ISO 639:2023-11 (E)

Code for individual languages and language groups

Contents

Page

Foreword ..... **v**

Introduction ..... **vii**

1 Scope **1**

2 Normative references **1**

3 Terms and definitions **1**
- 3.1 Terms related to language and individual languages 1
- 3.2 Terms related to linguistic variation and language varieties 3
- 3.3 Terms related to types of individual languages subject to language coding 4
- 3.4 Terms related to language groups subject to language coding 6
- 3.5 Terms related to modalities of language use 6
- 3.6 Terms related to written representation of individual languages 7
- 3.7 Terms related to language coding and naming languages 8

4 Linguistic variation and fundamental concepts of identifying and categorizing individual languages **10**
- 4.1 General 10
- 4.2 Linguistic variation 10
  - 4.2.1 Criteria and dimensions of linguistic variation 10
  - 4.2.2 Identification and types of individual languages and language groups 12
- 4.3 Individual languages and writing conventions 13

5 The ISO 639 language code **14**
- 5.1 Introduction to the ISO 639 language code 14
- 5.2 Sets of language identifiers 14
- 5.3 Language code elements and their structural components 14
- 5.4 Language identifiers 15
- 5.5 Language reference names 15
- 5.6 Language names in English and French 16
- 5.7 Code element scopes and local-use language identifiers 16
  - 5.7.1 Types of code element scopes 16
  - 5.7.2 Code element scope of individual-language code elements 16
  - 5.7.3 Code element scope of macrolanguage code elements 16
  - 5.7.4 Code element scope of language-group code elements 17
  - 5.7.5 Code element scope of special-purpose code elements 17
  - 5.7.6 Local-use language identifiers 18
- 5.8 Language code maintenance 18
  - 5.8.1 Basic rules for language code maintenance 18
  - 5.8.2 Language code maintenance activities 18
- 5.9 Adoption of language code elements into other standards 19

6 Criteria for language coding and naming languages **20**
- 6.1 Information to be considered in language coding and naming languages 20
  - 6.1.1 Pertinent reference sources 20
  - 6.1.2 Information necessary to identify and name individual languages and language groups 20
- 6.2 Eligibility for language coding 21
  - 6.2.1 Eligibility of an individual language for language coding 21
  - 6.2.2 Eligibility of an extinct language or historical language for language coding 22
  - 6.2.3 Eligibility of a constructed language for language coding 22
  - 6.2.4 Eligibility of a macrolanguage for language coding 22
  - 6.2.5 Eligibility of a language group for language coding 23

6.2.6 Criteria for the eligibility of individual languages for language coding in Set 2 ... 23
6.3 Principles governing the assignment of language reference names ... 23
6.4 Formation, disambiguation and presentation of language reference names ... 24
6.4.1 Rules for the formation of language reference names ... 24
6.4.2 Rules for disambiguating or differentiating language reference names ... 25
6.4.3 Rules for the presentation of language reference names ... 27
6.5 Rules for the selection, formation, and presentation of language names in English and French ... 27
6.6 Recommendations for the selection, formation, and presentation of language names in languages other than English and French ... 27
7 Fields of application ... **28**
8 Combining language identifiers with other identifiers ... **29**
8.1 Combining language identifiers with other standardized codes ... 29
8.2 Combining language identifiers with the ISO 3166 series ... 30
8.3 Combining language identifiers with ISO 15924 ... 30
8.4 Combining language identifiers with indicators of a language modality ... 30
8.5 Format of code combinations ... 31
Annex A (normative) **Explanatory illustration of the ISO 639 language code** ... **32**
Annex B (informative) **Maintenance Agency for the ISO 639 language code** ... **36**
Bibliography ... **37**