Origins

1 Where did the languages of the Iberian Peninsula come from?

1.1 With the exception of Basque, which is a LANGUAGE ISOLATE, the present-day languages of the Iberian Peninsula have a common ancestor in Latin. Languages deriving from Latin are called the ROMANCE languages.

1.2 Latin, originally a language of Latium (mod. Lazio) in central Italy, spread with the expansion of the Roman Empire. Celtic, Greek, ‘Iberian’ and Basque (and maybe other languages of which we have no knowledge) were spoken in the Iberian Peninsula before the adoption of Latin; of these, only Basque survived.

When was Spain added to the Roman Empire, and why? What did the Romans call Spain?

1.3 In 711 the Iberian Peninsula was invaded by Moors from north Africa who initially occupied the majority of the Peninsula. Arabic, Berber and other languages were spoken in the Moorish kingdoms. Spoken Latin, or Romance, usually referred to as MOZARABIC, continued to be used as a domestic language, and Latin was still used in the Christian church and written by Christian scholars and clerics.

What was the Moors’ name for Spain? Which was the last Moorish kingdom to be conquered by the Christians, and when?

2 The Romance language ‘family’

2.1 We often represent the historical origins of languages using the metaphor of a family and show relatedness through a FAMILY TREE. The Romance languages, like the majority of the languages of Europe and north India, belong to a ‘family’ called INDO-EUROPEAN.

Which languages spoken in the European Union are not Indo-European languages?
2.2 How have linguists worked out this family tree?

Sometimes we do have knowledge of a parent language: this is the case with Latin and is one reason why the Romance language family is so significant for linguists. (But, as we shall see, our knowledge of Latin is not as great as we might think.)

Historical linguists often apply the technique of **COMPARATIVE RECONSTRUCTION**. Comparing the numbers in the Romance languages, we can immediately see that they are likely to be related (and that they are not related to Basque):

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>French</th>
<th>Portuguese</th>
<th>Castilian</th>
<th>Catalan</th>
<th>Italian</th>
<th>Romanian</th>
<th>Latin</th>
<th>Basque</th>
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<tbody>
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<td>nueve</td>
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<td>10</td>
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<td>deu</td>
<td>dieci</td>
<td>zece</td>
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<td>amar</td>
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Source: http://www.danshort.com/ie/iesatem_c.shtml
2.3 Some difficulties with the family tree MODEL

2.3.1 It takes no account of external influences or BORROWINGS. In the course of its history, Spanish, like all living languages, has borrowed words from other languages, and it continues to do so today.

Some examples:

izquierdo ‘left’ < Basque ezker ‘left’ (but both languages might have borrowed from another pre-Roman peninsular language; first attested in the 12th century, but sinistro < Lat. sinistrum is also used at this time)

guerra ‘war’ < OHGerm. werra ‘confusion, discord, strife’ (Lat. bellum) (attested from the very earliest records of Romance in Castile)

hasta ‘until’ < Ar. ḥattā ‘until’ (Lat. donec) (first attested in the 13th century)

modelo ‘model’ < It. modello ‘model’ (< modellum, a DIMINUTIVE form of Lat. modum ‘manner’; the Spanish development would have been modillo) (Late 16th century)

tiza ‘chalk’ < Nahuatl tiçatl ‘clay, light-coloured earth’ (18th century)

bicicleta ‘bicycle’ < Fr. bicyclette ‘bicycle’ (this is a ‘LEARNED’ creation on the basis of the Latin prefix bi- ‘two’ and the Greek kyklos ‘circle’, first giving Eng. bicycle, then borrowed into French with a diminutive SUFFIX –ette and then borrowed into Spanish) (19th century)

túnel ‘tunnel’ < Eng. tunnel (itself a borrowing from OFr. tonel ‘barrel’) (19th century)

light ‘not extreme’ < Eng. light ‘not containing many calories’ (within the last 20 years)

fácil ‘easy’ < Lat. facilem (not an inherited, or POPULAR, word, but a LEARNED borrowing) (first attested in the 15th century; in medieval Castilian the idea of ‘easy’ was represented by ligero)

2.3.2 It assumes that the parent language (in this case Latin) is a single, ‘monolithic’ language. But if Latin, when it was used in the Roman Empire, was like modern DIASPORIC languages, it would have varied from century to century and from place to place, and there would have been differences between its spoken forms (about which we know relatively little) and its written forms (about which we know more). The modern Romance languages probably reflect variation in Latin:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Lat.</th>
<th>(malum) ‘apple, peach, etc.’</th>
<th>(pomum) ‘any kind of fruit; a fruit tree’</th>
<th>(mattianum) ‘relating to Gaius Matius (1st century BC)’</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>It. mela</td>
<td>Fr. pomme</td>
<td>Pg. maçã Cat. maçana</td>
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</table>
2.3.3 It assumes that there is a clear division between ‘generations’, so that there would be a clear divide between, for example, Latin on the one hand and Castilian, Portuguese and Catalan on the other.

But from the purely linguistic point of view this is impossible to determine, since there is a continuum of development in successive generations of speakers from Latin to modern Castilian, etc.

The answer to the question ‘when did Latin become Castilian?’ is more likely to do with:

- The growing awareness in medieval times of differences between the highly stylised language used for writing formal documents (‘Latin’) and everyday speech (‘Romance’) — these may be seen in origin as two different registers of the same language. When scholars encouraged the writing of Latin in accordance with the Classical language, and practical needs demanded the representation of the spoken language, the divergence was intensified.
- The recognition of differences in local speech, labelled with geographical adjectives often corresponding to political units (e.g. castellano versus aragonés)

2.3.4 The ‘daughter’ languages which are usually identified (e.g. Portuguese, Galician, Castilian, Catalan) are those which have become standardized and the official languages of a nation or other political unit.

But dialect geography has shown us that there is (or was) a continuum of popular speech across the Romance-speaking world and that any geographical limits set on ‘dialects’ are arbitrary.

There is a significant difference between the everyday spoken language of a particular locality and a language which becomes the basis of an official national language. Official languages typically

- are used in administration
- are used in courts of law
- are imposed through education
- are adopted by creative writers
- are used outside the area of the variety on which they were originally based (they become diasporic)
- are learned by foreigners

Because they are used for so many purposes they become elaborated, e.g. new words have to be found to label new concepts; there is a need to make fine distinctions of meaning.

The need for mutual understanding, clarity of expression and consistency in usage makes codification and prescription of the language necessary. Today this is usually achieved through the preparation of

- rules of spelling
- a dictionary
- a grammar
3 Summary

Spanish, Portuguese and Catalan
- are Romance languages
- are standardized, elaborated languages
- are diasporic languages

Reading

Essential

Extension