

Subgrouping in Uto-Aztecan

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Classical historical linguistic method for establishing a phylogenetic subgroup requires evidence of shared innovation from a reconstructed proto-language. In spite of the fact that Uto-Aztecan is one of the better-known American language families, there is surprisingly little work on the family within this framework. Instead, subgrouping hypotheses have emerged largely from the application of lexicostatistical methods. The latest of these hypotheses is that represented by the tree in Figure I, sent to me for discussion by Cecil Brown and Søren Wichmann (referred to in the paper as the “Leipzig tree”). With the exception of two very clearly defined clades, Aztecan and Tepiman, Uto-Aztecan subgrouping remains controversial. In this paper I discuss issues in subgrouping that emerge from attention to shared phonological innovation, and compare subgroups that in my view can be fairly securely established on this basis with the subgroups suggested by Figure I.