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: 2018-8-8

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

Associated Change request number : 2018-086 (completed by Registration Authority)
Tentative assignment of new identifier : lsn (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:
      Tibetan Sign Language
   b) Autonym (self-name) for this language:
      bökyi lagda (bod kyi lag brda)
   c) 
   d) Common alternate names and spellings of language, and any established abbreviations:
      I have also used TibSL in some of my publications, to distinguish the language in international linguistic literature from Taiwanese Sign Language, Thai Sign Language etc.
   e) Reason for preferred name:
      Since the English term 'Tibetan Sign Language' and TSL are used in most of the local Tibetan Sign Language dictionaries and other language materials, i think it is more respectful to go with that term. Also less cumbersome.
   f) Name and approximate population of ethnic group or community who use this language (complete individual language currently in use):
      In its more formalised and "pure" form, perhaps around 500 signers in Lhasa and among this figure, a few also in Shigatse and other parts of TAR.
   g) Preferred three letter identifier, if available: tsl

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:
   People's Republic of China

c) Region within each country: towns, districts, states or provinces where used. Include GPS coordinates of the approximate center of the language, if possible:
   Tibet Autonomous Region

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
   n/a

3. MODALITY AND LINGUISTIC AFFILIATION

a) This language is: ☒ Signed  ☐ Spoken  ☐ Attested only in writings

b) Language family, if classified; origin, if artificially constructed:
   Sign languages

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:
   Most pronounced influences come from spoken and written Tibetan. There are few instances of influences of individual lexical items from Chinese Sign Language on TSL lexicon, but not grammar.

4. LANGUAGE DEVELOPMENT AND USE

a) What written literature, inscriptions or recordings exist in this language? Are there newspapers, radio or television broadcasts, etc.?:
   Dictionaries (printed with drawings & photographs of signs), video lists (VCD & DVDs with Tibetan words lists and equivalent signs), children's books with drawings and photographs of TSL signs, recordings of TSL documentation activities in Lhasa.

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?:
   a) 1. In May 2004 Tibetan sign was recognised by the Chinese government as the first “minority sign language” in China. The state news agency, Xinhua, reported that this “is the
first sign language system designed for deaf-mutes of a minority ethnicity in China”, and that “this dactylogy system differs from the one being used nationwide as the latter is basically a kind of Chinese character conversion whereas many Tibetans can neither read nor write the Chinese characters” (Xinhua 2004). The language is described here as having been compiled by four members of a Tibetan deaf club based on their collection of local signs and that they were now in the process of popularising the language “among local Tibetan deaf farmers and herdsmen” (Xinhua 2004).

The precise status of the official recognition of Tibetan sign, the wording used for the language and its practical implications are not yet clear but I could find the following documents:

- In 2008 the Education Bureau’s regulations and stipulations on TibSL, its policy statement, is to make TibSL teaching compulsory in Tibetan special schools
- CPC TAR Party Committee (2010) with an important statements made in support of Tibetan Braille and Tibetan sign language, which favour support for Tibetan sign language in education (p. 10), sign interpretation in prefectural and city level TV news (p. 17), and stipulate that Disabled People’s Federations should provide free Braille translation and sign language interpretation in legal disputes (p. 22).

However, since 2010 children in the Lhasa Special School have no longer been exposed to TibSL, even as an extra curricular activity (with exception of some irregular informal visits by TDA members, and a few grammatical terms still used within the Tibetan language classes there.)

According to the TibSL activists, "recognition" has yet to yield practical consequences for TibSL and deaf Tibetans, for instance regarding education in TibSL at the Lhasa Special School and those other special schools that have in recent years been established in the TAR.

2. TSL is NOT used as a language of instruction in its own right at any level in the Lhasa and other Deaf School in TAR or other Tibetan reas of China. Only one of the Tibetan language teachers uses a few "natural signs" (also called "spontaneous signs"), which are also used in Tibetan Sign Language. She makes use of a few signs for Tibetan grammatical terms in her classes. Most of the eductaion is oral, assistend in some classes, sometimes, with CSL.

3. TSL used to be tought in weekend, extra curricular classes but this has stopped since 2010. The Lhasa Special school students still learn the TSL manual alphabet and learn to fingerspell simple Tibetan words, but they are not consistenly able to finger spell words - often just their personal names and some individudal letters or short, simple words. The TSL literature, as of January 2017, was absent from the new 1500-item school library of the Lhasa deaf School. For reference: see Hofer 2017 article.

c)

d) Comment on factors of ethnolinguistic identity and informal domains of use:
Ethnolinguistic identity and signers' attitudes towards TSL: Given the long-term and enthusiastic involvement of many deaf Tibetans in the TSL project since 2000, as well as their subjective experience of improved communication through the language, the score should be good for those TSL-dominant signers within the reference community. Yet the whole reference community, i.e. all deaf people, their teachers and others would need to be taken into account here and TSL-dominant users only make up 10 to 15% of that community. Even among them, especially among the youngest, we find a lot more CSL use now, due to the seeping influence from contact with signers who graduated...
from the state-run Lhasa Special School. The score I assigned in Hofer (2017: 135) therefore was only be that of 2 following Zeshan et al. 2011: 12, who describe this state as “Some members support language maintenance; many are indifferent or may even support language shift”. More substantial information on the attitudes of the remaining 85 to 90% of the reference community in Lhasa would be highly valuable to be clearer on their perspectives. I think their non-use of TibSL (or any other sign system) is not necessarily their own choice, but rather connected to a lack of knowledge about the existence of TSL and/or being surrounded by a more negative than positive attitude towards that sign language and/or ideas and realities about it being easier to progress in education and jobs, using CSL and Chinese. For a nuanced account and analysis of language ideologies with regard to TSL and mixing with CSL, see book chapter by Hofer: forthcoming.

**e) Domains of use:**

This category indicates the range of topics and areas of life where the language in question is employed, which directly affects whether or not it has a chance to be used in the next generation or not. Working again with iSLanDS’ questionnaire of Zeshan et al. (2011: 10), I suggest that TSL currently enjoys “multi-lingual parity”, or a score of 4, qualified in the following way: “two or more (signed and/or spoken) languages are used in most social domains and for most functions; the use of the target sign language [i.e. TSL] is usually rarely in the official domains (e.g. government, business, administration, formal education etc.) but is very present in the community’s public domains (e.g. deaf school dormitories, community gatherings etc.) and in informal domains (e.g. in families)” (Zeshan et al. 2011: 10). Although not used in dormitories at the Lhasa school, it is used in the gatherings of deaf Tibetans, such as the now irregular and informal deaf club on Sunday.

The reason for my score is mainly that TSL continues to be the language used in Tibet Deaf Association-organised gatherings, such as the Sunday deaf club, informal domains, such as picnics with friends, as well as the irregular Friday sign language classes. Overall the score of linguistic vitality and endangerment that I assigned in Hofer 2017, for TSL (following the iSLanDS-extended UNESCO criteria) was 2.75 - so "between definitely and severely endangered".
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):
I here only include new and forthcoming publication not mentioned in the other document:


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: