

EUROPEAN DAY OF LANGUAGES: exploring and celebrating the multicultural and multilingual nature of Europe



INTRODUCTION

Europe is, and always has been, a truly global continent with an incredible cultural and linguistic diversity. Here, we explore the huge impact of the Arabic language and culture on Spain and the Spanish language, dating back to the 10th century. Hundreds of years of migration, empire, trade and tourism have ensured that Europe is undeniably a melting pot of people from all over the world. Today, there are millions of young people across the continent, many of them multilingual, who are using new forms of language, often with European and non-European languages fused and blended together. In the UK this has been described as ‘Multicultural London English’ or MLE, although its use is by no means restricted to the capital.

This dialect of English has been infused with Afro-Caribbean language, as well as Turkish, Polish, South Asian and ‘cockney’ (a slang originating in the East End of London). The wider cultural impact of these communities and their languages on British culture is clear, and a similar story can be found across European nations. For example, *Kiezdeutsch*, established as a new German dialect and incorporating elements of Turkish, Arabic, Kurdish, is characterised by a more informal use of German grammar (in a similar way to MLE). This linguistic diversity and dynamism are undoubtedly propelled by multicultural multilingual young people across the continent. Look at this quote from the prestigious Humboldt University in Berlin:

“Kiezdeutsch has developed in residential areas where different dialects, linguistic styles and languages come together, and this diverse linguistic context has led to Kiezdeutsch being a particularly innovative dialect of German. Someone who speaks Kiezdeutsch with their friends, for example, may speak Kurdish with their grandmother, Arabic with their grandfather and aunt, German with their father, and Kurdish and Arabic with their mother. Another youth who speaks Kiezdeutsch may only speak German at home, but may have learned some Turkish from friends or their parents. These multilingual competences make Kiezdeutsch a particularly dynamic dialect in which we can practically observe language development at an accelerated pace.”

Crowded sidewalk on Oxford Street, London with commuters and tourists from all over the world.





SPAIN

Between the years 711 and 1492 there was a Muslim-ruled Empire (often called the Moorish Empire) which included the majority of present-day Spain and some of France. The impact and legacy on the language, culture and architecture in Spain was immense. Arabic has had a huge influence on the Spanish language: 4000 words come from Arabic! For example, the popular Spanish expressions *ojalá* and *¡olé!* are from the Arabic expressions *insh'allah* and *wa'llah* respectively. The Moors brought many types of food to the Iberian Peninsula that became central to Spanish cuisine (for example, sugar cane, almonds, rice, citrus fruits, aubergine and apricots), and music too, with flamenco music having many structural similarities to North African music.

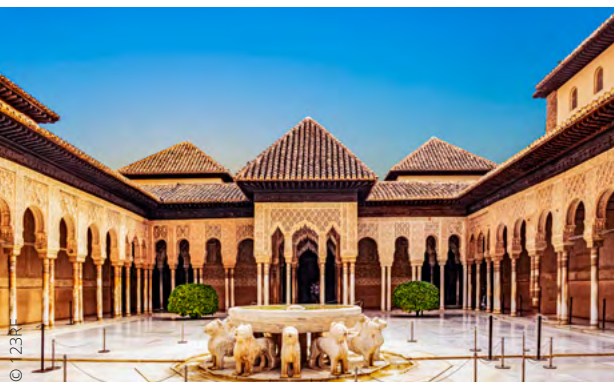
[Download this resource](#) on the Islamic influence in Spain to find out more!



Mirador de Daraxa, Palace of Alhambra in Granada, Spain.



Moorish plasterwork in the Nasrid Palace, Alhambra, Granada.



Patio of the Lions in Alhambra, Granada.

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Courtyard in Alhambra, Granada.



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Madinat al-Zahra, Córdoba, Spain.

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LANGUAGE TASK

Match the Spanish words in the table to their Arabic origin word and their English translation. Use the words in the boxes below.

SPANISH	ARABIC	ENGLISH
aceite		
aldea		
almohada		
algodón		
atún		
azúcar		
barrio		
dado		
guitarra		
hasta		
jirafa		
naranja		
rehén		
rincón		
sandía		
taza		
zanahoria		

al muhada	hatta	tast
qitarah	al-tun	
day'ah	safunnarya	barri
al-zayt	zarafa	
rihan	al-sukar	rukn
al-qutn	sindiyyah	
a'dad	narang	

sugar	neighbourhood	
cup	until	carrot
dice	watermelon	
cotton	guitar	
orange	small village	
oil	giraffe	hostage
tuna	corner	pillow

FRANCE

The Moorish Empire included part of what is today France and there has, therefore, been migration from North Africa into France since the Middle Ages. During the 19th century, France invaded and colonised parts of North Africa and the Middle East, as well as parts of the Caribbean and the Americas. The 20th century saw France violently try to maintain power in its colonies, which largely failed. These complex and troubled histories between European and non-European countries are inextricably linked to our present-day context in Europe as a global melting pot. Today there are six million Arabic speakers in France,

and it is the most widely spoken foreign language in France. There has been a huge impact of Arabic and Islamic culture and language in France, particularly evident in youth culture. Time and again across Europe we can see young people driving forward multicultural and multilingual fusion. *Verlan* is a type of French slang, which is heavily based on turning the words back to front: *envers* – *verlan*. Verlan has also evolved to include many Arabic words, even if for some of them the meaning is a bit different when used as part of French slang. Young people of all backgrounds use these words and phrases in everyday life. Over the last 30 years we have witnessed this in popular culture: for example, the 1995 seminal film *La Haine* (lots of use of verlan in a multicultural setting) and the 2004 ground-breaking novel *Kiffe Kiffe Demain* by Fadia Guene. Both these works also shone a light on the lives of marginalised communities in French society.



French North African fighters in World War I (1914-18). Army of soldiers from Algeria, Tunisia and Morocco.



The neo-Moorish dome of the water-cure establishment. Thermes Les Dômes Vichy.

LANGUAGE TASK

Match the French slang phrases to the standard French phrase and its English translation. The French phrases use **French slang originating in Arabic**: this is not standard Arabic, but this is how the words are used in France. Use the words from the boxes below.

FRENCH SLANG	FRENCH	ENGLISH
Je kiffe ça		
C'est chouiya bête		
Fissa!		
Je n'ai pas de flouze		
Oh la hchouma!		
Walou à faire		
C'est la hala		
Quel chouf bizarre		
Sahbi, wesh?		

Rien à faire	J'aime ça
Quel regard bizarre	Vite!
Mon mec, ça va?	La honte!
C'est un peu bête	C'est le chaos
Je n'ai pas d'argent	

It's chaos	How embarrassing!
I like it	I don't have any money
Quickly!	What a strange look
Nothing to do	It's a bit silly
Mate, how's it going?	

GERMANY

There is a long history of Turkish migration to Germany going back hundreds of years to the Ottoman (present-day Turkey) and Prussian (present-day Germany) Empires in the 17th century, due to both trading and conflict between the blocks. Then, in the 1960s, Turkish workers were invited to West Germany to help solve a labour shortage. Today there are seven million Turkish speakers in Germany, and German Turks make up the largest Turkish community in the world outside Turkey. The famous *döner kebab* (flatbread stuffed with onions and sliced lamb or beef) has become a \$4.5 billion dollar industry and was a Turkish–German invention. Similar to the way in which we’ve seen youth culture and language incorporate global influences in the UK (MLE) and in France (*verlan*), in Germany the same phenomenon has been observed:



Döner kebab

Johanna Watzinger-Tharp (academic): “In multilingual communities, speakers capitalise on the co-existence of two or more languages by using innovative styles of communication within and across national, ethnic and social groups. The examination of such speech styles is particularly intriguing for Turkish and German, two languages that have been in close contact in urban areas of Germany for more than 40 years ... emergence of a Turkish-German variant (*Türkendeutsch*) among young Turks and Germans in Germany today.”

Examples of Turkish words used by German youth are: *Lan* (dude), *tschüsch* (wow), *tam* (completely) and *moruk* (dude).

A team at Humboldt University in Berlin is studying the emergence of *Kiezdeutsch*, a type of slang German, influenced by other languages such as Turkish, Kurdish and Arabic, but also characterised by a less formal approach to grammar than standard German.



Berlin. Germany. Turkish Market on Maybachufer, Kreuzberg.

LANGUAGE TASK: EXTRA CHALLENGE!

Here are some quotes from real-life graffiti in German, showing examples of *Kiezdeutsch*. Can you use your knowledge of German and other languages (including slang) to work out or guess the meaning? (Answers and explanations can be found below.)

1. **Lauft bei dir**
2. **Bra... wir sind Kotti**
3. **Ich liebe dich... Bebequim ich dich auch**
4. **Indra, Fatlum, Lars, Kevin, Leon, Marty, Soraya... yagmur... Beste Freunde!**

1. German youth slang for 'What's up?'
2. Bra (version of the English slang 'bro') wir sind kotti – we are Kotti (Kotti = Kottsborg Tor in Kreuzburg, a densely populated, diverse and vibrant area of Berlin)
3. Ich liebe dich ('I love you' in German) Bebequim ('My baby' in Turkish); ich dich auch ('I love you too')
4. Examples of different heritage names and use of the Turkish yagmur, meaning 'rain', beste freunde = best friends.

REFERENCES AND FURTHER READING



[What is Kiezdeutsch? — German in Multilingual Contexts \(hu-berlin.de\)](https://www.hu-berlin.de/)

[Big up MLE – the origins of London’s 21st century slang \(newstatesman.com\)](https://www.newstatesman.com/)

<https://www.spanish.academy/blog/40-spanish-words-that-came-from-arabic/>

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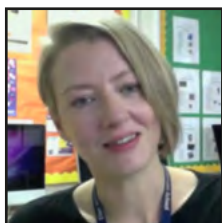
<https://www.thenationalnews.com/arts-culture/books/how-a-french-author-writing-in-arabic-slang-is-delivering-an-energetic-renewal-of-the-french-language-1.921449>

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<https://www.linguistik.hu-berlin.de/en/institut-en/professuren-en/german-in-multilingual-contexts/projects/ongoing-projects/kiezdeutsch/sprachliche-innovation-in-kiezdeutsch/sprachliche-innovation-in-kiezdeutsch>

<https://www.quora.com/Are-there-any-Turkish-loanwords-in-German-language>

ABOUT THE AUTHOR



Rachel Wright is the Head of Languages at Ellen Wilkinson School for Girls in Ealing, West London. She has been teaching French and Spanish in London secondary schools for 17 years and has spent time living in France and Mexico. She studied International Relations at the London School of Economics and completed her Secondary MFL PGCE at the Institute of Education. Throughout her career she has been passionate about the MFL curriculum and the importance of incorporating cultural content such as art, literature and history. She is particularly inspired by the students she works with, having spent her career in multicultural, multilingual contexts, and is an active member of the ALL Decolonise Secondary MFL Curriculum Special Interest Group. She applies and implements ideas shared in the group in her department and school, with the aim of building a rich, inclusive, and decolonised curriculum.

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