Comments received for
ISO 639-3 Change Request
2022-035

Outcome: Rejected
Effective date: January 20, 2023
Registration Authority decision on Change Request no. 2022-035: to create the code element [jnm] for Jonam.

The request to create the code element Jonam [jnm] is rejected. The Registration Authority notes that while the ethnolinguistic identity based on this speech variety appears to be strong, the rationale statement fails to describe a lack of intelligibility with Alur [alz], which is the main criterion used by the standard to distinguish languages in the absence of “established linguistic normalization and literatures that are distinct”. When no evidence concerning intelligibility is provided, substantial linguistic distance can serve as a proxy for non-intelligibility. The rationale statement takes this approach when it reports that a recent language survey found the two speech varieties to be “73% lexically similar. This is quite lower than the 96% claimed by an earlier survey (Ladefoged et al, 1973).” However, when our reviewers consulted the wordlist data provided in the new survey report, they found that the methodology for calculating 73% similarity was counting pronunciation differences in words that appeared to be cognate. They observed that a count of probable cognates would be much closer to 96% than to 73% and thus concluded that the degree of distance needed for recognizing distinct languages was not achieved.