



# Numerals in the Mongolian Language

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## Abstract

This paper is devoted to the etymology of numerals and classification of numerals in the Buryat language. This paper reveals similarities and differences in the terms “numeral” and “number”. In the linguistic research it is established that numerals in the Mongolian languages have a specific set of grammatical properties which distinguishes them as a significant part of speech. The basis of numerals is their special relation to the grammatical number. Numerals that express the concept of number cannot be correlated with the grammatical category of number. Numerals cannot take plural affixes. The lexical meaning of numerals is associated with the notion of plurality. Numerals can be combined with nouns and identify countable objects.

**Keywords:** Etymology, Numerals, Classification, Analysis, Mongolian, Buryat, language.

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## 1. Introduction

Language is very complex and multifaceted. It is a complex system that exists and changes according to its rules and laws. And in this versatility of various meanings there is a system of quantity and number. Since every language is unique and every language changes over centuries and millennia, a system of quantitative expression emerged. In this system one can find common features in related languages and new elements that significantly distinguish the languages.

Numerals appeared in ancient times. They were used to meet the need of people in a numerical representation. Originally a range of numerical representations was very limited, and counting was primitive.

The Buryat language as one of the Mongolic languages shares common features with the Mongolian system of numerals but at the same time developed many new features during an independent period.

As it is known, in the 12<sup>th</sup> - 13<sup>th</sup> centuries the Mongols created the great Mongol state, the common Mongolian nationality with its written and spoken Mongolian language. The state disintegrated after Genghis Khan's descendants were defeated in wars, and the Mongols found themselves in different territories around the world, losing contacts with each other and experiencing the influence of other languages.

The study of the Mongolian language has a long history. The Sanskrit grammatical treatises were translated into the Mongolian language in the 17<sup>th</sup> - 18<sup>th</sup> centuries. Mongolian dictionaries and manuals were created. From the second part of the 19<sup>th</sup> century the comparative-historical study of the Mongolian languages started.

The first scientific study of the Mongolian language in European countries started at the beginning of the 19<sup>th</sup> century when the school of the study of the Mongolian languages was established in Kazan. The Soviet period of Mongolism was a new stage in the development of Mongolistic studies. Research on the Mongolian language actively develops in Mongolia, Buryatia and Kalmykia, as well as in Hungary, Germany, the United States and Japan. Detailed grammatical descriptions of almost all Mongolian languages are created.

The relevance of this article arises from insufficient research on the numerals in the Buryat language. The numerals of the Buryat language as a significant part of speech deserve careful and detailed consideration from the etymological point of view to determine their place in the parts of speech system and identify morphological and syntactic features. All these aspects determine the relevance of this study and need for both theoretical and practical analysis of the numerals in the Buryat language.

Polysemy or controversy of the content side of the numerals attracts the attention of researchers. This paper presents thoughts of many Russian and Mongolian linguists on the origins of the concepts of “numeral” and “number”. On one hand, the grammatical peculiarities of the numerals correlate with the set of lexemes. On the other hand, numerals are language units which have not only logical features, but also linguistic ones. The formation of lexical and grammatical levels of the numerals was preceded by the formation of the “number” concept as well as by signs for their designation.

The concepts “numeral” and “number” have different lexical and grammatical meanings in linguistic semantics. Consider the following dictionary definitions of terms “numeral” and “number”.

According to one definition, numeral is a part of speech that denotes number, quantity, measure and associates with the mental category of order by reciting numbers, multiplicities (repeatability), totality, but *number* is one of the manifestations of the more general language category of quantity or it is a grammatical category that expresses quantitative characteristics of mental objects.

In the linguistic encyclopedic dictionary, the numeral denotes a class of meaningful words that denote number, quantity, measure and mental categories of order related to numbers, multiplicities (repeatability), totality. The number is a grammatical category that expresses quantitative characteristics of mental objects. Grammatically, the number is one of manifestations of the more general linguistic categories of quantity along with the lexical expression.

In V.N. Dal's “Explanatory Dictionary of the Living Great-Russian language”, “*numeral* is a word that denotes the quantity or quantitative signification of the meaning. The same dictionary defines the term *number* as a quantity, count and sign itself that expresses the quantity, digit” (Dal, 1955).

In S.I. Ozhegov's dictionary “*numerals* are words (the noun or adjective) denoting quantity or quantitative signification, the order of items in counting” (Ozhegov, 1999). The number as an independent grammatical category is inherent to nouns and personal pronouns; other lexico-grammatical categories of words have the syntactic category of the number.

The following definitions of terms “numeral” and “number” are used in Mongolian studies. G.D. Sanjeev suggests that “*the numeral* differs from all other parts of speech because it expresses a certain amount of quantity. However, *the number* imitates the counting system and implies a numeric paradigm” (Sanjeev 1951).

According to Ts.B. Tsydendambaev, “*the numerals* are words that convey a certain number of items”. *The number* can express a “grammatical category of plurality denoting a limited and indefinite plurality” (Tsydendambaev, 1979).

According to Professor V.I. Rassadin “*the numeral* is a part of speech that denotes the names of abstract numbers, the quantitative characteristic of objects and processes. *The number* is a nucleus around which other categories of numerals are grouped” (Rassadin, 2013).

Mongolian scientist S. Luvsanvandan points out that the numeral denotes the totality of numbers that can be inflected by case, they can take endings of singular and plural forms. Regarding the term “*number*”, it denotes a name of numeric signs.

Philologist and researcher T. Өнөрбаян proposed that *the numeral* is an independent part of speech that expresses quantitative characteristic of objects. The number itself is an important element that is a nucleus of the numerals”.

Thus, “*the numeral*” is a word form that is used to name the exact or the expected quantity of objects, etc. *The numerals* are characterized by the following. They occur only with nouns; they can be used as reference words in various combinations; they can have a certain cultural sense in proverbs, other folklore genres and in literature.

The term “*number*” is the name of a sign, the element of the counting system and it involves the simultaneous correlation with the whole (or some) paradigm of numerical units. In Mongolian studies “*the number*” is characterized by using it in quantitative meaning. It determines the exact number. It is used in contexts that imitate the counting system and involve a numeric paradigm. Basic units are not changeable in various contexts. It follows that the concepts of “*the numeral*” and “*the number*” have different lexical-

grammatical meanings. *The numeral* represents the quantity of objects in the counting system or names a number and has its own special grammatical features that distinguish this part of speech from others. In the Mongolian language it is a part of speech that inflects only for cases, answers the question “*how much?*” and indicates the number of objects or number.

From the semantic point of view the numeral can be represented as a predicate, and the number can be viewed as its name in the Mongolian language. They do not traditionally differ in terms of terminology. However, it is obvious that they need to be distinguished.

The occurrence of numeric forms in the Mongolian language has its own history, which allows us to identify the ethnic-cultural specificity of the grammatical category of numerals. According to specialists in Mongolian studies, the numeral is an independent part of speech that deserves a separate consideration. In word-formation the most important feature of the numerals is the ability to express an unlimited variety of numbers by using a limited set of initial components.

By the syntactic function the numerals in the Mongolian languages are close to quality nouns, but differ from them as they are not accompanied by reinforced words such as *masha* which means “very” and *egee* which means “most”, etc. The numbers differ from all other names so that they express the concept of a certain amount. Also, numerals are divided into several categories for semantic peculiarities and morphological features.

In Mongolian studies the question about the classification of numerals is not new, but it is still debatable and not completely resolved.

In “Modern Mongolian linguistics” edited by Sh. Luvsanvandan the following level of numerals were identified: “*undsen too* “cardinal numerals”; *des too* “ordinal numerals”; *ham too* “collective numerals”; *tugeel too* “dividing numerals”; *dahih too* “repetitive numerals”; *hjazgaaralsan too* “restrictive numerals”; *butarhaj too* “fractional numerals”; *todorhojgyj too* “obscure numerals” (Luvsanvandan, 2013).

In his work about the morphological classification of numerals philologist T. Өнөрбаян excluded vague and restrictive numbers and analysed dividing and approximate numbers by grouping them into 7 categories. According to the scientist, “the endings - *khan-khen* -*khon-khōn* are the affixes of Restrictive numeral. It should be noted that these morphemes can have different meanings and they can be found not only in numerals, but also in adjectives (*il-ilhen* “apparent-apparently”, *har-harhan* “black-blackly”), pronouns (*juu-juuhan* “which – any”), adverbs (*ert-erthen* “early - a little early”, *daraa-daraahan* “then – later”), nouns (*mor-morhon* “horse - a little horse”, also in verbs (*unasan-unasanhan* “to ride”, *tohson-tohsonhon* “to saddle”, *mjaralzan-mjaralzanhan* “to smile nicely”)” (Өнөрбаян, 2016).

Thus, the category of Vague numbers, which includes such words as *olon* “many”, *nileed* “significantly”, *baga* “little”, *heseg* “part”, *bugd* “all”, *heden* “some” etc., is excluded from the numerals. Indeed, these words differ from the numerals in terms of morphological and grammatical characteristics. Only *olon* “a lot”, *tson* “a little” can be attached to the affixes of Collective numeral: *ohuul* “many”, *tsohuul* “quite small”; *zarim* “some”, *hagas* “half”, *bugd* “everything” are related to Quantitative numerals.

*The number* is the purest quantitative definition. The number as an independent grammatical category is a characteristic of nouns and personal pronouns (sometimes also pronominal nouns “who?”, “what?”), other lexico-grammatical classes of words have a syntactic category of numbers. Their forms of numbers are consistent with the forms of nouns and personal pronouns.

From the semantic point of view the numeral in the Mongolian language can be represented as a predicate, and the number can be a name. They do traditionally differ in terms of terminology. However, it is obvious that they need to be distinguished.

The occurrence of numeric forms in the Mongolian language has its own history, which allows us to identify the ethnic-cultural specificity of the grammatical category of numerals. According to specialists in Mongolian studies, the numeral is an independent part of speech that deserves a separate consideration. In word-formation the most important feature of the numerals is the ability to express an unlimited variety of numbers by using a limited set of initial components. By the syntactic function the numerals in the Mongolian languages are close to quality nouns, but differ from them as they are not accompanied by reinforced words such as *masha* which means “very” and *egee* which means “most”, etc. The numbers differ from all other names so that they express the concept of a certain amount. Also, the numerals are divided into several categories for semantic peculiarities and morphological features.

In Mongolian studies the question about the classification of numerals is not new, but it is still debatable and not completely resolved.

A.E. Garmayeva in her work “The numerical symbolism in the Mongolian languages” notes that “limited and approximate numerals are excluded from the category of numerals in the academic grammar of modern Mongolian languages. In some textbooks *dahih too* “multiples numerals”, *toim too* “approximate numerals”, *todorhoigui too* “indefinite numerals” are included. However, the numerals are generally represented by the following types: *undsen too* “cardinal numerals”; *des too* “ordinal numerals”; *ham too* “collective numerals”; *tugeel too* “dividing numerals”; *butarhai too* “fractional numerals”” (Garmayeva, 2009).

In general, the characteristic of numerals in the Mongolian languages reveals similarities and distinctions of the terms *numeral* and *number*. The results obtained allow us to make the following conclusions: the concepts “numeral” and “number” have different meanings. The numeral designates the quantity of objects in counting and identifies a number. It has special grammatical features which allow us to distinguish this part of speech from other parts. The number has a quantitative definition. The number as an independent grammatical category is a characteristic of nouns and pronouns (sometimes to pronominal nouns “*who?*”, “*what?*”); the rest of the lexico-grammatical categories of words have the syntactic category of numbers. Their number forms are consistent with the form of the noun and the personal pronoun.

In the Mongolian languages A.E. Garmayeva identifies “eight types of the numerals in terms of their semantic and morphological characteristics. The most common and widely used numerals are cardinal, ordinal, collective, separating and fractional numerals. The scientist specifies that in the Mongolian languages the numerals often act as definitions and rarely function as a subject, predicate, addition, as well as the circumstances” (Garmayeva, 2009).

Accordingly, the numerals in the Mongolian languages have a specific set of grammatical properties that allows us to distinguish them as a significant part of speech. The distinctive feature of numerals is their special relation to the grammatical number. The numeral, which expresses the notion of number, cannot correlate with the grammatical category of number. The numeral cannot take affixes of plurality. The lexical meaning of the numeral is directly associated with the notion of a set. The numerals may be combined with other nouns and denote the countable objects.

The numeral in the Buryat language belongs to the category of significant parts of speech expressing spatial representations and functions mainly in a group of nominal words. It has the same name as other nominal parts of speech that allows the numeral to appear in a sentence as any member, but mostly attributive.

The numerals in the Buryat language are divided into categories, such as quantitative, ordinal, collective, distributive, approximate and fractional. The division of the numerals into these categories is due to their significance, morphological forms and syntactic function in a sentence.

The numeral is distinguished from other parts of speech by specific grammatical features:

1. By denoting the quantity, it does not have formal meaning of the number. Singular and plural forms do not exist, except for those numeric names, which are at the basis of tribal and generic names of the Mongolian peoples. For example, tyemen “ten thousand” - tymed “tymets”, but sometimes there are forms like hori “twenty”, which means the tribe Hori “khorinty”, naiman “eight” - the tribe of the naimans.
2. The main sections of the numerals have attributive properties that are identical to the forms of adjectives: five-ear scouts learned about what was in the taiga.

The numeral acting as a quantity denominator of an object is directly related to the head word by passing the connections of other definable words: as told to the two decrepit old people about the transportation of the products. The numeral cannot be combined with adjectives. However, the numerals can be used in a sentence as any of its members, for example:

1. Subject: the first pours out, the second drinks, the third grows (riddle).
2. Definitions: he was watching the departing pair of lovers for a long time.
3. Additions: you will have to choose one of them.
4. The predicate: five times five - twenty-five.
5. Adverbial: Bata came at eight (hours).

The numeral is widely used in various types of texts. In literary texts, the numeral plays a significant role in the embodiment of the author's idea. There are two main functions performed by numerals in a literary text:

1. In literary texts numerals can perform their primary function. That means they are used to convey accurate, objective information. This makes fictional situations realistic and brings the artistic style closer to the publicistic or scientific style, depending on the nature of provided information.

The numerals are often used in characters' description, their appearance, age, behavior, position in society, prosperity. With the help of numerals authors draw the reader's attention to a particular detail, indirectly characterize their behavior, character, circumstances of their lives, etc.

2. Other examples are even more interesting. The numerals are used not to convey accurate quantitative information, but to express an assessment (it can be both quantitative and qualitative). Assessment, as a category of logic, is of great interest to linguists, because the language has a variety of means to express evaluation values at all levels. In a literary text the numerals can be used both to convey the estimated value of “many – little” (evaluation in the broad sense), and to express the qualitative characteristics (“good – bad”). In both cases, the numerals are to express and create the atmosphere of the work, to transfer the characters' emotions and express the author's attitude.

The author includes numerals in the text taking into consideration the sound, semantics and connotation of other units. Semantic and stylistic factors can be defined as meaning-forming (from the author's point of view) and distinctive (from the reader's point of view). The semantic factor regulates the choice of the category within the norm, and many deviations from this norm can be explained by the stylistic choice.

All categories can take the suffixes of personal and return attraction. The role of these affixes for numerals is the same as for nouns.

The numerals of all categories have all the morphological forms that can be found in nominal words. But from the point of view of the syntactic requirements they are formally independent of the controlled nominal words and they are used in its original form.

Thus, the structure of numerals coincides in all Mongolian languages in most cases. Therefore, it cannot be denied that all Mongolian languages genetically belong to the common proto-language. It is well known that the material convergence is a known number of common words and grammatical, word-formative and partly inflectional elements. So, the material convergence is a consequence of the fact that the speakers of these languages have been in a state of close contact with each other for a long time.

It should be noted that in the process of long-term historical development, the Mongolian-speaking peoples, inhabiting the conquered lands, were not able to communicate with each other constantly. In this regard, the Mongolian language developed in accordance with the historical fate of each particular group.

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