

SOME ESSENTIALS ON THE POPULARITY OF (AMERICAN)
PROVERBS

This article studies the notion of proverb popularity. In this respect, three relevant notions are distinguished: proverb frequency, on the one hand, proverb knowledge and proverb familiarity, on the other. In this context, advantages and disadvantages of different methods are discussed. By way of an example, the relevance of each of these approaches, as well as their mutual relationships, are analyzed with regard to American proverbs.

Introduction

The popularity of proverbs is an important topic for paremiographers and paremiologists alike, as well as for researchers interested in proverbs as the basis for further research—be that of sociological, pedagogical, psychological, linguistic, or other orientation. Given this broad interest, the question of proverb popularity has increasingly become a topic of scholarly studies, with the guiding impetus related to these studies being quite heterogeneous. In some cases, scholars “simply” want to present a list of some well-known proverbs; in other cases, a comprehensive list of both well-known and less known proverbs is needed for subsequent work; finally, scholars may be interested in a full list of all proverbs known in a given culture (or sub-culture): based on the Russian scholar Grigorij Permjakov’s pioneering work in this field, such a comprehensive list of proverbs has been termed “paremiological minimum,” and in recent years, such minima have been presented for several languages all over the world.

This is not the place to discuss all these attempts in detail—neither in general, nor with regard to American proverbs, in particular. Yet, as to American proverbs, Hirsch’s (1987) *Cultural Literacy: What Every American Needs to Know* (1987), and particularly the *Dictionary of Cultural Literacy: What Every American Needs to Know* (1988) by Hirsch and colleagues, should be mentioned, with its list of ca. 265 popular “proverbs.” However, one cannot but agree with Wolfgang Mieder, who has rightly and repeatedly pointed out the methodological drawbacks of this list. Mieder himself has substantially contributed to improve the situation, both in theory (cf. Mieder 1989), and in practice, as, e.g. with his *English Proverbs* (Mieder 1988), providing a reliable collection of 1,200 familiar proverbs.

The question of proverb popularity thus is quite relevant in recent research. However, in defining popularity, and in tackling the specific (and, in fact, quite different) questions, scholars have applied different methods. In comparing these methods, one should expect that each of them has been chosen with regard to specific research interest, and that they all have specific advantages and disadvantages. As a consequence, in comparing the results obtained by these methods, it should be interesting to see how far they converge or diverge from each other. However, such a systematic comparison of results (as well as their methods) has practically never been undertaken until now.

In fact, such a comparison (which asks for some kind of external perspective), is quite difficult, and this for various reasons. One of the reasons is that, more often than not, popularity has been variously understood or, to put it more directly, it has been ill defined. In particular, possibly (and probably) related, essentially distinct categories have not been clearly distinguished: 'frequency' of proverbs, on the one hand, and 'knowledge' or 'familiarity' of proverbs, on the other. This lack of distinction is caused either by some kind of theoretical ignorance of definition, or by the (implicit) assumption that both categories yield more or less identical results.

Yet, we are concerned here with basically different concepts. By way of a general characterization, one may say that **frequency-oriented** studies are rather **text-based**, whereas **familiarity-oriented** studies are **knowledge-based** and thus **subject-dependent**. In this context, an additional terminological differentiation seems to be necessary and appropriate: whereas (individual or collective) **proverb knowledge** refers to a person's (or a group's) subjective acquaintance with proverbs, **proverb familiarity** refers to either individual proverbs or to a group of proverbs, in any case denoting average familiarity in a given collective. Regardless of the fact that, within a given group, the result of collective knowledge of a given proverb material thus coincides with collective familiarity, we are concerned with two essentially different perspectives.

Summarizing, one may thus say that frequency-oriented studies are based on the analysis of texts, i.e. either written or spoken sources, whereas familiarity-oriented and knowledge-oriented methods are based on asking (or testing) persons, in one way or another. But even within both of these approaches, there are a variety of further distinctions as to the concrete method applied, with which proverb popularity is to be established.

With regard to **text-oriented** approaches, the following methods are to be distinguished:

1. The documentation of the frequency of proverbs in "everyday life" asks for comprehensive longitudinal field studies, such as, e.g., Hain's (1950) famous study from the 1950s; such studies will hardly ever be repeated in our time.¹
2. A second method attempts to establish frequency through analysis of written sources; in detail, these sources may be
 - a. proverb collections, or
 - b. archive material.

The first way seems to be the more usual one: the more often a proverb is documented (in different sources), the more widespread and, as a consequence, the more familiar it is considered to be. Whereas in the case of archive material this assumption still might be reasonable, its justification with regard to proverb collections clearly depends on the quality of these collections, since compilers, as we know, tend to simply copy proverbs from other collections, or even translate them from other languages.
3. A method repeatedly applied since the 1970s includes the analysis of mass media, mainly printed media; it goes without saying that these studies include a particular segment of language use only, namely, from journalistic discourse.
4. More recent frequency studies are mainly corpus-based: With the option to choose between different discourse types (such as literary, journalistic, or even spoken language, etc.) such analysis has the advantage of electronic search and retrieval strategies, provided one previously defines what one wants to search.

As compared to this, **subject-based** approaches might be differentiated as follows:

1. In attempts to simply find some well-known proverbs, it has been regarded to be sufficient to ask a particular number of subjects to write down those proverbs, which spontaneously come to their minds. In fact, this method may suffice for this specific interest. Yet, we know today that this approach usually yields only a limited number of prototypical proverbs (on the average ca. 30-50 proverbs per person, depending on situational factors, time available, etc.). The reason for this limitation has to be seen in the fact that proverbs, by definition, tend to be used and, as a consequence, to be remembered only with regard to a specific situation to which it refers.
2. As an alternative, more or less comprehensive lists of selected proverbs have been presented to subjects asking them for their introspective intuition if the presented proverbs were familiar to them or not.

This method—which shall be called ‘full text presentation’ (FTP) in this article—thus demands subjects to make a clear binary YES-NO decision; it has the advantage that people will recognize and recall also such proverbs which do not spontaneously come to their minds; on the other hand, this method has two obvious disadvantages: first, results of introspection-based studies may be misleading since subjects may only think that they know a given proverb (or appreciate it as being ‘correct’), but in fact do not; and secondly, subjects may know a given proverb in a more or less divergent verbal form, and therefore, in this case, be unsure, as to a correct answer.

3. In principle, the same objections hold true for scaling techniques where subjects are presented with a list of proverbs, the task providing a scale (e.g., from 1 to 7), on which the alleged individual proverb familiarity must be rated. This method shall be termed ‘full text rating’ (FTR), in this article; in addition to the problems listed above (2), individual differences in rating may come into play, and they must additionally be controlled very carefully.
4. A method which tries to avoid the problems outlined includes the presentation of only the beginning of a given proverb; the subjects’ task then is to complete the text (e.g.: *Out of sight,...*). This method shall be called ‘partial text presentation’ (PTP), here.

The objective of the present article is to present some comparative results on the analysis as to the frequency and familiarity of American proverbs. With this objective in mind, it would be desirable, of course, if there were studies available using one and the same proverb material, which might serve as a basis for the intended methodological comparison. However, there are only a few studies dealing with the topic of proverb familiarity. Some of them concentrate on frequency only, others focus only on familiarity. As a result, if one wants to compare results for frequency and familiarity, these studies must be selectively analyzed, given the fact that there are (a) proverbs for which we have frequency data (but not familiarity data), (b) proverbs for which we have familiarity data (but not frequency data), and finally, (c) proverbs for which we have both.

In evaluating the results to be obtained, it will be interesting to see how far they coincide with or relate to the items contained in *English Proverbs* (1988). Unfortunately, no information has been given as to how the items of this list of 1,200 proverbs were selected; yet, we are assured that only “really well-known and popular proverbs” have been included, and that of the 1,200 items there are ca. 300 particularly popular proverbs, which might be considered to represent the paremiological minimum of English.

Frequency-oriented methods

As to American English, a comprehensive corpus analysis on the frequency occurrence of proverbs is the study by Kimberley Lau (1996), based on the Lexis/Nexis ALLNWS data base. At the time of Lau’s study, this data base comprised ca. 2,300 full text information sources from different US and overseas media and 1,000 additional texts from other sources. Lau’s (1996) major interest was to study the occurrence of ca. 300 proverbs and then determine the ten most frequent proverbs, assuming that they represent contemporary American values and attitudes.² As was mentioned above, in corpus analyses of this kind, one has to define *a priori* what one is searching for and, last but not least, the quality of the final result depends on the quality of this initial selection. For this purpose, Lau established a well-defined corpus of proverbs, based on the following paremiographic sources:

1. *Modern Proverbs and Proverbial Sayings* (Whiting 1989)
2. *Oxford Dictionary of English Proverbs* (1970)
3. *Dictionary of American Proverbs and Proverbial Phrases 1820–1880* (Taylor & Whiting 1958)
4. *Dictionary of American Proverbs* (Mieder 1992)

In further selecting her study material, she counted the number of references for each proverb in Whiting’s (1989) collection (considering this to be, in a “good” folkloristic tradition, as reliable frequency data), and then concentrated on those 315 items with the highest “frequency.” Lau then compared this result with the occurrence in the remaining three collections, and finally included into her research corpus those proverbs documented in all four collections. As a result, she obtained a corpus of 188 proverbs, which she then submitted to the corpus analysis. Table 1 represents the ten most frequent proverbs with their absolute occurrence.

Table 1: Most frequent proverbs from Lau (1986)

Rank (Lau)	Proverb	Frq	No. (EP)
1	<i>Enough is enough.</i>	15808	Mi 0292
2	<i>Time will tell.</i>	14226	
3	<i>First come, first served.</i>	13050	Mi 0168
4	<i>Forgive and forget.</i>	5097	
5	<i>Time is money.</i>	3770	Mi 1019
6	<i>History repeats itself.</i>	3713	
7	<i>Time flies.</i>	3673	Mi 1017
8	<i>Better late than never.</i>	3493	Mi 0573
9	<i>Out of sight, out of mind.</i>	2902	Mi 0917
10	<i>Boys will be boys.</i>	2103	Mi 0098

It is interesting to note that 17 of the 188 proverbs— that is, 9% of the whole material—did not occur once in the media corpus, notwithstanding their high frequency in Whiting's collection, and in spite of their inclusion in all three collections mentioned above! This finding alone seems convincingly to call into question the assumption that proverb popularity might be deduced in this way, from the analysis of written sources ...

As a matter of fact, there are many proverbs in *English Proverbs*, which are not included in Lau's study. However, what is more striking, there are also items which occur in Lau's study, but which are not included in *English Proverbs*; these items are listed in Table 2 (familiarity data in the last column will be commented upon below).

Table 2: Frequency and Familiarity for highly frequent proverbs

Proverb	Frq	Rank	Fam
<i>Forgive and forget.</i>	5097	3	91,00
<i>History repeats itself.</i>	3713	5	62,33
<i>Actions speak louder than words.</i>	1970	11	89,67
<i>Everyone loves a lover.</i>	1738	16	41,00
<i>The exception proves the rule.</i>	912	24	25,33
<i>Politics make strange bedfellows.</i>	443	36	25,00
<i>Birds of a feather flock together.</i>	267	48	82,33
<i>All that glitters is not gold.</i>	251	51	56,33
<i>One swallow does not make a summer.</i>	146	61	3,67
<i>Handsome is as handsome does.</i>	85	71	17,33
<i>A fool and his money are soon parted.</i>	79	72	54,67
<i>Turn about is fair play.</i>	40	81	21,67
<i>Clothes make the man.</i>	32	85	43,17
<i>Don't beat upon the bush.³</i>	32	85	86,00
<i>It's an ill wind that blows nobody good.</i>	22	89	9,00
<i>There is more than one way to skin a cat.</i>	18	90	68,00

Familiarity

As to familiarity of American proverbs, the scarce data available are mainly from the field of psychology. One solid study is that conducted by Higbee and Millard (1983), who studied 203 proverbs and had 101 undergraduate students rate the familiarity on a scale from 1 to 7. Table 3 contains the 12 most familiar proverbs with a familiarity of $\geq 95\%$.⁴ As can be seen, only five of them were included in Lau's frequency study (by way of a comparison, 12 of the 28 proverbs with $\geq 90\%$, and 72 of all 203 proverbs occur in Lau's frequency study).

Table 3: 12 Most familiar Proverbs $\geq 95\%$ from (Higbee & Millard's (HM) Study

Proverb	Fam	Frq	Rank
<i>Practice makes perfect.</i>	98,67	1406	20
<i>Better late than never.</i>	98,33	3493	7
<i>If at first you don't succeed, try, try, try again.</i>	98,00		
<i>Like father, like son.</i>	97,33	1593	18
<i>A place for everything, and everything in its place.</i>	96,00		
<i>Two wrongs don't make a right.</i>	96,00		
<i>Two is company, but three's a crowd.</i>	95,33	93	69
<i>Where there's a will, there's a way.</i>	95,33		
<i>All's well that ends well.</i>	95,00	879	26
<i>Don't count your chickens before they are hatched.</i>	95,00		
<i>Easier (Sooner) said than done.</i>	95,00		
<i>Practice what you preach.</i>	95,00		

With the exception of *Two wrongs don't make a right* they all are contained in *English Proverbs*. On the whole, of the 203 proverbs from the HM study, 119 are contained also in *English Proverbs*; these proverbs are characterized by an average familiarity of 67,53%. The remaining 84 proverbs, which are not included in *English Proverbs*, are less familiar, with an average familiarity of 49,49%. Table 4 represents the most familiar ($\geq 75\%$) items from the HM study, lacking from *English Proverbs*. As can easily be seen, quite a number of these items are not proverbs proper, but rather proverbial expressions, or even idioms; still, quite a number of these proverbs, highly familiar according to the HM study, are not taken into account in *English Proverbs*.

Table 4: Familiar proverbs (Higbee/Millard 1983)

Proverb: Additional Familiar Proverbs (Higbee/Millard)	Fam
<i>Two wrongs don't make a right.</i>	96,00
<i>Mind your own business.</i>	94,00
<i>Forgive and forget.</i>	91,00
<i>Actions speak louder than words.</i>	89,67
<i>The early bird catches the worm.</i>	89,00
<i>Kill two birds with one stone.</i>	87,00
<i>Don't beat around the bush.</i>	86,00
<i>Don't cry over spilt milk.</i>	84,67
<i>Don't make a mountain out of a molehill.</i>	83,33
<i>Birds of a feather flock together.</i>	82,33
<i>Monkey see, monkey do.</i>	81,67
<i>Anything worth doing is worth doing it well.</i>	80,00
<i>The hand is quicker than the eye.</i>	79,33

(Table 4—continued)

<i>The bigger the better.</i>	78,00
<i>Put your best foot forward.</i>	77,33
<i>Don't rock the boat.</i>	76,00
<i>Never bite off more than you can chew.</i>	76,00
<i>Opposites attract.</i>	76,00
<i>Save for a rainy day.</i>	75,00

In sum, one can thus say that from the few frequency and familiarity studies, which are available on American proverbs, evidence arises that even the impressive list of 1,200 *English Proverbs*, which surely contains the basic stock of popular American proverbs, might have to be complemented, if one wants to establish a proverb corpus minimum of Anglo-American proverbs. It becomes evident, how much (theoretical and empirical, i.e. paremiological, paremiographic, and experimental) work and care must stand behind the preparation of such a comprehensive list of popular proverbs, of which one can be sure that it represents a reliable corpus of potentially well-known proverbs. And again, one cannot but side with Wolfgang Mieder's claim that the paremiological minimum of native speakers be ascertained through a widely distributed questionnaire (Mieder 1992: 312).

Frequency-Familiarity

At this point, it seems reasonable to study more precisely the notion of popularity than has been carried out previously. Since, in quite a few studies, both concepts have not been clearly distinguished or even deliberately identified, thus explicitly or implicitly assuming that familiarity and frequency are two faces of one coin, and ultimately yielding one and the same result. It goes without saying that relevant research needs much more material than the one available from the studies reported above; yet, by way of an attempt, it seems tempting to at least formulate a hypothesis as to the relation between both categories.

Assuming both categories do not simply reflect one and the same state of affairs, and do not yield identical results, a first decision has to be made as to the direction of dependence: does frequency (FRQ) depend on familiarity (FAM), or is familiarity dependent on frequency? By way of an answer to this question, it has been argued elsewhere (Grzybek 2008) in favor of the notion of some kind of regulating circle, in this respect: an increase of proverb usage (i.e., heightened frequency) leads to an increase of individual and/or collective perceptibility of these items, which, in turn, is the basis for higher familiarity, and which finally results in an increase of usage. In mathematical terms, we thus have FAM as a function of FRQ, i.e.: $FAM = f(FRQ)$.

Testing this relation with the material reported above, we have 70 items, which occur both in Lau's frequency and in the HM familiarity study. For these

70 proverbs, familiarity ranges from 3.67% to 98.67%, as compared to a range of frequency from 3 to 5,097. Due to the enormous variation for the individual data points, and in order to see the paremiological forest for the individual proverb trees, it seems reasonable to smooth the data structure by way of pooling, e.g. by calculating averages per 10 items, thus reducing the overall data structure of 70 items to seven data points. This results in the values represented in Table 5: The seven remaining data points are denoted as pos(ition), x_{FRQ} and x_{FAM} denote the averages for frequency and familiarity data.

Table 5: Relation between frequency and familiarity

Pos	x_{FRQ}	x_{FAM}
1	2864,50	76,47
2	1147,40	73,80
3	510,60	65,67
4	313,80	68,93
5	155,90	62,57
6	68,20	50,53
7	21,80	48,55

Figure 13 illustrates the overall tendency; the resulting curve may mathematically be modeled with the function $y = a \cdot x^b$, i.e. $FAM = f(FRQ)$, the theoretical derivation of which need not be explained, here. It may well be that other functions turn out to be more adequate (both mathematically and interpretation-wise), if more data will be available—anyway, fitting this function to the data presented in Table 5, results in a very good fit, with parameter values $a = 36.66$ and $b = 0.10$, with a determination coefficient of $R^2 = 0.91$.

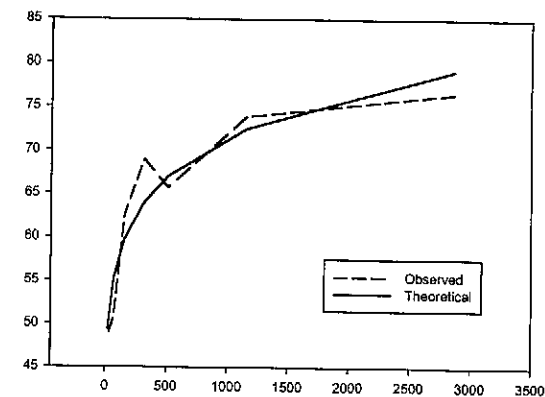


Figure 13
Relation between frequency and familiarity (observed and theoretical)

We may thus conclude that there is indeed a specific relation between frequency and familiarity. In detail, there seems to be a characteristic “asymmetry”: frequent proverbs tend to be familiar, whereas familiar proverbs may, but need not occur frequently. In linguistic (Jakobsonian) terms, a given culture’s stock of familiar proverbs thus turns out to be some kind of a paradigmatic inventory, from which items may be (or may not be) projected onto the syntagmatic axis of concrete (more or less frequent) proverb usage. Seen from this perspective, frequency and usage turn out to be two different faces of two different coins welded together, implying some kind of “exchange rate.” This rate may change, however, over time, depending on the language chosen, the method of study applied, or other factors, thus far unknown.

This conclusion is of utmost importance for the study of proverb popularity: in addition to the warning brought forth above, as to deducing proverb popularity from the documentation of occurrence in archive sources or from proverb collections, we now see that frequency studies cannot but grasp a particular segment of popular proverbs, namely, those which are used at a specific point (or period) of time, in particular sources, types of discourse etc.

Familiarity: Methods

Thus, if subject-based studies turn out to be necessary to grasp proverb popularity in its totality, one should not forget that a number of crucial questions remain to be answered, as to the concrete method of studying knowledge and familiarity. At least three different methods are relevant in this respect, which have been termed FTR (full text rating), FTP (full text presentation), and PTP (partial text presentation), above.

Unfortunately, a systematic comparison of the method of studying familiarity has never been made. In an attempt to systematically compare the results and thus, the reliability and efficiency of the various methods, data from a study using first FTP and, subsequently, PTP, may be useful. Various aspects and results of this study have been presented earlier (cf. Grzybek/Chlosta/Roos 1994, Chlosta/Grzybek 1995, Chlosta/Grzybek 2005), and need not be discussed here redundantly. The original objective of this study was to establish an empirically validated list of highly familiar American proverbs, and additionally control the spectrum of linguistic variation for each proverbial item. The experiment was split into two phases:

1. The first phase was based on the 1,200 items from *English Proverbs*. All items were presented to eight subjects by way of FTP; all subjects from North America and Anglophone Canada were native speakers between 50 and 70 years of age. As a result, a list of 234 proverbs was

obtained, which were marked as ‘familiar’ by all subjects without exception.

2. This list of 234 proverbs served as material in the second phase, using PTP: 59 subjects, (36 from Anglophone Canada, and 23 from North America), all native speakers, with average age of the whole group (including 22 male and 27 female persons), of $\bar{x} = 63.08$ ($s = 11.64$).

As a result, nine of the 234 proverbs (3.85%) were completed by all subjects in one and the same linguistic form, i.e., without any verbal variation. These items are represented in Table 6, the border between a proverb’s beginning presented to the subjects and its ending (according to *English Proverbs*) being marked by ‘|.’

Table 6: Generally known proverbs without variation

No.	Proverb
98	<i>Boys will be boys.</i>
102	<i>Much ado about nothing.</i>
134	<i>Charity begins at home.</i>
208	<i>The customer is always right.</i>
456	<i>Two heads are better than none.</i>
738	<i>No news is good news.</i>
753	<i>Better late than never.</i>
1062	<i>One good turn deserves another.</i>

Keeping to the principle of ‘zero variation’, but lowering the borderline of familiarity to $\geq 95\%$, or to $\geq 90\%$, would enlarge the number of highly familiar proverbs to 18, or to 49, respectively.

It would not be adequate, however, to accept only these completions as ‘familiar,’ and ignore any kind of linguistic variation. Such variations, however, may be of different kind, ranging from orthographic errors, over lexical and syntactic alternatives, to the “invention” of “new” proverbs, which have nothing to do with the items presented. Now, within the framework of empirical paremiology, a first aim is to document all completions and their occurrence frequencies, which requires a detailed classification key. In addition to such a meticulous documentation—which may seem hypertrophical, at first sight, but is, after all, an adequate way to gain insight into the variational spectrum of a proverb and to find out the most frequently used forms—this classification schema should also allow for some kind of placement in superordinate categories. To this end, variations may be classified along a number of major categories of modification:

- **Zero modifications** are those cases where a proverb is completed in the assumed form. With regard to this ‘zero variant’ (V_0), it is impor-

tant to note that, in empirical paremiology, this form does not imply any kind of a priori prejudice as to frequency, as opposed to traditional paremiography and paremiology, where terms such as “standard form,” “basic variant,” etc. imply that this form is the most common form, as compared to all kinds of variations. As a matter of fact, such a V_0 may well turn out to be the most common, or the most frequent one, but, quite logically, only a posteriori, i.e. as a result of the empirical study

- **First degree modifications** of the V_0 indicate familiarity (also) with the given zero variant; such modifications shall be termed ‘variations’ in subsequent discussion; these variations include, e.g., the omission of single words which are not crucial to the proverb’s semantics, orthographic or morphological variations; also lexical or syntactic variations are included here, as long as the modification does not result in a second degree variation (see below);
- **Second degree modifications** of the V_0 zero variant result in a proverbial form which does not any longer imply knowledge of the zero variant, but of the proverb type (in the paremiological meaning of this word) underlying it; such modifications shall be termed ‘variants’ from now on; these variants include shortenings or prolongations, also lexical variations (other than lexical synonymy), etc.
- **Third degree modifications** neither imply knowledge of the V_0 nor of the proverb type underlying it; in some cases, we may be concerned here with a different, or “new” proverb, in other cases with nonsense answers or other modifications; some other kinds of third degree modifications have been attributed to categories in their own right, e.g., completions representing explicit negations of the zero variant, unreadable answers, etc.

Each of these three basic categories is further subdivided so that each individual completion may be adequately classified. The whole classification schema has been presented elsewhere, in detail, and it needs not be presented here (cf. Grzybek/Chlosta/Roos 1994, Chlosta/Grzybek 1995, 2005). With regard to the question of proverb familiarity, it is thus important to note here, that in addition to all completions in form of the V_0 , all 1st and 2nd degree modifications, may be re-coded as ‘familiar.’ The results of applying this classification schema to the completions of the 234 proverbs mentioned have been published in details (Chlosta/Grzybek 2005); therefore, we may concentrate here on some general findings and conclusions.

On the whole, there were, as the possible (theoretical) maximum, 13,806 (59 x 234) completions. 8,747 proverbs (63.36%) were completed in form of

the V_0 ; 1,421 (10.29%) items were classified as ‘unknown’ since they remained uncompleted; as a consequence, ca. one quarter of all completions (3,638, or 26.35%, respectively), contained some kind of modification as compared to the V_0 and thus fell into one of the remaining categories. More than one half of them (1,962, i.e. 14.21% of all completions) were 1st degree variations; 823 (5.96% of all completions) were 2nd degree modifications.

Accepting all V_0 completions as well as all 1st and 2nd degree modifications as “known”, a total of 11,532 proverbs (i.e., 83.80%, ignoring ‘missing values’) is obtained. Thus, on the average, ca. 16% of items were classified as ‘unknown’ in the PTP approach, which had been marked ‘familiar’ in the first phase. To explain this fact, there are two options, which are not mutually exclusive:

- PTP “globally” yields poorer results, or
- poorer PTP results do not concern all items equally, but only particular proverbs.

Figure 14 represents the percentage of familiarity for each individual proverb, as it turns out as a result of the PTP.

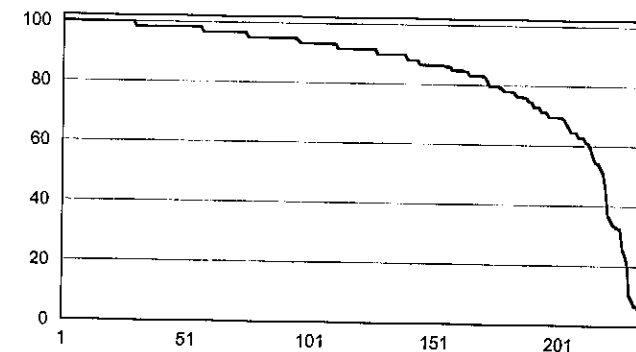


Figure 14
Overall familiarity (PTP) of 234 proverbs

Taking into account that all these proverbs had been marked as ‘known’ by all participants in the FTP condition, and in explaining the observed differences in familiarity for quite some proverbs, two further possible reasons should be acknowledged:

- small sample size in the first (FTP) condition ($N = 8$) as an insufficient basis as to general familiarity.⁵

- b. possible differences between US and Canadian subjects (subjects of the HM study were from the US, only, US and Canadian subjects participated in the PTP study);

Both options ask for thorough investigation. As to the first problem, it is reasonable (in order to generally work with sufficiently large sample sizes, of course) to calculate confidence intervals, on the basis of which one can define, given a particular error rate, probabilities with upper and lower confidence limits, which take into account the number of observations. As to the second problem, familiarity of each proverb has to be calculated for US and CAN subjects separately, and the results have to be submitted to statistical comparisons. The relevant analyses, and the underlying statistical procedures, will be presented elsewhere, so we can concentrate on the results, here.

To conclude, we may, by way of a final result, present a list of highly familiar proverbs, which fulfills the following criteria:

1. these proverbs are above the lower confidence limit of $\pi_i > 0.95$ in the whole group of subjects (i.e., those proverbs which are likely to be familiar with more than 95% in the whole population),
2. there are no significant differences in the familiarity of these proverbs between US and CAN subjects,
3. the proverbs are given in that form which, as a result of the PTP study, turned out to be the most frequently filled in by the subjects.

Table 7 contains a list of all 234 items, which fulfill the three conditions just mentioned. In cases, where another verbal form turned out to be more common, this is marked by \Leftrightarrow ; in cases where another verbal form was more common either among US or CAN subjects, this is marked by \rightarrow .

Table 7: Highly familiar Anglo-American proverbs

# (EP)	Proverb
1	<i>Absence makes the heart grow fonder.</i>
10	<i>Much ado about nothing.</i>
32	<i>An apple a day keeps the doctor away.</i>
98	<i>Boys will be boys.</i>
117	<i>You cannot have your cake and eat it.</i> \Leftrightarrow and eat it, too.
134	<i>Charity begins at home.</i>
147	<i>Children should be seen and not heard.</i>
167	<i>Easy come, easy go.</i>
168	<i>First come, first served.</i> \rightarrow US: serve.

(Table 7—continued)

- 203 *It is no use crying over | spilt milk.*
 \rightarrow US: spilled.
- 208 *The customer is always | right.*
- 263 *You cannot teach an old | dog new tricks.*
- 283 *Don't put all your eggs | in one basket.*
- 404 *It is better to give | than to receive.*
- 410 *God helps them | that help themselves.*
 \Leftrightarrow who help themselves.
- 418 *What goes up | must come down.*
- 456 *Two heads are | better than one.*
- 573 *Better late | than never.*
- 738 *No news is | good news.*
- 791 *A woman's place | is in the home.*
- 792 *There's no place | like home.*
- 834 *Never put off till tomorrow | what you can do today.*
- 876 *Rome was not | built in a day.*
- 877 *When in Rome, | do as the Romans do.*
- 902 *Seeing is | believing.*
- 936 *Where there is smoke | there is fire.*
 \Leftrightarrow there's fire.
- 1026 *Here today and | gone tomorrow.*
- 1062 *One good turn | deserves another.*

Notes

¹ A method which might seem to be similar, at first sight, is to ask people which proverbs they consider to be frequently used; taken at face value, this kind of approach is, however, subject-oriented, and it includes a high degree of subjective introspection (see below).

² Methodological problems of this kind of social psychology, studying social attitudes and values on the basis of proverbs, need not be discussed here.

³ Strictly speaking, we are concerned here with a proverbial expression, rather than with a proverb proper. In Higbee's and Millard's study, it was presented in the slightly different verbal form, "Don't beat around the bush."

⁴ The original scale ratings have been recalculated here in terms of percentages for easier comparison.

⁵ One must be aware of the fact that any conclusion based on percentages may be rather misleading, if there are not enough observations: it is a matter of common sense that a larger number of persons asked leads to more solid ("representative") results. The crucial question is, therefore, how much confidence may be given to conclusions on 'general familiarity,' given a particular number of observations.

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ON THE OCCASION OF
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