

英汉对照读物

美国 词语的 掌故

续二



WORDS AND
THEIR STORIES
Supplement Two

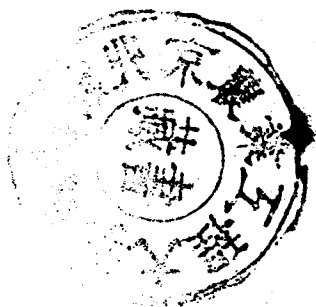
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美国词语的掌故

(续二)

美国之音慢速英语部 编写

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中国对外翻译出版公司

1992年·北京

1224 M

(京)新登字020号

Words And Their Stories

(Supplement Two)

Voice of America

Washington D.C.20547

1990

2594/17

责任编辑：梅祖培

责任校对：徐元歌

美国词语的掌故（续二）

美国之音慢速英语部编写

中国对外翻译出版公司出版

（北京太平桥大街4号）

新华书店北京发行所发行

北京市大兴县新魏印刷厂印刷

850×1168毫米 1/32 印张：6.625 字数：160（千）

1992年12月第一版 1992年12月第一次印刷

印数：1—5,000

ISBN 7-5001-0191-0/H·64

定价：3.50元

编 者 按

《美国词语的掌故》及其《续一》出版后，得到了广大读者的欢迎。最近，我们收到了原编写者修改的定稿，共计86篇，是为原书的又一续集。其中有35篇，与我们已经翻译出版的大体相同。现将我们未曾发表的51篇，作为《美国词语的掌故》之《续二》付梓，以飨读者。本书附有少量注释及书中全部词语的英文索引，有利于学习美国英语时作为参考，也有助于收听此类广播。

本书的出版得到了美国之音慢速英语部的支持，谨此再次表示感谢。

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1 A-OKAY

No one really knows when many of our expressions became popular. But others can be easily dated. One such expression is A-Okay¹. It means the situation is fine, there is no cause for worry.

A-Okay is a space-age expression. It was used in 1961 during the flight of an American astronaut, John Powers, a spokesman for NASA², the national space agency, used "A-Okay" to tell the world that everything on the space flight was operating perfectly.

Some experts say the expression did not begin with the space age. One story is that it was first used during the early days of the telephone, to tell an operator that his message had been received. The sound of the O in Okay often was lost in the noise on the telephone line. So the

1 A-Okay: 此字也拼作AOK, A-OK, A-O.K.等, 发音则不变。

2 NASA: 全名为National Aeronautics and Space Administration (国家航空和宇宙航行局), 为美国联邦政府机构。

— 一 切 正 常

英语中有许多用法究竟从何时开始，谁也不真正知道。然而，另外有一些用法的渊源却不难弄清。“一切正常”就是其中之一。它的意思是：情况很好，没有什么可以耽心的。

“一切正常”，是空间时代的产物，首次用于1961年一位美国宇航员在作宇宙航行之时。当时，美国的国家宇航机构——航空航天局——的发言人约翰·鲍尔斯用这个词儿向世界宣布这次航行中一切运行正常。

有些专家说这个词儿并不是随着空间时代的到来而诞生的。一种说法是：它产生于刚刚开始使用电话之时，用以通知接线员发出的讯号已经收到。当时电话线里噪音很大，只说 Okay 常常会听不清头上的O音。而在前面加上个比较清晰的A音成为 A-

sharper sounding "A" was added to the expression, making a more easily understood "A-Okay."

A-Okay is one of several expressions that may have come into the language earlier but became popular only when they were used in the space program. These expressions quickly became part of everyday speech. This happened because most people had television, and could see and hear all the major events of a space flight. People spent hours watching special TV reports of every space flight.

They could hear the astronauts talk with NASA scientists and engineers. In the first days of space flight, the astronauts seemed to be speaking a new language. But soon, the public accepted and began to use many expressions of this space language.

One such expression is "all systems go". It means everything is ready, let us begin. NASA uses it to mean that all the systems on a spacecraft have been examined and are working correctly. All systems go means the decision has been made to continue with the launch of the spacecraft. It is also used outside the space program to tell someone that you are ready to start a job or activity.

Countdown became a popular word of the space age. Space scientists would count down the seconds until launch. They counted backwards from 10 seconds, 9, 8, 7, 6, 5, 4, 3, 2, 1 and liftoff. Some language experts say the American people first heard countdowns in the late 1940's during broadcasts of atomic bomb tests in Nevada and on some islands in the Pacific. But countdown did not become a common expression until the space flights of the 1960's.

Another space expression that has become common in recent years is "burnout". It meant that a launch rocket had used all its fuel. Space ships were launched by more than one rocket. The first rocket would lift the ship high

Okay, 就比较容易听懂了。

象“一切正常”这样的一些用语,很可能早就在英语中产生了;不过,它们只是在用于宇航计划之后才得到人们的青睐,很快成为人们的日常用语的。之所以如此,则是因为大多数人如今都有了电视,可以看到、听到主要宇航事件的进行。每举行一次空间飞行,人们都一连许多小时地观看电视上的特别节目。

人们可以听见宇航员和航空航天局的科学家、工程师们谈话。刚刚兴起空间飞行时,宇航员们所讲的简直就是一种新的语言。然而公众很快就接受了,并且开始使用这种空间语言中的许多语汇。

其中之一是“一切就绪”,意思是:一切都已就位,可以开始了。航空航天局用这个说法表示:航天器上的全部系统都已检查完毕,一切运行无误。“一切就绪”意味着决定紧接着发射航天器。这个说法现在也用于宇航计划之外,用来告诉别人你已准备好开始干某件活或进行某项活动了。

“倒读数”已成为空间时代人们喜欢使用的一个词儿。空间科学家总是一秒一秒地倒着读数,直到下令发射。他们从10秒数起:9、8、7、6、5、4、3、2、1,然后“发射”。有些语言专家说,美国人最早是在40年代末听无线电台播放内华达州或太平洋某些岛屿上进行原子弹试验的实况时听到“倒读数”这个词儿的。但是,这个词儿之成为家喻户晓的词儿,还是60年代开始航天飞行之后的事了。

另外一个宇航用语近年来也颇为流行,那就是“熄火”,它的意思是一支发射火箭用完了全部燃料。航天器的发射,要用好几支火箭。头一支火箭把航天器射到地球上的高空,然后“熄

above the earth. Then it would "burn out" and a second rocket would fire to carry the vehicle into earth orbit.

Soon, people began to use burnout to describe what happens to a person who works too hard under too much stress for too long. Such a "burned out" person is like a rocket with no more fuel. He has no energy or desire to continue.

2 ACE IN THE HOLE

It is surprising how many expressions that people use every day came from the card game poker¹.

For example, you hear the expression "ace in the hole" used by many who would never think of going near a poker table. An ace in the hole is any argument, plan or thing kept hidden until needed, especially when it can turn failure into success.

In poker and most card games, the ace is the highest and most valuable card. It is often a winning card. In one kind of poker game, the first card to each player is dealt face down. A player does not show this card to the other players. The other cards are dealt face up with the players betting money each time they receive another card. No one knows until the end of the game whose hidden card is the winner. Often, the "ace in the hole" wins the game.

1 Poker: "扑克"是一种发源于美国的赌博,有发五张牌(第一张押底)和发七张牌(第一、二、七张押底)两种,从发第一张明牌后逐张加注,最后按摊牌的组合情况决定胜负。汉语中"扑克"泛指用这种纸牌玩的各种游戏,因此也把这种纸牌叫"扑克牌"(playing cards),以示与其他纸牌不同,其实都不是poker的原意。

火”；第二支火箭立即“点火”，把航天器带进地球轨道。

不久，人们就用“熄火”这个词儿来形容一个人工作太紧张、太累、太长之后发生的情况。就象一支火箭用完了全部燃料一样，这个人也“熄了火”；他已经没有继续干下去的精力和愿望了。

二 押底的“爱司”

人们日常用语中来自“扑克”牌戏的数量之多，确实令人惊讶。

譬如说，你可以听到许多人使用“押底的爱司”这个成语，而他们是决计不会去赌“扑克”的。所谓“押底的爱司”，即指任何非到急需绝不拿出的论点、计划或东西，往往一拿出来就可以反败为胜。

在“扑克”和大多数纸牌游戏中，“爱司”是最大的，也是最有用的牌，常常还是一个赢张。有一种“扑克”牌戏：发给每一个玩家的头一张牌总是“扣着的”，谁也不让别人看见这张牌是什么。然后再明着发其余几张牌；每发一张，大家就下一回注。直到最后翻牌时，才知道谁的押底的牌赢了。往往，“押底的爱司”大获全胜。

Smart card players, especially those who play for large amounts of money, closely watch the person who deals the cards. They are watching to make sure he is dealing honestly, that he is not dealing off the bottom of the stack of cards. A dealer who is doing that has "stacked the deck". He has fixed the cards so that he will get higher cards and you will lose.

The expression, "dealing off the bottom", now means cheating in business, as well as in cards. And when someone tells you that "the cards are stacked" against you, he is saying you do not have a chance to succeed.

In a poker game you do not want to let your opponents know if your cards are good or bad. So having a "poker face" is important. A poker face never shows any emotion, never expresses either good or bad feelings. No one can learn, by looking at your face, if your cards are good or bad. People now use "poker face" in everyday speech to describe someone who shows no emotion.

Someone who has a "poker face" usually is good at "bluffing". Bluffing is trying to trick a person into believing something about you that is not true. In poker, you bluff when you bet heavily on a poor hand. The idea is to make the other players believe you have strong cards and are sure to win. If they believe you, they are likely to drop out of the game, leaving to you the money they have bet.

You can do a better job of bluffing if you "hold your cards close to your vest". You hold your cards close to you so no one else can see what you have. In everyday speech, holding your cards close to your vest means not letting others know what you are doing or thinking. You are keeping your plans secret.

善于玩纸牌的人，尤其是那些赌大钱的人，总是仔细地盯着发牌的人。这是为了保证他在发牌时没有捣鬼，防止他从一叠牌的底下发牌。谁要是这么发牌，准是“在做牌时做了手脚”，也就是把牌做成他拿好牌、让你输牌。

因此，“从底下发牌”意思是指在做生意时（当然也指玩牌时）进行欺诈。而有人告诉你“牌做得对你不利”时，他是说你根本不会成功。

如果你玩“扑克”，你当然不想让你的对手们知道你拿的是好牌还是坏牌。因此，摆出一付“扑克面孔”就很要紧。所谓“扑克面孔”就是脸上从来不流露任何表情，既不表示高兴，也不表示沮丧。这样，别人看着你的脸，就不知道你到底拿了好牌还是拿了坏牌。于是人们在日常谈话中就用“扑克面孔”一词来形容一个不动声色的人了。

长着一付“扑克面孔”的人往往善于“唬人”，也就是骗得别人信以为真。玩“扑克”时，你手里拿着坏牌却拚命下注就是为了“唬人”。目的是让对手们以为你攥着好牌、一准能赢。如果他们信以为真，他们可能会一一退出而让你赢得他们已经下了的赌注。

你如果“把牌紧紧地攥在胸前”，唬起人来准会更灵。因为这么一来，别人就没办法看见你拿着什么牌了。因此，“把牌紧紧地攥在胸前”在日常英语中的意思就是不让别人知道你在做些什么、想些什么。也就是说，你将自己的打算秘而不宣。

3 BEHIND THE EIGHT-BALL

When someone is "behind the eight-ball" he is in a difficult, if not impossible situation.

The expression comes from the game of Kelly pool¹. Pool or pocket billiards, is a table game played with fifteen numbered balls and a cue ball. Players strike the cue ball with the end of a cue, or stick, sending it into one or more of the numbered balls. The idea is knock each of the numbered balls into one of the six pockets around the edge of the pool table.

In one kind of pool game called eight-ball, players try to put the numbered balls into the pockets, with the eight-ball the last to go in. A player loses if he sinks the eight-ball before all the other balls are in the pockets. A player can put his opponent in poor position by leaving the cue ball behind the eight-ball. The eight ball blocks his opponent from a shot at any of the other balls.

So, if you are behind the eight-ball, your position is bad. There is almost no way out of the situation. You are in trouble.

A New York newspaper, in a report on a new book, used the expression this way, "An attempt to describe what makes the drawings funny lands you behind the eight-

¹ Kelly pool: 这是“落袋弹子”的一种玩法。弹子戏 (billiards) 大体分三类, 一类叫 carom billiards, 球桌四周无口袋; 另一类就是本文说的 pocket billiards (又称 pool), 也是我国常见的一种; 还有一类叫 snooker, 与 pool 相似, 但有 21 个球。

三 落在 8 号球后面

说一个人“落在 8 号球后面”，就是说他处于困难的，即使不是没有希望的境地。

这个说法出自一种台球游戏。台球，也叫落袋弹子，是一种在桌面上玩的游戏，共有 15 个编了号的球和一个主球。玩球的人用球杆的尖去打主球，用它去撞其他的编了号的球。目的是将这些编号的球一个个打进台子周围的 6 个袋子里去。

有一种台球游戏叫“8 号球戏”：玩球的人要设法先将其他编号的球都打进袋子里，最后才把 8 号球打进去。如果还有别的球没有进袋而玩球的人却不小心把 8 号球打了进去，那他就输了。这样，谁要是能把主球推到 8 号球后面，他的对手可就落入了困难的境地：8 号球挡住了主球，使他无法打其他的球。

因此，如果你落在 8 号球后面，你的处境就很糟糕。简直没法逃出困境。你的麻烦可就大了。

一家纽约报纸在报道一本新书时是这样使用这一说法的：“你要是企图说明究竟是什么使这些插图如此滑稽，你就会落在 8 号