

# Explanation of the word *hobbit*

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[...] and there in rows stood great jars and vessels filled with a wealth that could not be guessed.

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The Hobbit, chapter XII: Inside Information

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## Preliminary Note

This work was first published in *Arda Philology* 5 (2015). The given online version slightly differs from the original, as new entries have been added to the KUP/KORB lists in chapter 4 (and a few have been added to the Elvish list in chapter 5), so that the statistics are updated as well. The lists can also be accessed independently at <http://sindanoorie.net/kup/kup.html> with a convenient search function. I am still extending them and appreciate any additional input.

## 1 Introduction

The story of how the word *hobbit* came about is well-known: While correcting examination papers, Tolkien came across a blank page and spontaneously wrote on it “In a hole in the ground there lived a hobbit”. In the introduction to *The History of the Hobbit*, its author John Rateliff cites various accounts of this event and presents evidence pointing to the summer of 1930 as the date of creation.

Already at the publication of *The Hobbit*, several speculations arose about a possible ‘explanation’ of this word, attempts to find out what Tolkien might have been influenced by when he invented it. They are discussed in detail in the *History of the Hobbit*. Since they have nothing in common with the one I have to offer, I just give a quick summary for the sake of completeness:

- the word *rabbit*:  
This might be the closest regular English word to *hobbit*. Apart from that, Bert the troll calls Bilbo “nassty little rabbit” when noticing his furry feet (H:II,57); and later on an eagle tells him: *You need not be frightened like a rabbit, even if you look rather like one*. However, the last clause was not present in the original manuscript (HH:VII note 1). This cannot be taken as a serious connection, of course, and was refuted by Tolkien himself.

- the novel *Babbitt* by Sinclair Lewis:  
A novel published in 1922, it has some superficial similarities with *The Hobbit*, dealing with a small-town businessman trying to escape conformity. Tolkien conceded that this novel might have had a subconscious influence, stating that Babbitt has the same “bourgeois smugness” as hobbits do (HH:I(b), note 6).
- an alleged tale *The Hobbit*:  
Shortly after the book’s publication, a reader claimed to know a friend who had read a fairy tale with this name, where the eponymous creatures were scary “little furry men”. Tolkien tried to trace this story down, unsuccessfully. He suspected that these creatures were of the “Hobberdy, Hobbaty class” and that the friend’s memory was inaccurate. Since then, the story in question has been identified as “The Hobyahs”, from Joseph Jacobs *More English Fairy Tales* (HH:App.II).
- the *Denham Tracts*:  
The very word *hobbit* appears in a list of “vaine apparitions”, self-published by a 19th century amateur antiquarian Michael Denham, containing such creatures as “boggles, kelpies, changelings, imps, fiends, mares” and many others. The word “hobbits” immediately precedes, and seems to be a variation on, “hobgoblins”. Other variants include “hobhoularde, hob-thrusts/hob-thrushes, hobby-lanthorns/hob-and-lanthorns, hob-headlesses”, constituting the “Hobberdy, Hobbaty class” mentioned by Tolkien. It would appear that he was unaware that the word had already existed in the precise form, which only caught attention in the 1970s (HH:App.I).

Now of course, *hobbit* does not need an ‘explanation’ any more than any of the numerous other words Tolkien has created, we are dealing with a language-inventor after all. But it turns out that it just might have one, in the sense that the word was not created completely arbitrarily. My approach will be a sound-symbolic rather than a philological one, in a similar vein to what has been done before by Stan McDaniel [3]. I was not aware of his work until I was finished with mine, so it would seem that we came to similar conclusions independently.

## 2 An entangled container

In 1926, a paper was published by the French linguist Marcel Cohen with the title “Sur un nom d’un contenant à entrelacs dans le monde Méditerranéen” (‘About a name of a wickerwork container in the Mediterranean world’) [1]. According to his own account, he was looking through Dillmann’s Ethiopian dictionary where he stumbled upon the Ge’ez word *karabo* translated by the similar-sounding Latin *corbis* ‘basket’ and had the idea that this similarity might not be an accident. Investigating further, he found a huge amount of words denoting a container – often specifically a woven basket, other times a vessel of some other kind – in many languages across the Mediterranean, conforming to the same shape:

1. initially, a labial sound, mostly a voiceless /k/ (in Semitic, also uvular /q/), rarely voiced /g/
2. medially, a vowel which Cohen does not specify, but which is mostly [a] according to his data, more rarely /o/ or /u/
3. finally, a labial sound, mostly /b/, /p/ or /f/
4. optionally, a liquid /r/ or /l/ somewhere within a word, more rarely an /s/, /n/ or /t/

The variant without a liquid is represented by the Latin word *cuppa* ‘cup’, the variant with a liquid by Latin *corbis* ‘basket’. To be able to refer to this shape, I therefore call the former variant KUP, the latter KORB.

Cohen’s theory is that a word of this shape has been acting as a *mot-bouchon* (literally a ‘floater-word’; in English the German term *Wanderwort* is normally used), i.e. it has been roaming the Mediterranean region, being loaned back and forth across multiple languages. He speculates that it might hail from a pre-Indo-European language from the region, with the original sense of ‘wicker’, ‘reed’, ‘stipa’ or any other material originally used in the weaving of baskets. From ‘basket’ semantic shifts lead to more general ‘vessel’, ‘cage’ and the like, as well as words denoting a particular measure of volume.

Cohen’s collection of words is of an impressive size. It has to be large in order to exclude the possibility of random similarities. In order to judge that and appreciate the scope of the prevalence of this fascinating shape, I give most of Cohen’s data below. I have excluded only a few words, some that have to do with weaving only (and no vessels, the reasons will become clear later) and some which I could not corroborate:

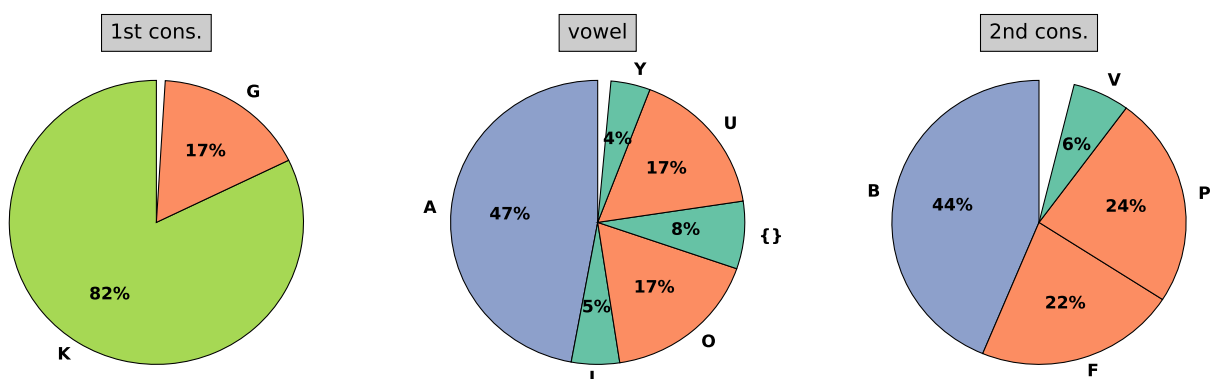
	language	gloss	translation
1	Akk.	<i>kapru(m)</i>	cup; table (for eating)
2	Akk.	<i>karpu(m), karpatu(m)</i>	jar, vessel (which may be of a fragile material)
3	Akk.	<i>quppu(m)</i>	chest, box, cage
4	Amh.	<i>gabar</i>	pan for frying pancakes
5	Amh.	<i>gabat</i>	1. wooden plate or tablet 2. wicker table
6	Amh.	<i>gabat</i>	measure of grain
7	Amh.	<i>gub</i>	a kind of woven disc
8	Amh.	<i>karabo, kabaro</i>	drum
9	Amh.	<i>qafo</i>	beehive
10	Ar.	<i>garafa</i>	to scoop with a hollow utensil
11	Ar.	<i>grb</i>	a kind of ship with rudders
12	Ar.	<i>arb</i>	measure of grain for sowing
13	Ar.	<i>girf</i>	vessel, measure
14	Ar.	<i>gurfa</i>	hollow of the hand full of water; measure of grain
15	Ar.	<i>guruf</i>	small cup
16	Ar.	<i>kabar</i>	drum
17	Ar.	<i>kabl</i>	foot shackles
18	Ar.	<i>kalb</i>	a red stripe which one sews between two strips of hide, making up a purse
19	Ar.	<i>kfra</i>	bowl out of a netted fabric from date trees
20	Ar.	<i>kibl</i>	foot shackles
21	Ar.	<i>kiwra</i>	beehive
22	Ar.	<i>kb</i>	big cup, bowl
23	Ar.	<i>kurufa, qurufa</i>	straw hat
24	Ar.	<i>kuwra, kuwra</i>	beehive
25	Ar.	<i>kufri</i>	chest-maker
26	Ar.	<i>qafa</i>	a type of round basket without handles out of palm leaves
27	Ar.	<i>qafa</i>	1. cage 2. shovel for wheat 3. a type of basket 4. stall 5. grid 6. measure of capacity
28	Ar.	<i>qaffra</i>	big basket
29	Ar.	<i>qafir</i>	beehive, tray for keeping dates in
30	Ar.	<i>qafiz</i>	measure of dry things, measure in surveying
31	Ar.	<i>qafir</i>	sheath of the palm tree blossoms
32	Ar.	<i>qalf</i>	basket for the transport of dates
33	Ar.	<i>qrb</i>	a kind of ship with rudders
34	Ar.	<i>qirba</i>	goatskin flask
35	Ar.	<i>quffa</i>	bag of palm leaves
36	Aram.	<i>kawrt</i>	beehive
37	Aram.	<i>kbsa</i>	1. cluster of grapes 2. testicles
38	Aram.	<i>kbbsa</i>	1. cluster of grapes 2. testicles
39	Aram.	<i>kuba</i>	tub
40	Aram.	<i>qapsa</i>	bottle, cage, basket
41	Aram.	<i>qbn</i>	box, chest
42	Aram.	<i>qbta</i>	box, chest
43	Aram.	<i>qubbta</i>	water reservoir; tent
44	Basque	<i>copalet</i>	pouch with water (for a whetstone)
45	Basque	<i>gopor</i>	bowl
46	Basque	<i>kupel</i>	tub
47	Basque	<i>khoban</i>	beehive
48	Basque	<i>khopor</i>	cup
49	Basque	<i>kofoi(n), kofan</i>	beehive
50	Basque	<i>kopa</i>	pouch with water (for a whetstone)
51	Basque	<i>kopor</i>	bowl, basin
52	Basque	<i>kupel</i>	tub
53	Beja	<i>guffa, gfa</i>	cup
54	Beja	<i>graf</i>	drinking glass
55	Beja	<i>kabr</i>	drum

56	Beja	<i>kafas</i>	closed basket, cage
57	Beja	<i>krfa</i>	drinking glass
58	Berber	<i>(a)grrabu</i>	a kind of ship
59	Berber	<i>akäfu</i>	basket out of paper
60	Berber	<i>akufi</i>	jar for cereal
61	Berber	<i>t-guff-t</i>	big carrycot out of halfah grass
62	Berber	<i>paqfif-ḥ</i>	big carrycot out of halfah grass
63	Bagrimi	<i>al-gawa</i>	straw hat
64	Bagrimi	<i>al-gapa</i>	big sieve
65	Bulg.		ship
66	Bilen	<i>kalambura</i>	drum
67	Bilen	<i>qaffo</i>	big vessel out of palm tree, used for storage
68	Chamir	<i>kirbra</i>	drum
69	Chamir	<i>qefa</i>	elongated basket, beehive
70	OCS	<i>koliba</i>	hut, cabin
71	Cop.	<i>kabi</i>	jar, measure
72	Cop.	<i>kebi</i>	jar, measure
73	M.Egy.	<i>kb</i>	jar, measure
74	M.Egy.	<i>qby</i>	jar, measure
75	Fr.	<i>cabane</i>	hut, cabin
76	Fr.	<i>cabas</i>	woven bag for groceries
77	Fr.	<i>cabine</i>	booth, cubicle
78	Fr.	<i>carabe</i>	withy boat covered in hides; a kind of litter; caravel
79	Fr.	<i>carafe</i>	carafe
80	Fr.	<i>coffin</i>	1. small basket, basket for fruit 2. pouch with water (for a whetstone) 3. coffin
81	Fr.	<i>coffre</i>	chest
82	Fr.	<i>corvette</i>	corvette (small warship)
83	Fr.	<i>couffe</i>	a type of basket
84	Fr.	<i>gobelet</i>	goblet
85	Fula	<i>gafakke</i>	woven feedbag (for horses)
86	Ger.	<i>Koben</i>	shed, sty
87	Ger.	<i>Korb</i>	basket
88	Geez	<i>gabat</i>	plate, frying pan
89	Geez	<i>grb</i>	goatskin flask, amphora (?)
90	Geez	<i>kabalo</i>	handle, ring
91	Geez	<i>kafar</i>	chest, basket
92	Geez	<i>karabo</i>	basket
93	Geez	<i>qafo</i>	chest, basket, cage, beehive
94	Geez	<i>qirb</i>	case, sheath
95	Ir.	<i>corb</i>	coach
96	Gr.		measure of wheat
97	Gr.		pitcher, vessel for drinking; cinerary urn
98	Gr.		pitcher, vessel for drinking; cinerary urn
99	Gr.		hut, cabin
100	Gr.		1. manger (crib for the food of cattle) 2. chariot, basket of a chariot
101	Gr.		manger (crib for the food of cattle)
102	Gr.		vessel, ship
103	Gr.		big ship
104	Gr.		pouch, wallet
105	Gr.		box, chest, bottle
106	Gr.	<i>ó</i>	birdcage
107	Gr.		basket; measure of volume
108	Gr.		1. vessel, cup, bowl 2. small boat
109	Gr.		cup
110	Gr.		hole
111	Gr.		big-bellied drinking vessel, beaker, goblet, cup
112	Gr.		vessel for drinking, for milking
113	Gr.		measure of capacity for cereal
114	Gr.		box, chest; cell; hollow of the ear

115	Gr.		cymbal
116	Hausa	<i>gafakka</i>	leather bag
117	Hausa	<i>gurunfa</i>	straw hat
118	A.Heb.	<i>grp</i>	vessel
119	A.Heb.	<i>g-p-l</i>	vessel for drinking
120	A.Heb.	<i>kbsa</i>	pouch, bag, wallet
121	A.Heb.	<i>kbra</i>	sieve
122	A.Heb.	<i>klb, klba</i>	basket for grapes
123	A.Heb.	<i>kilubi</i>	nest
124	A.Heb.	<i>kmer</i>	pile of fruits made overripe
125	A.Heb.	<i>qpa</i>	tub
126	A.Heb.	<i>quppa</i>	vessel, basket
127	Heb.	<i>kbl</i>	foot shackles
128	Heb.	<i>klb</i>	basket, cage
129	Heb.	<i>kpr</i>	metal cup
130	Heb.	<i>kpipa</i>	basket out of palm leaves
131	Heb.	<i>qab</i>	measure of capacity for non-liquids
132	It.	<i>cófano</i>	chest
133	It.	<i>coffa</i>	crow's nest (on a ship's mast), little basket
134	Kabye	<i>ḥaabip</i>	jar
135	Kafa	<i>kambo</i>	drum
136	Kunama	<i>kubula</i>	drum
137	Lat.	<i>calpar</i>	vessel for wine
138	Lat.	<i>capanna</i>	hut, cabin
139	Lat.	<i>capis, capedo</i>	bowl with a handle
140	Lat.	<i>capsa</i>	vessel, chest
141	Lat.	<i>capsula</i>	small bottle
142	Lat.	<i>capsus</i>	wagon-body, cage for large animals
143	Lat.	<i>capula</i>	bowl with a handle
144	Lat.	<i>capulus</i>	coffin
145	Lat.	<i>carabus</i>	coracle
146	Lat.	<i>cavea</i>	cage, fence, beehive
147	Lat.	<i>copa</i>	small boat
148	Lat.	<i>copelletus</i>	small cup
149	Lat.	<i>copellus</i>	measure of volume
150	Lat.	<i>cophinus</i>	basket
151	Lat.	<i>coppa</i>	small boat
152	Lat.	<i>coppanus</i>	measure of grain
153	Lat.	<i>corbis</i>	basket
154	Lat.	<i>corbta</i>	transport vessel
155	Lat.	<i>cumera, cumerus</i>	basket out of rush; clay vessel to store grain
156	Lat.	<i>cpa</i>	cask, tub, barrel
157	Lat.	<i>cuppa</i>	cup
158	Lat.	<i>gabata</i>	a kind of dish, plate
159	Mac.	<i>kanavaza</i>	vessel
160	Mandinka	<i>gab</i>	woven straw hat
161	Mandinka	<i>gafa</i>	woven feedbag (for horses)
162	N.Aram.	<i>klb</i>	jar
163	Oromo	<i>gbo</i>	woven vessel
164	Oromo	<i>hubo</i>	pot
165	O.Turk.	<i>kövr̥g</i>	big trunk
166	Pers.	<i>kawr</i>	basket
167	Pers.	<i>kuwr(a)</i>	basket
168	Pers.	<i>qafes</i>	cage, palanquin
169	Pers.	<i>qar(r)ba</i>	bottle, vessel out of glass
170	Pol.	<i>korab</i>	basket
171	Prov.	<i>coufo</i>	a type of basket
172	Rif.	<i>aq()bbuz</i>	chest for cereal
173	Rif.	<i>aqrab</i>	bag woven out of palm tree sprouts
174	Rif.	<i>ḥ-aqrab-ḥ</i>	crib
175	Rom.	<i>coliba</i>	hut, cabin

176	Rus.		ship
177	Sans.	<i>kapla</i>	cup, jar, dish
178	Sans.	<i>kapla</i>	skull, cranium, skull-bone
179	Sans.	<i>karparas</i>	cup, shard
180	Sans.	<i>karparas</i>	skull
181	Saho-Afar	<i>kabaro</i>	little drum
182	Somali	<i>gorof</i>	woven vessel
183	Songhay	<i>gafa</i>	woven feedbag (for horses)
184	Sp.	<i>cafiz, cahiz</i>	measure of capacity defined by the grain load on a mule with which one can inseminate an area
185	Sp.	<i>cuévano</i>	1. large basket for grapes 2. beehive
186	Saho	<i>kabal</i>	travel bag
187	Saho	<i>qafo</i>	large vessel out of palm tree, used for storage; beehive
188	Saho	<i>qb</i>	waterproof basket
189	Syriac	<i>kabla</i>	shackles
190	Syriac	<i>kparta</i>	drinking vessel made out of woven and tarred palm leaves
191	Syriac	<i>kulba</i>	basket for grapes
192	Syriac	<i>qarbn</i>	ship
193	Tigrinya	<i>gabab</i>	measure of grain
194	Tigrinya	<i>gabbar</i>	very large vessel made of a tree trunk; trough to make pastry
195	Tigrinya	<i>kafar</i>	woven withy basket
196	Tigrinya	<i>käläbo</i>	pot
197	Tigrinya	<i>kribbo</i>	goatskin flask stitched into a form of a bottle
198	Tigrinya	<i>qafo</i>	chest, basket, cage, beehive
199	Tuareg	<i>grbbn</i>	small spherical vessel for butter made out of leather
200	Tuareg	<i>akabar</i>	mortar without legs
201	Tuareg	<i>takbat</i>	very small can with a lid
202	Turk.	<i>kabrñ</i>	measure of volume
203	Turk.	<i>küp</i>	jar
204	Turk.	<i>qliba</i>	hut, cabin
205	Turk.	<i>qavanoz</i>	vessel
206	Turk.	<i>qobur</i>	holster, case
207	Turk.	<i>qova</i>	bucket
208	Turk.	<i>qub</i>	case, envelope

Having brought Cohen's data in digital form, it is possible to generate some statistics about sound distributions. To simplify things across different phonologies, I put similar sounds in groups: For the first consonant, all voiceless stops are represented by K, voiced by G and voiceless fricatives by H. For the vowel, I use the obvious notation A, E, I, O, U for the five common vowels, Y for [y] and empty curly brackets in the case of a schwa, an unknown vowel (as in Middle Egyptian) or no vowel at all. For the second consonant, the possibilities are P, B, F, V, M and MP/MB for a nasalized cluster. This gives the following distribution (values below 3% are suppressed):



If the words chosen have no correlation with their phonetic shape at all, one would expect the sound frequencies to follow their respective distributions among the languages. For example, the first sound was restricted to a velar, but no further, so that the above values would match how common K is compared to G or H. And indeed, the relative commonness of F as the second consonant, for example, seems to be related to a bias of the data towards Semitic and its commonness in Arabic (where [p] > [f]). If there is a correlation, one should see a deviation. However, this is obviously difficult to show in practice, since the rank-frequencies for the given languages are unknown. Still, one notices that the vowels E and I appear rather rarely, clearly way below their typical rank-frequencies across languages. I shall come to this point further below.

### 3 Cob and sound symbolism

If one looks further still, Cohen’s theory cannot be the whole story, as argued by Anatoly Liberman in a 2010 paper titled “Iconicity and etymology”. As an illustrative example, he considers the English word *cob* which is attested in the following meanings in the *Oxford English Dictionary* [18], with the year of first attestation:

- 1420: a great man, big man, leading man
- 1548: a wealthy man; a miser
- 1583: a huge, lumpish person
- 1589: a rounded, roundish mass or lump
- 1570: a male swan (cob-swan)
- 1589: various rounded solid bodies
- 1594: the head of a herring
- 1606: various roundish or lumpy pieces (e.g. coal, bread)
- 1611: the name of a fish
- 1616: a small stack of hay or corn
- 1702: a corncob
- 1708: “cobs are also round balls, or pellets with which fowls are usually crammed”
- 1818: a short-legged, stout variety of horse, usually ridden by heavy persons (cob-horse)
- 1818: a testicle
- 1825: the stone of a fruit
- 1847: the seeding head of wheat, clover, etc.
- 1865: a bunch or knot of hair; a chignon
- 1876: a small heap or lump
- 1888: the top of a hill
- 1898: a dumpling (apple cob)

The word apparently shows quite a bit of semantic spread, but the meanings seem to be centered around the ideas of ‘lump, small roundish piece’, ‘head, bulb, clove’, ‘stoutness’ (by extension ‘stout man, leader’) and ‘a kind of animal’. Such a semantic spread, along with its late (i.e., long past the Proto-Indo-European stage) appearance strongly suggests one thing: The English word ‘cob’ is sound-symbolic, and as such, it has simply been reinvented rather than taken as a loan or continued from the ancestor language.

And it is far from being alone, consider for example the following attested meanings of the Hungarian word *gamó* [7]:

- 1604: hook

- 1708: crook
- 1795: branches
- 1802: having windgalls (swellings on the joints of horses)
- 1885: big, unshapely foot

Here, the meanings could be grouped under ‘swelling’ or ‘crookedness’, the common denominator with *cob* being an idea of curvature or convexity.

A joining of the two semantic fields of ‘vessel’ and ‘convex shape’ is soon found by noticing that German *Kolben* ‘club, the thick end of a club’ underwent a change to ‘flask’ (which can be considered club-shaped), or that Ancient Greek on the one hand appears with the meaning ‘hollow of a vessel, drinking cup, bowl; boat’, but also as ‘head’ and ‘knapsack, wallet’. The latter, in particular, can be considered both as a kind of container and as a kind of lump at the same time.

Words with this idea also appear far from the Mediterranean region, as e.g. Korean *kopta* ‘be winding’, *kwupta* ‘be bent’ or Japanese *kobu* ‘bump, lump, protuberance, swelling’. This does not neglect the cross-loaning in the Mediterranean region discussed by Cohen, of course, but some instances should be perhaps rethought, especially when they do not match up as etymologists would like them to. Liberman mentions Sanskrit *kapalam* ‘cup, skull’ and Greek ‘cube’ which are thought of as cognates despite the mismatch of a voiceless and voiced sound. A similar mismatch is found in Greek beside ‘curved’ or Latin *globus* and *glomus* ‘globe, ball-shaped mass’.

A common pattern with such words that I have observed in etymological dictionaries, is then that the frustrated etymologist will either give up, tentatively suggest a Wanderwort, a loan, or propose some kind of substate effect. However, at one point the German etymologist Friedrich Kluge admits to a sound-symbolic origin when discussing the etymology of *Kropf*, writing “apparently a sound-symbolic formation with a phonetic shape common to such meanings” [14] (my translation).

Another way to cope with the difficulties has often been to cut up the words even further, for instance postulating Proto-Indo-European *\*keu-* ‘bend, curve’ with possible extensions *\*keu-p-* or *\*keu-b-*. It appears highly doubtful, however, that languages really work in this way – clearly, English *cob* was not created by extension of a root *\*ko-*. But while the exact consonant is a big deal for etymology, it is much less so for sound symbolism. Its simpler form is onomatopoeia where *beep* is just a louder *peep* and a lot of leeway is natural.

## 4 A semantic map of kup and korb

Having become slightly obsessed with the matter, I set out to find as many KUP/KORB shapes as possible which would confirm to the above ideas. To classify them, I devised the following semantic subdivisions:

- *vessel*: This includes drinking vessels of all kind, baskets and cages, as well as larger containers like tubs and vats.
- *lump*: Very often just the word for ‘lump’ in a particular language, but also heaps, balls/globes and beehives, as well as words denoting the amorphous shape of smoke, mist or dust clouds.
- *swelling*: This includes humps or humpy backs as well as burls (deformed outgrowths on trees). The difference to *lump* is that it is attached to something else or is a deformation thereof.
- *head*: The word for ‘head’ or ‘skull’, in a number of cases through a semantic shift from ‘vessel’.
- *cavity*: This includes caves, dells and ditches, as well as ‘to dig’.
- *hook*: This includes hooks, clamps and handles.
- *dome*: This includes domes, vaults or arches in architecture.
- *headgear*: This includes all kinds of headdresses, including hats, capes and helmets.
- *bending*: This includes words related to bending, curling or coiling.
- *ring*: This includes circle-shaped, conceptually one-dimensional objects, like belts, circles and rings proper.



- *cub*: On the one hand, Klein ascribes English *calf* to a root meaning ‘womb’, so that the link to the common theme would be the swelling during pregnancy [13]. On the other hand, *cub* is compared to Icelandic *kobbi* ‘young seal’ which, according to Klein, is “called from its heavy and clumsy form” and would thus be linked to *lump*.
- *rotation*: A couple of words which have to do with spinning, rolling and the like might also belong here.

Since Cohen was focused on vessel-words, simply mixing my list into his would create a bias towards *vessel*. Therefore, I keep all the words in my list distinct from Cohen’s, unless there are reasons to repeat them – like words appearing here in different semantic fields.

Apart from the glosses and their translations, I also list the semantic field I counted them in, as well as their origin, if such was suggested in an etymological dictionary. The sources are given in the last column. I do not provide sources for words from common languages which can be looked up easily in a number of dictionaries.

	lang.	gloss	translation	sem.	orig.	ref.
1	Akk.	<i>gamlu</i>	bent stick (as projectile), throwing stick	hook		[8]
2	Akk.	<i>kamkammatu</i>	1. metal ring	ring		[8]
3	Akk.	<i>kamkammatu</i>	2. round moon, full moon	lump		[8]
4	Akk.	<i>kaplu(m)</i>	to roll up, wind up, intertwine each other (of snakes, birds etc.)	bending		[8]
5	Akk.	<i>kappu</i>	to curve, bow	bending		[8]
6	Akk.	<i>kapu</i>	to bend back, distort (of part of body, snake, horn of moon, part of liver)	bending		[8]
7	Akk.	<i>kappultum</i>	wrapping (as purpose of textile)	bending		[8]
8	Akk.	<i>karmu(m)</i>	heap, mound	lump		[8]
9	Akk.	<i>kiplu</i>	twisting, twine	bending		[8]
10	Akk.	<i>kippatu(m)</i>	circle, hoop, ring	ring		[8]
11	Akk.	<i>kippatu(m)</i>	tendril, twining stem of vine	bending		[8]
12	Akk.	<i>kippatu(m)</i>	handle, grip of vessel, musical instrument	hook		[8]
13	Akk.	<i>kippu(m)</i>	loop, trap	ring		[8]
14	Akk.	<i>kirbnu</i>	lump (of earth)	lump		[20]
15	Akk.	<i>kuppu</i>	cistern, water source	vessel		[8]
16	Akk.	<i>kuppupu(m)</i>	very bent	bending		[8]
17	Akk.	<i>kupputtu</i>	measuring vessel	vessel		[8]
18	Akk.	<i>kupputu</i>	conglomerated (of parts of liver)	lump		[8]
19	Akk.	<i>qablu(m)</i>	1. hips, waist 2. belt, girdle	ring		[8]
20	Akk.	<i>qabru(m)</i>	grave, tomb	cavity		[8]
21	Akk.	<i>qabtu</i>	bowl	vessel		[8]
22	Akk.	<i>qebru(m)</i>	1. bury 2. wrap up (as though for burial) 3. be rolled up, convoluted (?)	bending		[8]
23	OE	<i>crump,</i> <i>crumb</i>	crooked	bending		[13]
24	Ar.	<i>arrfa</i>	norria (wheel-like machine for lifting water)	ring		
25	Ar.	<i>qubba</i>	dome	dome		
26	Av.	<i>kamar</i>	girdle, belt	ring		[12]
27	Chag.	<i>koburak</i>	box	vessel		[24]
28	Chag.	<i>kopur</i>	vessel	vessel		[24]
29	Welsh	<i>copa</i>	top, summit, head	head		
30	Welsh	<i>cwm</i>	valley	cavity		
31	Dutch	<i>klamp</i>	heap	lump		[13]
32	Dutch	<i>klamp</i>	clamp	hook	O.Dut.	<i>*clampe</i> [13]
33	Dutch	<i>koper</i>	trading vessel	vessel		[13]
34	Eng.	<i>calf</i>	calf, young of a cow, etc.	cub	PIE	<i>*gelb-/*golb-</i> [13]
35	Eng.	<i>clamp</i>	heap	lump		[13]
36	Eng.	<i>clamp</i>	clamp, device for fastening	hook	O.Dut.	<i>*clampe</i> [13]
37	Eng.	<i>cob</i>	round object, stone of a fruit, testicle, roundish heap, lump, haystack, knot of hair, lump of coal, dumpling	lump		[18]

38	Eng.	<i>cob</i>	head of a herring, seeding head of wheat, clover etc.	head				[18]
39	Eng.	<i>cob</i>	great man, big man, leading man, wealthy man, miser, huge, lumpish person	swelling				[18]
40	Eng.	<i>cobble</i>	cobble, rounded stone	lump	Eng.	<i>cob</i>		[13]
41	Eng.	<i>coble</i>	a kind of fishing boat	vessel	Lat.	<i>caupulus</i>		[13]
42	Eng.	<i>coif</i>	cap, headdress	headgear	O.Fr.	<i>coiffe</i>		[13]
43	Eng.	<i>coop</i>	basket	vessel	Lat.	<i>cpa</i>		[13]
44	Eng.	<i>cramp</i>	bent piece of iron	bending	M.Du.	<i>crampe, cramp</i>		[13]
45	Eng.	<i>creep</i>	move the body near or along the ground as a reptile or insect doe	bending				
46	Eng.	<i>crib</i>	1. bed for a baby 2. box with food for farm animals	vessel				
47	Eng.	<i>crimp</i>	to wrinkle	bending				
48	Eng.	<i>cripple</i>	lame or partly disabled person or animal; original sense 'bent, twisted'	bending				[13]
49	Eng.	<i>crumple</i>	to curl up, become wrinkled or bent	bending	OE	<i>crump, crumb</i>		[13]
50	Eng.	<i>cub</i>	the young of the fox, bear, lion, tiger etc.	cub	ON	<i>kobbi</i>		[13]
51	Eng.	<i>gaff</i>	fishing hook	hook	M.Fr.	<i>gaffe</i>		[13]
52	Eng.	<i>gob</i>	lump of slimy substance	lump	O.Fr.	<i>gobe</i>		[13]
53	Eng.	<i>gobbet</i>	piece of flesh, lump of food (archaic)	lump	O.Fr.	<i>gobet</i>		[13]
54	Eng.	<i>grave</i>	grave, tomb	cavity	PIE	<i>*greb-/*grob-/*grob-/*grob-</i>		[13]
55	Eng.	<i>groove</i>	furrow, trench, channel	cavity	PIE	<i>*greb-/*grob-/*grob-</i>		[13]
56	Eng.	<i>hamper</i>	large basket	vessel	O.Fr.	<i>hanapier</i>		[13]
57	Eng.	<i>hanaper</i>	case for holding documents	vessel	O.Fr.	<i>hanapier</i>		[13]
58	Eng.	<i>heap</i>	large, disordered pile of things	lump	PIE	<i>*keu-p-</i>		[13]
59	Eng.	<i>hive</i>	nest for bees	lump				
60	Eng.	<i>hoop</i>	circular band	ring				
61	ME	<i>cawell</i>	fish basket	vessel				[16]
62	Est.	<i>kolp</i>	skull	head				
63	Est.	<i>kübar</i>	hat	headgear				
64	Fin.	<i>huppu</i>	hoof, cowl	headgear				
65	Fin.	<i>kaivaa</i>	to dig, excavate	cavity				
66	Fin.	<i>kimpale</i>	slab, chunk, clod, lump, large irregular piece	lump				
67	Fin.	<i>klimppi</i>	gob, clump, clot	lump				
68	Fin.	<i>kuhmu</i>	knot, swelling	swelling				
69	Fin.	<i>kumara</i>	bent, bowed	bending				
70	Fin.	<i>kuoppa</i>	hole, pit	cavity				
71	Fin.	<i>kyhmy</i>	swelling, protuberance	swelling				
72	Fin.	<i>kypärä</i>	helmet	headgear				
73	Fr.	<i>coiffe</i>	headdress, cap	headgear	Lat.	<i>cofia (cofea)</i>		[13]
74	Fr.	<i>couffe</i>	carrycot	vessel				
75	Fr.	<i>couffin</i>	carrycot	vessel				
76	Fr.	<i>coupe</i>	cup	vessel	Lat.	<i>cuppa</i>		
77	Fr.	<i>courber</i>	to bend	bending				
78	Fr.	<i>cuve</i>	vat	vessel	Lat.	<i>cpa</i>		
79	Fr.	<i>gobe</i>	fattening ball (for poultry), poisoned ball (for a dog)	lump	O.Fr.	<i>gobe</i>		[13]
80	M.Fr.	<i>gaffe</i>	long pole with an attached fishhook	hook				[10]
81	O.Fr.	<i>gobe</i>	mouthful, lump	lump				[13]
82	O.Fr.	<i>hanap</i>	goblet	vessel	Frank.	<i>*hnap</i>		[13]
83	O.Fr.	<i>hanapier</i>	basket for holding a goblet	vessel	O.Fr.	<i>hanap</i>		[13]
84	Geo.	<i>gaberili</i>	swollen	swelling				
85	Geo.	<i>gumbati</i>	dome	dome				

86	Geo.	<i>kamari</i>	girdle, belt	ring			
87	Geo.	<i>khbo</i>	calf	cub			
88	Ger.	<i>Graben</i>	ditch	cavity	PIE	<i>*greb-</i>	[14]
89	Ger.	<i>Haupt</i>	head (arch.)	head	PIE	<i>*kapwet-</i> <i>/kaput-</i> <i>*keu-</i>	[14, 23]
90	Ger.	<i>Hüfte</i>	hip	bending	PIE		[14]
91	Ger.	<i>Humpen</i>	tankard	vessel			
92	Ger.	<i>Kalb</i>	calf	cub	PIE	<i>*gelb-/*golb-</i>	[13]
93	Ger.	<i>Kerbe</i>	dent, groove	cavity			
94	Ger.	<i>Kiepe</i>	dosser, pannier (high basket carried on the back)	vessel			
95	Ger.	<i>Kiepe</i>	straw hat, hood	headgear			
96	Ger.	<i>Knospe</i>	bud	swelling			
97	Ger.	<i>Knubbe</i>	bud, bulge, swelling	swelling			
98	Ger.	<i>Kolben</i>	various club-like or cylindric objects: corncob, spadix, butt of a rifle, club or mace proper; piston	lump			
99	Ger.	<i>Kolben</i>	laboratory flask	vessel			
100	Ger.	<i>Kopf</i>	head	head	Lat.	<i>cuppa</i>	[14]
101	Ger.	<i>Korb</i>	basket	vessel	Lat.	<i>corbis</i>	[14]
102	Ger.	<i>Kropf</i>	crop, craw (outwards expanded portion of the alimentary tract in birds)	swelling	P.Germ.	<i>*kruppa-</i>	[14]
103	Ger.	<i>krumm</i>	crooked	bending			
104	Ger.	<i>Kübel</i>	tub, bucket	vessel	Lat.	<i>cpella</i>	[14]
105	Ger.	<i>Kufe</i>	vat, tub (especially for transporting salt)	vessel	Lat.	<i>cpa</i>	[14]
106	Ger.	<i>Kuppel</i>	dome	dome	It.	<i>cupola</i>	[14]
107	Ger.	<i>Kürbe</i>	dosser, pannier (high basket carried on the back) (Bavarian dialect)	vessel			
108	Ir.	<i>cabhuil</i>	conical basket for catching fish	vessel	ME	<i>cawell</i>	[16]
109	OHG	<i>krampf</i>	bent, crooked	bending			[14]
110	Gr.		hollow, cavern	cavity			[15]
111	Gr.		grave	cavity			[15]
112	Gr.		head-covering, hood, veil, covering put on the face of the dead	headgear			[15]
113	Gr.		anything with an arched cover: covered carriage; covered boat or barge; vaulted chamber; burial chamber; vault of heaven; vaulted ceiling	dome			[15]
114	Gr.		1. to bend, curve 2. to turn or guide a horse or chariot round the turning-post 3. to be bowed down	bending			[15]
115	Gr.		cup, jar, pan	vessel			[15]
116	Gr.		head	head	PIE	<i>*geb(e)l-</i>	[15, 12]
117	Gr.		curved	bending			[23]
118	Gr.		curved	bending			[23]
119	Gr.		inclination, slope	bending			[15]
120	Gr.		tumble head foremost	rotation			[15]
121	Gr.		1. cubical die, 2. vertebra, 3. block of stone, 4. piece of salt fish, 5. kind of cubic cake, 6. hollow above the hips of cattle, 7. part of an irrigation-machine	hook			[15]
122	Gr.		hollows of the ears	cavity			[15]
123	Gr.		clouds of mist, arrows	lump			[15]
124	Gr.		anything swollen (as if pregnant): the swell of the sea, a wave, billow; the foetus in the womb, embryo etc.	swelling			[15]
125	Gr.		1. hollow of a vessel, drinking cup, bowl 2. boat 3. knapsack, wallet	vessel			[15]
126	Gr.		head	head			[15]

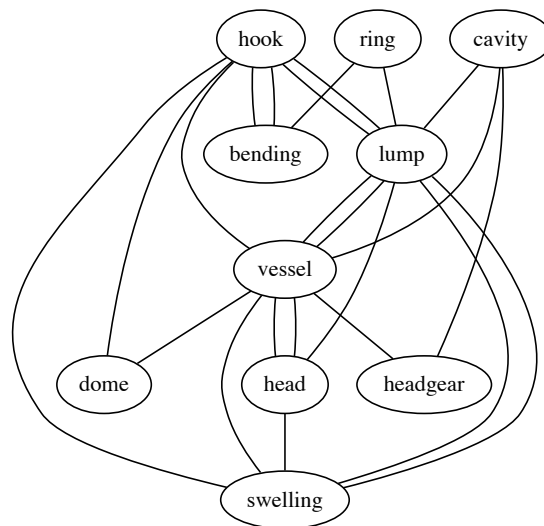
127	Gr.		1. a kind of ship 2. a kind of hut	vessel			[15]
128	Gr.		gap, hole	cavity			[23]
129	Heb.	<i>kípá</i>	kippah, traditional Jewish hat	headgear			
130	Heb.	<i>kípá</i>	dome (literal meaning of kippah)	dome			
131	Hindi	<i>khopri</i>	skull	head	Sans.	<i>kharpara</i>	[13]
132	Hun.	<i>gamó</i>	hook, crook, branches	hook			[7]
133	Hun.	<i>gamó</i>	1. having windgalls (swellings on the joints of horses) (1802), 2. big, unshapely foot (1885)	swelling			[7]
134	Hun.	<i>himpók</i>	windgall (swelling on the joints of a horse)	swelling			
135	Hun.	<i>kalap</i>	hat	headgear			
136	Hun.	<i>kampó</i>	hook	hook			
137	Hun.	<i>koporsó</i>	coffin	vessel	Chag.	<i>koburak</i>	[24]
138	It.	<i>caraffa</i>	decanter, carafe	vessel	Sp.	<i>garaffa</i>	[14]
139	It.	<i>cupola</i>	dome	dome	Lat.	<i>cpula (cup-pula)</i>	[14]
140	It.	<i>gabbia</i>	basket for fowls, coop	vessel			
141	Jap.	<i>kaban</i>	bag, basket, briefcase	vessel			
142	Jap.	<i>kabuto</i>	helmet, headpiece	headgear			
143	Jap.	<i>kobu</i>	bump, lump	lump			
144	Jap.	<i>kobu</i>	protuberance, swelling	swelling			
145	Jap.	<i>kubi</i>	neck, head	head			
146	Jap.	<i>kubomi</i>	hollow, cavity, dent, depression	cavity			
147	Jap.	<i>kurumu</i>	wrap up	bending			
148	Kor.	<i>kopta</i>	be winding	bending			[22]
149	Kor.	<i>kwupta</i>	be bent	bending			[22]
150	Lat.	<i>calvria</i>	skull	head	PIE	<i>*klHe- /klHou-</i>	[23]
151	Lat.	<i>camurus</i>	curved or arched inwards; having such horns	bending			[19]
152	Lat.	<i>cappa</i>	cape, hooded cloak	headgear			[14]
153	Lat.	<i>caput</i>	head	head	PIE	<i>*kap-ut-</i>	[23]
154	Lat.	<i>caupulus</i>	a kind of small ship	vessel			[13]
155	Lat.	<i>caverna</i>	cave, hole	cavity	Lat.	<i>cavus</i>	
156	Lat.	<i>cavus</i>	hollow, excavated, concave, deep (of water)	cavity	PIE	<i>*ouH-ó-</i>	[23]
157	Lat.	<i>cerebrum</i>	brain, skull	vessel			
158	Lat.	<i>cofia (cofea)</i>	cap	headgear			[13]
159	Lat.	<i>cubitus</i>	elbow, forearm	bending			[23]
160	Lat.	<i>cumulus</i>	heap, pile	lump	PIE	<i>*uh<sub>1</sub>-mo-</i>	[23]
161	Lat.	<i>cpella</i>	small vat or cask	vessel	Lat.	<i>cpa</i>	
162	Lat.	<i>cuphia</i>	cap	headgear			[13]
163	Lat.	<i>cpula (cup-pula)</i>	small, crooked handle	hook	Lat.	<i>cpa (cuppa)</i>	
164	Lat.	<i>cpula (cup-pula)</i>	little tub, cask	vessel	Lat.	<i>cpa (cuppa)</i>	
165	Lat.	<i>cpula (cup-pula)</i>	small burying vault	dome	Lat.	<i>cpa (cuppa)</i>	
166	Lat.	<i>curvus</i>	bent, crooked, curved	bending	PIE	<i>*kuruo-?</i>	[23]
167	Lat.	<i>gibbus</i>	hump, hunchbacked	swelling	PIE	<i>*geib-?</i>	[23]
168	Lat.	<i>glba (glaeba)</i>	lump of earth, clod	lump	PIE	<i>*gleb()-?</i> <i>*glob()-?</i>	[23]
169	Lat.	<i>globus</i>	round body, round sphere, globe	ring			
170	Lat.	<i>glomus</i>	ball-shaped mass	lump	PIE	<i>*glem-o/es-</i>	[13, 23]
171	Lat.	<i>grmus</i>	heap of earth, hillock	lump	PIE	<i>*h<sub>2</sub>r-m-o-</i>	[23]
172	Lat.	<i>hmus</i>	hook, fish-hook	hook			[23]
173	Lith.	<i>kupra</i>	hump	swelling			
174	Mal.	<i>koppara</i>	coconut	lump	Hindi	<i>khopri</i>	[13]

175	M.Du.	<i>crampe,</i> <i>cramp</i>	bent piece of iron	bending			[13]
176	Nivkh	<i>qob</i>	ladle	vessel			[21]
177	ON	<i>kobbi</i>	young seal	cub			[25]
178	O.Jap.	<i>kabu</i>	head	head			[11]
179	Pers.	<i>gonbad</i>	dome, vault, arch	dome			
180	Pers.	<i>kamar</i>	waist, loins	ring			[13]
181	Pol.	<i>klomb</i>	flowerbed	lump	Eng.	<i>clump</i>	[24]
182	Quechua	<i>kumpu</i>	crooked, hunchbacked	swelling			
183	Quechua	<i>qiwi</i>	arc, bow, curve; crooked, curved	bending			
184	Rus.		big lump	lump			
185	Rus.		head	head			
186	Rus.	( )	small lump (especially of curd or cheese)	lump			[9]
187	Rus.		burl (deformed growth on a tree)	swelling			
188	Rus.		pudgy, chubby child	swelling			
189	Rus.		large round bread; round cake; boulder, roundish underwater stone	lump			[9]
190	Rus.		pocket	vessel			
191	Rus.		puff, roundish formation of smoke, dust, mist	lump			
192	Rus.		tuber	lump			
193	Rus.	( )	stump, snag; pile for fastening boats; hummock	lump			[9]
194	Rus.		to bend, writhe, squirm, wriggle	bending			
195	Rus.		1. bag, pouch 2. awkward, clumsy person	lump			[9]
196	Rus.		pit	cavity			[9]
197	Rus.		ball, round bread	lump			
198	Rus.		high-crowned cap, cowl	headgear	Turk.	<i>kalpak</i>	[24]
199	Rus.		crib	vessel			
200	Rus.		lump, ball	lump			
201	Rus.		to dig	cavity			
202	Rus.		haycock; something having the shape of a haycock (in particular a tuft of hair)	lump			
203	Rus.		basket, box	vessel			
204	Rus.		1. basket, chest, box 2. measure of grain	vessel			
205	Rus.		chunk, slice (esp. of meat)	lump			[9]
206	Rus.		1. box, vessel 2. Ark of the Covenant, Noah's Ark	vessel			[24]
207	Rus.		to bend, distort	bending			
208	Rus.		ladle	vessel			
209	Rus.		vat	vessel			
210	Rus.		spinning top	rotation			
211	Rus.		vat	vessel			[9]
212	Rus.		1. wooden toy sphere 2. wallet, knapsack out of birch bark	lump			[9]
213	Rus.		to gather into a pile, lump, crowd	lump			[9]
214	Rus.		cup, goblet, bowl	vessel	Rus.		[24]
215	Rus.		jug	vessel			
216	Rus.		somersault, roll, tumble	rotation			
217	Sans.	<i>kapla</i>	skull, cranium, skull-bone	head			[17]
218	Sans.	<i>kapla</i>	cup, jar, dish	vessel			[17]
219	Sans.	<i>kharpāra</i>	1. thief, rogue, cheat 2. skull 3. a beggar's bowl or dish, 4. umbrella or parasol 5. a kind of mineral substance	head			[17]
220	Sans.	<i>kumbhá</i>	jar, pitcher, water-pot, ewer, small water-jar	vessel			[15, 17]

221	Sans.	<i>kumbhá</i>	the frontal globe or prominence on the upper part of the forehead of an elephant	swelling			[17]
222	Sp.	<i>garrafa</i>	decanter, carafe	vessel	Ar.	<i>arrfa</i>	[14]
223	Sum.	<i>gabil</i>	1. basket 2. main beam of a chariot	vessel			[20]
224	Sum.	<i>gam</i>	shepherd's crook, bent stick; haft, hilt	hook			[20]
225	Sum.	<i>gurum</i>	to bend, curve, wrap around; to bow; to roll up; to curb, restrain; to watch over	bending			[20]
226	Sum.	<i>gurum</i>	pile	lump			[20]
227	Sum.	<i>kibid</i>	backside, ass	swelling		[20]	
228	Tamil	<i>kappal</i>	ship	vessel			
229	Turk.	<i>kabar</i>	to swell	swelling			
230	Turk.	<i>kalpak</i>	high-crowned cap	headgear			
231	Ukr.		curve, bend of a road	bending			[24]

I should note that this list can only serve as a list of candidates. In no way do I claim that all of the words have been formed sound-symbolically (many are in fact attested loans). The latter is of course a thing which is almost impossible to prove most of the time. A sufficiently long list is, however, a first prerequisite to demonstrate that the correlation between KUP/KORB and convexity is not a coincidence that just works with any sound-shape and any meaning.

To round things up, one can show how the various fields interact using the semantic map technique. For this specific case one could do it in the following way: Filtering out all words which are attested in different fields, one can put them on a graph and draw a line between two vertices whenever a semantic field is shared. This leads to the following picture:



We can see that *vessel*, *lump* and *hook* have the most connections, with the other areas being connected peripherally.

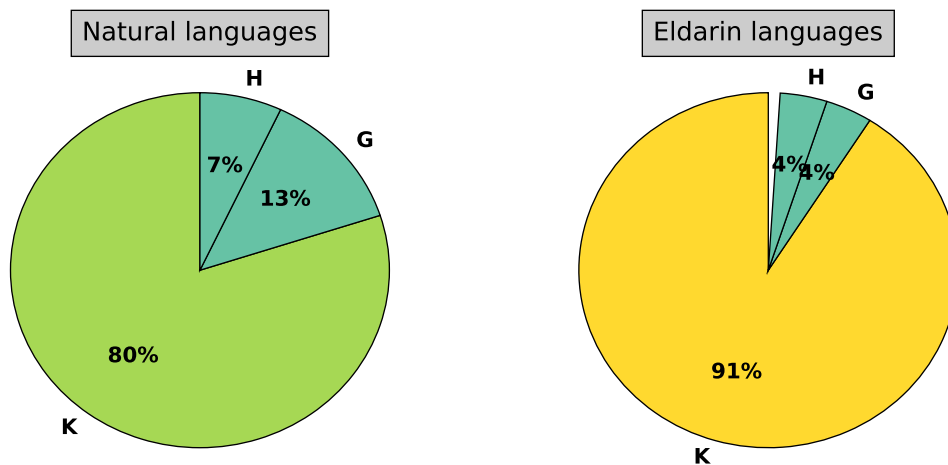
It is interesting to note at this point that in a letter discussing the pitfalls of historical semantics, Tolkien mentions Latin *corbis* as the formal equivalent of English *harp* (that is, they look like cognates). He goes on to say that “the poor philologist will have to call on some archaeological expert before he can decide whether any relationship between ‘harps’ and ‘baskets’ is possible – supposing Gmc. *harp* always meant ‘harp’ or *corbi-s* always meant ‘wicker basket’! *corbta* means a fat-bellied ship” (Let#209). Klein explains *harp* as literally meaning ‘an instrument plucked with crooked fingers’ [13], comparing ON *herpask* ‘to contract (one’s fingers)’ and Russian ‘to bend, warp’.

## 5 kup and korb in Tolkien's languages

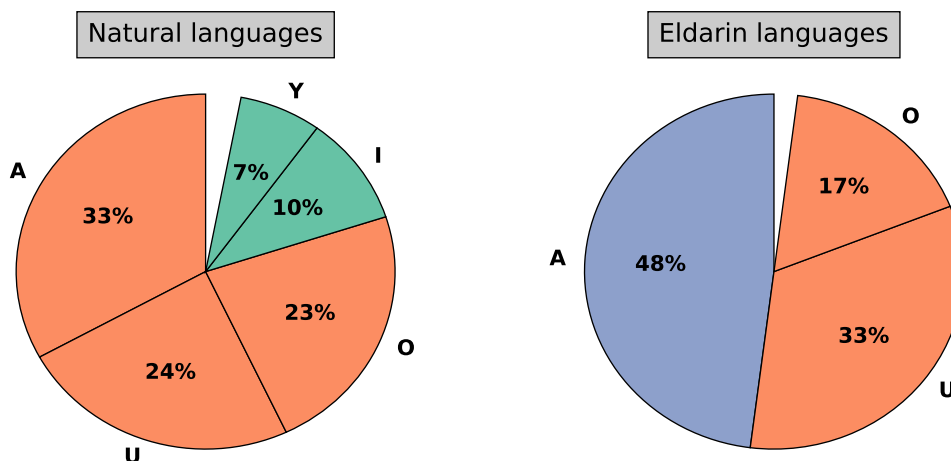
We can now finally turn to Tolkien's languages and apply the same procedure, looking for words satisfying the KUP/KORB phonetic shape while also belonging in the outlined semantic categories. The following, still quite sizeable set can be found:

	lg.	gloss	translation	root	sem.	ref.
1	G.	<b>cam</b>	bent, bowed; submissive, humble	KAVA-	bending	GL:25
2	G.	<b>cam(m)a-</b>	to stoop, bend, bow, cower	KAVA-	bending	GL:25
3	G.	<b>caug</b>	humpback	KAA- 'stoop'	swelling	GL:25
4	G.	<b>caug</b>	humped, bulging	KAVA-	swelling	GL:25
5	G.	<b>caug</b>	bent	KAVA-	bending	GL:25
6	G.	<b>cav-</b>	to bend, make stoop	KAVA-	bending	GL:25
7	G.	<b>corm</b>	globe, a ring or circle, a disc	*KORO-	ring	GL:26
8	G.	<b>corob</b>	skull	*KORO-	head	GL:26
9	G.	<b>cub</b>	hollow	*KUPU-	cavity	GL:27
10	G.	<b>cûf</b>	hollow	*KUPU-	cavity	GL:27
11	G.	<b>cûm</b>	mound, especially grave, burial mound	KUMU- 'heap up'	lump	GL:27
12	G.	<b>cuptha-</b>	to bend (tr.)	*KUVU-	bending	GL:27
13	G.	<b>cuvon</b>	bowed, bent, concave	*KUVU-	bending	GL:27
14	G.	<b>gob</b>	hollow of hand	*KOPO-	cavity	GL:40
15	N.	<b>calf</b>	water-vessel	KALPA-	vessel	LR:362
16	N.	<b>crib-</b>	to bend	krikw-	bending	PE13:141
17	N.	<b>cumb, cum</b>	mound, heap	KUB-	lump	LR:365
18	N.	<b>gamp</b>	hook, claw	GAP-	hook	LR:357
19	Q.	<b>kalpa</b>	water-vessel	KALPA-	vessel	LR:362
20	Q.	<b>kalpa-</b>	to draw water, scoop out, bale out	KALPA-	cavity	LR:362
21	Q.	<b>kamba</b>	bend [sic], crooked	KAVA- < *KABA-	bending	GL:25
22	Q.	<b>kambe</b>	hollow (of hand)	KAB- 'hollow'	cavity	LR:361
23	Q.	<b>kambo</b>	cellar, cave, vault	KAVA- < *KABA-	dome	QL:45
24	Q.	<b>kauka</b>	crooked, bent, bowed	KAA- 'stoop'	bending	QL:45, GL:25
25	Q.	<b>kauka</b>	humped	KAA- 'stoop'	swelling	QL:45
26	Q.	<b>kauko (-u)</b>	humpback	KAA- 'stoop'	swelling	GL:25
27	Q.	<b>kauta-</b>	to bend	*KAW-	bending	PE16:100
28	Q.	<b>kava-</b>	to dig	KAVA- < *KABA-	cavity	QL:45
29	Q.	<b>kawin</b>	I bow, make obeisance	KAA- 'stoop'	bending	QL:45
30	Q.	<b>kolma</b>	ring	KOL-	ring	VT45:23
31	Q.	<b>kma</b>	ball	KOMO-	ring	QL:47
32	Q.	<b>kmea</b>	globe-shaped, round	KOMO-	ring	QL:47
33	Q.	<b>kop-</b>	hollow of hand	*KOPO-	cavity	GL:40
34	Q.	<b>korma</b>	ring	*KOR-	ring	LotR
35	Q.	<b>-kumba</b>	bellied	*KUB-	swelling	SD:68,72
36	Q.	<b>kumbe</b>	mound, heap	KUB-	lump	LR:365
37	Q.	<b>kumbe</b>	pile, heap, load, burden	KUMU- 'heap up'	lump	QL:49
38	Q.	<b>kúme</b>	pile, heap, load, burden	KUMU- 'heap up'	lump	QL:49
39	Q.	<b>kumpo</b>	pile	KUMU- 'heap up'	lump	QL:49
40	Q.	<b>kne</b>	creasent, bow	KUVU- 'bend, bow'	bending	QL:49
41	Q.	<b>kupta-</b>	to hump up, look humpy, etc.	KUPU- 'hump'	swelling	QL:49
42	Q.	<b>kuptulo</b>	camel	KUPU- 'hump'	swelling	QL:49
43	Q.	<b>kuve</b>	bow	KUB-	bending	PE22:102
44	S.	<b>carab</b>	hat	*KARAP-	headgear	WJ:426
45	S.	<b>haudh</b>	funeral mound	KHAB- 'heap up, pile up'	lump	PE19:91
46	T.	<b>hamna</b>	funeral mound	KHAB- 'heap up, pile up'	lump	PE19:91

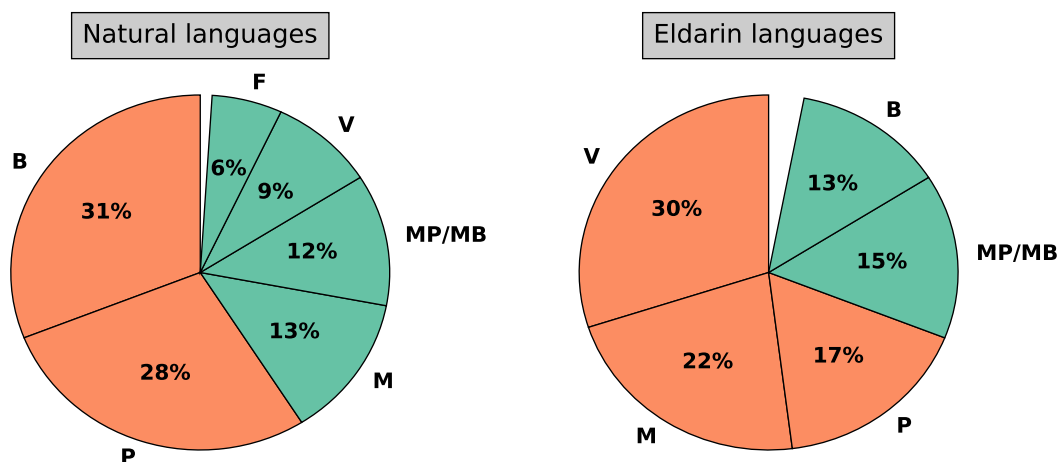
Before proceeding, let us look at some statistics and compare the Elvish data with the natural languages (excluding Cohen's data). For the first consonant, one finds the following distributions:



For the vowel:



Finally, for the second consonant:



I do not think that much can be said about the distributions of the consonants: The commonness of K probably just reflects its relative commonness compared to G or H in the languages involved. The high frequency of V in Elvish is clearly due to the Quenya shift of [b] > [v], and so on. However, looking at the distribution of vowels, one finds the same pattern as in Cohen's data: While A is the most common vowel, E almost does not appear at

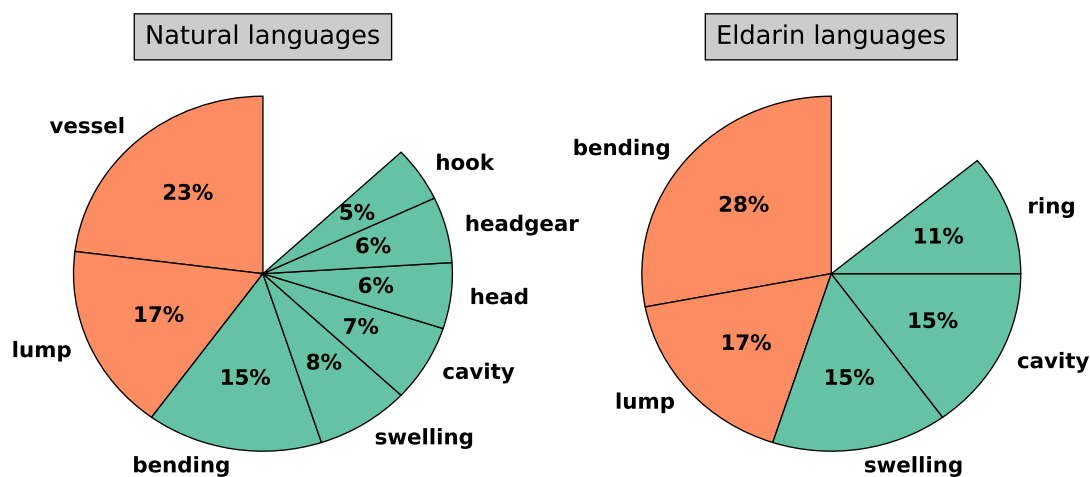


all and I only very little. Here, one can make a quantitative comparison to the rank-frequencies of Elvish vowels. For Sindarin (including the Noldorin of the “Etymologies”), I have calculated them directly [4]; for Quenya only in initial and final position in conjuncture with consonants [6] (using a list of words from the “Etymologies” only). The latter two actually give similar results and thus should be a reasonable approximation:

- Sindarin: A (0.355), E (0.231), I (0.183), O (0.136), U (0.089), Y (0.006)
- Quenya, initial: A (0.097), E (0.045), O (0.033), I (0.029), U (0.027), consonants (0.769)
- Quenya, final: A (0.396), E (0.302), O (0.087), I (0.027), U (0.010), consonants (0.178)

So while the commonness of A in the KUP/KORB shape clearly reflects its commonness in Elvish overall, a striking deviation is the near-absence of E, I on the one hand, and the highly increased frequency of O, U on the other (especially U). It is not difficult to see that the vowels O and U, which involve lip rounding, are particularly iconic in their reference to rounded or convex shapes, so that the preference given to them over E and I ties in well with the semantics. This appears to be true for Elvish and natural languages alike (and can be also seen in Cohen’s data above).

Finally, we can also compare the distribution of the words among the semantic fields:



Here we can see a lot of differences. While *vessel* is the most common semantic field in natural languages, it is almost not represented in Elvish, occurring only in the words Q. **kalpa**, N. **calf** ‘water-vessel’. The two most common fields in Elvish are *bending* and *lump*, which are also common in natural languages. On the other hand, *cavity* and *swelling* are noticeably more common in Elvish. It would appear that all of this simply reflects Tolkien’s taste, his own association with the KUP/KORB sound shape.

## 6 *Hobbit* as a sound-symbolic universal

We can now formulate the following hypothesis: The word *hobbit* is related to a universal sound-symbolic shape KUP, defined by *velar – rounded vowel – labial* (or KORB with an optional *liquid*) which independently occurs in many languages and is semantically centered around the idea of convexity or concavity<sup>1</sup>. In natural languages it occurs most frequently in names for vessels of various kind, followed by words for ‘lump’ and words related to bending. Tolkien places it most commonly among ‘bending’, ‘lump’, ‘cavity’ and ‘swelling’. And *hobbit* has been conceived not just on its own, but along with its hole in the ground.

Following the creation of the word, Tolkien has always explained it as ‘hole-dweller’, sometimes as ‘hole-maker’ (see below). At the end of *The Lord of the Rings*, the true Westron word rendered by English *hobbit* is said to be **kuduk**, related to a Rohan word **kûd-dûkan** (LotR App. F, note 1). In an earlier conception, however, the endonym used in the Shire was **cbuc** (with final vowel loss and devoicing of **cbug(u)**), pl. **cbugin**, a reflex of an Old Westron word **cg-bagu** ‘hole-dweller’, preserved in Rohan (PE:49). Other earlier variants include:

<sup>1</sup>Liberman also discusses English *pig*, which is of uncertain origin, though strikingly similar to Dutch *big* of the same meaning [2]. This might be due to a reversed KUP shape where the labial and velar switch places. And indeed, in Elvish we find T. **balga** ‘hump’ (PE13:138), Q. **pereqa** ‘crooked’ (QL:73); in natural languages words like Fin. *möhkäle* ‘lump’, *pahka* ‘burl, gnarl’, *paakku* ‘lump, gob, clod’, Jap. *mage-* ‘bend, twist’, *mak-* ‘wind, coil, roll’ and so on; but I have not attempted to investigate this in detail.

- Shire **cubut**, pl. **cubudil**, from OW **cubadul**, R. **cugbadul** ‘hobbit’ (PM:59)
- Shire **cbuc**, pl. **cbuga** >> **cbugen**, OW **cbugl(a)**, R. **cgbagul**<sup>2</sup> (PM:59)
- Shire **kubug**, R. **kûgbagul** (PM:83)

In the preparatory conceptions of Westron, we also find:

- W. **gluva** ‘inhabited hole’, R. **glba** (PM:58)
- **Kubalnarga** >> **Kubalnargia** ‘Dwarrowdelf’, from **kubu** ‘delve’, hence **kubal** \*‘delf, excavation’ + **narag** ‘dwarf’, pl. **narga** >> **nargia** (PM:58)

Obviously, we have that **kg** or **kd** is ‘hole’, while **-bagu(l)**, **-badul** or **-dka** is ‘dweller’, but in the usage of the Shire, the word does not seem to be analyzable any longer, the two elements fuse into a KUP shape (except for **kuduk**, of course). On the other hand, **glba** and **kubu**, **kubal** confirm to the shape right from the start.

So it would appear that *hobbit* simply reflects Tolkien’s preference of KUP to denote hollow cavities rather than vessels. The seeds were already laid in his languages by G. **cub**, **cûf** ‘hollow’, **gob** ‘hollow of hand’, Q. **kop-**hollow (of hand)’ and **kava-** ‘dig’ appearing in the Gnomish and Qenya Lexicons long before the *Hobbit*. Finally, one may speculate that his choice of [h] as the initial sound was influenced by the English word ‘hole’, while the ending *-it* shows a high front vowel typical of diminutives [6].

## Acknowledgements

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<sup>2</sup>Interestingly, this implies that the unusual change **a > u** took place, again towards a more iconic rounded vowel.

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