ISO 639-3 Registration Authority

Request for Change to ISO 639-3 Language Code

Change Request Number: 2016-001 (completed by Registration authority)
Date: 9-9-2015
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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 (include here a request for a new code element for a divergent dialect of a major language)
6. [x] 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: btg, dic
Associated reference name:

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 (what evidence do you have that the earlier name was erroneous or offensive, or that the new name should also be included): Guébie is not mutually intelligible with either Dida-Lakota nor with Bete-Gagnoa. I know this from my experience of two summers in Guébie villages and the surrounding areas.

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, or the major language and the divergent variety (or varieties) for which a new code element is being requested:
I propose that Guébie be removed as a dialect of Bete-Gagnoa and as an alternative name for Dida-Lakota. Bete-Gagnoa [btw] should not list Guébie as a dialect; the two are only distantly related. Dida-Lakota [dic] should not list Guébie as an alternative name for the language, as the two are not mutually intelligible. Guébie is not mutually intelligible with either Dida-Lakota nor with Bete-Gagnoa. I know this from my experience of two summers in Guébie villages and the surrounding areas.

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, or for requesting a separate identifier for the divergent variety:

Guébie should be listed as a distinct language with its own ISO code, as distinct from both Bete-Gagnoa and Dida-Lakota (it is currently listed under both). Guébie is not mutually intelligible with either Bete-Gagnoa nor Dida-Lakota. There are significant lexical, phonological, and syntactic differences which lead to this lack of mutual intelligibility. There is much morphosyntactic evidence to support the claim that Guébie is a Dida language, but the fact that it is not mutually intelligible with Dida-Lakota should be enough to warrant legitimacy as a distinct language. Guébie has no written tradition and no orthography to compare with the surrounding languages. Guébie people have a distinct ethnolinguistic identity from the surrounding languages. Guébie people have their own set of myths, distinct form Dida-Lakota or Bete-Gagnoa, and their own style of song. The people consider themselves to be of a distinct ethnicity and linguistic group from both Dida-Lakota and Bete-Gagnoa.
(c) Does the existing language code element 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.? Please comment.

The only context in which a Guébie might identify as either Bete-Gagnoa or Dida-Lakota is when speaking to someone with little knowledge about the linguistic diversity of the Gagnoa and Sud-Banama prefectures in Côte d’Ivoire. Because Gagnoa and Lakota are the largest cities near Guébie-speaking villages, and outsiders are more likely to have heard of Gagnoa or Lakota and the languages spoken there than of Gnagbodougnoa or Gnamagnoa and the Guébie language, a Guébie speaker might say they speak Bete or Dida for simplicity and understanding on the part of the addressee. I have seen Guébie speakers do just that, and upon probing them about why, they claimed that not many people have heard of Guébie, but most Ivoirians know about Bete (or Dida).

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, provided that sufficient information on the rationale is given in (b) above.

In the case of a minority language that has been considered in some contexts to be a dialect of a major language, yet is divergent enough to be unintelligible to speakers of the standard variety of the major language, it may be more beneficial for the users of the ISO 639-3 and 639-2 code sets to create a new code element for the divergent language variety without splitting the existing code element of the major language. The ISO 639-3 Registration Authority may make this determination when considering a request involving a major language and a highly distinct “dialect.” If such a course is followed, the rationale for the decision will be published in a comment by the Registration Authority on approval of the requested addition for the divergent variety.

6. Create a new language code element

(a) Name of missing language: __ Gabogbo or Guébie ______________________________

(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: There are significant lexical, phonological, and syntactic differences which lead to this lack of mutual intelligibility. There is much morphosyntactic evidence to support the claim that Guébie is a Dida language, but the fact that it is not mutually intelligible with Dida-Lakota should be enough to warrant legitimacy as a distinct language. Guébie is not mutually intelligible nor does it share an ethnolinguistic tradition with Bete-Gagnoa nor Dida-Lakota.

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.
I have spent two summers (2014 and 2015) carrying out linguistic fieldwork in Gnagbodougnoua and Gnamagnoa, Côte d'Ivoire with Guébie speaking communities. It has become evident that despite the current Ethnologue classifications of Guébie, the language is not mutually intelligible with either Dida-Lakota or Bete-Gagnoa. Some speakers of Guébie also speak Dida-Lakota due to exogamy practices, but the two are phonologically and syntactically very different. I don't know any Guébie speakers that can understand Bete-Gagnoa; in fact, they are part of two totally distinct language clusters.

There are no extant linguistic resources on Guébie. Working from word lists in Kaye et al (1982), Marchese 1979, and a dictionary of Bete-Daloa (Zogbo 2005) to elicit the same words in Guébie during my own fieldwork, it became evident that Guébie lexical items show significant differences from other geographically nearby languages; not only differences that have arisen through sound change, but many lexical items from published word lists of nearby languages do not have cognates in Guébie. An initial description in Gnahore’s MA thesis (2006) also shows significant differences between Guébie and neighboring Kru languages.


Sande, Hannah Leigh. 2016. Contrast maintenance and neutralization in Guébie morphophonology* Presentation to ACAL.