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Summary Article: **Romance languages**

From *The Columbia Encyclopedia*

group of languages belonging to the Italic subfamily of the Indo-European family of languages (see Italic languages). Also called Romanic, they are spoken by about 670 million people in many parts of the world, but chiefly in Europe and the Western Hemisphere. Among the more important Romance languages are Catalan, French, Italian, Portuguese, Occitan, Rhaeto-Romanic, Romanian, and Spanish. The spread of some Romance languages to other parts of the world, especially the Western Hemisphere, accompanied the colonizing and empire-building of the mother countries of these languages, notably Spain, Portugal, and France.

All of the Romance languages are descended from Latin (see Latin language and the table entitled Linguistic Relationships among Romance Languages). They are called Romance languages because their parent tongue, Latin, was the language of the Romans. However, the variety of Latin that was their common ancestor was not classical Latin but the spoken or popular language of everyday usage, which is believed to have differed greatly from classical Latin by the time of the Roman Empire. This vernacular, known as Vulgar Latin, was spread by soldiers and colonists throughout the Roman Empire. It superseded the native tongues of certain conquered European peoples, although it was also influenced by their local speech practices and by the linguistic characteristics of colonists and later of invaders. After the fall of the Western Roman Empire there was a degree of regional isolation. Germanic invasions from the north had a further disrupting effect, and Vulgar Latin was thus differentiated into local dialects, which in time evolved into the individual Romance tongues.

Because of their common source, the Romance languages have many similar features, both in grammar and vocabulary. The differences between them tend to be phonetical rather than structural or lexical. Even when the Romance languages differ grammatically from Latin, such changes frequently show a shared parallel development from the parent tongue. For example, although Latin had three grammatical genders (masculine, feminine, and neuter), the individual Romance tongues have only two (masculine and feminine). Moreover, all Romance languages except Romanian have discarded the Latin scheme of six different cases for the noun, retaining only one case. As a result, the grammatical relationships of words are clarified chiefly by prepositions and word order instead of by inflections, as in Latin. On the other hand, verbs in the Romance languages have preserved a highly developed conjugational system, inherited from Latin, in which the inflections make clear person and number, tense and mood. See articles on individual languages mentioned.

See Edcock, W. D. , *The Romance Languages* (1960);

Carlton, C. M. , *Studies in Romance Lexicology* (1965);

I. Jordan; J. Orr, *An Introduction to Romance Linguistics, Its Schools and Scholars* (2d ed. 1970).

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