Large Consonant Inventory

The size of the consonant inventory of each language was investigated. The categories labelled “moderately large” (26-33) and “large” (34 or more) in WALS, were collapsed and any inventory size comprising 26 or more consonants were considered large. In order to operationalize the analysis, only the 40-item list was used as a basis. The resulting value for an individual language should therefore be regarded as relative in relation to the sample in general (see Small Consonant Inventory), and not as an absolute statement about inventory size. Cross-checking the results with earlier phonological analyses, suggests that many of the inventories coming out with a negative value, in fact would be classified as large if taking more lexical data into account. An inventory, using the above-mentioned method, representative of the value large is that of Iranian Wakhi (Pakistan), as displayed in the table, with its 31 consonants. (The apparent gaps, e.g. missing voiceless counterparts of voiced consonants, suggest that a few additional consonants occur in the language, as also confirmed in earlier analysis, in which as many as 35-36 consonant phonemes have been posited.)

|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Wakhi, Pakistan [wbl(p)] (Iranian)** | **Labial** | **Dental** | **Retroflex** | **Palatal** | **Velar** | **Post-velar** |
| Plosive | p, b | t, d | ɖ |  | k, ɡ | q |
| Affricate |  |  | ʈʂ | tɕ, dʑ |  |  |
| Fricative | f | s, z, ð | ʂ, ʐ | ɕ | x, ɣ | χ, ʁ, h |
| Nasal | m | n |  |  | ŋ |  |
| Lateral/flap |  | l, r |  |  |  |  |
| Approximant | w | ɬ |  | j |  |  |

Approximately a third of the sample languages were recorded as using 26 or more consonants in the 40-item list. There is a tendency for those languages to be spoken in the eastern half of the region.

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| Feature value | # of varieties displaying it | % |
| Present | 19 | 32 |
| Absent | 40 | 68 |
| Indeterminate | 0 | 0 |