

## NUMBERS AS SYMBOLS

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### Target audience

- Pre-service teachers: Secondary teachers
- Other situations: Tertiary teachers of foreign languages (teaching university foreign languages majors/minors)

### Itineraries

- Cultural identity exploration
- Developing knowledge about languages and cultures
- Dealing with intercultural and plurilingual communication

### Abstract

The activity looks at the universal and culture-specific nature of numbers and at number idioms in different languages. The activity consists of 2 worksheets (4x45 min). The first worksheet asks students to develop a mind map with associations for the concept 'number', discuss most and least 'popular' numbers by language and by culture in various areas of life. The second worksheet contains assignments on idiom numbers. It focuses on a range of language-related differences between different idioms and their role in creating national stereotypes. The worksheets are followed by an evaluation questionnaire, teacher's notes and a short bibliography. The activity can be extended and updated with regard to a student's unique cultural background and individual class cultural set-up.

### Rationale

The material focuses on the notion of number in different cultures and languages. The aim of the activity is to develop students' knowledge about language and culture in general and in particular, enhance their awareness of cultural and linguistic diversity in school and everyday life, develop a plurilingual and pluricultural competence, encourage to reflect on the interdependence of language, mind and perception of self and others as well as on the origins of stereotypes. Pair and group work are mainly used to enhance shared knowledge, to encourage cooperation and openness among the participants as well as to strengthen the ability to build upon peer feedback. The students are encouraged to discuss the activities and worksheets and think about how these are applicable in their own classroom environment.

### Personal and social dimensions

- Enhancing an awareness of diversity and reflecting about diversity as the main feature of societies and schools
- Developing a plurilingual and pluricultural competence in order to act in a new sociocultural setting
- Perception of and examination of one's own identity as a pluricultural complex resulting from multiple experiences in class and outside
- Reflecting on how different languages shape in their speakers different concepts of themselves and of other ethnic groups

**Professional dimensions**

- Thinking about concepts linked to language teaching
- Developing one's knowledge about language and culture in general
- Reflecting on languages and cultures in the field of general linguistics and languages of the world

# Worksheet 1

## Numbers in art

**Timing:** 45' x 2

**Material required:** the print-out of the activity, teachers' notes, paper, markers, a companion to English/ American/ French/ German/ etc literature, the Internet.

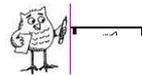
### Grouping

 (individual),  (pair work),  (group work),  (whole class)

### Description of the activities

The activity encourages students to reflect on the ubiquity of numbers, their universal and culture-bound nature. To achieve this aim the students are required to examine different (most and least common) numbers in everyday life, studies and in the titles of literary works in different languages

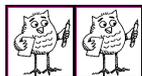
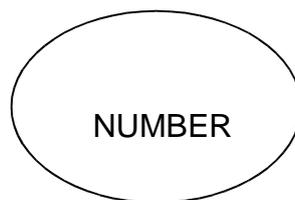
### Warm-up



Numbers are everywhere around us. We take them for granted as an unalienable part of our lives. Consider the famous quotation by Pythagoras “All is number”. In a group, brainstorm the following questions: What do you make of this quotation ? What characteristics of numbers does this quotation emphasize?



1) Develop a mind map to show your associations with the concept ‘Number’.  
Compare it to mind maps developed by your classmates (especially those who come from a different cultural background).



2) Discuss with your partner the differences between your mind map and his/hers. What hidden cultural assumptions or personal biases does it reveal?



3) Discuss your maps with the whole class, identify similarities and differences.



- 4) What are the most 'popular' numbers in your own culture? .....
- 5) In what contexts are these numbers most likely to occur? Give examples and explain your options:
- a) everyday life .....
  - b) jobs .....
  - c) school .....
  - d) politics .....
  - f) art .....
  - g) other .....



5) Think of a similar 'popular' number/s in the culture you study or know well. In pairs, prepare to discuss in class the following questions:

(5.1) Is this number/Are these numbers different from the one(s) in your culture?

.....

(5.2) In what contexts are these numbers most likely to occur? Give examples and explain your options:

- a) everyday life .....
- b) jobs .....
- c) school .....
- d) politics .....
- e) religion .....
- f) art .....
- g) other .....

6) Numbers make eye-catching titles/headings for literary works or works of art. Now you will see titles of three famous literary works with one word missing. Try to supply this word.

- a) '..... Kameraden'
- b) 'Волк и ..... козлят'
- c) '.....Night'



7) Are writers and poets guided by their artistic intuitions in their choice of numbers for their titles and choose at random, or do they follow a broader conceptual framework underlying their cultures?

Brainstorm this idea in groups and remember some works of art with numbers in the titles in different languages. Can any patterns be observed? Develop a poster to present and assess your

findings.

8) Follow-up.

How would you like to use this activity in class? What modifications and/or follow-up activities can you suggest?

**Evaluation:**

As a result of these activities I have become aware of my personal .....

As a result of these activities I have learned the following .....

As a result of these activities I would like to change ..... in my teaching practices/ teaching environment.

## Worksheet 2 Number Idioms Rule, O’K?

**Timing:** 45’ x 2

**Material required:** the print-out of the activity, teachers’ notes, sheets of paper, markers, a dictionary of idioms, the Internet.

### Grouping

 (individual),  (pair work),  (group work),  (whole class)

### Description of the activities

The activity encourages students to examine the link between language (number idioms), mind and culture. It addresses the issue of linguistic diversity and students’ awareness of it and invites to look into the origins of national stereotypes.



1. It is an accepted truth that language is a vehicle of culture. Number idioms can be found in any language. They reflect folk wisdom, the significance that ethnic communities attach to certain numbers as well as the cultural associations these numbers have in the national psyche. Can you quote 2-3 number idioms in your own language/other languages you speak? What do they stand for?

- 1) .....
- 2) .....
- 3) .....
- 4) .....
- 5) .....



2. How often you use number idioms when you speak your native language?/Any other language?



3. What are your reasons for choosing a number idiom against (a) a neutral expression; (b) another idiom with a similar meaning?



4. Ask your classmates/colleagues/ people in your speech community if they use number idioms and how often. What are their favourite ones? Do they attach any particular importance to this class of idiom? Why?



5. Listen to the recording<sup>1</sup> of several number idioms and identify the language they come from.



6. With your partner, look at the number idioms below and colour-code words that mean numbers in them.



7. Break down into three groups. Each group classifies the idioms below along one of the lines:

- a) by language (you can colour-code each language differently)
- b) by the number/related word used in them
- c) by meaning. For (c) fill in the chart

**(Idioms can be written on separate cards)**

Ménage `a trois / At the eleventh hour / deux poids et deux mesures / to kill two birds with one stone/ pays du troisièmt monde / faire d'un sel trait, en une fois / один в поле не воин / être ravi au septième ciel// in/mit einem Zuge/ faire coup double// in /mit drei Worten sagen / одним махом семерых убивахом /le revers de la médaille /меж двух огней / première damf de Tétât/ travailler pour deux, comme quatre /страны третьго мира / идти на все четыре стороны /un pour tous, tous pour un/ fünf Minuten vor zwölf / in one go /убить двух зайцев/ nager entre deux eaux/ die Dritte Welt/просто как дважды два / two sides of the same coin/ nur mit halbem Herzen/ Qui donne t^ot, donne deux fois/ страны третьего мира / seine zwei Seiten haben / третьего не дано/ The first Lady in the State/ die sieben Weltwunder/ entre quatre yeuz/eins, zwei, drei /знать как свои пять пальцев/ En deux terps et trois (quatre) mouvements/ семь чудес света/ für drei (arbeiten, essen)/ ewig und drei Tage /a nine-day wonder/ за один присест/ Unter vier Augen/ in seventh heaven / семь чудес света /on cloud nine/ les sept merveilles du monde/семь раз отмерь, один раз отрежь/ the Third World / im siebenten Himmel sein /на седьмом небе от счастья/ a half-hearted (attempt)/ look like million dollars // Nun /jetzt schlägt´s dreizehn/ семь нянек, а дитя без глаза / trois jours apr`es jamais / zwei Fliegen mit einer Klappe schlagen / есть за семерых /Seven Wonders of the world/ ein dreieckiges Verhältnis / two is company, three is a crowd /выглядеть на все сто/ a \$ 64000 question/ семь пятниц на неделе/ a cat has nine lives.

**LIST A (by language)**

.....  
.....

**LIST B (by the number used)**

.....  
.....





14. Brainstorm the following topic: To what extent might different languages shape in their speakers different concepts of themselves or of other ethnic groups?

15. How would you modify or develop this activity to teach it to your own class?

**Evaluation**

As a result of this activity, I have become aware of .....  
..... in my life.

As a result of this activity, I have learnt .....  
.....

As a result of this discussion, I would like to ..... in my teaching  
practices/teaching community.

## Teacher Notes

### Worksheet 1

The quotation in the warm-up activity encourages students to reflect on the ubiquitous and universal nature of numbers.

1. This mind map will help students to identify and become aware of the many associations and links numbers have.
2. / 3. Helps students to narrow the concept of number and put it into a familiar cultural context.
4. and 5. This also increases students' awareness of the many and varied uses that numbers can have in a specific culture. e.g., schools and forms in Russia are numbered, while in England schools are named and junior school classes are also named as well (Ms Black's Class ) etc. Some of the privately owned dwellings also have names, while in Russia most buildings are numbered. Knowing these cultural distinctions enhances students' cultural knowledge and understanding that despite their universal character numbers can have a different value in everyday life in different cultures.

Also, more academically-minded students can compare symbolic Western odd numbers 1,3,7, with their Oriental counterparts 2,4, 8 and pursue an individual research project "From other times and places" (Guiding question "What cultural implications does this difference have?")

6. a) Drei b) cemeпо c) The Twelfth.

7. Consider other famous or popular works of art, both classic and modern (novels, poems, plays, films, pictures, etc) preferably in their original languages, eg., 'Three men in a boat', 'Three musketeers', 'Twelve months' (Russian folktale), 'Around the world in 80 days', 'Catch 22', 'The three sisters', 'Le Tour du monde en quatre-vingts jours', '20 000 Leagues Under The Sea'

### Worksheet 2.

<sup>1</sup>Can be replaced with a viva voce.

6,7. Full list of number idioms by language and with numbers underlined in each idiom:

**English** At the eleventh hour / to kill two birds with one stone/ in two ticks / in one go /not to be able to put two and two together/ two sides of the same coin/ a half-hearted(attempt)/ The first Lady in the State/ in seventh heaven / on cloud nine/ The Third World / look like million dollars /Seven Wonders of the world/ two is company, three is a crowd / a \$ 64000 question/ at one's sixes and sevens/ on all fours/ once in a blue moon/in a couple of words/ third time lucky/ a cat has nine lives/ a nine-day wonder.

**German** in/mit einem Zuge/ in /mit drei Worten sagen / Doppelt gibt, wer schnell gibt/ fünf Minuten vor zwölf / die Dritte Welt/ nur mit halbem Herzen/ seine zwei Seiten haben/ die sieben Weltwunder/ eins, zwei, drei /für drei (arbeiten, essen)/ ewig und drei Tage/ Unter vier Augen/

im siebenten Himmel sein/ Nun /jetzt schlägt´s dreizehn/ zwei Fliegen mit einer Klappe schlagen / ein dreieckiges Verhältnis /

**French** Ménage `a trios/ deux poids et deux mesures/ pays du troisièmt monde /faire d'un sel trait, en une fois/ être ravi au septième ciel/ faire coup double/ le revers de la médaille / première damf de Tétât/ travailler pour deux, comme quatre / un pour tous, tous pour un/ nager entre deux eaux/ Qui donne t^ot, donne deux fois/ entre quatre yeuz/ En deux tepms et trois (quatre) mouvements/ les sept merveilles du monde/ trois jours apr`es jamais /

**Russian** один в поле не воин / одним махом семерых убивахом / меж двух огней / страны третьего мира / идти на все четыре стороны / убить двух зайцев / просто как дважды два / третьего не дано / знать как свои пять пальцев / семь чудес света/ за один присест / семь раз отмерь, один раз отрежь// на седьмом небе от счастья / семь няnek, а дитя без глаза / есть за семерых / выглядеть на все сто / семь пятниц на неделе

### Materials

1. Several monolingual dictionaries of idioms (English, German, French, Russian, etc.)
2. (Optional) a recording of several number idioms in different languages
3. Any recent encyclopedia or Wikipedia