

## A pragmatic analysis of numeral expressions in the Iraqi Arabic colloquial context

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### تحليل تداولي للتعبير الرقمية في سياق اللغة العربية العراقية العامية

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### Abstract

This study deals with the pragmatic dimension of numbers in Iraqi daily discourse, as symbolic systems that go beyond their traditional arithmetic function to become communicative tools loaded with deep contextual intentions. This, in turn, leads to a pragmatic problem in understanding the intended meaning behind using certain numbers in the colloquial context. Therefore, the problem of this study lies in the connotative ambiguity surrounding the use of numbers, where the number is shifted from its literal meaning as a real mathematical value to metaphorical and evasive connotations, which creates a gap between the apparent meaning and the pragmatically required meaning in different communication environments if their cultural codes are not deciphered. Hence, this study aims to explore the implicature of numbers in Iraqi society and how they can be used to violate Grice's maxims to achieve such goals as exaggeration, euphemism, or social identity. The study collected a purposeful sample of common numeral expressions in the Iraqi dialect, which included time numbers, symbolic numbers, and allegorical numbers. To achieve its aims, the study adopted the descriptive-analytical approach, relying on Searle's model of speech acts to analyze their forces, and Grice's taxonomy of maxims for analyzing the implicature resulting from the violation of the principles of quality, quantity, manner and relevance. The analysis results concluded that the number in the Iraqi dialect acts as an emotional condenser, where the large numbers (billion, thousand) are used for emotional amplification,

and the minor numbers (seconds, minutes) are used for temporal evasion. The results also showed that the numbers are used as social masks for generational identification (e.g., eighties, thousands) or ethical labelling (11). The most prominent conclusion was that the Iraqi speaker prioritizes the emotional quality of the number over its quantitative value, rendering the number in Iraqi communication a qualitative rather than a quantitative entity, transforming the number from a quantitative unit of measurement to a qualitative value that reflects the culture and heritage of the society. This proves that the pragmatic efficiency in the Iraqi dialect depends on understanding the contextual number rather than the arithmetic number, which opens new horizons for understanding digital language in contemporary human communication.

**Keywords:** communication, Iraqi Arabic colloquial context, numeral expressions, pragmatics, hidden meanings

### المخلص

تتناول هذه الدراسة البعد التداولي للأرقام في الخطاب اليومي العراقي، كأنظمة رمزية تتجاوز وظيفتها الحسابية التقليدية لتصبح أدوات تواصل محملة بمعان سياقية عميقة. وهذا بدوره يؤدي إلى مشكلة تداولية في فهم المعنى المقصود وراء استخدام أرقام معينة في السياق العامي. لذلك، تكمن مشكلة هذه الدراسة في الغموض الدلالي المحيط باستخدام الأرقام، حيث يتحول الرقم من معناه الحرفي كقيمة رياضية حقيقية إلى دلالات مجازية ومراوغة، مما يخلق فجوة بين المعنى الظاهر والمعنى المطلوب تداولياً في بيئات التواصل المختلفة إذا لم تفك رموز شفراتها الثقافية. لذا، تهدف هذه الدراسة إلى استكشاف مضامين الأرقام في المجتمع العراقي وكيف يمكن استخدامها لانتهاك مبادئ غرايس لتحقيق أهداف مثل المبالغة، أو التلميح، أو الهوية الاجتماعية. تم جمع عينة قصدية من التعبيرات الرقمية الشائعة في اللهجة العراقية، والتي شملت أرقام الزمن، والأرقام الرمزية، والأرقام الاستعارية. لتحقيق أهدافها، اعتمدت الدراسة النهج الوصفي- التحليلي، بالاستناد إلى نموذج سيرل لأفعال الكلام لتحليل تأثيرها، وتصنيف غرايس للمبادئ الحوارية لتحليل المضامين الناتجة عن خرق مبادئ النوعية والكمية والأسلوب والملاءمة. خلصت نتائج التحليل إلى أن الرقم في اللهجة العراقية يعمل كمكثف عاطفي، حيث تستخدم الأرقام الكبيرة (المليارات، الآلاف) لتضخيم المشاعر، وتستخدم الأرقام الصغيرة (الثواني، الدقائق) للمراوغة الزمنية. كما أظهرت النتائج أن الأرقام تستخدم كأقنعة اجتماعية للتعرف على الأجيال (مثل الثمانينيات، الالفينات) أو التصنيف الأخلاقي (مثل رقم ١١). وكان الاستنتاج الأبرز هو أن المتحدث العراقي يعطي الأولوية للنوعية العاطفية للرقم على قيمته الكمية، مما يجعل الرقم في التواصل العراقي كياناً نوعياً بدلاً من كمي، محولاً الرقم من وحدة قياس كمية إلى قيمة نوعية تعكس ثقافة وتراث المجتمع. وهذا يثبت أن الكفاءة التداولية في اللهجة العراقية

تعتمد على فهم الرقم السياقي بدلا من الرقم الحسابي، مما يفتح آفاقا جديدة لفهم اللغة الرقمية في التواصل البشري المعاصر.

**الكلمات المفتاحية:** التواصل، السياق العامي العربي العراقي، التعبير الرقمية، التداولية، المعاني الخفية.

## 1. Introduction

Numbers are a major part of the Iraqi Arabic colloquialism as they can carry far beyond the quantitative data. They can be indicative of social identities, culture, and power. In the traditional linguistic perspective, numbers are abstract symbols that indicate specific quantitative values; however, their extrapolation in different discourses reveals dimensions that extend beyond mere arithmetic numbers to pragmatic references, where the number is not always understood based on its mathematical value, but rather on what speech acts it accomplishes (Searle, 1969). In Arabic, the number can be used as a communicative tool loaded with hidden intentions, capable of forming meaning based on the attitudes and contexts that are the main drivers of the pragmatic analysis (Levinson, 1983).

The transition from the semantic aspects of the number to its pragmatic ones imposes questions about how the number deviates from its literal meaning to perform such functions as exaggeration or approximation. For instance, the use of large numbers to express distress, such as saying "a thousand hours", is a violation of Grice's (1975) "maxim of quality", in which the speaker uses this mathematical expression to achieve a conversational implicature that conveys the extent of suffering to the listener.

Furthermore, the number in Arabic discourse is closely related to cultural scripts that make some numbers symbols of perfection or plurality (Wierzbicka, 1991). This is emphasized by Leech (1983) in his differentiation between linguistic and social rules, where the use of the number is subject to a social pragmatism that makes the religious or heritage context the main guide to understanding.

Even though the use of numbers in Arabic has been approached in various perspectives, and to the researcher's knowledge, no study had

been conducted to analyze numbers in the Iraqi Arabic colloquial context from a pragmatic perspective. Accordingly, this study seeks to analyze numbers as pragmatic phenomena that are understood via the interaction between the speaker's intention and the listener's interpretation in the light of the Iraqi Arabic cultural environment. The current study, thus, fills this gap by concentrating on the use of numbers in everyday communication in the Iraqi Arabic colloquial context to reveal various hidden meanings.

## 2. Literature Review

This section presents and defines the core concepts of this study to better understand them. It clarifies the Iraqi Arabic colloquial context, the concept of numbers in pragmatics, their meanings and significance in different cultures, in addition to relevant previous studies.

### 2.1 The Iraqi Arabic Colloquial Dialect

Iraq is a heterogeneous country with a religious and ethnic diversity. This heterogeneity is reflected linguistically as there is a vast linguistic diversity. Among all varieties of Arabic spoken in Iraq, the major variant spoken in Iraq is Iraqi Arabic, as it is the native language of over 80% of the Iraqi people (Peoples & Bailey, 2011: 298).

The first major and mostly used classification of Iraqi Arabic dialects established by Blanc (1964) is called *qəltu-gilit*. It is applied to the literature to mean the separation of Arabic dialects spoken in the Mesopotamian region. Jastrow (2006) describes *qaqueltu* dialects group as three more subgroups: Euphrates, Tigris and Anatolian. The Euphrates group spreads along the Euphrates River in Iraq. The Tigris group consists of Christian Baghdadi Arabic (CBA), Jewish Baghdadi Arabic (JBA), dialects used by Muslims living within the territory of Mosul to the city of Sāmarra, and dialects used by Jewish and Christian communities living within the entire *qəltu*-speaking area. Lastly, the Anatolian group is related to dialects spoken in Turkey.

The Iraqi-Arabic dialect takes an immense effort to be categorized and filled in as per the sociological and sociolinguistic viewpoints. The gaps in the research of Iraqi-Arabic dialect concerning its regional variant are numerous because there are numerous sub-local forms of the dialect that

were not studied. Therefore, in the study of the Iraqi-Arabic dialects, there are numerous aspects that should be distinguished regarding the morphological, phonological and lexical application of language (Meyerhoff, 2006, p. 16).

In Iraq, the dialects are distributed regionally into three types: the southern, the middle and the northern ones. There are features and characteristics of each type and the ways how it is said. Nevertheless, an actual geographical map of the various dialects that can be used in Iraq is not available (□□y□ & Nbyl, 2018, p. 23).

## 2.2 The Pragmatic Concept of Numeral Expressions

Traditionally numeral expressions (one, two, etc.) have been taken to be scalar expressions like quantifiers (some, a few, all). The pragmatic considerations are applied to decide on the more suitable reading applicable within a given context. When numbers are simply a concept related to quantity, there would be no distinction in their meaning; but when they are related to superstition, then they are something more meaningful. According to historians, the superstitious beliefs were formed in the early days of humanity (Yu, 2015).

Numbers do not merely represent a convenient way of measuring the physical world; they are not simply quantitative, but also qualitative. There are two properties of numbers, namely: they are concrete, and they are determined by the quantity; they are non-concrete (abstract), meaning they have a qualitative manifestation, which varies through cultural and historical backgrounds.

Numbers are concepts that do not exist physically, yet they can be expressed as symbols known as numerals. For example, 8 p.m. means eight in the evening. A spoken number may be a word in a language, whereas a written number may be identified as a word, a symbol, or a set of symbols (e.g. 1, 2, 12, or 21). The Western and Chinese cultures have certain similarities in the cognition of concrete numbers. Certain non-concrete (abstract) numbers are also able to acquire the status of cross-cultural awareness due to the growing rate of cultural contacts and reciprocal communication. But the character of numbers is neither good nor bad. Hence, numbers have become the most significant aspect of

culture, the communicator of human beings and the mother of computers (Yu, 2015).

These linguistic homonyms, and whether they provide a good or a bad connotation to the number itself, have resulted in the origin of certain superstitions or taboos of numeral representations (Bjorkell, 2012). Numbers are regarded as paradigms of creation, and hence symbols of perfection (Fontana, 1993, p. 64).

### 2.3 The Cultural Significance of Numeral Expressions

Numerals have been an interest since they are frequently used as symbols of some concepts and they are present in the folklore of all cultures. The application of numbers in various cultures has been filled with numerous symbolisms since the earliest documented phenomena. Such cultural acquisition of meaning gives the possibility of enormous diversity across the borders of any nation in terms of the symbolism of numbers. Such a possibility of numeral symbolism is rather universal. Numbers have a conspicuous role in our everyday life. The mystical numbers have been taken to be feminine and masculine, holy and evil, auspicious and inauspicious. Number superstition tends to be grounded in the symbolic traditions of numbers (the sacred seven and unlucky thirteen) (Yu, 2015).

Special meanings of numbers have been used in historical times, in cultures, mythology, and in religions. The beliefs of the various cultures across the world are quite varied, as some are based on religion and others are based on tradition. Numbers may have other meanings depending on the culture. Their spiritual value can be good or bad; the actual figure can be attributed to good luck in a given country and bad luck in another. As an illustration, four is a neutral number in Germany, but in China, the sound of the words (four) and (death) are synonymous, thus four represents a bad omen in Chinese culture (Stewart, 2020).

Numbers have been associated with the old traditions and cultural beliefs in Arab culture. There are numbers which have profound spiritual meanings, which influence the life path and style of a person. Most numbers have symbolic values besides having spiritual senses, and one needs to know more about these values to determine their influence on

the Arab culture. Due to the significance of numbers in the Arab culture, they have been widely used in normal conversation. Verbal representations of numbers have their own meaning attached to each set of numbers. The connotations of the verbal communication are similar in most Arab countries, with slight variations. To illustrate, when Jordan is compared to Egypt, most of the number connotations in the colloquialism would be similar, which is the case in most of the Middle East countries (Jaber, Jubran & Daana, 2023).

Ancient Greeks were especially interested in the nature of numbers. Numbers possessed certain qualities to them. As an illustration, the Greeks believed that odd numbers (1, 3, 5, 7, 9) were or could be broken, weak and feminine, while the even numbers (2, 4, 6, 8, 10) were or could not be broken, strong and masculine (Virginia, 2001, p. 378). Similarly, in Chinese culture, even numerals are feminine, while odd numerals are masculine (Lip, 1996, p. 11).

The Greeks and most other ancient people of the time thought that numbers possessed magical powers. The Chinese culture is full of superstitions and beliefs, e.g. numerology employing the laws of heaven and earth (astronomy and geography). The number thirteen is considered taboo in English culture. It is generally attributed to the New Testament that it derives its negative symbolism. The ancient Chinese and Egyptians, however, did not consider the number 13 as unlucky (Goetz, 1991, p. 517).

In Western culture, odd numbers are considered better than even numbers except for 13. Even numbers are believed to be inauspicious, whereas odd numbers are believed to be good. To take an example, in Russia, odd numbers are to be used in festivals, and even in funerals (Russian superstitions, n.d.).

Based on the above illustrations, it is possible to realize that the relationship between numbers and superstitions has an ancient source; over time, the origin of a superstition has been lost as time went by, but some ancient beliefs still permeated the larger culture.

## 2.4 Connotations of Numeral Expressions

This section clarifies the connotative meanings of numbers from (0) to (10), as follows:

0 (Zero): it is used in reference to the Arabic language, where it is known as sifra (cipher) and is of no value by itself, but it fills the gaps that other numerals do not have (Chevalier & Gheerbrant, 1996, p. 1144). It represents death, i.e. the state where the life-forces are changed.

1 (One): according to the western anthropological perspective, one represents the homo erectus as the only species that walks upright (Chevalier & Gheerbrant, 1996, p. 719). It portrays the male principle (O'Connor & Airey, 2007, p. 28). In Western culture, being number one is equal to being the best.

2 (Two): in various rituals and cultures, it is a symbol of division, duality, balance, plurality and diversity, femininity, and is propitious, alternative, contentious, parallel and opposite poles (Kenner, 2006, p. 19).

3 (Three): in most Religions, three (3) is a religious figure. Three is a concept in various rituals and cultures that portrays perfection, holiness, bounty and prosperity, reverence, and masculinity. It is often perceived as a fortunate number, perhaps due to being a number that represents the end of a dispute or a decisive step that can bring about fortune or tragedy. The wishes in folk tales are habitually fulfilled three times. There are three options that heroes or heroines have, three challenges that are presented or three opportunities to win (Tresidder, 2000, pp. 165-166).

4 (Four): it represents wholeness and the universal, and is associated with seasons, elements and the phases of the moon. It is also related to the cross and the square, which indicate order, stability, and solidity (O'Connor & Airey, 2007, pp. 27-28). Four is the number of symbols representing time, which is divided into four units (day, night, Moon, and year), and the life of people into four ages (childhood, youth, maturity, and old age). Four is a symbol of tangibility, establishment, distinctiveness, discipline, totality, bountifulness, femininity, immense power, sacredness, and tabooed figure in numerous rituals and customs of different societies (Wilkinson, 2008, p. 294).

5 (Five): Pythagoras believed that five was the number of humanity, a human body with four limbs and a head, and the body is contained within a pentagram (O'Connor & Airey, 2007, p. 28).

6 (Six): it signifies completeness. Various rituals and cultures have several symbolic meanings of the number six, including the world creation, joy and misfortune, spiritual fate, balance, harmony and unity of opposites, sin of ancestors, fertile and wise (Schimmel, 2016, 137).

7 (Seven): it is common in magic and divine mystery. It is the number of the planets and the number of the days of the week (O'Connor & Airey, 2007, p. 28). In other religions and cultures, it is a representation of perfection, holiness, abundance, immortality, material-spiritual unity, complexity, finality and magic (Bruce-Mitford, 2009, 30).

8 (Eight): it represents the richness and strength. In various rituals and cultures, it is a sign of equilibrium and lawfulness, perfection, plentifulness and innumeracy (O'Connor & Airey, 2007, p. 29).

9 (Nine): it is a symbol of the triple power of three, completion and fulfillment. There is a famous expression that a cat has nine lives, so cats are lucky that they can escape death on many occasions. This is very lucky as it represents the number of heavenly spheres (O'Connor & Airey, 2007, p. 29).

10 (Ten): it is the number of mystical completeness and unity. In decimal systems, it represents the revival to unity. It completes all the numbers between zero and nine; hence, it represents completeness. The ten years can be said to be a turning point in history, or a cycle in myth. For example, Troy was besieged for nine years and fell on the tenth (Cooper, 1978, p. 119).

To an extent that their significance has not been overshadowed, numbers have been considered as sacred, ominous, and special in most traditions and cultures (Nooraghaei, 2008, 13). This gives a conclusion that numbers possess symbolic and interpretable meanings (Robertson, 2018, 332).

## 2.5 The Theoretical Framework

The present study relies on a theoretical combination that combines Searle's (1969) functional approach and Grice's (1975) inferential approach to analyze numbers as linguistic phenomena serving contextual pragmatic purposes, as clarified below:

### 1. Searle's (1969) Model of Speech Act Theory

This model is based on the idea that saying something means doing something. In the context of numbers, the number is not only seen as an assertion, but also as a tool for communicative actions. Therefore, Searle's classification of speech acts is adopted to analyze the number according to the following dimensions:

- A. Locutionary Act: It refers to the utterance of a number in its abstract linguistic structure (e.g., uttering the number "one thousand").
- B. Illocutionary Act: It is the pragmatic intention of the number, and it is classified in this study into declaratives and assertives, which provide data or facts; expressives, which express emotions (exaggeration, distress, praise); commissives, which refer to promises and are used for euphemistic purposes; and directives, which influence the recipient (command, request, urge).
- C. Perlocutionary Act: It is the effect that the number leaves on the listener (persuasion, apology, or response).

### 2. Grice's (1975) Model of Conversational Implicature

Grice's (1975) model is used to explain how the listener understands the indirect meaning of a number when it deviates from its arithmetic significance. The study focuses on the Cooperative Principle and its sub-principles (Flouting the Maxims):

- A. Flouting the Quality Maxim: When a speaker uses a mathematically unreal number (e.g., "I called you a hundred times"), s/he is deliberately violating the truthfulness of the statement to send an overstated message.

- B. Flouting the Quantity Maxim: When a speaker presents a number that is less or more than the situation requires to make a pragmatic effect (such as disruptive brevity or boring detail with numbers).
- C. Flouting the Relevance Maxim: It is violated when a number is inserted into a context that does not seem mathematical at first glance. For example, (انت صفر عالمين) (you are nothing), this number does not describe or define someone as being zero, but it means s/he has no effect on others or is neglected.
- D. Flouting the Manner Maxim: It is violated when the number is used as a code that only people of the same culture can understand. For example, the number (هذا سببيني) (seven-months born) reflects that this child is brave and resilient, implying vitality.
- E. Implicature: It is the mental process that the listener performs to understand the gap between what was said literally (the mathematical number) and what was meant pragmatically (the social meaning), depending on the common context.

The two models are applied together in this study through the examination and interpretation mechanism. On the one hand, Searle's model examines the type of action performed by the number (i.e., is it a reproach? is it a promise?). On the other hand, Grice's model interprets the shift from the literal meaning of a number to its intended meaning by analyzing the violation of the cooperative principle.

## 2.6 Previous Studies

In this section, the earlier studies on numbers are reviewed from different perspectives. These studies are organized chronologically, starting with the oldest to the latest ones, as follows:

When it comes to number connotation in varying cultural collocations, Ayonrinde et al. (2021, p. 179) used superstition and bad omen to good omen to explain the cultural relativity of numbers in various societies. As for Papafragou and Musolino (2002), they examined the semantic and pragmatic aspects of the number expressions. They found that number terms and quantifiers respond differently regarding the scalar inferences that they support. Moreover, Bender and Beller (2011) analyzed the counting systems of Polynesian and Micronesian languages, explaining

the linguistic nature of counting systems and their cognitive nature. While Alavijeh (2013) explored the meaning of the number seven in terms of culture, religion, social and mystical in terms of exploring the different Islamic, Christian, Jewish and Hindu cultures.

In addition, Turlukanovna and Zhuldyz (2015) examined the importance of numbers in the Turkish number system. They contended that the numbers are symbolic and possess connotative meanings, which are not similar to their original meaning. The primary causes of their symbolism were religion and mythology, which influence our understanding of symbolic meanings of numbers. Then Pratt and Kirillova (2019) employed the socio-demographic, psychographic, and situational traits to justify how guests in the Chinese and Western hotels are ambivalent to the specific floor or room number. O'Shaughnessy, Gibson, and Piantadosi (2022) researched the cultural roots of symbolic numbers. They discussed six uncovered natural predictions of strong numeral nativism on a multidisciplinary view. They saw them both in conflict with anthropological and developmental scientific evidence. They emphasized the role of economic and social aspects in creating radically new cognitive structures to reach culturally specific objectives.

Besharati and Fakhari (2023) compared the literal meaning and symbolic meaning of numbers in Qur'anic verses about creation. They claimed that the Glorious Qur'anic numbers possess numeral meanings. They discovered that the literal meanings of numbers in such verses are not metaphors, ironies, or parables, and they may be symbolic. Besides, the ritual-cultural symbology is also closely related to the literal meanings of the numbers and their associations in these verses. According to Jaber, Jubran and Daana (2023), the Arabic culture interprets the meaning of the numbers by referring to the old traditions and cultural beliefs since some of them have profound spiritual and symbolic significance, which can influence the direction of a person. Thus, they performed a pragmalinguistic research of the usage of limited numbers (10, 100, 1000, 2, 7 and 60 or 66) and their contextual connotation in Arabic. They clarified that some numbers carry a negative meaning, whereas the rest are employed to mean exaggeration. Besides, the connotations of numbers are connected with social, religious, and cultural values.

It is evident that few studies have been done on the pragmatic interpretation of numbers as applied in colloquial settings in general and the Iraqi Arabic setting in particular. In line with the above studies, there exists a gap with respect to the role played by socio-cultural and political aspects in the perception and interpretation of numbers. However, unlike the study of Jaber et al. (2023), which is the most related to the current study, the interlocutors within the Iraqi Arabic colloquial environment regard the representatives of various number formats under different connotations depending on their use.

### 3. Research Method

The study employs the qualitative content analysis, aiming to examine the numeral expressions and interpret them pragmatically. It adapts an eclectic model (see section 2.5) to analyze the data, which is collected using a purposive sampling method, including phrases and sentences with numeral expressions (as numbers and nouns) used in daily conversations. Iraqis use these expressions in their written and spoken communication. They are transliterated and translated into English in order to be comprehended by the readers. The analysis process is applied as follows:

1. Unit of Analysis: The unit of analysis is a sentence or phrase that includes a numeral expression (whether it is a number or its noun), and is studied within its full textual context.
2. Coding Categories: According to content analysis, phrases and sentences containing numeral expressions are categorized as follows:
  - A. Figurative numbers: this category includes large numbers, such as thousand, million, hundred, which are often used to exaggerate, blame or reproach.
  - B. Temporal evasion numbers: this category includes such expressions as minute, second, 5 minutes, or even thousands, which are used to manage social expectations.
  - C. Cultural symbolism numbers: this category includes numbers like one, seven, forty, which reflect different cultural references and proverbs, not ranking.

Based on mixing Searle's and Grice's models, the categories of analysis are divided into three levels:

A. Category of Speech Act (based on Searle's model): declaratives and assertives, using a number to state to a fact (e.g., accurate statistics); expressives, using a number to express a psychological state (such as using "one thousand" to express distress or exaggeration); directives; using a number to influence the listener's behavior (e.g., "Give me a minute" to ask for a wait); and commissives refer to promises and are used for euphemistic purposes.

B. Category of Conversational Principle (based on Grice's model): adherence to the principles means using the number in its exact literal sense, while flouting the principles means using the number as a metaphor, exaggeration (violation of quality), or to deliberately give incomplete information.

C. Category of Pragmatic Function: determines the meaning conveyed by the number (exaggeration, underestimation, approximation, a religious/cultural symbolism).

#### **4. Results and Discussion**

This section discusses the findings of the research sample analysis based on the methodology described in the previous section. To elaborate further, the analysis follows a thematic categorization of numeral expressions and their purposes in daily communication. The numeral expressions represent the unit of analysis, and thus they are bolded to be easily recognized in the text. Each numeral expression is stated as a nominal phrase or a complete sentence, with its English transliteration and translation (the Arabic transliteration system (English) clarified in table (1) is employed in this study). This is further complemented by a contextual analysis to reveal the pragmatic connotations of numbers in the Iraqi Arabic colloquial context.

Table 1: The Arabic transliteration system (English)

Arabic letters	English transliteration	Arabic letters	English transliteration
ا	' , ā	ط	□
ب	b	ظ	□
ت	t	ع	'
ث	th	غ	gh
ج	j	ف	f
ح	□	ق	q
خ	kh	ك	k
د	d	ل	l
ذ	th	م	m
ر	r	ن	n
ز	z	هـ	h
س	s	و	w
ش	sh	ي	y
ص	□	ك	□
ض	□		

#### 4.1 Figurative Numbers

This section illustrates the figurative meanings and uses of numbers in the Iraqi Arabic colloquial context and analyzes them pragmatically. It includes numeral expressions that have figurative meanings, such as metaphors, exaggerations and so on. The numeral expressions under this category are clarified in table (2).

Table 2: Numeral expressions used for figurative purposes

No.	Text (its transliteration)	Text in English	Speech act	Violation of Grice's maxims	Implicit meaning
1	مئة/ الف هلا (Miat/halla)	Deep and warm greetings	Expressive: to welcome warmly.	Quantity: using the numeral expression (one hundred/thousand) to enhance the warmth of the meeting	It indicates moving from a normal welcome to a hearty welcome and to amplify a greeting. The number here represents the warm feelings for meeting, not the number of greetings.
2	الف مبارك	Warmest	Expressive:	Quantity:	The numeral

	(Alf mubarak)	congratulations	to congratulate warmly	using the numeral expression (thousand) to multiply the value of wishing for good and show your warmest happiness.	expression (thousand) acts as an intensifier to amplify and show the intensity of joy to others.
3	مليار احبك (Milliar a $\square$ ibak)	I love you so much	Expressive: to express immeasurable love.	Quality: indicating that love is not calculated or measured in billions of dinars.	The use of an astronomical number (billion) is meant to show infinity. The numeral expression here is a metaphor for emotional abundance.
4	صارلي الف ساعة انتظرك ( $\square$ arly alf sa'ah anta $\square$ rak)	I've been waiting for you for a long time	Expressive/ Directive: to reproach	Quality and quantity: referring to a blatant exaggeration of time.	This numeral expression reflects temporal evasion. The goal is to embody the weight of waiting and impatience, not to set a time period.
5	أقدر اميزك من بين الالاف (A $\square$ dar amayzak min bin al-all'f)	a. You are unique enough to beat the odds b. You mean so much to me c. Your presence is so overwhelming that it erases everyone around you	Assertive/ Expressive: to confirm uniqueness	Quality and quantity: reflecting an excess of the actual need for identification.	The number (thousands) here does not act as a number, but as a background noise, through which the image of the person in question is highlighted in high definition. Thus, it indicates selection and uniqueness.
6	انت غلبيت حياتي ٣٦٠ / ١٨٠ درجة ('nta $\square$ labt $\square$ ayaty 180/360 darajah)	You have totally changed my life	Expressive: to confirm a psychological state describing fate	Manner: indicating a total change or return to the same point, meaning a great change.	This refers to a radical transformation. Here, 180 means a total change, and 360 means starting over.

Table (2) shows the analysis of the numeral expressions according to the pragmatic models adopted (Searle and Grice). It is noticed that the numeral expressions transform from their mathematical value into a figurative device. In all of these expressions, the quality and quantity

maxims are deliberately violated. It is clear that the numerical information is not used to mislead the hearer, but rather to create a conversational implicature. The explicit meaning shows arithmetic numbers (100, 1000, billion), while the implicit meaning is expressed as too much, exaggerated, and exceptional. According to Searle's (1969) model, these samples fall under the category of expressives, assertives and directives, where the speaker is not interested in matching the word to the world, meaning that s/he does not care if the clock is actually 1000 or if it is actually 100, but is interested in matching the word to a mental state. For example, the illocutionary force of (مليار احبك) is emotional exaggeration, while (صارلي الف ساعة انتظرك) denotes protest and distress. This phenomenon can be called numerical emotional multipliers, which are numbers devoid of their computational quality and become amplification devices.

#### 4.2 Temporal Evasion Numbers

Under this category, the numeral expressions are employed to convey different implicit meanings related to temporal evasion. The numeral expressions under this category are clarified in table (3).

Table 3: Numeral expressions used for temporal evasion purposes

No.	Text (its transliteration)	Text in English	Speech act	Violation of Grice's maxims	Implicit meaning
1	ثواني/ دقائق واكون يمك (Thawany/ Daqiaq w'akon yamak)	I will be there soon	Commissive: to promise attending shortly.	Quality: acting as a euphemistic device	This represents a promise. Using the smallest unit of time to mitigate the effect of undesired waiting time.
2	يمعود هسه كلها دقيقتين ونوصل شخبصتنا (Yam'wad hasah kulha daqiqten wnw□al shkhh□tna)	a. Dude, be patient. b. We are almost there.	Directive: to mitigate urgency	Quality and manner: indicating a white lie; this is often said when taking a long time to reach to enforce others to wait for you. Additionally,	This acts as a sedative. The number "2" in Iraqi culture (two minutes, two moments) is used to reduce vast distances. It is used to mitigate the anger or urgency of others. Here, "two

				using (هسه) with (دقيقتين) creates a temporal ambiguity intentionally.	minutes" is used to give the impression that the trip is almost over, to avoid blame for the delay.
3	لا تنتظروني ترا اني مطول احتمال بعد 5 ساعات واوصلكم (La tinta□rony tara āni m□awwil, i□timāl ba'ad 5 sā'āt wa- aw□alkum)	Do not wait for me. I will take a long time to reach.	Directive: to disclaim intentional delay	Quality and quantity: indicating exaggeration and open time.	The numeral phrase here implicitly means that "I cannot be in a hurry, so do not bind yourselves to me".

In table (3), different numeral expressions are employed in different contexts related to temporal evasion. In Iraqi society, the numeral expression "minutes", for example, is a psychological unit of measurement, not a temporal one. Here, the purpose is not to tell the time, but to silence or forcibly reassure others. The speaker wants the listener to stop complaining, as highlighted by (شخبصتنا), which serves as an offensive act to defend the speaker's face. This implicitly means "Be patient, the distance is short (mentally) even if it is long (in reality)." Here, the listener is complicit in flouting the maxims, as s/he knows that the speaker will be late, but s/he accepts "seconds/ minutes" as a sedative. This is called communicative success despite the literal lie. This category proves that small numbers (minutes, two minutes) act as a temporal minimization as opposed to large numbers (hours, years), as in the third example, which act as time amplification. The third example provided in the table represents a case of protective augmentation, where the number is used not to describe the time, but to manage the maximum limit of expectations. The speaker asks others to "not wait" to relieve themselves of time pressure or guilt for their delay. Here, this imperative structure "do not wait for me" is an explicit prohibition intended to change the behavior of the recipients (stop waiting). In Iraqi communication, the phrase "5 hours" or "6 hours" is often used as a symbol for open time or too long delay, regardless of the actual duration (which may be only two hours or less). Using "5 hours" here is an over-the-counter strategy. The speaker chooses a long-time expression to ensure that others will not

actually wait for him, and because if he arrives 3 hours later (i.e. earlier than his alleged time), he will look like "faster" rather than "late." The speaker tries to protect his "face" from future reproach by setting a huge time barrier that is difficult to break through with blame. In the Iraqi dialect, specific numbers (such as 5 hours) act as 'precautionary amplification tools'. The speaker uses a larger number to create a free time zone that protects him from deliberative and social accountability.

### 4.3 Cultural Symbolism Numbers

Under this category, numbers are associated with different cultural norms, clarified in table (4), as follows:

Table 4: Numbers as cultural symbolism

No.	Text (its transliteration)	Text in English	Speech act	Violation of Grice's maxims	Implicit meaning
1	حانت ساعة الصفر (Hānat sā'at al- □ifir)	a. The time is now b. The die is cast c. It is go-time d. The clock is ticking e. The tipping point has been reached	Assertive/ Declarative: to commence a decisive action.	Relevance: zero here is not a number, but a "starting point."	It is a metaphorical timing. It indicates the maximum readiness for the event.
2	الثالثة ثابتة (Al-thālitha thābta)	a. Third time is a charm. b. The third attempt is decisive/successful.	Commissive/ Declarative: to affirm a requirement for patience or decisiveness	Quality/ Manner: It is a vivid example of how "belief" dominates "number". The speaker here makes a claim that lacks empirical evidence, indicating optimism or self-encouragement. Moreover,	This number reflects superstitious optimism. It denotes that the third attempt will be successful. It also represents the law of opportunity, where the popular belief is that the third attempt is the touchstone of luck. The number 3 here represents the psychological deciding point.

				the phrase is inherently ambiguous. It does not define "What is a constant thing?" Is it success? Or stop? Or failure?	
3	صوتك واصل ل سابع جار (□awtak wā□il li-sābi' jār)	Your voice is extremely loud (literally, your voice is reaching the seventh neighbor)	Expressive/ Directive: to indicate reproach, representing a moral authority (requiring to lower the voice)	Quantity: the number 7 here is meant to amplify the error and reflect a sign of annoyance.	Culturally, the number 7 represents the maximum social distance allowed. It denotes Shari'a obligation, invoking the Prophetic Commandment, which gives the complaint a moral weight that the listener cannot ignore.
4	ام سبع عيون (Um saba' 'uyūn)	Amulet for protection.	Expressive/ Declarative: to indicate fear of envy.	<b>Quality/ Quantity/ Manner:</b> The speaker here does not mean to tell a scientific fact, but rather to practice a magical/protective act. The speaker avoids direct clarity (e.g., a blue piece of plastic for protection) and uses a culturally coded idiomatic designation.	It indicates ritualistic protection. A traditional amulet used for protection against the "evil eye" or envy. In popular culture, it gives a protective intensity, as the number 7 is associated with completeness, perfection, and universal immunization (the seven heavens, days of the week, etc.).
5	هذا ١١	He is	<b>Directive: to</b>	Relevance:	It is a metaphor of

	(Hadha ida'ash)	untrustworthy/ deceptive	<b>warn</b> or reflect caution against a cunning person	The number 11 stands for "dodge" or "deception" (similar to the movement of the legs when running).	duplicity and a physical analogy. The number symbolizes the speed of escape or the movement of the legs when dribbling.
6	سوالفه كلها +١٨ (Swalfa kulha +18)	Vulgar explicit speech.	or Prohibitive: to represent a camouflage.	Manner: it is used as a polite "taboo" to prevent curiosity or to warn of obscene content without uttering profanity.	It is a content rating label, reflecting explicit content and ethical control, showing that his speech is vulgar or contains adult-only themes.
7	مثل ام ٤٤ (Mithil um 44)	Deceptive/ Harmful person	Expressive: to turn the human character into an animal mold to increase the power of insult or warning	Quality/ Quantity/ Manner: to represent a metaphorical exaggeration, describing a multitude of tricks, toxicity, or the pursuit of evil, symbolizing gossip or the many means that hurt others, requiring prior knowledge of the mental link between this insect and unacceptable human behavior.	This is a zoomorphic metaphor. Centipede is a metaphor for a treacherous person.
8	صاحبنا طلع ٥٦ (□ā□ibna □ila'	He is a fraudster/ con	Expressive: to reflect a	Manner: The number	Numerical Slang/Coding

	56)	artist	culturally coded act of condemnation.	56 is a local code for a con artist.	
9	جابها بالتسعين (Jāb-ha bil-tis'in)	a. He is professional b. Last-minute salvation c. This is a knockout	Expressive: to reflect astonishment and professionalism	Relevance: it represents a mathematical metaphor.	It symbolizes a knockout, combining spatial precision (hard angle) with temporal decisiveness (killer time). It reflects fascination and skill.
10	الفينات/ ثمانينات (Alfināt/ Thmaninat)	Generational stereotyping	Expressive: to act as a social brand, classifying a total social identity.	Quality/ Quantity/ Manner: the number here is used as a socio-cultural code, a "mask" of social qualities and semantic collector to shorten certain behavioral traits (e.g., digital openness, spoil, or lack of patience according to popular custom). The Iraqi listener immediately understands that "1980s" means the golden generation, patience, suffering, dignity; while "2000s" means the generation of technology, speed, modernity.	It represents generational and temporal categorization, comparing the youth of the 2000s to the 80s. The number encapsulates an entire moral and behavioral system (modernity vs. sobriety).

Based on the results shown in table (4), the numbers under this category reflect:

### 1. Pragmatism of objectification and coding (numerical iconicity)

The numbers in the sample (e.g., 56, 11, +18) no longer refer to quantities, but are recognized as semantic icons. The number here serves as a "linguistic economy"; instead of explaining complex behavior (such as fraud), the number (56) is invoked to perform a verdictive act. This proves that the number in Arabic pragmatically serves as a textual reduction. The number acts to pass sensitive political or ethical messages through the phonetic similarity and legal coding, replacing the noun (fraudster) by using a legal code (56) that protects the speaker and reveals the perpetrator. Apparently, there is no relationship between the number of legal article (456) in the Iraqi penal code and a fraudster, but pragmatically, the number acts as a connotative bridge between them in the sense of fraud. While (11) symbolizes the speed of escape or the movement of the legs when dribbling. It reflects caution against a cunning person. Therefore, the use of numbers here is a pragmatic shield. Instead of using an adjective that hurts (swindler/ traitor), the speaker uses a number to make the message secret among people of the same culture.

### 2. Gricean displacement

The results showed that numbers are the preferred tool for violating the quality and quantity maxims. In such texts as (سابع جار), the number is not seen as a mathematical falsehood, but as an implicature aimed at amplifying the feeling. The Arabic speaker uses the number as a "linguistic microscope" to magnify the mental image of the listener, which raises the illocutionary force of the speech.

### 3. The physical, temporal and special pragmatism

The numbers in texts such as (عشر صواب، جابها بالتسعين) revealed a pragmatic connection between the number and conscious recognition. The number 10 is associated with regret (the act of biting), and the number 90 is associated with the critical moment (decisiveness). This suggests that numbers act as conceptual metaphors that connect

numerical values to the body and time experiences, facilitating the pragmatic reasoning process for the listener.

#### 4. The protective function and legitimacy of the numbers

In this sample (ام سبع عيون), the number denotes the directive and protective acts. The number (7) in popular pragmatic practice serves as a protective act against envy. This proves that the number gains its effect from the social reference, not from its mathematical value.

#### 5. Identity pragmatism

Time numbers have turned into identity markers. When the speaker says (ألفينات / ثمانينات), s/he is not referring to a time, but rather to practising a pragmatic classifying act. The number here carries social qualities (tiredness, laziness, cleverness, golden generation), making the number a container for moral and social values.

### 5. Conclusion

The number in everyday Arabic discourse is remarkably contextual. It is flexible in its value, rigorous in its social connotation. The ability to understand numbers requires a pragmatic competence that goes beyond knowledge of language to knowledge of culture and the popular imagination. Accordingly, this study concluded that the number in the Iraqi dialect is not just an abstract unit of calculation, but rather a pragmatic object whose meaning is shaped according to context, shared knowledge, security and social necessities. The analysis proved different functions for numbers. Firstly, they have a cryptographic function. Here, the number acts as a linguistic mask (as in numbers 11 and 56) to pass sensitive political or moral messages through the phonemic and legal coding portals. Secondly, they reflect a departure from professionalism. In this regard, the Arabic speaker does not seek mathematical honesty as much as seeking emotional honesty, which explains the systematic violation of Grice's maxims in the forms of exaggeration (billion, hundred, hour). Finally, they denote a conceptual metaphor. For example, the number (90) is no longer a minute in time, but has become an "icon of decisiveness and skill", which reflects the ability of the Arab mind to

transform numbers into "mental images" that express success and accuracy.

Moreover, the study exposed the symbolic sense and practical roles of numbers in the Iraqi culture, ways of using numbers to support social identity, norms, and power systems. It highlighted the influence of numbers as used in the Iraqi Arabic colloquial context on the process of social identity, gender roles, and intergenerational communication. The pragmatic analysis of the selected samples of daily communication revealed several fundamental facts about the nature of numbers used in the Iraqi Arabic colloquial context. It demonstrated the dominance of the expressive function. It showed that numbers in everyday communication are rarely used to convey information (assertively) in their arithmetic sense, but are overshadowed by the expressive function, according to Searle's model. The number here acts as an emotional condenser rather than a measuring tool, transforming abstract numbers into emotional symbols and codes.

The analysis also showed the maxims violation strategy. It pointed out that speakers systematically rely on the violation of the quality maxim through different implicatures. This violation is not a falsehood, but rather an implicature assuming that the listener possesses pragmatic competence enabling them to go beyond the literal number to reach the intended meaning. In addition, it considered round numbers as a safety valve. Round numbers (100, 1000, 1) have been observed to perform the function of social closeness and facilitate communication. The use of one second or a minute serves as a guiding verbal act aimed at politeness, reducing pressure on the listener, which the use of accurate numbers, such as 7 seconds, does not.

As for the cultural reference of the number, the analysis proved that the socio-context determines the value of the number pragmatically; while the number (zero) is used in a technical context as a value, in the everyday context it reflects decisiveness, change or starting over. This confirms that pragmatism serves as the bridge between the symbol and the social value. In brief, numbers are quantitative metaphors used to manage social relationships. Our understanding of numbers depends on

our ability to decipher intent (Searle's taxonomy of speech acts) and the logic of dialogue (Grice's maxims).

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