ISO 639-3 Registration Authority

Request for Change to ISO 639-3 Language Code

Change Request Number: 2014-010 (completed by Registration authority)

Date: 2014-1-31
Primary Person submitting request: J. Albert Bickford
Affiliation: SIL International
E-mail address: linguistic underscore services underscore gslt at sil dot org
Names, affiliations and email addresses of additional supporters of this request:
Bernard Spolsky, Bar-Ilan University (emeritus), Israel
bspolsky at gmail dot com

Postal address for primary contact person for this request (in general, email correspondence will be used):
SIL
16131 N. Vernon Dr.
Tucson AZ 85739-9395

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: yds
Associated reference name: Yiddish Sign Language
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:
Dr. Bernard Spolsky has investigated this language thoroughly and has found no evidence that it ever existed. He has posted the following information on a website (http://www.jewish-languages.org/yiddish-sign-language.html):

(d) Ethnologue (2013 edition) states: "Yiddish Sign Language – a language of Israel. ISO 639-3: yds. Language status: 6a (vigorous). Classification: Deaf sign language. Apparently distinct from Israeli Sign Language." There are a number of questions about this entry, and indeed Wikipedia consider YSL a "spurious" language. There are no published descriptions or detailed attestations of its existence, although there may have been local varieties in pre-Holocaust East Europe especially in schools for the Deaf. There are however signs for Jewish concepts added to American and British Sign Language.
(e) The origin of the entry, as reported by Charles Fennig, the current Managing Editor of Ethnologue, was a footnote in the preface of Oliver Sacks’ 1990 book, Seeing Voices. But Sacks’ assistant now says they cannot recall how they came up with the reference, and will probably drop it in future editions.

(f) Experts in Sign Language have not heard of YSL. Wendy Sandler, Professor of Linguistics at the University of Haifa and Founding Director of the Sign Language Research Lab there, points out that Sign Languages are not connected to a language but to a place. Among Haredim, she notes, there is sometimes a stigma about deafness, so that children or adults may not have an opportunity to form a community and create a separate language. Nancy Brunlehrman, founder of the US based Jewish Deaf Resource Center, knows of no such variety, but notes that American Sign Language includes some signs for words like Shabbat. Bram Weiser, who interprets Rosh Hashanah services into ASL, also has not heard of it. Adele Kronick Shuart, in a 1986 book that lists many signs for Jewish religious concepts in ASL (Signs in Judaism: A Resource Book for the Jewish Deaf Community), writes that “There is no Jewish Sign Language as there is no English Sign Language.”

(g) Bencie Woll, Director of the Deafness Cognition and Language Research Centre at University College London, agrees that there could not be one Yiddish Sign Language. She believes that there may have been Jewish variants of American Sign Language and British Sign Language, marked by additional lexical items, especially when there were special schools for Jewish deaf children. There was a school in Cracow, the Yiddishe Toib Shtim Shule, where the pupils probably used a Sign Language amongst themselves (even though the school officially used spoken Yiddish). Mark Zaurov, a Deaf historian studying the experiences of Jewish Deaf in the Holocaust, found mentions of several Deaf Jewish schools where many children spoke Yiddish; they may have had a local sign language. In a biography of her father, Eleanor Dunai (Surviving in Silence, Gallaudet University Press, 2002) reports that he attended a school for the Deaf in Budapest in 1940 where children were taught oral speech and forbidden to sign in class, but did sign outside class, albeit without a unified system. A Jewish school started in London in 1865 used manualism, but soon switched to oralism, influenced by the policy of the Rotterdam School for the Deaf, which had many Jewish pupils. There may have been distinctive sign languages used by Deaf communities in Eastern Europe before the war. But a distinct unified Yiddish Sign Language is unattested and unlikely."

(h) (end of Spolsky quote from website)

(i) Therefore, the code element yds should be retired.

(j) As background information: Yiddish Sign Language became part of the original ISO 639-3 code set because of its inclusion in prior editions of Ethnologue; the entry for YSL dates back at least as far as the 13th edition (1996). Based on Spolsky's evidence, Ethnologue has now changed the status of this language to "unattested".

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

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.

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:

(b) Knowledge through personal communication. Describe:
   see Spolsky’s notes, above

(c) Knowledge from published sources (please give complete bibliographical references):
   see Spolsky’s notes, above

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 may be 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:

Request for Change to ISO 639-3 Language Code, page 6