ISO 639-3 Registration Authority

Request for Change to ISO 639-3 Language Code

Change Request Number: 2011-111 (completed by Registration authority)

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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 and will be posted on the ISO 639-3 website.

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 (duplicate or non-existent)
4. □ Expand the denotation of a code element through the merging one or more language code elements into it (retiring the latter group of code elements)
5. ☒ Split a language code element into two or more new code elements
6. □ 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: NLN

Associated reference name: Nahuatl, Durango
1. Modify an existing language code element

(a) What are you proposing to change:
- [ ] Language reference name; generally this is changed only if it is erroneous;
  if usage is shifting to a new preferred form, the new form may be added (next box)
- [ ] Language additional names
- [ ] Language type (living, extinct, historical, etc.)
- [ ] Language scope (individual language or macrolanguage)

(b) What new value(s) do you propose:

(c) Rationale for change:

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.

(b) If equivalent with another code element, with which ISO 639-3 code element (identifier and name) is it equivalent:

(c) Rationale for change:

4. Expand the denotation of a code element through merging of one or more code elements

(a) List the languages (identifier and name) to be merged into this code element and retired from use:

(b) Rationale for change
5. Split a language code element into two or more code elements

(a) List the languages into which this code element should be split:
(1) Nahuatl, Eastern Durango; and (2) Nahuatl, Western Durango-Nayarit

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:

Based on phonological, grammatical, and lexical differences (see attached documentation), there are two linguistic variants in this language which make it difficult to convert materials in one variant directly to the other. When speakers of the two variants try to communicate in their language, they have so much trouble understanding each other that they usually use Spanish instead. Furthermore, there are several words that appear to be the same in the two variants that show significant semantic shift. There is approximately 85% comprehension between the two variants, which makes the speakers think they should be able to communicate in their language, but in fact they usually find it impossible. This has been confirmed by linguistic and sociolinguistic studies (see bibliography).

In the cultural realm, the Eastern variant has conserved more of their traditional beliefs than has the Western variant, where only some very elderly speakers still know them. Another factor has been the invasion of the Eastern variant by migrating speakers of Southeastern Tepehuan (stp), causing cultural and linguistic changes. In the Western variant, there are fewer such influences, especially in the communities in Durango State (San Agustin de Buenaventura, Curachitos de Buenavista, San Diego, Tepetates II (Berenjenas), Alacranes and Tepalcates). Except for Tepalcates, all these communities still use the language in all aspects of daily life, probably because there are few other linguistic influences in their isolated area. They even use Nahuatl when they talk on their "walkie talkies." Thus this area can be considered the heart of the ethnic group, because there the language and culture are preserved.

There are, however, some trends toward moderization that threatened their cultural identity.
In Nayarit State, the same Western variant is spoken in four places (Santa Cruz, La Laguna, Mesa de las Arpas, and El Duraznito). The language is more threatened there, since these four communities have fewer speakers and are surrounded by large communities of Cora and Huichol speakers. This has caused the loss of the language in some parts to the extent that symptoms of language death are evident. In the schools of these four communities, Nayarit State has created a program to promote the use of the language, including training teachers in the language and in positive attitudes toward it, but in the homes it is often not spoken by the children, although they still understand it. The older traditional authorities also favor the creation of materials to promote the use of the language.

(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.

As can be seen from the bibliography, the Durango Nahuatl language has been documented historically, culturally, and linguistically for various authors, but the body of literature is still not extensive. I (Dr. Castro) have specialized in the linguistic analysis of this language for over twenty years, both synchronically and diachronically.

Diachronically speaking, I have discovered that both variants share a common development from the "Aztec of Sierra Madre Occidental", which is confirmed by studies dating back to the colonial period such as the grammar of Fray Juan Guerra (1692). In more recent times there is the extensive collection of text by Konrad T. Preuss (1907) from the Eastern variant (San Pedro Jicora). These texts show evidence of a large vocabulary in the language. Unfortunately, there are no corresponding studies of the Western variant from that same period, although historical documents do mention that Nahuatl was spoken in San Agustín de Buenaventura, Durango, and Santa Cruz, Nayarit.

From 1968 to 1972, Dr. Elsa Ziehm carried out a revision of Preuss's texts on numerous visits to San Pedro Jicora. She also produced a grammar and a lexicon that, although they remain unpublished, allowed me to make a comparison of linguistic changes to the language up to that time. Later I did a diachronic study of the works of Guerra, Preuss and Ziehm and added to them my own field data from 1990 to 1995, which further demonstrated the changes at various levels. My work was the first that ordered the phonetic and phonological data according to modern standards of descriptive linguists. Since Ziehm was an ethnomusicologist, she views the data primarily from that viewpoint; and Preuss, an anthropologist, was more interested in documenting five literary genres in the narratives he collected. Thus the Eastern variant of San Pedro Jicora and its "anexos" has been documented by extensive materials from different periods of history.

This is not the case, though, for the Western variant of San Agustín Buenaventura, Durango, and Santa Cruz, Nayarit. For example, in 1998 I reviewed about 970 verb paradigms taken from Preuss's and Ziehm's materials in San Pedro Jicora, of which 910 were recognized by current speakers of that variant. When these same verbs were shown to speakers from San Agustín Buenaventura and Santa Cruz, about 850 were recognized by speakers over 50 years old, but a great many of them appear to be archaic forms that have been replaced by others in that variant. Later I compared phonological, grammatical, and lexical data from the two variants by referring to Una Canger's (2001) work on "Nahuatl..."
Western” in San Agustín de Buenaventura Durango.

The evidence of linguistic change that best confirms the decision to consider the Eastern and Western variants as separate languages is found in the documentation of everyday use of the language. I have worked for many years with several bilingual (i.e. they speak one variant of Durango Nahuatl as well as Spanish) teachers from both areas. During the process of phonological analysis to determine a practical alphabet, I was able to observe clearly the differences between the two variants. Later, in various courses I taught these teachers about the grammar of their language and in the development of exercises for these courses, the grammatical differences between them became clear to me. Then, as I helped the teachers develop teaching materials and spelling rules in their language, we were constantly faced with lexical differences, too. In all our work sessions, each teacher always spoke his or her variant with other from the same area, but when we talked as a group we always had to resort to Spanish in order to understand each other clearly.

We have had to work with the two languages as if they were "dialectal variants" because of pressure from the local Department of Education, whose plans only included developing materials in one Durango Nahuatl language. The result was a loss of effectiveness because each book had to have a large number of footnotes to document the many words that are not known to speakers of one variant so the materials could be understood, and supposedly learned, by speakers of the other. The teachers who are transferred from the Eastern variant to the Western variant usually teach in Spanish, because they have been criticized by speakers of the other variant of not speaking their language correctly.

This is strong evidence of the existence of two related languages that have diverged significantly from each other over time. If we add to this the different influences from other language in each area (see above), it appears that we have sufficient evidence from both linguistic and sociolinguist aspects that, despite the high percentage of interintelligibility, these variants should no longer be considered the same language.

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.

6. 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:
I (Dr. Castro) began my research in the Durango Nahuaatl area in April, 1990. At first it was only a suspicion that there might be significant differences between the eastern and western communities (see above). But after many years of work on the analysis, teaching the grammar to teachers who were speakers, and helping them develop written materials in their language, I have been able to compile a large quantity of linguistic documentation at three levels (phonology, grammar, and lexicon) that they are, in fact, two languages. This conclusion has been confirmed by several personal visits to different communities in the region, where I was able to observe the use of the language in different areas. I am now convinced that we must consider Durango Nahuaatl as two languages, Eastern and Western.

(b) Knowledge through personal communication. Describe:
I (Dr. Castro) know of several cases where speakers of one variant worked for an extended period of time among speakers of the other variant. They have always expressed their surprise that they had to "learn the differences" between their own variant and the other one in order to communicate effectively. This type of personal experience by native speakers demonstrates that these variants are actually related languages, like Spanish and Portuguese.

Another experience I have heard of is that when radio programs broadcast songs, announcements and messages in the language, the speakers of the Eastern variant complain that they can't understand it because it is in the Western variant, and vice versa.

(c) Knowledge from published sources (please give complete bibliographical references):

A.H. G. E. D. 1806/07. Expediente y Mapa de los terrenos correspondientes a los pueblos de la Jurisdiccion de San Francisco del Mesquital. En el Archivo Histórico del Gobierno del estado de Durango, 1802/1803 [s/c].
BOLETÍN DEL ARCHIVO GENERAL DE LA NACIÓN 1938 "Las tropas de indios flecheros


CASTRO, Margarita, et. al. 2004, Las normas para la escritura de la lengua Meshikan (mexicanera), 2ª versión, Manuscrito inédito.


CORTÉS Y ZEDEÑO, Gerónimo Thomas de Aquino. 1765. Arte, vocabulario y confessionario en el idioma mexicano, como se usa en el Obispado de Guadalaxara. Imprenta del Colegio Real de San Ignacio de la Puebla de los Angeles.

CUEVAS, Bertha y José Luis Reyes. 1994. Estudios de base, una introducción a la vida social y cultural de los mexicaneros y tepehuanes de San Pedro Jicora, municipio del Mezquital, Durango. Durango, Durango: Instituto Nacional Indigenista.


GUERRA, Juan, fray. 1900. Arte de la lengua mexicana que fue usual entre los indios del obispado de Guadalajara y parte de los de Durango y Michoacan. Santoscoy. Guadalajara, Ancira y Hno. (1692).


I.N.A.L.I. 2010. Catálogo de las lenguas indígenas nacionales: Variantes lingüísticas de...
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) rejected as a whole; or 4) amended and resubmitted for the next review cycle. 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: