

## SUPERSTITIOUS BELIEFS ACROSS CULTURES: A VIEW FROM LINGUACULTUROLOGY

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### ABSTRACT

Superstitions have become part and parcel of any culture, its definition vary greatly across languages and cultures. These beliefs vary so extensively that mostly according to their diversity people are grouped into cultures. The presence of these superstitious beliefs calls for in-depth study and thorough researching for conceptualizing their coincidences, historical background and other important factors. It can be admitted that even if people deny believing in them, they still use them in situations, especially in difficult ones. The notion of superstition and its issues among cultures is open to dispute. There is hot debate among some scientists about the relationship of religion and superstitions. While studying this topic we tried to look at it from linguaculturological point of view and some authentic and interesting examples have been found. Analyzing them we have learned that there exist huge contrast and little similarities among superstitions and their use among nations. As the result of different examples, we may infer that cultural varieties may change the main concept of some superstitions and their purpose as well.

**Keywords:** superstitions, linguaculturology, religion related superstitions, object based superstitions, sign, analysis of superstitions, interpretation.

### INTRODUCTION

Superstitious beliefs have existed with humanity before and they will continue to be with people till they live in this incredible world. These beliefs vary so extensively that mostly according to their diversity people are grouped into cultures.

Additionally, superstitions may tell us long stories about one culture's history, religion, traditions and deep-rooted faith. They differ dramatically from cockroaches to geckos, numbers to colors, from culture to culture. In some countries people live with these individual beliefs and these superstitions have become part and parcel of their life.

Superstition has no single definition and it has rarely been proved to be true or practically, it may seem to be real and coincide with some situations; these situations make people believe in superstitions.

The presence of these superstitious beliefs calls for in-depth study and thorough researching for conceptualizing their coincidences, historical background and other important factors. It can be admitted that even if people deny believing in them, they still use them in situations, especially in difficult ones.

The notion of superstition and its issues among cultures is open to dispute. It was believed strongly and undoubtedly before enlightenment, in past era; there was no difference among magic, religion, astronomy and superstitions.

## BACKGROUND OF THE STUDY

However, in 18<sup>th</sup>-19<sup>th</sup> –centuries people commenced to understand that not everything tightly depended on that unproven beliefs; and in that period, particularly, the relationship between religion and superstitions was hotly debated. McCartney studies the fear of people towards events and objects, he pays his thorough attention on the root of some superstitions that humans experience collaboratively or individually. As he and other superstition-interested scientists state that people had to believe in superstitions when they lost their control over events and outcomes or even they got soothing believing in the situations that were growing dubious. Mostly, people with scientific knowledge or without consider the notion of 'magic' and 'superstition' the same thing. Magic is uncertain, unstable and it is carried out by special individuals, who are called magicians among nations, while superstitions are the result of humans` actions. They are not fully aware of the result of their beliefs, yet follow them in order feel secure to little extent. There is hot debate among some scientists about the relationship of religion and superstitions and, has not led to unanimous findings. For example, while Buhrman and Zaugg (1981) in their study have found a direct relationship between level of religiosity and believing in superstition, Bleak & Fredrieck (1998) have come to the end that there is no relationship between them. Another study carried on the same subject indicates that religious and non-religious people enjoy almost equal level of believing in superstitions, however religious people have more tendencies toward the metaphysical beliefs (Gallup & Newport, 1990).

## RESULTS

While studying this topic we tried to look at it from linguaculturological point of view and some authentic and interesting examples have been found. Analyzing them we have learned that there exist huge contrast and little similarities among superstitions and their use among nations. Examples vary according to their historical backgrounds, in terms of their use and purpose. These given examples are ones of the most pervasive superstitions.

Defying their unproven scientific cases, people try to omit the number of 13 in their lives, especially when it is Friday 13<sup>th</sup> people feel anxious. Mostly, in western cultures there exists a psychological illness that is called "triskaidekaphobia"-fear of the number 13; those people who suffers from that omit 13<sup>th</sup> floor, they have no 13<sup>th</sup> gate at airport. Another interesting evidence can be found in Mexican and Latin Americans` lives, it is that as they follow Spanish cultural and traditional way in terms of superstitions, they have no unlucky Friday 13<sup>th</sup>, but they have unlucky Tuesday 13<sup>th</sup>. As a result of their belief in that superstitions, no one who considers themselves sane choose that date to get married or to set up a travel. Conversely, in Muslim countries the day-Friday is religiously inestimable day; in this very day Muslims congratulate each other, Muslim men go to mosque to pray to Allah and that is called "namozi juma" Similarly, In Thailand, as Bernards pointed out, every Friday (Wan Suk) is generally auspicious because it sounds like "day of happiness" or "enjoyment." Regarding to number superstitions, there is another one in China; Chinese people appreciate the number of 8<sup>th</sup>(ba)the month under the number is highly favourable. Since the pronunciation of the number is alike to 'fa', the word meaning amass of fortune, infinite wealth and productivity, the Chinese associate it with

development and prospects. On 8<sup>th</sup> date of the month, people conclude deals or plan wedding days. According to Thompson, the magic number of Western cultures is 3, Holy Trinity to three little pigs. Therefore, we may say that though global structures and motifs of some superstitions are very similar, their cultural background and meaning can be different.

There are several and various superstitions related to New Year as well. People in Havan throw a bucket of water from their balcony or out of their doorway to get rid of all bad luck and bad feeling of the previous year, they do it when midnight strikes. Water related superstitions exists among Turkish people, they splash a glass of water after the people who have left to travel. According to the words of Gomez, Cubans open a bottle of rum in New Year's Eve, they deliberately spill the first few drops on the floor to get the blessing of "the gone one". In Spain, they eat 12 grapes, no more, no less believing that will bring good luck and happiness.

Umbrella related superstitions are extant enough among cultures, for instance, some people avoid opening umbrella before going out; Umbrellas have been around for centuries and the original superstition has its origins in ancient Egypt, where umbrellas were used as a shield from the sun, and opening one indoors was disrespectful to the sun god, Ra, who would seek vengeance on the household in which the umbrella was opened. Getting married under umbrella means lifelong happiness and protection from evil spirits for a new couple in Western Cultures. However, the origin of umbrellas goes back to ancient Egypt where they were only used by nobles and it was believed that if its shadow fell upon a person who was not noble it was bad luck as the Sun God would see this act as sacrilegious. This superstition has another explanation and it is rooted in 18<sup>th</sup> century when they were not automatic like current ones and were built with hard metal spokes and spring triggers and bigger than 21st century umbrellas, so they were dangerous enough to open indoors i.e. it was for safety reasons.

One of the oldest superstitions of nations is related with 'mirror'. It is about avoiding to use broken mirror and this is more than 2700 years old superstition; Intriguingly, even if some people don't consider themselves a particularly superstitious person, they probably say "bless you" when someone sneezes, just in case the devil should decide to steal their soul – as their ancestors thought possible during a sneeze.

Taking the sample of gifting superstitions, presenting yellow flowers in Russian and in some European countries is a sign of divorce, so some people never give yellow flowers to their loved ones. Chinese people don't offer their host a clock or an umbrella as a gift. "The word for "clock" (zhong) sounds like 'end,' it is considered as the person who gives clock to someone may be wishing an end or death (song zhong)," Bernards explains. "This is similar to giving an "umbrella" (san), which sounds like "parting" (san), so presenter is essentially suggesting that he will never see the person again"

Believing a black cat as a bad luck began in ancient Germany, in 13<sup>th</sup> century; in religious books there was a note "In it, black cats were declared an incarnation of Satan," Initially it was designed to squash the growing cult of Luciferians in Germany, but quickly spread across Europe." However, if a cat crosses path, Chinese people do not worry — cats in China are generally considered to be good luck; their association with wealth originated in Japan, but has been adopted in Chinese culture. In another cultural information, it is said that in ancient Egypt cats were considered divine symbols. Cats also made an appearance in Greek

mythology, specifically Hecate, goddess of magic, sorcery, the moon and witchcraft. There is abundance of evidences to name but a few.

## CONCLUSION

As we studied above, the tendency of people towards superstitions is because of their sense of fear, feeling of unsafe or they mostly want their surroundings to make more predictable and another main reason of beliefs in superstitions is appeasing themselves. As the result of different examples, we may infer that cultural varieties may change the main concept of some superstitions and their purpose as well. Time has a huge impact on the use and beliefs in superstitions, such as in ancient times people were so more vulnerable to environmental forces that they seemed to have no choice to be superstitious. By being superstitious they somehow felt calm and safe. However, the chain of superstitions has not been proceeding over the centuries in the same way, as people become more knowledgeable and more aware of their surroundings. This period was forced by enlightenment. Various disputable questions were being raised by some scientists and they began researching in this field.

Regarding with examples, we have analyzed number superstitions, which vary hugely among cultures. Taking example of some of them, we have comprehended that one number may be unlucky and cursed in one culture, yet it is holy and appreciated in another. The days of the week even were not untouched by superstitions too, studying the example of 'Friday', we have found that it is hated by one culture while another culture consider it as a sacred and divine day. Hoping for the best with the help of superstitions may reflect in holiday superstitions too, New Year superstitions examples` analysis showed us that they may differ considerably in one the same culture. It is because one culture may contain various nationalities with diverse historical backgrounds and beliefs. The phenomenon of superstition as a product of human cognitive activity calls for a deeper insight into the aspects of cross-cultural communication. The above-described and similar models of verbal and non-verbal superstitious behavior are part of any national culture. Focus on the value system here is also a pragmatic consideration for the purposes of enhancing cross-cultural communication and foreign language teaching.

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