

1

The family of Latin languages



Southern Italy

Latin is often called a ‘dead’ language. But is it? About a quarter of the world’s population still keep Latin alive in their speech. If you find this hard to believe, read on.

To begin with, Latin was spoken in Latium, an area of central Italy. It was the language of the Romans, who founded their city of Rome in Latium in the traditional date of 753 BC.

If you go to Rome today, you will find copies of this famous statue in every souvenir shop. It shows Romulus, the founder of Rome, and his brother Remus being suckled by a she-wolf. The story goes that the wicked king who had seized control of this part of Italy tried to kill these baby boys. They were said to be the sons of the god Mars and the king did not want



them to grow up and take his throne from him. They were left out on the banks of the river Tiber to be swept away in its waters. But a kindly she-wolf rescued them and made sure that they survived.

- **Why do you think that the city which Romulus founded was called Rome?**
- **The word *martial* comes from the name Mars. What does it mean? What are *martial arts*?**
- **And so what was Mars the god of?**
- **How else has his name survived in the modern world?**
- **What can we tell about the Romans' attitude to life from the fact that they imagined Mars to be their ancestor?**



The power of this warlike people gradually spread throughout the whole of Italy. The different tribes in Italy each had their own language, but Latin became the dominant language because it was spoken by the ruling tribe.

This book is written in English, but in London, England, over 300 different languages are spoken by schoolchildren, and in the USA and Canada over 100 languages are used for instruction in schools in different parts of the country.

- **How many different languages are spoken by the people in your school or college? What are they?**
- **Would it be better if everyone in your country spoke only English? Write out a list of ways in which it would be better. Then write out a list of ways in which it would be worse. Which side do you agree with?**

The spread of Latin

By the end of the first century BC, the Romans had built up a great empire outside Italy. They had conquered almost all of Europe and all the countries around the Mediterranean.

- Write down the modern names of ten of the countries, cities or rivers on the map below. Sometimes the Roman names are exactly the same as the modern names.
- Can you work out from the following why the Mediterranean Sea was given its name?

medium *territory* (What do these two words mean?)
medius *terra* (Latin words)
middle *land* (English meanings)



The Romance languages

Latin became the language of educated people in the western countries of the Roman Empire. In the countries where the Romans had been longest, their language grew deep roots.

The languages used today in Spain, Italy, France, Portugal and Romania are directly descended from Latin. You can see how Latin has influenced these languages by looking at the words for the numbers 1–10.

	Latin	Italian	Spanish	French	Portuguese	Romanian
1	unus	uno	uno	un	um	unu
2	duo	due	dos	deux	dois	doi
3	tres	tre	tres	trois	três	trei
4	quattuor	quattro	cuatro	quatre	quarto	patru
5	quinque	cinque	cinco	cinq	cinco	cinci
6	sex	sei	seis	six	seis	şase
7	septem	sette	siete	sept	sete	şapte
8	octo	otto	ocho	huit	oito	opt
9	novem	nove	nueve	neuf	nove	nouă
10	decem	dieci	diez	dix	dez	zece



The first month of the Roman year was March.

- Imagine that you belong to a sports team playing for ancient Rome. (You can choose the sport, but remember that none of the scores may be above ten.) Challenge three modern countries from the list above to play against you, and give the scores in the native language of each team. Yours, of course, will always be in Latin. Text these scores – or simply show them – to a friend and ask your friend to put them into English.
- Look at these words for ‘five’: *cinque* (Italian), *cinq* (French), *fünf* (German), *five* (English), *cinco* (Spanish), *fern* (Danish). Which of them do *not* come from Latin?
- What is the reason for the names of our last four months?

We call Italian, Spanish, French, Portuguese and Romanian ‘Romance’ languages because they were originally spoken by the Romans. The word *romance* also has other meanings which developed over time in three stages:

- 1 It was used to describe stories written in one of these languages about knights and their adventures.
- 2 This led to its meaning any story full of wonderful and extraordinary happenings.
- 3 From that it came to mean the sort of book which deals with love in a sentimental way, or simply to mean a love affair itself.

The Romance languages developed more from the Latin spoken by ordinary people than from the grand Latin of the Empire builders, which even many native Romans found difficult! The Latin word for ordinary people is *vulgus*. So we call the language from which the Romance languages grew Vulgar Latin.

- **What does the word *vulgar* mean today? Think of some things which you consider vulgar. Do you think it is fair to link them with 'ordinary people'?**
- **There are in fact two separate meanings of the word *vulgar*. What are they?**

In 'educated' Latin the word for a horse was *equus*. In Vulgar Latin the word for a horse was *caballus*. In Spanish this turned into *caballo*, and in Italian into *cavallo*. In French it became *cheval*.

- **Can you think of any English words derived from *equus*?**
- **Which English words to do with horses and the people who ride them have come from *caballus*? What does *chivalry*, which comes from *cheval*, have to do with a horse?**

You can see that some words changed their spellings as they moved from Latin to another language.

Latin	French	English
caballus	cheval	chivalry
taberna	taverne	tavern
mercator	marchand	merchant
cantus	chant	chant

The Romance languages spread

Many centuries after the Roman Empire had fallen, the Romance-speaking Spaniards and Portuguese colonized huge areas of the world. They took their Latinate languages with them and as a result these are now spoken by many millions of people outside Europe.

- Find out where and when these colonizations took place.
- Match up the name of each country with the correct number.
- Which of these countries were colonized by the Spaniards and which by the Portuguese?



Some facts

- 1 Spanish is the national language of 19 countries (mainly in South and Central America).
- 2 Spain has 40 million Spanish native speakers (including some 9 million bilingual Catalans, Basques and Galicians who speak Spanish as their second language).
- 3 The total number of Spanish native speakers in the world is about 364 million (including some 28 million Spanish native speakers in the USA).
- 4 Portugal has between 10 and 11 million native speakers of Portuguese. There are 210 million Portuguese native speakers in the world.
- 5 In one South American country alone there are some 190 million native speakers of Portuguese. Which country is this? (Answer below.)

- **Here are some Spanish and Portuguese words with the Latin words which they come from. Find out what they mean in English.**

Spanish	Portuguese	Latin
amigo	amigo	amicus
gato	gato	cattus
libertad	liberdade	libertas
vela	vela	velum
arte	arte	ars
carne	carne	caro

- **Have another look at the map of South America. You will see that Spanish and Portuguese are spoken over a huge area. Why do you think that the whole area, along with Central America, has become known as Latin America?**
- **Where else is Spanish spoken – and why?**
- **Look again at the first paragraph at the beginning of this unit. Do you believe that statement now? Or do you have any doubts about it, and if so what are they?**

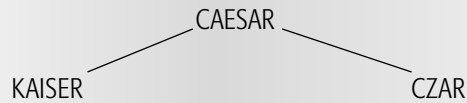
The Latin language was always open to influences from outside Rome. Most of the great writers who shaped the Latin language did not come from Rome itself. The famous public speaker Cicero was born 70 miles from Rome. This may seem a short distance, but a proud Roman nobleman called him an immigrant. Seneca, a philosopher and playwright who taught the Roman Emperor Nero, came from Cordoba in Spain.

Latin belongs to millions of people, not just to a privileged few.

2

The Romans in Britain

When Julius Caesar invaded Britain in 55 and 54 BC, he raided the country but did not conquer it.



Julius Caesar was an individual, but what did the word *Caesar* come to mean? (Note that in Latin *c* was pronounced with the sound *k* in all words.) Which country was ruled by the Kaiser, and which by the Czar?

Julius Caesar and his adopted son Augustus gave their names to the months of July and August.



Julius Caesar, the Roman general and statesman.

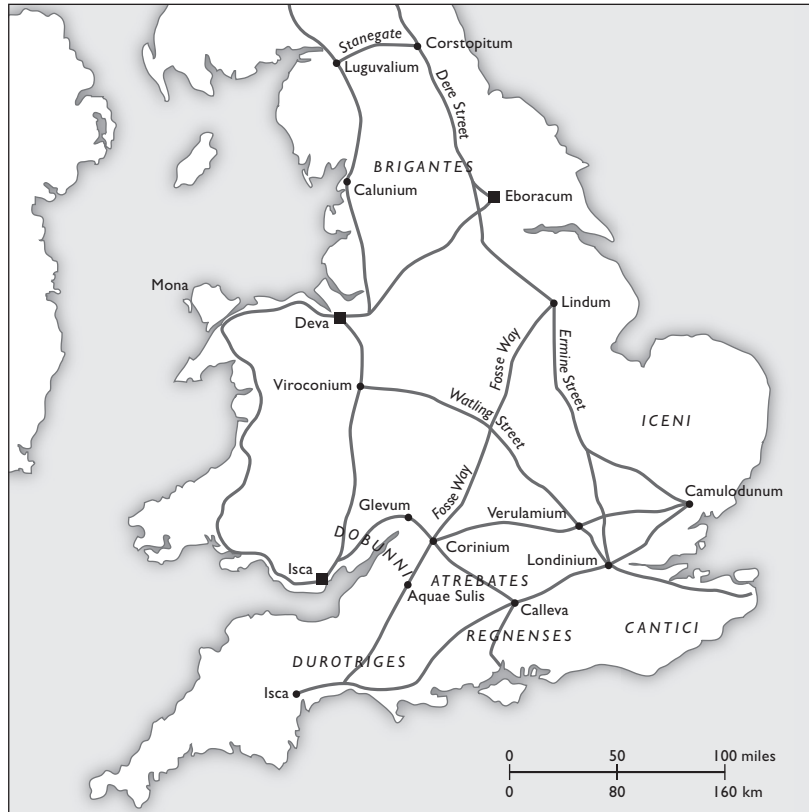


Kaiser Wilhelm, the last Emperor of Germany, who led his country to defeat in the First World War.



Czar Nicholas, the last Czar of Russia, who was executed in 1918.

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A hundred years later, in AD 43, a general sent out by the Emperor Claudius Caesar carried out a successful conquest and Britain became part of the Roman Empire.

The Romans made a great difference to the way people lived in Britain. The Britons were mainly country people who lived in hut-villages or on isolated farms. Their wealth came from agriculture and the metals which they mined. The Roman way of life, however, was based on towns, which provided centres for markets and trade and for the administration of the laws. So they wanted to establish towns in Britain as well.

If you build towns you need roads to connect them. The Romans were famous for the great network of roads they built throughout their Empire, and they established in Britain many thriving towns linked by first-class roads.

Ermine Street from the air.