

---

---

**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*



**PDF disclaimer**

This PDF file may contain embedded typefaces. In accordance with Adobe's licensing policy, this file may be printed or viewed but shall not be edited unless the typefaces which are embedded are licensed to and installed on the computer performing the editing. In downloading this file, parties accept therein the responsibility of not infringing Adobe's licensing policy. The ISO Central Secretariat accepts no liability in this area.

Adobe is a trademark of Adobe Systems Incorporated.

Details of the software products used to create this PDF file can be found in the General Info relative to the file; the PDF-creation parameters were optimized for printing. Every care has been taken to ensure that the file is suitable for use by ISO member bodies. In the unlikely event that a problem relating to it is found, please inform the Central Secretariat at the address given below.

This document is a preview generated by EVS

© ISO 2007

All rights reserved. Unless otherwise specified, no part of this publication may be reproduced or utilized in any form or by any means, electronic or mechanical, including photocopying and microfilm, without permission in writing from either ISO at the address below or ISO's member body in the country of the requester.

ISO copyright office  
Case postale 56 • CH-1211 Geneva 20  
Tel. + 41 22 749 01 11  
Fax + 41 22 749 09 47  
E-mail [copyright@iso.org](mailto:copyright@iso.org)  
Web [www.iso.org](http://www.iso.org)

Published in Switzerland

# Contents

Page

Foreword.....	iv
Introduction .....	v
1 Scope .....	1
2 Normative references .....	1
3 Terms and definitions.....	1
4 Three-letter language code.....	3
4.1 Form of the language identifier .....	3
4.2 Denotation of the language identifier .....	3
4.3 Documentation of the intended denotation of identifiers.....	6
4.4 Relationship between ISO 639-2 and ISO 639-3 .....	7
4.5 Registration Authority and maintenance of the code .....	8
4.6 Application of language identifiers.....	9
4.7 Scripts and regions .....	9
5 Language code tables .....	9
Annex A (normative) Procedures for the Registration Authority and Registration Authorities Advisory Committee for ISO 639.....	10
Bibliography .....	12

## 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*

## 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*<sup>[1]</sup>, with additional ancient, historic or artificial languages obtained from *Linguist List*<sup>[2]</sup>, [3].

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

This document is a preview generated by EVS

# Codes for the representation of names of languages —

## Part 3:

## Alpha-3 code for comprehensive coverage of languages

### 1 Scope

This part of ISO 639 provides a code, published by the Registration Authority of ISO 639-3, consisting of language code elements comprising three-letter language identifiers for the representation of languages. The language identifiers according to this part of ISO 639 were devised for use in a wide range of applications, especially in computer systems, where there is potential need to support a large number of the languages that are known to have ever existed. Whereas ISO 639-1 and ISO 639-2 are intended to focus on the major languages of the world that are most frequently represented in the total body of the world's literature, this part of ISO 639 attempts to provide as complete an enumeration of languages as possible, including living, extinct, ancient and constructed languages, whether major or minor, written or unwritten. As a result, this part of ISO 639 deals with a very large number of lesser-known languages. Languages designed exclusively for machine use, such as computer-programming languages and reconstructed languages, are not included in this code.

Knowledge of the world's languages at any given time is never complete or perfect. Additional language identifiers may be created for this list when it becomes apparent that there is a linguistic variety that is deemed to be distinct from other languages in accordance with the definitions in Clause 3 and their elaboration in Clause 4. In addition, the denotation of existing identifiers may be revised or identifiers may become deprecated when it becomes apparent that they do not accurately reflect actual language distinctions. In all such changes, careful consideration is given to minimized adverse effects on existing implementations.

### 2 Normative references

The following referenced documents are indispensable for the application of this document. For dated references, only the edition cited applies. For undated references, the latest edition of the referenced document (including any amendments) applies.

ISO 3166-1, *Codes for the representation of names of countries and their subdivisions — Part 1: Country codes*

ISO 15924, *Information and documentation — Codes for the representation of names of scripts*

### 3 Terms and definitions

For the purposes of this document, the following terms and definitions apply.

#### 3.1

##### **code**

data transformed or represented in different forms according to a pre-established set of rules

#### 3.2

##### **code element**

individual entry in a code table