ISO 639-3 Registration Authority

Request for Change to ISO 639-3 Language Code

Change Request Number: 2019-053 (completed by Registration authority)

Date: 2019 August 29

Primary Person submitting request: Kirk Miller

Affiliation:

E-mail address: kirkmiller at gmail dot com

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

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 and will be posted on the ISO 639-3 website.

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) propose a new macrolanguage or modify a macrolanguage group; 3) retire a language code element from use; including merging its scope of denotation into that of another code element, 4) split an existing code element into two or more new language code elements, or 5) create a new code element for a previously unidentified language variety. Fill out section 1, 2, 3, 4, or 5 below as appropriate, and the final section documenting 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.

Type of change proposed (check one):

1. ☒ Modify reference information for an existing language code element
2. □ Propose a new macrolanguage or modify a macrolanguage group
3. □ Retire a language code element from use (duplicate or non-existent)
4. □ Expand the denotation of a code element through the merging one or more language code elements into it (retiring the latter group of code elements)
5. □ Split a language code element into two or more new code elements
6. □ Create a code element for a previously unidentified language

For proposing a change to an existing code element, please identify:

Affected ISO 639-3 identifier: adb

Associated reference name: Adabe

1. Modify an existing language code element

(a) What are you proposing to change:

☒ Language reference name; generally this is changed only if it is erroneous; if usage is shifting to a new preferred form, the new form may be added (next box)

☐ Language additional names
(b) What new value(s) do you propose: Atauran

(c) Rationale for change:

The name ‘Adabe’ is problematic because it has been widely reported to be a Papuan language spoken on the island of Ataúro in East Timor (e.g. Wurm & Hattori 1981, editions of Ethnologue up to the present). There is no Papuan language on Atauro. ‘Adabe’ is a synonym for the Austronesian Raklungu dialect, which is the name normally found in the literature by authors who identify it as Austronesian. There are two other dialects on the island, usually labeled Rahesuk and Resuk, as well as a a colonial population on mainland East Timor, Dadu’a, that has been influenced by neighboring Galoli to the extent that it should probably be considered a fourth dialect. These appear to be largely mutually intelligible, so the scope of [adb] should probably be expanded to include all of them – as, indeed, Ethnologue has effectively done already by giving the population of all three insular dialects as the population of ‘Adabe’, though the map is somewhat ambiguous as to its geographic extent.

Geoffry Hull states that there is no “Atauran language”, but rather that the speech of the island is typically Wetarese. However, there are four ISO codes for Wetarese, and it’s not clear that Atauran should be merged with any one of them (though presumably with [ilu] Ili‘uun if it were). Thus I am not requesting a code merger, and will leave that – if it is required – to a future request by someone knowledgeable about the languages. Likewise, I am not requesting a split or the creation of separate codes for the three dialects on the island. I quote my responses from Geoffrey Hull and David Penn below, in case the ISO committee might draw different conclusions from them.

Re. the possibility of a Papuan language on Ataúro, David Penn (p.c. 2019) said, “like others, I found no evidence of it during my visits.”

As for the identity of the language, Geoffrey Hull (p.c. 2014) said,

“The three dialect of Atauro – Resuk, Rahesuk and Raklungu – are all Austronesian and variants of the Wetarese language. Dadu’a, a language spoken near Manatuto coast (east of Dili) is a colonial variety of Atauran. The idea that Raklungu (also referred to Klu‘un Hahan Adabe by its speakers) is Papuan is an error that goes back Antonio de Almeida in 1966 taking on face value the claim of some speakers that the other islanders could not understand that dialect. It is also possible that he may have been in contact with some Alorese settler there and taken him for a native Atauran. I have often questioned Ataurans about this and they have also denied that there is any language akin to an Alorese one spoken on Atauro. I also have collected extensive Raklungu data, all typically Timoric. Another Australian, David Penn, did his MA thesis on Dadu’a and verified these facts.”

“Dadu’a is classified as a separate dialect, though typically Atauran, because it has influences from nearby Galoli and some (very minor) structural difference. However, I remember the fishermen I interviewed telling me they had no difficulty conversing with Atauro people.”
Geoffrey Hull (p.c. 2019):

“I would be surprised if there were any problem with mutual intelligibility [on the island], as all these Atauran dialects are very similar. The main difference between Atauran dialects and Wetarese proper concerns higher vocabulary: from Portuguese via Tetum in the first case and from Indonesian in the second, but since Indonesian still has some currency in East Timor, that would not hinder mutual intelligibility between the dialects of the two islands either.”

Hull (1999, 2002) had written,

“The four Atauran dialects, mutually very similar, do not form an 'Atauran' language, but are variants (subdialects) of the Wetarese language proper to Wetar and the tiny island of [Liran] situated between Atauro and Wetar. Wetarese is closely related to Galoli, but it is more conservative in structure and its vocabulary has been more influenced by Malay and languages of the Moluccas.”

David Penn (p.c. 2019):

“on so-called ‘Atauran’, as you say, 3 contemporary varieties on the island (not 4); all Austronesian. The endonyms are Rasua, Hresuk and Raklungu. Rasua appears as Rahesuk in published mentions, though no Ataurans use this name that I could tell. The 3 varieties are closely co-evolved, with similar structural properties and lexical cognacy rates of 70–80% over a small (100 word) Swadesh list.

“On Dadua: Structurally like the Atauran varieties, and Rasua most notably. But lower lexical cognacy with them (60–70%), this under long/intense contact pressures from higher status Galoli (80%) on mainland Timor. Synchronically it would be a stretch to call it Rasua, just as it would be inaccurate to call it Galoli.

“On classification vis-à-vis Wetarese (as best I could glean from the available readings at the time of research): Talur is for all intents and purposes Galoli (as in Timor), and thus distinct (50–60% lexical cognacy) from the Wetarese varieties proper [and indeed this is how Ethnologue classifies it – KM]. The remaining Wetar varieties are mutually similar (70–80%), much like the situation on Atauro. Lexical cognacy between the Wetarese and Atauran clusters is not high (50–60%). Morphology in numbers and pronouns might point to one variety, Ili’uun, as most relevant to the evolution of Atauran (and thus Dadu’a), but again, arguably it’s a stretch to lump them together as the same thing in the here and now. At least, it definitely was not the case that I could read Ili’uun sentence data and understand it based on my working knowledge of Dadua.”

David Penn (p.c. to https://mpi-lingweb.shh.mpg.de/numeral/Dadua.htm)

“The speakers of Dadu’a are a group whose ancestors resettled from the island of Ataúro, to the north. The closest relatives to Dadu’a are the 3 varieties of Ataúro which I sent you data for. Based on a 100-word Swadesh list, the lexical cognacy among these four varieties ranges from 65–75%. These are all related to the varieties of Wetar and
the much larger Galoli language of mainland Timor. Complicating things, Dadu’a is under intense contact influence from Galoli, while it looks like the speakers of Talur on Wetar island are a recently displaced group of Galoli speakers (±90% lexical cognacy).

Note that the 2010 East Timor census reports the greatest concentration of Dadu’a speakers is on the NE tip of Atauro Island. The results have been mapped at https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Dadua.png

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:
emails from Geoffrey Hull (2014 March 06 and 2019 August 31), former director of research for the Instituto Nacional de Linguística in East Timor, and, per his advice, from David Penn (2019 Sept 04), who wrote his MA thesis on the Dadu’a (mainland) variety of Atauran.

(c) Knowledge from published sources (please give complete bibliographical references):


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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: