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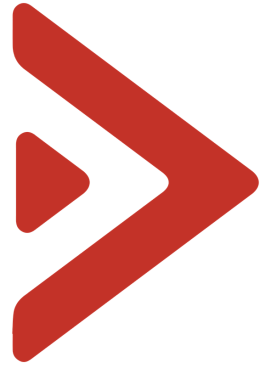
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# Spanish in Germany: Numbers and Attitudes

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# Spanish in Germany: Numbers and Attitudes

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## Abstract

The status of Spanish in Germany can be seen, on the one hand, in the number of speakers and learners and, on the other hand, in how the language is evaluated. Historically, Spanish played only a minor role in Germany; larger-scale migration to Germany by people with Spanish as a language began only in the 1960s. Today, Spanish in Germany is primarily a foreign language and only rarely a family language. According to the 2024 microcensus, around 354,000 people (0.4% of the population) speak Spanish at home. Although the absolute number is still small, it has grown significantly in recent years. Overall, Spanish is viewed positively in Germany. It is among the most frequently mentioned “likeable” languages and is rarely described as unlikeable. In addition, around 60% of respondents in the Germany Survey 2017 support offering Spanish in schools—almost on a par with French. Overall, Spanish has a positive image in Germany and so far a rather limited actual presence, which, however, seems to be increasing.

## Keywords

statistics on language - language attitudes - sociodemographics

## 1. Spanish in Germany

People evaluate other people and how they speak. That is, they evaluate languages. Some languages are rated as beautiful, pleasant or helpful, while others are not. The evaluation of a language is linked to the knowledge about it. Languages can have a certain popularity. Also, a language may not be evaluated because it is hardly or not at all relevant in a given context. In contrast, if a language is reasonably well known and has some kind of popularity, it is usually associated with certain characteristics and assessments. These are determined by individual encounters with the language, as well as by the perception and evaluation of the people who speak that language, and by the evaluations attributed to the countries associated with that language. This text focusses on these aspects regarding the Spanish language and its status in Germany.

From a German perspective, contact with Spain and the Spanish language occurs particularly in the context of tourism. Spain has been one of the most popular holiday destinations for Germans for decades. In 2024, it was the 'favourite destination' among Germans for holidays outside Germany.[1] Spain is also one of the most common destinations for German emigration (cf. Erlinghagen 2024). For example, many older Germans spend their retirement in Spain.[2] Spain therefore clearly holds a certain appeal for Germans. This appeal is very likely accompanied by a positive assessment of the Spanish language.

The Spanish language occurs in various contexts in Germany: as a foreign language taught in schools, as a second language, as a first or family language, and as a heritage language (cf. Polinsky 2015, Brehmer and Mehlhorn 2018, Loureda Lamas/Moreno-Fernández/Álvarez Mella 2023). Each of these contexts is linked to different social realities and sociolinguistic characteristics. Spanish does not have a long tradition as a foreign language taught in schools in Germany. It only found its way into German schools in the second half of the 20th century (at around the same time when German tourism to Spain began to flourish). The subject's popularity grew particularly towards the end of the 20th century. More and more people in Germany acquire knowledge and learn Spanish (e.g. at school, see Statistisches Bundesamt (Destatis), 2025a).[3]

Spanish is also spoken in Germany as a first language, a family language and a heritage language. A 'heritage language', also 'language of origin' in the context of migration, is defined as a language spoken by people who grew up in families where, due to family history, the majority language – in Germany, German – is not spoken at all or in combination with another language (cf. e.g. Brehmer and Mehlhorn 2018, p. 18). The most common heritage languages in Germany are Turkish, Russian, Polish and Arabic (see *ibid.*). It is a relatively recent phenomenon that more and more people with Spanish as a heritage language come to Germany. Especially in the second half of the 20th century, people from Spain came to Germany to work. In 1960, the Federal Republic of Germany and Spain signed a recruitment agreement. By the time recruitment was stopped in 1973, around 600,000 people from Spain had come to West Germany (Pinheiro 2011). There was also Spanish-speaking migration to East Germany. The GDR concluded agreements with 'socialist brother states'. In 1978, the GDR signed an

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[1] Duration of travel longer than 5 days, cf. s. DRV, Die Reisewirtschaft, Reiseanalyse 2025, <https://www.driv.de/themen/reisen-in-zahlen/destinationen.html> (26.9.2025).

[2] As illustrated by numbers on German pensions: many Germans receive their pensions abroad in Spain, cf. Rentenatlas 2024, Rentenzahlungen ins Ausland, (26.9.2025).

[3] Cf. also GENESIS-Online Tabelle 21111-0006, GENESIS-Online Tabelle 21111-0015, or GENESIS-Online Tabelle 21311-0003; <https://www-genesis.destatis.de/datenbank/online>.

agreement with Cuba. As a result, around 30,000 people – a much smaller proportion than those who came to West Germany – came to the GDR from Cuba, the majority to work, a few to study (see Rodríguez/Mücke/Waziri 2024:7-8). However, the language contact situation in the GDR was different; most migrants only stayed for a short time and had very little contact with the population. More recently, the European financial crisis in the 2010s led to migration from Spain to Germany. Currently, Spanish-speaking people come to Germany in the context of the targeted recruitment of foreign skilled workers, particularly from Latin American countries. At the end of 2024, for example, Germany signed a joint declaration of intent with Colombia to promote labour migration to Germany.

Before the middle of the 20th century, however, there was no significant Spanish-speaking migration to Germany. At the beginning of the 20th century, there were very few Spanish speakers and people from Spain living in Germany. This is confirmed by the results of German censuses. These censuses counted the mother tongue and citizenship of the population. Spanish does either not appear at all in the mother tongue counts (e.g. in the 1933 census, Statistik des Deutschen Reichs 1936), or only in very low numbers (e.g. in the 1900 and 1946 censuses, Statistik des Deutschen Reichs 1903, Schinzler 1949).[4] The figures for citizenship point in the same direction: according to the 1933 census, only 1,263 people with Spanish citizenship lived in Germany at that time (corresponding to 0.2% of people with foreign citizenship; Statistik des Deutschen Reichs 1936).[5] Consequently, there are no large historically established Spanish-speaking groups in Germany.

The status of Spanish in Germany is determined in particular by the assessments which people in Germany give to the language. The first part of this article describes attitudes towards and the assessment of the Spanish language in Germany (chapter 2). For this purpose, data on language attitudes from the representative *Germany Survey 2017* conducted by the Leibniz Institute for the German Language in Mannheim is used. This section describes to which degree people in Germany find the Spanish language appealing. Furthermore, data on views on whether Spanish should be taught in schools will be presented and analysed. In addition, the status of Spanish is also reflected in the Spanish language skills of people in Germany and in whether and how well Spanish is spoken in Germany, which is taken up in chapter 3. On the one hand, it discusses current data from the German microcensus, and on the other hand, it draws on data from two representative surveys (the *Germany Survey 2017* and the *Germany Survey 2008*).

## 2. Assessments of the Spanish language in Germany

The following chapter discusses attitudes towards the Spanish language. It therefore relates to the cognitive presence of the Spanish language in Germany, and to its evaluations. To this end, the first two parts of this chapter describe the results of questions explicitly concerned with language ratings. Second, the last part of the chapter presents the responses to a question concerning which languages should be taught in school.

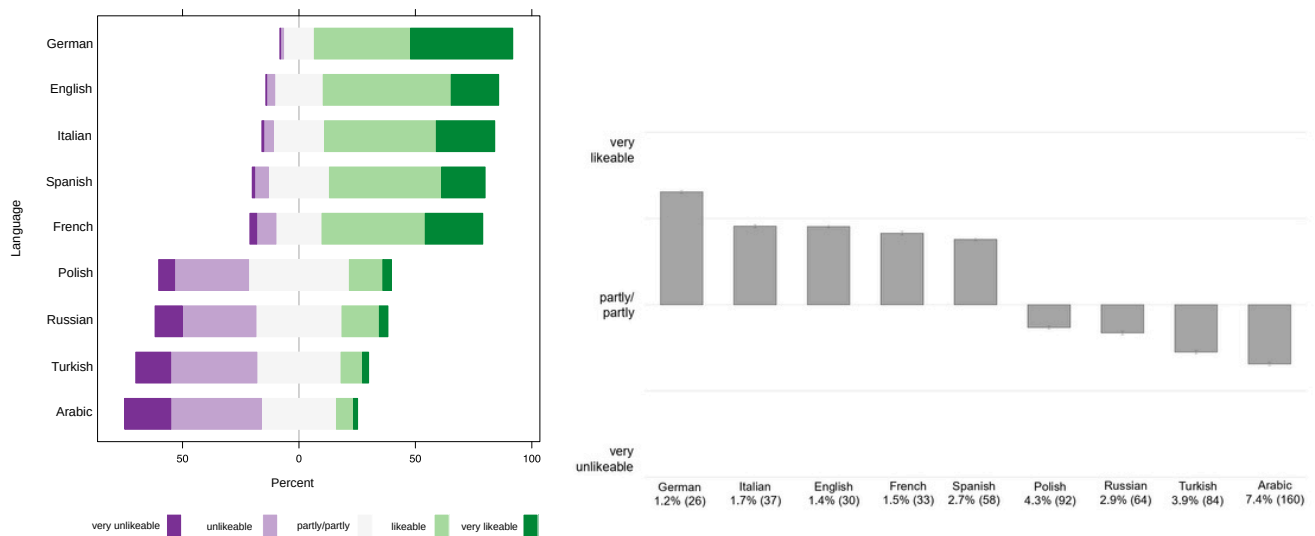
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[4] In the 1900 census, 2,059 people were counted as having Spanish as their mother tongue, out of a total population of 56,367,178 (cf. Statistik des Deutschen Reichs 1903:119). In the text, Spanish is described as a recently immigrated foreign language tribe (*Sprachstamm*) that is represented in all federal states (as are English, Italian and Russian). In contrast, there are language tribes that have been living, for a long time, in the so-called colonisation areas within the empire's borders (cf. Statistik des Deutschen Reichs 1903:127). In 1946, there were 3,118, out of a total population of 64,501,757 (cf. Schinzler 1949).

[5] In 1925, the figure was just over 1,434, or 0.1%; Statistik des Deutschen Reichs 1928.

## 2.1. Assessment of the Spanish language using a closed-ended question

The *Germany Survey 2017* [6] elicited language ratings for a range of languages [7] using a closed-ended question. Respondents were shown nine languages, which they were asked to rate according to predefined categories. There were five possible answers, ranging from ‘very likeable’ to ‘very unlikeable’. Respondents also had the option of not answering. **Figure 1** shows the respondents’ answers: absolute numbers on the left-hand side, calculated means and missing answers on the right-hand side. [8]



**Figure 1:** Language ratings: **a.** absolute frequencies, **b.** calculated means (using standard error) and missing answers (*Germany Survey 2017*,  $n = 2,156$ ; closed-format question “How likeable do you find the following languages in general?”, German original: „Wie sympathisch finden Sie ganz allgemein die folgenden Sprachen?“; based on valid answers, without „weiß nicht, keine Angabe“)

The results show that German is considered the most likeable language. Next, several languages follow which have comparably high average rating scores, but which are slightly lower than the average scores for German. This group includes several Romance languages and English: Italian, English, French and Spanish in descending order, with English and Italian essentially on par. Among these languages, Spanish is rated slightly less favourably than the others. The left side of Figure 1 illustrates the ratings in more detail. For German, Italian, English, French and Spanish, the proportions of favourable (‘likeable’) and very favourable responses (‘very likeable’) are very high, with German receiving the highest score. Spanish receives fewer highly positive responses, especially in comparison to French and Italian. At the same time, Spanish has a slightly higher

[6] For the representative *Germany Survey 2017*, 4,380 people were asked about their language skills and attitudes towards languages (regarding this survey see, for example, Adler and Ribeiro Silveira, 2020). It was conducted in cooperation with the German Institute for Economic Research as part of the Innovation Sample of the Socio-Economic Panel (SOEP-IS). It took place in two parts: first as a face-to-face interview, and second as an online survey. Both surveys are representative nationwide surveys.

[7] The selection of languages includes German, the national language, the usual foreign languages taught in schools and the languages of neighbouring countries, as well as the most commonly spoken languages in Germany. The languages were presented in random order – with German never being the first language.

[8] The means were calculated according to the responses converted as follows: ‘very unlikeable’ (“sehr unsympathisch”) = -2, ‘unlikeable’ (“unsympathisch”) = -1, ‘partly/partly’ (“teils/teils”) = 0, ‘likeable’ (“sympathisch”) = +1, ‘very likeable’ (“sehr sympathisch”) = +2.

proportion of responses indicating the highest level of dislike ('unlikeable', 'very unlikeable') compared to Italian, English and, above all, German. Here, French has the highest proportion of ratings among this group of languages. The responses in the middle category are again highest for Spanish. Overall, however the responses in the categories 'likeable' and 'very likeable' dominate for Spanish, with only a few responses in the categories 'unlikeable' and 'very unlikeable'.

Polish, Russian, Turkish and Arabic display a significantly different pattern of ratings in the ranking of languages. These languages are commonly referred to in Germany as 'heritage languages' or 'languages of origin' (see above). In Germany, Turkish, Russian, Polish and Arabic are the most common heritage languages (cf. Brehmer and Mehlhorn 2018, p. 18). It is precisely these languages that are predominantly rated as unlikeable.

Missing data (see Fig. 1) provide further insight into these ratings. High missing values may indicate uncertainties or problems with a response or a question. Missing values are lowest in the assessment of German, and highest in the assessment of Arabic (1.2% of respondents abstained from answering the rating regarding German, compared to 7.4% for Arabic). The number of abstentions is highest for languages that are rated as rather unlikeable. Among the languages rated as likeable, Spanish has the highest number of missing values: 2.7% of respondents abstained here. Overall, however, uncertainty in the assessment does not seem to be particularly high, although it is higher than for German, English, Italian and French. This is consistent with the fact that Spanish also has the highest proportion of responses in the middle category 'partly/partly' among this group of languages.

A more detailed analysis of the ratings reveals two factors as particularly relevant in the evaluation of Spanish. First, gender plays a role: women rate Spanish as more likeable than men; this also applies to the rating of Italian. Second, age plays a role in the assessment (see Fig. 2, which shows the ratings of languages according to the age of the respondents; mean value, age ascending from left to right).

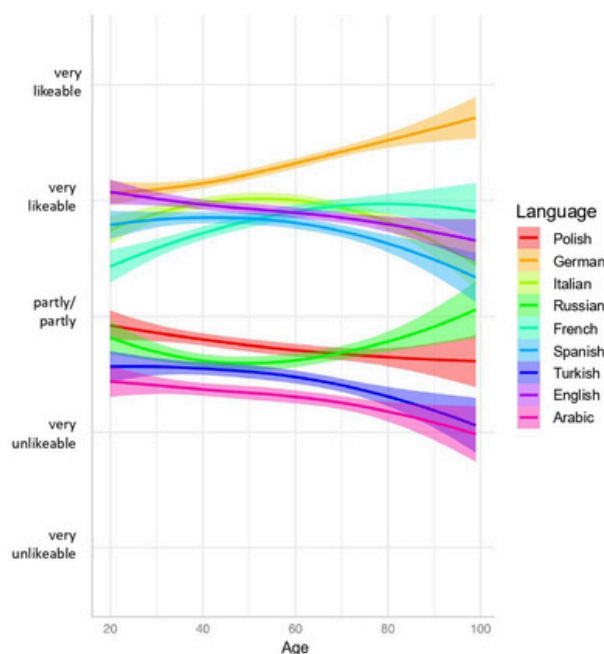


Figure 2: Language ratings by age (Germany Survey 2017; cf. Adler/Ribeiro Silveira 2021: 415)

**Figure 2** indicates that age is a statistically significant factor in the evaluation of German, French and English. As can be clearly seen, the pattern for German differs significantly: the older the respondents are, the more favourable is their evaluation of German (the pattern for French is similar, but at an overall lower level). The opposite is true for English. In contrast, age is not a statistically significant factor in the rating of Spanish. However, the trend is similar to that for English: younger respondents rate Spanish, like English, as more likeable, while older respondents rate it as slightly less likeable.

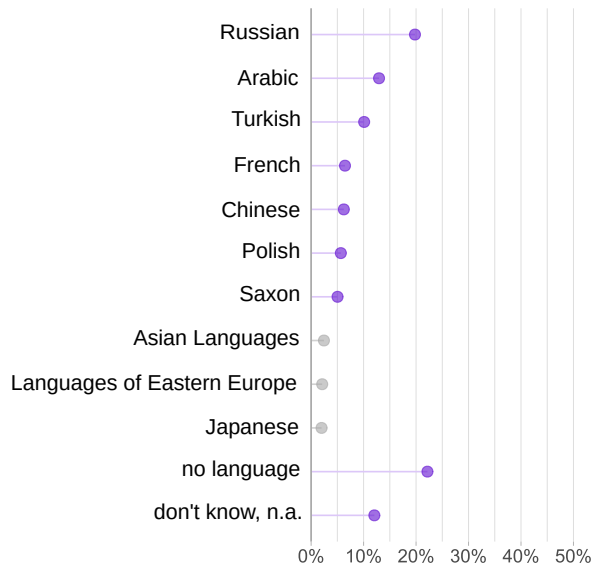
## 2.2. Assessment of the Spanish language using an open-ended question

The ratings of the languages assessed by the closed-ended question are complemented by another type of question. In addition to the question presented above the *Germany Survey 2017* used an open-ended question. Half of the respondents were asked the closed-ended question, the other half the open question. For the open question, respondents were asked to name languages they find likeable or unlikeable, without being given any answers to choose from. Multiple answers were possible, i.e. in principle, any number of languages could be named. The use of both question formats allows the mitigation of methodological effects. **Figure 3** presents the results of the question about likeable languages in two different ways: on the left, raw data are shown in a word cloud, while on the right, the processed answers are arranged according to their relative frequency.



**Figure 3:** Liked languages (*Germany Survey 2017*,  $n = 2,024$ ; open-format question “Are there any languages that you like? Which ones are they?”, German original: „Gibt es Sprachen, die Sie sympathisch finden? Welche sind das?“)

The most common answer to the question about likeable languages is French (32.3%; see **Fig. 3** left and right). This is followed at some distance by English (26.9%), Italian (24.7%), and Spanish which scores on fourth place (23.5%). The other languages mentioned follow at a considerable distance, scoring well below 10%. The survey also asked for languages that are disliked. The answers to this question are shown in **Figure 4**.



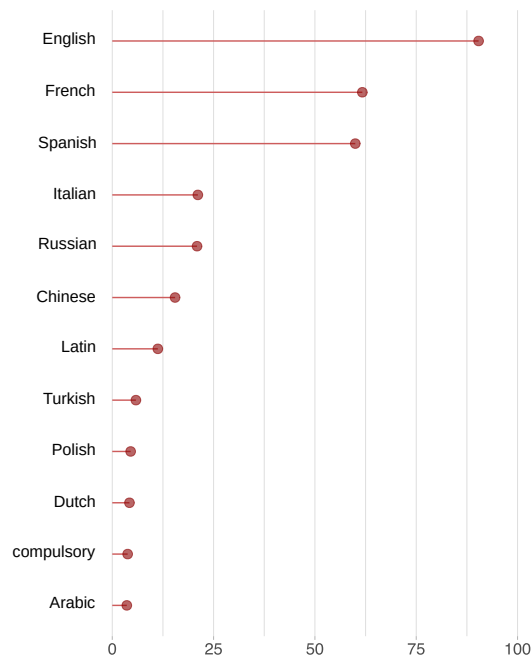
**Figure 4:** Disliked languages (*Germany-Survey 2017*,  $n = 2,024$ ; open-format question “Are there languages that you dislike? Which ones are they?”, German original: „Gibt es Sprachen, die Sie unsympathisch finden? Welche sind das?“)

The most frequent response is that no language is disliked (22.3%). The second most frequent response is Russian which is named as a disliked language by 19.8% of respondents. This means that the languages named most frequently as disliked are mentioned significantly less often than the most frequently mentioned languages in the question about liked languages. The proportion of respondents who name Russian as a disliked language is slightly lower than the proportion of respondents who name Spanish as a language they like, although Spanish scores only fourth in the ranking, and significantly lower than French, which is named most often as a liked language. Next to Russian, the most frequently mentioned disliked languages are Arabic (12.9%), Turkish (10.1%), French (6.5%), Chinese (6.2%), and Polish (5.7%); 5.0% mention Saxon. This highlights the unique nature of the instrument: when asked open-ended questions, respondents can formulate their own answers. These may be answers that are generally not considered appropriate for the question, such as the answer ‘Saxon,’ which is linguistically classified as a dialect, i.e. a regional variety of German. Thus, open-ended questions can generate answers that would not be reflected in a closed format with predetermined answers. Thereby they give insights in laypeople’s mental representations. Spanish does not appear among the most frequently mentioned disliked languages. This also applies to Italian, which is consistently mentioned among the languages considered as a liked language, but not among those considered disliked.

From the answers to the open-ended question, one could conclude that Spanish is generally perceived as a liked language. It is not, however, considered to be one of the disliked languages.

### 2.3. Assessment of Spanish as a foreign language offered at school

The language ratings just reported go hand in hand with assessments of which languages should be taught in schools. A question on this topic was asked in the *Germany Survey 2017*. The responses are shown in **Figure 5**.



**Figure 5:** Foreign languages that should be offered in school (*Germany Survey 2017*, online survey/partial sample,  $n = 1,439$ , in percent, proportion of respondents, open-format question “Which foreign languages do you think should be offered at school?”, German original: „Welche Fremdsprachen sollten Ihrer Meinung nach in der Schule angeboten werden?“; cf. Adler/Plewnia/Ribeiro Silveira 2024: 18)

The responses provide insights into how school practice and public opinion in Germany relate to each other (for details on the results, see Adler *et al.*, 2024): Over 90% of the respondents mention English, which is thereby unrivalled as a language that should be taught in school. Socio-economic considerations certainly play an important role in this, with language skills being considered an economic resource and human capital (see Heller and Duchêne, 2016, p. 139). French (62%) and Spanish (60%) follow at some distance. Italian (21%) and Russian (21%) are mentioned even further behind. Spanish is thus almost on a par with French, which is the traditionally established second foreign language taught in schools in Germany. This clearly shows a competition between the two Romance languages. Italian lags far behind in comparison: it does not seem to be in competition with French and Spanish, whereas it is roughly on a par with Russian. Against the backdrop of Spanish's current status as a foreign language in schools, this perhaps reflects a desire to establish it more firmly in the canon of foreign languages taught in school (see e.g. chapter 9.2 in Loureda Lamas 2022, p. 131 ff.).

These assessments are corroborated by the results of the latest Eurobarometer survey on languages (Special Eurobarometer 540). Respondents were asked to name the two most useful languages (apart from their mother tongue) and the two languages that would be most useful for their children's future. The survey results for both questions in Germany are very similar. First and foremost, the vast majority cited English (81% and 88% respectively), followed by French (20% and 21%) and Spanish in third place with 11% and 15%. These three languages are therefore considered useful by respondents in Germany (In this context, the discourse on languages and language skills as an economic resource is also relevant; see, for example, Chiswick/Miller 2003 on English and French in Canada). The naming and ranking of these three languages correspond to the languages offered in school.

### 3. Knowledge of the Spanish language in Germany

How do these assessments and ratings of the Spanish language relate to the knowledge of the language in Germany? To answer this question, we will first look at the foreign languages learned in schools and then describe which languages people in Germany speak in addition to their native languages. We will then evaluate current data from the German microcensus, which provides information on how often Spanish is spoken in private contexts in Germany, i.e. at home.

#### 3.1. Proficiency in Spanish in Germany

Learner numbers (e.g. based on school statistics or courses at adult education centres) indicate how many people are learning a particular language. However, they do not provide any information about how well the respective languages are known (for more detail on Spanish language competence in Germany and speaker profiles regarding Spanish competence, see Loureda Lamas et al. 2022, e.g. chapter 8, Loureda Lamas et al. 2021), nor about the future development of proficiency in this language, i.e. whether people who have learned it will be able to speak it after some years. The results of the *Germany Survey 2008*<sup>[9]</sup> and the *Germany Survey 2017* provide some data to answer these questions. Even though these surveys were not conducted recently, they provide some indication about proficiency in some languages. In 2008, respondents were asked which languages they had learned, and of which languages they had a good command ('Have you learned one or more foreign languages? If so, which ones?'; 'And do you have a good command of these languages?' or 'And which of these languages do you have a good command of?')<sup>[10]</sup>. The first question thus covers all languages ever learned, regardless of the proficiency of the respondents. The second question aims to determine which of the languages learned are considered to be spoken well (cf. Adler and Ribeiro, 2022, Gärtig et al., 2010, pp. 257-263). The results are shown in **Figure 6**. Neither question refers to a specific learning context (e.g. school).

The vast majority of respondents stated that they had learned English (71.8%; see Fig. 6, left). French came in second with 25.5%, indicating a wide margin, followed by Russian (20.3%). Other foreign languages that had been learned were Latin (7.7%), Spanish (7.2%) and Italian (4.0%), while 17.2% said that they had not learned any foreign languages. This latter proportion roughly corresponds to the combined percentage for Latin, Spanish and Italian.

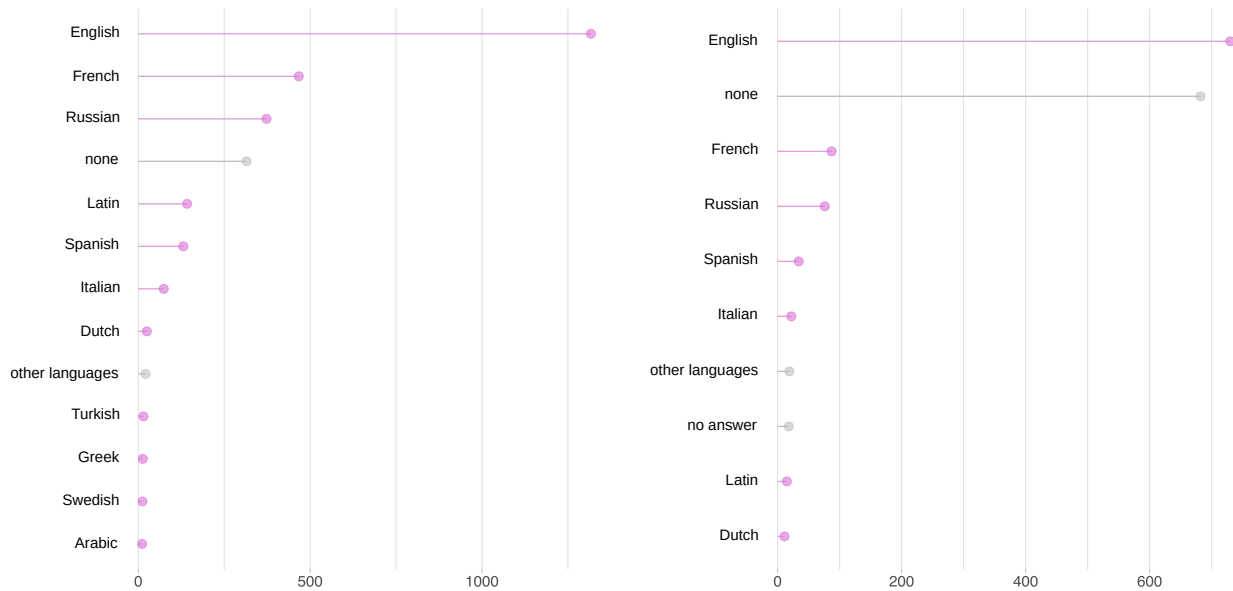
This roughly corresponds to the results of the current Eurobarometer survey from 2023 (however, Eurobarometer surveyed fewer people in Germany than the *Germany Survey 2008*, i.e. 1,532; Special Eurobarometer 540, Europeans and their languages, cf. Europäische Union 2024). According to this, most respondents, i.e. 65%, state that they speak English well enough to converse in it (exact question: And which other language, if any, do you speak well enough in order to be able to have a conversation, Eurobarometer

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<sup>[9]</sup> The *Germany Survey 2008* comprises a sample of 2,004 respondents (Gärtig et al., 2010). It covered both language skills and attitudes towards languages. It was conducted as a telephone survey by the Forschungsgruppe Wahlen research group.

<sup>[10]</sup> German origin: „Haben Sie eine oder mehrere Fremdsprachen gelernt? Wenn ja, welche?“; „Und können Sie diese Sprache gut?“ „Und welche dieser Sprachen können Sie gut?“ These questions were asked to respondents whose native language(s) included German. Respondents whose native language was not German were asked the following questions: 'Have you learned any languages other than your native language and German? If so, which ones?' Respondents were therefore not allowed to mention German.

540). French is in second place with 16%, followed by German (11%), then Spanish in fourth place with 8% and finally Italian (4%). Germany is one of the countries surveyed in the Eurobarometer in which Spanish as a foreign language has seen the greatest growth (along with Luxembourg, Denmark and Belgium, Eurobarometer 540, cf. Europäische Union 2024: 15).

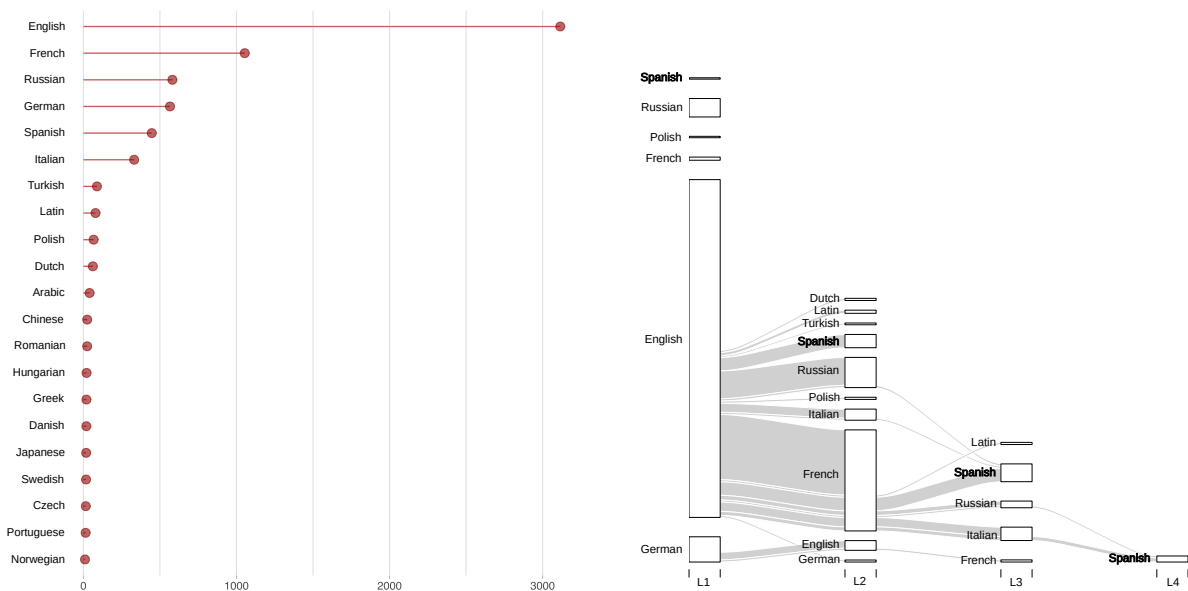


**Figure 6:** Languages learned (left) und languages with good command (right; *Germany Survey 2008*; cf. Adler/Ribeiro Silveira 2022: 53)

The answers to the follow-up question, i.e. on the languages in which the respondents consider to have a good proficiency, illustrate current competence of the respective language (see Fig. 6 on the right). Like the first question, this question refers to language skills in general, not to the learning context. Languages mentioned may have been acquired at school, which certainly accounts for a significant proportion of language learning, or in other ways. The majority of respondents (47.5%) state that they have a good command of English. English is therefore not only the most commonly learned foreign language in Germany, but also the language in which people are most proficient. The second most common response is that no foreign language is spoken well (44.3%). This accounts for almost half of all respondents. The order of other languages that are mastered well is similar to the ranking of languages that have been learned: French (5.7%), Russian (4.9%), Spanish (2.2%) and Italian (1.4%). If we compare the frequency of responses to both questions, we can see which languages that have been learned are most likely to be well-mastered, and which are not: 55.4% of those respondents who have learned English say they also have a good level of proficiency in it. This is the highest number among the six languages mentioned most frequently. Yet, this also means that almost half of those who have learned English do not consider it to be a language in which they are particularly proficient. The next-highest scores are assigned to Italian (29.7%) and Spanish (26.0%) – which, however, have smaller learner numbers in general. Next in line, with lower scores, are Russian (20.4%), French (18.6%) and Latin (10.6%). Latin is certainly a special case in this, since the aim of its acquisition is usually not to develop active language skills. Current skills in relation to language learning are lowest for French, followed by Russian. These results imply that the learning success is highest for English, and that generally, learning languages leads to relatively little language

proficiency. This is particularly visible in the case of French: only two-fifths of those who have learned French state that they have developed a high proficiency in it. Spanish, like Italian, is in the middle range, with just under 30% of those who have learned it stating that they are proficient in it.

Additional information about the importance of Spanish as a foreign or second language in Germany can be found in the *Germany Survey 2017*. This survey collected data on skills in other languages (i.e. not the native languages of the respondents). Languages mentioned, their number and their combination, provide revealing insight into language competences of the German population. The following question was asked: ‘In which other languages do you have language skills?’<sup>[11]</sup> Compared to the results just described, this question points at a very broad understanding of language proficiency. The results, as shown in **Figure 7**, confirm the ranking of languages learned and spoken from the *Germany Survey 2008*, with English in first place (77.1%) and French far behind in second place (24.4%). This is followed by Russian, German, Spanish and, somewhat behind, Italian. Spanish, in fifth place, is cited as an additional language by 10.2% of the respondents.



**Figure 7:** Additional languages (*Germany Survey 2017*; cf. Adler/Ribeiro Silveira 2022: 52-53)

The survey not only reveals in which languages the respondents claim to have some competence, but also how many languages they know and which combinations are common. Most respondents state that they have language skills in only one other language in addition to their native language (38.1%). More than one quarter of the respondents state that they know two other languages (28.9%). The third most common answer, given by 16.1% of the respondents, is that a person does not know any languages other than their native languages. 11.8% claim knowledge in three other languages. The majority of people in Germany therefore know one or two other languages in addition to their native languages – i.e. 1.5 additional languages on average.

[11] German original: “In welchen weiteren Sprachen besitzen Sie Sprachkenntnisse?“ (cf. Adler and Ribeiro Silveira, 2022, p. 52)

**Figure 7** on the right displays the languages specified as additional languages in a way that the combination of language competences becomes visible.<sup>[12]</sup> It shows that the majority of people in Germany can speak only one other language, and that this language is English (the first bar on the far left is the highest overall; the largest sub-bar within this bar is the one representing English). Most other languages occur almost exclusively as a second (in combination with English) or third language. This applies to French and especially Spanish: Spanish is hardly ever mentioned as the only other language. It occurs usually as one of three languages or, somewhat less frequently, one of two languages.

### 3.2. Spanish as a home language in Germany

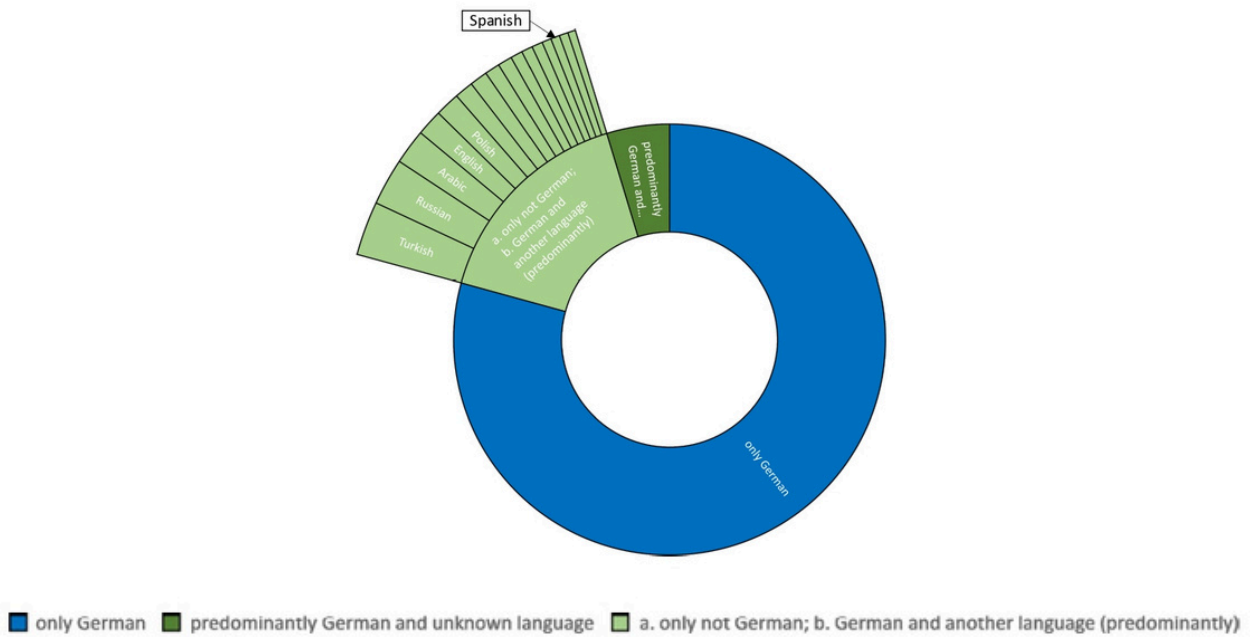
The final section discusses current results from the German microcensus.<sup>[13]</sup> Since 2017, the German microcensus has asked about language. However, it only covers the language predominantly spoken in the household. The way in which the survey asked about languages has received considerable criticism (see e.g. Adler 2018). As a result, the questions were changed and improved in the 2021 survey, but several critical aspects remain (see Adler 2023).<sup>[14]</sup> In particular, this relates to the function of the question. Although there are no explicit statements on this, it can be assumed that the main purpose of the language question is to measure the cultural integration of non-native/non-German people. In this sense, inquiring about the language predominantly spoken at home may be considered to serve as a proxy for cultural integration resp. national identity (see Adler 2018). All of this means that the results of the language question must be interpreted with caution. This applies in particular to the results from 2017 to 2020, which are therefore not presented here.

**Figure 8** shows the most current results – the preliminary results of the 2024 microcensus. Some contextual information is required for interpretation: the way in which the question is asked allows multilingual realities to be reflected only partially. For some

<sup>[12]</sup> The responses for each language are displayed as vertical bars. Only languages mentioned by more than 10 respondents are shown in this diagram, which is why the maximum number is four languages: Language 1 (L1) to Language 4 (L4). The data does not provide any information about the order of the languages. The connections between the bars indicate which language combinations occur.

<sup>[13]</sup> The microcensus is an official census of the German population that has been conducted annually since 1957 (resp. 1990; for information see e.g. <https://www.destatis.de/DE/Themen/Gesellschaft-Umwelt/Bevoelkerung/Haushalte-Familien/Methoden/mikrozensus.html> or Statistisches Bundesamt (Destatis) 2025b). It is not a complete census; it surveys a representative sample of the total population (i.e. 1% of the total population). The results therefore apply to the entire population and can be extrapolated to it. Most of the questions are mandatory. As the microcensus regularly asks a large set of questions, it is a very important official statistic in Germany. It is also used as a source of information for preparing and making political decisions.

<sup>[14]</sup> The questions asked since the 2021 microcensus are as follows: 1. ‘Which language or languages do you speak at home?’ ‘I only speak German at home.’ ‘I speak German and at least one other language at home.’ ‘I do not speak German at home, but another language or languages.’ (German original: „Welche Sprache bzw. welche Sprachen sprechen Sie zu Hause?“ „Ich spreche zu Hause nur Deutsch.“ „Ich spreche zu Hause Deutsch und mindestens eine andere Sprache.“ „Ich spreche zu Hause nicht Deutsch, sondern eine andere Sprache bzw. andere Sprachen.“) All respondents who do not choose the first answer are asked the second question. 2. ‘Which language do you speak mainly at home?’ (German original: „Welche Sprache sprechen Sie vorwiegend zu Hause?“) For all those who are asked this question, a language or generic answer from the given list is noted – there is no option for an open answer. If the answer is German, then there is no information about any language other than German, even if the general information is that another language and German are spoken at home, the latter being the main language.

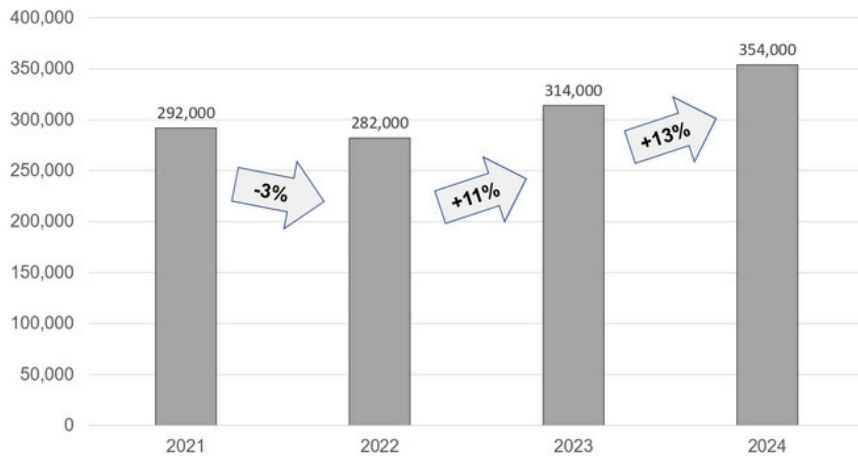


**Figure 8:** First results on predominantly spoken languages in 2024 in German households according to German microcensus (own calculation and visualisation)

of the respondents who do not speak only German at home, no information about other languages is available (for details, see Adler 2023).

**Figure 8** shows that Spanish is rarely spoken in German private households. The majority of people in Germany speak mainly German (76.8%). 18.6% speak at least one other language at home and German, or only one or several other languages but not German (in detail: 5.9% speak one or more other languages at home; 12.7% speak German and mainly another language at home). 4.6% speak mainly German and another language at home. The language other than German is only recorded for those who do not speak mainly German at home. This information is therefore missing for the respondents shown in the dark green section of the figure. Thus, only 18.6% provided information about another language. These languages are shown in the light green circle above the circle segment (only languages with a total of or more than 300,000 extrapolated speakers). The figure includes Spanish, but not as one of the most common languages other than German. Highest on this list are Turkish, Russian and Arabic (see Adler 2025). According to the projection based on the microcensus, Spanish is spoken at home by 354,000 people in 2024 (the results of the microcensus are based on a 1% representative sample and are ultimately extrapolated, see footnote 13 above). This equals 2.4% of all those who specify a language other than German (compared to 14.0% for Turkish, 12.2% for Russian and 9.1% for Arabic). Further, this implies that only 0.4% of the total sample speak Spanish at home (compared to 2.6% who speak Turkish, 2.3% Russian and 1.7% Arabic) – (either Spanish only, or Spanish and another language, or mainly Spanish, but also German). There is no information on the number of people who speak mainly German, but also Spanish at home.

Since this question has been included in the annual microcensus from 2021 on, it is possible to compare how this number has developed during the past years. **Figure 9** shows the extrapolated figures for the response ‘Spanish’ in the 2021 microcensus and subsequent years. Please note that the same restrictions of the data apply to these figures as outlined in the explanation of **Figure 8**.



**Figure 9:** Extrapolated results regarding Spanish as a language spoken at home, German microcensus 2021-2024

The results show a slight decline regarding Spanish as a language spoken at home from 2021 to 2022, but a rise of the figures since then. Growth has been more than 10% in the last two years, with figures rising by 11.3% from 2022 to 2023, and by 12.7% from 2023 to 2024. This makes Spanish the only language in a list of languages spoken by an extrapolated number of more than 350,000 to grow by a double-digit relative share in these two consecutive years (English also recorded growth for both years, but only once in double digits, see Adler 2025). In this sense, Spanish is not one of the most common languages spoken in German households, but its relatively small share has grown considerably during the past two years.

These Spanish-speaking households can be described in more detail. Analyses by Valero Fernández *et al.* (in press), for example, show that Spanish speakers are distributed regionally in Germany, mainly in urban areas (cities with over 200,000 inhabitants, e.g. Berlin, Munich, Frankfurt, Cologne, etc.). Most Spanish-speaking multi-person households (with Spanish as their language of origin) show a typical constellation: Married Spanish speakers are typically married to a German citizen (cf. *ibid.*, p. 3). This constellation seems to be particularly conducive to the transmission of Spanish (as confirmed by a study of 316 respondents regarding their communication practices within families/at home, cf. *ibid.*, pp. 4-5).

#### 4. The current status of Spanish in Germany

In total, the data presented here on Spanish in Germany can be summarised as follows: Spanish is predominantly viewed positively; overall, it is a language with a positive image. However, as the results of the open-ended question on liked and disliked languages indicate, Spanish does not seem to be as firmly established and cognitively present among the population as English and French. At the same time, Spanish is frequently mentioned as a language that should be taught in schools – alongside English and French. The frequency in which Spanish is mentioned significantly exceeds the number of those who say they have knowledge of Spanish. This could therefore be interpreted as a clear positioning of Spanish as a language that is worth learning and speaking. The fact that Spanish is a global language, spoken in many countries, probably also plays a role here as a potential factor in the appeal of learning the language.

This desire stands in contrast to the current level of Spanish proficiency among people in Germany; Spanish does currently not play a particularly significant role in the linguistic repertoire of the population. Not many people are proficient in Spanish as a language in addition to their native language or languages. Spanish is most often a third or second language, and only very rarely the first and only additional language. This is certainly a reflection of the fact that Spanish is not yet an established foreign language in German schools, and that the usual and most common foreign languages taught in schools are or were English and French (and, in former East Germany, Russian).

In addition, Spanish also has a comparatively low position as a family and heritage language in Germany. There is not a particularly large group of such speakers. In an ecolinguistic context in which German clearly dominates, Spanish currently ranks only thirteenth among the languages that are spoken to a much lesser extent than German. Spanish is therefore not among the top languages – and its figures are significantly lower than for the most common languages, i.e. Turkish, Russian, Arabic, English and Polish. However, data from recent years show that numbers for Spanish are currently growing. This suggests that more and more people in Germany are speaking Spanish at home. If this trend continues, it is quite possible that Spanish will soon be part of the group of languages with a larger number of speakers in Germany.

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