

The **Swadesh list** (/ˈswɑːdɛʃ/) is a classic compilation of tentatively universal concepts for the purposes of lexicostatistics. Translations of the Swadesh list into a set of languages allow researchers to quantify the interrelatedness of those languages. The Swadesh list is named after linguist Morris Swadesh. It is used in lexicostatistics (the quantitative assessment of the genealogical relatedness of languages) and glottochronology (the dating of language divergence). Because there are several different lists, some authors also refer to "Swadesh lists".

## Versions and authors

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Morris Swadesh himself created several versions of his list. He started<sup>[1]</sup> with a list of 215 meanings (falsely introduced as a list of 225 meanings in the paper due to a spelling error<sup>[2]</sup>), which he reduced to 165 words for the Salish-Spokane-Kalispel language. In 1952, he published a list of 215 meanings,<sup>[3]</sup> of which he suggested the removal of 16 for being unclear or not universal, with one added to arrive at 200 words. In 1955,<sup>[4]</sup> he wrote, "The only solution appears to be a drastic weeding out of the list, in the realization that quality is at least as important as quantity. Even the new list has defects, but they are relatively mild and few in number." After minor corrections, the final 100-word list was published posthumously in 1971<sup>[5]</sup> and 1972.

Other versions of lexicostatistical test lists were published e.g. by Robert Lees (1953), John A. Rea (1958:145f), Dell Hymes (1960:6), E. Cross (1964 with 241 concepts), W. J. Samarin (1967:22of), D. Wilson (1969 with 57 meanings), Lionel Bender (1969), R. L. Oswald (1971), Winfred P. Lehmann (1984:35f), D. Ringe (1992, *passim*, different versions), Sergei Starostin (1984, *passim*, different versions), William S-Y. Wang (1994), M. Lohr (2000, 128 meanings in 18 languages). B. Kessler (2002), and many others. The Concepticon,<sup>[6]</sup> a project hosted at the Cross-Linguistic Linked Data (CLLD) project, collects various concept lists (including classical Swadesh lists) across different linguistic areas and times, currently listing 240 different concept lists.<sup>[7]</sup>

Frequently used and widely available on the internet, is the version by Isidore Dyen (1992, 200 meanings of 95 language variants). Since 2010, a team around Michael Dunn has tried to update and enhance that list.<sup>[8]</sup>

## Principle

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In origin, the words in the Swadesh lists were chosen for their universal, culturally independent availability in as many languages as possible, regardless of their "stability". Nevertheless, the stability of the resulting list of "universal" vocabulary under language change and the potential use of this fact for purposes of glottochronology have been analyzed by numerous authors, including Marisa Lohr 1999, 2000.<sup>[9]</sup>

The Swadesh list was put together by Morris Swadesh on the basis of his intuition. Similar more recent lists, such as the Dolgopolsky list (1964) or the Leipzig–Jakarta list (2009), are based on systematic data from many different languages, but they are not yet as widely known nor as widely used as the Swadesh list.

## Usage in lexicostatistics and glottochronology

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Lexicostatistical test lists are used in lexicostatistics to define subgroupings of languages, and in glottochronology to "provide dates for branching points in the tree".<sup>[10]</sup> The task of defining (and counting the number) of cognate words in the list is far from trivial, and often is subject to dispute, because cognates do not necessarily look similar, and recognition of cognates presupposes knowledge of the sound laws of the respective languages.

## Swadesh 100 original final list

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Swadesh's final list, published in 1971,<sup>[5]</sup> contains 100 terms. Explanations of the terms can be found in Swadesh 1952<sup>[3]</sup> or, where noted by a dagger (†), in Swadesh 1955. Note that only this original sequence clarifies the correct meaning which is lost in an alphabetical order, e.g., in the case "27. bark" (originally without the specification here added).

- |   |   |
|---|---|
| 1. <u>I</u> (first person singular pronoun)                       | 37. <u>hair</u> (on head of humans)                   |
| 2. <u>you</u> (second person singular pronoun; 1952<br>thou & ye) | 38. <u>head</u> (anatomic)                            |
| 3. <u>we</u> (1955: <u>inclusive</u> )                            | 39. <u>ear</u>  |
| 4. <u>this</u>  | 40. <u>eye</u>  |
| 5. <u>that</u>  | 41. <u>nose</u>                                       |
| 6. <u>who?</u> ("?" not 1971)                                     | 42. <u>mouth</u>                                      |
| 7. <u>what?</u> ("?" not 1971)                                    | 43. <u>tooth</u> (front, rather than molar)           |
| 8. <u>not</u>   | 44. <u>tongue</u> (anatomical)                        |
| 9. <u>all</u> (of a number)                                       | 45. <u>claw</u> (not in 1952) <sup>†1</sup>           |
| 10. <u>many</u>   | 46. <u>foot</u> (not leg)                             |
| 11. <u>one</u>  | 47. <u>knee</u> (not 1952) <sup>†</sup>               |
| 12. <u>two</u>  | 48. <u>hand</u>                                       |
| 13. <u>big</u>  | 49. <u>belly</u> (lower part of body, abdomen)        |
| 14. <u>long</u> (not wide)  | 50. <u>neck</u> (not nape)                            |
| 15. <u>small</u>  | 51. <u>breasts</u> (female; 1955 breast) <sup>†</sup> |
| 16. <u>woman</u>  | 52. <u>heart</u>                                      |
| 17. <u>man</u> (adult male human)                                 | 53. <u>liver</u>                                      |
| 18. <u>person</u> (individual human)                              | 54. <u>drink</u> (verb)                               |
| 19. <u>fish</u> (noun)  | 55. <u>eat</u> (verb)                                 |
| 20. <u>bird</u>   | 56. <u>bite</u> (verb)                                |
| 21. <u>dog</u>  | 57. <u>see</u> (verb)                                 |
| 22. <u>louse</u>  | 58. <u>hear</u> (verb)                                |
| 23. <u>tree</u> (not log)   | 59. <u>know</u> (facts)                               |
| 24. <u>seed</u> (noun)  | 60. <u>sleep</u> (verb)                               |
| 25. <u>leaf</u> (botanics)  | 61. <u>die</u> (verb)                                 |
| 26. <u>root</u> (botanics)  | 62. <u>kill</u> (verb)                                |
| 27. <u>bark</u> (of tree)   | 63. <u>swim</u> (verb)                                |
| 28. <u>skin</u> (1952: person's)                                  | 64. <u>fly</u> (verb)                                 |
| 29. <u>flesh</u> (1952 meat, flesh)                               | 65. <u>walk</u> (verb)                                |
| 30. <u>blood</u>  | 66. <u>come</u> (verb)                                |
| 31. <u>bone</u>   | 67. <u>lie</u> (on side, recline)                     |
| 32. <u>grease</u> (1952: fat, organic substance)                  | 68. <u>sit</u> (verb)                                 |
| 33. <u>egg</u>  | 69. <u>stand</u> (verb)                               |
| 34. <u>horn</u> (of bull etc., not 1952) <sup>†</sup>             | 70. <u>give</u> (verb)                                |
| 35. <u>tail</u>   | 71. <u>say</u> (verb) <sup>†</sup>                    |
| 36. <u>feather</u> (large, not down)                              | 72. <u>sun</u>  |

- |  |   |
|--|---|
| 73. <u>moon</u> (not 1952) <sup>†</sup>        | 87. <u>red</u> (color)                            |
| 74. <u>star</u>                                | 88. <u>green</u> (color)                          |
| 75. <u>water</u> (noun)                        | 89. <u>yellow</u> (color)                         |
| 76. <u>rain</u> (noun, 1952 verb)              | 90. <u>white</u> (color)                          |
| 77. <u>stone</u>                               | 91. <u>black</u> (color)                          |
| 78. <u>sand</u>                                | 92. <u>night</u>                                  |
| 79. <u>earth</u> (soil)                        | 93. <u>hot</u> (adjective; 1952 warm, of weather) |
| 80. <u>cloud</u> (not fog)                     | 94. <u>cold</u> (of weather)                      |
| 81. <u>smoke</u> (noun, of fire)               | 95. <u>full</u> <sup>†</sup>                      |
| 82. <u>fire</u>                                | 96. <u>new</u>                                    |
| 83. <u>ash(es)</u>                             | 97. <u>good</u>                                   |
| 84. <u>burn</u> (verb intransitive)            | 98. <u>round</u> (not 1952) <sup>†</sup>          |
| 85. <u>path</u> (1952 road, trail; not street) | 99. <u>dry</u> (substance)                        |
| 86. <u>mountain</u> (not hill)                 | 100. <u>name</u>                                  |

^ "Claw" was only added in 1955, but again replaced by many well-known specialists with (finger)nail, because expressions for "claw" are not available in many old, extinct, or lesser known languages.

The 110-item Global Lexicostatistical Database list uses the original 100-item Swadesh list, in addition to 10 other words from the Swadesh–Yakhontov list.<sup>[11]</sup>

## Swadesh 207 list

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The most used list nowadays is the Swadesh 207-word list, adapted from Swadesh 1952.<sup>[3]</sup>

In Wiktionary ("Swadesh lists by language"), Panlex<sup>[12][13]</sup> and in Palisto's "Swadesh Word List of Indo-European languages",<sup>[14]</sup> hundreds of Swadesh lists in this form can be found.

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|--------------------|-----------------------|
| 1. I               | 23. two               |
| 2. you (singular)  | 24. three             |
| 3. they (singular) | 25. four              |
| 4. we              | 26. five              |
| 5. you (plural)    | 27. big               |
| 6. they (plural)   | 28. long              |
| 7. this            | 29. wide              |
| 8. that            | 30. thick             |
| 9. here            | 31. heavy             |
| 10. there          | 32. small             |
| 11. who            | 33. short             |
| 12. what           | 34. narrow            |
| 13. where          | 35. thin              |
| 14. when           | 36. woman             |
| 15. how            | 37. man (adult male)  |
| 16. not            | 38. man (human being) |
| 17. all            | 39. child             |
| 18. many           | 40. wife              |
| 19. some           | 41. husband           |
| 20. few            | 42. mother            |
| 21. other          | 43. father            |
| 22. one            | 44. animal            |

45. fish  
46. bird  
47. dog  
48. louse  
49. snake  
50. worm  
51. tree  
52. forest  
53. stick  
54. fruit  
55. seed  
56. leaf  
57. root  
58. bark (of a tree)  
59. flower  
60. grass  
61. rope  
62. skin  
63. meat  
64. blood  
65. bone  
66. fat (noun)  
67. egg  
68. horn  
69. tail  
70. feather  
71. hair  
72. head  
73. ear  
74. eye  
75. nose  
76. mouth  
77. tooth  
78. tongue (organ)  
79. fingernail  
80. foot  
81. leg  
82. knee  
83. hand  
84. wing  
85. belly  
86. guts  
87. neck  
88. back  
89. breast  
90. heart  
91. liver  
92. to drink  
93. to eat

94. to bite  
95. to suck  
96. to spit  
97. to vomit  
98. to blow  
99. to breathe  
100. to laugh  
101. to see  
102. to hear  
103. to know  
104. to think  
105. to smell  
106. to fear  
107. to sleep  
108. to live  
109. to die  
110. to kill  
111. to fight  
112. to hunt  
113. to hit  
114. to cut  
115. to split  
116. to stab  
117. to scratch  
118. to dig  
119. to swim  
120. to fly  
121. to walk  
122. to come  
123. to lie (as in a bed)  
124. to sit  
125. to stand  
126. to turn (intransitive)  
127. to fall  
128. to give  
129. to hold  
130. to squeeze  
131. to rub  
132. to wash  
133. to wipe  
134. to pull  
135. to push  
136. to throw  
137. to tie  
138. to sew  
139. to count  
140. to say  
141. to sing  
142. to play

143. to float	176. black
144. to flow	177. night
145. to freeze	178. day
146. to swell	179. year
147. sun	180. warm
148. moon	181. cold
149. star	182. full
150. water	183. new
151. rain	184. old
152. river	185. good
153. lake	186. bad
154. sea	187. rotten
155. salt	188. dirty
156. stone	189. straight
157. sand	190. round
158. dust	191. sharp (as a knife)
159. earth	192. dull (as a knife)
160. cloud	193. smooth
161. fog	194. wet
162. sky	195. dry
163. wind	196. correct
164. snow	197. near
165. ice	198. far
166. smoke	199. right
167. fire	200. left
168. ash	201. at
169. to burn	202. in
170. road	203. with
171. mountain	204. and
172. red	205. if
173. green	206. because
174. yellow	207. name
175. white	

## Shorter lists

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The **Swadesh–Yakhontov list** is a 35-word subset of the Swadesh list posited as especially stable by Russian linguist Sergei Yakhontov around the 1960s, although the list was only officially published in 1991.<sup>[15]</sup> It has been used in lexicostatistics by linguists such as Sergei Starostin. With their Swadesh numbers, they are:<sup>[16]</sup>

1. I	47. dog
2. you (singular)	48. louse
7. this	64. blood
11. who	65. bone
12. what	67. egg
22. one	68. horn
23. two	69. tail
45. fish	73. ear

74. eye	150. water
75. nose	155. salt
77. tooth	156. stone
78. tongue	163. wind
83. hand	167. fire
103. know	179. year
109. die	182. full
128. give	183. new
147. sun	207. name
148. moon	

Holman *et al.* (2008) found that in identifying the relationships between Chinese dialects the Swadesh–Yakhontov list was less accurate than the original Swadesh-100 list. Further they found that a different (40-word) list (also known as the ASJP list) was just as accurate as the Swadesh-100 list. However, they calculated the relative stability of the words by comparing retentions between languages in established language families. They found no statistically significant difference in the correlations in the families of the Old versus the New World.

The ranked Swadesh-100 list, with Swadesh numbers and relative stability, is as follows (Holman *et al.*, Appendix. Asterisked words appear on the 40-word list):

1. 22 *louse (42.8)	30. 11 *one (27.4)
2. 12 *two (39.8)	31. 41 *nose (27.3)
3. 75 *water (37.4)	32. 95 *full (26.9)
4. 39 *ear (37.2)	33. 66 *come (26.8)
5. 61 *die (36.3)	34. 74 *star (26.6)
6. 1 *I (35.9)	35. 86 *mountain (26.2)
7. 53 *liver (35.7)	36. 82 *fire (25.7)
8. 40 *eye (35.4)	37. 3 *we (25.4)
9. 48 *hand (34.9)	38. 54 *drink (25.0)
10. 58 *hear (33.8)	39. 57 *see (24.7)
11. 23 *tree (33.6)	40. 27 bark (24.5)
12. 19 *fish (33.4)	41. 96 *new (24.3)
13. 100 *name (32.4)	42. 21 *dog (24.2)
14. 77 *stone (32.1)	43. 72 *sun (24.2)
15. 43 *tooth (30.7)	44. 64 fly (24.1)
16. 51 *breasts (30.7)	45. 32 grease (23.4)
17. 2 *you (30.6)	46. 73 moon (23.4)
18. 85 *path (30.2)	47. 70 give (23.3)
19. 31 *bone (30.1)	48. 52 heart (23.2)
20. 44 *tongue (30.1)	49. 36 feather (23.1)
21. 28 *skin (29.6)	50. 90 white (22.7)
22. 92 *night (29.6)	51. 89 yellow (22.5)
23. 25 *leaf (29.4)	52. 20 bird (21.8)
24. 76 rain (29.3)	53. 38 head (21.7)
25. 62 kill (29.2)	54. 79 earth (21.7)
26. 30 *blood (29.0)	55. 46 foot (21.6)
27. 34 *horn (28.8)	56. 91 black (21.6)
28. 18 *person (28.7)	57. 42 mouth (21.5)
29. 47 *knee (28.0)	58. 88 green (21.1)

59. 60 sleep (21.0)	80. 17 man (16.7)
60. 7 what (20.7)	81. 94 cold (16.6)
61. 26 root (20.5)	82. 29 flesh (16.4)
62. 45 claw (20.5)	83. 50 neck (16.0)
63. 56 bite (20.5)	84. 71 say (16.0)
64. 83 ash (20.3)	85. 84 burn (15.5)
65. 87 red (20.2)	86. 35 tail (14.9)
66. 55 eat (20.0)	87. 78 sand (14.9)
67. 33 egg (19.8)	88. 5 that (14.7)
68. 6 who (19.0)	89. 65 walk (14.4)
69. 99 dry (18.9)	90. 68 sit (14.3)
70. 37 hair (18.6)	91. 10 many (14.2)
71. 81 smoke (18.5)	92. 9 all (14.1)
72. 8 not (18.3)	93. 59 know (14.1)
73. 4 this (18.2)	94. 80 cloud (13.9)
74. 24 seed (18.2)	95. 63 swim (13.6)
75. 16 woman (17.9)	96. 49 belly (13.5)
76. 98 round (17.9)	97. 13 big (13.4)
77. 14 long (17.4)	98. 93 hot (11.6)
78. 69 stand (17.1)	99. 67 lie (11.2)
79. 97 good (16.9)	100. 15 small (6.3)

## Sign languages

In studying the sign languages of Vietnam and Thailand, linguist James Woodward noted that the traditional Swadesh list applied to spoken languages was unsuited for sign languages. The Swadesh list results in overestimation of the relationships between sign languages, due to indexical signs such as pronouns and parts of the body. The modified list is as follows, in largely alphabetical order:<sup>[17]</sup>

1. all	21. feather
2. animal	22. fire
3. bad	23. fish
4. because	24. flower
5. bird	25. good
6. black	26. grass
7. blood	27. green
8. child	28. heavy
9. count	29. how
10. day	30. hunt
11. die	31. husband
12. dirty	32. ice
13. dog	33. if
14. dry	34. kill
15. dull	35. laugh
16. dust	36. leaf
17. earth	37. lie
18. egg	38. live
19. grease	39. long
20. father	40. louse

41. man	71. sun
42. meat	72. tail
43. mother	73. thin
44. mountain	74. tree
45. name	75. vomit
46. narrow	76. warm
47. new	77. water
48. night	78. wet
49. not	79. what
50. old	80. when
51. other	81. where
52. person	82. white
53. play	83. who
54. rain	84. wide
55. red	85. wife
56. correct	86. wind
57. river	87. with
58. rope	88. woman
59. salt	89. wood
60. sea	90. worm
61. sharp	91. year
62. short	92. yellow
63. sing	93. full
64. sit	94. moon
65. smooth	95. brother
66. snake	96. cat
67. snow	97. dance
68. stand	98. pig
69. star	99. sister
70. stone	100. work

## See also

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- Other lists
  - A General Service List of English Words — roughly 2,000 of the most common English words
  - Dolgopolsky list — the 15 words that change least as languages evolve
  - Leipzig–Jakarta list — 100 words resistant to borrowing, used to estimate chronological separation of languages, intended to improve on the Swadesh list
  - The Appendix of Swadesh lists ([https://en.wiktionary.org/wiki/Appendix:Swadesh\\_lists](https://en.wiktionary.org/wiki/Appendix:Swadesh_lists)) in Wiktionary
- Projects and databases
  - Automated Similarity Judgment Program — a project applying computational approaches to comparative linguistics using a database of word lists
  - Evolution of Human Languages — a project to provide a genealogical classification of the world's languages
  - Intercontinental Dictionary Series — a database of vocabulary lists in over 200 languages, especially indigenous South American and Northeast Caucasian
- Linguistic concepts and fields



- Cognate — a word derived from the same word as another
- Historical linguistics — the study of language change over time
- Indo-European studies — the study of Indo-European languages and their hypothetical common ancestor, Proto-Indo-European
- Proto-language — a postulated ancestral language from which a family of languages is presumed to have evolved
- **Methods of language reconstruction**
  - Comparative method — feature-by-feature comparison of related languages to reconstruct their development and common ancestor
  - Mass lexical comparison — a controversial method, seen as a rival to the comparative method, to determine the relatedness of languages
  - Internal reconstruction — reconstruction of an earlier state of a language without comparing it to other languages
- **Other**
  - Basic English — a simplified form of English for communication and learning

## Notes

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## External links

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- Lexico-semantic universals: A critical overview (<http://www.deepdyve.com/lp/de-gruyter/lexico-semantic-universals-a-critical-overview-YJqNg4PDlr>)
- Rosetta project (<https://web.archive.org/web/20150623030728/http://rosettaproject.org/>)
- Swadesh Lists of Brazilian Native Languages (<https://web.archive.org/web/20171111012059/http://www2.unucseh.ueg.br/gicli/ListasEnglish.htm>)
- Illustrated linguistic and etymology blog by Stephan Steinbach (<https://alternativetransport.wordpress.com/category/linguistics/>)

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