

Comments received for
ISO 639-3 Change Request
2008-049

Outcome: Adopted
Effective date: 2009-01-16

Editor Ethnologue/IntlAdmin/WCT
Sent by: Paul Lewis

To ISO639-3/IntlAdmin/WCT@SIL

cc

2008-11-18 01:21 PM

bcc

Subject ISO Change Requests 2008 - 048 through 2008 - 063

Dear ISO Registrar:

In regard to the ISO Change Requests 2008-048 through 2008-063, relating to the Mayan languages of Mexico and Guatemala, as Ethnologue Editor and as an erstwhile Mayanist, I would like to express my support for the creation of a single language identifier for each of the Mayan languages as proposed, requesting, however, that these be identified as macrolanguages, and that the individual language identifiers which currently exist be retained in the standard list of language identifiers. This aligns with the suggestion offered in several of the proffered change requests, to wit: ***"If for some reason it is decided to maintain dialect distinctions in the codes for Mayan languages instead of merging the separate codes, then each language needs a separate general code to designate the language as a whole rather than one of its dialects."*** My comments are directed specifically to the languages of Guatemala which I know best and address the reasoning behind maintaining dialect [sic] distinctions in the codes for Mayan languages instead of merging them all into single individual languages. I suspect these perspectives could be applied equally to the languages of Mexico as well.

Here is the rationale for this suggestion:

In the description of macrolanguages on the ISO 639-3 website, several "typical" situations are described where the identification of a macrolanguage is appropriate. The Mayan languages included in the referenced Change Requests are similar to these typical situations in several (but not all) ways:

(1) In only a few of the Mayan cases is there a single individual language that is more developed and that tends to be used for wider communication by speakers. In most of the Mayan cases, each of the currently identified individual languages has been separately and more-or-less equally developed with existing (albeit small) bodies of literature. Speakers tend to use their own variety (or Spanish, when intercomprehension is difficult) for oral communication with each other. Though standardization is being promoted across the different languages in educational materials, oral communication and locally authored written materials reflect the characteristics of the local languages. It is not yet clear that the standard varieties used in the schools have been taken up as prestigious spoken dialects nor that they are widely understood by all speakers of the individual varieties. This argues for the retention of the individual identifiers.

(2) In all of these cases there is a relatively-recently-developed common written form for these multiple closely-related languages. Orthographies have been unified and standardized. Considerable investment has been made in developing unified terminology and these are used in officially sanctioned written materials in the schools. This argues for the recognition of a macrolanguage since the situation somewhat parallels the case of Arabic with a common standard written variety that is learned in school unifying diverse, frequently unintelligible, local oral varieties which are learned in the home and community.

(3) In contrast to the third typical situation described, I'd suggest that the dynamics in Guatemala and Mexico are a "transitional sociolinguistic situation" in which, in many cases, sub-communities are unifying (rather than diverging) ethnically (far more than linguistically), thus creating a need for some purposes to recognize a single language and common identity while, for other purposes (as described above), the recognition of distinct languages remains valid.

Given the history of language development in many of these individual varieties, neither the local communities nor the scholarly community would be well served by losing the ability to uniquely identify the specific individual language varieties. At the same time, the laudable and valuable efforts of the members of these communities to unify and develop their languages into a standardized, more broadly usable, written form should be recognized.

In light of these considerations, then, I would propose the following (omitting Change Requests relating primarily to languages of Mexico in regard to which I would hope for comments from others) :

- (a) Modify CR 2008-048: The creation of a macrolanguage code for Achi comprised of the two existing individual languages [acr] and [acc]
- (b) Modify CR 2008-049: The creation of a macrolanguage code for Chol comprised of the two existing individual languages [cti] and [ctu]
- (c) Modify CR 2008-050: The creation of a macrolanguage code for Chuj comprised of the two existing individual languages [cnm] and [cac]
- (d) Modify CR 2008-052: The creation of a macrolanguage code for Ixil comprised of the three existing individual languages [ixl], [ixi], [ixj]
- (e) Modify CR 2008-053: The creation of a macrolanguage code for Kaqchikel comprised of the ten existing individual languages [cak], [cbm], [ckc], [ckd], [cke], [ckf], [cki], [ckj], [ckk], and [ckw]
- (f) Modify CR 2008-054: The creation of a macrolanguage code for K'iche' comprised of the six existing individual languages [quc], [cun], [quj], [qut], [quu], and [qxi]
- (g) Modify CR 2008-055: The creation of a macrolanguage code for Mam comprised of the six existing individual languages [mam], [mms], [mpf], [mtz], [mvc], and [mvj]
- (h) Modify CR 2008-056: The creation of a macrolanguage code for Popti' comprised of the two existing individual languages [jac] and [jai]
- (i) Modify CR 2008-057: The creation of a macrolanguage code for Poqomam comprised of the three existing individual languages [poc], [poa], and [pou]
- (j) Modify CR 2008-058: The creation of a macrolanguage code for Poqomchi' comprised of the two existing individual languages [poh] and [pob]
- (k) Modify CR 2008-062: The creation of a macrolanguage code for Tz'utujil comprised of the two existing individual languages [tzj] and [tzt]

None of these modifications preclude the ongoing review of whether the existing individual languages meet the ISO criteria for identification as separate languages. There could well be future proposals for mergers or deletions of some of the individual language identifiers based on evaluation of those varieties against the ISO criteria. The issue of how to define any given variety as a "language" or as a "dialect" is a vexing one. Sorting that out, however, needs to be handled much more carefully and thoughtfully, and not through a single, indiscriminate set of changes for all cases as currently proposed in these Change Requests.

As a user of the ISO 639-3 standard, I make these comments on behalf of the Ethnologue and from my own personal perspective. Whatever the outcome of these decisions, the Ethnologue remains committed to supporting the ISO 639-3 standard and to reporting the language inventory as determined by the ISO 639-3 process as it stands at the time of our publication.

With regards,

M. Paul Lewis
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To ISO 639-3/IntlAdmin/WCT@SIL

Sent by: Heidi Johnson

Subject: ISO Change Requests 2008 - 048 through 2008 - 063

Dear ISO Registrar:

In my capacity as the manager of the Archive of the Indigenous Languages of Latin America (AILLA), I am writing to express my support for ISO Change Requests 2008-048 through 2008-063. These changes will effectively bring the ISO codes for Mayan languages in line with the standard reference works on the structure of the Mayan language family. These works are cited in the Change Requests, in accordance with ISO guidelines. I am also aware that these Change Requests are the result of many months of consideration, including consultation with Mayan linguists currently engaged in dialect surveys, language documentation projects, and the development of educational materials in Mayan languages. They thus have broad support in Mayanist and Maya communities, among which we are pleased to count many of AILLA's depositors and users.

I would like to note that these Change Requests are partly the result of my urgings to Dr. England and her team to rationalize the ISO codes for the Mayan languages, because AILLA is developing an extensive and rapidly growing collection of resources for these languages. These revisions will allow us to characterize the languages in AILLA's collections correctly. Dr. England's Change Requests represent exactly the sort of comprehensive review and revision that AILLA, DELAMAN, and other organizations have been asking linguists to perform, in order to bring the ISO codes in line with the linguistic literature. It is to be hoped that her initiative will stimulate similar reviews by other language area specialists.

The comment submitted by Paul Lewis (2008-048-063_cm1.pdf) suggests that macrolanguage codes be created for each of the Mayan languages. I believe this would add an unnecessary layer of obfuscation: why label languages as macrolanguages? It would be very useful to have a parent language code for 'Mayan' and perhaps also for some of the subbranches, such as 'Yucatecan,' but macrolanguage codes are neither necessary nor desirable for the Mayan languages. Macrolanguages, as I understand the term, are best employed in cases where the divisions between languages and dialects are unknown or not determinable. Good examples of this situation are the Zapotecan and Quechuan languages, which do presently have macrolanguage codes. Linguists generally agree that there is more than one Zapotec language, but the linguistic situation is so complex that clear lines can not be drawn, given the current (poor) state of our knowledge. This is not the case for the Mayan languages, which have been well-studied both from an historical perspective and from a contemporary standpoint. In the Mayan case, there is broad general agreement on the language designations that result from the application of Change Requests 2008-048 through 2008-063. If finer divisions are ever needed for the Mayan languages, these would be at the dialect level, not at the language level.

For those who like visual aids, I include a tree displaying the effects of the Change Requests on the following pages. It can be seen at a glance that the new code set will be simpler and more comprehensible, with the dialect divisions removed. The Change Requests will result in a vast improvement of the codes for the Mayan languages. I recommend that they be accepted and implemented.

Thank you for your consideration.

Heidi Johnson

Manager, the Archive of the Indigenous Languages of Latin America

Mayan

Mayan

Cholan-Tzeltalan

Cholan

Chol-Chontal

Chontal, Tabasco [chf]

Chol [cti]

Chorti

Ch'orti' [caa]

Tzeltalan

Tzeltal [tzh]

Tzotzil [tzo]

Huastecan

Chicomuceltec [cob]

Huastec [hus]

Kanjobalan-Chujean

Chujean

Chuj [cnm]

Tojolabal [toj]

Kanjobalan

Kanjobal-Jacalteco

Jakalteco [jac]

Q'anjob'al [kjb]

Akateco [knj]

Mocho

Mocho [mhc]

Quichean-Mamean

Greater Mamean

Ixilan

Awakateco [agu]

Ixil [ixl]

Mamean

Mam [mam]

Tektiteco [ttc]

Greater Quichean

Kekchi

Q'eqchi' [kek]

Pocom

Poqomam [poc]

Poqomchi' [poh]

Quichean

Kaqchikel [cak]

Quiche-Achi

Achi [acr]

K'iche' [quc]

Tz'utujil [tzj]

Sacapulteco

Sakapulteco [quv]

Sipacapeno	
Sipakapense	[qum]
Uspantec	
Uspanteko	[usp]
Yucatecan	
Mopan-Itza	
Itza'	[itz]
Maya, Mopán	[mop]
Yucatec-Lacandon	
Lacandon	[lac]
Maya, Yucatán	[yua]

Lyle Campbell
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2008-12-12 12:39 PM

To iso639-3@sil.org

cc

bcc

Subject Comments on ISO codes for Mayan languages -- completed

Dear Joan (and ISO folks),

I am writing about the ISO codes for Mayan languages, 2008-048 to 2008-063 (on the website http://www.sil.org/iso639-3/chg_requests.asp). I would like to support the changes recommended by Nora England and B'alam Mateo Toledo for each of these languages. I strongly recommend that these suggestions be adopted. The multiplicity of entities said to be separate Mayan languages in Ethnologue and given separate ISO codes has long been a serious problem -- it is long past time that this problem should be fixed. Thanks for giving this the attention deserved. I think the alternative suggestions from Paul Lewis miss in a number of situations the fact that these entities really are not different, really are mutually intelligible, and don't have major non-linguistic factors that could be called upon to keep them separate.

Mutual intelligibility, in fact, would not only combine the two Achí variants into a single one, but would eliminate Achí altogether and make it just a dialect of K'iche' (which I would personally prefer), though the political situation does allow for recognition of a separate Achí.

I would add, also, that the spelling of the names of the languages should be reconsidered and changed. That is, whether we liked it or not, the Guatemalan government officially decreed official spellings of the names of Mayan languages in Guatemala and these spellings have been adopted almost universally by both scholars and the communities themselves. Thus, it is now also time to accept these officially for the ISO naming practice -- for example K'iche' for Quiché, Kaqchikel for Cakchiquel, Jakalteko for Jacalteco, Poqomam for Pokomam, Poqomchi' for Pokomchí, Q'anjob'al for Kanjobal, etc.

I hope this helps.

All the best,

Lyle

--

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2008-12-15 09:48 PM

To iso639-3@sil.org
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Subject ISO Change Requests 2008 - 048 through 2008 - 063

To: ISO639-3/IntlAdmin/WCT@SIL

Dear ISO Registrar:

I am sending this email in support of ISO Change requests 2008-048 through 2008-063. These changes reflect the state of our knowledge on Mayan languages as evidenced in the work cited by Dr. England in her proposal. As a linguistic member of OKMA and a speaker of one of these Mayan languages we have considered the classification of Mayan languages in the 15th edition of Ethnologue as inaccurate because it mixes dialects and languages. My understanding is that ISO wants to register languages and not dialects. Thus, England's proposal clearly reflects this classification.

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2008-12-15 09:53 PM

To iso639-3@sil.org

cc

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Subject change requests 2008-048 through 2008-063, codes for Mayan languages

Dear ISO registrar,

As a native speaker of K'ichee' I would like to express my support for ISO change requests 2008-048 through 2008-063.

From 1998 to 2003 I worked with other people on a linguistic project about the dialects of K'ichee'. Based on the results we got, I think that Dr. Nora England's proposal about the codification of the K'ichee' language, as well as other Mayan languages, is accurate. As a native speaker of K'ichee' I would like to have and use a general code for the language rather than different codes for different dialects of the same language.

Thanks,

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