

Conclusion

Based on the, admittedly, limited set of language couples evaluated here, the word candidates can be grouped as follows with decreasing degree of stability:

Survives in 13 couples: –

Survives in 12 couples: *five, four, two*

Survives in 11 couples: *I, six, three, you (sg.)*

Survives in 10 couples: *to die, fly (animal), full, hand, horn, one, star, ten, tongue*

Survives in 9 couples: *dream, to eat, eight, to give, hundred, to laugh, nail, name, new, seven, stone, water, we, who?, winter, you (pl.)*

Survives in 8 couples: *blood, eye, heart, moon, night, nine, to sit, year*

Survives in 7 couples: *all, to bear (give birth), brother, day, to do, dry, ear, egg, father, finger, fire, fish, head, to hear, hunger, ice, nose, other, right (side), shadow, son, to spit, sun, sweet, tear, tooth, what?, yesterday*

Survives in 6 couples: *ashes, to bite, bitter, bone, to come, to dig, to drink, green, heavy, to live, liver, long, louse, mother, mouth, navel, rain, red, root, salt, short, sky, to sleep, to stand, to suck, this*

Survives in 5 couples: *black, cloud, cold, flea, foot, grass, hedgehog, honey, knee, to know, to lie (down), milk, mouse, nest, not, to open, person, to see, seed, skin, smoke, snake, to swim, to tie, to wash, white, wind, wing, worm*

Survives in 4 couples: *earth, fat, to fear, feather, to kill, leaf, man, meat, near, old, road, to say, to sew, to sing, summer, tail, that, tree, yellow*

Survives in 3 couples: *to ask, back, bark, bird, breast, to burn, child, dog, far, flower, fruit, to go, good, hair, house, mountain, sand, snow, thin, warm, wet, woman*

Survives in 2 couples: *ant, bad, big, to carry, to fall, to fly, many, narrow, river, round*

Survives in 1 couple: *belly, to cut, neck, sea, small, work*

It turns out that certain items which figure prominently in existing basic vocabulary lists are rather bad, such as “belly”, “dog”, “neck”, “small”, whereas some good words are rarely included in such lists, such as “finger”, “fly (animal)”, “hunger”, “winter”.

Based on these data, a good (= diachronically stable) basic vocabulary list, which I herewith wish to propose, could be the following 54 item-list:

all, to bear (give birth), blood, brother, to die, to do, dream, dry, ear, to eat, egg, eye, finger, fire, fish, five, fly (animal), four, full, to give, hand, head, to hear, heart, horn, hunger, I, ice, to laugh, moon, nail, name, new, night, one, right (side), shadow, to sit, son, star, stone, sun, sweet, ten, three, tongue, tooth, two, water, we, who?, year, yesterday, you (sg.).

These are all items of my table that occur as cognates at least 7 times, with the exception of:

- (1) some items that in many languages depend from other list items (numbers from 5 to 9 may be composed of lower numbers; “hundred” may be related to “ten”; “other” may be related to “two”; “you (pl.)” may be derived from “you (sg.)”; “what?” often from the same root as “who?”; “day” often from the same root as “sun”; “tear” often expressed as “water of eye” or the like);
- (2) three items which tend to be onomatopoeic and can therefore be misleading when used as evidence in historical linguistics (“father”; “nose”, which often contains a nasal consonant; “to spit”);
- (3) one item which, despite showing a good stability rate where it occurs, does not exist as a concept in a large part of the world (“winter”).