

Proto-Iroquoian language

Proto-Iroquoian is the name given to the hypothetical proto-language of the Iroquoian languages. Lounsbury (1961) estimated from glottochronology a time depth of 3,500 to 3,800 for the split of South and North Iroquoian. At the time of first contact, speakers of Iroquoian languages were distributed from the Cherokee in the Great Smoky Mountains northwards to the Tuscarora and Nottoway near the modern Virginia and North Carolina borders, then further north to the Five Nations in Upstate New York and the Huron and Neutral in modern day Ontario.

The Iroquoian languages are usually divided into two main groups: Southern Iroquoian (Cherokee) and Northern Iroquoian (all others) based on the great differences in vocabulary and modern phonology. Northern Iroquoian is then further divided by Lounsbury and Mithun into Proto-Tuscarora-Nottoway and Lake Iroquoian, although Julian (2010) does not believe Lake Iroquoian to be a valid subgrouping.

Isolated studies were done by Chafe (1977a), Michelson (1988), and Rudes (1995). There have also been several works of internal reconstruction for daughter languages, in particular with Seneca and Mohawk. A preliminary full reconstruction of proto-Iroquoian was not provided until Charles Julian's (2010) work.

1 Phonology

Proto-Iroquoian as reconstructed shares the Iroquoian languages' notable typological traits of small consonant inventories, complex consonant clusters, and a lack of labial consonants.

1.1 Vowels

The reconstructed vowel inventory for Proto-Iroquoian is: Like later Iroquoian languages, Proto-Iroquoian is distinguished in having nasal vowels /ō/ and /ē/, although it has more than in its daughter languages.

1.2 Consonants

The reconstructed consonant inventory for Proto-Iroquoian is given in the table below. The consonants of all Iroquoian languages pattern so that they may be

grouped as (oral) obstruents, sibilants, laryngeals, and resonants (Lounsbury 1978:337).

2 References

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3.1 Text

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