

**LANGUAGE, CULTURE, COMMUNICATION****TO KILL TWO BIRDS WITH ONE STONE:  
PHRASEOLOGICAL EXPRESSIONS WITH SACRED NUMBERS  
IN ENGLISH, HUNGARIAN, AND UKRAINIAN****Viktória Albert**Ph.D., Kodolányi János University, Hungary  
e-mail: dr.albertviki@gmail.com, orcid.org/0000-0001-7059-3946**Summary**

The paper is devoted to the identification and interpretation of some common and unique features of the phraseological expressions, or idioms, with numeric component in their formations in the English, Hungarian, and Ukrainian languages. In the course of analysis, various groups of meanings of these numbers found in these units are distinguished which accurately reflect the given nation's culture, beliefs, identity, mentality, folklore and provide a deeper insight into the link between language and culture. Moreover, the present study further outlines some challenging points for both non-native speakers and translators when dealing with culture-specific set expressions in a foreign language based on semantic and structural differences.

**Keywords:** phraseological expression (unit), symbolism, numbers, culture.

DOI <https://doi.org/10.23856/5001>

**1. Introduction**

A language and its speakers are born, evolve, and mature simultaneously in a perfect symbiosis, mutually affecting and moulding each other. As once Heraclitus (c. 540 BCE – c. 480 BCE) put it: “The only thing that is constant is change” meaning that everything is in motion, everything changes, and these changes are interdependent. Being a dynamic system, language shapes the way we think and perceive the world around us. Similarly, its speakers wishing to satisfy their communicative needs create the lexical storehouse which reflects the spirit and unfaded beauty of their native language.

People live in the world of symbols from prehistoric times. The word 'symbol' evokes in a contemporary person not only a series of abstract meanings or concrete imaginations, associations, images, but also a feeling of something mysterious, furtive, and secret as regards their surroundings and inner world. Some symbols are used consciously, others – unconsciously or subconsciously.

It has been long established that in the Paleolithic period people attributed symbolic meaning to almost everything: constellations, herbs, animals, or numbers. During the Neolithic period, symbolism received a deeper and wider interpretation. First religions and arts could not exist without them. It is considered that symbolism began to flourish exactly in early agricultural tribes which inhabited South-Eastern Europe and a part of Asia between 10,000-4,000 BC.

It is obvious that the peculiarities of the language are better revealed in phraseological expressions which are stable formations made according to a definite pattern and are reproduced in a ready-made form suggesting that they are not created every time to fit the situation (Kunin, 1984: 7-10). Naturally, numbers and their symbolic meanings found their realization in phraseological expressions which are the product of the long history of mankind and reflect certain features pertaining to one's culture, traditions, customs, mentality, and lifestyle. These phrasemes help to (re)create the national and cultural picture of the world as they are passed on from generation to generation, each conveying symbolic meaning.

Earlier, the European and American linguistic literature there were few works devoted to the theory of phraseology whereas the phraseological material was generously presented in numerous dictionaries and phrasebooks (Bilonozhenko, 1999; Brewer, 2012; Radford, 1946; Nagy, 1979; Kunin, 1984; Subbotina, 2012). However, presently, the problems of phraseology have found a wide interpretation in grammar in stylistics, cultural linguistics, lexicography, language history, translation, and intercultural communication. In addition, phraseological units containing numbers have been just recently compared in numerous languages, such as Russian and Serbian (Andreici, 2017), Russian and Tatar (Zagidulina et al., 2018), Kazakh and English (Dossymbekova, 2016), English and Albanian (Robo, 2013), just to name a few.

Therefore, the main *objectives* of this article are to classify and trace the usage of numbers reflected in the phraseological expressions of modern English, Hungarian, and Ukrainian according to the peculiarities of their symbolic significance as well as to provide a contrastive analysis of their semantic meaning.

The linguistic data have been collected from the following dictionaries and phrasebooks: "English-Russian phraseological dictionary" (Kunin, 1984), "The Phraseological Dictionary of the Ukrainian Language" (Bilonozhenko, 1999), and "Magyar szólások és közmondások" (Nagy, 1976). During the current research 594 phraseological expressions have been collected, classified, and analysed (see Table 1. below).

The main *methods* of analysis applied in the research are quantitative, qualitative, contrastive, and descriptive.

## 2. The representation of numbers from one to ten in phraseological expressions in English, Hungarian, and Ukrainian

In this paper the first ten numbers have been chosen as they are regarded as the most productive and Table 1. demonstrates that all numbers except 'eight' and 'ten' are quite well represented in all three languages. In this connection, Andreici (2017: 101) states that although the belief in the magic powers of numbers may still be present in some areas; yet, in many cases, these expressions have become so common that they are no longer used with any regard to magic powers or symbolism.

Table 1

### The occurrence of numbers with sacred meaning in phraseological expressions

Numbers	one	Two	three	four	five	six	seven	eight	nine	ten	Total
English	69	43	14	7	5	3	5	5	14	5	170
Hungarian	79	39	6	3	6	22	12	3	5	-	175
Ukrainian	139	49	21	6	5	1	19	-	1	8	249

**Number 'one'.** In symbolism 'one' means existence, being, the revealing of the spiritual essence of the mystic Centre, the Paramount Strength. This number was also a symbol of spiritual unity, and divinity and was associated with the light (Cirlot, 2020).

Thence, due to the above-mentioned qualities of this number, four distinct groups can be singled out based on their symbolic meanings, such as:

(i) 'unity, sameness, priority, or equality' which may carry either a positive or a negative meaning referring to people's thoughts, feelings, and behaviour: *one and only; one and all; one dog, one bull* ('fair play' and derives from Shakespeare and bullbaiting days. Only one dog was allowed to be loosened on the bull at a time, hence the phrase which is even now used extensively among miners in the North of England) (Radford, 1946: 169); *to be at one with something; hard on one string; with one accord; one big happy family; egy húron pendülnek* (to play on one string); *egy kanállal esznek* (to eat with one spoon); *egy iskolába járnak* (to go to one/same school); *mintha egy szájból köpték volna* (alike as if they were spat from one mouth); *однієї (одної) масті* (of one and the same breed); *одного гніздечка птаці* (one bird's nest); *одного поля ягода* (one field's berries); *один від одного недалеко відбіг* (they ran not far from one another); *одним духом дихати* (to breathe with one spirit); *як одна душа* (as one soul); *як один* (as one); *співати однієї й тієї ж* (to sing one and the same song); *на одній ноті* (on one note).

The expression '*egy füst alatt*' (literally, under one smoke) is also observed in Slovak, German, Latin, or Finnish and has an interesting origin. Back in the day, not only did people consider the 'family bonfire' to be the symbol of home but also its smoke. The ancient houses were built without chimneys, and the smoke could escape the house through different holes and cracks, but the greater amount of smoke clouds was still hanging above the heads of the family members who gathered by that fire. Overtime, this expression's meaning further evolved and has come to mean 'to do something in one sitting' or 'to do something in one go' (Nagy, 1979: 144).

(ii) 'swiftness, immediacy, and closeness' is richly represented in all the three languages: *all at once; at once; give somebody / something the once-over; one foot in the grave; egyszer mondom, kétszer ugorj* ('I say once and you are twice to jump!' says an indignant parent to a misbehaving child); *egy a vezényszó, egy a végrehajtás* (one is the order and one is an immediate fulfilment); *egyszer fent (fenn), másszor lent* (once up and then down); *за одну мить* (in one instant); *один крок від чогось* (one step from something); *одна нога тут, а друга там* (one foot here and the other there); *за одним присідом* (in one squat); *душа на одній нитці держиться* (the soul is held on one thread).

(iii) 'something being (in)sufficient': *the first stroke is half the battle; one dog sets all the street a-barking; egy jó álom mindent helyrehoz* (one good and sound sleep will fix everything); *egy kápolna nem templom* (one chapel is not a church yet); *ahol egy van, ott egy sincs* (where there is one, there is nothing, i.e., one thing can be easily lost or damaged); *egy szegre ne akassz mindent* (do not hang everything on one nail, which corresponds to *do not put all your eggs in one basket*); *egy kenyérért nem fűtik be a kemencét* (an oven is not heated for one bread); *залишатися в одній сорочці* (to remain in one shirt).

(iv) 'priority, importance, uniqueness, beginnings, having the best quality': *first come, first served; the first man; the first night; one cloud is enough to eclipse all the sun; one link is broken, the whole chain is broken; első boldogság az ész* (the first happiness is a good wit); *első az igazság* (the truth should always be the first); *jobb egy Isten száz papnál* (one God is better than 100 popes); *a Szentháromság után az első személy* (he is the first person after the Holy Trinity); *sok ördög sem ér egy angyalt* (a lot of devils are not worth one angel); *перша скрипка* (first violin); *проблема номер один* (problem number one); *тримати першість* (to be number one, i.e., be the champion).

**Number 'two'** stands for echo, reflection, conflict, or equilibrium. This number also corresponds to the passing of time, and in esoteric tradition number two was regarded as ominous, as something evil: it meant shadow, dualism, two opposite poles of good and evil, or life and death (Cirlot, 2020).

In this regard, the following six groups have been detected:

(i) 'conflict, contradiction, as something secondary in quality and importance' is observed in all the three languages: *two of a trade never agree; two blacks do not make a white; when two ride on one horse, one must sit behind; two dogs over one bone seldom agree; első a munka, a második a pihenés* (first comes the job, the second comes the leisure time); *nem jó egy kocsmában két dudás* (it is bad to have two pipers in one pub); *egy házban két gazda* (two masters in one household); *minden botnak kettő a vége* (every stick has two ends); *egy konyhában két szakács* (two cooks in one kitchen); *палиця з двома кінцями* (a stick with two ends); *два боки однієї медали* (two sides of one / the same medal, which is close to *two sides of the same coin*); *відійти на другий план* (recede into the background); *в одне вухо впускає, а в друге выпускає* (in one ear and out the other).

(ii) 'minimum or maximum quantity, distance, or immediacy': *two or three; second thoughts are best; a bird in the hand is worth two in the bush; jobb ma nekem egy-kettő, mint holnap tizenkettő* (it is better to have one or two than twelve tomorrow); *kettőre se felel egyet* (he does not give even one answer to two questions, which is used for a quiet, taciturn person); *egy-kettő* (one-two, i.e., immediately); *раз-два* (one-two); *у двох словах* (literally, in two words, *in a nutshell*).

(iii) 'simultaneousness and sameness': *in two; by two* (also *two and two; two by two*); *of two evils choose the lesser; egy csapásra két legyet* (two flies with one hit); *két ebszarnak egy a bűze* (two dogs' excrements stink alike); *між двох вогнів* (between two fires); *за двома зайцями ганяти* (to chase two hares); *на два фронти* (on two fronts, i.e., *on all fronts*); *сидіти між двох стільців* (to sit between two chairs, i.e., *fall between two stools*).

(iv) 'unity, integrity, wholeness': *two in distress makes sorrow less; two heads are better than one; two negatives make a positive; kettőn áll a vásár* (a bargain stands on two); *два чоботу пара* (two boots is a pair and is used to describe people who are close).

(v) 'multitude': some examples can be found in Ukrainian and Hungarian, such as *megmutatom neki, hogy hány a kettő!* (I shall show him how many two is! i.e., I shall teach him); *se nem egy, se nem kettő* (not one and not two, i.e., many); *двоїтися в очах* (the eyes see double).

(vi) 'simplicity': *two and two make four; put two and two together; annyi, mint kétszer kettő* (so simple, like two times two); *як двічі два чотирьох* (like two times two is four); *як двічі но два* (like two times two).

Pythagoras calls the **number 'three'** the perfect number, since "it represents the solution of the conflict posed by dualism" (Cirlot, 2020). It is also perceived as a spiritual symbol expressing the beginning, the middle, and the end (Brewer, 2012: 1099), and is associated with the concept of heaven and the Trinity (Cirlot, 2020). Furthermore, it stands for happiness, wealth, protection, and healing (Potapenko, 1997: 129). A person is threefold (body, mind, and spirit), and so is the world (earth, water, and air), the enemies (the world, the flesh, and the devil); the Christian graces (Faith, Hope, and Charity); the Kingdoms of Nature (flora, fauna, and minerals), and the cardinal colours (red, yellow, and blue) (Brewer, 2012: 1097). Besides, the World Tree has a structure of three elements: the heavens, the terrestrial world, and the underworld.

Long before the introduction of Christianity, this number had been often used in Slavic folklore. There, as usual, appear three sons, three daughters, three years, three ways, three kingdoms, or three mountains. The systematic repetition of this number is observed in wedding, birth, and funeral ceremonies and rituals.

Based on the above-mentioned symbolic meanings of this number, three large groups are distinguished based on the collected data expressing:

(i) 'a group or a company' is detected in English and Hungarian: *when three know it, all know it; the three tailors of Tooley Street* (i.e., a comparatively small group of people considering themselves to be the representatives of the whole mankind. Canning (1770-1827), an English politician, witnessed when three tailors of Tooley Street appealed to the Parliament with a petition beginning with the following words: "We, the people of England ..."); *három asszony kész vásár* (it takes three women to make a bargain); *egy tudja, titkos, kettő tudja, homályos, három tudja, vilagos*; or *amit három tud, nem titok* (what one knows is a secret, what two know is something obscure, what three know, the whole world knows).

(ii) 'annoyance with the implication of physical injury' and finds its main representation in Ukrainian: *to give somebody the third degree* (i.e., to question somebody intensively for a long time, perhaps also using physical methods of torture to make them confess to a crime or give secret information); *hosszú, mint a hármas tánc* (as long and annoying as three dances); *знати в три шиї* (literally, to chase in three necks meaning make somebody leave); *спустити три шкуру* (to strip the three layers of skins, i.e., to hit somebody hard); *викинути у три вирви* (to throw in three ditches, i.e., to chase away).

(iii) 'threefoldness of a process, triunity': *three cheers* (to shout 'hurray' three times to show admiration or support for somebody or something); *three souls* (metaphysicians say that a man has concentrated within himself three origins: that of herbs, animals and homo sapiens); *the three readings*; *három a szent szám* (three is a holy number); *három az igazság* (three is the truth); *háromszor iszik a magyar* (the Hungarian drinks three times).

**Number 'four'** is well depicted in mythology, religion, philosophy, and linguistics. It is the symbol of the world, the earthly space and is equated to a quadrant or a cross which represents the four seasons and four parts of the world (Cirlot, 2020: 577).

The collected phraseological units with 'four' can be divided into two groups meaning:

(i) 'fourfoldness of the whole' is observed in English and Ukrainian only: *from the four corners of the Earth; within the four seas; four corners; іди на всі чотирі сторони / вітри* (go in all four directions/winds is a swearing expression which is similar to *go to hell*).

(ii) 'flaws and perfections': *four eyes see more than two; nincs ki a négy kereke* (he does not have four wheels, i.e., he is stupid); *a lónak négy lába van, mégis megbotlik* (a horse has four legs, but it can stumble all the same); *a négylábu is botlik* (a four-legged stumbles too); *кований на всі чотири ноги* (all four legs are forged, i.e., very experienced); *в чотири ока* (with four eyes, i.e., to watch carefully, to keep an eye on something).

**Number 'five'** symbolizes a person (four limbs of the body plus the head which controls them), health, and love (Cirlot, 2020). Moreover, it is associated with the five senses (hearing, sight, smell, taste, and touch); and the five wits (common sense, imagination, fantasy, estimation, and memory) (Brewer, 2012: 427).

In relation to the symbolic meanings of 'five', the collected phraseological units split into three groups:

(i) 'completeness and perfection': *the five wits, tudja mint az öt ujját* (knows as his own five fingers, i.e., to know something like the back of one's hand); *beadta az ötöt, ki kell tölteni*

a *hatot* (if you promised to do something for five, do it for six); *знати як своїх п'ять пальців* (to know something as well as your five fingers, i.e., to know something/body very well).

(ii) 'redundancy and unimportance': *the fifth wheel*; *ötödik kerék a kocsiiban* (the fifth wheel in the cart); *як п'ять колесо до воза* (like the fifth wheel to a cart); *як собаці п'ять нога* (like a dog with five legs). Identical phrases are common in German: *das fünfte Rad am Wagen*, French: *la cinquième roue du carrosse* and other languages.

(iii) refers to physical attributes and human nature: *a bunch of fives* (meaning a punch); *ötön vész* (to take something with five i.e., to steal); *ötön vette Kotoriban* (he bought it for five in Kotori, i.e., to steal); *kap egy magyar ötöst* (to get a Hungarian 'five', i.e., to get a slap in the face).

**Number 'six'** symbolises both ambivalence and balance, comprises the union of two triangles and signifies the human soul. It also corresponds to the cessation of movement as the Creation lasted six days, hence it is associated with experience, trial, and effort (Cirlot, 2020) as well as with love, harmony, fidelity, reliability, and fairness.

The collected phraseological units with the number 'six' are divided into three groups expressing:

(i) 'multitude, intensity, completeness': *to knock somebody or something for six* (to destroy completely); *six feet under* (dead and buried); *ki hat mesterséget tud, éhen hal az meg* (a person who knows six trades will die of hunger); *hatször is megolvassa a pénzt* (he will recount his money six times); *hat gyűrűje egy ujján* (six rings on one finger); *úgy dolgozik mint hat* (he works like six i.e., giving the work all his energy); *hat ház nem falu* (six houses is not a village yet); *всунати по шосте число* (literally, to hit somebody to the sixth number i.e., to punish severely).

(ii) 'likeness, equality, and sameness': *it is six of one and half a dozen of the other*.

(iii) 'luck, fortune, happiness': *olyat aludtam mint a hat* (I have slept like a six i.e., to have a good sound sleep); *hatot vet a kocka* (the dice shows a six i.e., somebody has luck); *egynek hatot, másnak vakot vet a világ kockája* (for one it is six i.e., everything, for the other – nothing).

**Number 'seven'** is endowed with exceptional value and is correlated with perfect order, full period, or cycle. It corresponds to seven Directions of Space and forms the basic series of musical notes (Cirlot, 2020). In addition, this number refers to the main Seven Gifts of the Spirit (wisdom, understanding, counsel, fortitude, knowledge, righteousness, fear of the Lord); the seven senses are animation, feeling, speech, taste, sight, hearing, and smelling (Brewer, 2012: 1004); the Seven Wonders of the World, and the Seven Deadly Sins (Radford, 1946: 192).

According to its symbolic meaning, three distinct groups can be observed, such as:

(i) 'luck, happiness': *in seventh heaven*; *once in seven years* (i.e., once in seven years even the worst farmers have the best crops); *rain before seven, fine before eleven*; *olyan boldog voltam, hogy a hetedik menyországban éreztem magam* (I was so happy that it felt like being in seventh heaven); *hetedik gyermek* (the seventh child is believed to be lucky and can see even the hidden treasure); *Isten is megpihent a hetedik napon* (God also took a rest on the seventh day); *на сьомому небі* (in seventh heaven).

As it can be seen, 'to be in seventh heaven' occurs in all the three languages and means 'to be extremely happy'. Its first appearance is recorded in the *Testament of the Twelve Patriarchs* and refers to the highest place where God resides.

(ii) 'evil, misfortune, curse': *the seven-year itch* (i.e., the wish for a new sexual partner because you are bored with your present husband or wife); *one lie needs seven lies to wait upon*

*it; hová lép, hét évig ott fű nem nő* (i.e., where he treads, there the grass does not grow for seven years); *hét bőre van mint a cigánynak* (he has seven layers of skin like a gipsy and means 'being impudent and arrogant'); *hetesével jár a rossz* (i.e., something bad goes with seven i.e., of seven people go somewhere and are up to no good); *хай йому сім чортів* (let him have seven devils is used as a cursing); *як чорт сім кін гороху змолотив* (as if the devil ground seven piles of peas and this phrase is used to describe an ugly face / look); *клясти до сьомого коліна* (to curse up till the seventh generation); *сnyстуми сім шкур* (to flay seven skins means 'to punish severely or hit somebody hard').

Special attention deserves the following expressions: *heten vannak mint gonoszok* (they are seven like the devils) and *sovány mint a hét szűk esztendő* (as undernourished as the seven thin years). *Hetten vannak mint gonoszok* is mainly connected to a superstition according to which the devils were not walking alone but walked together, in a group of seven. *Sovány mint a hét szűk esztendő* has a biblical origin. Joseph, Jacob's son, being imprisoned in Egypt, was the one who managed to explain the pharaoh's dream. In his dream the pharaoh, initially, saw seven thick and big cows and then seven lean cows: those seven skinny and ugly cows gobbled those seven thick cows. Then again, the pharaoh had another dream in which seven full and nice ears of corn were gobbled by seven thin ears. Nobody could explain the dream but Joseph: seven thick cows and seven nice ears of corn meant seven rich and prosperous years. However, those seven skinny cows and seven thin ears of corn meant that seven thin years would follow those prosperous years. There also would not be rain, the animals would die of thirst and hunger; the harvest would be very poor. Therefore, Joseph advised making a good store of food and water which would save the citizens (Nagy, 1979: 139).

True to their nature, people spoke very little about the seven prosperous years; whereas people talked a lot about those seven bad years since those hardships remained deep in their memories, and that is why it gave way to the appearance of *seven thin years*.

(iii) 'reliability and security': *hétszer mérj, egyszer vágj* (measure seven times and cut off once); *hétszer nézzünk, egyszer csináljunk* (one should look at something seven times before doing something); *nið cimoma замкаму* (under seven locks, which corresponds to *under lock and key*). For instance, *za cimoma nečamkamu* (literally, a book with seven seals meaning *a closed book*) has a biblical origin and "refers to secrets known only by the Great Creator" (Andreici, 2017: 94). This is the reason why it has proliferated in other languages as well.

**Number 'eight'**. Owing to its shape this number is associated with two interlacing serpents symbolizing the balance of the opposing forces or the equivalence of the spiritual to the natural power (Cirlot, 2020). Besides, it has some negative implications in both English and Hungarian: *behind the eight ball*; *one over the eight*; *megmutatja valakinek hány a nyolc!* (to show somebody how many eight is i.e., to teach somebody manners); and *ez nekem nyolc* (this is eight to me meaning 'I do not care').

**Number 'nine'** is the triplication of the three. In Judaism, it was the symbol of justice, entity and protection from evil (Cirlot, 2020). The holiness of the number 'nine' was associated with the nine months of pregnancy. In fables and myths, one may encounter nine-headed snakes or hydras. According to the beliefs of some tribes, thunder was sent by nine gods. In Dante's inferno, there are nine circles of hell.

In Ukraine, this number is present in an array of different rituals. In the Carpathians, the bread loaf was made of nine smaller loaves. In Polissya, after the engagement ceremony, nine pies were baked which were given to the bride. The reference to this number can be found in medicine as well. For instance, in Poltava and Dnipropetrovsk, sick people were bathed in the waters of nine fords or drank the liquor made of nine kinds of herbs.

Based on the meanings of the collected expressions, 'nine' can express:

(i) 'multitude': *a stitch in time saves nine* (if you act immediately when something goes wrong it will save you a lot more work later otherwise the problem will worsen); *aj baj, kilenc tehén, még sincs vaj* (oh, that is trouble when there are nine cows but there is no butter); *megbanta mint az eb, mely egyszerre kilencet fiadzott* (regrets as that dog which whelped nine puppies at a time); *békés malacai egy olban kilencen is elférnek* (even nine peaceful pigs can fit in one pigsty). *дев'ятуї вал* (the ninth wave).

(ii) 'closeness to the summit': *on cloud nine*; *dressed up to the nines*; *touch it off to the nines*; *a cat has nine lives* (refers to the care which a cat takes of itself. Its caution, its suspicious approach to anything unknown or unrecognized, its tenacity in life, its resilience, and the habit of always falling on its feet and avoiding bodily injury, all serve to lengthen its life span) (*Radford, 1946: 106*); *nine tailors make a man* ('tailors' is a corruption of 'tellers'. A 'teller' was the stroke of the church bell in case of death: three strokes (tellers) indicated the death of a child, six of a woman, and nine of a man (*ibid.: 162*); *a nine days' wonder* (of a person or thing that attracts a lot of attention, but only for a short period of time); *kilenc vármegyében nincs párja* (there is no match for her or him in nine counties); *már megint utólért a kilencednap?* (i.e., Does the ninth day again catch up with you? which is used for a quarrelsome person).

**Number 'ten'** denotes the comeback to unity and, consequently, to number 'one' (10: 1+0=1). According to some theories, it symbolizes the integrity of the universe as it brings everything back to unity and perfection (*Cirlot, 2020: 579*).

Phraseological expressions with 'ten' are also classified into two groups:

(i) 'top intensity, to the limits' and is represented in English and Ukrainian: *the top ten*; *the ten commandments*; *ten to one*; *the upper ten*; *здираати десяту шкуру* (to peel off the tenth skin, i.e., to torture); *до десятого поту* (till the tenth sweat, i.e., to work arduously).

(ii) 'remoteness, insignificance' is found in Ukrainian only: *в десятому коліні* (the tenth relation is used for a very remote relative); *із десятих рук* (from the tenth hand means unreliable, insignificant); or *обминати десятою дорогою* (to avoid something or somebody by picking the tenth alternative route).

From the above-listed expressions, it is evident that "the image becomes a symbol through its function in a person's life, in the life of a society, country, religious or cultural community and, finally, in the life of the whole mankind" (*Kononenko, 1991: 31*). It happens because of the similarity of nature, and the psychology of a man, even though they are also oriented towards a definite community. The verbal symbolism of people is an important factor in the creation of the national and cultural picture of the world, whereas even some individual symbols are influenced by the peculiarities of the language.

As seen, phraseological units tend to be used according to the accepted formula because of their integral and general meaning. Some expressions are universal and can be traced in all the three languages, whereas some of them are quite specific and unique. Therefore, understanding and using them correctly can be quite challenging for non-natives and translators (*Mykhaylenko, 2019: 69*). In fact, it is essential that those units be defined in the text correctly; consequently, finding the best equivalent should be the translator's top priority (*Subbotina, 2012*). Translators must be very careful and refer to phraseological dictionaries in the first place. In case, the phrase is not there, the translator must comprehend the context and choose one of the translation methods: descriptive translation or translation by analogues (*Mykhaylenko, 2019: 70*). At the same time, Mykhaylenko warns against 'domestication' of those units since it may result in the loss of essential cultural information which can confuse the reader (*ibid.*) and lead to improper reinterpretation or interlingual interference (*Dossymbakova, 2016*).



In light of the above-mentioned facts, of special interest are the transformations of key symbols into nationally specified: *három a magyar igazság* (three is a Hungarian verity). Only in the middle of the last century did this proverb appear in Hungarian and immediately gained popularity. This expression is a free translation of a Latin proverb: *Omne trinum perfectum* (that is perfect what is three). *Három a magyar igazság* does not at all mean that only Hungarians consider this number to be holy and the property of their own. They have transformed and adapted this proverb attributing to it some national colouring just for the sake of emphasis as it often occurs in their folktales, in which three children are involved or three wild animals should be killed or something should be obtained during the interval of three days (Nagy, 1979: 224).

### 3. Contrastive analysis of structure and semantics of phraseological units with numbers

Kunin distinguishes different types of stability of phraseological units based on their usage, semantic, lexical, and syntactic stability (Kunin, 1984: 10). Comparing the studied expressions, some phraseological equivalents have been detected which can be of two types: mono-equivalents and sampled phraseological equivalents (*ibid.*).

**1. Monoequivalent** is the only possible phraseological equivalent that can be **absolute** and **partial**.

**Absolute phraseological equivalents** are those which have an equal meaning, lexical structure, imagery, the same stylistic and grammatical structure. For instance, *first violin = első hegedű = перша скрипка*; *first thing = első dolog = першим ділом*; *first steps = első lépések = перші кроки*; *at first sight = első látásra = з першого погляду*; *one God knows = egy Isten tudja = один Бог (Господь) знає*; *second breath = második lehelet = друге дихання*; *when three know it, all know it = amit három tudja, világos = що відомо трьом, відомо всім*; *in the seventh heaven = a hetedik mennyországban = на сьомому небі*; *measure seven times and cut off once = hétszer mérj, egyszer vágj = сім раз відміряй, один раз відріж*.

**Partial phraseological equivalents** are those which have some lexical, grammatical or lexico-grammatical divergencies but as regards their stylistic meaning, they are equal: *one swallow does not make a summer ≈ egy fecske nem tavasz (= spring) or egy fecske nem csinal nyarat (= summer) ≈ одна ластівка не робить весну (= spring)*; *to kill two birds with one stone ≈ egy csapasra két legyet (two flies with one hit) ≈ вбити двох зайців одним пострілом (to kill two hares with one shot)*; *two and two make four ≈ kétszer kettő négy (two by two is four) ≈ два плюс два чотири (two plus two equals four)*.

**2. Sampled phraseological equivalents** occur when a phrase has a different equivalent in other languages, so the translator must choose the best one to make it work in a certain context: *olyan mintha kettőig sem tudná számolni* (i.e., he looks as if he were not able to count to two) – *he looks as if butter would not melt in his mouth*; *one man no man – один у полі не воїн* (a single man on the battlefield is not a soldier yet); *two in distress make sorrow less – поділене горе – це нізгоря* (shared grief is half the sorrow); *four eyes see more than two or two heads are better than one – один розум добре, а два краще* (one wit is good, but having two wits is better).

### 4. Conclusions

The present study has attempted to classify the collected phraseological expressions of modern English, Hungarian, and Ukrainian according to the symbolic meaning of numbers and

to describe their structural and semantic peculiarities. Besides, it has been proved that there exists a strong link between the culture and the language, and numbers used in phrasemes help to reflect the worldview and mentality of a certain culture. In these expressions, numbers often tend to lose their original numeric meaning and acquire a symbolic meaning instead (Zagidulina, 2018: 263).

The first classification of phraseological units based on the symbolic meaning of numbers is rather general and universal as there is an overlap in the interpretation of symbols in the studied languages. This classification reflects the most general associations and approaches to the understanding of the world which is similar to all representatives of the mentioned languages and does not always reflect the specific features of the mentality of people of definite nations.

Furthermore, their categorization demonstrates that oftentimes one and the same number can express different symbolic meanings as well as one and the same symbolic meaning can be expressed via different numbers. For example, the number 'one' as well as numbers 'two' and 'six' symbolize equality and sameness – *with one accord, монтатися на одному місці, egy huron pendülnek; два чоботу – пара; it is six of one and half a dozen of the other*. Numbers 'one' and 'two' symbolize importance: *first come, first served; проблема номер один; első boldogság a jó ész; two heads are better than one; kettőn áll a vásár*. To express cursing with implication of physical injury, numbers 'three', 'seven', 'eight', 'ten', 'eleven', and 'thirteen' are used: *to give somebody the third degree; rosszabb a hetes esőnél; megtudja, hány a nyolc; спустити три шкури; даму під сьоме ребро; здирати десяту шкуру; до десятого поту; чортова дюжина* and so on.

Conversely, some meanings of numbers do not necessarily coincide in the contrasted languages. It happens because every language is unique and so is the perception of the world by its speakers. Fairly often, one must be familiar with the story behind those expressions in order to understand and use these units properly in conversation. Translators in this case must be creative and turn to various ways of rendering these phrases accurately and consistently.

Finally, this topic can be further developed and studied from the historical perspective based on the material of more languages involving other numbers as it can provide a more comprehensive answer about the worldview of its speakers.

## References

1. Andreici, M. T. (2017). *Phraseological Units with Sacred Numbers in Russian and Serbian. Professional Communication and Translation Studies. Vol. 10. P. 92–103.*
2. Dossymbekova, R. (2016). *Numerological Phraseological Units in Multi-Structural Languages. International Journal of Applied Linguistics & English Literature. Vol. 5. No. 6. Australian International Academic centre: Australia. P. 141–146. doi:10.7575/aiac.ijalel.v5n.6p.141*
3. Kononenko, V. I. (1991). *Slovesni symvoly v semantychnij strukturi frazemy. [Word Symbols in Semantic Structure of a Phraseme]. Movoznavstvo. Vol. 6. P. 30-36. [In Ukrainian].*
4. Mykhaylenko, V. (2019). *Exploring English-Ukrainian Contrastive Phraseology. Naukovij visnyk Uzhgorodskogo universitetu. Serija: Filologija. 2 (42). P. 68–72. doi:10.24144/2663-6840/2019.2(42).68–72.*
5. Nagy, G. O. (1979). *Mi fán terem? Magyar szolászmondások eredete. Budapest : Gondolat Kiadó.*

6. Nagy, V. (2001). *Symbolic Usage of Numbers in Modern English, Ukrainian and Hungarian (based on proverbs and phraseological expressions)*. Thesis. Drohobych : Drohobyt'skyj derzhavnyj pedahohichnyj universytet imeni Ivana Franka.
7. Radford, E. (1946). *Unusual words and how they came about*. New York : Philosophical library.
8. Robo, L. (2013). *A Diachronic and Source Approach of Phraseological Units – Theories of Definition, Criteria and Structure Analysis in English and Albanian Language*. *Academic Journal of Interdisciplinary Studies*. Vol. 2. No. 9. MCSER Publishing: Rome. P. 589–596. doi:10.5901/ajis.2013.v2n9p589.
9. Subbotina, V. (2013). *Challenges of translating phraseological units*. *Akdeniz language Studies Conference 2012. Procedia – Social and Behavioral Sciences* 70. P. 1487–1492. doi: 10.1016/j.sbspro.2013.01.216.
10. Zagidulina, A. F. et al. (2018). *Number symbolism in the Russian and Tatar linguistic world image*. *Revista Publicando*, 5. No 16. (1). P. 257–264.

### Dictionaries

1. Cirlot, J. E. (2020). *A dictionary of symbols*. New York: Review Books.
2. Potapenko, O. I. (1997). *Slovyk symboliv. [A Dictionary of Symbols]*. Kyiv: Redaktsija chasopysu "Narodoznavstvo". [In Ukrainian].
3. Bilonozhenko, V.M. (1999). *Frazeologichnyj slovnyk ukrajinskoï movy. [The Phraseological Dictionary of the Ukrainian Language]*. Kyiv: Naukova Dumka. [In Ukrainian].
4. Brewer, E.C. (2012). *Brewer's dictionary of phrase & fable*. London: Cassell Publishers Ltd. doi: 10.1093/acref/9780199990009.001.0001.
5. Kunin, A.V. (1984). *Anglo-russkij frazeologicheskij slovar. [English-Russian Phraseological Dictionary]*. 4<sup>th</sup> ed. Moscow : Russkiy yazyk. [In Russian].
6. Nagy, G. O. (1976). *Magyar szólások és közmondások*. Budapest : Gondolat Kiadó.