



# 大学英语 词汇多维研究



The Multi-dimensional Study of  
College English Vocabulary

栗欣 著

 北京理工大学出版社  
BEIJING INSTITUTE OF TECHNOLOGY PRESS

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# 前言 ◀

## PREFACE

This book aims to explore and figure out the secrets of English vocabulary and furnishes the language learners with some efficient and viable approaches of studying words. The book contents are instrumental in boosting the pace of word study in the process of language acquisition. As is known, English vocabulary has experienced a long history of character evolution and transformation. There are several character systems thriving in the human society, such as hieroglyphics, arrow-headed characters, Phoenician characters, Greek and Latin. To acquaint with these ancient and historic characters can enlighten the language learners to study English vocabulary from a brand-new perspective. Also, the profound study of the hieroglyphic meanings of 26 English letters is the distinctive feature of this book. It analyzes words in terms of a single letter and its diverse implicit meanings, which is likely to enhance the efficiency of word memorization. The process of learning vocabulary is not a snap. Polysemy, synonyms and easily confused words are the major difficulties of studying English vocabulary. Those who are able to tackle these problems can grasp the keys to vocabulary acquisition. The effective study of English words involves a comprehensive understanding of how words are produced. English words do not appear by accident. There are several principles of word creation, such as creating new words from scratch, loanwords or word borrowing, adding

prefixes and suffixes, clipped words and acronyms, fusing words, and sound imitation. Additionally, English vocabulary has an intimate relationship with human cultures. Greek and Roman mythology as well as roots and affixes in etymology are two major cultural sources of English vocabulary. They both play an important role in guiding language learners to acquire words in an interesting and flexible manner.

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# 1

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## **The Origin and Evolution of Characters in History**

A language is composed of substantial words. Vocabulary is the core of language learning. The famous linguist Wilkins (1972) once said that without grammar, very little could be conveyed; without vocabulary, nothing could be conveyed. When it comes to English words, we must first talk about language origins and developments in history, since understanding the origins and evolutions of human characters has an important role in mastering and memorizing English words. English vocabulary has gone through several stages of evolutions. Prior to the age of English, we believe that the human characters mainly experienced five periods: the period of hieroglyphics in ancient Egypt, the period of cuneiform characters (arrow-headed characters) in ancient Babylon, the period of the Phoenician characters, the period of Greek in ancient Greece, and the period of Latin in ancient Rome. These characters of different times and symbols of distinct ages have a profound influence on the formation and evolution of modern

English words. Learning and mastering the basic knowledge of these characters plays an important role in improving the learners' interest of vocabulary study as well as refining their memory efficiency in the process of English vocabulary acquisition.

## 1.1 The Period of Ancient Egypt — Hieroglyphics

The first phase of the origin and evolution of human characters is the ancient Egyptian hieroglyphics, which helped the ancient people understand the pictographic meanings of the letter symbols and utilized images to facilitate the process of word memorizations. 5,000 years ago, the ancient Egyptian hieroglyphics emerged in history, namely, the Egyptian characters, which were the oldest words human beings had invented. As early as 3,100 BC, one joint panel of a Pharaoh's armor was engraved with hieroglyphs. Later, these mysterious ancient Egyptian words were called *Hieroglyphe* by Europeans. It was composed of two separate Greek words meaning "sacred" and "inscription" and implied "the words of God". The ancient Egyptians believed that their characters were created by Thoth, the lunar god, who was also in charge of computation and learning.

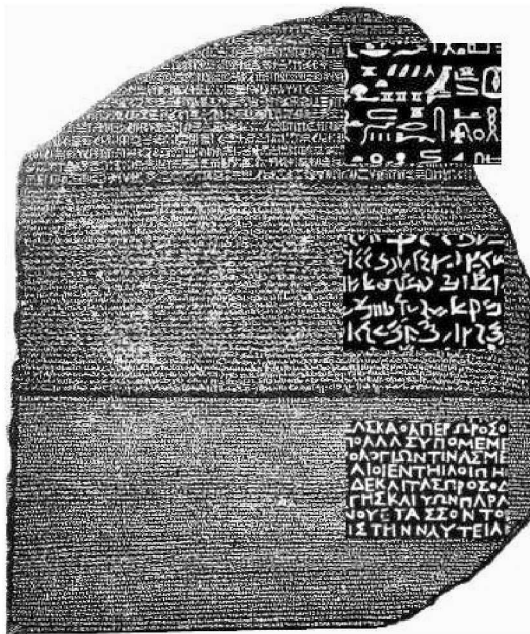
In modern English, hieroglyphic is a compound word composed of the prefix *hiero-* (holy) and the root *graph-* (draw; engrave). Hieroglyphics are the signs and symbols that directly describe the objects' images and their original users are mainly monks. This kind of characters was engraved on the walls of the temples and religious monuments, known as "the holy book". The ancient Egyptian hieroglyphics have been lost for a long time in history. Until 1799, during the Napoleon's expedition to Egypt, the French soldiers dug trenches in the Fort Rosetta and found a stone consisting of three scripts: the hieroglyphic scripts, demotic scripts and ancient Greek scripts. The Rosetta Stone was a clue to decoding the hieroglyphics and many scholars







**The Ancient Egyptian Hieroglyphics Engraved on Stone**

were absorbed in the research of these Egyptian symbols. In 1822, French Dr. Jean-François Champollion successfully interpreted the meanings of the three different scripts and this significant event marked the advent of Egyptology.



**The Three Distinct Ancient Characters Carved on the Rosetta Stone**

	man		house, building		book, writing, abstract
	woman		town, village		small, bad, weak
	god, king		desert, foreign country		wood, tree
	force, effort		sun, light, time		logogram indicator
	eat, drink, speak		walk, run		plural indicator

**The Chart of Simple Hieroglyphics**

In the chart of figures and hieroglyphics above, word expressions and descriptions of images are very accurate and precise. In the first column, we can see that a man waves his fists to fight, while a woman kneels down indicating obedience. The Pharaoh's beard embodies his sacred position and dominant role. A worker is using his handy tools to labor in the field. Another person is eating and drinking. These graphs portray the distinct social status of different people vividly. In the second column, the house has a door and extensive open space. The city is surrounded by a circular wall with internal intersected roads. The desert looks like the rolling hills. The sun is in the circle and the dot in the middle denotes that it is the origin of the light. Walking is represented by two legs on the move. In the third column, the book is put flat with a band to keep it firm. The bird manifests the weak, the small, or the bad. The branches have the implicit meanings of wood or trees. A vertical bar implies the singular form of a noun, while the three vertical bars represent plural nouns and complex numbers.



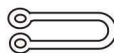
vulture



foot



folded cloth



tethering rope



hand



2 flowering reeds



**The Chart of Advanced Hieroglyphics**

The ancient Egyptian hieroglyphics have a significant effect on modern English vocabulary acquisition. Through mastering hieroglyphic meanings of 26 English letters, learners can better understand the meanings of English words and form a deep memory in their minds. For example, the first word, *vulture* (a large bird that eats dead animals) can be memorized as the letter *v* combined with the word *culture* (the beliefs, way of life, art, and customs shared by the people in a particular society). Letter *v* is like the gap of the canyon, so *vulture* is an animal cultural phenomenon in the canyon. As vultures possess a greedy nature, the extended meaning of *vulture* is used to refer to the greedy people. Letter *v* also constitutes some other English words that have the same meaning of *the gap of a canyon*, such as *valley* (an area of lower land between two lines of hills or mountains, usually with a river flowing through it), *village* (a very small town in the countryside), *vent* (a hole

or pipe through which gases, liquid, etc. can enter or escape from an enclosed space or container). The hieroglyphic symbol in the third column and the third row is like a *wave*. This wave-shaped word resembles the English letter *w*, which indicates the idea of water or twisting something into the wavy forms, such as *wine* (an alcoholic drink made from grapes, or a type of this drink), *wade* (to walk through water that is not deep), *woman* (an adult female person whose mood is changing like water), *wrestle* (to fight someone by holding them and pulling or pushing them), *wrong* (not correct, and not based on true facts), *wrench* (to twist and pull something roughly from the place where it is being held).

## 1.2 The Period of Ancient Babylon — Arrow-headed Characters

The second stage of the origin and evolution of characters is the emergence of the arrow-headed characters in the Babylonian Empire. It is one of the oldest words in the world arising from the Tigris and Euphrates rivers. Sumerians invented the arrow-headed characters which had a history of approximately 3,000 years. The cuneiform characters came from the hieroglyphic system and the glyph structure was gradually simplified and abstracted. As a result, the number of characters was reduced from about 1,000 to about 400. Cuneiform characters were mainly written on the clay plates and a small number of them were carved on stone, metal or wax plates. People used sharpened reed rods or sticks to write these amazing characters in the soft mud boards. Then, after going through the process of drying and baking, these soft mud boards became hard, not easy to be deformed.

In the 18th century BC, under the reign of the ancient Babylonian King Hammurabi (1792 BC–1750 BC), Babylonian people compiled a code



**The Clay Plate of Arrow-headed Characters**

featuring the arrow-headed characters, known as “the Code of Hammurabi”. It was considered as the first code in the human history. This famous code, which is covered with a number of cuneiform characters and portrait reliefs, was carved in a 2.25 meter-high pillar. The upper part of the stone pillar was the relief depicting the story that the sun god Shamash entitled Hammurabi to possess the ruling power. The lower part of the pillar was engraved with the full texts of the code. This code elaborates the detailed class relations among the king, slave owners and free people. It also emphasizes the protection of orphans and widows as well as the



**The Stone Stele of the Code of Hammurabi**

reduction of the debt and slavery period to three years, etc. This code not only displays a historic human progress, but also sets a precedent in the realm of codes.



**The Code of Hammurabi**

In 539 BC, the Persians conquered the Kingdom of Babylon and learned cuneiform characters from the Babylonians. Soon, the Persian Empire dominated more and more territories and had an extremely large expansion of the domain. Due to the demand of business development, Persians in Iranian Plateau transformed the Mesopotamian cuneiform into more conveniently used words. In the Greek era, the Phoenician traders ultimately invented the Phoenician alphabet on the basis of Egyptian hieroglyphs. It was at this time that the alphabetic letters came into the historical stage and became the mainstream communicative tools in the western world. Cuneiform characters were used in the western Asia for more than three thousand years. The last piece of clay cuneiform characters was found in AD 75 as a relic. After that, arrow-headed characters could not be seen any more.

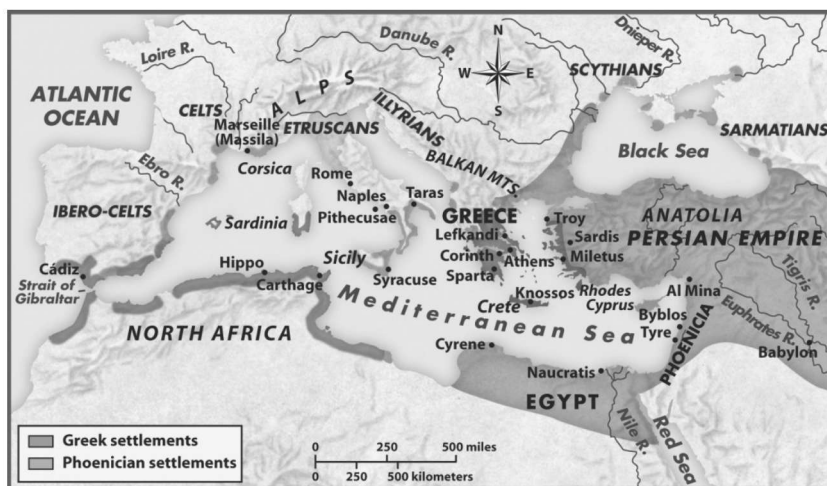


The Sumerian Cuneiform

### 1.3 The Period of Phoenicia—the Phoenician Alphabet

The appearance of the Phoenician alphabet witnesses the third stage of the origin and evolution of characters. Phoenicia is a narrow strip located in the eastern coast of the Mediterranean Ocean. Geographically, the southern part of Phoenicia is the ancient Egyptian civilization, the eastern is the ancient Babylonian empire, and the western is the vast Mediterranean Ocean. According to a famous legend, the world's first letter-based characters were invented by the ancient Phoenician people. Once upon a time a Phoenician carpenter, whose wisdom was well known in the nearby neighborhood, worked in a friend's house and forgot to carry a tool. He randomly picked up a piece of wood and carved something in it with a knife. Then he made a

slave take this piece of wood to his wife at home. When his wife saw the wood piece, she promptly handed the slave a tool without saying anything. The slave was shocked and thought that his master used a mysterious way to convey information. The symbols on the wood indicated what he needed. Accordingly, people said that those letters on the wood carved by the carpenter was the first letter-based characters in the Phoenician history. Later, many Phoenician people were informed of this amazing event and turned to the carpenter to learn the alphabet. The carpenter was very generous and gave away his invention to other people. In this way, the Phoenician alphabet was gradually spread along the coasts of the Mediterranean Sea.



The Map of Phoenicia Located Between Egypt and Persian Empire

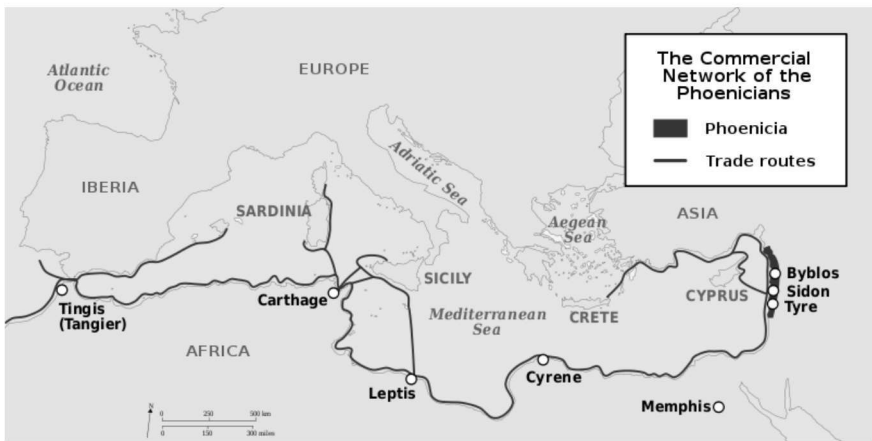
In fact, the appearance of the Phoenician alphabet is not a coincidence. It is the outcome of life necessity. Phoenicians were busy in the field of commerce and maritime industry. Keeping an account and signing the paper could not be ignored in their business adventures. However, the popular hieroglyphs and cuneiforms characters were too tough to be written and took people a large amount of time to memorize. Both of them were not very effective and efficient for the Phoenician businessmen who valued their time as money. Under these circumstances, the ancient Phoenicians had to give up



their old writing styles, borrowed a few figures from the Egyptian hieroglyphics, and simplified some characters from the Babylonian cuneiform aiming to develop a new word system. Thus, the 22 Phoenician letters were finally invented by the witty Phoenicians and a new era of characters was established.



The Phoenician Commercial Ship



The Phoenician Commercial Routes in the Mediterranean Sea