

## PHRASEOLOGICAL COMBINATIONS WITH THE NUMERICAL COMPONENT: LEXICO-SEMANTIC AND TRANSLATION ASPECTS

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### Summary

The aim of this article is to study the lexico-semantic peculiarities of the phraseological units with component *number*. The symbolic meanings of numbers in the phraseological units are described in this study. Different approaches for determination of the term *phraseological units* by variety of linguists are considered in the present work. The problem of studying the semantic specificity of phraseological units with different components is cleared up. Numerical phraseological units are studied in the aspect of translation problem. The article includes varieties of functions of numeric words nowadays. Correlations of the terms *number* and *word* are studied. The authors also describe peculiar features of the concept *number* in the culture. The most popular numbers in phraseological units are analyzed. The preferential use of certain numbers in different cultures in relation to the special religions is reported. The article deals with the peculiarities of translation of phraseological units with respect to the language-specific nature. Main ways of translation of phraseological units with numerical component are studied in detail.

**Keywords:** lexico-semantic peculiarities, number, numerical phraseological unit, translation, expressions and connotations, commonplace expressions.

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### 1. Introduction

Phraseological units are used for the names of physical, mental and social situations, as well as of the human conditions. Phraseological units reflect the ideology and the national culture of the people. Due to such phraseological unit characteristics as imagery and meaning unity, the speech becomes brighter, more emotional and more expressive. Phraseological units are interesting for linguistic curiosity because they are colourful and lively. At the same time, they are difficult because they have unpredictable meanings and grammar, and often have special connotations.

Phraseological units, sharing the equivalent or similar expressions and connotations, can be perceived from the literal meaning directly. There are still some other numerical phraseological units in English having the equivalent or similar connotative meaning but differing in expressive means and expressive forms. So we can find that the essential differences between English and Ukrainian numerical phraseological units are not the content expressed by them, but the expressive forms and expressive means.

The aim of this article is lexico-semantic and translational peculiarities of the phraseological units with numerical component.

## 2. Analysis of the basic publications and researches

The phraseological units have been studied by many scientists. There is a certain divergence of opinion as to the essential features of phraseological units as distinguished from other word-groups and the nature of phrases that can be properly termed *phraseological units*. The habitual terms *set-phrases*, *idioms*, *word-equivalents* are sometimes treated differently by different linguists. According to A. Kunin, phraseological units are stable word-groups with partially or fully transferred meanings (Kunin, 1970). R. S. Ginzburg defines them as habitually non-motivated word-groups that cannot be freely made up in speech but are reproduced as ready-made units (Savickii, 2006). J. Sedl and W. Mc. Mordie give the definition as following: "The idiom is some quantity of words which, under condition of their joint consideration, mean something absolutely another in comparison with the individual word meanings, forming an idiom" (Robo, 2013: 589). N. N. Amosova defines phraseological units as units of fixed context, i.e. phrases with a specific and stable sequence of certain lexical components and peculiar semantic relations between them (Amosova, 1963: 25).

Thus, in our research we understand phraseological unit (or idiom) as a word group with a fixed lexical composition and grammatical structure; its meaning, which is familiar to native speakers of the given language, is generally figurative and cannot be derived from the meanings of the phraseological unit's component parts. The meanings of phraseological units are the result of the given language's historical development (Saeed, 2016).

Despite the big number of researches of the phraseological units, the problem of studying the semantic specificity of phraseological units with different components is topical one (Yusifov, et al., 2021). One of the components of phraseological units is a number (Munday, 2008). Numerals are abstract indicators, expressed in figures, the number of similar subjects. Every number has its own significant meaning, its symbolism. Number plays a big role in people practical activity, in which establishes a specific cultural and historical experience of a person (Travis, 2008). Numeric words are traced in old linguistic forms; nowadays units fulfil nominative, cognitive and epigrammatic (word creating) functions (Pym, 2010). The English numerals and words of weigh and measure make the subject of this paper.

The fact that civilizations and their written language development were inevitably connected with *Number* phenomenon (Sumerian written language creation, etc.) appears to be typical. "Any word absorbing one or other sense presents itself a countless figure combination. It also arose because of the fact that some ancient alphabet *letters* were not only *sounds*, but also the *quantity* of something" (Fomina, 2013: 31). In contrast to mathematics, the concept *Number* is revealed and showed in culture by means of three interconnected forms: a) counting, i.e. some action; b) the word, verbalizing the number, i.e. the number's name (Numeral, as a rule); c) some character of the number, i.e. its sign. Dividing numbers into an independent class and providing them with features and functions are connected with abstract human thinking development: the concept of number, taken off by the thought from the image of the definite objects of the object world, became abstract conceptual essence. Number is correlated with the *word*: on the one hand, it is concerned with the desire to see the number behind the word, on the other hand- with the desire to the semantization number, i.e. to return it the role it had in mythopoetic epoch (potential sacrality, canonization) (Fomina, 2013: 32).

### 3. The statement of basic material of study along with full substantiation of the obtained scientific results

Archaic ideas about *number* are reflected in *phraseological* usage; moreover, they undergo transformation, development and serve as basic material for the formation of new images (Baker and Saldanha, 2019). Numerical phraseological units, i.e. idiomatic combinations with the lexical component “number” are characterized by sufficiently high representation degree in the English linguistic world picture (Bovkunova, 2021). The most popular numbers in phraseological units are ranged from 1 to 10, for example:

*First-rate*: In the 1600s, *first-rate* referred to a class of warships of the highest “rate,” or value. By the early 1700s, *first-rate* moved beyond the sea, and came to refer to persons of high rank. Today the phrase means “excellent; superb,” describing anything from *first-rate actors* to *first-rate shoes*.

*Second nature*: Many idioms with *second*, like *second fiddle*, *second best*, and *second thoughts*, rely directly on the definition of *second* meaning “next after first.” However the phrase *second nature* does not follow that strict sense. Aristotle expressed the concept that humans have a first nature of biological characteristics and a second nature of acquired behaviour; this was reiterated hundreds of years later in the Latin proverb *consuetudo est secunda natura* meaning “habit is second nature.” The phrase *second nature* has come to mean “an acquired habit in one’s character that is so deeply ingrained as to appear automatic.”

*Third degree*: In medical nomenclature, “third-degree burns” are the most intense on the spectrum of first-, second-, and third-degree. In criminal justice terminology, a third-degree offense is the least serious type of infraction, as in a felony “in the third degree.” Then there’s the idiomatic noun sense of *third degree* meaning “intensive questioning or rough treatment.” This sense arose in the late 1800s and may be related to a degree, or position, in the fraternal organization of Freemasonry called master mason, which is the highest of the three ranks in the order. Attaining this title requires passing a difficult interrogation test which may have influenced the idiom.

*Fourth estate*: This phrase arose in the early 1800s as an extension of the three estates. Depending on where you are, the three estates can refer to slightly different groups, but they generally correspond to the clergy (first estate), the nobles (second estate) and the commons (third estate). The *fourth estate* once described a general sense of a mob, but since the early 1800s, it’s come to primarily refer to the press, as an organized body outside of the other three estates. The sense of estate as in “a major political or social group” has been in English since the 1400s.

*Fifth column*: *Fifth column* is another way to say “enemy inside,” and it has come to mean “a group of people who act traitorously and subversively out of a secret sympathy with an enemy of their country.” First used in Spain by General Emilio Mola Vidal to describe nationalist supporters in Madrid in 1936, the fifth column was in addition to his four columns of army supporters outside of the city.

*Six feet under*: First appearing in the 1940s, this idiom means “dead and buried,” referring to the depth at which caskets are buried in graveyards. There are countless euphemisms for death in English, but *six feet under* is a notably concrete description. The phrase grew in usage when the television show of the same name premiered in 2001.

*Seventh heaven*: The phrase *seventh heaven* originates in Jewish and Muslim theologies, which posit that there are seven levels of heaven with the seventh being the highest and most exalted. The extended meaning of “a state of intense happiness” arose in the late 1700s and

appears sporadically in popular culture in films and music, such as the 1937 film *Seventh Heaven* and the popular television series of the 1990s.

*Eighth wonder*: The seven wonders of the ancient world were catalogued more than 2,000 years ago. However, there were only seven of them, which may leave you wondering: what is the eighth? The phrase *eighth wonder of the world* is a hyperbolic extension referring to any incredibly impressive object.

*To the nines*: Starting in the early 1700s *to the nines* had a life of its own which meant “to perfection,” but today this idiom is most commonly used in the verb phrase “dressed to the nines.” The origin of this particular phrase is unknown, but nine is used in many idioms to signify perfection like cloud nine and the whole nine yards.

*Hang ten*: In surfing jargon, to *hang ten* means to put all ten toes over the front of the surfboard with the weight of the body as far forward as possible to increase momentum. This is an extension of the term hang five, which refers to putting one foot over the edge of a surfboard. The phrase came to embody a range of colloquial extensions from joining the cool crowd to hanging out and having a good time, but none of them have achieved widespread usage (*Let Me Count the Ways*, 2022).

Most cultures consider certain numbers to be especially significant, even symbolic, what is reflected in their religions. For example, number *seven* is of particular importance in the Arabic traditions, which originate in the Middle East. Some civilizations like Sumerian and Babylonian identified seven planets and framed seven days of the week around them. Seven was also known as a “perfect” number, symbol of completeness and goodness. There are approximately twenty five references made to the number seven in the Quran, the sacred text of Muslims. These references usually concern the seven heavens, the seven periods of creation, seven groups of things, or seven individuals, such as the Seven Sleepers of Ephesus. Thus, the number *seven* is directly linked to the power of the divine and has great symbolic value as an expression of Muslim belief and the miracles of God.

From the point of view of the ancient symbolic, the numbers seven and nine have common features. *Nine* is the end-the finish point of the digital series up to its return to one. Seven can also mean the whole period or cycle. Therefore the numerals in some cases can be interchangeable. Thus, in the phraseological unit *on cloud seven (nine)* meaning *very happy* the usage of both numerals, from by way of the symbolism is quite understandable for they symbolize the maximum of the possible, the limit.

*The ten commandments* is the first phraseological unit with the numeral “ten” deserves attention if it is observed from the symbolic point of view. “Ten” can symbolize the spiritual achievement, love to God and the nearest and dearest as it is mentioned in the “Comparative Dictionary of the Mythological Symbolism in the Indo-European languages”, that totally corresponds to this phraseological unit. The symbolism in the phraseological units *ten to one* and *the upper ten/ten thousand (the top of the society, aristocracy)* conforms with the interpretation of the number nine, the maximally possible, the limit (*Aikenova and Narmukhametova*, 2012).

In English phraseological fund examples with *forty* are rare, and they all express a neutral value. In European mythology, the number *twelve*, or a *dozen* is very common: *twelve-headed snakes*, *twelve brothers-robbers*. The word *dozen* was borrowed in the Middle English period from Latin via French: *a baker's dozen*, *devil's dozen*, *long dozen*. According to an old English custom, merchants received bread from the bakers who feared punishment for underweight; they received thirteen loaves instead of twelve, and the thirteenth one was in the traders' income, and that is how the expression *baker's dozen* appeared. Phraseological unit *devil's dozen* was motivated by medieval superstition of Christians about the number of

witches on Sabbath. Dozen comes from the numeral *duo* – two and *dosim* – ten, which were formed by compounding at first, and then formed a simplification word for *twelve*. *Around dozen* – exactly a dozen. The symbolism of the number *twelve* is primarily associated with basic concepts and measurements of astronomy and astrology in western and eastern nations. Moreover, in Christianity the number has a meaning of *the chosen number*, which is confirmed by the presence of this amount among the apostles of Jesus Christ, sons of Iyakov, the tribes of Israel, twelve Olympian gods in Greek Pantheon, etc. (Dossymbekova, 2016: 144).

Some idioms with numeral as a component is difficult to explain in terms of the origin, as their lexical composition, firstly, is not stable, and secondly, their value is not associated with any custom, tradition or belief: for example, *talk nineteen (twenty or forty) to the dozen* – talk incessantly, without end.

Due to the language-specific nature of phraseological units, their translation can be somewhat challenging at times. Phraseological units must be recognized, understood and analyzed before appropriate translation methods can be considered. That is to say there is no word equivalence among languages since even in the same language there is no absolute synonym between words. It is impossible to perfect translation equivalence between source language word and its target language correspondent. Between the two words that are deemed to be correspondents, one always covers more ground in meaning than the other, leading to the problem of non-equivalence at word level. Baker believes that “the main problems that idiomatic and fixed expressions pose in translation relate to two main areas: the ability to recognize and interpret an idiom correctly and the difficulties in rendering various aspects of meaning that an idiom or a fixed expression conveys into the target language” (Baker, 1992: 65). One of the problems a translator faces in translating idioms is the lack of equivalence on the phraseological level. All languages have phraseological units. But it is not easy to find an equivalent in the target language that corresponds to the phraseological unit in the source text in both form and meaning. Phraseological unit may contain a culture-bound item and this poses a problem for the translator.

Faithful translating of a large number of picturesque phraseological expressions, on the other hand, can be achieved only by a thorough selection of variants having in the target language a similar to the original lexical meaning, and also their picturesqueness and expressiveness. This similarity can be based on common in the source language and in the target language componential images as well as on the structural form of them: *measure twice and cut once* – *сім раз одміряй, а раз відріж*.

#### 4. Main ways of translation of phraseological units with numerical component

There are several main ways of translation of phraseological units with numerical component:

– **Translation by Choosing Equivalents:** This is a way of translating by which every component part of the source language phraseological unit is kept in the target language. The words also create the main images, the expressiveness and the figurative meaning. Translating by equivalents is used when the phraseological units, which originate from the same source in the both languages, are translated, for example: *the thirty pieces of silver* – *тридцять срібняків*; *the fifth column* – *п'ята колона*.

– **Translation by Choosing Genuine Idiomatic Analogies:** The phraseological units are in most cases easily given corresponding analogies in the target language. As a matter of fact the phraseological units are usually very close in their connotative meaning in English and

Ukrainian languages. These common and similar traits of the phraseological units serve a proof of their being genuine analogies, for example: *two of one kind* – *два чоботи пара* (similar by character); *two-edged sword* – *палка о двух кінцях* (controversial problem).

– **Descriptive translation of idiomatic and set expressions:** The meaning of a considerable number of the phraseological units can be conveyed through explication only i.e. in a descriptive way. Depending on the complexity of the meaning contained in the source language unit, it can be conveyed in the target language, for example: *to be a zero* – *бути нікчемною особистістю*; *far-far away kingdom* – *тридев'яте царство*.

## 5. Conclusions

Taking into account the discussed above phraseological combinations with the numerical component, it can be concluded that a phraseological unit is a phrase, which means something different from the meanings of the separate words that are a part of it. Usually it cannot be understood by the literal interpretation of the words that make up the expression. Used together, the words convey a meaning that is often related to the individual words in the phraseological unit. Some phraseological units have become so well worn that they are clichés and overused or commonplace expressions. In their semantics phraseological units reflect a long process of cultural development of people, recording and transferring cultural attitudes and stereotypes from generation to generation. The number has additional symbolic values in the cultural system of symbols. Numerical in phraseological units can be used in the direct and metaphorical meaning. The analysis shows that direct meaning is more frequent.

Phraseological units with numerical component represent the problem for translation. There are three main methods of translation of the phraseological unit: translation by choosing equipments; translation by choosing genuine idiomatic analogies; descriptive translation of idiomatic and set expressions. The aim of translating of the phraseological expressions is to fully convey their lexical meaning in the target language and where possible, to convey the structural peculiarities, the figurativeness, the expressiveness, and the connotative meaning of the source language phraseological units.

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