

THE SEMANTICS OF NUMBERS IN GERMAN PHRASEOLOGY

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Abstract: This article presents information on the semantics of numbers in German phraseology, specifically on the characteristics and significance of numbers in idiomatic expressions formed with numerals.

Keywords: phraseology, numerical idiomatic expressions, intonation, minimal segment, numerical component.

Despite the existence of various linguistic studies describing the nature of numerical phraseologisms, the specific meanings and symbols of numbers have not been thoroughly analyzed. At the same time, there is significant interest in the symbolic and even mystical aspects of numbers. This article presents how the symbolism of numbers is reflected in language and, accordingly, in its integral part—idiomatic expressions, specifically in the German language.

German contains many short, meaningful, witty, and metaphorical phrases known as idioms, and the branch of linguistics studying them is phraseology. Idioms reflect folk wisdom and have existed in the language for decades or even centuries, as people enjoy metaphorical expressions conveying humor and satire. Phraseology holds an important place in language due to its richness of meaning, imagery, conciseness, and vividness. Therefore, idioms originate from various sources, including the speech of professionals that later entered the literary language. Some idioms are based on historical events of a nation or ancient myths and legends. Other idioms have come from religious texts, folk sayings, and the expressions of writers, scholars, and public figures.

H.Burger categorizes idioms into three groups:

1. Expressions denoting objects, processes, and phenomena of reality.
2. Structural expressions establishing grammatical relationships.
3. Communicative idioms fulfilling specific functions in interaction. [1]

Idioms are equivalent to inseparable word combinations assigned to specific grammatical categories. For example: „j-m eins auf die Birne geben“ (“to hit someone on the head”), „über zwei Ecken j-n/etw kennen“ (“to know someone or something indirectly”). [2]

The structural-semantic classification of idioms is based on the degree of semantic integration of their components. According to this classification, idioms are divided into four groups:

1. Idiomatic combinations
2. Idiomatic units
3. Idiomatic collocations
4. Idiomatic expressions [3]

Idioms are crucial in learning a language because they add color and expressiveness, making the author's message more understandable and convincing. Studying idioms scientifically contributes to a better understanding of the language itself. They are closely related to vocabulary, and analyzing them helps understand their structure, formation, and usage in language.

A number is a concept that serves to express quantity and is one of the ways the category of quantity is manifested in language. The initial stage in forming the abstract category of quantity involves establishing the equivalence of concrete sets of objects. The concept of number emerged as a result of counting individual items. Over time, physical form and objectivity were replaced by the abstract notion of number. [5]

The external relationships and characteristics of objects or their parts are most precisely expressed through numbers. The function includes identifying the relation of numerical components to numbers or other parts of speech. A “numerical component” in an idiom is a word that includes an explicit or implicit reference to a number. In idioms, numerical components acquire new meanings. [5]

Comparing idioms with the number “one,” it is evident that these are among the most frequently used in German. Examples include:

- “Erst die Arbeit, dann das Vergnügen” (First the work, then the pleasure) – First fulfill duties, then relax. Grammatically composed of a numeral, noun, and conjunction.
- “Mir ist alles eins” (It’s all the same to me) – Semantically neutral; composed of a noun, pronoun, verb, and numeral.
- “Sich mit j-m eins wissen (fühlen)” (To share someone’s opinion) – Emotionally expressive; consists of a preposition, verb, and numeral.
- “Einswerden (sein)” – (To agree, to come to an agreement).
- “J-m eins auf/vor die Birne geben,” “J-m eins auf die Nase geben” – (To slap someone).

Unlike idioms, in proverbs and sayings, the process of synonymy within the language takes place.

The next group examined includes idioms with the number “two.” A distinctive feature of these expressions is the existence of equivalents with similar components, semantics, and syntax in other languages. Examples include:

- German: “Niemand kann zwei Herren dienen.” (You can only serve one master.) Uzbek: “Bir ishning boshini tutgan ma’qul.”
- German: “Man soll nicht zwei Hasen auf einmal jagen.” Uzbek: “Ikkita quyovni quvgan bitta ham tutolmaydi.” [6]

More examples can be given, but even those provided show the parallels between German and Uzbek idioms. Although similar, there are slight differences in their semantics.

Idioms are used as indivisible units and typically do not allow for rearrangement of their components. Their semantic coherence can vary widely—from meanings that cannot be derived from the components, to partially motivated ones. The process of a word combination becoming a stable idiom is called lexicalization. [7]

In conclusion, the meaning of each idiom is often based on the qualities, symbolism, or associations connected with the number it includes. This illustrates how idioms with numerical components reflect national and cultural characteristics.

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