

Jordanian popular numerical proverbial expressions: A critical linguistic review of the culture-mathematics interaction

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Abstract: This paper aims to examine a selected number of numerical proverbial expressions that are used in Jordanian everyday talks. Given the importance of numbers in our lives, it is clear that these proverbs have referenced a wide range of themes in most spheres of life. Proverbs are short, concise sayings that have been handed down through the ages. These proverbial phrases contain true conventional beliefs and knowledge disguised as memorable metaphors. Additionally, these phrases are regarded as useful tools for disseminating information and insight about human nature. Numbers occupy great importance in human life, as they are used in all aspects of life. In addition to employing numbers mathematically and scientifically in different aspects of life, they were employed linguistically and culturally in the intangible human heritage such as proverbs and wisdom. The current research aims to study the use of cardinal numbers in Jordanian folk proverbial expressions through a sample of selected proverbs that were chosen from multiple sources. After collecting the targeted proverbs, they were analyzed, as the results showed the diversity of these numbers the multiplicity of the formulas of the proverbs that in which they were used, and the diversity of the pragmatic purposes for which these proverbs were employed.

Keywords: Jordanian culture, folklore, proverbs, numbers, mathematics

Introduction

The popular proverb is a brief, expressive phrase that has been passed down from one generation to another. It travels effortlessly and swiftly via place and time. It arose as an expression of a certain event and frequently employed in the setting of different incidents or circumstances. The popular proverb is a product of interactions between culture, history, physical location, the written word, economic

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life, beliefs, traditions, and customs. Popular proverbs play a significant role in building and nurturing values such as sovereignty, collaboration, tolerance, encouragement, respect, appreciation, orientation, and behavioral control. The popular proverb is distinguished by its brevity, as it is a brief phrase of merely few words, which contributes to its memorizing and popularity. The popular proverb is distinguished by its correctness of meaning, that is, it contains a true and profound notion, that is, a thought which is true and consistent with reality and amenable to logic. Popular proverbs are also distinguished by their musicality, harmony, and coherence of their words. Popular proverbs reflect the people's feelings, emotions, hopes, pains, joys, sorrows, thinking, philosophy, and wisdom. Through the popular proverb people's opinions and attitudes can be expressed about the various affairs of life. Popular proverbs often use direct language along with metaphors, puns, and euphemisms that allow people to discuss taboos and difficult and often complex ideas and issues. Popular proverbs benefit from many sources that they employ in formulating their texts. For example, they employ names of all kinds, whether they are the names of people, the names of other living beings, natural or man-made products, concepts, abstract nouns, or natural phenomena and geographical places. The numbers are a source that popular proverbs use in the formation of their texts. Jordanian popular proverbs get benefit of these sources including the use of cardinal numbers which this study aims to explore.

Data collection and methodology

The present study is a descriptive analytical investigation that focuses on examining how numbers are used in Jordanian proverbial expressions. The data set comprises of a group of popular proverbial expressions that have been gathered from various sources. The study aimed to debate the three issues concerning the types of cardinal numbers that are used in these proverbs, the linguistic structure of them and the social purposes for using them. The proverbs were collected from a variety of related print and online sources, in addition to media sources (i.e., Jordanian local TV and radio programs), besides the public and private gatherings. The proverbs were analyzed and discussed to answer the three inquiries of the study. Due to the limited scale of the study, it will be confined to a small number of expressions to be used as a representative sample of the research topic.

Review of related literature

No language exists apart from the cultural fabric that binds its original speakers to it because the language symbolizes a trustworthy image that ensures the survival of the language through age (Hazaymeh 2022, 89). Although paremiologists, or experts in the study of proverbs, have not agreed on a single, all-inclusive definition, the proverb is traditionally defined in terms of its distinguishing qualities, which include self-containedness, pithiness, traditionality, a tendency toward didacticism, fixedness of form, and prosody (Hijazin & Al-Khanji 2022, 523). Jordanian Spoken Arabic has many numbers and rhetorical phraseological proverbial expressions that are integrated with each other (Hazaymeh 2021, 75) which can be used for different themes in private and public gatherings (Hazaymeh et al. 2019, 289) to express opinions about various issues such as advice, warning, thankfulness and gratitude (Hazaymeh & Battah 2021, 2628). Proverbs are true conventional opinions and wisdom expressed in the form of remembered images (Khalifeh & Rababah 2022, 22). Syntactic aspects are used in Jordanian proverbs (Migdadi et al. 2023, 471) where these proverbs are used to serve a wide range of issues and can be formed in different ways including the declarative, imperative, and conditional sentences (Almomani 2013, viii). Proverbs as sincere and profound expressions of the life of society (Hazaymeh 2023, 78) communicate messages in an indirect and frequently figurative manner because the meanings they imply are socially accepted because people have the same knowledge and inherit the exact characteristics of proverbs (Al-Azzam 2018, 56). As part of literature and as a lens for exploring and comprehending a culture, proverbs including the Jordanian ones have figurative elements like synecdoche, metaphor, metonymy, exaggeration, paradox and allusion, and incorporate different ethical principles, customs, and traditions (Dawaghreh & Tengku-Sepora 2020, 281; Farghal 2021, 7; Hijazin & Al-Khanji 2022, 522).

Discussion and analysis

The importance of studying popular proverbs stems from their origins and purposes, since the general population is their source and author, and their objective is to express a practical collective attitude toward various situations and issues that people encounter in their daily lives. One of the most common genre of intangible folklore is the popular proverb. Because of the various dialects in the places where it is used, some of its vocabulary or the construction of its phrases change, but its

meaning remains the same. Because of the physiological implications of numbers that surpass beyond their numerical significance, the number constitutes one of the components of popular culture. The source of this importance of the numbers is diverse, it may be just a coincidence or because they were mentioned in sacred texts in a remarkable manner. It is worth noting that the same number may have a positive connotation for some people, while it may have a negative connotation for others. Numbers are divided into multiple types, such as odd, even, cardinal, and ordinal ones, and they have a presence in the tangible and intangible life of people. Numerical proverbs have a place within the Jordanian popular proverbs. These numerals and their proverbial applications vary. These proverbs have various cultural and social purposes. Popular proverbs use numbers in Jordanian Arabic as a means of expressing judgment and opinions in a strong way. The common use of numbers in these proverbs is to use them as illustrative elements that enhance understanding of the idea or strengthen the message.

Here are some examples.

ه د لقم يةت يد يال ط د لةدق duqiltablatijimiithabla: Beat the drum; a hundred fool woman will come” is proverbial verbal sentence that begins with the verb “duq; beat”. The proverb uses the cardinal number “hundred” to exaggerate the description of the situation. The proverb is a short sentence that uses alliteration between the words “tabla” and “habla”. It reflects a negative view of women by describing them as “foolish” and links them to the idea that it is easy to gather women by simply beating the drum. The proverb is used to show that on some occasions good and bad people may gather. The proverb also points to the necessity and importance of being solemn and not behaving in an insulting manner.

Another proverb which also serves the same function is: اضرب ال طاسةت يد يلكال فلحاسة udhrubiltasihtijilakalfahhasih: beat the bowl; one thousand lickers will come to you”. This verbal proverb uses the cardinal number ‘one thousand’ for hyperbole. It also uses alliteration between the words ‘iltasih’ and ‘lahhasih’.

The two proverbs use two man-made products ‘iltabla; the drum’ and ‘iltasih; the bowl’ for a rhythmic function. Also they employ the verb ‘tijji; come’.

وال نارال بارود بد ف قوشمايذ نين ithneanmabitfqush: two do not agree with each other: the gun powder and the fire” is a noun phrase proverb that starts with the cardinal number “two” to refer to

dissonance and incompatibility between two people or two things because of the lack of agreement or harmony between each other, or because there are differences and incompatibilities between them. To emphasize this idea, the proverb uses two opposing tools, “gunpowder” and “fire”, as each of them increases the other.

بـالـ عـشـرة لـطـمـ بـالـ خـمـسـة وـكـلـ لـيـ

illiboakilbilkhamshbultumbila'ashra: who eats with the five, will slap with the ten". The proverb is a relative clause and begins with the relative article 'illi; who'. It uses the two cardinal numbers 'five' and 'ten' to refer to the five fingers of the hand and the ten fingers of the two hands. The proverb depicts the setting where the person uses the five fingers i.e., one hand to eat, but he slaps his cheeks with the ten fingers i.e., the two hands. The proverb is used to show the regret a person expresses if he consumes and wastes everything if he does not save and keep things for cases of emergency and need.

يـلـلـ المـطـحـبـة عـسـتـلـ المـيـقـالـ بـعـرـشـ عـلـا illimabihutiltisa'a ma

bilaqiila'ashara: who does not keep the nine, will not find the ten". The proverb is a relative clause and starts with the relative article 'illi; who'. It employs the two neighboring cardinal numbers 'nine' and 'ten' to indicate and imply the necessity and importance of having effort and hard work to be made in order to achieve a satisfactory and desirable results.

لـ غـتـشـ بـمـوـيـ عـرـشـ عـوـال bishtaghlyoamwa'ashara la: work one day and ten no" is a verbal phrase proverb uses the cardinal number 'ten' to exaggerate the long period of having no work to do. This proverb is usually said by a person describing his situation when others ask him about how he manages his life affairs when he works sometimes and stops working most of the time for one reason or another. The proverb is also used by a person when others ask him how someone they both know is managing his life.

وـثـلـاـثـتـنـيـنـعـنـدـهـاـلـخـيـر ilkhayyrinduthinteanwthalath: the good one has two and three" is adjectival phrase proverb that starts with the definite adjective 'ilkhayyr; the good one'. The proverb praises the polygamy by showing that the good man can have two and three wives. The proverb utilizes the cardinal numbers 'two' and 'three' to express its function.

قـدـرـمـا ثـالـثـيـلـ عـلـا بـكـري ilqidr ma yrkabillaa'alathalath: the pot is only fixed on three legs" is a noun phrase proverb that starts with the definite singular noun 'ildidr; the pot' which uses the cardinal number 'three' to emphasize the importance of collaboration, solidarity,

togetherness, and cooperation in order to complete something that needs the effort of more than one person. Urging and encouraging the invited guest to eat more food is expressed in the popular proverb, “hamqulni‘ibirana‘abahsliray‘i: عن اع بشل اني عبر أقمقل” the measure of satiety is forty mouthfuls,” meaning that in order for a person to feel full and quit eating, he should eat at least forty mouthfuls. The proverb is a noun phrase and begins with a singular masculine noun, and uses the cardinal number ‘forty’ to exaggerate the big amount of food a guest should eat to feel satisfied to quit eating more.

The proverb “qamararba’taaish: a moon of fourteen i.e., full moon” which a noun phrase with a singular masculine noun in its beginning is used to signify an extremely gorgeous woman. In Arabic society, the full moon is an emblem of beauty. Jordanian people use this proverb to liken the women’s beauty to the badr i.e., the full moon when it is in the middle of the month. The cardinal number ‘fourteen’ symbolizes the middle of the month, when the moon is large and shining brightly. The cardinal number ‘sixty’ is merely and solely used in proverbial expressions to show exaggeration in the speed, insulting, and mockery.

The proverbial expressions “hiyamrusniitisnbi: اب ذ صرماية سد تين as on of sixty shoes” and “ibnsitiinkalb: ابن بنان يتس بلك” a son of sixty dogs”, both begin with the singular noun “ibn; the son” and use the cardinal number ‘sixty’ to humiliate, mock, and offend others in a hyperbole way.

The proverbial expressions “haata’aissitiin: طاح اعن يتسل” put ‘the speed’ at sixty” and “qaalyaasitiin: اياي يتسل لاق” said of sixty” are verbal phrases that use the cardinal number ‘sixty’ to show the exaggerated speed of someone in driving or doing something.

To describe the worst place or destination that a person or thing can go to, especially hell, the proverbial phrasal verb expression “qalaa’ ibsitiinijhannam: جهنم بسد تين ذ قلع” go through sixty hells” is used to express people’s extreme and exaggerated annoyance with a person or something.

To show a warm welcome to the guest, people use the proverbial expression “alhaswalhatiimay: وسهلا هلام يتي” Oh 100, you are welcome”, which starts with the particle ‘ay’ where the number “one hundred” shows the exaggeration and the increase in joy at the arrival of the guest.

To describe the high quality of a thing or to indicate that a person is in very good condition, the popular noun phrase proverbial expression

“عبر أن يرش عوطاريق” arbaa’ wiishreenqirat: twenty-four carats” is used. The carat is a quantitative measurement of purity for gemstones and precious metals like gold that is expressed in parts fine per 24 parts whole.

The proverbial noun phrase expression “الشمال عد صفر lamhsilala’arfis: zero on the left” symbolizes that the cardinal number ‘zero’ has no significance when it is on the left side. It is employed in Jordanian culture to mock, insult, humiliate and to show that someone does not worth nothing or respect in other people’s eyes as they do not give him any importance or priority.

Conclusion

Jordanian popular proverbs are seen as one of the most essential foundations of intangible Jordanian folklore because they act as a mirror, reflecting the culture, ways of life, and numerous relationships, morals, and values that exist in society. Popular proverbs are common oral and easily transportable wisdom that is commonly shared in the different sectors of the society. The settings where these proverbs were said could be repeated at any time. Many proverbs’ phrases may differ from region to region within the same country due to dialect differences, but their contents are consistent. Simply said, popular proverbs are a spontaneous expression of a specific situation, event, or incident in a linguistic structure that is brief, intense, accurate, funny, easy to transmit, and rapidly spreading. The popular proverb can be a combination of wisdom, humour, and guidance. The goal of popular proverbs is to extract lessons from cumulative experiences that have resulted in living, intangible, verbal heritage products that can be valued, admired and used as intangible cultural material which deserves to be circulated, known, protected, collected, and maintained as non-unconstitutional law. Jordanian proverbs with numbers in their texts account for a good portion of Jordanian popular proverbs. The current study attempted to carry out a descriptive analysis of a number of these proverbs in three dimensions: the types of cardinal numbers employed in the proverbs, their language structure, and the social goals for which they are used. The study concluded that there is a diversity expressions with the used cardinal numbers, as well as a variation in the linguistic structure of their phrases, in addition to the multiplicity in their social uses.

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