Numerical Semantics and Cultural Cognition: Investigating the Symbolic Value of Numbers in Russian and English Linguoculture

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Abstract

This research paper explores the role of numerical codes in the linguocultures of Russian and English, focusing on their semantics and symbolism. Numerical codes, which include figures such as "three," "seven," "ten," and others, hold distinct meanings and cultural connotations that vary between languages and societies. This study examines how these numbers are used in proverbs, idiomatic expressions, folklore, and everyday language, with an emphasis on their symbolic value. In particular, the paper contrasts the interpretations and uses of numerical codes in Russian and English-speaking cultures, seeking to understand the cultural nuances behind these symbols. It also addresses the psychological and cognitive underpinnings that shape these codes, proposing that numbers are not merely utilitarian markers but also reflect deeper cultural values, beliefs, and traditions. Through a combination of literary analysis and cognitive linguistics, this paper sheds light on how numbers function within the broader framework of cultural identity and communication.

Keywords: Code, Numeric Code, Cultural Code, Number, Digit, Analysis, Semantics Of Numbers, Meaning Of Numbers, Phraseological Unit.

Introduction

Numerical codes are an essential part of human language and culture, often carrying meanings that go beyond their mathematical value. In both Russian and English linguoculture, numbers are not just used for counting or measuring but are imbued with deeper layers of symbolism and meaning. The study of numbers in language—numerical symbolism—provides valuable insights into the culture, values, and traditions of a society. These symbols often have an impact on the way people think, communicate, and understand the world around them.

For centuries, numbers have had significant importance in various cultures and have been associated with certain beliefs, myths, and superstitions. In both Russian and English, numbers such as "three," "seven," and "nine" are seen as particularly powerful and often appear in folklore, proverbs, and religious contexts. Understanding the semantics and symbolism of numerical codes in these two cultures can reveal much about the values, worldview, and linguistic preferences of Russian and English speakers. The study of numerical codes in Russian and English linguoculture is important for several reasons. First, it offers a comparative perspective on how different cultures interpret and use numbers, shedding light on both universal and culture-specific cognitive processes. Second, it helps to understand the historical and psychological roots of numerical symbolism, including how these meanings have evolved over time and how they continue to shape modern language and thought. Finally, examining numerical codes within the

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broader scope of linguoculture allows for a deeper understanding of language as a reflection of social norms, values, and communication practices.

This research also has practical implications. By exploring the role of numbers in idiomatic expressions, metaphors, and sayings, we can better understand the linguistic devices used in literature, advertising, and everyday speech. Additionally, a cross-cultural analysis of numerical symbolism may contribute to more effective communication between speakers of different languages, enhancing cross-cultural understanding and reducing the likelihood of misunderstandings that may arise from misinterpreting cultural references to numbers. To explore the role of numerical codes in Russian and English linguoculture, focusing on their symbolic and semantic meanings.

To identify the similarities and differences in the use of numbers in these two languages and cultures.

To analyze how numbers are integrated into proverbs, idiomatic expressions, folklore, and everyday language.

To investigate the cognitive and psychological aspects of numerical symbolism and its connection to cultural values and beliefs.

Through this study, we aim to provide a comprehensive understanding of how numerical codes operate within Russian and English linguoculture and how they contribute to the broader cultural narrative of each society.

Numbers have long been a subject of fascination and importance in human cultures. In Russian culture, numbers have often been linked to religious, mythological, and folkloric traditions. For instance, the number "three" appears in many Russian fairy tales, often representing the ideal number of trials, the threefold pattern of fate, or the divine trinity. Similarly, in English, the number "three" is prevalent in common expressions like "third time's the charm" and "the holy trinity." The number "seven" is another widely recognized number with symbolic significance in both cultures, representing luck, completion, and divine perfection.

Research in cognitive linguistics suggests that numerical codes are deeply rooted in human cognition and reflect the collective psyche of a society. The symbolism of numbers is often linked to universal human experiences, such as the passage of time, the organization of the universe, and the concept of life cycles. By analyzing the historical and cultural contexts of these numbers, we can better understand the shared human experience that shapes these symbols.

Proverbs are a rich source of linguistic and cultural wisdom, and many proverbs in both Russian and English feature numerical codes that carry significant meaning. For example, in Russian, the phrase "cemb бед — один ответ" ("seven misfortunes—one answer") reflects the idea that multiple challenges can be overcome with a single solution. In English, the expression "a stitch in time saves nine" uses the number "nine" to emphasize the value of early intervention in solving problems.

The use of numerical codes in proverbs illustrates how numbers are not simply used to denote quantities but to convey complex ideas about human behavior, values, and wisdom. By comparing these proverbs across languages, we can gain insight into how different cultures use numbers to encapsulate life lessons and social norms. Cognitive linguistics provides a framework for understanding how numbers function as symbols within a culture. Research in this field suggests that numbers are not abstract entities but are shaped by human experiences and social contexts. For example, the number "seven" is often associated with completeness and perfection because of its frequent appearance in religious and mythological texts, such as the seven days of creation in the Bible.

Numerical symbolism in Russian and English-speaking cultures is also influenced by the unique historical and social developments of each society. In Russian culture, numbers are often connected to Orthodox Christianity, folk traditions, and the Russian Orthodox Church calendar. In contrast, English-speaking

cultures, particularly those with Protestant roots, may place more emphasis on pragmatic interpretations of numbers, as seen in expressions like "a penny saved is a penny earned" or "two heads are better than one." A cross-cultural comparison of numerical codes reveals both shared and distinct features in the symbolism of numbers in Russian and English. While numbers like "three" and "seven" are significant in both cultures, the meanings and associations of other numbers, such as "four" or "nine," may differ. In Russian, the number "four" is often associated with bad luck, while in English, the number "four" is typically neutral or even positive, as seen in phrases like "four-leaf clover" symbolizing good fortune.

This comparison highlights the importance of understanding numerical codes within their cultural context. What may be seen as a lucky or sacred number in one culture may have entirely different connotations in another. By analyzing these differences, we can gain a deeper understanding of how numerical symbolism shapes communication and worldview in different cultural contexts.

This research paper provides a comprehensive exploration of the role of numerical codes in Russian and English linguoculture, focusing on their semantics and symbolism. By examining the cultural significance of numbers in both languages, we can better understand the cognitive and social factors that influence their meaning, as well as the broader implications for communication and cultural identity.

Methods and Methodology

The research methodology employed in this study is a qualitative, comparative approach that combines aspects of linguistic analysis, cognitive linguistics, and cultural anthropology. The study seeks to investigate how numerical codes are used and interpreted in both Russian and English-speaking cultures, focusing on their symbolic and semantic meanings. To achieve this, we conducted a cross-cultural analysis of numerical expressions, idioms, proverbs, folklore, and everyday language in both languages. The primary data sources for this study include:

- **Proverbs and Idiomatic Expressions**: A collection of proverbs and idiomatic expressions from both Russian and English languages, focusing on those that feature prominent numerical values such as "three," "seven," "nine," "four," and others. This selection represents a cross-section of both languages and highlights how numbers function in everyday communication.
- Folklore and Mythology: Relevant folklore, fairy tales, and myths from Russian and English traditions that incorporate numerically significant themes, such as the repetition of a number (e.g., "three wishes," "seven trials").
- **Historical and Cultural Texts**: Literature and religious texts, as well as historical documents that reflect the symbolic meanings of numbers in each culture. These include religious references like the "seven days of creation" in Christian texts and the "three Slavic gods" in Russian mythology.

Linguistic Analysis: The first step involved identifying specific numbers and analyzing their meaning and usage in the given texts. This includes a close examination of the syntactical and lexical structures of the expressions in both languages to compare how these numbers are framed within the idiomatic expressions and proverbs.

Cognitive Linguistics Framework: The study applies concepts from cognitive linguistics to explore how numbers influence perception and behavior. This includes analyzing the metaphorical roles numbers play in constructing meaning in various expressions and sayings.

Cross-Cultural Comparison: A comparative analysis of how similar numerical expressions are framed in Russian and English, noting both similarities and differences. This comparison also includes examining cultural practices and symbolic associations that influence the interpretation of numbers in each society.

Results

Through our analysis of proverbs, idioms, and folklore, several common patterns emerged in both cultures regarding the symbolic value of numbers. Below is a table comparing the symbolic meanings of key numbers in Russian and English.

Number	Russian Meaning & Symbolism	English Meaning & Symbolism
3	Symbolizes completeness, perfection, and divine order. Often found in religious and folkloric contexts (e.g., "the three trials," "trinity").	
	Represents luck, completion, and spiritual perfection. Frequently found in both religious and magical contexts (e.g., "seven days of creation," "seven sins").	completion, and divine intervention (e.g.,
4	Associated with stability and the four corners of the world but also has negative connotations (e.g., "four horsemen of the apocalypse").	
9	Represents death, the afterlife, and sacred significance (e.g., "nine lives," "nine months of pregnancy").	Symbolizes completeness and the mystical (e.g., "cloud nine," "nine lives").
10	Seen as a number of completeness, perfection, and order in Russian culture (e.g., "ten commandments," "top ten").	Represents completeness and finality (e.g., "a perfect ten," "ten commandments").

The following are a few examples of proverbs and idiomatic expressions featuring numbers from both cultures:

Russian Proverbs

- "Семь бед один ответ" (Seven troubles, one answer) This reflects the Russian perspective on the universality of solutions to life's challenges, where multiple problems can be addressed with one solution.
- "Три раза не вредно" (Three times is not harmful) Reflects the idea that repetition of an action in groups of three has significance and often indicates completeness or a cycle.

English Proverbs

- "A stitch in time saves nine" Suggests that addressing problems early can prevent bigger issues later, with "nine" representing the more substantial effort saved.
- "Third time's the charm" Indicates the belief that the third attempt will often be successful, aligning with the symbolic significance of "three" as a number of completion.

Discussion

From the results, it is clear that the cultural significance of numbers is deeply embedded in cognitive processes. The number "three," for example, is widely perceived as a symbol of balance and completeness, reflecting a universal cognitive pattern in human perception of symmetry. In both Russian and English, "three" is connected to harmony, whether it's in the form of the Holy Trinity in Christianity or the traditional "three wishes" in folk tales. This suggests that the number "three" is universally recognized as a structure of completeness across cultures.

The number "seven" is another example of symbolic significance shared between both cultures. It is widely regarded as a number of luck and spiritual perfection. The "seven wonders of the world" and the "seven days of creation" in Christianity resonate deeply with both Russian and English speakers, highlighting a shared cultural association with divine order.

However, the cultural differences become apparent with numbers like "four" and "nine." While "four" in Russian culture is often associated with death or bad luck, in English, it maintains a more neutral or even positive association (e.g., "four-leaf clover" for good fortune). This contrast can be linked to historical and religious influences. In Russian Orthodox Christianity, "four" may evoke the four horsemen of the apocalypse, whereas in Western Christianity, it is largely neutral.

Numerical symbolism is not confined to proverbs alone but extends to folklore and myth. In Russian fairy tales, the number "three" often represents a magical or perfect number (e.g., three brothers, three challenges). Similarly, in English folklore, numbers like "seven" have a magical aura (e.g., "Seven-league boots" from fairy tales).

These repeated occurrences of certain numbers across cultures suggest that numbers are not simply linguistic artifacts but also cognitive tools that reflect a culture's worldview. For example, the recurrence of the number "seven" in both Russian and English folktales as a symbol of magical power or perfection indicates a shared human cognition about the mystical and the sacred. In conclusion, numerical codes in Russian and English linguoculture carry rich symbolic value that extends beyond their mere mathematical significance. Numbers like "three," "seven," "four," and "nine" not only serve as structural elements in language but also embody cultural, psychological, and cognitive associations that reflect the worldview of each society.

This research demonstrates that while there are many similarities in the symbolic use of numbers in both languages, cultural differences do exist that reveal unique social, historical, and religious influences on numerical cognition. The study of numerical semantics provides valuable insights into the intersection of language, culture, and cognition, highlighting the complex ways in which numbers shape our understanding of the world. By the code, which is actively used in language theory, linguoculturology, cognitive linguistics, semiotics, we understand a certain algorithm that sets the significance of a sign, and the rules for reading it are set by culture: cultural chronotope, cultural competence of the interpreter. Consequently, the code is developed and functions in culture.

Cultural codes are associated with the most ancient archetypal and mythological ideas about the world, and culture itself acts as a set of different codes. Culture codes form a coordinate system that sets the standards of culture.

There are a number of cultural codes: cosmogonic (starry hour), somatic (hand in government), quantitative (third eye, seventh heaven), spatial (upper left), temporal (before Christmas), military (to win back positions), subject (the highlight of the program), natural landscape (family tree), architectural (temple of science), olfactory (smell of spring, breathed fear), clothing code (to be born in a shirt), food code (bread and salt), etc.

In the early mythopoeic traditions, numbers and letters were given a sacred meaning: they represented the divine symbols of the universe and the Cosmos.

Each digit has its own system of equivalents: quantitative, ordinal, and collective are equivalent to a digit. (Fedulenkova,Adamia,2019)

Equivalence, as a property of numbers and significant words, can be direct and inverse: replacing numbers with significant words and replacing significant words with numbers.

As noted above, there is a rich tradition of studying the cultural and typological properties of the concept of number in relation to English and Russian cultures. This aspect is of great importance when considering the cognitive-semiotic features of numerals in each of the languages under consideration, as a result, general cultural information is applicable in the semantic analysis of phraseological units with numerals.

Russians culture as the closest to us and described in detail in the literature, we note that Russian folk spiritual culture tends mainly to the word, not to the number. Despite this, it is imbued with a numerical designation, which is manifested in fairy tales, epics, and Christian traditions. The presence of numbers in it is visible everywhere, and almost always they act as sacred and deeply symbolic.

Linguist V. N. Toporov defines the peculiarities of the meaning of the number one, considering it not so much the first sign of the series in the modern sense, as integrity, unity. Perfect indivisibility, which is understood as a unit, explains the attribution of the number one to such images of this absolute indivisibility as God or the cosmos. (Zamaletdinov,2012)

When the number "one" is used in sayings, proverbs or phraseological units, it can convey both a specific quantitative meaning (if we consider these expressions separately) and the meaning of "minority" in the context: "Sergei Muravyov and Bestuzhev must come— Spiridov replied. "Seven are not waiting for one,— Sukhinov objected. "What should I do?" In this situation, we know that two people are late, not just one. But we can notice that in Russian and English, some values of the number one either partially coincide or do not coincide at all.

The prominence of the number one, which represents the essence, the beginning and end points of the world, is represented in the English language through the ambivalence of meanings associated with this number. In some cases, one expresses a completely sufficient and even self-sufficient quantity (a thing designated in this way "fills" all imaginable space).

The number "two" in Russian basically expresses the meaning of "Number, digit and number "2", which is how it is expressed in English. But in colloquial speech, two sometimes takes on the meaning of "A few, a little, a small number, a quantity" and expresses a non—specific numerical value: "Two days to decipher the results, and everything will become clear.""- I think you won't have to suffer for a long time. We'll find out in the next two or three days... Do you need a ride?" "I called again and conjured her to come down, for two words" and "It was a mystical day: heat, fog like milk, so you can't see anything two steps away, and at the same time it's pouring hot rain.". The number two has some meanings in religion. (Bankova,2018)

In Islam, the deuce symbolizes the spirit. In Christianity, Christ has two natures – divine and human, so the number two is a symbol of antithesis, contradiction. Russians worship odd numbers, they don't like even numbers. That's why Russians give flowers to someone only in odd numbers. An odd number of flowers endows a bouquet with positive vitality and harmony, of course, excluding the number thirteen. Two is just a simple even integer.

Russian Russians believe that the number two is demonic, unclean, and Russians believe that even numbers usually bring misfortune and bad luck to people. A negative score, therefore, sometimes accompanies the number two.

The number "two" in English has an equally ambiguous semantic interpretation. On the one hand, it is associated with the expression of the creative principle: eng.

We have identified standard models according to which a number of English proverbs are built: $1 \dots = 2 \dots$ and $1 \dots > 2 \dots$ The use of such formulas allows us to judge the clearly expressed "mathematical" mindset of the British.

For a large number of peoples, the number "three" was the limit of counting for quite a long time. It was considered a symbol of completeness, perfection: among the ancient Greeks it was happy, and in Ancient Babylon they began to worship exactly three gods: the Sun, the Moon and Venus. Three has become the most beloved number in fairy tales and myths. Its magical power consisted in the fact that it was created from the sum of the preceding numbers (3 = 1 + 2) and was designated by a triangle, which is a symbol of the past, present and future.

The number "three" was essential in magical rituals. Various spells had to be cast exactly three times to give more power. To get rid of the evil eye, you need to spit three times over your left shoulder and knock on wood three times, according to the Russian custom, a kiss is performed three times. In various legends and traditions, actions that were performed three times have been preserved: for example, success could be achieved from the third time.

The legends also show the cognitive designation of the number three, as an example, the legend that the Earth stands on three whales is given. The spirit of the trinity manifests itself in everything and everywhere, for example:

the components of time: past - present - future;

three-dimensional space: length - width -height;

three branches of life: animals - plants - microorganisms;

three epochs in history: the ancient world - the Middle Ages - modernity;

three main stages in a person's life: youth - adulthood - old age;

a person has three main forces: mental - motor - emotional;

three mental manifestations of a person: intuition - instinct - intelligence;

the duration of life on earth: feminine - masculine - new life. As you know, the Earth is the third planet in the Solar system in terms of distance from the Sun.

According to some studies, the number three is one of the most significant, if not in all, then in many mythological systems, it represents an ideal model of any dynamic process involving the emergence, development and decline.

There is a special relationship to the three in both languages: it symbolizes absolute perfection and completeness, embodies the solution of the conflict. The third superfluous one is about someone inappropriate in a situation where two are present; the third generation - grandchildren, three souls - "three souls" (according to the teachings of metaphysicians, three principles inherent in plants, animals and intelligent beings are united in man); God loves the trinity (epist.) - anything is possible or inevitably, for

the third time; When three know it, all know it (posl.) - what is known to three is known to all. Phraseological units with this numerical component characterize a person, his position in society, and the situation.

"Seven" is the number of the Universe, the macrocosm, meaning completeness and totality. Containing a three as a symbol of Heaven and soul and a four as a symbol of Earth and body, "seven" is the first number encompassing both the spiritual and the temporal. The sum of "four" and "three" gives the "magic seven", the "sum of the world", the most stable number is the symbol. "Three" multiplied by "four" gives the number "twelve" -a perfect, perfect, round number.

Let's give other examples. Phraseological units with the component "seven" are found in folklore works of European and Slavic peoples (seven dwarfs, seven heroes, seven lambs, seven wonders of the world, to see the seventh dream). In the phraseological and paremiological fund of the Russian language: a book with seven seals; seven spans in the forehead; seven troubles — one answer; seven cases do not take into one hand; measure seven times — cut off once; seven nannies have a child without an eye. (Telegina,2017)

According to V.A. Maslova, "in Russian culture, seven is a symbol of something excessive: behind seven locks (seals) — very much hidden, in deep secrecy; seven spans in the forehead — very smart; seven miles to slurp jelly — very far; seven sweats came off — very tired; seven miles to heaven and everything in the forest is very much and meaningless; seven Fridays a week — often change your mind; to be in the seventh heaven — to be very happy"

In the Anglo-American linguistic picture of the world, the symbolic use of the number is mainly associated with the numeral nine (nine). Cf.: to be on cloud nine, to be dressed up to the nines, a stitch in time saves nine, love potion number nine. As a rule, the expression of numerical values in English idioms is associated with occasional word usage.

This is primarily due to cultural stereotypes, according to which the semantics of numerals should express specific and singular meanings. Cf.: to have one over the eight in the meaning of 'to get drunk, to drink too much; to be at six and sevens to be in complete disorder and confusion; to happen at the eleventh hour to happen very late or at the very last moment; Unfortunately, the present defoliation, motivated by short-term economic benefit, probably will continue unless a revolution in public and official attitudes comes to the rescue at the eleventh hour.

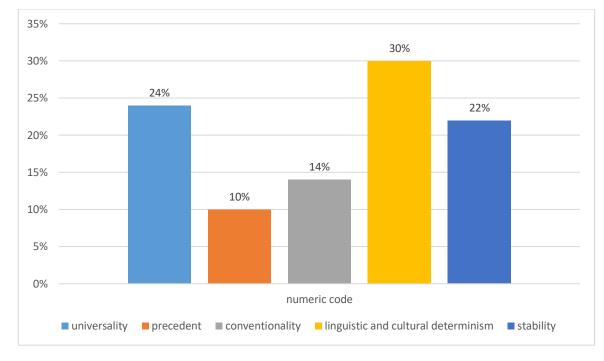
The free use of specific numeric values is observed in comparisons of two or more objects. Cf. the expression from the cartoon «Shrek»: *But you only look like this at night Shrek is ugly 24–7* (letters: "But you only look like this at night. Shrek is much scarier than you"). The concreteness, precision and pragmatism characteristic of a low-context culture are manifested in the designation of a time interval *24 hous*.

Comparative characteristics such as "more", "much", "much" are not convincing for pragmatic Americans. The low-context nature of American linguistic culture illustrates the desire to express one's thoughts concretely using numbers. Cf.:«The most reliable facts, in the American view, are those in the form of quantities — specific numbers, percentages, rates, rankings, or amounts. Many foreign visitors in the States re struck — if not stunned — by the quantity of numbers and statistics they encounter in the media and in daily conversations. «McDonald's has sold 8.7 billion hamburgers», say signs all over the country. «Nine out of ten doctors recommend this brand of mouth wash», says a radio announcer or a magazine advertisement. (Doctors are viewed as scientists or appliers of science, and are held in very high esteem). «This humidity is at 27 per cent», says the television weather reporte. «The barometric pressure is at 29.32 and rising. Yesterday's high temperature in Juneau, Alaska, was 47 degrees»».

The numerical code of culture, along with corporate, somatic, natural landscape, zoomorphic, etc., stands out in different languages outside of their genetic characteristics. "In the naive linguistic picture of the world, the number habitually fits into the system of guidelines and norms of the human community"

The numerical code of culture is understood as a set of representations in the consciousness of the linguistic and cultural community, actualized through signs and numerical nominations, which are not only

nominative properties, but also linguistic and cultural information, figurative, associative and symbolic representations. Like any cultural code, numeric has its own characteristics:



universality, precedent, conventionality, linguistic and cultural determinism, stability.

Universality is not limited to the existence of numerical codes in linguistic cultures, but also affects the possible coincidence of numerical representations among different ethnic groups. The possible universality in understanding and representing numerical designations is associated with the typology of everyday situations and the similarity of collective experience in various linguistic cultures.

The semantics and functioning of numerical designations, as well as cognitive and linguocultural prerequisites for fixing their symbolic component, relate to topical issues of modern linguistic science and related disciplines. (Sadigova,2023)

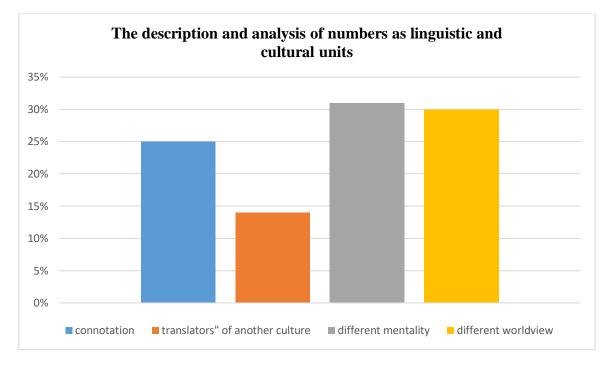
The numerical code of culture in the language is represented by the names of numerals, words and stable units denoting quantity.

In free use, a definite-quantitative numeral denotes an abstract number or number of objects and plays a utilitarian-pragmatic role. In addition, numbers have cultural meanings and acquire symbolic significance, which is reflected in the phraseological system of the language.

The analysis of the research of the numerical code of culture in the Russian and English languages on phraseological and para-mythological material showed the unanimous interest of the authors in considering "the symbolic semantics of numbers as part of phraseology and their mythological interpretation."

The comparative study of numbers provides information about culturally determined quantitative criteria, allows us to determine the similarities and differences of numerical values in various linguistic cultures, which is especially important in the process of intercultural communication and translation transformations.

The description and analysis of numbers as linguistic and cultural units in literary translations, which are carriers of cultural connotation -25%, "translators" of another culture-14%, a different mentality-31%, a different worldview-30%, was proposed by Yu.A. Sorokin.



As a rule, the numbers included in stable combinations represent gaps in one of the compared linguistic cultures.

Conclusion

Numbers and operations on them represent a universal category of human thinking and possess a peculiar abstract-concrete and ideal-material nature. At the same time, the figurative semantics of phraseological units can refer to various mathematical operations, which are the figurative basis and undergo various semantic transformations.

The existence of a number as a sign of a natural language is caused by communicative purposes, or, in other words, the number is used to consciously convey certain information. (Betti,2022)

In the act of linguistic communication, a certain ideal essence — information — passes from one person to another not directly, but indirectly, with the help of material entities — linguistic expressions representing a certain way organized sequences of sounds or outlines. That is, linguistic expressions of numbers function as signs in the process of communication.

Thus, a number is not only an abstract structure, a potential dialectic of various categories within one entity, it is a multidimensional concept that implements its basic properties through language.

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