HISTORICAL NUMERATIVES IN THE AZERBAIJANI LANGUAGE

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Abstract. *Numerative words occupy a distinctive position within the lexical and grammatical system of the Azerbaijani language, playing an important role in expressing quantitative relations, measurement, volume, distance and frequency. Their historical development can be traced through linguistic evidence preserved in ancient Turkic written monuments. The emergence of numeratives was closely associated with human perception of the surrounding world, the counting and measurement of objects, and the establishment of various quantitative relations. Numerative constructions recorded in the Orkhon-Yenisei inscriptions, Mahmud al-Kashgari's Dīwān Lughāt al-Turk, and other medieval Turkic written sources demonstrate the antiquity of these lexical units. Historical examples such as "kat", "yol", "ülüg", "öpüm" and "orum" reflect different semantic aspects of quantitative relations. The historical development of numeratives in Azerbaijani is characterised by the extension of their lexical meanings and their gradual establishment as conventional expressions of measurement and quantity. A comparative examination of examples from ancient and modern Turkic languages reveals that numeratives have preserved features common to the Turkic language family while acquiring distinct semantic characteristics in accordance with the historical development of individual languages.*

Keywords: *numerative words, historical numeratives, category of quantity, ancient Turkic inscriptions, units of measurement.*

Introduction. Throughout the historical development of language, the expression of quantity has been realised through various lexical and grammatical means. Numerative words occupy a significant position among these linguistic resources. Numeratives are lexical units that specify the number, measurement, volume, weight, proportion and other quantitative characteristics of objects. They generally occur between numerals and nouns, contributing to the precise expression of quantitative relations. The existing system of numeratives in Azerbaijani has emerged through a prolonged process of historical development and has been enriched by changes in the lexical composition of the language during successive historical periods.

The investigation of the historical origins of numeratives is particularly important for identifying the characteristics of the formation and development of quantitative concepts in Turkic languages. Numeratives preserved in ancient Turkic inscriptions, medieval dictionaries and classical literary texts provide valuable evidence for understanding the historical foundations of corresponding lexical units in modern Azerbaijani. Accordingly, examining their lexical-semantic characteristics, grammatical positions and historical patterns of development constitutes an important aspect of the historical morphology of the Azerbaijani language.

The emergence of numerative words was closely connected with human practical activities and interactions with the surrounding environment. The need to count objects, measure

distances, determine the weight and volume of products, and establish quantitative relations contributed to the development of specific linguistic units expressing quantity. During the earliest stages of linguistic development, certain words denoting concrete objects, actions and spatial concepts gradually acquired meanings associated with measurement and quantity, subsequently functioning as numeratives. This process demonstrates the historical relationship between the lexical meanings of numeratives and their grammatical functions.

Ancient Turkic written monuments constitute important sources for identifying the earliest patterns of numerative usage. The occurrence of words such as “kata”, “kat”, “yolu”, “bağ” and “ülüg” in the Orkhon-Yenisei inscriptions indicates that quantitative relations were expressed through various linguistic means in Old Turkic [6, p. 563]. These units specified the meanings of numerals and determined the quantitative characteristics of objects and events. Compared with modern Turkic languages, the functional range of numeratives in ancient inscriptions was relatively restricted, as they were predominantly associated with cardinal numerals. This characteristic may be regarded as linguistic evidence of the subsequent functional expansion of numeratives.

The historical vocabulary of Turkic languages contains various numerative forms denoting measurement, weight, distance and frequency. Words such as “arşın”, “batman”, “poçik”, “totam”, “kat”, “tınar”, “atım”, “oya”, “çuval” and “çanak” are particularly noteworthy in this respect [4, p. 512]. Throughout different historical periods, these lexical units were associated with everyday life, economic activities and traditional systems of measurement. Some became established as conventional units of measurement, whereas others acquired quantitative meanings through associations with the capacity, amount or proportion of particular objects. The functional range of numeratives expanded considerably in medieval Turkic written sources. The occurrence of units such as “jol” (time, occurrence), “naubat” (time, occurrence), “qaşıq” (spoon) and “karrat” (time, occurrence) in Rabghuzi's fourteenth-century work Qiṣaṣ al-Anbiyāʾ demonstrates the development of numeratives belonging to different semantic groups [2, p. 16]. For example, in the construction “üç qaşıq şərbət” (three spoonfuls of syrup), the word “qaşıq” denotes a concrete object while simultaneously expressing a particular volume or quantity. In such constructions, the quantitative meaning of the numerative retains a clear connection with its original lexical content.

Numeratives recorded in Mahmud al-Kashgari's Dīwān Lughāt al-Turk also provide evidence of the historical depth of quantitative expressions in Turkic languages. Constructions such as “bir öpüm mün” (a mouthful of soup), “bir orum ot” (a handful of grass) and “bir əkim yer” (a unit of land measurement) illustrate how concepts associated with physical actions, capacity and area acquired quantitative meanings [3, pp. 149–150]. In these examples, the words “öpüm”, “orum” and “əkim” serve to express particular quantities. The emergence of such units demonstrates how concepts originating in everyday human activities gradually developed into lexical means of expressing measurement.

Numeratives denoting distance and length also occupy a significant position in the historical lexical material of Old Turkic. The example “tigma dərvəzədin jana bir dərvəzəgə bir yığaclıq jer erdi”, recorded in the Old Turkic Dictionary, contains the word “yığaclıq”, which functions as an expression of distance [1, p. 265]. Such linguistic evidence indicates that specific units of measurement were employed to determine distances in ancient Turkic society.

The use of numeratives can also be observed in religious texts. In the Azerbaijani translation of the Holy Qur'an, the expression “bir parça ət” (a piece of flesh) contains the word

“parça”, which denotes a particular portion of a whole and specifies its quantitative meaning [5, Surah Al-Hajj, verse 5]. In this construction, “parça” does not indicate the numerical quantity of the object but rather a particular part of it. This feature demonstrates that numeratives are not restricted to precise units of measurement; they also participate in the expression of indefinite quantitative relations.

In modern Azerbaijani, numeratives have acquired broader functional possibilities as a result of historical development. In constructions such as “beş metr parça” (five metres of fabric), “bir litr su” (one litre of water), “üç kiloqram un” (three kilograms of flour) and “iki stəkan çay” (two glasses of tea), numeratives specify the measurement, volume and weight of the objects concerned. Some of these units belong to internationally recognised systems of measurement, whereas others originate from the names of objects used in everyday life. Their common characteristic is the specification of quantitative relations between numerals and nouns.

The semantic characteristics of numeratives are closely related to their syntactic positions. Occurring after numerals, these words denote particular quantitative units and specify the amount or measurement associated with the following noun. For example, in the construction “üç stəkan su” (three glasses of water), the numeral “üç” indicates the number of glasses, while “stəkan” denotes the unit of capacity used to measure the water. Numeratives therefore function as linguistic means of specifying quantity and contribute to greater semantic precision in communication.

A comparison of historical and modern numeratives reveals a degree of continuity in their semantic development. In ancient periods, numeratives frequently originated from concepts associated with physical activities, parts of the human body, household objects and natural forms of measurement. During subsequent stages of linguistic development, this system was enriched by the introduction and conventionalisation of standardised units of measurement. Nevertheless, traces of ancient measurement practices remain evident in modern Azerbaijani constructions such as “bir ovuc buğda” (a handful of wheat), “bir qurtum su” (a sip of water) and “bir çəngə ot” (a handful of grass). These examples demonstrate the historical continuity of numeratives and their established position within the lexical system of the language.

Conclusion. The historical development of numeratives in the Azerbaijani language is closely associated with the ancient lexical and grammatical characteristics of Turkic languages. The Orkhon-Yenisei inscriptions, Mahmud al-Kashgari's Dīwān Lughāt al-Turk, and other medieval written sources demonstrate that numeratives have been employed to express quantity, measurement, distance and frequency since ancient times. Some numeratives preserved in historical sources have remained productive in modern Azerbaijani, while others have become archaic or undergone semantic changes.

An important feature of the development of numeratives is the gradual acquisition of quantitative meanings by lexical units originally denoting concrete objects and actions. This process is associated with the expansion of the lexical resources of the language and the development of human conceptions of measurement. In modern Azerbaijani, numeratives perform significant grammatical and semantic functions by specifying quantitative relations between numerals and nouns. Their historical investigation provides valuable linguistic material for identifying the characteristics of lexical development in Azerbaijani and establishing historical connections shared by the Turkic languages.

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