Unit 7: Proverbs and Fixed Expressions


Questions:

1. Why can proverbs be used to support your argument?

2. Why do people use fixed expressions?

3. Which fixed expression are you likely to meet more often in contemporary texts, proverbs or commonplaces? Give reasons.

4. Which fixed expressions are young people like you more likely to use, proverbs or commonplaces? Give reasons.

5. Using e.g. an Internet search, find out what the forms of this binomial are, *bacon and eggs*.

Exercises

1. Proverbs


Find suitable German (or French etc, if that is your first language) translations for these proverbs, which are arranged in descending order of frequency.


<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>English proverb</th>
<th>German translation</th>
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<tr>
<td>First come, first served</td>
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<td>Forgive and forget</td>
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<td>Money talks</td>
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<td>First things first</td>
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<td>Time flies</td>
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<td>Small is beautiful</td>
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<td>Better late than never</td>
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<td>Horses for courses</td>
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<td>Live and let live</td>
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<tr>
<td>Out of sight, out of mind</td>
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<td>Boys will be boys</td>
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Knowledge is power
Time is money
Charity begins at home
Every man for himself
Practice makes perfect
Actions speak louder than words
All good things (must) come to an end
All’s well that ends well
Power corrupts
Waste not want not
Fight fire with fire
It takes two to tango
Let sleeping dogs lie
Silence is golden
Beauty is in the eye of the beholder
Like father, like son
There is no such thing as a free lunch

Exercise 2

Identify, and explain the meanings of, the idioms in this exercise. Page numbers refer to *Harry Potter and the Goblet of Fire* (adult edn)

1. `Unfriendly, like. I'm sure if I've offered him a cuppa once, I've offered it a hundred times. Never wanted to mix, he didn't.' (8)
2. I will allow you to perform an essential task for me, one that many of my followers would give their right hands to perform ...' (15)
3. 'I will not be spoken to like that!' said Uncle Vernon, trembling with rage. But Harry wasn't going to stand for this... (35)
4. ...this remark didn't go down too well with the Dursleys. Uncle Vernon's face purpled once more... (44)
5. I've got to keep him up here because he annoys Errol and Hermes. He annoys me, too, come to that.'(54)
6. 'That woman's got it in for the Ministry of Magic!' said Percy furiously. 'Last week she was saying we're wasting our time quibbling about cauldron thickness, when we should be stamping out vampires!' (131)
7. 'Well, the fat's really in the Fire now,' he told Mrs Weasley.. 'Rita Skeeter's been ferreting around all week, looking for more Ministry mess-ups to report (137)
8. "Your father thinks very highly of Mad-Eye Moody,' said Mrs Weasley sternly. 'Yeah, well, Dad collects plugs, doesn't he?' said Fred quietly, as Mrs Weasley left the room. 'Birds of a feather ...' (143)
9. "I'd invite you for Christmas, but ... well, I expect you're all going to want to stay at Hogwarts, what with ... one thing and another.' (146)
10. "Durmstrang and Beauxbatons like to conceal their whereabouts so nobody can steal their secrets,' said Hermione matter-of-factly. 'Come off it,' said Ron, starting to laugh. 'Durmstrang's got to be about the same size as Hogwarts, how are you going to hide a dirty great castle?' (147-8)
11. "We held a ghosts' council - the Fat Friar was all for giving him the chance - but most wisely, in my opinion, the Bloody Baron put his foot down.' (160)
12. The house-elves in the kitchen seemed to have pulled out all the stops; there was a greater variety of dishes in front of them than Harry had ever seen (221).

13. "But I don't think anyone under seventeen will stand a chance," said Hermione, "we just haven't learned enough. . ."

"Speak for yourself," said George shortly. "You'll try and get in, won't you, Harry?" (226)

14. "I don' want ter spoil it fer yeh," said Hagrid. "But it's gonna be spectacular... Them champions're going ter have their work cut out. Never thought I'd live ter see the Triwizard Tournament played again!" (233)

15. "But Harry set Dobby free, and he was over the moon about it!" said Hermione. "And we heard he's asking for wages now!" (233)

16. 'I little expected something of this nature to occur! I have half a mind to leave now!' (244)

17. Dear Sirius, You told me to keep you posted on what's happening at Hogwarts', so here goes... (256)

18. 'Yes,' said Mr Ollivander, 'yes, I've never used Veela hair myself...however, to each his own, and if this suits you ...'(270)

19. :::no horrible remarks came his way for a change, and nobody was quoting that stupid article (279)

20. He said he'd seen the error of his ways, and then he named names (291)

**Exercise 3**: Arrange these expressions into two groups and find out about their use and meaning.

- Bearing up
- Can’t complain
- Enjoy!
- Have a good time!
- Enjoy!
- Have a nice day! Have a nice one!
- How are you (keeping)?
- How are you doing?
- How is it going?
- How’s it hanging?/How’s tricks?
- Many happy returns
- Mustn't grumble
- Safe journey
- Sleep tight!
- Sweet dreams!
- Take care!

**Exercise 4**: Put these items into two groups and state their meanings.

brown as a berry
claim to fame
cool as a cucumber
cool, calm and collected
easy-peasy
footloose and fancy free
friend and foe
from top to toe
groan and moan
grunt and groan
hanky-panky
hatches, matches and dispatches
huff and puff
kith and kin
like it or lump it
might is right
name and shame
niminy-piminy
semi-hemi-demi millionaire
shop till you drop
wear and tear
wheel and deal, wheeler-dealer

Exercise 5: Correct Drenka's mistakes.

She was weakest at retaining idiomatic English but managed...to display a knack for turning the clichéd phrase, proverb, or platitude into an object trouvé so entirely her own that Sabbath wouldn't have dreamed of intervening – indeed, some (such as "it takes two to tangle") he wound up adopting. Remembering the confidence with which she believed herself to be smoothly idiomatic, lovingly recalling from over all the years as many as he could of Drenka's malapropisms... bear and grin it...his days are counted...a roof under my head...when the shithouse hit the fan...you can't compare apples and apples...the boy who cried "Woof!"...easy as a log... alive and cooking...you're pulling my leg out...I've got to get quacking...talk for yourself, Johnny...a closed and shut case...don't keep me in suspension...beating a dead whore...a little salt goes a long way...he thinks I'm a bottomless piss...let him eat his own medicine.../the early bird is never late...his bark is worse than your cry...it took me for a loop...it's like bringing coals to the fireplace...I feel as though I've been run over by a ringer...I have a bone to grind with you...crime doesn't pay off...you can't teach an old dog to sit...

From: Philip Roth, Sabbath's Theater. London 1996, pp. 71f

Exercise 6: How and why are the fixed expressions in bold used in this text?

The context: In the first scene of Alan Ayckbourn's Bedroom Farce, Delia and Ernest are talking about the shaky state of Trevor’s, their son’s, marriage to Susannah. Ernest says that he much preferred an earlier flame of his son's, Jan, because she was much jollier, and Delia agrees, saying that Susannah has not really made up her mind what she wants to be.

Ernest and Delia are dressing to go to a housewarming party.

Delia: It would appear that things between Susannah and Trevor are coming to a head.
Ernest: Ah.
D: He was always a difficult boy. I sometimes think if you hadn't ignored him quite as much-
E: I did?
D: Of course you did. You hardly said a word to him all the time he was growing up.
E: I seem to remember chatting away to him for hours.
E: Doesn't really leave them much to talk about then, does it?
D: And that if I may say so is typical. No. Let's admit it. We weren't good parents. You did nothing and I tried to make up for it, and that's why he's like he is today. I mean if he'd had a stable childhood, he'd never have completely lost his sense of proportion and married Susannah. I mean, I sometimes feel on the rare occasions one does see them together that she's not really - awful thing to say but - not really resilient enough for Trevor. He wants somebody more phlegmatic. That Jan girl for instance would have been ideal. Do you remember her?
E: Jan? Jan? Jan?
D: Nice little thing. Beautifully normal. She came to tea, do you remember? You got on very well with her.
E: Oh yes. She was jolly, wasn't she? She was very interested in my stamps. What happened to her?
D: Oh, she married- someone else, I think. She still writes occasionally.
E: I must say I preferred her to Susannah. Never really hit it off with her, I'm afraid.
D: Well, she's a very complex sort of girl, isn't she? Hasn't really made up her mind. About herself. I mean, I think a woman sooner or later has simply got to make up her mind about herself. I mean, even if she's someone like Carolyn - you know, Mrs Brightman's Carolyn - who looks at herself and says, right, I am a lump. I'm going to be a lump but then at least every one can accept her as a lump. So much simpler.
E: I think he should have married this other one.
D: Jan? I don't think she was that keen.
E: She was altogether much jollier.
D: Well, we're saddled with Susannah as a daughter-in-law - at least temporarily. We'd better make the best of it - I think I've put these eyes on crooked - we'd better make the best of it.
E: It's their bed. They can lie on it.
D: Yes. I think that's one of the problems.
E: Eh? D: B-E-D.  E: B-E-D? Bed?
D: Enough said.
E: Good Lord. How do you know?
D: One reads between the lines, darling...Now then. Do I wear what I wore when I went to the Reynolds or shall I wear the stripy thing that you loathe...

**Exercisse 7:** Instructions as for exercise 6.

In this conversation, a husband has just told his wife he wants to leave her.

‘I asked where you were going,’ she snapped.
‘What difference does it make? I don’t know.’
‘Well, I’ve got to know. I’ll want money from you every week. You don’t think I’m going into a factory to keep your kids, do you?’
5 ‘I’ll see you are not short.’
‘You’re always ready with the money, I will say that. Money cures everything, don’t it?’
‘What do you want me to do? Chop off my legs and leave ‘em behind? If it’s finished it’s finished. Or maybe it’s only me that’s finished. I’m twenty-seven 10 and I feel like sixty.’
‘I don’t know what you mean.I don’t think you do either.’
‘Maybe not. I’m off just the same.’
‘I hope you enjoy it.’
They stood like two armless people under the short claymore, sentences
15 chopping across each other, dry, painful and cutting deep. ‘I suppose you’ve been fed up with me, as well, lately,’ he said.
‘I was fed up with you five years ago. But I’m not like you. I thought :“We’re married, and as far as I’m concerned, that’s that. This ain’t what I thought it would be like at all, not what the stories and magazines or my own mind led 20 me to believe, anyway, but here it is, this is life.” That’s what I thought, and it didn’t take me long to get to it.’
‘I can just hear your mother saying that. “You made your bed, now lie on it.” It must have made her happy to say it. But I’m not going to be the one to lie for good on the bed you’ve made. Nor on the one I’ve made either. It’s finished, I 25 tell you.’


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**Exercise 8: Instructions as for exercise 6.**

The context: The post of the Governor of the Bank of England is to be filled. The Prime Minister, James Hacker, is looking for suitable candidates. In this extract from his diaries, he is consulting a private banker, Sir Desmond Glazebrook ("tall, distinguished... casually elegant, the epitome of the English gentleman with all that implies - amateurism, lack of commitment and zero intellectual curiosity", p. 374), a close friend of Sir Humphrey’s, the head of the Civil Service.

I asked him who he thought should be the governor... ‘I was thinking of Alexander Jameson.’
‘Ah,’ he said, deflated. How could he even *think* that he could be Governor...
‘What are your views on him?’ I asked
5 Desmond damned him with faint praise. ‘He’s a good accountant.’
‘Honest?’
‘Yes.’
‘Energetic?’
‘I’m afraid so.’
10 ‘So you’d recommend him?’
‘No.’ Desmond was unequivocal. Not surprising - anybody that interprets the word energetic as a criticism would hardly be on Jameson’s side. ‘City’s a funny place, Prime Minister. You know, if you spill the beans you open up a whole can of worms. I mean, how can you let sleeping dogs lie if you let the cat 15 out of the bag? You bring in a new broom and if you’re not very careful you find you’ve thrown the baby out with the bathwater. Change horses in the middle of the stream, next thing you know you’re up the creek without a paddle.’
‘And then what happens?’
‘Well! Obviously the balloon goes up. They hit you for six. An own goal, in fact.’
20 I got the message. Leave things as they are. *Laissez-faire*. Humphrey was nodding in agreement, with feigned admiration, as he sat at the feet of this latter-day Adam Smith...
My problem was that Sir Desmond was such an improbable choice for Governor. He is such a fool. He only talks in clichés. He can talk in clichés till the cows come home.


Exercise 9 : Read the text, then do the translation.

God, how ironic, I thought miserably, it’s worked out exactly as I planned it should. Gussie and Jeremy breaking up and Jeremy driving me back to London. But instead of being in each other’s arms, we were at each other’s throats. Jeremy looked grey beneath his suntan, all the bravado and panache seemed to be knocked out of him. The trees by the roadside fell away and rushed back in clumps.

‘You’ve got to talk to Gussie’, said Jeremy. ‘Tell her it was all your fault. All right, I admit I tried to pull you this afternoon, but my God, I had provocation.’

‘I know you did’; I said listlessly. ‘I’m sorry. I thought I wanted you so much; then when it came to the crunch, I found I didn’t after all.’

‘Yeah well, it’s the same with me. I was crazy about you, but now I realize I’m in danger of losing Gus, it all seems a terrible mistake. It’s the ill-wind department, I suppose. Takes a jolt like this to make you realize how much you really need someone. She’s so straight, Gus.’

I’d seldom seen a man more shattered.

‘Tell her it was your doing’, he pleaded. ‘Tell her how much you led me on. It’s no skin off your nose.’

‘All right’, I said, ‘I’ll talk to her. But it’s no good trying to see her until tomorrow.’

From: Jilly Cooper, Octavia, London 1978, p. 115

Now translate into English:

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<tr>
<th>German</th>
<th>English</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>alles hat auch seine guten Seiten</td>
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<tr>
<td>das juckt mich nicht</td>
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<tr>
<td>eine Baumgruppe</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>einen Mann/eine Frau aufreißen</td>
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<td>jdm an die Gurgel gehen</td>
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<td>klappen</td>
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<td>mir geht’s genau so</td>
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<td>Na gut</td>
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<td>wenn es hart auf hart geht</td>
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