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## THE COMPARATIVE METHOD IN THE RECONSTRUCTION OF PROTO-LANGUAGES

### Abstract

This article deals with the comparative method, a key approach in the reconstruction of proto-languages. In the article, the concepts of proto-language, language relationship, and comparative reconstruction are briefly introduced. The focus then shifts to the history of the comparative method, its application and the key principles that guide its use. Finally, the article seeks to assess the effectiveness of the comparative method and how reliably it can reconstruct through examining its limitations and the difficulties faced during morphological and syntactic reconstruction.

**Keywords:** comparative method, proto-language, reconstruction, language relationship

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### Introduction

Language is a way people communicate using spoken, signed or written symbols. It helps individuals in a social group to express themselves and to be part of their culture (6). The number of languages spoken on our planet is approximately 6,000 (12, p.16). It is not true to think that one language exists in isolation from others. People learning a foreign language might discover similarities between certain words in that language and their native tongue. For example, the word *mother* is *Mutter* in German, *moder* in Danish, *moeder* in Dutch, *mētēr* in Greek, *māthair* in Irish, and *mādar* in Persian. At the same time, the word *father* appears in these languages as *Vater*, *fader*, *vader*, *patēr*, *athair*, and *pidar*, respectively. Attributing this relationship between words to the presence of borrowings would be inaccurate, because languages do not borrow such simple and fundamental words from other languages. The hypothesis that best explains the similarity between the above words is as follows: the languages in question are related to each other and descended from the same parent language. Languages that are connected in this familial manner and words within those languages that share the connection as discussed above are called cognates (2, pp.1-3). According to David

Crystal, a cognate is “a language or a linguistic form which is historically derived from the same source as another language/form” (5, p.83). That single source or parent language is called a proto-language (3, p.108).

If several languages descended from the same parent language, we call them genetically related languages (14). The genetic hypothesis suggests that similar language structures in different grammars are there because they inherited these features from a common ancestor (8, p.226). However, some languages, like Basque and Burushaski, do not show any clear evidence of being related to other languages. They are often called isolates. It is more accurate to say they are unrelatable because one can never prove that two languages have no connection, i.e. it is possible their relationship is so ancient that linguistic changes over millennia have hidden it (10, p.566).

### Reconstruction of Proto-languages and the Comparative Method

The ideas of language relationship and proto-language were first proposed by Sir William Jones. In 1786, he gave a speech on the Sanskrit language, in which he claimed that Sanskrit, Greek, and Latin are related and descended from some common source (4, pp.6-7). In the past, there were different regional dialects of that



proto-language. Over time, these dialects developed and changed separately from each other, resulting in each of them becoming a distinct language (3, p.108). For example, there were various local dialects of Latin on the territory of the Roman Empire. Over time, these local dialects developed into French, Spanish, and other independent languages. So, the Latin language is the parent of Romance languages (7, pp.490-91). The Latin language, in turn, is related to the above-mentioned, namely Greek, German, Sanskrit, Persian, and other languages and is derived from the Proto-Indo-European language.

There are no written sources about the Proto-Indo-European language, so its grammar and vocabulary is not readily available (2, p.2). Therefore, in order to describe the proto-language, the evidence provided by the languages derived from it is used and the proto-language is reconstructed (8, p.227). Reconstruction is defined by David Crystal as “a method . . . in which a hypothetical system of sounds or forms representing an earlier, non-extant state of a language . . . is established deductively (reconstructed) from an analysis of the attested sounds and forms of extant texts.” Such kind of reconstruction is called comparative reconstruction (5, p.405). The second type of reconstruction is internal reconstruction. The main difference between internal reconstruction and comparative reconstruction is that information about the history of the language is obtained not on the basis of several related languages, but on the basis of only one language. Although comparative reconstruction allows the description of a proto-language, internal reconstruction determines the earlier stage of a language (4, p.121). Usually, people use both kinds of reconstruction to understand how languages were in the past. They help to complete missing parts in a language’s history, find out how sounds and words changed over time and check if languages are related as some theories suggest.

Sometimes, we can only partially reconstruct an ancestor language. This happens when there are not many records of the languages being

compared, or when a very long time has passed since they split from the proto-language. Also, if the changes within the languages over time make it hard to understand the sound rules, it becomes obscure for researchers. In these situations, we might think there is a connection, but we are not completely sure (14).

The following principles should be followed during comparative reconstruction:

- Reconstructed items, systems and suggested linguistic changes ought to be natural. At the same time, hypothesised sound changes must follow a regular pattern. According to this principle, the reconstructed sound should have a phonetic value.

- Reconstruction must abide by Occam’s razor, which is a maxim proposed by William of Occam: “Entities should not be multiplied beyond necessity.” This principle says that making things more complicated than necessary is unacceptable. In terms of reconstruction, these things are reconstructed items and changes.

- The oldest possible stages of the languages should be used in the comparison. In this case, it is easier to see the similarities between languages, because less time has passed since the languages separated from the ancestral language and the languages have not undergone many changes. For example, the third person singular pronoun is *sa* in Sanskrit and *sē* in Old English. But this pronoun appears as *vō* in Hindi and *he* in Modern English. As it can be seen, the similarity between the words in the ancient stages was more than in the modern period (9, pp.466-69).

Comparative reconstruction utilises the comparative method (7, p.514). This method is also used in the classification of languages, research on the genetic relationship between languages, etc (3, p.108). David Crystal defines the comparative method as a “standard comparative philological technique of comparing a set of forms taken from cognate languages in order to determine whether a historical relationship connects them” (5, p.91).

#### **History of the Comparative Method**

The comparative method emerged in the 19th century as a result of the study of Indo-European languages and gained a scientific

approach thanks to the works of the Neogrammarians. The Danish scholars Rasmus Rask and Karl Verner and the German scholar Jacob Grimm contributed very much to the comparative method (14). In the past, the study of similar words in different languages was a bit childish by modern standards. For instance, in 1606, a French scholar named Etienne Guichard made a list comparing words in different languages like Hebrew, Syrian, Greek, Latin, French, Italian, Chaldaic, Spanish, German, Flemish, and English. He wanted to prove that all languages came from Hebrew. He pointed to similarities between words, like Hebrew *dabar*, English *word*, and Latin *verbum*, as evidence for his idea. After the study of Indo-European languages began, linguists started to focus on how Indo-European languages were structured, rather than just looking at similar words. This change led to a new way of studying language relationships. Scholars began to compare the grammars of different languages to determine if they were related. They argued that relying on similar random words was not enough evidence, as anyone could find similarities between any two languages if they looked hard enough. In 1818, Rasmus Rask studied the history of Icelandic by looking at its grammar compared to other Germanic languages, not paying much attention to lexicon. But he also said that repeated sound correspondences were better evidence of language relationships than just individual words. In 1822, Jakob Grimm found sound patterns between Sanskrit, Greek, Latin, and Germanic languages, showing that these recurring patterns were important evidence and not just random word similarities. He said that the changes in sounds mostly worked in specific words and some words did not follow the general rules. This was because there were many forms that did not fit his above-mentioned ideas. However, subsequent findings by Grassmann, Verner, and others gradually resolved many of these inconsistencies. By the end of the 1800s, scholars like Brugmann and Leskien were saying that sound laws always work without exceptions. Once it was accepted that sound change always followed rules with no exceptions, studying the history of words and

languages could become scientific (4, pp.163-68).

The comparative method first leads to the reconstruction of sounds and then vocabulary and grammar (3, p.109). However, the comparative method has some difficulties. For example, there are no exact rules for determining semantic change and everything depends on the linguist's own experience (1, p.229).

### **The Application of the Comparative Method**

How the comparative method works can be explained in simple terms like this:

1. First, after our investigations, we decide that certain languages come from some common ancestor. Thus, they are related to each other.

2. We put together words with similar meanings from the languages we want to compare.

3. We check these words to find systematic correspondences.

4. We draw up tables of these regular patterns we discover.

5. For each pattern we find, we imagine a sound in the original language that could have turned into the sounds in the daughter languages, based on our knowledge of phonological changes.

6. We use the information from step 5 to guess the original form of a word in the proto-language for each word of daughter languages.

7. Lastly, we use the results from steps 5 and 6 to guess the sounds and rules that the ancestor language likely had (12, p.196).

According to the first step, the scholar should decide that certain languages are related to one another. In order to reach this conclusion, words such as body parts, small numbers and kinship terms need to be analysed in those languages. Because these are words that are almost never borrowed. Otherwise, we might see loanwords in languages being compared and think that they have the same origin, which would be wrong. On the other hand, one should not forget that there may be accidental sound correspondences. Sometimes two languages do not come from the same source, nor did one borrow the word from the other, but the same word can sound very similar in those languages. For example, the English word *mess* and the Kaqchikel (Mayan)

word *mes* with the same meaning are almost identical. But this does not mean that they are sister languages. Because the *m-m* correspondence we can see in the above words is not observed in other words, e.g. *man* (English) - *açi* (Kaqchikel), *mother* (English) - *nan* (Kaqchikel), etc. However, if we examine the Italian, Portuguese, Spanish, and French languages, we shall see the same sound correspondences in many cognate words. For example, the word *goat* is *chèvre* in French, *capra* in Italian, and *cabra* in Spanish and Portuguese. Similarly, the word *meat* is used as

French	Portuguese	Spanish	Italian
f-	k-	k-	k-

A hyphen is used in order to describe the position of a sound in words being compared. The hyphen follows *f* and *k* in the table, it means they are in the initial position.

Based on step 5, we have to guess what sound the proto-language (Latin in this example) had. There are several guiding principles to do that. One of them is “majority-wins” guideline (3, pp.111-17). It is also called “majority rules” principle. The essence of this principle is as follows: scholars examine cognates in related languages and, based on the sound that appears most frequently among those cognates, think that the proto-language had this sound. Below is an example of how this principle is applied:

The word *dear* is *cher* in French and *caro* in Spanish, Italian and Portuguese. Similarly, the word *field* appears as *champ* in French and *campo* in the three other languages mentioned. In French, the sound [ʃ] is like [k] in Italian, Spanish and Portuguese. This regular pattern, [ʃ]-[k]-[k]-[k], suggests that French, Italian, Spanish, and Portuguese all came from the same

Language A	Language B	Language C	Language D
Halo	Halo	Falo	Valo
Rohena	Rohena	Rofena	Rovena

When we look at Languages A and B, they have an *h*, while Language C has an *f* and Language D has a *v* instead. So, we see sound correspondence set *h-h-f-v*. According to the “majority rules” principle, we might think the

*chair* in French and *carne* in three other languages. We observe the [ʃ]-[k]-[k]-[k] correspondence between the above mentioned cognates, thus, they are sister languages.

Steps 2 and 3 say that we identify sound correspondences by putting together the words that we study. According to step 4, we describe these sound correspondences in the table. For example, we analysed the words *goat* and *meat* in four Romance languages and determined [ʃ]-[k]-[k]-[k] sound correspondence. Now we can depict it in a table:

language. Using “majority rules” principle, we can figure out that the original sound in words like *dear* and *field* was [k] in the parent language. Because three out of the four languages use this sound. Reconstructing this sound as [ʃ] would be contrary to the principle of “majority rules.” Over time, French changed [k] to [ʃ], but Italian, Spanish, and Portuguese kept the original [k] from the parent language which was Latin. Latin is well-known and we can check if the method works by testing it with written records. Latin does indeed use [k] in these words. So, the “majority rules” principle works correctly.

Sometimes, other factors are more important than following “majority rules” principle. If there is a likelihood of certain sound changes, the researcher might choose a less common sound or even one that does not appear in cognates. To understand this, we can consider the following example based on four hypothetical languages.

original sound was *h*. But we know that *h* rarely turns into *v* from our phonological knowledge. However, the opposite change, where *f* and *v* become *h*, happens historically. So, linguists suggest that the original sound in the parent

language was *\*f* and later on, *f* became *h* in Languages A and B and *f* became *v* in Language D. There are no issues with the other correspondances in the data: *o-o-o-o*, *l-l-l-l*, *a-a-a-a*, *r-r-r-r*, *n-n-n-n*, *e-e-e-e*. These help us to reconstruct the original forms as *\*o*, *\*l*, *\*a*, *\*r*, *\*n*, *\*e* (7, pp.514-15). This is called directionality and it is another guiding principle while reconstructing. When we talk about directionality in linguistics, we are referring to the tendency of certain sound changes to occur more frequently in one direction ( $A > B$ ) than in the opposite direction ( $B > A$ ). This concept is sometimes described as naturalness, where some changes are more likely to happen across different languages. For instance, the transformation of the sound /s/ to /h/ is common, but the reverse change from /h/ to /s/ is rare. In cases like this, we follow directionality principle to reconstruct. If we observe the sound correspondence between /s/ in Language 1 and /h/ in Language 2, we reconstruct the original sound as *\*s* and suggest that in Language 2, *\*s* evolved into *h*. The alternative scenario with *\*h* and the change of *\*h* into *s* in Language 1 is not considered probable.

Here is another example showing how the guidance of directionality helps in reconstruction of proto-language forms: frequently, voiceless stops (like *p*, *t*, *k*) become voiced (*b*, *d*, *g*) between vowels. If we look at two genetically related languages, Language 1 and Language 2, and see that intervocalic *-b-* in Language 1 coincides with intervocalic *-p-* in Language 2, we reconstruct *\*p* and assume that Language 1 underwent the common sound change of voiceless stops between vowels (the change of *p* into *b* in this case). If we reconstructed *\*b* as an original sound, we would have to assume that Language 2 changed *b* to *p*, which goes against the usual direction of changes of stops between vowels (3, pp.115-16).

The next guiding principle is factoring in features held in common. In the effort to reconstruct original forms in proto-languages, we aim to guess the original sounds as accurately as possible. Though we cannot be completely sure about exact sounds of an ancestor language, the availability of more information leads to the likelihood of a reasonably accurate

reconstruction. We look at what features in pronunciation are shared among the daughter languages. As mentioned above, the word *goat* appears as *chèvre* in French, *capra* in Italian, and *cabra* in Spanish and Portuguese. Thus we have *v-p-b-b* sound correspondence set. The common feature of these sounds is that they are all labial. So, the proto-language also used the labial consonant in that word. At the same time, three of these four languages use stop consonant. According to the principle of “majority rules”, we think that the proto-language has a labial stop, not a labial fricative. So, the proto-language used either *b* or *p* consonant in the word *goat*. Then, under the guidance of directionality, we realise that voiceless stops can easily turn to voiced ones in intervocalic positions while the opposite phenomenon is rare. Further, recognizing that stops often evolve into fricatives between vowels and other continuants, but vice versa is rare, the French *v* likely results from such a change. Taking these factors into consideration, we reconstruct *\*p* for this correspondence set. Finally, we propose that in Spanish and Portuguese, *\*p* evolves into *b*, and in French, *\*p* transforms into *v* (or  $*p > b > v$ ).

The last guiding principle that we shall talk about is the criterion of economy. This principle in linguistic reconstruction suggests that when faced with multiple possible alternatives, the one requiring the fewest independent changes is more likely to be accurate. For instance, we analysed the words *dear* and *field* in French, Spanish, Italian, and Portuguese above and encountered [ʃ]-[k]-[k]-[k] correspondence set. If we propose *\*f* as an original form, it would demand three independent changes from *\*f* to *k* for Italian, Spanish, and Portuguese. On the other hand, if we propose *\*k* for the Proto-Romance sound, only one sound change ( $*k > f$ ) is needed for French. The criterion of economy assumes that a single change is more probable than three independent changes. While this criterion does not always guarantee accuracy, all else being equal, a reconstruction with more economical assumptions is considered more likely to be correct than one with less economical developments (3, pp.118-20).

**Morphology, Syntax and the Comparative Method**

Unlike phonological reconstruction, in the reconstruction of morphology the comparative method alone is not sufficient (11, p.197). Non-phonological reconstruction is harder than phonological reconstruction for a few reasons. Firstly, our understanding of the natural direction of non-phonological changes is limited. This makes the evidence more complex and harder to interpret compared to sound changes. While we can usually determine the likely direction of sound changes, it is challenging to determine the direction of changes in grammar. Additionally, unlike sound changes, other linguistic changes are often irregular, leading to more disruptions in language history. (10, pp.609-10). For instance, in Romance languages, much of the Latin word endings are hard to reconstruct due to the loss of certain grammar features. So, while some aspects of word structure can be reconstructed, it is challenging when significant changes happen over a long period (11, p.198). However, we are able to guess more than just words when reconstructing the original language. Using the comparative method and more advanced techniques, we can also get a good idea of the morphology of the proto-language and its syntax (9, p.470).

Morphological reconstruction mainly follows the principle of choosing the more challenging option, known as *lectio difficilior*, i.e. “more difficult reading” principle. In simpler terms, when deciding between two word parts that seem to do the same job, we choose the one that does not easily fit with how we use words currently. This helps us to understand how words have changed over time (13, p.141). Furthermore, when reconstructing the morphology of an ancestor language, shared anomalies – unusual language features that are present in two or more related languages – provide strong evidence of their genetic relationship. For instance, English and German, both Germanic languages, share regular morphology like comparatives (English *deep/deeper/deepest*, German *tief/tiefer/tiefste*) and verb forms (English *love/loved/loved*, German *lieben/liebte/geliebt*). They also share irregularities like English *good/better/best*,

German *gut/besser/beste*; English *sing/sang/sung*, German *singen/sang/gesungen*, etc. These indicate a shared inheritance from their common ancestor, Proto-Germanic. These anomalies not only confirm the relationship between the languages but also tell something about the morphology of Proto-Germanic (12, p.218).

Linguists are often able to guess a lot about morphology of ancient languages by looking at the word forms of their daughter languages. It helps to understand the proto-language that is being studied. But when it comes to syntax, reconstruction becomes more challenging. Some linguists even claim it might be impossible to fully reconstruct how sentences were structured in the past. For example, when we try to reconstruct the order of words in Proto-Indo-European, we see different patterns in its descendant languages. Celtic languages have one order, Indo-Iranian languages have another and most other languages have a different one (though Germanic languages are a bit complex). But can this information be used to confidently say how Proto-Indo-European arranged its words? Unfortunately, the answer is no. The issue is that the way sentences are structured does not have the same kind of individual existence as words. Lexical items can last for thousands of years. For example, the word *new* in English is the 6,000-year-old Proto-Indo-European word *\*new*. But the way words are ordered changes through many smaller shifts in grammar. Nevertheless, some linguists, like Winfred Lehmann, have focused on lots of smaller grammatical details and made a strong case that Proto-Indo-European likely had a Subject-Object-Verb word order (12, p.219).

When we use the comparative method to study the Uralic language family, we can discover plenty of features of the proto-language. This language had three different ways of showing numbers: dual (*\*-ka*), plural (*\*-t* and *\*-y*) and singular ( $\emptyset$ ). Objects receiving the action of a verb were marked with a special case called accusative, but when the verb was a command, there was no special marking for the object. Sentences had a subject with either a verbal or a nominal predicate. The subject could

be shown by personal pronominal suffixes attached to the predicate. There was an agreement between subject and predicate in person and number. Proto-Uralic did not use specific words like conjunctions and relative pronouns for joining ideas. So, with the help of the comparative method, we can get a good idea of the syntax of Proto-Uralic (3, pp.250-51).

### **The Reliability of the Comparative Method**

We can evaluate the results of the comparative reconstruction using documented languages. Some argue that the comparative method is only valid for older Indo-European languages with written records. They imply that other unwritten languages need a different approach. However, writing depends on cultural and socioeconomic factors, not the language's shape. Choosing modern Germanic languages helps to check the results of the comparative reconstruction because these languages were written down a thousand years ago. This allows us to go back in time and see how well our reconstruction works (1, pp.239-40).

The success of reconstructing a proto-language depends on the available material and the skill of linguists in understanding the language's history. If the daughter languages clearly show what the parent language was like, reconstruction can be accurate. However, some languages undergo changes that make reconstruction challenging or impossible, such as the loss of sounds and morphological categories, or the merger of formerly contrasting sounds. If the daughter languages do not preserve evidence of the proto-language, it cannot be recovered through the comparative method. Mistakes may occur when evidence is limited, but linguists try to make the best inferences based on available data and their knowledge of linguistic patterns. Results vary in completeness, with greater difficulty due to numerous changes in languages that split in the distant past. For example, comparing reconstructed Proto-Romance to attested Latin reveals challenges. While the comparative method successfully recovers much of this ancient language, modern Romance languages mostly lack many features present in Latin. The former noun cases and complex verbal

morphology are not well-preserved, obscured by subsequent changes to the point that much of it cannot be reconstructed through the comparative method (3, pp.147-48).

### **Limitations of the Comparative Method**

As mentioned above, the complete loss of a sound or the merger of two different phonemes is an obstacle to the correct operation of the comparative method. Looking at the connection between reconstructed Proto-Romance and attested Latin, we found that it is not a perfect match. Because the comparative method cannot always reconstruct when sounds were completely lost or merged. When we compare Romance languages, we cannot reconstruct *\*h*, because none of the daughter languages show any sign of it. This is different from what we know about Classical Latin written in the first century BCE. Another example of this limitation occurs when comparing Gothic and Sanskrit. Many instances show *a-a* sound correspondence, leading us to think they share a common ancestor sound *\*a*. But evidence from other genetically related languages reveals that two different sounds *\*a* and *\*o* have actually merged here. Without this extra evidence, we would not know that the common ancestor of Gothic and Sanskrit had also *\*o*.

The existence of loanwords is another limitation or challenge of the method. For example, the word *coffee* appears as *caffé* in Italian and *café* in Portuguese and Spanish. Just based on this evidence, one could reconstruct a Proto-Romance word *\*kaf:e*. At first glance, it might seem like a regular part of Proto-Romance, despite some unusual features (like double *f* and stressed final *e*). However, when we add the French word *café*, it becomes challenging to maintain this reconstruction. Because a final short *e* would typically be deleted and the initial *k* before *a* would be expected to become *f* in French. We saw examples of this [ʃ]-[k]-[k]-[k] correspondence in some words such as *champ-campo-campo-campo*. In the word *café*, the sound pronounced as *k* in other languages has not become *f*. More evidence confirms that the word *coffee* was borrowed from Turkish, first into Italian and then into other above mentioned languages. This suggests that we might reconstruct words

through the comparative method that did not actually exist in the proto-language, as long as they do not show any irregular patterns.

The next problem with the comparative method is that it reconstructs a system without considering variations. However, natural languages have always variations. Some scholars say this gives an unrealistic view of a proto-language. But the comparative method actually focuses on the grammar inside the language, not external factors. Though it does not cover variations influenced by society, it still serves its purpose.

The next limitation of the comparative method is time depth. Some above-mentioned limitations come from information getting lost over time and this is what makes it hard for the comparative method to make really deep reconstructions. As Kuryłowicz said, no one can keep reconstructing endlessly. It is not because a proto-language cannot be used for further reconstruction; in fact, it can help to explore ancient relationships. Proto-languages are also good for internal reconstruction. The problem is that, over time, the loss of information makes the comparative material less useful and the remaining similarities might seem like they are just happening by chance. Another issue is that sometimes entire branches of a language family disappear and that can erase important evidence which supports a theory of distant relatedness between two language families. Because of these reasons, many linguists are not very hopeful about reconstructing large language families like Nostratic, or even smaller ones like Indo-Uralic (13, pp.137-38).

### Conclusion

In conclusion, the comparative method is one of the most significant achievements of historical linguistics and it is an invaluable method for obtaining information about proto-languages. Although the comparative method is very successful in reconstructing the phonology of proto-languages, the reconstruction of morphology and syntax through this method poses serious difficulties. Moreover, the

comparative method has several limitations. Therefore, it is necessary to benefit from the comparative method together with other methods of historical linguistics.

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## **ULUDİLLƏRİN BƏRPASINDA MÜQAYİSƏLİ METOD**

### **Xülasə**

Bu məqalə uludillərin bərpasında əsas yanaşma olan müqayisəli metoddan bəhs edir. Məqalədə uludil, dillərin qohumluğu və müqayisəli bərpa etmə anlayışları qısa şəkildə təqdim olunur. Daha sonra diqqət müqayisəli metodun tarixinə, onun tətbiqinə və istifadəsinə rəhbərlik edən əsas prinsiplərə yönəlir. Nəhayət, məqalə müqayisəli metodun məhdudiyyətlərini, o cümlədən morfoloji və sintaktik bərpa etmə zamanı üzləşdiyi çətinlikləri araşdıraraq onun effektivliyini və nə dərəcədə etibarlı şəkildə bərpa edə biləcəyini qiymətləndirməyə çalışır.

**Açar sözlər:** müqayisəli metod, uludil, bərpa, dillərin qohumluğu

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## **СРАВНИТЕЛЬНЫЙ МЕТОД В РЕКОНСТРУКЦИИ ПРЯЗЫКОВ**

### **Резюме**

Эта статья посвящена сравнительному методу, ключевому подходу в реконструкции праязыков. В статье кратко вводятся понятия праязыка, родства языков и сравнительной реконструкции. Далее рассматривается история сравнительного метода, его применение и ключевые принципы, которые руководят его использованием. В заключение статья стремится оценить эффективность сравнительного метода и насколько надежно он может выполнять реконструкцию, исследуя его ограничения и трудности, возникающие при морфологической и синтаксической реконструкции.

**Ключевые слова:** сравнительный метод, праязык, реконструкция, родство языков

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