

## **Searching for Unexpected Genetic Links between the Languages of South America**

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With more than a hundred genetic entities, indigenous South America is often highlighted as the region with the highest degree of linguistic diversity in the world. Nevertheless, a systematic investigation of the possible genetic relations that may obtain between its numerous language families and isolates is still to be undertaken. Here it will be argued that the possibilities of discovering historical relations between the different genetic entities in South America are far from exhausted. In recent years, previously unknown genetic relations have been discovered by comparing carefully selected sets of basic vocabulary, often in combination with shared morpho-syntactic idiosyncrasies. The selection of vocabulary items implies the elimination of residual morphology, also in poorly described languages and languages of which the prehistory is virtually unknown, and the recognition of semantic fluctuations proper to the cultural environment of the languages in question (for instance, the interchange of notions such as 'head' and 'hair', or 'hand' and 'leaf' in Amazonian languages, and correspondences between full nouns and classifiers referring to shape). It is to be expected that similar techniques will continue to reduce the number of genetic units recognized for South America, a development that has been underway for some time.