

# 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: 2016-8-22

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

Associated Change request number : 2016-031

(completed by Registration Authority)

Tentative assignment of new identifier : wbs

(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:  
West Bengal Sign Language
- b) Autonym (self-name) for this language:  
W.B. Sign Language
- c) Common alternate names and spellings of language, and any established abbreviations:  
Kolkata Sign Language (personal communication with the deaf)
- d) Reason for preferred name:  
Name more commonly used by Deaf of West Bengal.
- e) Name and approximate population of ethnic group or community who use this language (complete individual language currently in use):  
In 2016, the West Bengal Deaf population for moderate to complete hearing loss ranges from 1.2 million (based on 9 deaf per 1000 people in the 1981 India census (Government of India, Ministry of Social Welfare 1981), the 2011 Indian census (Chandrmouli 2011), and 7.79% annual growth rate in West Bengal (Office of the Registrar General & Census Commissioner 2011) to 1.7 million (based on the ratio of the number of Deaf to the population by Vasishta in Mani et al., 2001, the 2011 Indian census and 7.79% annual growth rate in West Bengal. Roughly 37 % (0.4 to 0.6 million) given the opportunity could learn and use the West bengal Sign Language. Approximatley 37,000 to 197,000 Deaf currently use the West Bengal Sign Language (based on data above and an estimated 11% (based on the percentage of the deaf in domains where sign language is acquired: schools for the Deaf, Deaf associations and gathering points, and children born with other deaf family members) of the Deaf who have learned the sign language.).
- f) Preferred three letter identifier, if available: WBS

Your suggestion will be taken into account, but the Registration Authority will determine the identifier to be proposed. The identifier 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
- |                                     |   |
|-------------------------------------|---|
| <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> | Living language   |
| <input type="checkbox"/>            | Nearly extinct/secondary use only (includes languages in revival) |
| <input type="checkbox"/>            | Recently extinct language   |
| <input type="checkbox"/>            | Historical language   |
| <input type="checkbox"/>            | Ancient language  |
| <input type="checkbox"/>            | Artificially constructed language                                 |
| <input type="checkbox"/>            | 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
- 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 (state); place of origin is Kolkata (Latitude: 22.57° North, Longitude: 88.37° East). Possible use in neighboring states of Bihar, Orissa, Assam, and Jharkand.
- 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 Bangla Sign Language (Bangladesh) 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 would now be considered to be similar dialects. However, because of strong religious separation and political boundary between the two regions, we suggest the two signed languages be considered separate languages (Johnson and Johnson 2016).

#### 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: A printed dictionary of the Calcutta Sign language variety (Vasishta, et al. 1987), and two dictionaries of the Bengali/Bangla Sign Language (Bangladesh Sign Language Committee eds.1994, and Centre for Disability in Development 2000)

Recordings: ~60 hours of videotaping of Kolkata Deaf signing, We are currently working on a dictionary of the West Bengal Sign language

Newspapers: none Radio or television: none

- 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?:

West Bengal Sign Language is not recognized by the Indian Government or any government agency, 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 the schools. Some teachers at one school have used a little 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.

- c) Comment on factors of ethnolinguistic identity and informal domains of use:

Deaf occur in all ethnic and religious groups in West Bengal. The West Bengal Sign Language is used in all informal and formal domains among Deaf from West Bengal.

## 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 this time, we have been meeting with Deaf and learning the West Bengal Sign Language. We published a paper on the West Bengal Sign language in Sign Language Studies this summer, and are currently working on a dictionary of the West Bengal Sign Language.

b) Knowledge through personal communication. Describe:

We have had discussions with workers among the Deaf in Kolkata, Delhi, 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):

1. Bangladesh Sign Language Committee eds. 1994. Bengali sign language dictionary. Sutrapur, Dhaka: National Centre for Special Education, Ministry of Social Welfare.
2. Centre for Disability in Development. 2000. Sign Supported Bangla (6 books, 2 CDs), Centre for Disability in Development, Dhaka.
3. Chandrmouli, C. 2011. Census of India 2011, Provisional Population Totals, Paper 1 Of 2011, India Series 1. Office of the Registrar General & Census Commission, New Delhi, India, 13p., [http://www.censusindia.gov.in/2011-prov-results/data\\_files/india/paper\\_](http://www.censusindia.gov.in/2011-prov-results/data_files/india/paper_)
4. Government of India, Ministry of Social Welfare. 1981. A Summary of the Report on Survey of Disabled Persons. New Delhi: Ministry of Social Welfare.
5. Johnson, J. and R. Johnson. 2008. Assessment of Regional Language Varieties in Indian Sign Language. SIL Electronic Survey Report 2008-006 at [sil.org/silesr/yearindex.asp?year=2008](http://sil.org/silesr/yearindex.asp?year=2008).
6. Johnson, R and J. Johnson. 2016. Distinction between the West Bengal Sign language and the Indian Sign Language based on statistical assessment. Sign Language Studies 16(4): 473-499.
7. Mani, M. N. G., V. Gopalakrishnan and G. Amaresh. 2001. Indian Sign Language Dictionary. Sri Ramakrishna Mission Vidyalaya Printing Press, Combatore, India 676 p.
8. Office of the Registrar General and Census Commissioner, India. 2011. Provisional Population Totals Paper 1 of 2011 : West Bengal Our Census our Future Government of India, Ministry of Home Affairs, Office of the Registrar General and Census Commissioner, India, [http://www.censusindia.gov.in/2011-prov-results/prov\\_data\\_products\\_wb.html](http://www.censusindia.gov.in/2011-prov-results/prov_data_products_wb.html) (29 May 2012).
9. Vasishta, Madan, James Woodward and Susan de Santis. 1987. An introduction to the Calcutta variety of Indian Sign Language. Washington, D.C.: Gallaudet University Press (Gallaudet Research Institute Monograph, No. 4)

**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  
ISO 639-3/RA web site: <http://www.sil.org/iso639-3/default.asp>  
Email: [iso639-3@sil.org](mailto: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:**

Gordon, Raymond G., Jr. (ed.), 2005. Ethnologue: Languages of the World, Fifteenth edition. Dallas, Tex.: SIL International. Online version: <http://www.ethnologue.com/> .

LinguistList. Ancient and Extinct Languages. <http://linguistlist.org/forms/langs/GetListOfAncientLgs.html>

LinguistList. Constructed Languages. <http://linguistlist.org/forms/langs/GetListOfConstructedLgs.html>