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

Date: 2016-3-12

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Names, affiliations and email addresses of additional supporters of this request:

Associated Change request number : 2016-023 (completed by Registration Authority)
Tentative assignment of new identifier : cew (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:
   Chichewa (Individual language)

b) Autonym (self-name) for this language:
   Chichewa

c) Common alternate names and spellings of language, and any established abbreviations:
   Cewa/Cicewa (Zambian orthography), Nyanja/Cinyanja/Chinyanja, Standard Nyanja or Deep Nyanja (when distinguishing it from Town Nyanja in Zambia)

d) Reason for preferred name:
   This new code request is to support the elevating of Nyanja (nya) to macrolanguage status, encompassing the traditional standard form of the language (spoken in Malawi and neighbouring districts of eastern Zambia), which is the subject of this new code request, and Town Nyanja (spoken in Lusaka and some other Zambian towns), for which a separate new code request has been submitted. The Malawian form of the language has been officially known (by Malawian government decree) since 1968 as Chewa/Chichewa. In Zambia, where the name Nyanja is officially preferred, 'Chewa' is often used informally to describe the traditional form of the language (the Malawian form) in order to distinguish it from the 'Town Nyanja' from which this code is being split. Town Nyanja, by contrast, is never referred to as Chewa. A macrolanguage 'Nyanja' encompassing 'Chewa' (spoken in Malawi and as a traditional from in Zambia) and 'Town Nyanja' (the urban Zambian form) would thus be clear and consistent with previous naming practices from both the Malawian and Zambian point of view.

e) Name and approximate population of ethnic group or community who use this language (complete individual language currently in use):
   National language in Malawi, with 7,000,000 speakers. Also spoken in neighbouring areas of Mozambique (500,000 speakers), Zimbabwe (330,000) and Zambia (1,200,000). These are based on published estimates although I have reduced the Zambian one by ~1,000,000 to reflect the number of Zambian speakers who are fluent only in Town Nyanja,
not Chewa, which are lumped together in previous speaker population estimates. This number is a personal estimate reflecting the fact that a majority of the population of Lusaka (pop 1.7 million) speak Town Nyanja and only a small minority (those with ethnic links to Eastern Province) also speak Chewa. I know of no census or survey data that distinguishes Town Nyanja and Chewa speakers.

f) Preferred three letter identifier, if available: cew

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:
   Malawi, Zambia, Mozambique, Zimbabwe

c) Region within each country: towns, districts, states or provinces where used. Include GPS coordinates of the approximate center of the language, if possible:
   In Zambia, spoken only in Eastern Province. See existing published descriptions for distribution elsewhere.

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:
      as for standard Nyanja

   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:
standard Nyanja

4. LANGUAGE DEVELOPMENT AND USE

a) What written literature, inscriptions or recordings exist in this language? Are there newspapers, radio or television broadcasts, etc.?:
Town Nyanja is widely used in popular culture (songs etc), and on social media. It is seldom explicitly distinguished from standard Nyanja in these contexts but users are conscious of the difference. iSchool Zambia, which produces tablets pre-loaded with learning materials for schools, has produced interactive learning materials covering Grades 1-3 of the Zambian primary school curriculum in Town Nyanja, separately from standard Nyanja. Various NGOs translating awareness materials have produced specific Town Nyanja versions. Large parts of the forthcoming documentary film The Colours of the Alphabet (2016), which explores language barriers in a rural classroom a short distance from Lusaka, are in Town Nyanja (though it is not explicitly identified as such) with English subtitles.

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?:
Government officially recognises only standard Nyanja. Schools in Lusaka province teach 'vernacular' literacy classes in standard Nyanja but informally use Town Nyanja as a medium of instruction.

c) Comment on factors of ethnolinguistic identity and informal domains of use:
Town Nyanja serves a lingua franca among all tribal groups (Nyanja, Bemba, Lozi, Tonga, etc) in southern Zambia in a variety of informal domains. (In the north of Zambia, Bemba is the main lingua franca, while in formal domains it is English, Zambia's national language.)
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:

b) Knowledge through personal communication. Describe:

c) Knowledge from published sources. Include known dictionaries, grammars, etc. (please give complete bibliographical references):

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: