Comments received for
ISO 639-3 Change Request
2016-023

Outcome: Rejected
Effective date: January 23, 2017
Registration Authority decision on Change Request no. 2016-023: to split the code element [nya] for Chichewa and create two new code elements [lsk] for Town Nyanja and [cew] for Chichewa.

The request to split the code element [nya] for Chichewa and create two new code elements [lsk] for Town Nyanja and [cew] for Chichewa is rejected. This decision was deferred for one year to allow the RA to work on defining the criteria that will govern requests for emerging languages to fit within the framework of the current TC 37 work for revising standards in the ISO 639 family. There is now a draft statement on the 639-3 website to establish the criteria for recognition as a “full” language. This is being used for the first time in 2017 as a basis for decisions to create language codes. This statement was also presented to the Technical Committee 37 / Subcommittee 2 of ISO at their meetings in June 2017, and they approved its use as part of the decision criteria. Thus in a case like this, the change request must demonstrate that a new language meets the new criteria for being a full language, as well as meeting the existing criteria for being adequately distinct from all other languages that already have a code. The request is rejected at this point because the review panel did not feel that the request contained enough evidence to demonstrate that the emerging Town Nyanja meets all three criteria for being a full language. For instance, is it an urban youth language or is it used and transmitted across generations in a variety of domains? Is it stable enough that the educational materials described in the Change Request work in all the schools were Town Nyanja is spoken, or are different materials required in different schools? Furthermore, the primary evidence for the claim that Town Nyanja should be considered a distinct language from Chichewa is the fact that educators have found it necessary to develop different educational materials, but that also happens with dialects of the same language so is not definitive evidence. A successful request would need stronger evidence such as a low percentage of shared cognates or evidence that adult speakers of the two are not able to communicate. Therefore, the request to split the code [nya] for Chichewa is rejected. A new request may be submitted if there is solid evidence for meeting all the criteria.