ISO 639-3 Registration Authority
Request for New Language Code Element in ISO 639-3

This form is to be used in conjunction with a “Request for Change to ISO 639-3 Language Code” form

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Associated Change request number : 2012-148 (completed by Registration Authority)
Tentative assignment of new identifier : bxy (completed by Registration Authority)

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. Use Shift-Enter to insert a new line in a form field (where allowed).

1. NAMES and IDENTIFICATION

   a) Preferred name of language for code element denotation:
      Bengali Sign Language

   b) Autonym (self-name) for this language:
      Bengali Sign Language

   c) Common alternate names and spellings of language, and any established abbreviations:
      Several current names given to the language are the two dialect names and other names associated with the two dialects of this language include: Bangla Sign Language (Centre for Disability in Development, 2002; Bangladesh), Bangladeshi Sign Language (Begum and Hasanuzzaman 2009), West Bengali Sign Language (Johnson and Johnson, work in progress), and Kolkata Sign Language (personal communication with the deaf).

   d) Reason for preferred name:
      Bangladesh people and West Bengal people both consider themselves Bengali. The language originated in the Providence of Bengal prior to the partition of India in 1947. Therefore, the most appropriate name that includes all signers of this language would be the Bengali Sign Language.

   e) Name and approximate population of ethnic group or community who use this language (complete individual language currently in use):
      The Bengali Deaf is a subset of the Bengali people group in West Bengal India and Bangladesh with some spillage into neighboring states. During India's partition in 1947, Hindus moved from the eastern region (now Bangladesh) to the western region (now West Bengal, India) and Muslims moved from the western region to the eastern region. This separated the Deaf into the West Bengal Deaf and the Bangladeshi Deaf. The population of Deaf whose education would benefit attending a school for deaf children over a school for hearing children, or being part of the Deaf community and learning the sign language (includes ~9% of the Deaf with moderate hearing loss (>40 dB) and all the Deaf with severe or higher hearing loss), is ~1.50 million in Bangladesh and ~0.34 million in West Bengal in 2012 (Johnson and Johnson, work in progress). However, the majority of these
Deaf have not attended school (99.5% in Bangladesh; 97% in West Bengal) and/or have not become a part of the Deaf community (89% in West Bengal and 97% in Bangladesh), thus not learned the sign language. Consequently, only 38,000 Deaf in West Bengal and 40,000 Deaf in Bangladesh for a total of 78,000 Deaf use Bengali Sign Language. Currently the number of fluent hearing signers is most likely less than 100 in both West Bengal and Bangladesh combined.

f) Preferred three letter identifier, if available: bes

Your suggestion will be taken into account, but the Registration Authority will determine the identifier to be proposed. The identifiers is not intended to be an abbreviation for a name of the language, but to serve as a device to identify a given language uniquely. With thousands of languages, many sets of which have similar names, it is not possible to provide identifiers that resemble a language name in every case.

2. TEMPORAL DESCRIPTION and LOCATION

a) Is this a ☒ Living language

☐ Nearly extinct/secondary use only (includes languages in revival)

☐ Recently extinct language

☐ Historical language

☐ Ancient language

☐ Artificially constructed language

☐ Macrolanguage

(Select one. See explanations of these types at http://www.sil.org/iso639-2D3/types.asp)

For individual languages, also complete:

b) Countries where used:
   India and Bangladesh

c) Region within each country: towns, districts, states or provinces where used. Include GPS coordinates of the approximate center of the language, if possible:
   West Bengal, India and possible use in neighboring states of Bihar, Orissa, Assam, and Jharkand and most of Bangladesh (extent not yet assessed); place of origin is Kolkata, India (Latitude: 22.57° North, Longitude: 88.37° East)

d) For an ancient or historical language, give approximate time frame; for a recently extinct language, give the approximate date of the last known user’s death

3. MODALITY AND LINGUISTIC AFFILIATION

a) This language is: ☒ Signed ☐ Spoken ☐ Attested only in writings

b) Language family, if classified; origin, if artificially constructed:
c) Closest language linguistically. For a Macrolanguage, list the individual languages (adopted and/or proposed) to be included in its group. For signed language, note influence from other signed or spoken languages:
The Bengali Sign Language originated from the Kolkata Deaf and Dumb School before the partition of India and East Bengal in 1947 (now Bangladesh). Since then, language shift has occurred independently between the two regions and now would be considered to be similar dialects; West Bengal Sign Language in West Bengal, India and Bangla Sign Language in Bangladesh. The closest language linguistically is the Indian Sign Language (ISL) which has developed as a language of broader communication throughout most of India, wherein signs were borrowed from local and regional signed languages. Preliminary results of a study of overlapping vocabulary used between West Bengal Deaf and Delhi Deaf (Delhi dialect of ISL) shows ~10 to 30% of the West Bengal Deaf signers use non-iconic words of the Delhi dialect of ISL (Johnson and Johnson, work in progress).

4. LANGUAGE DEVELOPMENT AND USE

a) What written literature, inscriptions or recordings exist in this language? Are there newspapers, radio or television broadcasts, etc.?:
Written literature: two dictionaries: Bangladesh Sign Language Committee eds.(1994), and Centre for Disability in Development (2000)
Recordings: no audio recordings; Video: Sign Supported Bangla (Centre for Disability in Development. 2000), DVDs of the West Bengal Sign Language used for West Bengal Sign Language acquisition
Newspapers: Not Applicable; Radio: Not Applicable; Television: unknown

b) Is this language officially recognized by any level of government? Is it used in any levels of formal education as a language of instruction (for other subjects)? Is it taught in schools?:
The Indian Government has not recognized the Bengali Sign Language or West Bengal Sign Language dialect. Government officials who are aware of the language think it is either gesture or the wider-used Indian Sign Language. No formal education at any level uses the West Bengal Sign Language and it is not taught in any schools. Some teachers at one school have used some American Sign Language. Some teachers may use some basic Indian Sign Language while a few others have learned some West Bengal signs from the students and use them.
In Bangladesh, the government officially recognized the Bangla Sign Language (dialect of Bangali Sign Language) as a language in 2009 (Chowdhury 2012). Several schools for the Deaf in Bangladesh claim to use total communication including the Bangla Sign Language dialect.

c) Comment on factors of ethnolinguistic identity and informal domains of use:
Deaf occur in all ethnic and religious groups in West Bengal and Bangladesh. The two dialects of Bengali Sign Language are used in all informal domains among Deaf. Much of the language shift and strong identity with either the West Bengal Sign Language or the Bangal Sign Language dialects reflect the different religious cultures in West Bengal, India and Bangladesh; namely Hinduism and Islam respectively.
SOURCES OF INFORMATION

You do not need to repeat sources previously identified in the form, “Request for Change to ISO 639-3 Language Code”

a) First-hand knowledge. Describe:
   My wife and I surveyed the Deaf and the sign language varieties in several cities across India including Kolkata from 2000 to 2002 and published our survey report in 2008 (Johnson and Johnson 2008). We have worked with the Deaf in Kolkata from 2005 to the present. During that time, we have been meeting with Deaf, learning the West Bengal Sign Language, working on documenting the sign language, and assisted with sign language survey data analysis from Dhaka, Bangladesh and Tamil Nadu, India.

b) Knowledge through personal communication. Describe:
   We have had discussions with workers among the Deaf in Kolkata, Kerala, and Tamil Nadu, India and Dhaka, Bangladesh as well as firsthand interaction with Deaf in Kolkata and a few Deaf immigrants from Bangladesh in India.

c) Knowledge from published sources. Include known dictionaries, grammars, etc. (please give complete bibliographical references):
   3. Centre for Disability in Development. 2000. Sign Supported Bangla (6 books, 2 CDs), Centre for Disability in Development, Dhaka

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
Email: iso639-3@sil.org
An email attachment of this completed form is preferred.

Further information:
If your request for a new language code element is supported by the Registration Authority as a formal proposal, you may be contacted separately by researchers working with the Ethnologue or with LinguistList asking you to provide additional information.

**Sources of documentation for ISO 639-3 identifiers:**


LinguistList. Constructed Languages. [http://linguistlist.org/forms/langs/GetListOfConstructedLgs.html](http://linguistlist.org/forms/langs/GetListOfConstructedLgs.html)