

Symbolic Meaning of The Number Three in Karakalpak Phraseological Units

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Abstract: This article examines the national and cultural features reflected in phraseological units containing the number three. A linguocultural analysis is carried out on the use of the number three within the structure of Karakalpak phraseological expressions, highlighting its ethnic, national, and cultural peculiarities. As supporting material, examples are drawn from folklore, as well as works of Karakalpak writers and poets.

Keywords: Phraseology, numerals, linguoculturology, symbolism of numbers, number three.

Introduction: Language is a reflection of a people's national culture. Numeral components in phraseological units do not merely serve the function of counting but also possess additional symbolic meanings. Phraseological expressions in Karakalpak containing the number three reflect the people's mythological, religious, and cultural worldview.

The aim of this study is to identify the linguocultural significance and symbolic functions of phraseological units formed with the number three. The relevance of the research lies in the fact that phraseological units with the number three in the Karakalpak language are, for the first time, systematized and studied from a linguocultural perspective. This study also reveals the common and universal characteristics of numerical symbolism in Turkic languages. The object of research is phraseological expressions with the number three in the Karakalpak language, while the subject of study includes folklore, as well as works of Karakalpak writers and poets.

The national culture of a people, as bearers of language, finds expression in phraseological units, among which those containing numeral components occupy a significant place. At the core of many religious and philosophical doctrines lies the idea of trinity. Mythologically, space is divided into earth, sky, and the underworld; time into the present, past, and future. Folktale heroes often have to pass three types of trials:

tests of physical strength and endurance, intellect and ingenuity, as well as morality and etiquette.

The number three carries sacred meaning, most often designating the fundamental and significant ritual-mythological units. In Indo-European mythology, the number three symbolizes the entire world surrounding a human being, divided into earth, the underworld, and the sky. For this reason, the number three has been regarded as a sacred number in many world languages, expressing three interconnected phenomena.

The significance of trinity lies in its ability to reconcile oppositions, including the opposition between one and two, thereby serving as the first complete odd number. In natural representation, trinity is expressed as the threefold essence of the world: Heaven, Earth, and Man.

METHODOLOGY

Research on the symbolism of numbers is most often conducted in connection with mythology, esotericism, numerology, and religion. The number three is considered a symbol of wholeness, intensification, and sacredness. In this article, comparative, descriptive, and linguocultural methods were applied.

The symbolic meaning of numbers penetrates all spheres of human spiritual activity—religion, art, literature, and architecture. Without numbers, it is impossible to imagine not only any science but also

everyday life and human relations

[1, p. 76]. The concept of three once served as the limit of counting and carried a symbolic meaning. Because of this, in some phraseological units it loses its direct quantitative sense and instead conveys the meaning of “many.”

In world linguistics, the number three has long been associated with magic, rituals, and intensification and these functions are also reflected in phraseology. For instance, Russian phraseological units with the component three often serve as evaluative expressions of actions: в трёх шагах (“within three steps”), в три погибели (“bent double”), в три ручья (“crying in three streams”) [2, p. 102].

A common feature of Russian and English phraseological expressions with the number three is their tendency to give a negative evaluation of interpersonal relationships. For example, третий лишний (“the third is superfluous”) has a direct English equivalent, third wheel [3, pp. 104–105]. In Karakalpak colloquial speech, the Russian phrase третий лишний is also used directly in its original Russian form. In everyday conversations, one may encounter expressions such as третий лишний болма (“don’t be the third wheel”) or сен третий лишнийсаң (“you are the third wheel”).

Kazakh phraseologist S. Kenesbaev observed: “... the words three, seven, forty in most cases lose their quantitative function. Instead, they act as symbols of certain objects, phenomena, or concepts,” thus underlining the symbolic function of numbers within phraseological structures [4, p. 344].

In Karakalpak culture, the number three holds significant meaning and has given rise to numerous phraseological expressions such as úsh inayat (“three blessings”), úsh-úshten keyin push (“regret after three attempts”), and úsh qaynağanda sorpası qosılmaw (“their broth does not merge even after three boils”). In myths and legends, we frequently encounter concepts involving three: three brothers, three sisters, three trials, three wishes, and many others.

RESULTS

Although the number three frequently appears in folk traditions, it is less commonly used in the composition of phraseological units. Historically, the number three functioned as the boundary of counting, and therefore, in folk customs and rituals, it also carried the meaning of a certain limit. In Karakalpak proverbs and sayings, the number three symbolizes limitation. For example: Er qádesi úsh, úshten qalsa push (“A man’s patience lasts three times; if it fails, regret follows”); Atın bir súrinbesin, bir súrinse úshke deyin súrinedi (“Do not

saddle your horse once, if you do, it will be saddled up to three times”), etc. Similarly, in fairy tales and epics we often encounter úsh ayshılıq jol (“a three-month journey”), úsh ret sinap koriw (“three tests”), úsh aǵayınli jigit (“three brothers”), úsh qız (“three sisters”), úsh túrli shárt (“three conditions”), among others.

Phraseological units containing the number three are relatively rare in Karakalpak, yet even in limited use they preserve rich cultural symbolism. Examples include: úsh eli, eki eli (“a little, a small amount”), úsh uyıqlağanda túsine enbew (“never dream of, unimaginable”), úsh uyıqlağanda oyda joq (“completely unexpected”), úsh qaynağanda sorpası qosılmaw (“to remain incompatible”), úshten birin bilmew (“to know only a little”), úsh qoy bir som bolıw (“all the same, it makes no difference”).

The phraseological unit úsh uyıqlağanda túsine enbew (“never dream of, unimaginable”) is widely used among the Kazakh, Karakalpak, and other Turkic peoples. Its meanings are:

1. An unexpected, unforeseen situation;
2. Something inconceivable, unimaginable, beyond rational thought.

This reflects Turkic beliefs about dreams, sleep, and numbers. In the national mentality, sleep is viewed as rest for the human soul, while dreams are interpreted as signs of the future. The number three functions here as an intensifier. In Karakalpak, úsh uyıqlağanda túsine enbew means “an impossible or completely unexpected event.” In Kazakh, the expression úsh uyıqtasa oyda joq / úsh uyıqtasa túsine enbegen carries the same meaning: “something never anticipated.” In Kyrgyz, it is üç uyuktaganda tüşümö kiregen (“it never entered my dream”). In Tatar, öç yoklaganda töşemä kermegen conveys the same meaning. In both Kyrgyz and Tatar cultures, the number three symbolizes integrity, strength, and sacredness. Among all Turkic peoples, “úsh / öç / üç” is a symbol of wholeness, magnitude, and power. Such phraseological units preserve national cultural heritage and reflect worldviews and symbolic thinking.

For instance, in Karakalpak literature we find:

“Úsh uyıqlağanda túsine enbew” – unimaginable, unforeseen.

— “Úsh uyıqlağanda bunday xabar túsine enbep edi onıń!” (“He could never have imagined such news, even in three sleeps!”) (M. Nizanov).

Phraseological units with three may also indicate limited measure or small quantity. For example:

- “Úshten birin bilmew” (“to know only a third, to know very little”):

— Seniñ bilgeniñniñ úshten birin bilmeytuğın adamlar áste-áste basqarmalarǵa, trestlerge barıp may kemik orınlardı iyelep atır. (“People who do not even know a third of what you know are gradually taking up comfortable positions in administrations and trusts.”) (E. Ermanov).

- “Úsh eli, eki eli” (“a little, a small amount”):

— “Ústiñe dushpan kelgende, Oq atısıp kór dedi. Ya úsh eli, ya eki eli kem kelse, Edige bóleñ sol dedi”. (“When the enemy attacked you, he said: fire your arrows. Whether three or two handfuls were lacking, Edige divided equally.”) (Edige epic).

- “Úsh qoy bir som bolıw” (“all the same, no difference”):

— “Óǵan úsh qoy bir som, dárya tassa tobiǵına kelmeydi”. (“For him, whether three sheep or one coin, it makes no difference; even if the river dries, it won’t reach his ankle.”) (Anonymous).

Thus, phraseological units with the number three describe various aspects of human life—external traits, inner qualities, character, emotions, psychophysiological and physical conditions, as well as interpersonal relations.

CONCLUSION

In Turkic phraseology, the numbers three, seven, and nine have traditionally been regarded as sacred. Since ancient times, they have represented the limits of counting and the highest numerical values, and as such they became symbols reflecting the mythological, astrological, and religious concepts of the people, embodied in phraseological expressions. To determine the role of numerical components in phraseology, the symbolic meanings of numbers in Karakalpak culture were studied.

The symbolic meanings of the number three in phraseological units can be summarized as follows:

- Three expresses the symbolism of “completeness”;
- It functions as an intensifier, denoting absolute strength or totality of an event;
- It reflects the worldview of the people;
- It signifies social relations and cultural perspectives.

Within phraseology, the number three reflects the figurative richness and linguocultural heritage of the Karakalpak language. As part of phraseological expressions, three symbolizes completeness, strength, limitation, and impossibility. Through phraseology, the mythological and cultural outlook of the Karakalpak people has been preserved and transmitted to future generations.

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