



# ISO 639 RA-JAC

ISO 639 – Codes for the representation of names of languages

Secretariat: Standards Norway

Secretary: Håvard Hjulstad

ISO 639-1 RA: Infoterm, Vienna, Austria

ISO 639-2 RA: Library of Congress, Washington DC, USA

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<b>ISO 639 Registration Authorities' Joint Advisory Committee</b>	
Subject:	<b>ISO 639 JAC telephone Conference 2006-07-10 – Report</b>
Prepared by:	Håvard Hjulstad (secretary of ISO 639 RA-JAC)
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**Time of conference:** Monday 10 June 2006, 1500–1615 UTC (18 EEST, 17 CEST, 11 EST, 08 PST)

**Participants:** Rebecca Guenther, chair  
Anila Angjeli  
Eeva Murtomaa  
Glenn Patton  
Joan Spanne  
Peter Constable  
Håvard Hjulstad, secretary

**Apologies:** Christian Galinski  
Gerhard Budin  
Margaret Stewart

The infrastructure for the telephone conference was provided by the Library of Congress.

## Agenda

1. Review issues concerning maintenance process for ISO 639-3. Consider if there is any impact on the maintenance process for 639-2 and 639-1. See Joan Spanne's message to JACVOTE on 13 June and the attached documents in that email.

Also may be found in listserv archives at:

<http://listserv.loc.gov/cgi-bin/wa?A2=ind0606&L=jacvote&T=0&X=7B0FDD338F3F652C9FP=2496>

2. Brief discussion of actions to be taken after the last teleconference:

2a. finalizing new criteria for 639-2 and how to publicize;

2b. "in pipeline" items.

## Discussion

The discussion of the maintenance procedures was based on Joan Spanne's email message on 2006-06-13 to the JACVOTE list. The text of the message is included as an annex to this report.

The understanding of *individual language* vs. *macrolanguage* and *language group* isn't entirely clear. When a *language variant* is assigned an identifier as *individual language* the original language becomes "smaller" and the old individual language becomes a macrolanguage. But there may be many cases and variations to this, and the question needs to be addressed in each individual case.

Estonian was used as an example: If we accept Võro as an individual language, we would have to redefine "Estonian" as macrolanguage and assign a new identifier to "Estonian minus Võro".

Following the publication of ISO 639-3 it is necessary to be extremely careful not to alter the scope of any items, be it *individual languages* or *macrolanguages*, in relation to the "splitting out" of variants.

Another important issue is the relationship between maintenance procedures for parts 1 through 3 of ISO 639. The plan is to have an annual cycle of update of ISO 639-3, while ISO 639-2 and 639-1 in theory are updated continuously.

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The principle of periodical (rather than continuous) updates of ISO 639-3 was accepted. The length of the cycle may be assessed at a later date.

It is also extremely important to maintain the principle that ISO 639-3 is a superset including all ISO 639-2 (and consequently also ISO 639-1) items.

**Decision:** If an item is proposed for inclusion in Part 2 that is not in Part 3, the proposal shall be submitted to Part 3 maintenance for consideration according to Part 3 procedures before it can be processed for possible inclusion in Part 2.

In the very exceptional case that it is deemed necessary to process a proposal faster, it may be processed and announced for inclusion without waiting for the annual update of the database.

Cooperation between the ISO 639 Registration Authorities will be through the JAC. ISO 639-3 RA will keep the JAC informed about all steps in processing of new requests.

**Re 2a:** The updated criteria for inclusion in ISO 639-2 may now be published.

**Re 2b:** All “pipeline issues” may now be processed according to the proposal; one comment has been received (re historical stages of Korean), which will be taken into account.

## Annex – Joan Spanne’s email message 2006-06-13

Hello All,

While we await action on the last stage of adoption ISO/FDIS 639-3, SIL is asking the JAC for input regarding the process by which SIL is proposing to manage requests for new or changed code elements (that is splits, merges and retirements, code scope changes and name changes). Gary Simons and I have worked on this process, and have discussed aspects of its functioning with our contacts at LinguistList, and with some prominent people in the linguistic research community. We think that it is time to bring our ideas to you all (initially, but also the rest of the JAC), since the Part 3 standard document says that:

A.1.2 Joint Advisory Committee ISO 639/RA-JAC

The Joint Advisory Committee (ISO 639/RA-JAC) that is established in ISO 639-1, A.3 and ISO 639-2, A.3 also functions to advise the ISO 639-3/RA Registration Authority and monitor the activities of the Registration Authority to ensure the application of the coding rules as laid down in ISO 639-3.

This is a slightly edited version of what Rebecca, Håvard, and Christian have received. The attachments are the same.

Since the launch of the ISO/DIS 639-3 website, we have already been getting requests from the public for new code elements and changes/corrections to existing elements and their reference information. We are eager to be ready to move ahead with implementing a managed change process as soon as the final draft has been adopted. The Society for the Study of Indigenous Languages of the Americas (SSILA) approached SIL with the desire to be more active in offering their expertise to improve the inventory of languages with identifiers (as well as correct reference names, etc), so we have invited SSILA to also participate in making and reviewing requests for new and changed code elements for languages within its area of expertise. In fact, we desire to include other identified groups of experts in this process, as well, for languages of other regions of the world and within other language families. To this end, we have developed the process described in the attached documents.

The process, in brief:

- follows the rules set forth in the ISO 639-3 standard document with regard to code element changes and retirements;
- uses the criteria set forth in the ISO 639-3 standard document with regard to interpretations of what is a distinct language that merits its own identifier, as opposed to a dialect of another identified language;
- operates on an annual cycle of submission, public presentation, review and comment for new "change requests;"
- ensures that each change request receives a minimum open (public) review period of at least three months;
- solicits input from known and recognized scholarly associations with regard to requests relating to languages or language families (in the cases of macrolanguages) within their area of interest;
- permits amendment of a change request based on initial review and comment, or resubmission with changes at a later date;
- retains the final decision-making authority within the ISO 639-3/RA.

The process will be visible, and mostly transparent to the public, through the ISO 639-3/RA website.

There is already a page describing the guidelines on which changes may be based, which is at:

<http://www.sil.org/iso639%2D3/changes.asp>

We have created a new page describing the change proposal process. It is not yet live on the website, since we are asking for JAC input on it, so I am attaching a free-standing version of what the .asp page will be (proposals.html; the first section is simply the navigation links that will later appear on the left, as they do on the live site.)

We also have created two forms to use in making a change request. The primary form, "Change Request Form," is for any kind of change. The "New Code Request Form" is used in addition to the other form if the change is either for an entirely newly identified language to receive an identifier, or for a split in an existing code element, requiring its retirement and the creation of two or more new code elements in its place. The implicit concept of a change request is that it may include multiple resulting specific changes. For example, a request to split a language into three distinct languages involves four changes: 1 code element retirement and 3 new code element adoptions. The whole process would allow for partial acceptance of such a change request, if, for instance, the public review and comment showed agreement with the splitting of the original language, but recognized only two of the language varieties proposed as warranting code elements of their own.

The web page and the two forms are all the formal documentation of the process that exists at this point. The whole process is currently managed in an Access database that resides off-line, and is periodically dumped to the website. The website itself will expand, as I mentioned above, to include:

- the page that I have attached, where the process is described and forms for requesting changes may be downloaded;
- a page showing all pending proposals + public comments on them;
- a mechanism (not yet decided) by which interested people can monitor new requests and postings (RSS feed perhaps);
- a page summarizing the results of the previous annual cycle of change requests, showing changes adopted and changes rejected;
- a page from which the whole change history of the code set may be downloaded (this page is the one already noted above with the link, though as of today there are no changes in the ISO/DIS 639-3 code set--however, we intend to publish the Frisian/Western Frisian corrections very soon, since they are already "adopted")

The existing MS Access application has the structures for managing all the steps, but the process is still essentially manual. We are developing a new application that will automate much of the work, but not the direct interaction with requesters and reviewers, which will remain manual, my responsibility as registrar. We do not plan to have interactive, web-based forms, because completion of the forms requires some thoughtful writing and perhaps discussion from a group making the request together, such that it would be inappropriate for a web form

Our assumption all along has been that new language identifier requests for languages not already present in Part 3 that are considered and adopted by the JAC for ISO 639-2 will automatically be adopted by ISO 639-3. However, that can cause some disruption to Part 3 in ways that were (possibly) not as keenly felt by Part 2, with the more strict guidelines of Part 3 regarding language "splits" (which I don't see mentioned at all on the "ISO 639 Joint Advisory Committee Working principles for ISO 639 maintenance" page). The examples of Resian/Slovenian, Silesian/Polish (or Czech or ??), and Estonian "dialects" have shown the difficulty of making decisions in such cases where we would then be saying, in essence, that the majority language previously considered to include the dialect-cum-language no longer includes that variety, and is being narrowed in interpretation. A strict interpretation of the rules of code change for Part 3 would thus require retirement of the original code element and adoption of a new code element for the more narrowly defined language. That would result in its own set of implementation problems, with the retirement of a widely used code element. So we are presented with a choice between retiring an extensively used code element or narrowing its meaning such that previous uses of the code element for the newly identified language would be invalid. The use of "macrolanguage" codes has been proposed as a solution for maintaining the existing code element, but the JAC does not appear to have discussed the concept enough to feel comfortable with it or know when it is appropriate or not, and it still does not do away with all the difficulties. If my understanding of this problem is wrong or incomplete in some essential aspect, please correct me.

In summary, it would seem that these aspects require discussion of the JAC:

1. what, really, is meant by "macrolanguage" and how might it figure into future management of the whole of ISO 639? What distinguishes a macrolanguage from a linguistic family code element in Part 5?

2. how should requests made to the JAC for new language code elements that are not already included within Part 3 be handled:
  - should they be referred first to the Part 3 process (which is considerably more lengthy, but also solicits input from other "experts" and interested parties apart from the submitter);
  - should they be handled directly by the JAC according to its existing criteria, assuming that meeting that criteria would also imply that it would fit the criteria of Part 3; or
  - should the question of whether the Part 3 process or the JAC process handle the request be determined by the JAC on a case-by-case basis?
  - Will an annual cycle of proposal, review and decision that is predictable for the rest of the world (particularly for the reviewers whose input we desire, and for database maintainers who must update implementations) be workable and acceptable in light of the contrasting process of "consideration s needed" currently taken the JAC? (several pros and cons)
  - May a request received and considered by the Part 3 process and rejected in the public review process subsequently be considered by the JAC without referring it back to the Part 3 process?
  - In light of the above, do we need more effective means of coordinating requests for new code elements across all three parts, and how would that then change what SIL has proposed in its change request process as I have outlined it above?

Other points for discussion will probably occur to you, as well.

Thanks,

Joan

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