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Codes for the representation of names of languages —

Part 3: Alpha-3 code for comprehensive coverage of languages

Codes pour la représentation des noms de langues —

Partie 3: Code alpha-3 pour un traitement exhaustif des langues



Reference number
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Foreword

ISO (the International Organization for Standardization) is a worldwide federation of national standards bodies (ISO member bodies). The work of preparing International Standards is normally carried out through ISO technical committees. Each member body interested in a subject for which a technical committee has been established has the right to be represented on that committee. International organizations, governmental and non-governmental, in liaison with ISO, also take part in the work. ISO collaborates closely with the International Electrotechnical Commission (IEC) on all matters of electrotechnical standardization.

International Standards are drafted in accordance with the rules given in the ISO/IEC Directives, Part 2.

The main task of technical committees is to prepare International Standards. Draft International Standards adopted by the technical committees are circulated to the member bodies for voting. Publication as an International Standard requires approval by at least 75 % of the member bodies casting a vote.

Attention is drawn to the possibility that some of the elements of this document may be the subject of patent rights. ISO shall not be held responsible for identifying any or all such patent rights.

ISO 639-3 was prepared by Technical Committee ISO/TC 37, *Terminology and other language and content resources*, Subcommittee SC 2, *Terminographical and lexicographical working methods*.

ISO 639 consists of the following parts, under the general title *Codes for the representation of names of languages*:

- *Part 1: Alpha-2 code*
- *Part 2: Alpha-3 code*
- *Part 3: Alpha-3 code for comprehensive coverage of languages*

The following parts are under preparation:

- *Part 4: Implementation guidelines and general principles for language coding*
- *Part 5: Alpha-3 code for language families and groups*
- *Part 6: Alpha-4 representation for comprehensive coverage of language variation*

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Introduction

ISO 639 provides three language codes for the representation of names of languages: one is a two-letter code (ISO 639-1) and two others are three-letter codes (ISO 639-2 and ISO 639-3). ISO 639-1 was devised primarily for use in terminology, lexicography and linguistics. ISO 639-2 was devised primarily for use in terminology and bibliography; it represents all languages contained in ISO 639-1 and in addition other languages and language collections of interest for those primary applications. ISO 639-3 was devised to provide a comprehensive set of identifiers for all languages for use in a wide range of applications, including linguistics, lexicography and internationalization of information systems. It attempts to represent all known languages.

The three-letter codes in ISO 639-2 and ISO 639-3 are complementary and compatible. The two codes have been devised for different purposes. The set of individual languages listed in ISO 639-2 is a subset of those listed in ISO 639-3. The codes differ in that ISO 639-2 includes code elements representing some individual languages and also collections of languages, while ISO 639-3 includes code elements for all known individual languages but not for collections of languages. Overall, the set of individual languages listed in ISO 639-3 is much larger than the set of individual languages listed in ISO 639-2.

The languages represented in ISO 639-1 are a subset of those represented in ISO 639-2; every language code element in the two-letter code has a corresponding language code element in ISO 639-2, but not necessarily vice versa. Likewise, elements other than collections listed in ISO 639-2 are a subset of those listed ISO 639-3; each non-collective element in ISO 639-2 is included in ISO 639-3, but not necessarily vice versa. The denotation represented by alpha-3 identifiers included in both ISO 639-2 and ISO 639-3 is the same in each part, and the denotation represented by alpha-2 identifiers in ISO 639-1 is the same as that represented by the corresponding alpha-3 identifiers in ISO 639-2 and ISO 639-3.

All three language codes are to be considered as open lists.

The large number of languages in the initial inventory of ISO 639-3 beyond those already included in ISO 639-2 was derived primarily from *Ethnologue*^[1], with additional ancient, historic or artificial languages obtained from *Linguist List*^[2], ^[3].

This part of ISO 639 also includes guidelines for the creation of language code elements and their use in some applications.