ISO 639-3 Registration Authority

Request for Change to ISO 639-3 Language Code

Change Request Number: 2021-012 (completed by Registration authority)

Date: 2020-1-18

Primary Person submitting request: Nelson C. Tschonghongei

Affiliation: University of Yaounde 1 / KPAAM-CAM Project, University at Buffalo

E-mail address: tsfoonye at yahoo dot co dot uk

Names, affiliations and email addresses of additional supporters of this request:
Prof Jeff Good, University at Buffalo / KPAAM-CAM Project

Dr Pierpaolo Di Carlo, University at Buffalo / KPAAM-CAM Project

Postal address for primary contact person for this request (in general, email correspondence will be used):
tsfoonye at yahoo dot co dot uk

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 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:

Associated reference name:
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
      □ Language type (living, extinct, historical, etc.)
      □ Language scope (individual language or macrolanguage)

   (b) What new value(s) do you propose:

   (c) Rationale for change:

2. Propose a new macrolanguage or modify a macrolanguage group
   (a) For an existing Macrolanguage, what change to its individual language membership do you propose:

   (b) Rationale for change:

   For a new Macrolanguage proposal, please also complete the form “Request for New Language Code Element in ISO 639-3” (file name “ISO639-3_NewCodeRequest.doc” or “ISO639-3_NewCodeRequestForm.rtf”), which must also be submitted to fully document the intended meaning for the new macrolanguage.

3. Retire a language code element from use
   (a) Reason for change:
      □ There is no evidence that the language exists.
      □ This is equivalent to another ISO 639-3 language.

   (b) If equivalent with another code element, with which ISO 639-3 code element (identifier and name) is it equivalent:

   (c) Rationale for change:

4. Expand the denotation of a code element through merging of one or more code elements
   (a) List the languages (identifier and name) to be merged into this code element and retired from use:

   (b) Rationale for change
5. **Split a language code element into two or more code elements**

(a) List the languages into which this code element should be split:

By the language identification criteria set forth in ISO 639-3, the simple fact of distinct identities is not enough to assign separate identifiers. The criteria are defined in the standard as follows:

For this part of ISO 639, judgments regarding when two varieties are considered to be the same or different languages are based on a number of factors, including linguistic similarity, intelligibility, a common literature (traditional or written), a common writing system, the views of users concerning the relationship between language and identity, and other factors. The following basic criteria are followed:

- Two related varieties are normally considered varieties of the same language if users of each variety have inherent understanding of the other variety (that is, can understand based on knowledge of their own variety without needing to learn the other variety) at a functional level.
- Where intelligibility between varieties is marginal, the existence of a common literature or of a common ethnolinguistic identity with a central variety that both understand can be strong indicators that they should nevertheless be considered varieties of the same language.
- Where there is enough intelligibility between varieties to enable communication, the existence of well-established distinct ethnolinguistic identities can be a strong indicator that they should nevertheless be considered to be different languages.

(b) Referring to the criteria given above, give the rationale for splitting the existing code element into two or more languages:

(c) Does the language code element to be split represent a major language in which there already exists a significant body of literature and research? Are there contexts in which all the proposed separate languages may still be considered the same language—as in having a common linguistic identity, a shared (or undistinguished) body of literature, a written form in common, etc.? If so, please comment.

In order to complete the change request, the form “Request for New Language Code Element in ISO 639-3” (file name “ISO639-3_NewCodeRequestForm.doc” or “ISO639-3_NewCodeRequestForm.rtf”) must also be submitted for each new identifier that is to be created. That step can be deferred until this form has been processed by the ISO 639-3 registrar.

6. **Create a new language code element**

(a) Name of missing language: Mbuk

(b) State the case that this language is not the same as or has not been included within any language that already has an identifier in ISO 639-3:

Until very recently the Mbuk variety had not been the subject of significant linguistic work and was mostly known only via its name. As discussed in an accompanying code change.
request for code [cug], Mbuk appears to be closely related to Chung, and change request 2016-006 implicitly treats them as dialects of a single language, though it was primarily presented as a request for a change in reference name. However, at the time of the request, no published research existed establishing that Chung and Mbuk were varieties of a common language. Tschonhongei's 2020 thesis on Mbuk now provides evidence that each should be treated as a separate language, which is why we now request a code for Mbuk.

While there are speakers who understand both Chung and Mbuk, existing evidence suggests that is due to acquired intelligibility resulting from exposure to both varieties. Otherwise, mutual intelligibility is marginal. Literature wise, the Mbuk do not agree on having a common literary standard with any other variety, including Chung, because the lexemes peculiar to Mbuk are not taken into consideration during the production of such literature. Supporting evidence for Mbuk's independent status can be found in Tschonhongei 2020 across various dimensions. We focus on the distinction between Chung and Mbuk since Chung is the only variety that has ever been suggested to constitute a common language with Mbuk.

(i) Children of ages eight to twelve years who speak Chung and Mbuk do not generally understand each other (unless their personal histories provided them with significant exposure to both of them) (see Tschonhongei 2020, pages 10–11)

(ii) There are significant lexical differences between Chung and Mbuk, both with respect to words that appear to be cognate but have significantly different pronunciations and with respect to words that use entirely different roots (see Tschonhongei 2020, pages 23, 64–72, 542–544)

(iii) From a sociolinguistic perspective, Mbuk speakers view themselves as clearly distinctive and view their own variety as a separate language from Chung and other varieties. Tschonhongei (2001, page 11) includes the following statement from a Mbuk speaker about the writing of the Mbuk language: “Our literacy supervisor said that the machine cannot type the letters of our alphabet because it has not been able to recognise them. And all the stories we wrote in Mbuk, all the Mbuk words were replaced with Chung words. But I was surprised when I went to type one day and I realised that the machine could type Mbuk sounds as well.” This quotation clearly demonstrates the local perception of a distinct identity. Relatedly, the two communities are sociopolitically distinct as well, and the Mbuk are politically independent in the local political space, with their own chief (Tschonhongei (2001, page 11).

Given the lack of mutual intelligibility, as opposed to acquired intelligibility, and the presence of a distinct sociopolitical and ethnomiristic identity, we believe that the creation of a new code for Mbuk is warranted.

In order to complete the change request, the form “Request for New Language Code Element in ISO 639-3” (file name “ISO639-3_NewCodeRequest.doc” or “ISO639-3_NewCodeRequestForm.rtf”) must also be submitted to more fully document the new language.
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:

The primary proposer conducted field work in the Mbuk community over a period of three years; 2014, 2015, 2016.

(b) Knowledge through personal communication. Describe:

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


The change proposal process

A request to change the code set goes through a six-step process:

1. A user of ISO 639-3 proposes a change and submits it to the ISO 639-3 Registration Authority (ISO 639-3/RA) using this form.

2. The ISO 639-3 registrar processes the change request to verify that the request is compatible with the criteria set forth in the standard and to ensure that the submitter has supplied all necessary information. This may involve rounds of interaction with the submitter.

3. When the change request proposal is complete in its documentation (including all associated New Code Requests), the change request is promoted to “Proposed Change” status and the ISO 639-3 registrar posts the request on the official web site of the ISO 639-3/RA. Also at this time, an announcement is sent to anyone requesting notification of new proposals matching their specified criteria (region and/or language family of interest). Periodically, a message maybe sent to the general LINGUIST discussion list on Linguist List (http://linguistlist.org/issues/index.html), and other appropriate discussion lists, inviting individuals to review and comment on pending proposals. Anyone may request from the ISO 639-3 registrar to receive notification regarding proposals involving languages in a specific region of the world or specific language family.

4. Individuals may send comments to the ISO 639-3 registrar for compilation. The consensus of early reviews may result in promotion to “Candidate Status” (with or without amendment), or withdrawal of the change request, if the conclusion is that the request is not in keeping with the stated criteria of the ISO 639-3 standard.

5. Three months prior to the end of the annual cycle of review and update, a new notice is posted on the official web site of the ISO 639-3/RA, and an announcement listing the Candidate Status Change Requests is posted to the LINGUIST discussion list and other discussion lists, as requested by their
owners. All change requests are then open to further review and comment by any interested party for a period of three months. A Change Request received after the start of Candidacy phase must wait until the next annual cycle for consideration. The purpose of this phase is to ensure that a minimum of three months is allotted for the review of every proposal.

6. At the end of the formal review period, a given Change Request may be: 1) adopted as a whole; 2) adopted in part (specific changes implicit in the whole Change Request may be adopted separately); 3) rejected as a whole; or 4) amended and resubmitted for the next review cycle. All change requests remain permanently archived at the official web site of the ISO 639-3/RA.

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
E-mail: iso639-3@sil.org

An email attachment of this completed form is preferred.

Sources of documentation for ISO 639-3 identifiers: