Occitan and ISO.
Questions and answers about the name of a language.
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1) A language or a group of languages ?

The vast majority of scientific approaches as well of cultural and social activities concerning Occitan (or "Oc language", or "Provençal" *lato sensu*) treats it as one language, whatever internal variation is also recognized in this language.

In the Middle Age, the poetry of the *Troubadours* constitutes one litterature, written in a rather homogeneous linguistic variety and writers (and musicians) from all over the Occitan speaking area contributed to this important litterary production.

In the times of Romanticism, the linguistic and litterary revival movement known a « Felibrige », although it first developped in Western Provence, has always sought to gather writers from all the Occitan domain, and it succeeded in doing so. Emblematically enough, Frederic Mistral, the main leader of this cultural revival and the most renowned and influential Occitan writer and thinker in the XIX century, later Nobel Prize, compiled a panoccitan dictionary, the most comprehensive up to now (*Lou Trésor dóu Felibrige*). *Felibrige* is still a living association and constantly advocates a unitary conception of the language.

 'Occitanism' was first a trend within the Felibrige and close links still bind the two movements in many areas. The new approach promoted the use of the word "Occitan" and a new orthography (in fact a modernised version of the medieval notation for the language). Concerning the unity of the language, occitanists and *Felibres* share the same point of view, no matter how they prefer to name the language (Occitan, Oc language, Provençal). The most salient association representing "occitanism", the IEO (*Institut d'Estudis Occitans*, founded in 1945), like Felibrige, is present in all *Régions* and *Départements* where Occitan is spoken.

The philological and linguistic tradition in the study of Romance languages in general, and the Occitan area in particular, considers Occitan (or Provençal) as one language, *pace* some discussion concerning Gascon and discussion on the very possibility to draw limits within a linguistic domain of one and the same genetical origin (viz. Romance).

When Occitan is taught in the educational system (elementary or secondary schools), the local form of the language always more or less serves as a basis, but it is also insisted on the unity of the language. Pupils are indeed taught to speak in a different fashion according to where the live, but they also are trained to read texts written in other varieties and to understand speakers from other areas.

2) Which name for this language ?

Many names have been used to designate what we call « Occitan ». Let us review the most commonly used ones and point out their drawbacks :

- "Romance" (*roman*) is clearly not specific enough and rather refers to any form of speech of latin ascendence as opposed to a language belonging to another group (germanic for instance) or to latin itself,
- "Provençal" (*provençal*) is problematic because the term unavoidingly has a specific reading too, referring to the specific form of Occitan spoken in Provence (in ancient or modern times): linguists using the word Provençal for the whole language are constantly lead to specify *stricto sensu* or *lato sensu.*
- "Oc language", (*Langue d'oc*) is just as accurate as Occitan; the only disadvantage of this designation being it is a locution and not a word; indeed the only adjectival form corresponding to "Oc language" is "Occitan".
- other designations are either too obsolete (e.g. "Gascon" *lato sensu*) to mention or inacceptably depreciative (e.g. *patois*).

3) Which dialect divisions ?

Two ancient divides are currently accepted within Occitan :

- South versus North on the basis of the palatalization of the velar stops ([k] [g]) before [a] ; Northern dialects palatalize (*chantar* 'to sing') whereas the southern ones don't (*cantar*),

- Gascon versus the rest of Occitan on the basis of bunch of features tending to cluster closely in the South-Western part of the Occitan domain, in particular Gascon has [h] (*hilh* 'son') for [f] elsewhere in Occitan (*filh*), Latin –LL- yields [t'] and [r] in Gascon (*bèth, bèra* 'beautifull' m.f.), but basically [l] (*bèl, bèla*) in the rest of the language, [n] deletes intervocalically in Gascon (*plea* 'full' f.) but is preserved elsewhere (*plena*).

Other factors (in general more recently attested ones) allow further distinctions. In particular, innovation in noun morphology and plural marking caracterises modern Provençal (*lei polidei filha(s)* 'the beautiful girls') and makes it distinct from the neighbouring Lengadocian which maintains a fully sigmatic system : (*las polidas filhas*).

The commonly accepted dialect list reads as follows :

- Gascon (including Biarnese and Aranese, the latter spoken in Spain),
- Lengadocian,
- Provençal (including Niçard and Judeo-Provençal, sometimes called « Shuadit »)
- Limousin,
- Auvergnat,
- Vivaroalpine (including varieties spoken in Italy, province of Piedmont and in the isolate of Guardia Piemontese, Calabria).

4) Which place in classification ?

Assuming the traditional split in the Romania (the area where languages arising from latin are spoken) between an eastern part ignoring plurals in –*s* and a western area where –*s* serves as plural marker (at least at the first stages of the evolution from Latin), Occitan clearly belongs to the second group. This Western Romance group

gathers : Portuguese, Spanish o Castilian, Aragonese, Catalan, Occitan, French, Francoprovençal, Romanche, Galloitalian, Friulan. The line from La Spezia to Rimini is traditionally held as the border between Western and Eastern Romance.

Further grouping in Western Romance is a disputed matter. Some suggestions are :

- a classical one distinguishing Galloromance which would group French, Francoprovençal and Occitan, Iberoromance including Portuguese, Spanish and Catalan, Italoromance whith Italian (Eastern Romance) and Galloitalian (Western Romance)
- a revised version of the preceding would consider Catalan as a « bridge language » between Iberoromance and Galloromance, and Galloitalian as a bridge between Galloromance and Iberoromance.
- Pierre Bec suggested an Occitanoromance group, including Occitan and Catalan : in this group Catalan and Gascon (as a dialect of Occitan) share features with iberoromanic languages, whereas Nothern Occitan exhibits common trends with French and Francoprovençal (theses two languages forming Galloromanic proper).
- a revised version of the latter classification singles out a Central Western Romance group with Occitan (including Gascon), Catalan, Galloitalian; the remaining surrouding languages constitute the Galloromanic, Rhetoromanic, Italoromanic and Iberoromanic groups.

Due to this multiplicity of classments, due to the fact that some classifications present overlaps (the so called 'bridge languages' for instance), due to the fact that the most widely accepted divide between Western and Eastern cuts through Italy and hence through an Italoromance group which also has (if only for secondary historical reasons) some degree of legitimity, it seems difficult and perhaps useless to specify, as a norm and for normalizing purposes, an intermediate level of grouping within Romance languages, specifically between Romance and Occitan.

Of course proposing various groupings remains a legitimate activity within the field of linguitic research, although it must be mentioned that the *Stammbau* (tree) model, on which a classification operating successive divisions exclusively relies, may not be the most appropriate framework to describe the situation where languages all stem from the same mother language and form continuous domain. A *Wellen* (wave) model is probably more suitable, which makes attempts to establish a univoque treelike classification simply pointless.

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On the basis of the preceeding remarks, the following points should be emphasised:

- Occitan, medieval and modern, is a single language with a single name (**Occitan**),
- the medieval and modern forms of Occitan should be given two related codes within the ISO norm (for instance « **ocm** » for Medieval Occitan and « **occ** » or « **oci** » for the modern language (« pro » for the medieval language too strongly suggests « Provençal », a misleading term as we have emphasised),

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- inclusion of Occitan alongside French, Catalan, Spanish, Italian… within the « **Romance** » family (and further within "Italic" and "Indoeuropean" phyla) is enough for all practical purposes,
- if and where useful, reference to the following dialects within Occitan may be done : **Gascon** Occitan, **Lengadocian** Occitan, **Provençal** Occitan, **Limousin** Occitan, **Auvergnat** Occitan, **Vivaroalpine** Occitan. It is a general practice, in the classment of books dealing with modern languages to separate « standard » from « dialect ». Such a divide is not directly suitable for Occitan, rather a distinction could be made between « **descriptive** » and « **normative** » or « prescriptive » work, which can both be developped in reference to a single dialect or to a variety of dialects. In case it would be considered suitable for dialects to receive codes, Occitan dialects should be given a code recalling they belong to the Occitan language, « **ocX** » for instance. But Occitan dialects do not more urgently need to be given such specific codes than the dialects of any other language.