

Comments received for
ISO 639-3 Change Request
2008-092

Outcome: Name change: adopted
Language split: rejected
Effective date: 2009-01-16



SIL International ISO 639-3 Registration Authority

7500 W. Camp Wisdom Rd., Dallas, TX 75236
PHONE: (972) 708-7400 FAX: (972) 708-7380 (GMT-6)
E-MAIL: iso639-3@sil.org INTERNET: <http://www.sil.org/iso639-3/>

Registration Authority decision on Change Request no. 2008-092: to split the code element “[tpx] Acatepec Tlapanec” into four specific language varieties

The request to retire the code element for Acatepec Tlapanec and divide it into four distinct languages, Acatepec Me'phaa [txp] (new identifier with a more restricted scope of denotation), Zapotitlán Tablas Me'phaa [tzp], Huitzapula Me'phaa [thp], and Teocuitlapa Me'phaa, is rejected for lack of evidence. The requester has cited as primary evidence the work done by the Me'phaa Language Development Committee and the Instituto Nacional de Lenguas Indígenas (INALI). The evidence is strongly sociolinguistic, and does not present any data which would aid in distinguishing between attitudes of difference as opposed to inability to communicate (though the “personal knowledge” section of the references makes a statement about difficulty of communication). Further, the admission by the requester that “the true degree of linguistic difference has not been investigated” between two of the four requested varieties whose main centers are only 2 kilometers apart indicates that there is more investigation to be done. Rather than make a decision that might later be reversed by such further investigation, the Registration Authority prefers a more conservative approach, requiring clear linguistic, as well as sociolinguistic evidence. The need to have distinct written media in the varieties does not in itself constitute sufficient evidence to identify them all as separate languages.

The Registration Authority agrees with the the proposed name change, to use the indigenous name to identify the language (now also coming into wider use in English), rather than a pejorative exonym. However, considering that name “Tlapanec” is still far more widely used, in comparison with the name “Me'phaa”, throughout the literature, in reference tools and resources, and generally on the Internet, it would be unhelpful to remove it altogether from the standard. In view of its pejorative nature, it is no longer used as the Reference Name. While the reference name is not intended to have any special status in comparison with other names used in the standard with a given code element (it is intended for convenience of users of the downloadable code tables), and therefore is not generally changed if the specific name form is retained, it is the intention of the Registration Authority to avoid use of pejorative names as reference names. Therefore, the name of the existing code element will be updated accordingly, even though the split is not approved.