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LATIN AND OTHER INDO-EUROPEAN LANGUAGES

The Roman Empire disappeared more than 1,500 years ago, but its language is still spoken by hundreds of millions of people every day. They just don't call it Latin anymore. As the Roman Empire spread across Europe, Latin gradually evolved into the languages we now call Spanish, French, Italian, Portuguese, Romanian, and several others.

A Local Language Spreads

Before large kingdoms and empires united people under a common government, a traveler often encountered a new language every few dozen miles. Ancient Italy was no exception. Latin was just one of many languages spoken on the Italian peninsula. As Rome expanded its influence, soldiers, merchants, settlers, and government officials carried Latin throughout Italy and eventually much of Europe. People learned Latin to conduct business and communicate across the empire.

Classical and Vulgar Latin

Educated Romans wrote and spoke Classical Latin, the language of literature and government. Ordinary people, merchants, and soldiers spoke everyday Latin, known as Vulgar Latin. It was Vulgar Latin, not Classical Latin, that gradually evolved into the Romance languages.

The Romance Languages

As Latin spread across the Roman Empire, it mixed with the vernacular languages and dialects spoken by the ordinary people of each region. Over time, these vernacular languages blended with Vulgar Latin to form what we now call the Romance languages. The word Romance comes from Rome not from romance or love. Today, the Romance languages include Italian, Spanish, Portuguese, French, and Romanian.

The power of the Roman Empire faded as Christianity spread throughout Europe. Roman provinces gradually became independent during the fifth century CE, but Latin remained the official language of the Roman Catholic Church for centuries. Today, Latin is still the official language of Vatican City and continues to be used in the Church. Although no longer spoken as a native language, Latin remains important because it is widely used in law, medicine, science, and philosophy. The Latin phrase E pluribus unum ("Out of many, one") appears on the Great Seal of the United States and on some U.S. coins and currency.

Language Families

Along with the Romance languages, Europe is home to several other language families, including the Slavic and Germanic languages. A language family is a group of related languages that developed from a common ancestor.

Slavic languages are spoken primarily in Eastern Europe, particularly in Poland, Russia, Croatia, Slovenia, Bulgaria, North Macedonia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, and Serbia. Germanic languages are spoken primarily in northern Europe, including the Netherlands, Sweden, Denmark, Germany, and the United Kingdom.

The Origins of English

Modern English evolved from the language of the Germanic peoples who began settling in Great Britain during the fifth century CE. Scholars believe that English as spoken around 1000 CE would sound most like modern Frisian, a language still spoken in parts of the Netherlands and Germany. As the Germanic settlers spread across Britain, they gradually replaced many of the Celtic languages.

Celtic Languages

Celtic languages were once spoken across much of western Europe before the expansion of the Roman Empire. Today, about 800,000 people in Wales can speak Welsh, one of the few Celtic languages that is neither extinct nor classified as endangered by UNESCO. Although relatively few people still speak Celtic languages, their influence lives on in stories, myths, and traditions. Leprechauns, Halloween, and the Blarney Stone have Celtic roots. In the Republic of

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Ireland, Irish is a required subject in most schools, but English is the language most people use in everyday life.

The Indo European Langauge Family

Romance, Germanic, Slavic, and Celtic languages are all branches of the larger Indo-European language family. Today, Indo-European languages are spoken by about 46 percent of the world's population, from the Americas across Europe to northern India. Other major language families include Sino-Tibetan in East Asia, Afro-Asiatic in North Africa and the Middle East, and Dravidian in southern India and Sri Lanka.

Fill in the Blanks

Educated Romans wrote and spoke C__a__s__c__l Latin, the language of l__t__r__tu__e and government. Ordinary people spoke V__l__ar Latin, which gradually evolved into the R__m__n__e language *f__m__ly, which today includes I__a__i__n, Spanish, P__r__u__u__se, French, and R__m__n__an. Europe is home to several other language families, including the S__a__ic and G__r__a__ic languages. Modern E__g__i__h evolved from the language of the Germanic peoples who began settling in G__e__t B__i__a__n during the f__f__h century CE.

Answer in Complete Sentence

1. Why are Latin, Italian, Spanish, Portuguese, French, and Romanian called "romance languages?"

2. What is a vernacular language?

3. Give an example of a Celtic influence in modern society.

*4. What foreign language would you like to study? Explain why.

*This is a higher order learning question. You must answer the question to the best of your ability, but any reasonable answer will be graded as correct.

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