ISO 639-3 Registration Authority

Request for Change to ISO 639-3 Language Code

Change Request Number: 2016-018 (completed by Registration authority)

Date: 2016-3-4
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P.O.Box 60368, Dar es Salaam, Tanzania

Do not be concerned about your responses causing the form text spacing or pagination to change. Use Shift-Enter to insert a new line in a form field (where allowed)

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) retire a code element from use, including merging its scope of denotation into that of another code element, 3) split an existing code element into two or more separate language code elements, or 4) create a new code element. Fill out section 1, 2, 3, or 4 below as appropriate, plus section 5 to document 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.

For changes of type 1, 2 or 3 (proposing a change to an existing code), please identify:

Affected ISO 639-3 identifier:

Associated reference name:

1. Modify an existing language code element

(a) What are you proposing to change:
   - [ ] Language name
   - [ ] 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. 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.
- This is a variety that is fully intelligible with another ISO 639-3 language and should be merged with it.

(b) If one of the latter two reasons, with which ISO 639-3 code element (identifier and name) should it be merged:

(c) Rationale for change:

3. 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:
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.

4. Create a new language code element

(a) Name of missing language: Thur

(b) State the case that this language is not the same as any language that already has an identifier in ISO 639-3:

Until the 17th edition of the Ethnologue Thur was listed as a dialect of Acholi under the name of Labwor with a comment that Ruhlen (1987) lists it as separate language from Acholi. (Since the 17th edition it doesn’t appear anymore neither in the list of languages nor as a dialect.) Labwor is the xenonym given to the Thur people by other people groups in Uganda. In 1995 the Thur were formally recognised by the Ugandan government and their people group name (Ethur) placed in the national constitution. In 2007 the Ugandan government started "Thematic Curriculum” primary schools which promote the use of local languages in lower primary school classes (P1 to P3). This has been implemented also in Abim district, the area of the Thur language. In the literature there is some controversy as to the status of Thur/Labwor and as to how it best fits into the classification of the Southern Luo languages branch of the Western Nilotic languages. A short synopsis of the discussion can be found in the introduction of Bernd Heine and Christa König’s grammar sketch of Thur/Labwor (Heine, Bernd and Christa König (2010) The Labwor Language of North-eastern Uganda. A grammatical Sketch. Tokyo: ILCAA: 10-11). Bernd Heine and Christa Koenig indicate this controversy as their motivation for field work which resulted in their sketch grammar. They conclude that, even though there is a great similarity with Acholi, “there are both linguistic and sociolinguistic reasons to consider Labwor as a distinct language.” (Heine, Bernd and Christa König 2010:12) In 2013 we (the Language Assessment team of SIL-UTB) went on a language assessment trip to help decide whether or not to continue the language programme. This trip confirmed the distinctiveness of Thur and Acholi. We found that the Thur are proud of their language and culture. We were also told that all the surrounding people groups, including the Acholi, up until recently have often been hostile towards the Thur. Pastors and a Catholic priest told us that for church services in Thur where the Thur use the Acholi New Testament for scripture readings, they either translate the passage from Acholi to Thur "on the fly" during the service or they translate the passage the day before so that everybody can understand.

During the survey we tested comprehension of Acholi with Thur speakers and found that from 11 statements in a story only 8 were repeated correctly (in a group of Thur speakers). We took phrase/word lists and calculated the similarity of the varieties. Using one comparison method the similarity between Acholi and Thur is 80%-82% (depending on village); using another it is only 71%. There is not one single number/percentage
5. 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:

(c) Knowledge from published sources (please give complete bibliographical references):
Ruhlen (1987) lists Thur as separate language from Acholi (calling it Labwor). Also:

The change proposal process

A request to change the code set goes through a five 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 deemed to be sufficiently 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 appropriate discussion lists (those which express in their statement of purpose an interest in the language or language family in focus in the proposal, inviting individuals to review and comment on the proposal. The source of list information is the LinguistList Mailing List index, http://cf.linguistlist.org/cfdocs/new-website/LL-WorkingDirs/lists/index.html. Responses are sent to the ISO 639-3 registrar for compilation. The concensus of 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.
4. 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 LINGUIST, http://linguistlist.org/issues/index.html, and other general language and linguistics discussion lists, as well as lists relating to specific languages or language families. All change requests are then open to further review and comment by any interested party for a period of three months.

5. 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) amended and resubmitted for the next review cycle, or 4) withdrawn from consideration. 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: