ISO 639-3 Registration Authority

Request for Change to ISO 639-3 Language Code

Change Request Number: 2007-188 (completed by Registration authority)

Date: 2007-8-24

Primary Person submitting request: Conrad Hurd

Affiliation: SIL International

E-mail address: editor_ethnologue@sil.org

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):
Ethnologue Editor, 7500 W Camp Wisdom Rd., Dallas, TX, 75236

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:

Affected ISO 639-3 identifier: [blu]

Associated reference name: Hmong Njua

1. Modify an existing language code element

   (a) What are you proposing to change:

      ☐ Language reference name
      ☐ Language additional names

Request for Change to ISO 639-3 Language Code, page 1
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”) must also be submitted to fully document the scope 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:
   Hmong Njua [blu] should be retired, split into Chuanqianian Cluster Miao, Sinicized Miao, Small Flowery Miao, Horned Miao and more specific Hmong Njua.

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:

Hmong Njua [blu] should be retired, split into Chuanqiandian Cluster Miao, Small Flowery Miao, Horned Miao and Hmong Njua. Until now Hmong Njua [blu] as described in the Ethnologue 15th ed. was awkwardly forced to encompass a large number of Chuanqiandian Miao lects. The specific variety Hmong Njua (or Hmongb Nzhua), appearing under country headings for Thailand, Vietnam, Laos and Myanmar and also spoken by many overseas Hmong around the world, is one member of the Chuanqiandian Cluster Miao group. Thus Hmong Njua has been used in two senses until now, denoting a broad category of several dozen Chuanqiandian lects, and in a much narrower sense, denoting one specific variety within that broad category. Because from now on it would be unclear in any given use of the identifier as to whether [blu] meant the old, overly broad Hmong Njua, or the new, more proper Hmong Njua, the identifier [blu] must be retired from use. The specific variety Hmong Njua should be given a new identifier to remove that ambiguity, and the broad category of Chuanqiandian lects should be split into four new entries.

Chinese linguists normally organize the broad category of Chuanqiandian lects, formerly represented in the Ethnologue by the lect best known overseas, Hmong Njua, into three or four clusters of closely related lects. They call these three clusters 川黔滇方言第一、第二、第三、第四个土语. In English these could be translated as the first, second, third and fourth local dialects of the Chuanqiandian sub-dialect of the Chuanqiandian dialect of the Miao language.

Chinese linguists have arranged these multiple varieties in three or four groups based on closeness of genetic relationship, determined through analysis of extensive word lists, and on estimates of inherent intelligibility, gained through observations of ability to communicate across lects in the mother tongue.

While the many lects within the Chuanqiandian Cluster Miao group (corresponding to the first local dialect described by Chinese linguists) do differ somewhat in phonology and lexicon, and their speakers have autonyms, clothing and customs distinct from other subgroups within the cluster, and while marriage tends to be within the same subgroup, there is fairly good inherent intelligibility at a functional level across lects within the cluster.

Small Flowery Miao or Gha-Mu, corresponding to the second local dialect described by Chinese linguists, is a distinct ethnolinguistic subgroup with its own clear identity. Through historical reconstruction Chinese linguists have determined that the Small Flowery Miao lect is closely related to other lects within the Chuanqiandian sub-dialect, and they state that there is partial intelligibility between this lect and Chuanqiandian Cluster Miao (the first...
Sinicized Miao or Hmong Sa, posited by at least one Chinese linguist (Li Yunbing) as a fourth local dialect of the Chuanqiandian sub-dialect, is also a distinct ethnolinguistic sub-group, and is phonologically more divergent from the Chuanqiandian Cluster Miao lects (the first local dialect) than Small Flowery Miao is from the Chuanqiandian Cluster Miao lects. There is marginal intelligibility between Sinicized Miao and either Chuanqiandian Cluster Miao lects or Small Flowery Miao. It is believed, however, that this is the same language that is already represented by the code [hmz] Hmong Shua, previously identified as only being used in Vietnam. Thus, this proposal recommends an expansion of the denotation of [hmz] Hmong Shua to incorporate this lect as spoken in China (cf change request 2007-132)

Horned Miao, although it has been classified in several different ways by Chinese linguists, is also a distinct ethnolinguistic sub-group speaking a variety of Miao that is phonologically divergent from other lects in the Chuanqiandian sub-dialect and only partially intelligible with them.

The specific variety Hmong Njua (or Hmongb Nzhub), spoken in China, Thailand, Vietnam, Laos, Myanmar and by many overseas Hmong around the world, is one member of the Chuanqiandian Cluster Miao group. A significant body of literature now exists in Hmong Njua in the RPA writing system used since the 1950’s in Laos, Thailand and in western countries where overseas Hmong live. Speakers of the Hmong Njua lect, along with speakers of Hmong Daw, are probably the best-known members outside of China of this large over-arching ethnolinguistic group known as Miao or Hmong.

(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.

Chinese linguists consider Chuanqiandian Cluster Miao, Small Flowery Miao and Sinicized Miao to be linguistically distinct at the "local dialect" level, although all are members of a single sub-dialect. The growing body of research publications on Chuanqiandian Miao acknowledges the linguistic variation among lects within the sub-dialect. There is a single official standard "Chuanqiandian" writing system for the Chuanqiandian Miao of China but a large body of literature does not yet exist in this writing system. Speakers from Chuanqiandian Cluster Miao, Small Flowery Miao, Sinicized Miao and Horned Miao are expected to learn and use the spelling of the standard Dananshan lect, one of the lects within Chuanqiandian Cluster Miao. However, a text collection (a collection of burial chants) has already been published using an adaptation of the standard spelling to write Sinicized Miao as it is actually pronounced.

Within China, speakers of Chuanqiandian Cluster Miao (including Hmong Njua), Small Flowery Miao, Horned Miao and Sinicized Miao all consider themselves to be members of the Miao nationality, with a shared history, common themes in oral literature and certain shared aspects of culture, such as music styles, musical instruments and general clothing styles.

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:

(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:

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:

(b) Knowledge through personal communication. Describe:
   1. Personal communication with a Chinese Miao scholar, August 24, 2007, who confirmed that Small Flowery Miao, Horned Miao and Sinicized Miao, as well as other lects in Guizhou, are distinct varieties within the Chuanqiandian Miao sub-dialect and have varying degrees of intelligibility with lects in the first local dialect [Chuanqiandian Cluster Miao] group.
   2. A colleague played recorded texts (folktales) in Hmong Njua of China to Hmong Njua speakers in Thailand and to speakers of other Chuanqiandian Cluster Miao lects in China, and they were able to understand the texts and retell the content in their own words. But after hearing the folktales speakers of Sinicized Miao were unable to tell the main idea of any of these recorded texts and said they could not understand the texts, although they recognized some of the words.
   3. Unpublished paper. Michael Johnson. 1998. "Farwestern Hmongic" describes in some detail the linguistic variation and cultural distinctness of the Small Flowery Miao, Horned Miao, Sinicized Miao and Hua Miao groups (as well as other Chuanqiandian Miao groups) and comments on degrees of mutual intelligibility among these groups.

(c) Knowledge from published sources (please give complete bibliographical references):
   The following publications contribute toward confirming the distinctness of the Chuanqiandian Cluster Miao, Small Flowery Miao, Sinicized Miao and Horned Miao ethnolinguistic groups, and to analyzing their linguistic variation and classifying them in various ways within the Chuanqiandian sub-dialect.

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

Request for Change to ISO 639-3 Language Code, page 6
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 (ordinarily October 1st), 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: