Artifacts and the art of looking at the facts scientifically to know more about past cultures

Scientists study artifacts that were *made* by people in ancient cultures. When people make things, they do so with some purpose in mind. Therefore, we can expect that objects left behind ancient civilizations reflect something important to those who lived in that culture.

Just about anything made by someone can be an artifact that can be treated as evidence about how a culture lived. In a way an artifact is a window allowing us to *look* into the past. Not only precious objects like jewelry, but also everyday things like pieces of pottery, a tool, a bench from a marketplace, or even an old shoe were all manufactured by an artisan for a reason that was important to their community. It might be fun to wonder what archeologists of the future might hypothesize about our culture if they happened to find your school bag that got left behind somehow!

The Oxford dictionary defines archaeology (also spelled <archeology>) as "the study of human history and prehistory through the excavation of sites and the analysis of artefacts and other physical remains." Archaeologists are scientists who investigate the traces of the remains of ancient cultures to build knowledge about how different peoples lived. By learning about other cultures, we might even find lessons that are important for us today.

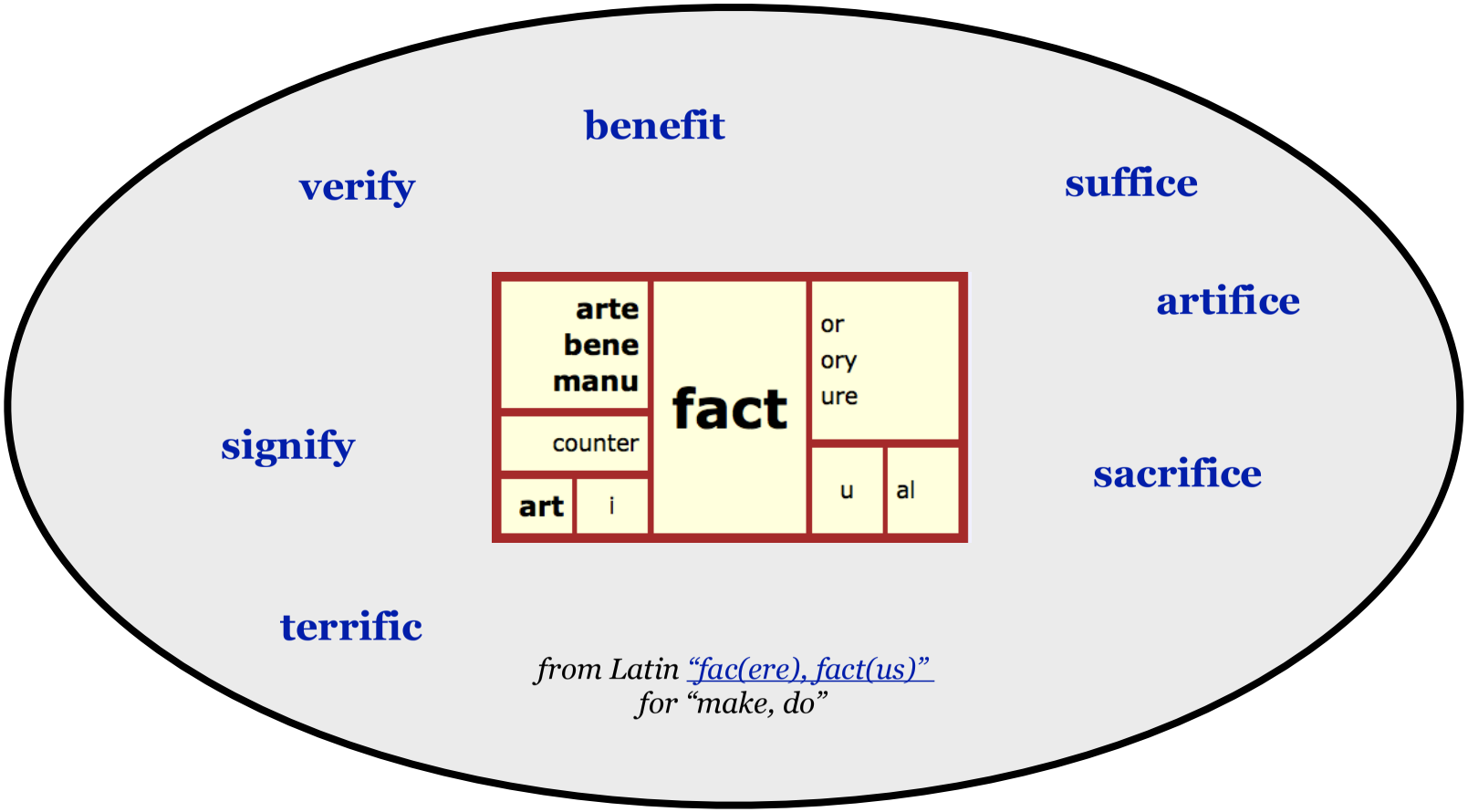
Notes:
Click any of the hot linked words to find clues marking a trail to the history, meaning, and related words.

Notice the alternatives spellings <artefact> / <artifact> and <archaeology> / <archeology>. Etymologists study words like archeologists study artefacts. Click on these words to find out which spellings are older. Perhaps that will be the beginning of a journey of learning more about how English spelling came to be!

Deepen your understanding of "artifacts" by investigating its relatives
See a diagram representing one hypothesis of morphological and etymological relatives of the spellings <artifact> / <artefact> on the next page.

A description of how to read this diagram and the concepts of morphology and etymology is on page 3.

Some Etymological and Morphological Relatives of the Free Base Element <fact>



See some notes and remaining questions for this representation of this family of words on the next page.

Reading this diagram of morphological and etymological families: The structure & meaning test

- Words within the oval share the same *root* (*etymological* family); however, *NOT* all words in the etymological family are in the matrix (share the same *base element).*

The oval marks members of an etymological family

Every word within the perimeter of the oval is part of the same ***etymological family.*** To be placed within this area, a word must share share the same ***root.***

The matrix marks members of a morphological family

Every word represented by a matrix must share both the same ***root*** AND the same ***base element***. (The term “base element” denotes “written base”.)

Since the matrix is *within the boundary of the oval*, it only includes words that share the same root. However, only words with the same root AND the same base element -- can be represented in the same matrix.

In this diagram, words like <suffice>, <benefit>, and <signify> all share the Latin root *‘fac(ere), fact(um)’*. However, there is no word sum that can link those words with a base spelled <fact>. This means they remain in the oval, but not the matrix.

The structure & meaning test

I use this phrase as a way to mark the criteria used to analyze the nature of the relationship between words.

To pass the “structure test” one must show evidence that all of the elements in a word sum can be shown to be morphemic elements in other words.

To pass the “meaning test” one must show that the hypothesized base and the target word share a common root origin.

See more on this concept at this link.

Some questions & observations

<artefact> <artifact>

Note that I have represented both spellings in the matrix. If you inspect the entries in Etymonline, you will see that the spelling <artifact> is a recent respelling of <artefact>. Perhaps that respelling was the result of a perception of a connecting vowel letter <-i->. If that is the case, this spelling evolved into one that can be represented in the matrix with that connecting vowel letter. However, as indicated by Etymonline, the older (but still used) spelling <artefact> was built from Latin ‘*arte*’ which at that time meant "by skill". The spelling <artefact> can be understood to have the Latin word “*arte*” combined with the English base element <fact>. This analysis then is including a Latin element in an English matrix.

<manufacture>

Etymonline identifies the root of this word as going back to Latin '*manu*', the ablative of man(us) for "hand". While the <-u-> connecting vowel letter does occur in words of Latin origin, I am unsure whether this history indicates the presence of a <-u-> connecting vowel letter. Scientists should avoid analyzing deeper than they can prove, so I let my analysis rest a <manu> for this matrix.

Finding members of an etymological family is easy!

How did I find words of this etymological family? If you type <facere> into the search field of Etymonline, you will find words with that root typed in the entry.

Remember Etymonline is an ***etymological*** reference. It gives you zero morphological information -- but it does give you etymological relatives. Once you have a bank of etymologically related words, you can analyze them with word sums to identify which of those words contain a common base element.

For further investigation…

There are many rich words in this passage to use as launching pads for investigation. I've linked some of those to resources. You and/or your students may like to construct their own "etymological and morphological diagrams with some of these words!

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