

# Understanding Language Evolution Using an Event-Based Model

David Goldstein  
Department of Linguistics  
University of California, Los Angeles  
[dgoldstein@humnet.ucla.edu](mailto:dgoldstein@humnet.ucla.edu)

# Introduction

Modern languages are related to one another through a complicated history of divergence and word borrowing. The divergence of languages is caused by the slow change in spoken language as it is passed from parents to offspring. Over time, divergence causes languages to become increasingly different from one another, ultimately to the point where they are mutually unintelligible. Languages that were spoken by the same human group more recently in time are considered to be more closely related to each other than they are to groups that spoke the language more distantly in time; this relatedness information can be depicted by a tree-like diagram called a ‘phylogeny.’ Linguistic borrowing, by contrast, causes languages to become more similar to one another.

Language	IPA	Coding
English	/hænd/	0
German	/hant/	0
French	/mẽ---/	1
Spanish	/mano-/	1
Italian	/ma:no-/	1
Russian	/rɔka/	2
Polish	/rɛŋka/	2

**Table 1.** Coding of lexical cognates for the word *hand*.

# Languages

**Latin**



**French**



**Spanish**



**Italian**



**Brazilian Portuguese**



**Portuguese**



**Catalan**



**Walloon**



**Friulian**



**Romanian**



# Concept Examples

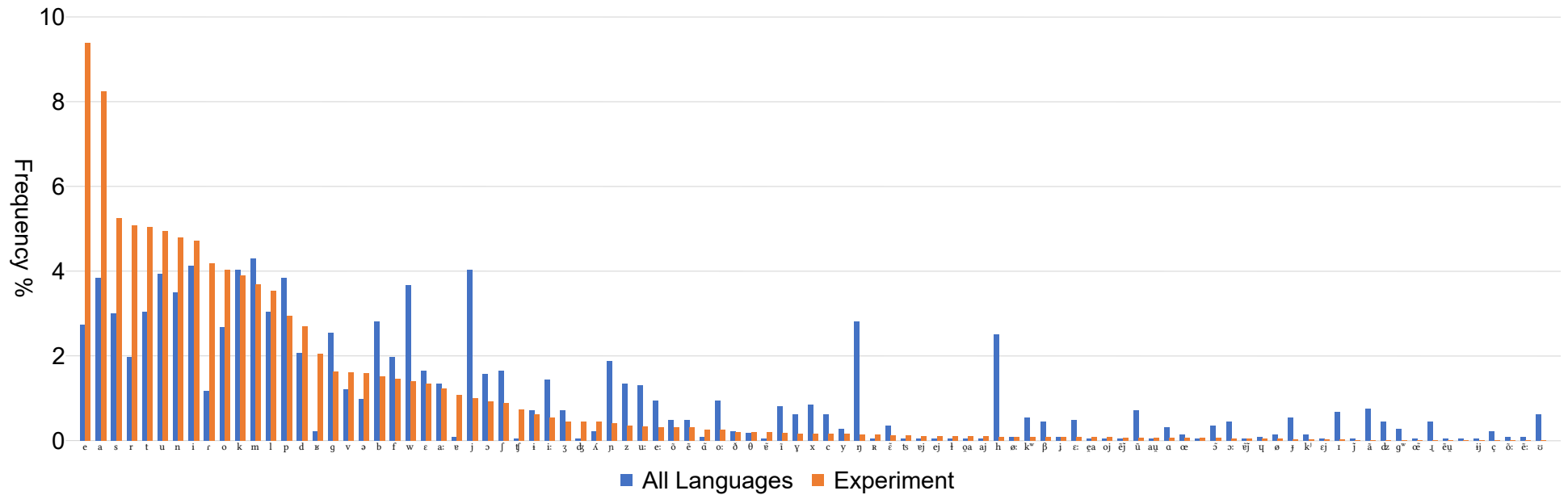
	I	We	YouPlural	YouSingular	YouSingular- VostramMercedem	Woman
Latin	- e g o:	n o: - s -	w o: - s	t u:		f e: - m i - n - a
French	ʒ ə - -	n u - - -	v u - -	t y		f a - m - - - -
Spanish	j - - o	n o - s -	b o - s	t u	- u s t e d	- e - m - b r - a
Italian	i - - o	n o: i - -	v o: i -	t u		f e m m i - n - a
PortugueseBrazil	- e - w	n ɔ j - s	v ɔ j s	t u	v o s - e -	f e - m e - - - e
Portuguese	- e - w	n ɔ - ʃ -	v o - ʃ	t u	v ɔ s - e -	f e - m j - - - e
Catalan	ʒ - - ɔ		b u - s	t u	v o s t e -	f e - m - b r - a
Walloon	ɖʒ i - -	n o - - -	v o - s	t y		f œ - m - - - -
Friulian	j - - o	n o: - - -	v o: - -	t u		f ε - m i - n - ε
Romanian	j e - w	n oj - - -	v oj - -	t u		f e - m e - - j e
	Woman-Mulier	Woman-Domina	ManHumanBeing	ManHumanBeing- Homo	Child	Child-Ninnus
Latin	m u l i e r e m	d o m i n a	h o m i - n e m	h - o m o:	i n f a n t e m	
French		d a m - - -	- ɔ m - - - -	- - ɔ̃ - -	ã - f ã - - - -	
Spanish	m u x - e r - -	d o - - ɲ a	o m - b r e - -		i n f a n t e -	n i ɲ o
Italian	m o ʎ ʎ e - - -	d ɔ n - n a		- w ɔ m o	- - f a n t e -	n i n o
PortugueseBrazil	m u ʎ - e ʁ - -	d o - - n e	o m ẽj - - - -		ĩ - f ẽ - ʃ i -	n e n ẽj
Portuguese	m u ʎ - e r - -	d o - - n e	ɔ m ẽj - - - -		ĩ - f ẽ - t i -	n e n ẽj
Catalan	m u ʎ - e - - -	d ɔ - - n ə	- ɔ m ə - - - -			n e n -
Walloon		d œ m - - -	- ɔ m - - - -		ε - f ã - - - -	
Friulian	m u - - i: r - -	d ɔ - - n e	- ɔ m - - - -			
Romanian	m u - j e r e -	d ɔ am - n ə	- o m - - - -			
	Wife	Wife-Mulier	Husband	Husband-Sponsus	Husband-Socius	Mother
Latin	- s p o n s a	m u l i e r -	m a r i: t u s	- s p o n s u s	s o k i u s	m a: t r e m
French	e - p u - z -		m a ʁ i - - -	e - p u - - - -		m e - ʁ - -
Spanish	e s p o - s a	m u x - e r -	m a r i ð o -	e s p o - s o -		m a ð r e -
Italian	- s p ɔ - z a	m o ʎ ʎ e - -	m a r i t o -	- s p ɔ - z o -	s ɔ ʃ - o -	m a: d r e -
PortugueseBrazil	i s p o - z a	m u ʎ - e ʁ -	m a r i d u -	i s p o - z u -		m ẽj - - - -
Portuguese	i ʃ p o - z e	m u ʎ - e r -	m ɐ r i ð u -	i ʃ p o - z u -		m ẽj - - - -
Catalan	ə s p ɔ - z ə	m u ʎ - e - -	m a r i t - -	ə s p ɔ - s - -		m a - r ə -
Walloon						m e - ʀ - -
Friulian		m u - i: r - -	m a r i: t - -	- s p o: - s - -		m a - r i -
Romanian		m u - j e r e	m ă r i t - -		s o ts - - -	

# Character Assignments

Each segment gets a different number

1	e	2	g	3	o:	4	ʒ	5	ə	6	j	7	o	8	i	9	w	10	ɔ	11	ɟ	12	ɪ	13	j	14	n	15	s	16	u	17	ʃ	18	oj	19	v	20	b
21	t	22	u:	23	y	24	d	25	f	26	e:	27	m	28	a	29	r	30	ɐ	31	œ	32	ɛ	33	l	34	r	35	x	36	ʎ	37	ʁ	38	i:				
39	ɲ	40	ɔa	41	h	42	ẽj	43	õ	44	ã	45	ĩ	46	ẽ	47	tʃ	48	ɨ	49	p	50	z	51	ð	52	k	53	ts	54	a:	55	ẽj	56	ʀ				
57	aj	58	ɛ:	59	θ	60	ej	61	ɐj	62	õ	63	ẽ	64	ẽw	65	ẽ	66	c	67	ij	68	β	69	ɬ	70	ɥ	71	iw	72	dʒ	73	ø:						
74	ɔ:	75	ɡ <sup>w</sup>	76	ɳ	77	õ:	78	ç	79	au	80	ø	81	ɛa	82	k <sup>j</sup>	83	ã	84	ʃ	85	ɑ	86	ɣ	87	ɛj	88	k <sup>w</sup>	89	ẽ:	90	ẽu						
91	ũ	92	ɭ	93	ʝ	94	œ	95	ʊ																														

## Prior Segment Frequencies



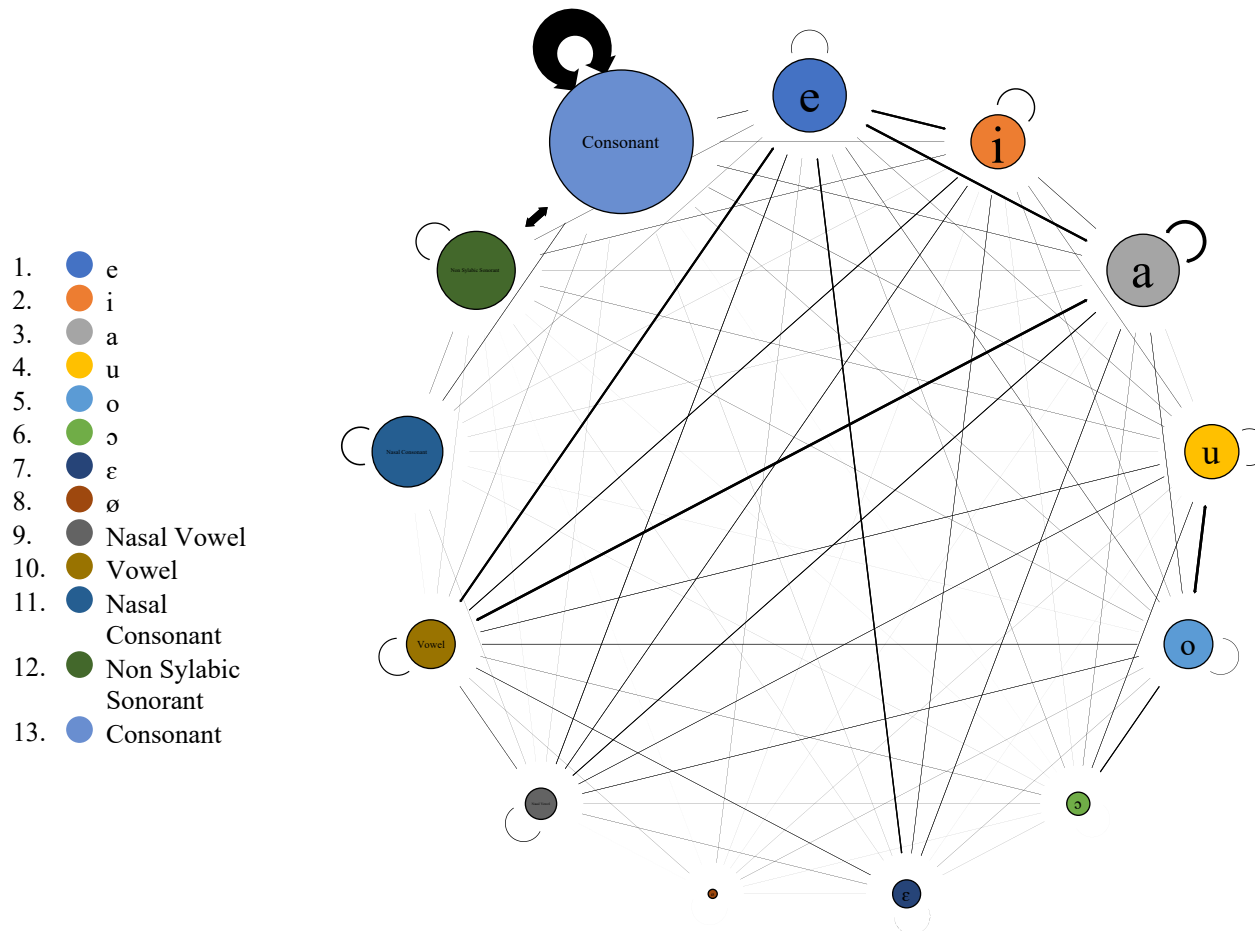
# Partition Assignments

### Model: “Linguistically Informed”

1) e	e e:
2) i	i i:
3) a	a a:
4) u	u u:
5) o	o: o
6) ɔ	ɔ ɔ:
7) ε	ε ε:
8) ø	ø: ø
9) Nasal Vowel	ẽj ã ã̃ ĩ ĩ̃ ẽj õ õ̃ ẽwĩ ẽ õ̃: ã̃ ẽ̃: ẽᵛ ṽ œ̃
10) Vowel	ə ɪ ɔj y ʋ œ ɔ̞ a ɨ aj ej ɐj ij iw au̘ ɤa ɑ ej ʊ
11) Nasal Consonant	n m ɲ ŋ j̃
12) Non Sylabic Sonorant	w j l r
13) Consonant	g ʒ j d͡ʒ s f v b t d f r x ʎ ɸ h t͡ʃ p z ʈ k ts ʀ θ c β ɭ ɥ dz gʷ ç kʝ ʝ ɣ kʷ ɮ

# Prior Transition Rates

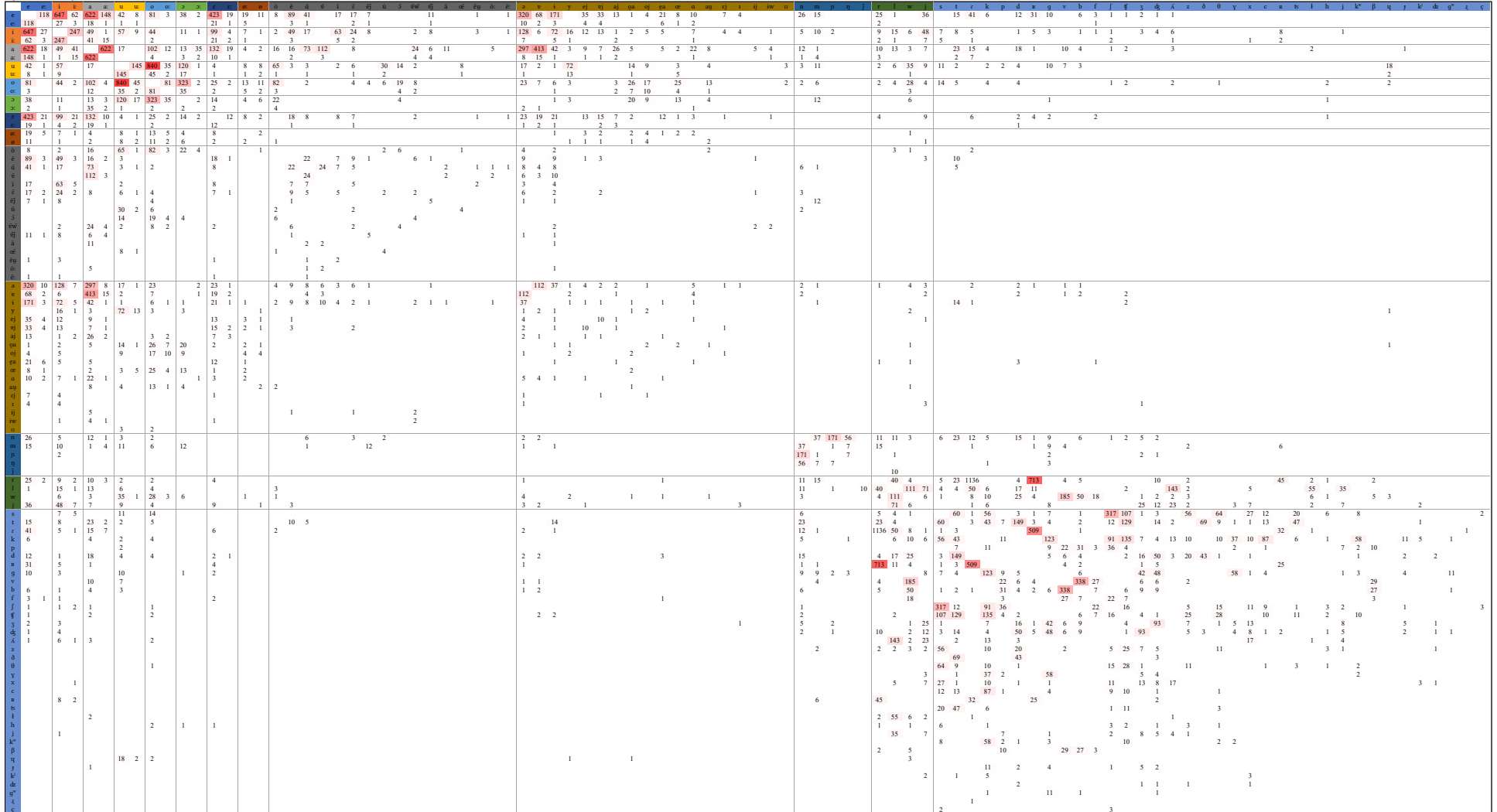
For the 'Linguistically Informed' model, states were grouped into 13 sets. Here, the area of the circles is proportional to the occurrence frequencies for each group. The width of the lines is proportional to the rates of transition between the each partition.



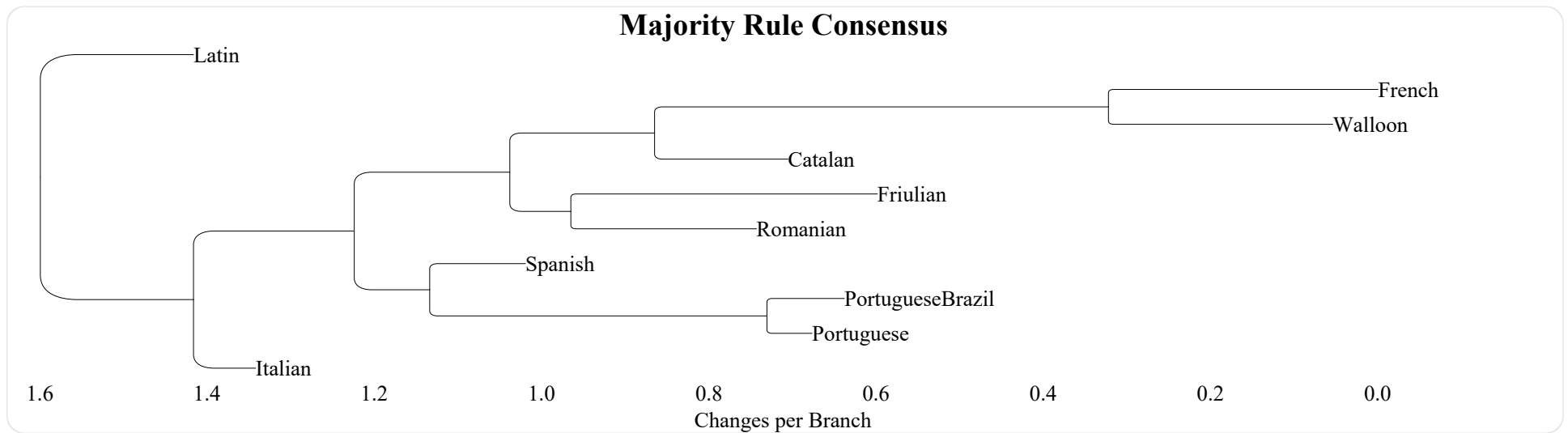


# Segment Transition Rates

This chart shows the number of times that each segment (on the left vertical bar) differs from any other other segment in the same cognate set at the same aligned segment position. The rates of transitions to gaps and from gaps are ignored. The segments are grouped into partitions, represented by the sections divided by horizontal lines. Within each partition, the segments are ordered from highest to lowest frequency of occurrence. Transition counts are shown with the number in a red box, where the darker reds are larger numbers. The chart has diagonal symmetry.



# Results



# Questions

