

## SWADESH'S PLACE IN LINGUISTICS: A 'COMPLEAT LINGUIST'

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Morris Swadesh is mostly remembered now for his work on lexicostatistics and glottochronology, from 1950 to his death in 1967. But he achieved so much more in linguistics: Here, in no particular order, are ten of these achievements.

- 1 He trained and encouraged a number of students and early-careers linguists, most notably advising Floyd Lounsbury, a giant of anthropological linguists.
- 2 He wrote an insightful paper (Sociologic Notes on Obsolescent Languages, IJAL 1948) about language endangerment and what had to be done about it.
- 3 He collected material on a number of languages which were at best fragmentarily remembered when he was working on them (Biloxi, Atakapa, Mahican) and provided crucial documentation of over a dozen languages of California and the Pacific Northwest, most of them associated with the Penutian hypothesis (many of which are now dormant), providing almost the only known sound recordings of some of them. Additionally he worked on Catawba of South Carolina, and yet more so the Louisiana isolate Chitimacha (his documentation of this language is still unpublished in its original form).
- 4 He worked on the language, literature and anthropology of several Native American groups, especially the Nuuchahnulth (formerly Nootka-speakers), but also with groups such as the Nez Percés, the Menominees and Potawatomis, and also with the Gur-speaking Mamprusi in Ghana.
- 5 He emulated Boas and Sapir in their belief in the importance of teaching native speakers how to write their own languages by setting up literacy programs in Mexico, most notably for Purepecha/Tarascan – for which he learned to speak and write both Purepecha and Spanish!
- 6 He was one of the first to document basic divisions within 'Eskimoan' languages, recognising that (for instance) Inuktitut and Central Alaskan Yupik belonged to different groups, and documented a Yupik variety in a tour de force of fieldwork lasting a few hours with James Andrews of Unaaliq.
- 7 He worked on materials to assist people in learning a range of languages quickly (Burmese, Russian, Arabic, and most fully, Mandarin Chinese).
- 8 He provided crucial input into phonemic and morphophonemic theory (he was one of the first people to speak about 'morphophonemics', and did important work on English syllabics), and helped streamline American phonemic transcriptional practices.
- 9 He did early work on setting up a notational system for using computers for large-scale comparative linguistic work; his techniques have been followed by others, such as Terrence Kaufman.
- 10 He used historical insight, including lexicostatistics, in an attempt to cast more light on aspects of the history of Mesoamerica, and world linguistic prehistory.

MS published over 230 books, articles, chapters, reviews, notes and abstracts, in English and Spanish, on Old and New World languages. His work, written in clear and always readable prose, dealt with phonetics, both synchronic and diachronic phonology, morphology, syntax, semantics, pragmatics, and lexicon, drawing on deep experience of over 20 languages. Truly, Morris Swadesh was (to misquote Izaak Walton) a *Compleat Linguist*.