

ASJP Results for South America – a critical assessment.

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Standards treatments suggest that there are over 100 language families in South America, and currently a number of researchers are further exploring the possible relations between these families. The inclusion of a large number of South American languages in the Automated Similarity Judgment Program (ASJP) is a welcome further step in trying to elucidate the complex prehistoric language relations of the continent.

In this paper we aim to accomplish two things:

- (a) We critically evaluate the putative genealogical or contact relationships that can be inferred from the currently publicly available version ASJP World Language Tree of Lexical Similarity (Müller et al. 2009), in terms of the state of the art inventory of genealogical language information in Hammarström (2010). ASJP rarely fails to recognize “obvious” families, so we will focus on the deeper relations. There are two universally accepted “non-obvious” South American families (Chibchan and Tupi) and further five deep families which enjoy a fair amount of support (Harakmbut-Katukina-Katawixi, Bora-Witoto, Macro-Je [including Chiquitano, Kaingang and Jabuti but without Guato], Ticuna-Yuri and Pano-Tacanan). ASJP has competitive record in these cases.
- (b) We explore the consequences of adding a set of languages to ASJP particularly from the Guaporé-Mamoré region of South America, including well-known languages such as Yuracaré, but also some other languages not currently included.

We conclude that the ASJP is a very useful hypothesis-generating tool that can stimulate much further research into the language prehistory of South America, research which will ultimately need to combine a number of different techniques (Crevels and Muysken, in prep.) and insights from different disciplines.

References

Hammarström, Harald (2010) Database of language genealogies.

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