ISO 639-3 Registration Authority

Request for Change to ISO 639-3 Language Code

Change Request Number: 2007-028 (completed by Registration authority)

Date: 2007-5-25

Primary Person submitting request: Hope Hurlbut

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Names, affiliations and email addresses of additional supporters of this request:

Postal address for primary contact person for this request (in general, email correspondence will be used):
S.I.L., W.D.T. 26, 88900 Kota Kinabalu, Sabah, Malaysia

PLEASE NOTE: This completed form will become part of the public record of this change request and the history of the ISO 639-3 code set.

Types of change requests

This form is to be used in requesting changes (whether creation, modification, or deletion) to elements of the ISO 639 Codes for the representation of names of languages — Part 3: Alpha-3 code for comprehensive coverage of languages. The types of changes that are possible are to 1) modify the reference information for an existing code element, 2) propose a new macrolanguage or modify a macrolanguage group; 3) retire a code element from use, including merging its scope of denotation into that of another code element, 4) split an existing code element into two or more new language code elements, or 5) create a new code element for a previously unidentified language variety. Fill out section 1, 2, 3, 4, or 5 below as appropriate, and the final section documenting the sources of your information. The process by which a change is received, reviewed and adopted is summarized on the final page of this form.

Type of change proposed (check one):

1. □ Modify reference information for an existing language code element
2. □ Propose a new macrolanguage or modify a macrolanguage group
3. □ Retire a language code element from use
4. □ Split a language code element into two or more new code elements
5. ☒ Create a code element for a previously unidentified language

For proposing a change to an existing code element, please identify:

1. Modify an existing language code element

(a) What are you proposing to change:

□ Language name
□ Language type (living, extinct, historical, etc.)
□ Language scope (individual language or macrolanguage)
2. Propose a new macrolanguage or modify a macrolanguage group

(a) For an existing Macrolanguage, what change to its individual language membership do you propose:

(b) Rationale for change:

For a new Macrolanguage proposal, please also complete the form “Request for New Language Code Element in ISO 639-3” (file name “ISO639-3_NewCodeRequest.doc” or “ISO639-3_NewCodeRequestForm.rtf”), which must also be submitted to fully document the intended meaning for the new macrolanguage.

3. Retire a language code element from use

(a) Reason for change:
   - [ ] There is no evidence that the language exists.
   - [ ] This is equivalent to another ISO 639-3 language.
   - [ ] This is a variety that is fully intelligible with another ISO 639-3 language and should be merged with it.

(b) If one of the latter two reasons, with which ISO 639-3 code element (identifier and name) should it be merged:

(c) Rationale for change:

4. Split a language code element into two or more code elements

(a) List the languages into which this code element should be split:

By the language identification criteria set forth in ISO 639-3, the simple fact of distinct identities is not enough to assign separate identifiers. The criteria are defined in the standard as follows:

For this part of ISO 639, judgments regarding when two varieties are considered to be the same or different languages are based on a number of factors, including linguistic similarity, intelligibility, a common literature (traditional or written), a common writing system, the views of users concerning the relationship between language and identity, and other factors. The following basic criteria are followed:
• Two related varieties are normally considered varieties of the same language if users of each variety have inherent understanding of the other variety (that is, can understand based on knowledge of their own variety without needing to learn the other variety) at a functional level.

• Where intelligibility between varieties is marginal, the existence of a common literature or of a common ethnolinguistic identity with a central variety that both understand can be strong indicators that they should nevertheless be considered varieties of the same language.

• Where there is enough intelligibility between varieties to enable communication, the existence of well-established distinct ethnolinguistic identities can be a strong indicator that they should nevertheless be considered to be different languages.

(b) Referring to the criteria given above, give the rationale for splitting the existing code element into two or more languages:

(c) Does the language code element to be split represent a major language in which there already exists a significant body of literature and research? Are there contexts in which all the proposed separate languages may still be considered the same language—as in having a common linguistic identity, a shared (or undistinguished) body of literature, a written form in common, etc.? If so, please comment.

In order to complete the change request, the form “Request for New Language Code Element in ISO 639-3” (file name “ISO639-3_NewCodeRequestForm.doc” or “ISO639-3_NewCodeRequestForm.rtf”) must also be submitted for each new identifier that is to be created. That step can be deferred until this form has been processed by the ISO 639-3 registrar.

5. Create a new language code element

(a) Name of missing language: Hong Kong Sign Language

(b) State the case that this language is not the same as or has not been included within any language that already has an identifier in ISO 639-3:

Hong Kong Sign Language (HKSL) shares only 40% similarities with Chinese Sign Language (CSL) from Beijing. (In an as-yet unpublished comparison study I conducted with 240 words. Hurlbut, 2007) It shares 42-52% similarities with Taiwan Sign Language (TSL). Both of those languages are reputed to be similar to HKSL, and it is true that they belong to the same language family, but in my opinion are not close enough to be easily understood. The Deaf of Hong Kong consider that their sign language is different from other signed languages.

In order to complete the change request, the form “Request for New Language Code Element in ISO 639-3” (file name “ISO639-3_NewCodeRequest.doc” or “ISO639-3_NewCodeRequestForm.rtf”) must also be submitted to more fully document the new language.
Sources of information

Please use whichever of the points below are relevant in order to document the sources on which you have based the above proposal.

(a) First-hand knowledge. Describe:
   I have interviewed a Deaf person from Hong Kong, and also videoed him.

(b) Knowledge through personal communication. Describe:

(c) Knowledge from published sources (please give complete bibliographical references):
   Hurlbut, Hope. (2007). A Survey of Sign Language in Taiwan. To Be Published in SILESR.
   Lam Tin Sek. (1990). Hong Kong Deaf Sign Language Dictionary. Hong Kong Deaf Sign Language Work Group. Hong Kong Special Education Section. (Chinese only.)
   Wong Kai Fung. (1999). Hong Kong Sign Language Pictorial Thesaurus. Hong Kong. (Chinese only).

The change proposal process

A request to change the code set goes through a six-step process:

1. A user of ISO 639-3 proposes a change and submits it to the ISO 639-3 Registration Authority (ISO 639-3/RA) using this form.

2. The ISO 639-3 registrar processes the change request to verify that the request is compatible with the criteria set forth in the standard and to ensure that the submitter has supplied all necessary information. This may involve rounds of interaction with the submitter.

3. When the change request proposal is complete in its documentation (including all associated New Code Requests), the change request is promoted to “Proposed Change” status and the ISO 639-3 registrar posts the request on the official web site of the ISO 639-3/RA. Also at this time, an
announcement is sent to anyone requesting notification of new proposals matching their specified 
criteria (region and/or language family of interest). Periodically, a message maybe sent to the 
general LINGUIST discussion list on Linguist List (http://linguistlist.org/issues/index.html), and 
other appropriate discussion lists, inviting individuals to review and comment on pending proposals. 
Anyone may request from the ISO 639-3 registrar to receive notification regarding proposals 
involving languages in a specific region of the world or specific language family.

4. Individuals may send comments to the ISO 639-3 registrar for compilation. The consensus of early 
reviews may result in promotion to “Candidate Status” (with or without amendment), or withdrawal 
of the change request, if the conclusion is that the request is not in keeping with the stated criteria of 
the ISO 639-3 standard.

5. Three months prior to the end of the annual cycle of review and update, a new notice is posted on 
the official web site of the ISO 639-3/RA, and an announcement listing the Candidate Status Change 
Requests is posted to the LINGUIST discussion list and other discussion lists, as requested by their 
owners. All change requests are then open to further review and comment by any interested party for 
a period of three months. A Change Request received after the start of Candidacy phase must wait 
until the next annual cycle for consideration. The purpose of this phase is to ensure that a minimum 
of three months is allotted for the review of every proposal.

6. At the end of the formal review period, a given Change Request may be: 1) adopted as a whole; 2) 
adopted in part (specific changes implicit in the whole Change Request may be adopted separately); 
3) amended and resubmitted for the next review cycle; or 4) withdrawn from consideration. All 
change requests remain permanently archived at the official web site of the ISO 639-3/RA.

Please return this form to:
ISO 639-3 Registrar
SIL International, Office of Language Information Systems
7500 West Camp Wisdom Road
Dallas, Texas 75236 USA
E-mail: iso639-3@sil.org

An email attachment of this completed form is preferred.

Sources of documentation for ISO 639-3 identifiers:

Request for Change to ISO 639-3 Language Code, page 5