

Mainland Southeast Asia represents a distinct linguistic area due to shared similarities in culture and environment as well as close contact between people groups. Wordlists developed for Mainland Southeast Asia must be adapted to reflect the distinct character of the region.

Linguists working for SIL International in Mainland Southeast Asia have developed a number of wordlists over the past 40 years. Two of the primary wordlists are the Southeast Asia 281 item wordlist and the Southeast Asia 406 item wordlist (referred to as the ‘MSEA 281’ and the ‘MSEA 436’, respectively, in this paper). The 281 item wordlist was developed for comparative studies in Vietnam and Cambodia in the 1960s and 1970s. The 406 item (later developing into a 436 item list) wordlist was an adaptation of the basic 281 item list for comparative studies in Thailand, Laos, and Myanmar.

James Matisoff developed the CALMSEA wordlist (Matisoff 1978:283-296) for comparative studies in Southeast Asia. This list contains 209 items organized into 14 semantic domains. This wordlist draws upon Matisoff’s experience in Tibet-Burman languages. It contains some items which may be difficult to elicit because of taboo (at least in my culture). For this reason, these items may also be subject to replacement.

4.0 Comparing wordlists

By comparing these wordlists, a hybrid wordlist can be derived which has the advantage of the combined expertise of the developers of the individual wordlists as well as insuring the greatest degree of commonality with other comparative studies.

4.1.1 Comparison by lexical item

The following table provides a comparison of the Swadesh 100 and 200, CALMSEA (referred to as the Matisoff 209), MSEA 281 and 436 item wordlists.

[NOTE: MY COMPUTER IS REFUSING TO AUTOMATICALLY REINSERT THE HEADER ROWS ON EACH PAGE, SO I MAY HAVE TO BREAK THE TABLE UP AND DO IT THE HARD WAY ONCE WE HAVE THE REVISIONS COMPLETE]

Item	MSEA 281	MSEA 436	Matisoff 209	Swadesh 100	Swadesh 200
afraid	afraid	afraid	fear/frighten	---	fear
alive	live/alive	---	alive	---	---
all	all	all	---	all	all
and	and	---	---	---	and
angry	---	angry	---	---	---
animal	animal	animal	meat/animal	---	animal
answer	---	answer	---	---	---
ant	---	---	ant	---	---
area under house	---	area under house	---	---	---
armpit	---	armpit	---	---	---
arrow	arrow	arrow	arrow	---	---
ashamed	---	---	ashamed	---	---

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ashes	ashes	ashes	ashes	ashes	ashes
at	at	---	---	---	at
awaken	---	---	awaken	---	---
back	back	back	---	---	back
bad	bad	bad	---	---	bad
bald	---	bald	---	---	---
bamboo	---	bamboo	bamboo	---	---
bamboo shoot	---	bamboo shoot	---	---	---
banana/plantain	banana	banana	banana	---	---
bark	tree bark	tree bark	---	bark	bark
bark	---	bark	---	---	---
bathe	---	bathe	---	---	---
bear	---	bear	bear	---	---
beard	---	beard	---	---	---
because	because	---	---	---	because
bee	---	bee	bee	---	---
belly	belly	belly	belly	belly	belly
bend	---	bend	---	---	---
betel nut	betel nut	betel nut	---	---	---
big	big	big	---	big	big
bird	bird	bird	bird	bird	bird
bird nest	---	bird nest	---	---	---
bite	bite	bite	bite	bite	bite
bitter	---	bitter	bitter	---	---
black	black	black	black	black	black
blanket	---	blanket	---	---	---
blind	---	blind	---	---	---
blood	blood	blood	blood	blood	blood
blow	blow	---	blow	---	blow
boat	---	boat	boat	---	---
boil	---	boil	---	---	---
bone	bone	bone	bone	bone	bone
born	---	---	born	---	---
bow	crossbow	bow, crossbow	bow	---	---
brain	---	brain	brain	---	---
branch	branch	branch	branch	---	---
breast	chest/breast	---	---	breast	---
breast/milk	chest/breast	milk	vagina/breast/milk	---	---
breath	breathe	breath	breath/life	---	breathe
bright	---	bright	---	---	---
brother (eldr. of f.)	brother (eldr. of f.)	brother (eldr. of f.)	---	---	---
brother (eldr. of m.)	brother (eldr. of m.)	brother (eldr. of m.)	---	---	---
brother(yngr. of f.)	---	brother(yngr. of f.)	---	---	---
brother(yngr. of m.)	---	brother(yngr. of m.)	---	---	---
buffalo	buffalo	buffalo	---	---	---
burn	burn	burn	burn	burn	burn
bury	---	bury	---	---	---
butterfly	---	butterfly	---	---	---
buttocks	---	buttocks	---	---	---
buy	buy	buy	buy	---	---
calf	calf	calf	---	---	---

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candle	---	candle	---	---	---
cane/rattan	---	cane/rattan	---	---	---
cat	---	cat	---	---	---
cave	---	cave	---	---	---
cheek	---	cheek	---	---	---
chicken	chicken	chicken	---	---	---
child	child	child	child/son	---	child
chin	---	chin	---	---	---
choose	---	choose	---	---	---
claw	finger nail	finger nail	nail/claw	claw	---
climb/ascend	---	---	climb/ascend	---	---
clothing	clothing	clothing	---	---	---
cloud	cloud	cloud	cloud	cloud	cloud
cockroach	---	cockroach	---	---	---
coconut	coconut	coconut	---	---	---
cold	cold	cold	cold	cold	cold
comb	---	comb	---	---	---
come	come	come	---	come	come
cook/boil	cook	cook	cook/boil	---	---
cool	---	cool	---	---	---
corn	corn	corn	---	---	---
correct	correct	correct	---	---	right/correct
cough	---	cough	cough	---	---
count	count	count	---	---	count
cow	cow	cow	---	---	---
crawl	---	crawl	---	---	---
crested	---	crested	---	---	---
crocodile	---	crocodile	---	---	---
cut	cut	stab	cut	---	cut
dance	dance	dance	---	---	---
dark	---	dark	---	---	---
day	day	day	---	---	day
deaf	---	deaf	---	---	---
deep	---	deep	---	---	---
deer	deer	deer	---	---	---
descend	---	---	descend	---	---
die	die	die	die	die	die
difficult	---	difficult	---	---	---
dig	dig	dig	dig	---	dig
dirty	dirty	dirty	---	---	dirty
disappear	---	disappear	---	---	---
disgusting	---	disgusting	---	---	---
do/make	---	do/make	---	---	---
dog	dog	dog	dog	dog	dog
don' t do it	---	don' t do it	---	---	---
door	---	door	---	---	---
dove	---	---	dove	---	---
dream	---	dream	dream	---	---
drink	drink	drink	drink	drink	drink
drum	drum	drum	---	---	---
drunk	drunk	drunk	---	---	---

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dry	dry	dry	---	dry	dry
duck	duck	duck	---	---	---
dull	blunt	blunt	---	---	dull
dust	dust	dust	---	---	dust
dye	---	dye	---	---	---
ear	ear	ear	ear/hear	ear	ear
earth/soil	earth	earth	earth	earth	earth
east	---	east	---	---	---
easy	---	easy	---	---	---
eat	eat	eat	eat	eat	eat
egg	egg	egg	egg	egg	egg
eggplant	---	eggplant	---	---	---
eight	eight	eight	eight	---	---
elbow	---	elbow	---	---	---
elephant	elephant	elephant	---	---	---
emerge	---	---	emerge	---	---
enter	enter	enter	---	---	---
exchange	---	exchange	---	---	---
excrement	---	excrement	shit	---	---
extinguish	---	extinguish	extinguish	---	---
eye	eye	eye	eye	eye	eye
eyebrow	---	eyebrow	---	---	---
eyelid	---	eyelid	---	---	---
face	---	face	---	---	---
fall	fall/ drop (object)	fall	fall	---	fall
far	far	far	far	---	far
fast	---	fast	---	---	---
fat (n.)	fat	fat	fat/grease	---	fat
fat (adj.)	---	fat	fat	---	---
father	father	father	---	---	father
feather	feather	feather	hair (body)	feather	feather
few	few	few	---	---	few
field	---	---	field	---	---
fight	fight	fight	---	---	fight
finger	---	finger	finger/toe	---	---
fire	fire	fire	fire	fire	fire
firewood	firewood	firewood	---	---	---
fish	fish	fish	fish	fish	fish
five	five	five	five	---	five
flesh/meat	flesh	flesh	---	flesh	meat
float	float	float	---	---	float
flow	flow	flow	---	---	flow
flower	flower	flower	flower	---	flower
fly	fly	fly	fly	fly	fly
fly (n.)	fly	fly	---	---	---
fog	mist	mist	---	---	fog
foot	foot	foot	foot	foot	foot
forehead	---	forehead	---	---	---
forget	---	forget	forget	---	---
four	four	four	four	---	four
fowl	---	---	fowl	---	---

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freeze	freeze	---	---	---	freeze
friend	---	friend	---	---	---
frog	---	frog	frog	---	---
fruit	fruit	fruit	fruit	---	fruit
full	full	full	full	full	---
full	full	full	---	---	---
garlic	---	garlic	---	---	---
ghost	---	ghost	---	---	---
gibbon	---	gibbon	---	---	---
ginger	---	ginger	---	---	---
give	give	give	give	give	give
gold	gold	gold	---	---	---
gong	gong	gong	---	---	---
good	good	good	---	good	good
grandchild (nephew)	---	---	grandchild	---	---
grass	grass	grass	grass	---	grass
grease	---	---	---	grease	---
green	green	green	---	green	green
grind	---	grind	grind	---	---
gums	---	gums	---	---	---
hair	hair	hair	hair (head)	hair	hair
half	---	half a unit	---	---	---
half a quantity	---	half a quantity	---	---	---
hand	hand/arm	hand/arm	hand/arm	hand	hand
hard	---	hard	---	---	---
hate	---	hate	---	---	---
he	he, she	he, she	---	---	he
head	head	head	head	head	head
hear	hear	hear	---	hear	hear
heart	heart	heart	heart	heart	heart
heavy	heavy	heavy	heavy	---	heavy
heel	---	heel	---	---	---
here	here	---	---	---	here
hide	---	---	hide	---	---
hit	hit	hit	---	---	hit
hold	---	---	---	---	hold
horn	horn	horn	horn	horn	---
horse	---	---	horse	---	---
hot	hot	hot	---	hot	---
house	house	house	house	---	---
how	how many	how many	---	---	how
hundred	hundred	hundred	hundred	---	---
hungry	---	hungry	---	---	---
hunt	hunt	hunt	hunt/drive	---	hunt
hurt	---	hurt	---	---	---
husband	husband	husband	---	---	husband
I (1sg.)	I (familiar)	I (familiar)	I	I	I
ice	---	---	---	---	ice
if	if	---	---	---	if
ill	ill	---	ill	---	---
in	in	---	---	---	in

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insect	---	insect	insect/bug/vermin	---	---
intestine	intestine	intestine	guts	---	guts
iron	---	iron	iron	---	---
irrigated paddy field	---	wet rice field	irrigated paddy field	---	---
itchy	---	itch	itchy	---	---
jackfruit (fruit)	---	jackfruit (fruit)	---	---	---
joint	---	---	joint	---	---
kapok	---	kapok	---	---	---
kick	---	kick	kick	---	---
kill	kill	kill	kill	kill	kill
knee	knee	knee	---	knee	---
kneel	---	kneel	---	---	---
knife	---	knife	---	---	---
know	know	know	know	know	know
ladle	---	coconut shell ladle	---	---	---
lake	lake	---	---	---	lake
laugh	laugh	laugh	laugh	---	laugh
launder	launder	launder	---	---	---
leaf	leaf	leaf	leaf	leaf	leaf
leech (land)	---	land leech	leech (land)	---	---
left (hand)	left (side)	left (side)	Left side	---	left (hand)
leg	leg	leg	---	---	leg
lick	---	lick	lick	---	---
lie on side	lie down	---	---	lie on side	lie (on side)
lie, fib	lie, fib	lie, fib	---	---	---
lift	---	lift	---	---	---
lightning	---	lightning	---	---	---
lightweight	---	---	lightweight	---	---
lime	---	lime for betel	---	---	---
liquor	---	liquor	liquor	---	---
live	live	---	---	---	live
liver	liver	liver	liver	liver	liver
lizard (house)	---	lizard (house)	---	---	---
long	long	long	long/tall	long	long
loose	---	loose	let go/set free/loosen	---	---
louse	louse	louse	louse	louse	louse
love	---	love	---	---	---
lungs	---	lungs	---	---	---
man	man	man	---	man (male)	man (male)
mango (fruit)	---	mango (fruit)	---	---	---
many	many	many	many	many	many
marrow	---	---	marrow	---	---
mat	---	mat	---	---	---
medicine	---	medicine	medicine/juice	---	---
monkey	monkey	monkey	monkey	---	---
monkey	monkey	monkey	---	---	---
moon	moon	moon	moon	moon	---
morning	---	morning	---	---	---
mortar	mortar	mortar	mortar	---	---
mosquito	mosquito	mosquito	---	---	---
mother	mother	mother	---	---	mother

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mountain	mountain	mountain	mountain	mountain	mountain
mouth	mouth	mouth	mouth	mouth	mouth
mud	mud	mud	---	---	---
mushroom/fungus	---	mushroom	mushroom/fungus	---	---
naked	---	naked	---	---	---
name	name	name	name	name	name
narrow	narrow	narrow	---	---	narrow
navel	---	navel	---	---	---
navel	---	---	navel	---	---
near	near	near	near	---	near
neck	neck	---	neck	neck	neck
needle	---	needle	needle	---	---
new	new	new	new	new	new
night	night	night	night	night	night
nine	nine	nine	nine	---	---
noon	---	noon	---	---	---
north	---	north	---	---	---
nose	nose	nose	nose	nose	nose
not	not	---	---	not	not
old	old	old	old	---	old
one	one	one	one	one	one
opium	---	opium	---	---	---
other	---	different	---	---	other
otter	---	---	otter	---	---
palm	palm	palm	palm	---	---
pangolin	---	pangolin	---	---	---
papaya	papaya	papaya	---	---	---
paper	---	paper	---	---	---
pay	---	pay	---	---	---
peanut	---	peanut	---	---	---
peas, beans	---	---	peas, beans	---	---
penis	---	---	penis	---	---
person	person	person	person	person	person
pestle	pestle	pestle	---	---	---
pig	pig	pig	pig	---	---
pillow	---	pillow	---	---	---
plant	---	plant	---	---	---
plate	---	plate	---	---	---
play	play	play	---	---	play
poison	---	---	poison	---	---
porcupine	---	porcupine	---	---	---
pot (cooking)	---	pot	---	---	---
pound (rice)	---	pound	---	---	---
pull	pull	pull	---	---	pull
pus	---	pus	---	---	---
push	push	push	---	---	push
put/place	---	---	put/place	---	---
rabbit	rabbit	rabbit	---	---	---
rain	rain	rain	rain (n.)	rain	rain
rainbow	rainbow	rainbow	---	---	---
rat/rodent	rat	rat	rat/rodent	---	---

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red	red	red	red	red	red
red pepper	red pepper	red pepper	---	---	---
return	return	return	---	---	---
rib	---	rib	---	---	---
rice (cooked)	rice (cooked)	cooked rice	rice (cooked)	---	---
rice (in fields)	rice (field)	paddy rice	rice (in fields)	---	---
rice (pounded)	pounded rice	pounded rice	---	---	---
rice seedling	---	rice seedling	---	---	---
right(hand)	right (side)	right (side)	right side	---	right(hand)
ring (finger)	---	ring	---	---	---
ripe	---	ripe	ripe/well-cooked	---	---
river	river	river	river/valley	---	river
road (path)	road (path)	road (path)	road	road	road
roof	roof	roof	---	---	---
root	root	root	root	root	root
rope	cord	---	---	---	rope
rotten	rotten	rotten	---	---	rotten
round	round	round	round	round	---
rub	rub (scrub)	rub	rub	---	rub
run/flee	---	---	run/flee	---	---
saliva	---	saliva	---	---	---
salt	salt	salt	salt	---	salt
same	---	the same	---	---	---
sand	sand	sand	---	sand	sand
sarong	sarong	sarong	---	---	---
scorpion	scorpion	scorpion	---	---	---
scratch	scratch	scratch	scratch/scrape	---	scratch
sea	sea	sea	---	---	sea
see	see	see	see	see	see
seed	seed	seed	---	seed	seed
sell	---	sell	sell	---	---
seven	seven	seven	seven	---	---
sew	sew	sew	sew	---	sew
shade/shadow	---	shadow	shade/shadow	---	---
shallow	---	shallow	---	---	---
sharp	sharp	sharp	sharp	---	sharp
shave (beard)	---	shave (beard)	---	---	---
shin	---	shin	---	---	---
shiver	---	shiver	---	---	---
shoot	shoot	shoot	shoot	---	---
short (height)	short (height)	short (height)	---	---	short
short (length)	short (length)	short (length)	---	---	---
shout	---	shout	---	---	---
silver	silver	silver	silver	---	---
sing	sing	sing	---	---	sing
sink	---	sink	---	---	---
sister (eldr. of f.)	sister (eldr. of f.)	sister (eldr. of f.)	---	---	---
sister (eldr. of m.)	sister (eldr. of m.)	sister (elder of m)	---	---	---
sister (yngr. of f.)	---	sister (yngr. of f.)	---	---	---
sister (yngr. of m.)	---	sister (yngr. of m.)	---	---	---
sit	sit	sit	sit	sit	sit

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six	six	six	six	---	---
skin	skin	skin	skin/bark	skin	skin
skinny	---	skinny	---	---	---
sky	sky	sky	sky	---	sky
sleep	sleep	sleep	sleep/lie down	sleep	sleep
sleeping area	---	sleeping area	---	---	---
slow	---	slow	---	---	---
small	small	small	---	small	small
smell	smell	smell	smell	---	smell
smile	---	smile	---	---	---
smoke	smoke	smoke	smoke	smoke	smoke
smooth	smooth	smooth	---	---	smooth
snail	---	snail	---	---	---
snake	snake	snake	snake	---	snake
sneeze	---	sneeze	---	---	---
snore	---	snore	---	---	---
snot	---	---	snot	---	---
snow	---	---	---	---	snow
soft (touch)	---	---	soft (touch)	---	---
some	some	some	---	---	some
son-in-law	---	son-in-law	son-in-law	---	---
sour	---	sour	sour	---	---
south	---	south	---	---	---
speak	speak	speak	---	say	say
spear	spear	spear	---	---	---
spicy, hot	---	spicy, hot	---	---	---
spider	spider	spider	---	---	---
spider web	---	spider web	---	---	---
spit	spit	spit	spit (n)	---	spit
split	split	split	---	---	split
split w knife	---	split w knife	---	---	---
spoon	---	spoon	---	---	---
squeeze	squeeze	---	squeeze	---	squeeze
stab	stab	stab	---	---	stab
stand	stand	stand	stand	stand	stand
star	star	star	star	star	star
steal	---	steal	steal	---	---
stick	stick	---	stick	---	stick
stone	stone	stone	stone	stone	stone
straight	straight	straight	---	---	straight
stream	---	stream	---	---	---
strong	---	strong	---	---	---
suck	suck (milk)	suck	---	---	suck
sugarcane	---	sugarcane	---	---	---
sun	sun	sun	sun/day	sun	sun
swallow	---	swallow	---	---	---
sweat	---	sweat	sweat	---	---
sweet	---	sweet	sweet	---	---
swell	swollen	swell	---	---	swell
swidden	---	---	swidden	---	---
swim	swim	swim	---	swim	swim

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tail	tail	tail	tail	tail	tail
take	---	take	---	---	---
tall	tall	tall	---	---	---
tell	---	tell	---	---	---
ten	ten	ten	ten	---	---
termite	---	termite	---	---	---
that	that	that	---	that	that
there	there	---	---	---	there
they	they	they	---	---	they
thick	thick	thick	thick	---	thick
thigh	thigh	thigh	---	---	---
thin	thin	thin	thin	---	thin
think	think	think	---	---	think
thirsty	---	thirsty	---	---	---
this	this	this	---	this	this
this	---	---	---	---	---
thorn	---	thorn	thorn (prick)	---	---
thousand	---	thousand	---	---	---
three	three	three	three	---	three
throw	throw	throw	---	---	throw
thunder	---	thunder	---	---	---
tie	tie	tie	tie	---	tie
tiger	tiger	tiger	---	---	---
tired	---	tired	---	---	---
tomorrow	---	tomorrow	---	---	---
tongue	tongue	tongue	tongue (n)	tongue	tongue
tooth	tooth	tooth	tooth (n)	tooth	tooth
tree	tree	tree	tree (n)/wood	tree	tree
trousers	---	trousers	---	---	---
turn	turn	---	---	---	turn
turtle	---	turtle	---	---	---
tusk	tusk	tusk	---	---	---
twenty/score	twenty	---	twenty/score	---	---
two	two	two	two	two	two
urine	---	urine	piss	---	---
village	---	village	village	---	---
vomit	vomit	vomit	vomit	---	vomit
wait	---	wait	---	---	---
walk	walk	walk	---	walk	walk
wall of house	---	wall of house	---	---	---
warm	warm	warm	warm	---	warm
wash	wash (dishes)	wash	wash	---	wash
water	water	water	water	water	water
water leech	---	water leech	water leech	---	---
we	we (inclusive)	we (inclusive)	---	we	we
weak	---	weak	---	---	---
weave (cloth)	---	weave (cloth)	weave	---	---
weep	weep	weep	weep	---	---
west	---	west	---	---	---
wet	wet	wet	---	---	wet
what	what	what	---	what	what

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when (future)	when (future)	when (future)	---	---	---
when (past)	when (past)	when (past)	---	---	when
where	where	where	---	---	where
whistle	---	whistle	---	---	---
white	white	white	white	white	white
who	who	who	---	who	who
wide	wide	wide	---	---	wide
widow	---	widow	---	---	---
wife	wife	wife	---	---	wife
wind	wind	wind	wind	---	wind
window	---	window	---	---	---
wing	wing	wing	wing	---	wing
wink	---	wink	---	---	---
winnow (rice)	---	winnow (rice)	---	---	---
wipe	wipe	wipe	---	---	wipe
with	with	---	---	---	with
woman	woman	woman	---	woman	woman
woods	forest	forest	---	---	woods
work	work	work	---	---	---
worm	earthworm	earthworm	---	---	worm
wrong	---	wrong	---	---	---
yawn	---	yawn	---	---	---
year	year	year	year	---	year
yellow	yellow	yellow	---	yellow	yellow
yesterday	---	yesterday	---	---	---
you (2s.)	thou (2s)	thou (2s)	thou	---	thou
you (2pl.)	you	you	you	you	you

Table 1.1 Common items in comparative wordlists

4.1.2 Comparison by weighing

Now we can analyze these wordlists to determine which items recur with the greatest frequency. This is accomplished by weighing the items contained in the wordlists. However, weighting the wordlists the same would not seem best since some of the wordlists have arisen from the same, or similar sources. This is true of the two MSEA wordlists, and the two Swadesh lists. The two MSEA wordlists are combined yielding a composite wordlist of 482 distinctive lexical items given a value of 1.0. The resulting wordlist is called the ‘MSEA 482’. The Swadesh 100 and 200 item wordlists are combined yielding a wordlist of 210 distinctive items and given a value of 1.0. The resulting wordlist is called the ‘Swadesh 210’. The remaining wordlist from Matisoff is assigned a weight of 1.0, and called the ‘Matisoff 209’. Summing the weights for the respective wordlist inclusions provides a means to determine which items are most frequently shared by these wordlists, with the largest numbers being the lexical items that are most commonly shared.

The results of this weighting are shown in Table 1.2

Number	Gloss	MSEA 482	Matisoff 209	Swadesh 210	Total
1	afraid	1	1	1	3