The Effect of Absence of Select Languages on Amount of Divergence in Reconstruction of Proto-Romance

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Diachronic linguistics is the scientific study of language and its change across time. Historically, the vast majority of research in the field has overfocused on languages with large speaker bases, which leads to accuracy and bias concerns. This issue is especially visible in Romance linguistics, the subfield where linguists work to reconstruct proto-Romance, the last common ancestor of the languages that descend from Latin. The purpose of this study is to employ quantitative and qualitative methods to determine the relative importance that select Romance languages have in the accurate reconstruction of proto-Romance. Using a cladistic approach to selection and the Comparative Method of reconstruction, 672 reconstructed words were created using wordforms from specific dialects of five languages: Spanish, French, Italian, Sardinian, and Romanian. An Excel program was developed to identify patterns of systematic (predictable) or irregular (non-predictable) divergences. The findings indicate that the removal of Sardinian resulted in the highest number of divergences (69.64%), meaning that it is the most important to proto-Romance reconstruction. Qualitative analysis confirmed that Sardinian is the only Romance language that unconditionally retains a distinction between the second-highest and third-highest vowel qualities of proto-Romance. This study confirms the necessity of including languages with speaker bases of differing sizes to ensure an accurate reconstruction of proto-Romance. Languages with the fewest speakers are at the highest risk of extinction, yet the protection of our linguistic heritage relies on accurate reconstruction. Future research can expand the language pool to determine if the relative importance findings are upheld.

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Fourth Award of $500