

Words and Their Origins

英语词语的故事



刘四平
武汉大学出版社

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前 言

英语词汇量浩如烟海，初涉英语者的第一个难题往往是“无穷尽”的生词和“无规则”的拼写。对生词的熟悉过程往往是死记硬背，就像记电话号码一般，想起来的也就是常用的几个，大多数恰似过眼烟云。为把生词留在大脑中，人们效仿着各种办法，可能奏效的却寥寥无几。

我们不妨先与熟悉陌生人进行对比。如果我们了解陌生人的背景情况，或把他与我们认识的人联系起来，我们往往很容易对他留下影响。记忆生词是同样的道理，通过了解英语的发展历史，通过熟悉生词的“身世”以及与其他词的关系，我们对英语的认识就不再是外围的一点“皮毛”了。

现代英语早已成为国际性语言，成为使用范围最广泛的语言。然而在一千五百多年前，英语又是如何从英格兰孕育而生的呢？是什么因素在影响着英语的形成和发展，英语与其他语言有着什么样“沾亲带故”的关系呢？了解其“源头”，对我们学好英语定会大有裨益。

通过了解英语单词的演变过程，我们还会惊讶地发现，英语单词的构成原来与汉字表义、表音偏旁如出一辙，从中我们定能悟出某些规律来。从此，背生词不再是件令人生厌的苦差事。

此外，一旦了解了单词后面的趣闻轶事，单词决不再是几个字母的枯燥组合。历史中的人物、事件常常会留下自己的烙印。豪华的 palace（宫殿）原来是古罗马的山岳名；令人尊敬的 lady 身世可不太高贵，她得为一家老少的肚子日夜操劳。边看故事，边学单词，这种寓教于乐的方法定会让我们受益匪浅。

语言与文学和文化是密不可分的。英语文学在世界文学史上的地位举足轻重。学习语言史就是对文学史的一次回顾。莎士比亚、弥尔顿这些赫赫有名的文学巨匠我们已很熟悉，他们“原汁原味”的英语名句，将使我们领略到地道纯正的英语。此外，博大精深的古希腊、古罗马文化也会使我们浮想联翩：一位位栩栩如生的神仙会跃然纸上，一周七日名和十二月份名决不再会那么拗口难记。

此书正是以英语词源为主线，揭示英语的发展进程，讲述单词的演变过程，描述单词后面发生的曲折故事，并介绍相关的历史人物和历史事件。阅读此书，我们就仿佛翻开了英语的“家书”。我们会对英语的形成和发展过程有清晰的了解；对英语单词的构成规律有深刻的认识；对英美文学、历史掌故有初步的熟悉；同时对古希腊、古罗马灿烂的文化有概括的了解。

本书精选和浓缩了有代表性的英语词条约二百五十个，按字母顺序进行编排，用英语行文。每个词条前均列出生词表，对文中出现的不常用单词加汉语注释。此外，文中所涉及的历史人物和背景知识在每篇短文的后面有详尽的汉语解释，并在书后列有所有词条的索引。本书语言难度适中，不仅可作为英语知识性读物，亦对提高英语阅读水平有一定帮助。本书适合大学英语二级以上程度的英语爱好者阅读。

本书在策划、编写、修改及出版过程中始终得到武汉大学出版社曾建华编辑、王春阁副编审的大力帮助和支持；同时本书在定稿初期，承蒙武汉大学外语学院韩玮老师的积极筹划和热情推荐，在此一并深表谢意。

由于编者水平有限，书中难免存在不足之处，热切希望专家读者不吝指正，实为感谢。

编者

2000年3月于珞珈山

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ACADEMY (专科学校) (from the name of a god in Greek mythology)

New Words

teens	十几岁的青少年
inspiration	灵感, 启示
abduct	绑架
hideout	藏匿处
rescue	解救
mythology	神话
gymnasium	体育馆
legendary	传奇的
descendent	后裔, 下一代
denote	表示

In the Greek myth, Helen, daughter of Zeus¹, has always been regarded as the type of perfect female beauty. Even in her teens, Helen was already a charming girl. Many a man stared at her with both admiration and inspiration.

When Helen was only twelve years old, she was abducted by Theseus², who hoped to marry her eventually. But Theseus' dream was smashed by an unknown god, Akademos³, who revealed Helen's hideout to her brothers, Caster and Polux, who were in search of their sister.

注:

1. 宙斯, 希腊神话中万神之首。
2. 忒修斯, 传说中的伟大英雄, 他降妖除怪, 统一了阿蒂卡全国。
3. 阿卡蒂莫斯, 希腊神话中一位不太出名的小神。

Because of Akademos' information, Helen was rescued. Thus, Academos won himself a place in Greek mythology.

In Athens⁴ a park and gymnasium was named in honor of this legendary hero Akademos. It was in this park known as Akademeia that Plato⁵ established his first school, which is, in name at least, the grandfather of all modern academies.

In the fifteenth century, the word Academy found its way into English. At first, it especially referred to Plato's school of philosophy. But in French, the descendant of Greek *Akademeia* had lost its original reference as no more than a proper noun and had developed more general senses. A French Academie may be any school above the elementary level, or it may be a learned society. These later meanings of Academy entered English from French. From then on, the name of a god began its entirely new career as a noun denoting a special school.

4. 雅典, 古代希腊最伟大的城邦。

5. 柏拉图(约公元前 428 ~ 前 348 年), 古希腊三大哲学家之一。他和苏格拉底、亚里士多德共同奠定了西方文化的哲学基础。

AGONY(极度痛苦)(from a Greek verb meaning *celebrate*)

New Words

athletic	体育的
fierce	激烈的
take on	显现出
anguish	痛苦
exemplify	例证
pinch	拧
predominate	占主导地位
antagonism	敌意、对抗
protagonist	提倡者

Contrary to its present sense, the original intention of this word was pleasure rather than pain. *Agony* is a word deriving from ancient Greece. The ancient Greeks were fond of celebration that included games and athletic contests. From the verb *agein* meaning “to celebrate”, the Greeks derived the noun *agon* to denote a public gathering for such celebrations. Competition in their games and contests were just as fierce and violent as that of today’s Olympic Games. Hence, the struggle to win the prize in the athletic contests came to be called *agonia*,

which later took on the general sense of “any difficult struggle”. From this sense *agonia* additionally came to refer to the pain, whether physical or mental, that was involved in a struggle.

In the fourteenth century the Greek word *agonia* entered the vocabulary of Middle English¹, meaning mental anguish or distress.

An entirely new sense of agony developed in the eighteenth century: “a strong sudden and often uncontrollable display²(as of joy and delight)”. Thus we see the shift from intense pain to intense pleasure. This is exemplified by Henry Fielding in *Tom Jones*³ (1749): “*The first agonies of joy which were felt on both sides are indeed beyond my power to describe,*” and more recently by Edith Wharton in *New Year's Day*⁴ (1924): “*My cousin Kate... was pinching my arm in an agony of mirth.*” Nevertheless, the distressful sense of *agony* still predominates, even though the word originally came from a verb meaning “to celebrate”.

The Greek *agon* also forms the root of such English words as *antagonism* and *protagonist*.

注:

1. 中古英语
2. 该词从 18 世纪开始可表示任何精神上的激动, 无论是痛苦还是欢乐。
3. Henry Fielding H. 菲尔丁 (1707 ~ 1754 年), 英国小说家。菲尔丁在英国文学史上占有举足轻重的地位, 是英国第一个用完整的小说理论从事创作的小说家。他奠定了 19 世纪末一直支配着英国小说的那种全面反映当代社会的现实主义传统。《弃婴汤姆·琼斯的故事》(*Tom Jones*) 是菲尔丁 1749 年 2 月发表的小说, 书中洋溢着喜剧情调, 刻画了众多人物, 并描写了伦敦和外省上、下层社会鲜明对照的生活, 是了解 18 世纪英国生活的重要读物。
4. Edith Wharton E. 华顿 (1862 ~ 1937 年), 美国女作家。华顿以

描写她所处的上流社会而出名,其主要代表作有《天真的时代》(*The Age of Innocence*)和《伊坦·弗洛美》(*Ethan Frome*)。

AMBITION(志向,野心)(from a Latin word meaning *go around*)

New Words

ardent	热烈的
strive	奋斗
pomp	夸耀
uncomplimentary	贬低的

In the Roman days *ambition* was a word that was restricted to politicians. These seekers after power would always “go around”; making speeches and collecting votes like those of today in the Western countries. The word comes in fashion from the Latin term *ambitio*, meaning “go around”. The Roman historian, Tacitus¹, who died in the year 120 AD, used the word *ambitio* to refer to “ardent striving for pomp and honor”. Later, ambition entered English with this uncon-

注:

1. 塔西佗(约公元 56 ~ 约 120 年), 罗马帝国高级官员, 著有大量历史著作。

plimentary meaning. But through the years the word softens and broadens in meaning and now is applied to any go-getter².

2. 志在必得的人。

AMERICA(美洲)(from the name of an Italian navigator)

New Words

submit	提交
alleged	声称的
patron	赞助人
label	把...称为
sketch	绘制
cling to	坚持于

Amerigo Vespucci¹ was an Italian navigator from whom the New World got the name *America*. In the year 1503 Americigo submitted a report of his alleged voyages to his old patrons, in which he gave a vivid account of his four trips to the New World. Later, his narration of the voyage was translated and published by a young geographer and map-maker, Martin Waldseemueler². The most striking feature of the Amerigo's report was

注:

1. 阿美利哥, 意大利航海家。据传从1499年至1502年他曾先后四次到达美洲大陆, 并明确提出新发现的大陆不是亚洲的一部分, 而是欧洲人一无所知的新大陆。
2. 瓦尔德赛弥乐, 德国地图绘制家。他最先建议新发现的大陆用阿

the inclusion of a map showing an area that he called the New World. The young author had been so deeply impressed by both Amerigo's writing and drawing, who had first referred to these lands as "new", that he labeled the New World *America* in honor of the great explorer. Later on when map-makers sketched in North America, they clung to this new name, but the angry Spanish, feeling unfair for their Christopher Columbus³, refused to use the name *America* until the 18th century.

美利哥的名字命名。

3. 哥伦布, 意大利航海家, 新大陆的发现者。他为了证明从欧洲向西可以到达东方的想法, 向西班牙国王求助, 西班牙国王赐予他百万金币的装备。哥伦布于 1492 年 10 月 12 日终于登上巴哈马群岛。

AMETHYST(紫晶, 水碧)(from a Greek word meaning *not drunken*)

SAPPHIRE(蓝宝石)(from a Sanskrit word associated with *Saturn*)

New Words

gemstone	宝石
violet	紫罗兰
quartz	石英
intoxicating	醉人的
bestow	赋予
intensity	强度
dote upon	溺爱

tease	取笑
mount	登上
Sanskrit	梵语
astrology	星象术
jade	玉

Ancient peoples made creative use of gemstones. They found precious stones to be not only charming but curing as well, a fact that influenced the naming of *amethyst*. The Greeks believed that this violet-colored quartz could protect its owners from harm and from drunkenness. The Greeks called this stone *amethyst*, which comes from the Greek word *amethystos*, meaning "not intoxicating". A story told by Aristotle¹ is that Amethyst was a beautiful nymph² who begged for the aid of the goddess Artemis³ to protect her from Dionysus⁴. Artemis did this by turning her into a precious gem, and Dionysus, in honor of his love for the nymph, bestowed the stone its present purple color and the quality of preserving its wearers from the influence of wine.

The color of the amethyst varies in intensity, but is always clear purple and bluish violet. Throughout the Middle Ages, the stone was greatly admired for

注:

1. 亚里士多德(公元前 384 ~ 前 322 年), 希腊哲学家、逻辑学家和科学家。
2. 根据希腊神话, nymphs 为居住在山林、草地、水中及海上半人半神的美丽少女。
3. 阿尔忒弥斯, 希腊宗教中野生动物、狩猎、植物及贞节和生育女神。
4. 狄俄尼索斯, 在古希腊宗教中, 他是丰产与植物的自然神, 尤其以饮酒和狂欢而著称。

its beauty. Eventually it found its way into poetry, becoming a standard by which earthly beauty was measured. In his "*Entymion: A Poetic Romance*" (1818) John Keats⁵ writes,

Although, before the crystal heavens
darken

I watch and dote upon the silver lakes
Pictur'd in western cloudiness, that
takes

The semblance of gold rocks...

And towers of amethyst,— would I
so tease

My pleasant days, because I could not
mount

Into these region?

Another gemstone whose name is rooted in ancient folklore is the *sapphire*. The name *sapphire* is originated from the Sanskrit term *sanipriya*, which means "dear to the planet Saturn". The exact nature of this association of the sapphire with Saturn is unclear. Perhaps the star-like brilliance exhibited by certain sapphires reminded the ancient people of the planets over head. Or it may have its foundations in ancient astrology; in modern Western astrology, however, sapphire is associated with Venus rather than Sa-

5. 济慈 (1795 ~ 1821 年), 英国诗人, 也是 19 世纪最伟大的诗人之一。在他 26 年短暂的一生中, 他借助于逼真的意象、极大的感性美和通过神话传说表达哲理, 创造性地探索诗的完美境界。

turn.

Over the years, sapphires have served a variety of purposes, many of them mystical. Like jade, sapphire was believed to cure illness, particularly of the eye. The bright blue stone was associated with calmness or peace of mind and body. Supposedly the person who wore the stone would be granted peace and happiness, as long as that person led a moral life. But today the sapphire and the amethyst are valued as ornamental rather than medicinal gems and nobody would turn to these stones for treatment when he or she falls ill.

AMMONIA(氨)(from the name of a Egyptian god)

CADMIUM (镉)(from a character in Greek mythology)

TANTALUM (钽)(from a character in Greek mythology)

New Words

ram	公羊
horn	犄角
oasis	绿洲
casspool	污水池

urine	尿
soot	煤炭
sal ammoniac	氯化铵
literally	照字面地
alkali	碱
exploit	功绩
monster	怪物
slaughter	杀戮
citadel	城堡
zinc oxide	氧化锌
ore	矿
marble	大理石
condemn	判刑
tantalite	钽铁矿
niobium	铌
parched	焦干的

The modern names of many chemical elements and compounds have their origins in the obscure tales of the ancient world. In Egyptian mythology Ammon¹ was a god variously represented as a ram with great horns, as a creature with a ram's head and a human body, or as simply a man either seated or standing. His chief temple was located at an oasis in the Libyan desert near Memphis². It is said that near this temple a cassoil was located, where the urine of camels was col-

注:

1. 阿蒙, 古代埃及宗教所信奉的神, 该神号称是众神之王。
2. 孟菲斯, 埃及古王国(约公元前 2686 ~ 前 2160 年)的都城。该城位于尼罗河西岸。如今在古孟菲斯墓地位有埃及著名的金字塔和狮身人面像。