

Understanding Language Evolution Using an Event-Based Model

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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

Language A



Language B



Language C



Language D



Concept Examples

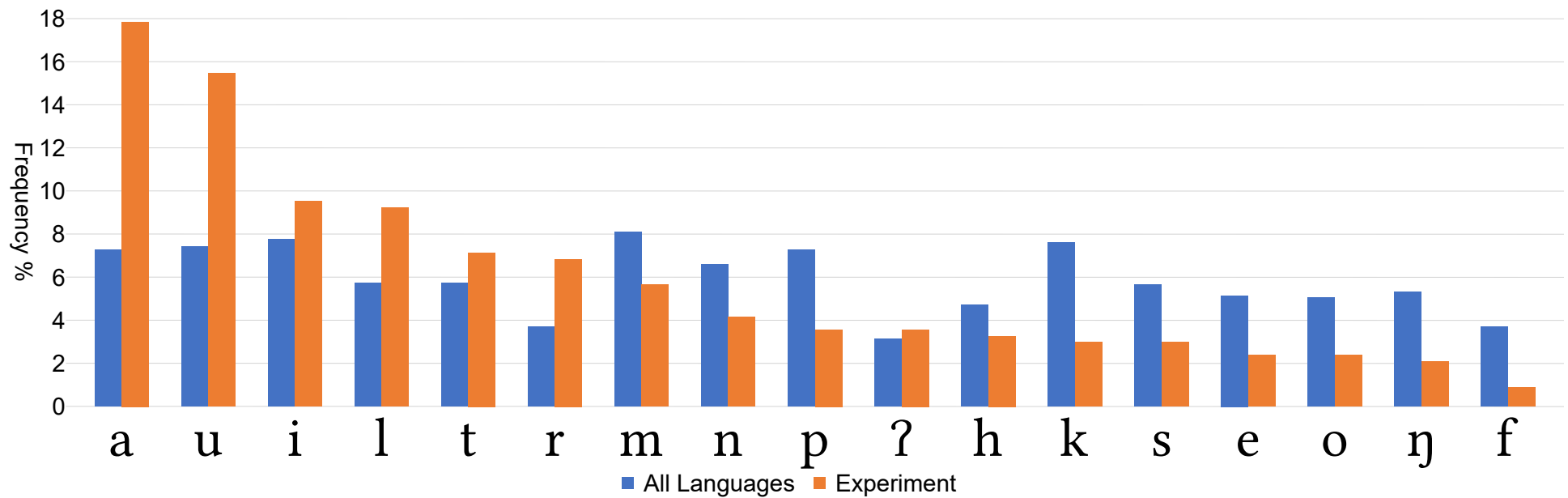
	Fish-Primary	Water-Primary	Earth-Primary	Rain-Primary	Cloud-Primary	Wind-Primary
LanguageA	? u t i l	i h a r a	n a ?	p o p a t	u r u ?	h i t u
LanguageB	u t i l -	i a r a -	n a -	f o f a ?	u r u -	i t u -
LanguageC	k u r i l	i s a r a	n a k	p o p a t	u r u -	s i r u
LanguageD	k u l i l	i s a l a	n a k	p o p a t	u l u -	s i l u
	Man-Primary	Woman-Primary	Child-Primary	House-Primary	Forest-Primary	Walk-Primary
LanguageA	l a m i	n a r i t	h e l u	m u m a ŋ	a l a h	h u t u p
LanguageB	l a m i	n a r i ?	e l u -	m u m a ŋ	a l a -	u t u ? -
LanguageC	l a m i	n a r i t	h e l u	m u m a ŋ	a l a s	s u r u p
LanguageD	l a m i	n a l i t	h e l u	m u m a ŋ	a l a s	s u l u p
	Speak-Primary	Sleep-Primary	Bathe-Primary	Black-Primary	White-Primary	Red-Primary
LanguageA	r u m u n	? u r o m	a t a r	? a ? u	t i ? a n	t e t u
LanguageB	r u m u ŋ	u r o ŋ -	a t a r	a u - -	t i a ŋ -	t e t u
LanguageC	r u m u n	k u r o m	a r a r	a k u -	t i a n -	t e r u
LanguageD	l u m u n	k u l o m	a l a l	a k u -	t i a n -	t e l u

Character Assignments

Each segment gets a different number

1	?	2	u	3	t	4	i	5	l	6	k	7	r	8	h	9	a	10	s	11	n	12	p	13	o	14	f	15	m	16	e	17	ŋ
---	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	----	---	----	---	----	---	----	---	----	---	----	---	----	---	----	---

Prior Segment Frequencies



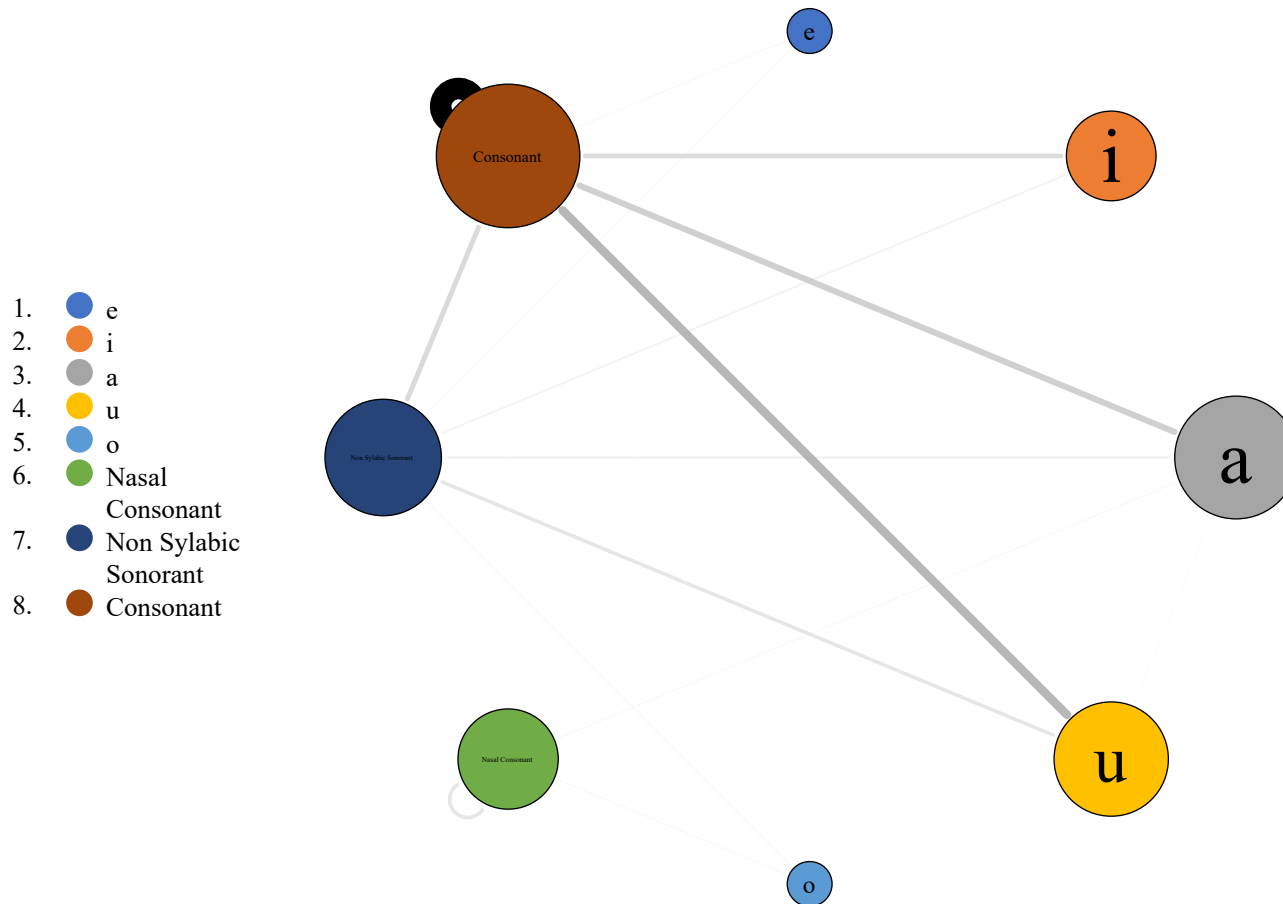
Partition Assignments

Model: “Linguistically Informed”

1) e	e
2) i	i
3) a	a
4) u	u
5) o	o
6) Nasal Consonant	n m ŋ
7) Non Sylabic Sonorant	l r
8) Consonant	? t k h s p f

Prior Transition Rates

For the 'Linguistically Informed' model, states were grouped into 8 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 each partition.

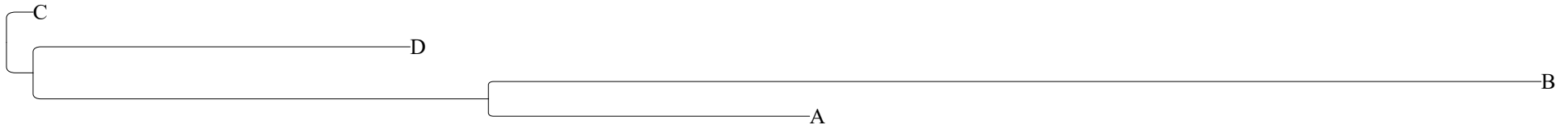


Segment Transition Rates

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 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.

	e	i	a	u	o	m	n	ŋ	l	r	t	p	ʔ	h	s	k	f
e									3					3			
i									4	1	4	3		4	2		
a				1			2	1	1	5			6	2	4	2	3
u			1						5	5	8		7	1	2	6	
o								3	1	2							
m																	
n			2					5									
ŋ			1		3		5										
l	3	4	1	5	1					21	7						
r		1	5	5	2				21		7						
t		4		8					7	7			6				
p		3															6
ʔ			6	7							6					8	
h	3	4	2	1											10		
s		2	4	2										10			
k			2	6									8				
f			3									6					

The majority rule consensus tree



Questions

