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dictionary

of the
English
Language



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pho·neme  (fō nēm')

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n.

The smallest phonetic unit in a language that is capable of conveying a distinction in meaning, as the *m* of *mat* and the *b* of *bat* in English.

[French *phonème*, from Greek *phōnēma*, *phōnēmat-*, utterance, sound produced, from *phōnein*, to produce a sound, from *phōnē*, sound, voice; see **bhā**-² [in the Appendix of Indo-European roots](#).]

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Indo-European & Semitic Roots Appendices

Thousands of entries in the dictionary include etymologies that trace their origins back to reconstructed proto-languages. You can obtain more information about these forms in our online appendices:

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The Indo-European appendix covers nearly half of the Indo-European roots that have left their mark on English words. A more complete treatment of Indo-European roots and the English words derived from them is available in our [Dictionary of Indo-European Roots](#).

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