

Cultural aspects of numbers from one to ten in English and Uzbek languages

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Abstract: This article delves into the cultural and symbolic significance of numbers from one to ten in English and Uzbek languages, highlighting their roles in folklore, traditions, superstitions, and idiomatic expressions. Drawing upon cognitive and linguistic theories, the research emphasizes how numbers function beyond their mathematical purpose, serving as carriers of cultural identity and societal values. By exploring the shared and distinct interpretations of these numbers, the article illuminates the interplay between language, culture, and cognition, showcasing how numerical symbolism bridges individual and collective beliefs in English-speaking and Uzbek-speaking societies.

Keywords: Numbers, culture, symbolism, English language, Uzbek language, idiomatic expressions, folklore, traditions, cognition, collective beliefs.

Introduction: Numbers are more than just mathematical tools; they carry deep cultural, historical, and symbolic meanings. In both English and Uzbek cultures, numbers from 1 to 10 hold significant value, appearing in folklore, traditions, superstitions, and everyday language. This article explores the cultural dimensions of these numbers, highlighting their roles in rituals, idiomatic expressions, and collective beliefs in both English and Uzbek-speaking societies.

Neurologists and cognitive scientists, such as Stanislas Dehaene, argue that numbers are not just abstract mathematical entities but also deeply tied to human cognition and perception. In his book, "The Number Sense," Dehaene explains how the number one represents the simplest cognitive representation of quantity—a singular object, entity, or concept. This foundational perception extends into cultural systems, where singularity often symbolizes primacy, uniqueness, and origin.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The number One holds a foundational role in numerals and language across cultures. It represents unity, singularity, and the beginning of counting systems. Linguists and anthropologists often highlight how the word for "one" is among the earliest and most stable terms in human languages. Frege argued that numbers,

including one, are not mere labels for collections but abstract entities that exist independently of physical reality.

Unity and Oneness

In English-speaking cultures, the number 1 is frequently associated with individualism and self-reliance. Ifrah explained that early human civilizations often began numerical systems with a concept of one as a unique entity, distinct from plurality. Expressions such as "Be number one" or "You are your own person" highlight a cultural emphasis on personal achievement and independence. The Western philosophical tradition, shaped by thinkers such as John Locke and Jean-Jacques Rousseau, underscores the primacy of the individual as a singular, autonomous unit within society.

In contrast, Uzbek culture often interprets the number one through a lens of collective unity and spiritual singularity. The phrase "Yagona Alloh" (One God) reflects the core of Islamic monotheism, a cornerstone of Uzbek cultural and spiritual identity. According to Dr. Nurbek Ibragimov, a cultural historian from Tashkent State University, "The number one in Uzbek tradition represents both divine singularity and communal harmony—a balance between individual identity and collective responsibility."

Leadership and Success

In both cultures, the number 1 symbolizes leadership and excellence. In English-speaking societies, achieving “Number One” in competitions or academics signifies ultimate success. Titles like “Number One Bestseller” or “First Place Champion” reinforce this cultural association.

In Uzbek culture, being “birinchi” (first) carries not only prestige but also responsibility and accountability. The eldest child, referred to as “birinchi farzand”, often bears social and emotional responsibility for younger siblings, reflecting a hierarchical structure embedded in family dynamics.

Language serves as a mirror of cultural attitudes. In English, idioms such as: “One step at a time” – emphasizes gradual progress, “One in a million” – highlights uniqueness. In Uzbek, proverbs like: “Yigirma barmoqqa bir bosh kerak.” (Twenty fingers need one head) – Stress the importance of leadership. “Bir qadam tashla, ming qadam yo‘l ochiladi.” (Take one step, and a thousand paths will open) – Suggests initiative and courage.

Scientific and Cultural Synthesis

Research in numerology and cultural psychology suggests that humans universally attribute symbolic power to the number 1 due to its cognitive simplicity and symbolic clarity. In both English and Uzbek traditions, the number 1 acts as a cultural metaphor for origins, unity, and exceptionalism. However, while English culture often emphasizes individuality and competition, Uzbek culture intertwines the number one with spirituality, family roles, and collective responsibility.

The number one holds profound symbolic and cultural importance across civilizations, transcending linguistic and geographical boundaries. As the first natural number, it serves as a fundamental building block in linguistics, philosophy, and cultural systems. From a scientific standpoint, mathematician G.H. Hardy described one as “the foundation of numerical identity, a singularity that sets the stage for all subsequent numerical understanding.” In cultural contexts, the number takes on layers of meaning, embodying unity, leadership, beginnings, and divinity.

Number Two carries profound symbolic significance across cultures, representing concepts of duality, balance, partnership, and opposition. As the first even number, it serves as a fundamental building block in linguistics, philosophy, and cultural symbolism.

In English: The word “two” originates from the Old English “twā” (feminine and neuter forms) and “twa” (masculine), ultimately derived from the **Proto-Indo-

European root “dwóh₂” (two). It is one of the foundational numbers in the English numeral system and serves as a grammatical and conceptual base for plurality. Georges Ifrah highlights how the shift from singular to plural often begins with the recognition of two as a distinct category.

In Uzbek: The Uzbek word for 2 is “ikki”, originating from the Old Turkic “iki” and tracing back to Proto-Turkic roots. Uzbek, like many Turkic languages, uses “ikki” in both numerical and symbolic senses.

In linguistics, the number 2 represents the first and simplest form of plurality—a step beyond singularity. It introduces the concept of pairing, division, and symmetry.

Duality and Opposites

In English culture, the number 2 often represents contrast, conflict, or partnership. Phrases like “Two sides of the same coin” or “It takes two to tango” emphasize the necessity of balance and cooperation. Additionally, duality appears in classic philosophical oppositions such as:

- Good vs. Evil
- Light vs. Dark
- Yin vs. Yang

In Uzbek culture, duality also plays a significant role, often symbolizing balance and harmony. In Islamic philosophy, which influences Uzbek cultural values, the world is viewed as a balance between material and spiritual realms, life and afterlife, day and night. The Uzbek saying, “Yaxshi-yomon qo‘shilib hayot bo‘ladi” (Good and bad together make life), reflects this balance. Dr. Otabek Ismoilov, a cultural historian, emphasizes: “In Uzbek tradition, the number 2 is seen as a symbol of harmony—man and woman, sky and earth, day and night—all existing in delicate balance.”

Partnership and Cooperation

In English culture, partnerships and pairs are symbolized by the number 2. Examples include:

- Marriage: The union of two individuals.
- Friendship: “Two peas in a pod” signifies strong companionship.
- Balance: The scales of justice are often depicted with two sides.

In Uzbek culture, partnership and harmony are also deeply embedded. Marriage is considered one of the most sacred partnerships, and the saying “Ikki qo‘l bir boshni yuvadi” (Two hands wash one head) highlights the importance of cooperation and mutual support. Family roles also emphasize pairs, such as parents (ona va ota), who are seen as two complementary pillars of

a household.

Symbolism in Religion and Spirituality

In Christianity, the number 2 is associated with concepts such as: The dual nature of Christ (divine and human), The Old Testament and the New Testament.

In Islam, which greatly influences Uzbek culture, the number 2 holds significant spiritual meaning: Fajr (early morning) and Maghrib (sunset) prayers mark the duality of day and night. The Quran emphasizes the pairing of creation: "And We created everything in pairs, so that you may reflect" (Surah Az-Zariyat, 51:49). This dualism reflects a divine order in creation and human existence.

Proverbs and Idioms

English Idioms: "Two heads are better than one" – Emphasizes cooperation and teamwork, "It takes two to tango" – Highlights the necessity of mutual effort. "Caught between two stools" – Indicates indecision or being stuck between choices.

Uzbek Proverbs: "Ikki qo'l bir boshni yuvadi." (Two hands wash one head.) – Cooperation leads to success, "Ikki eshakning ustidan chiqqan o'tni yemang." (Don't eat the grass grown between two donkeys.) – Avoid getting caught in indecision. "Ikki karra ikki to'rt." (Two times two is four.) – Represents clarity and undeniable truth.

From both scientific and cultural perspectives, the number 2 universally symbolizes contrast, cooperation, and balance. In English culture, the number 2 frequently signifies partnership, opposition, and decision-making, while in Uzbek culture, it emphasizes balance, harmony, and unity within opposites.

Number Three: The number 3 carries deep linguistic, cultural, and pragmatic significance across languages and societies. Its repeated presence in language, storytelling, proverbs, and social constructs reflects its universal appeal and functionality. Below, we explore the pragmatic usage of "3" in different linguistic contexts, emphasizing how it conveys meaning, structure, and emphasis in communication. In English Culture: Three is often seen as a complete set (e.g., "third time's the charm"). It appears in fairy tales (e.g., "Three Little Pigs") and religious contexts (e.g., the Holy Trinity). Uzbek Culture: three carries spiritual significance, appearing in proverbs and traditional practices, often symbolizing balance and completeness: "Uch og'iz so'zning boshida — tinchlik."

Number Four: Stability and Order English Culture: The number 4 symbolizes stability, as seen in four seasons or four cardinal directions. "Four corners of the earth." (Representing all directions). "On all fours." (Balanced or crawling posture).

Uzbek Culture: To'rt is associated with structure and completeness in Uzbek traditions, often connected to physical and spiritual stability. Both English and Uzbek cultures feature idioms and proverbs using the number 4, often to symbolize stability or universality: "To'rt qadam bosmasang, manzilga yetmaysan." (If you don't take four steps, you won't reach your destination). "To'rt ko'z bo'lib gaplashmoq." (To speak one-on-one in confidence). Mieder explains how numbers in proverbs are not random but culturally meaningful, with four symbolizing completeness or structure.

Number Five: The number five holds a special place in linguistics, cultural expressions, symbolism, and communication systems across many societies. It is often associated with balance, harmony, human experience, and natural order due to its presence in human anatomy, nature, and cultural practices. Below, we delve into the linguistic and cultural aspects of the number five with insights from scholars and examples from different languages. The number 5 often serves as a structural tool in linguistic and cultural expressions: Five senses: Sight, hearing, touch, taste, smell. Five vowels in the English alphabet: A, E, I, O, U. Uzbek Example: "Besh ustunli jamiyat" (Five-pillar society).

Protection and Harmony

- English Culture: The number 5 appears in expressions like "high five" and symbolizes balance (e.g., five senses).
- Uzbek Culture: Besh (5) holds cultural importance, often linked with protection (e.g., amulets and talismans).

Number Six: The number 6 carries rich linguistic, cultural, and symbolic meanings across languages and societies. Often associated with harmony, balance, family, and completeness, the number six holds a unique position in numerology, religious symbolism, and linguistic expressions. Lévi-Strauss emphasizes how numbers like six often shape human perception of order and natural harmony. The number six frequently serves as a structural marker in language and cultural systems: Six Days of Creation (Judeo-Christian tradition): According to the Bible, God created the world in six days. Hexagon (Six sides): Found in natural structures like honeycombs. Uzbek Example: Olti tomon (Six directions — symbolizing comprehensiveness in space). Idioms and proverbs often incorporate 6 to symbolize balance, completeness, or routine: English Idioms: "Six of one, half a dozen of the other." (Equivalent options, no difference.) "Hit for six." (A cricket term symbolizing something impactful or shocking.) Uzbek Proverbs: "Olti oy qor, olti oy yor." (Six months snow, six months light — symbolizing seasonal cycles.) "Olti burchakli

dunyo.” (A six-cornered world — a metaphor for complexity or completeness.)

Imperfection and Work

English Culture: The number 6 can represent imperfection (e.g., the biblical number 666). It also represents hard work and diligence.

Uzbek Culture: Olti (6) is associated with completeness in work and responsibility.

Number Seven: The number seven is one of the most culturally significant and linguistically rich numbers across various languages and societies. It is often associated with spirituality, perfection, luck, and completeness in both linguistic and cultural contexts. Below, we delve into the linguistic, cultural, and symbolic meanings of the number seven, drawing insights from scholars and linguistic traditions across languages. Claude Lévi-Strauss (Structural Anthropology): Lévi-Strauss identifies seven as a symbolic number used to create balance and structure in cultural rituals and mythologies.

Luck and Spirituality

English Culture: Seven is considered a lucky number, seen in expressions like “seventh heaven” and culturally significant in religious texts. The number 7 is commonly used in cultural systems, categorization, and organizational structures: Days of the Week: Most modern calendar systems, including the Gregorian calendar, are based on 7 days. Seven Colors of the Rainbow: Represents completeness and harmony in nature. Seven Chakras (in Hindu and Buddhist traditions) symbolize energy centers in the human body. Uzbek Culture: Yetti (7) carries spiritual meaning, frequently appearing in folklore and religious stories. Yetti ulugʻ inson (Seven great people — a reference to important figures in Islamic history).

Number Eight. In its geometric form, the number 8 resembles the infinity symbol (∞), representing endlessness and eternal cycles. In many traditions, the infinity symbol signifies concepts that transcend physical limitations, such as time, life cycles, and the universe itself. English Culture: The number 8 is linked to infinity (the shape of its symbol) and prosperity. Uzbek Culture: Sakkiz (8) symbolizes abundance and continuity.

The number eight holds significant symbolic, cultural, and linguistic meanings across various societies. Its representation spans across diverse fields, including religion, mathematics, literature, and daily life. Below, we examine the symbolic and linguistic aspects of the number eight, including insights from scholars and examples from different cultural contexts, focusing on English and Uzbek perspectives.

Christianity

In Christian symbolism, eight represents resurrection and new beginnings. For example, the eight beatitudes in the Gospel of Matthew speak of spiritual fulfillment and blessings. Georges Ifrah (The Universal History of Numbers, 2000): Ifrah observes that eight is historically significant in numerology and ancient cultures due to its association with cosmic order and infinite cycles.

The number Nine holds a distinctive symbolic, cultural, and linguistic significance across various cultures and societies. From mathematics to spirituality, folklore, and art, the number nine carries meanings of completion, wholeness, and divine connection. Below, we explore the linguistic, cultural, and symbolic roles of the number nine, with particular focus on English and Uzbek cultures.

Wisdom and Fulfillment

English Culture: The number nine represents wisdom and completion (e.g., nine lives of a cat). Uzbek Culture: Toʻqqiz (9) is associated with wisdom and spiritual fulfillment.

Number Ten. The number ten is widely regarded as one of the most significant numbers across various cultures and fields, including mathematics, religion, language, and symbolism. It often represents completeness, perfection, and the highest form of achievement.

Completion and Perfection

In many cultures, the number ten represents completeness or wholeness, as it is the base of the decimal system, which forms the foundation of modern arithmetic and counting. It is often seen as the perfect number due to its association with balance and universality. The number ten is considered sacred in various religious and spiritual traditions. In Judaism and Christianity, the Ten Commandments represent the fundamental moral law governing human behavior, marking the number ten as a symbol of divine order. In English-speaking cultures, the number ten is often associated with completeness and the highest level of achievement. For example, a perfect score on a test is often a “ten out of ten”, symbolizing total success or perfection. Perfection and Wholeness: In Uzbek culture, the number ten also signifies perfection and completion, reflecting its mathematical and cultural roles in counting systems and rankings. Like in English-speaking cultures, ten is closely linked to ideas of excellence and completion in Uzbek proverbs and sayings. “A stitch in time saves nine.” (Taking timely action prevents future problems, emphasizing the importance of completing tasks at the right time to achieve perfection.) “Possession is nine-tenths of the law.”

(Having control or ownership over something is almost the same as having complete legal rights, showing the value of completing what you claim.) “To be on cloud nine.”

(A state of ultimate happiness or near perfection, implying a sense of fulfillment and completion.) “Nine women can’t make a baby in one month.”

(Certain processes, like perfection or completion, take time and cannot be rushed.)

It signifies ideal performance or achieving the highest standard. In Uzbek Culture: “O’n qadam tashla, yuzga yet.” (Take ten steps, and you will reach a hundred.) This saying reflects effort, growth, and the idea that ten steps toward a goal can result in significant success, symbolizing progress and achievement. “To’qqiz o’ylab, bir kes.”

(Mukammal va to’liq natijaga erishish uchun bir ishni bajarishdan oldin ko’p marta o’ylash kerak.). “To’qqiz tog’ni aylanib, biriga chiq.”

(Mukammallikka va to’liq muvaffaqiyatga erishish uchun sabr-toqat va mashaqqat bilan harakat qilish lozim.). “To’qqiz marta yiqil, o’n marta tur.”

(Qanchalik qiyinchilik bo’lsa ham, mukammal natijaga erishish uchun kurash va qat’iyat zarur.). “To’qqiz ariqdan suv keltir.”

(Maqsadga to’liq erishish va mukammallikka yetishish uchun har qanday manbani ishga solish kerak.). Seyyed Hossein Nasr (Islamic Art and Spirituality, 1987): Nasr describes how the number 10 in Islamic contexts is also revered as a symbol of spiritual completeness and moral perfection, reflecting its influence on Central Asian cultures, including Uzbekistan. English: The word “ten” in English comes from Old English *ten*, derived from Proto-Germanic *tehun*, and Proto-Indo-European *dékmt*. Uzbek: The word for 10 in Uzbek is *o’n*, which shares linguistic roots with Turkic languages, and is used widely in counting and measuring. David Crystal (The Cambridge Encyclopedia of Language): Crystal notes that the number 10 plays a significant role in language, particularly in its lexical forms and the universal recognition of ten fingers, which forms the basis of counting systems in many cultures. In Western Cultures: The number ten is commonly used in rankings and lists to represent the highest achievements in various domains, from entertainment to sports and beyond. Examples include the Top 10 Movies, Top 10 Books, and Top 10 Songs, where items ranked number ten signify notable excellence.

The Decimal System: The number ten is foundational in the decimal system, used universally for arithmetic, counting, and measurements in everyday life. The “Top 10” ranking system is also used to evaluate

performances, such as in sports, where athletes and teams are ranked based on their performance and success. Symbol of Success and Achievement: In Uzbek culture, the number ten is often used to refer to the highest standard in various domains, such as education, athletics, and spiritual achievement. Traditional Measurements: The number ten is used in measurements, such as in traditional counting systems and even in money (such as 10 so’m, a unit of Uzbek currency), symbolizing economic prosperity and efficiency. Example from Uzbek Culture: “O’n yildan o’n ming so’z.” (Ten years bring ten thousand words.) This proverb suggests that time and effort lead to great outcomes, indicating the value and richness that the number ten signifies.

CONCLUSION

The cultural aspects of numbers in English and Uzbek languages highlight the intricate interplay between language, tradition, and worldview. Numbers, beyond their quantitative value, carry rich symbolic meanings influenced by historical, religious, and cultural contexts. In English, numbers often reflect Western cultural and religious traditions, with notable references in literature, idioms, and folklore. Similarly, in Uzbek, numbers are deeply rooted in Islamic traditions and Central Asian heritage, serving as a lens through which societal values and beliefs are expressed. Despite the differences in their cultural backgrounds, both languages share commonalities in attributing symbolic meanings to numbers, such as the notions of luck, completeness, and harmony. These parallels underscore the universal human tendency to assign meaning to abstract concepts, while the differences reflect the unique cultural identities of the two linguistic communities. Studying the cultural aspects of numbers enriches our understanding of how languages encode cultural knowledge and underscores the significance of cultural awareness in cross-linguistic studies. This exploration not only sheds light on the linguistic features of English and Uzbek but also fosters appreciation for the diversity and commonality in human cultural expressions.

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