

comparative exercises

The last week of this version of Structure of Modern English will ask you to reflect on the rules of standard English syntax you've studied this semester, in the light of the syntax of "neighboring" languages and other languages that you have studied. We will begin by observing syntactic and other contrasts between English and Spanish, French, and German. Perhaps ironically, one of the best ways to do this is by using the Tower of Babel story to observe how far the forces of linguistic diversity have separated these related languages in the course of history. Our texts will be the 21st-century English NET Bible, the 1960 revision of the Spanish Reina-Valera Bible, the 1910 French Louis Segond Bible, and the 2002 German Schlachter 2000 Bible (sources: <https://netbible.org/> and <https://www.biblegateway.com/>).

Genesis 11:1:

(English) The whole earth had a common language and a common vocabulary.

(Spanish) Tenía entonces toda la tierra una sola lengua y unas mismas palabras.

(French) Toute la terre avait une seule langue et les mêmes mots.

(German) Und die ganze Erde hatte eine einzige Sprache und dieselben Worte.

Here are word-by-word English versions that preserve the word order and phrase structure of the various languages:

(English) The whole earth had a common language and a common vocabulary.

(Spanish) Had then all the earth one lone language and the same words.

(French) All the earth had one lone language and the same words.

(German) And the whole earth had one lone language and the-same words.