

BBC Learning English – Q & A of the Week

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Feifei: 大家好，欢迎收听本期《你问我答》节目。我是冯菲菲

Diarmuid: And I'm Diarmuid.

Feifei: Let's hear this week's question which comes from Zhang Tong who is a Chinese person living in France.

Question

Could you please explain the meaning of "pros and cons" and how to use it? Is this an informal expression? I can not find it in dictionaries.

Feifei: 原来 Zhang Tong 想知道 pros and cons 这个短语的意思。我们能帮帮她吗 Diarmuid?

Diarmuid: Of course. This is a very useful phrase which simply means the reasons in favour of and against a thing or course of action.

Feifei: I see. Pros and cons 这个短语通常用来表示一件事情或一种行为带来的正面和负面影响。So is it similar in meaning to advantages and disadvantages? 优势和劣势。

Diarmuid: Yes, the phrase pros and cons is very similar in meaning to advantages and disadvantages.

Feifei: So the pros are the advantages or arguments for something.

Diarmuid: And the cons are the disadvantages or arguments against something.

Feifei: 所以 pros and cons 正面和反面。那句个例子，can you show us how this works in practice?

Diarmuid: No problem. Let's consider a city like London.

Feifei: Ok.

Diarmuid: So there are a lot of ways to travel around London, such as using public transport or having a private car.

Feifei: 可能很多人都觉得自己开车是最方便的了。

Diarmuid: Maybe so... or maybe not. There are good reasons for having a car and also good reasons for not having a car.

Feifei: So what are the pros and cons of having a car in London?

Diarmuid: I would say the pros are: you can go where you want, when you want...

Feifei: You don't have to wait for trains and buses...

Diarmuid: You can carry lots of things, like shopping, with you.

Feifei: Ok, so what about the cons 负面影响, 劣势 of having a car in London?

Diarmuid: I would say the main con is that it is more expensive to have a car than to use public transport...

Feifei: And it can be very hard to find somewhere to park.

Diarmuid: And in central London you have to pay the congestion charge.

Feifei: Congestion charge 车辆进城费。

Diarmuid: So you can see there are many pros and cons to having a car.

Feifei: How true. Let's have some examples:

Examples

A: I'm thinking of getting a pet dog.

B: Well, consider the pros and cons first. Yes, a dog is good company, but it's a lot of responsibility too.

(Chinese voices)

A: What are the pros and cons of studying at a British University?

B: It would be very good for your level of English but you might feel homesick for China.

Diarmuid: Now there's an interesting thing that you should know about the phrase pros and cons, Feifei.

Feifei: What's that Diarmuid?

Diarmuid: Pros and cons is a phrase from another language. It's a language that has had an enormous impact on the English language. It's name is Latin.

Feifei: Ah, Latin. In Chinese that's called 拉丁语。拉丁语这个已经灭亡的语言是古罗马时期人们使用的一种语言。I didn't think anybody spoke that language any more.

Diarmuid: True, it is officially a dead language in that it is not the native tongue of anyone any more. However, the Latin language has had a huge influence on English and lots of other languages.

Feifei: So the phrase pros and cons is...

Diarmuid: ...actually a Latin phrase. Exactly.

Feifei: So what is the 字面意思 literal meaning of pros and cons?

Diarmuid: Very simply pro means for, and con, is short for contra, which means against.

Feifei: 原来 pros and cons 是一个拉丁语短语意思就是赞同还是反对

Diarmuid: Yes, pros and cons – for and against.

Feifei: But why is there a Latin phrase in modern English?

Diarmuid: Well, the Romans occupied Britain for more than 400 years and their Empire spread over much of Western Europe.

Feifei: 罗马帝国也成为日耳曼帝国曾统治英国 400 多年，而在其鼎盛时期几乎占据了整个欧洲。

Diarmuid: Also for centuries, even after the Roman Empire collapsed, Latin was used as the language for scholars and many records were written in Latin.

Feifei: 在罗马帝国衰亡后的几百年间众多欧洲的学者仍然在使用拉丁语。

Diarmuid: And until recently schoolchildren in the UK had to learn Latin at school.

Feifei: So Latin has played a major part in the English language for a long, long time.

Diarmuid: Exactly. That's why many English words are based on Latin, but as well as that we also use Latin phrases in English today.

Feifei: Really? Like what?

Diarmuid: Do you know the word etcetera?

Feifei: Yes, of course. Etcetera 等等。

Diarmuid: That is a Latin phrase that means 'and the rest' or and so on.

Feifei: Wow. I didn't know that. Are there many more examples?

Diarmuid: Yes, there are lots. Have you ever heard the phrase vice versa?

Feifei: Vice versa 反之亦然，就是反过来情况也一样。

Diarmuid: That's a Latin phrase meaning turn position or, as we understand it in English, the other way round.

Feifei: This is great. I never knew I could speak Latin. Let's do another one.

Diarmuid: Ok. What about status quo?

Feifei: Status quo 现状。

Diarmuid: Yes, it's another Latin phrase meaning existing state of affairs.

Feifei: 原来英语中有很多源于拉丁语的词汇和短语。

Diarmuid: And not just Latin words. English takes many words from lots of languages. Let's do a few more Latin/English words to finish.

Feifei: Why not?

Diarmuid: Try this: post-mortem. In Latin it means after death.

Feifei: Post-mortem 验尸。 Another word for that is autopsy.

Diarmuid: Versus.

Feifei: 对抗, we hear that a lot in sport, don't we?

Diarmuid: That's right. It's a Latin word that means against. And here's one we find a lot in answering emails: Re.

Feifei: Re. 回复。原意是关于。

Diarmuid: Very good. Well, it's nearly time to go now. Let's just remind the listeners how to ask their own questions.

Feifei: Send your emails to questions.chinaelt@bbc.co.uk. 或者可以通过网站给我们留言, 网址是 www.bbcukchina.com.

Diarmuid: All that remains is to say goodbye everybody and thanks for listening.

Feifei: See you next time.