

STRUCTURAL AND SEMANTIC FEATURES OF ENGLISH PROVERBS WITH NUMERICAL COMPONENTS (IN COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS WITH RUSSIAN AND UZBEK EQUIVALENTS)

Samandarova Gulnoz Yarashovna

*PhD in Philology, Associate Professor. Department of Uzbek Linguistics and Journalism.
Bukhara State University. Bukhara, Uzbekistan.*

ORCID: 0000-0002-8251-3891. g.y.samandarova@buxdu.uz

Abstract: This article examines the structural and semantic characteristics of English proverbs containing numerical components, with particular focus on proverbs involving the numeral “one.” Approximately 150 English proverbs were selected and analyzed from syntactic, semantic, compositional, and linguocultural perspectives. The study also explores their equivalents in Russian and Uzbek, enabling a comparative analysis that highlights both universal and culture-specific conceptualizations reflected through numbers in paremiology. The research reveals the symbolic meanings and pragmatic functions of numbers in proverbs, reflecting life values, philosophical outlooks, and cultural attitudes. Through syntactic pattern identification and semantic classification, the study identifies the most frequently used numerals, their metaphorical roles, and the typical structural templates they form. Statistical methods were applied to determine the phraseological frequency and productivity of numerals across the three languages.

Keywords: proverb, numeral, English, Russian, Uzbek, semantics, structure, phraseology, contrastive analysis, linguoculture.

Proverbs: A Linguistic and Cultural Phenomenon with Numerical Components

Proverbs are concise, aphoristic expressions with figurative meanings, rhythmic structure, and deep moral implications. They have long captured the interest of scholars across various disciplines within the humanities. For instance, historians extract valuable information about the socio-cultural life of the people who created and transmitted these proverbs over centuries. Similarly, cultural studies experts and ethnographers view proverbs as important sources reflecting national traditions, values, and worldviews. Folklorists examine proverbs as one of the key genres of oral folk literature, exploring their structure, functions, and stylistic features.

In addition to these fields, proverbs hold particular significance for linguists, who investigate their diverse linguistic dimensions. Numerous linguistic studies have analyzed the syntactic structures of proverbs [15], their lexical-semantic features [16], pragmatic functions [14; 17], expressive devices [1], and other linguistic characteristics. These aspects continue to be the subject of scholarly attention in modern linguistics. Some researchers focus on thematic classification and semantic analysis of proverbs, while others conduct comparative studies with proverbs from different languages to reveal similarities and differences in cultural mentalities. Proverbs are often grouped into semantic categories based on the values they reflect, such as:

- attitudes toward wealth and money [5];
- views on law and justice [13];
- notions of wisdom and foolishness [2];
- perceptions of knowledge and ignorance [21];
- perspectives on gender and family relationships [18].

While some scholars explore the functions of proverbs in contemporary spoken and written discourse [22; 23], others examine their usage in advertising discourse [11]. Furthermore, specialists in foreign

language teaching recognize the didactic value of proverbs as effective tools for enhancing intercultural competence and language skills [6; 12]. Thus, proverbs serve as essential material across multiple subfields of linguistics.

In support of this view, a detailed analysis of the paremiological corpus of the English language reveals the frequent presence of numerical elements in proverbs. Proverbs with numeric components have attracted considerable attention from paremiologists, who examine the symbolic and cultural meanings encoded in these numbers [4; 10; 20]. Drawing on existing scholarly perspectives, our study aims to analyze the structure and semantics of English numerical proverbs, identify the most frequently occurring numbers, and determine the typical syntactic templates associated with such expressions. Additionally, we perform a comparative analysis with equivalent proverbs in Russian and Uzbek, highlighting cross-cultural parallels and distinctions.

The primary data for our research comprises approximately 150 English proverbs containing numbers, selected from reputable paremiological dictionaries. We examine their semantic, syntactic, structural, and linguocultural features. A structural analysis of complete proverbs enables the identification of the most common syntactic patterns, while a semantic examination of lexical components facilitates the interpretation of both literal and figurative meanings. This approach also aids in selecting accurate equivalents in Russian and Uzbek.

Using statistical methods, we identified the most frequently occurring numerals and analyzed their phraseological activity in English, Russian, and Uzbek proverbs. Structural and semantic analysis of the data allowed for classification of the proverbs based on several criteria:

- the specific numeral used (e.g., one, two, three, seven – bir, ikki, uch, yetti);
- the number of numerals within a single proverb (e.g., одно, два, три – one, two, three);
- the presence of contrast or opposition (e.g., one–two, one–another – bir–ikki, bitta–boshqa);
- the type of numeral (cardinal vs. ordinal numbers);
- structural composition (single-part or two-part proverbs);
- partial attribution (e.g., first – birinchi or initial).

This study contributes to a deeper understanding of how numerals function as symbolic and structural elements in English proverbs and provides a comparative linguocultural perspective on their equivalents in Russian and Uzbek.

Analysis of English Proverbs Containing the Numeral “One”

Our analysis begins with the most frequently used numeral in English proverbs: “one”. Among the 150 numerical proverbs selected for this study, 70 proverbs contain the number one (corresponding to один in Russian and bir in Uzbek). Below are several examples of English proverbs featuring the numeral “one”, alongside their Russian and Uzbek equivalents and interpretative commentary.

- One chick keeps a hen busy.

И один цыплёнок доставляет наседке много хлопот.

Translation: Birgina bola ham onaning butun vaqtini oladi.

This proverb metaphorically illustrates how even a single child can fully occupy a mother’s time and energy, emphasizing the burden or responsibility carried by caregivers.

- You only get one shot at life.

Один раз живём.

Translation: Hayot faqat bir marta beriladi.

The proverb reminds us of the uniqueness and transience of life, suggesting that individuals should live authentically and not be overly concerned with the opinions of others. It encourages bold, self-driven living.

- One step above the sublime makes the ridiculous.

От великого до смешного – один шаг.

Translation: Buyuklik bilan kulgilik orasida bir qadam bor.

This saying reflects the fragility of human judgment and the thin line between greatness and absurdity. It points out how even highly esteemed individuals can occasionally act irrationally or foolishly.

- One swallow doesn't make a summer.

Одна ласточка весны не делает.

Translation: Bir qaldirg'ochdan bahor bo'lmaydi.

This ancient proverb warns against making hasty generalizations based on limited evidence. It emphasizes the need for comprehensive analysis rather than drawing conclusions from a single sign. Historically, it is linked to Aesop's fables and is referenced by Aristotle in Nicomachean Ethics. The story tells of a man who sells his coat upon seeing one returning swallow, thinking spring has arrived—only to suffer when cold weather returns. The proverb has equivalents in many European languages, showing its wide cultural dissemination:

- Ukrainian: Одна ластівка не робить весни
- Polish: Jedna jaskółka nie czyni wiosny
- German: Eine Schwalbe macht noch keinen Sommer
- French: Une hirondelle ne fait pas le printemps
- Italian: Una rondine non fa primavera
- Latin: Una hirundo non facit ver

In Russian, the phrase gained popularity through Krylov's 1818 fable "The Mot and the Swallow," which adapted Aesop's narrative. The expression "the first swallow" has since become a metaphor for early or initial signs of a phenomenon.

- One tongue is enough for a woman.

Женщине и одного языка хватает.

Translation: Ayol uchun bitta tilning o'zi yetarli.

This outdated proverb reflects patriarchal cultural norms from earlier European societies, where women were expected to be silent, modest, and obedient. Though once seen as wisdom, the saying is now regarded as incompatible with contemporary ideals of gender equality and freedom of expression. The underlying belief—that a woman's words held power over life or death—is rooted in ancient mythological traditions.

Two-part proverbs containing the word "one" often exhibit tight logical and semantic cohesion between clauses:

- If one claw is caught, the bird is lost.

Коготок увяз – всей птичке пропасть.

Translation: Bitta tirnoq ilinib qolsa, butun qush nobud bo'ladi.

This proverb warns against engaging in even small wrongdoings, which can lead to greater entrapment. It suggests that major consequences often arise from seemingly minor beginnings.

- It is a poor mouse that has only one hole.

Плоха та мышь, которая одну нору имеет.

Translation: Faqat bitta ini bor sichqon bechoradir.

This metaphor implies that over-reliance on a single option or resource is unwise. One should always have alternatives and contingency plans.

Conclusion: The analysis of English proverbs containing the numeral "one," in comparison with their Russian and Uzbek equivalents, has revealed the deep semantic and cultural significance of numerical components in paremiological expressions. Proverbs featuring the number "one" are particularly rich in metaphorical meaning, often symbolizing uniqueness, singularity, individual responsibility, or the onset of change. Many of these proverbs have ancient origins and are found across different languages and cultures, demonstrating the universality of certain life experiences and values.

The comparative analysis highlights both similarities and differences in how numerical symbolism is reflected in the proverbial systems of English, Russian, and Uzbek. While certain proverbs share structural and thematic parallels, others are rooted in culture-specific worldviews and historical contexts. Furthermore, the syntactic structure of such proverbs often follows predictable patterns that reinforce their aphoristic and mnemonic qualities.

Overall, this study underscores the importance of numerical elements in shaping the meaning, structure, and cultural resonance of proverbs. It also contributes to a broader understanding of cross-linguistic and cross-cultural paremiology, offering valuable insights for linguists, folklorists, translators, and language educators.

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