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SENIOR ESSAYS IN LINGUISTICS



A new proposal of Western Tukanoan consonants and internal classification

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Abstract: The Tukanoan language family, one of the six major families of the Amazon Basin, has traditionally been classified as comprised of two branches, Eastern and Western. Although the Eastern Tukanoan languages and peoples have been subject to much linguistic and anthropological study, little research has taken place on Western Tukanoan (WT). Comparative work on WT is especially scarce, with only three papers (Mason 1950, Waltz & Wheeler 1972, and Chacon forthcoming) available on the history and internal classification of the group. Furthermore, the internal classifications of WT constructed in these papers do not correlate well with the geography of the languages or with speakers' judgments about their similarity.

In this essay, I employ phonological and morphological evidence on Eastern and Western Tukanoan languages to reevaluate the reconstructed phonemic inventories and internal classifications of WT advanced by Waltz & Wheeler (1972) and Chacon (forthcoming). I find that this evidence – drawn from dictionaries, grammars, wordlists, and my own fieldwork on Máihi – is inconsistent with the conclusions of the previous research. I therefore propose a new reconstruction of the phonemic inventory of Proto-Western-Tukanoan and a new internal classification of the attested WT languages.

Coffee, tea, and
refreshments
will be served!