of numeral semantics in phraseology.

A key finding of this analysis is the distinction between the denotative and connotative dimensions of numeral meaning within phraseological units. While the denotative meaning of a numeral is its literal numerical value, its connotative meaning within a phraseological unit may carry evaluative, emotional, cultural, and stylistic overtones that are entirely independent of – and often contradictory to – its mathematical value. This phenomenon is consistent with the cognitive-semantic framework of Lakoff and Johnson (1980:12), who demonstrated that human conceptual systems are fundamentally metaphorical in

nature, and with Wierzbicka's (1992:19) cross-cultural analysis of universal human concepts in culture-specific configurations.

The application of frame semantics (Fillmore, 1982:111) to the analysis of numeral-based phraseological units is particularly productive: frames activate not just the denotative meaning of the numeral but the entire cultural and evaluative context in which it is embedded. In Arabic phraseology specifically, the ethnocultural parameters of numeral usage – rooted in Islamic cosmology, Semitic cultural symbolism, and the historical memory of the Arab ethnic mentality – create a particularly rich semantic environment for numeral-based phraseological units that has been insufficiently explored in existing English-language scholarship. The Sapir-Whorf hypothesis (Sapir, 1921; Whorf, 1956) provides theoretical support for the expectation that speakers of different languages will organize numerical experience differently in phraseological form, a hypothesis that is confirmed by the cross-cultural diversity of numeral symbolism documented in this article.

## CONCLUSION

In conclusion, numerals in phraseological expressions acquire significance not through their literal meaning but through their symbolic and figurative content. In Arabic culture, numerals possess broad semantic potential and influence both emotional and linguistic responses. They constitute an integral part of phraseological units, enhancing expressiveness and reflecting cultural and ethnolinguistic characteristics (Maslova, 2001:62; Telia, 1996:84).

The functions of numerals in phraseological units should therefore be analyzed not only from a grammatical perspective but also within semantic, cultural, and ethnolinguistic contexts. This enables the expression of complex meanings through concise linguistic forms and demonstrates that phraseological units are not merely frozen expressions but living repositories of cultural memory and evaluative attitudes. Future research should focus on the systematic comparative analysis of numeral-based phraseological units across Arabic, English, and Uzbek – three languages with distinct cultural and typological profiles – with particular attention to the cross-linguistic variation of numeral symbolism, the evaluative components of numeral connotation, and the implications of these findings for translation theory and practice (Nida, 1964; Jakobson, 1984).

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