

Cognates

Linguists group languages into families based on their historical relationship. English belongs to the Indo-European language family along with several hundred other languages and dialects. The Indo-European family of languages is further divided into branches that include Germanic languages (e.g., English, German, and Norwegian), Indo-Iranian languages (such as Hindi, Bengali, or Farsi), and Romance languages (languages descended from Latin such as French, Italian, and Romanian). All these languages share some common vocabulary. Languages in the same branch generally share a greater deal of their vocabulary. Words that are historically related in different languages are called cognates.

Many words in English are cognates that also appear in Romance languages. These languages are also related to each other. The list below includes translations of a number of English words into some number of Romance languages.

cantare, escola, stella, étoile, estrela, étudiant, scuola, escuela, cantar, studiare, école, estrella, estel, estudar, chanter

Questions

1. How many different English words do the fifteen words above correspond to? Hints: Cognates are likely to have somewhat similar spelling. Try to lay out the words in a grid. Note that the same word may appear with identical spelling in more than one language.
2. How many languages are included in the sample?
3. Can you try and translate each of these words into English (knowing that some words in English are also cognates to the words above)?
4. "Escuela" is one of the words in Spanish on the list above. How do you say "étudier" in Spanish (that word is not on the list)? Try to get as close as possible to the correct translation, even if you cannot get it quite right. Explain how you arrived at the solution.