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: 2020-8-4

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Associated Change request number : 2020-028 (completed by Registration Authority)
Tentative assignment of new identifier : emz (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: Mbessa
   b) Autonym (self-name) for this language: Iteanghe-a-Mbessa
   c) Common alternate names and spellings of language, and any established abbreviations: Mbesa; Iteanghe-a-Mbesa; Itangimbesa; Mbizenaku;
d) Reason for preferred name:
Mbessa is the name of the ethnic community speaking Mbessa. The original name was Mbesa and Mbessa is growing steadily for the past ten years or so.

e) Name and approximate population of ethnic group or community who use this language (complete individual language currently in use):
Mbessa (also spelled as Mbesa) has about 25,000 inhabitants. While a majority of the speakers are found in Mbessa, others are found in Cameroonian towns and cities such as Bamenda, Kumbo, Bafoussam, Douala, Buea, Foumbot, Limbe, Santa, Kumba, Nkongsamba, Nkonjock, Garoua, Ebolowa, Bertoua, Maroua and Yaounde. There are few speakers of Mbessa in countries such as Nigeria, South Africa, Ghana, Gabon, Dubai, USA, Germany, UK, Cyprus, and Denmark, etc.

f) Preferred three letter identifier, if available: mtz
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: Cameroon

c) Region within each country: towns, districts, states or provinces where used. Include GPS coordinates of the approximate center of the language, if possible:
   North West Region, Boyo Division, Belo Subdivision, Mbessa (Mbesa)

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: Niger-Congo -- Bantoid -- Grassfield -- Center Ring
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:

Babanki (Kedjom), Kom and Oku are the closest languages to Mbessa.

4. LANGUAGE DEVELOPMENT AND USE

a) What written literature, inscriptions or recordings exist in this language? Are there newspapers, radio or television broadcasts, etc.?:

Little written material exists on Mbessa. About 20 years ago, a small booklet was produced twice with a Mbesa calendar. In 2013, Nsah Mala self-published a book entitled Do You Know Mbesa? A recent self-published book, likewise by Nsah Mala, is the Dictionary of Mbesa Names - Mgvakle a Teghel ta Mbesa (2020). Although largely written in English, PDF copies of these two books can be made available upon request. Nsah Mala has also published a poem in Mbesa (entitled "Buhse" - Dogs) and is working on children's books now. There are also a good number of academic dissertations, mainly at Bachelor's and Master's levels, written on different aspects of the Mbessa community. Nsah Mala has some videos on Facebook and YouTube where he speaks or teaches Mbessa. Since 2019 he helped to create the Mbessa Language Committee (MBELAC) which is currently working on developing a simplified alphabet for Mbessa, with plans to start Bible translation into Mbessa later. MBELAC has already applied for collaboration with SIL Cameroon and we are awaiting their response.

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?:

Yes. The Cameroonian government recognises all the local languages for the numerous (about 3000) ethnic communities in the country's Constitution. And these numerous ethnic communities include Mbessa. It is used in earlier classes in schools in Mbessa for the youngest pupils.

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

In terms of identity and ancestral origins, Mbessa and Kom are separate entities although both of them are administratively located in Boyo Division in the Northwest Region of Cameroon. While the Kom migrated from around the Ndop plains to their present site, Mbesa was founded by a runaway Prince of Oku called Nsung Nyiete and an exiled traditional doctor from Nkar on the Kimbo hills (cf. Nsah Mala's Do You Know Mbesa? 2013). Moreover, there is no common oral tradition between Mbessa and Kom except as two friendly neighbouring communities, with the Mbessa having helped the Kom to win a war against their Bafmeng neighbours in the past. Consequently, the Mbessa view their language as a strong and distinct marker of their cultural identity and separate from Kom. Despite a few similarities between Mbessa and Kom (as mentioned above), the Mbessa believe that their language was initially forged from a combination of Nkar and Oku languages and it only acquired some limited Kom influences due to the geographical proximity of the two communities. This partly explains some of the similarities between Mbessa and Oku. In addition, language use in Mbessa is very vigorous, standing at 100 percent. Iteanghe-a-Mbessa is used at home, in churches, in markets, during community work, in farming, in health centres, and in education (although English is the main language
of instruction in schools). A few people occasionally speak Pidgin English and French in Mbessa. Moreover, Mbessa and Kom do not have a common writing system. While Kom uses an alphabet drawn from the International Phonetic Alphabet (IPA) and which is fairly difficult to access on common writing devices like mobile phones, Mbessa through the Mbessa Language Committee (MBELAC) is opting for a more simplified alphabet based on the English alphabet and inspired by the alphabets of other African languages such as Lingala, Chichewa and Swahili. As a result, it should be noted that some of the Kom spellings in this application are approximated due to difficulties in obtaining some of the special symbols used in the Kom alphabet. Meanwhile, Mbessa spellings are more or less closest to their linguistic realities. In terms of vitality, Mbessa has a population of about 25,000 speakers. While a majority of Mbessa speakers are found in Mbessa, there are also many Mbessa speakers in other Cameroonian towns and cities such as Bamenda, Kumbo, Bafoussam, Douala, Buea, Foumbot, Limbe, Santa, Kumba, Nkongsamba, Nkonjock, Garoua, Ebolowa, Bertoua, Maroua, Yaounde, as well as few expatriate speakers of Mbessa in countries like Nigeria, South Africa, Ghana, Gabon, Dubai, USA, Germany, UK, Cyprus and Denmark, etc. In Mbessa, Iteanghe-a-Mbesa is the language of communication in all homes, in churches, in markets, in the farms, in early classes of primary school (especially nursery school and class one), and during community works such as clean-up campaigns, road constructions, thatch or thatched roof constructions, burials and funerals, etc. Outside Mbessa, all sons and daughters of Mbessa use Iteanghe-a-Mbesa in their homes and in their community meetings. The Mbessa Language Committee (MBELAC) is now working to produce a new and revised alphabet for Mbessa and will proceed to translating parts of the Bible into Mbessa afterwards.

**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:

I am a native speaker of Mbessa. As shown above, I have undertaken many initiatives aimed at promoting Mbessa and her language.

b) Knowledge through personal communication. Describe:

I am also in personal communication not only with MBELAC members but also with my family and many other Mbessa people back at home, mainly through social media (e.g. Mbessa Elite Forum - MEF, MBELAC, Mbessa Youth in Yaounde, etc.) and on phone.

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

See the two self-published books by Nsah Mala above.

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:**
LinguistList. Constructed Languages. [http://linguistlist.org/forms/langs/GetListOfConstructedLgs.html](http://linguistlist.org/forms/langs/GetListOfConstructedLgs.html)