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Summary of Doctoral Dissertation:

Numbers in the Polish Folk Culture. An Ethnolinguistic Study

Numbers form an important cultural category, which allows to symbolically transform disordered chaos into a tamed cosmos. Numbers can be subject to semantization, assigned rich connotations, and fulfil a multitude of cultural functions. The objective of dissertation is the exploration of the symbolism of numbers in typical and singular contexts of the Polish folk culture.

The dissertation is divided into the theoretical and analytical parts, for a total of eleven chapters. Chapter One comprises an in-depth reflection on the nature of symbols, since numbers in the folk tradition function as complex and multi-code symbolic signs. Chapter Two outlines the ethnolinguistic methodology, which provides the framework for the examination of relationships between language and culture, and the analysis of language in its social and cultural context. This method is applied to organise and categorise the source material assembled in the dissertation into wider categories. As a result, particular spheres of the human world were paired up with particular numbers, co-creating and modelling their meanings. Two main categories of source material were used in the analysis. First, various data was extracted from printed sources of the lexical and ethnographic nature. The second major corpus of source material comprises results of fieldwork completed by the author herself, in the form of interviews based on an original questionnaire. Reports from 86 informants from eleven Polish provinces were taken into account.

The analytical part begins with Chapter Three, which forms an introduction to the discussion of numbers in the Polish folk culture. First, the general state of research on numbers in the humanities was presented, including the analysis of etymology and meanings of the lexemes *liczba* [number] and *liczyć* [to count]. Key concepts and definitions were outlined in this section. The very operation of counting shows important qualities of the world described by depositaries of folk culture. Counting can be used as a symbolic inventory of family members, the formula *ile – tyle* [how much - this much] is used for approximation and divination, numerical equivalency was used to construct magical predictions about the harvest or the length of life. In folklore texts, counting is also present in the form of numerical concepts, which may structure a text and contribute to its semantics. Numbers are an excellent tool for visualizing multitude, which connotes fertility and

wealth, and is used to signify characteristics such as intensity and length. Multitude is also expressed through attributes such as stars, grains, groats, poppy seeds, or the act of breaking things into small pieces.

Chapter Four focuses the *even - odd* opposition, which is of paramount importance for the analysis of the collected source material, subjected to a detailed linguistic and cultural analysis. Beliefs and customs with an explicit reference to this opposition are discussed. It can be also activated implicitly, namely by the interpretation of a specific number's meaning through its odd or even character. In this concept, even numbers are synonymous with closure, stability, and immobility, but they are also associated with stillness, and thus death. On the other hand, odd numbers express the idea of openness, materiality, femininity, dynamism, movement, progress, vitality, and more generally - life. Occasional inversion of these connotations was also noted.

Chapters Five to Eleven contain detailed explications of specific numbers: 1, 2, 3, 4, 7, 12 and 100. Since the number sequence in folk culture is heterogeneous, the dissertation centres on the numbers that appear most frequently and display the strongest symbolic attributes. Each of the chapters in this part opens with a general description of the given number's symbolism in culture, largely based on symbol dictionaries. Sub-chapters focus on particular facets of the meaning, such as time, space, repeated activities, medicinal and magical uses, persons, animals, plants/plant motifs, objects, or body parts. The set and content of facets in the case of each number depend on source material, reflecting the specificity of their symbolic structure. These categories point to significant aspects of the traditional vision of the world, both positively and negatively valued, which were subjected to an in-depth description along with numerical components that define them. In addition, facets such as 'collections' and 'permanent juxtapositions' were also distinguished, taking into account not only semantics, but also the formal aspect of numerical patterns. Unique expositions of some numbers were also highlighted, such as the matrimonial context with the number 2 or the graphic sign of the number 7. Arguments are richly illustrated with quotes from excerpted materials and fieldwork, in line with the 'cognitive definition' framework, which serves to exemplify and explain the symbolism of numbers in particular and diverse contexts.

These analyses and interpretations led to the reconstruction of the linguistic and cultural image of selected numbers, as well as the formulation of more general theses regarding the functioning of numerical symbols in folklore. From this perspective, numbers can be used to manifest the broadly understood *sacrum*, as well as to communicate with it. Therefore, numbers often function in religious, but also in magical, demonic and eschatological contexts. They form an important element of the language used by humans in contact with the afterlife. In a variety of ways, numbers symbolise wholeness, completeness, and fullness. Some of them serve as symbolic markers of

borders. Numbers are also included in the artistic language of folklore. As poetic means or numerical formulas-clichés, they can perform various literary functions, including generalisation or specification. They can also be evoked due to their aura of mystery or singularity. Sometimes the specific symbolism of analysed numbers is of a lesser importance for these purposes, as shown by their equivalent uses. These alternations are recurrently seen, pointing to the most important and symbolically powerful numbers in the traditional folk vision of the world, which remains at the centre of this work.

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