

Romance Languages

The languages which developed from the 'vulgar' or spoken form of Latin used throughout the Roman Empire. The major ones are Italian, French, Spanish, Portuguese, and Romanian, all of which are official languages in their respective states. There are also several other varieties, such as Sardinian, Rhaetian (dialectal variants in N Italy and Switzerland), and Catalan, used mainly in NE Spain. Colonialism has dispersed the Romance languages throughout the world, so that over 700 million people now speak a Romance language or a creole based on one. French is spoken by c.72 million as a mother-tongue in France, Canada, Belgium, Switzerland, Luxembourg, Monaco, and many parts of Africa, Oceania, and the Americas, and is used as a second language by a further 200 million. Spanish is spoken by over 270 million people in Spain, most of the countries of Central and South America, and by rapidly increasing numbers in the USA. Portuguese is spoken by c.175 million people, mainly in Brazil, and also in Portugal and parts of Africa. Italian is spoken by c.63 million in Italy and adjoining localities, as well as in parts of N Africa and the Americas.

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