
NUMBER SYMBOLISM

Abstract:Number words are generally used to refer to the exact cardinal value of a set, but cognitive scientists disagree about their meanings. Every individual grows up surrounded by numerals reflecting various uses of number. In their primary school years they are expected to grasp arithmetical symbols and use measuring devices. While much research on number development has examined people's understanding of numerical concepts and principles, little has investigated their understanding of these symbols. This thesis examines studies of understanding and use of number symbols in a range of contexts and for a variety of purposes.

Key words:cultural association, odd and even numbers, numeralogy

Introduction:Humanity has had a love-hate relationship with numbers from the earliest times. Bones dating from perhaps 30,000 years ago show scratch marks that possibly represent the phases of the Moon. The ancient Babylonians observed the movements of the planets, recorded them as numbers, and used them to predict eclipses and other astronomical phenomena. The priesthood of ancient Egypt used numbers to predict the flooding of the Nile. Pythagoreanism, a cult of ancient Greece, believed that numbers were the basis of the entire universe, which ran on numerical harmony. The Pythagoreans' ideas were a mixture of prescience (the numerical features of musical sounds) and mysticism (3 is male, 4 is female, and 10 is the most perfect number). Numbers were associated with names for magical purposes: the biblical “number of the beast,” 666, is probably an example of this practice. More recently, cranks have sought the secrets of the universe in the dimensions of the Great Pyramid of Giza, an aberration so common that it even has a name—pyramidology. Millions of otherwise rational people are terrified of the number 13, to the extent that hotels omit it from their floors, airplanes do not have a row 13, and the numbers for Formula 1 racing cars skip from 12 to 14 so that, for example, 22 cars would be numbered from 1 to 23. Learned tomes are written about the significance of such stalwarts as the golden number (1.618034), which does occur in flowering plants and modern architecture but does not occur in the shell of the nautilus and ancient Greek architecture, despite endless myths to the contrary. Many religions have their sacred numbers, as do organizations such as Freemasonry; Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart's music, notably the Magic Flute (1791), includes many intentional references to Masonic numerology.

Cultural associations of some numbers

The enormous range of symbolic roles that numbers have played in various cultures, religions, and other systems of human thought can be gauged from a brief sample.

1

Not surprisingly, the number 1 is generally treated as a symbol of unity. Therefore, in monotheistic religions, it often symbolizes God or the universe. The Pythagoreans did not consider 1 to be a number at all because number means plurality and 1 is singular. However, they considered it to be the source of all numbers because adding many 1s together can create any other (positive whole) number. In their system, where odd numbers were male and even numbers female, the number 1 was neither; instead, it changed each to the other. If 1 is added to an even number, it becomes odd; similarly, if 1 is added to an odd number, it becomes even.

2

The number 2 symbolizes many of the basic dualities: me/you, male/female, yes/no, alive/dead, left/right, yin/yang, and so on. Dualities are common in human approaches to the world, probably because of our preference for two-valued logic—yet another duality, true/false. Although 2 was female to the Pythagoreans, other numerological schemes viewed it as male. In Agrippa von Nettesheim's *De occulta philosophia* (1533; "On the Philosophy of the Occult"), 2 is the symbol for man, sex, and evil. One reason that some have associated 2 with evil is that the biblical book of Genesis does not use the formula "and it was good" when referring to the second day of Creation.

Some religions are dualistic, with two gods in place of the one God of monotheism. Examples include Zoroastrianism, where Ahura Mazda (the god of light and goodness) battles with Ahriman (the god of darkness and evil). The number 2 is often associated with negatives, as in the words duplicity and two-faced. Northwest Coast Indians required the parents of twins to observe various taboos because they believed that supernatural powers would bring the wishes of twins to fruition.

3

The number 3 is a very mystical and spiritual number featured in many folktales (three wishes, three guesses, three little pigs, three bears, three billy goats gruff). In ancient Babylon the three primary gods were Anu, Bel (Baal), and Ea, representing Heaven, Earth, and the Abyss. Similarly, there were three aspects to the Egyptian sun god: Khepri (rising), Re (midday), and Atum (setting). In Christianity there is the Trinity of God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit. Plato saw 3 as being symbolic of the triangle, the simplest spatial shape, and considered the world to have been built from triangles. In German folklore a paper triangle with a cross in each corner and a prayer in the middle was thought to act as protection against gout, as well as protecting a cradle from witches. Three black animals were often sacrificed when attempting to conjure up demons. On the other hand, a three-coloured cat was a protective spirit. In William Shakespeare's *Macbeth* (1606–07) there are three witches, and their spell begins, "Thrice the brindled cat hath mewed," reflecting such superstitions. Also, 3 is the dimension of the smallest magic square in which every row, column, and diagonal sums to 15.

4

The number of order in the universe is 4—the four elements of earth, air, fire, and water; the four seasons; the four points of the compass; the four phases of the Moon (new, half-moon waxing, full, half-moon waning). The Four Noble Truths epitomize Buddhism. To the Pythagoreans 4 was the source of the tetractys $1 + 2 + 3 + 4 = 10$, the most perfect number. In medieval times there were thought to be four humours (phlegm, blood, cholera, and black bile—hence the adjectives phlegmatic, sanguine, choleric, and melancholic), and the body was bled at various places to bring these humours into balance.

The number 4 is central in the world view of the Sioux, with four groups of gods (superior, ally, subordinate, and spirit), four types of animal (creeping, flying, four-legged, and two-legged), and four ages of humans (infant, child, mature, and elderly). Their medicine men instructed them to carry out all activities in groups of four.

Because 4 is generally a practical, material number, few superstitions are associated with it. An exception is in China, where 4 is unlucky because she ("four") and shi ("death") sound similar. In the biblical Revelation to John the Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse wreak destruction upon humanity.

5

The sum of the first even and odd numbers ($2 + 3$) is 5. (To the Pythagoreans 1 was not a number and was not odd.) It therefore symbolizes human life and—in the Platonic and Pythagorean traditions—marriage, as the sum of the female 2 and the male 3.

The number 5 was also important to the Maya, who placed a fifth point at the centre of the four points of the compass. The five fingers of the human hand lent a certain mystery to 5, as did the five extremities of the body (two arms, two legs, head). A human placed in a circle with outspread arms and legs approximates the five points of a pentagon, and if each point is joined to its second nearest neighbour, a pentagram results. This geometric figure is central to occultism, and it plays a prominent role in summoning spells whereby it is supposed to trap a demon, or devil, who can then be compelled to do the sorcerer's bidding. The belief that 5 was sacred led to an extra element, augmenting the traditional four that made a human being. This fifth essence, or quintessence, is the origin of the word quintessential.

In Islam 5 is a sacred number. Foremost are the five Pillars of Islam: declaration of faith, prayer, fasting during Ramadan, giving alms, and making the pilgrimage to Mecca. Prayers are said five times every day. There are five categories of Islamic law and five law-giving prophets (Noah, Abraham, Moses, Jesus, and Muhammad).

Is There Any Significance to Numerology in Islam?

It is permissible to believe in the effectiveness of doing certain things in numbers as and how they are mentioned for us to do in the hadiths. However, believing in the numbering system being the cause of harm and benefit without the cause and effect from Allah Most High is a baseless superstition. As Muslims, we place our trust in Allah Most High in all our affairs. Whatever happens in this World occurs with the will of Allah Most High. However, in Islam, accomplishing certain tasks in odd numbers is mentioned and significant, like three and the creation and doing of certain acts to seven.

Abu Huraira reported Allah's Messenger as saying: There are ninety-nine names of Allah; he who commits them to memory would get into Paradise. Verily, Allah is Odd (He is one, and it is an odd number), and He loves odd numbers. And in the narration of Ibn Umar " He who enumerated them." For this reason, in certain aspects of Sharia, when a large amount is intended, it must be done in the least odd number, which denotes a multitude, like three and seven. This has been chosen by Allah Most High and His Messenger, and they only know the wisdom behind it; we have to submit and follow.

Seven Deeds

Anas ibn Malik reported: The Messenger of Allah said, "Seven deeds of a servant continue to be rewarded after his death while he is in his grave: knowledge to be learned, constructing a canal, digging a well, planting a date-palm tree, building a mosque, handing down a written copy of the Quran, and leaving a righteous child who seeks forgiveness for him after his death."

Hadith on Shade: Seven People in the Shade of Allah

Abu Hurair reported: The Prophet said, "There are seven whom Allah will shade on a day when there is no shade but His. They are a just ruler, a youth who grew up in the worship of Allah, one whose heart is attached to the mosques, two who love each other, meet each other, and depart from each other for the sake of Allah, a man who is tempted by a beautiful woman of high status but he rejects her, saying, 'I fear Allah,' and one who spends in charity and hides it such that his right hand does not know what his left hand has given, and one who remembered Allah in private and he wept."

Seven Types of Ongoing Charity after Death

Anas ibn Malik reported: The Messenger of Allah said, "Seven deeds of a servant continue to be rewarded after his death while he is in his grave: knowledge to be learned, constructing a canal, digging a well, planting a date-palm tree, building a mosque, handing down a written copy of the Quran, and leaving a righteous child who seeks forgiveness for him after his death."

Meaning of Numbers in the Bible

During the time the Bible was written, several numbers had significant symbolism of deeper meaning. God uses symbols to communicate spiritual truths to mankind, including numbers.

It is important at the outset that we make it very clear that while God did inspire the use of specific numbers for symbolic reasons, we have to be careful not to place too much emphasis on numbers used in the Bible.

Such exaggerated emphasis can and has led to dangerous mystical ideas, bad theology, fringe eschatological approaches, and even outright occultism — believing that numbers hold a mystical power that can be tapped into for divination purposes.

Meaning of Numbers in the Bible

Let's take a brief look at the most common numbers found in Scripture and their biblical meanings.

Number 1: Symbolic of unity (Deuteronomy 6:4). God is one, Jesus and the Father are one, etc.

Number 2: Symbolic of a witness (Exodus 25:22; Matthew 26:60; Luke 10:1). Christ sent his disciples out two by two, and wherever two are gathered in His name He is present, etc.

Number 3: Symbolic of perfection and completion (John 2:19; Matthew 12:40; Luke 13:7). The three Persons of the Holy Trinity is the best example of this.

Number 4: Symbolic of the Earth (Daniel 7:3; Matthew 13: Isaiah 11:12). Four directions, four seasons.

Number 5: Symbolic of grace (Leviticus 1-5; Genesis 43:34; Matthew 14:17). Five types of offering in Leviticus, the Book of Psalms is divided into five sections, five books of the Law.

The Tabernacle contained five curtains, five pillars, five sockets, five bars, and the altar was five cubits by five cubits, etc.

Number 6: Symbolic of humanity (Genesis 1:31; Revelation 13:15-18). Man was created on the sixth day, man labors six days, slaves served only for six years, etc.

Number 7: Symbolic of spiritual perfection (Genesis 2:2; Psalm 12:6; Matthew 18:22). Thus, we see seven churches, seven spirits, seven gifts of the Holy Spirit, etc.

Number 8: Symbolic of a new beginning (Genesis 17:2; Mark 16:9-11; Genesis 7:13). Christ appeared eight times after His resurrection, God saved eight people from the Flood, newborns were circumcised on the eighth day.

Number 10: symbolizes earthly government (Ruth 4:2; Exodus 20:1-17; 1 Kings 11:31-35). Ten lost tribes, ten commandments, and a tithe being a tenth of our earnings.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the present study provides good reasons to believe that number words are not bounded by scalar implicature, but instead have exact meanings. By adopting a task in which implicatures are cancelled, we are able to disentangle semantic and pragmatic contributions to interpretation and clearly disassociate the meaning of numbers and true scalar quantifiers. These findings help to resolve a longstanding controversy in linguistics, and they validate a key assumption underlying much of the current developmental work on number word learning.



References:

1. Number symbolism - Pythagoreanism, Numerology, Mysticism | Britannica, September 9 2005
2. Symbolism of numbers, Mawlana Ilyas Pastel, Halal and Haram, Living Religion, February 12, 2023
3. What Is the Meaning of Numbers in the Bible and the Significance of Biblical Numerology? April 16, 2021 by Jack Ashcraft
4. The editors of Encyclopaedia Britannica Article History