# On criteria for granting new codes in ISO 639-3

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8 June 2017

The current text of ISO 639-3 declares:

> It is a goal for this part of ISO 639 to provide an identifier for every distinct human language that has been documented, whether living or extinct, and whether its primary modality is spoken, written or signed.

The discussion that follows in the standard enumerates criteria to be used in judging whether languages are distinct (as opposed to being varieties of the same language).

The panel that the Registration Authority convenes for reviewing and acting on the ISO 639-3 change requests has come to the realization that there is a concept that the standard takes for granted without making explicit, namely, that the languages in scope for being granted a code should be *full* languages. There are many kinds of languages that have distinct names and that are documented in the literature but which do not seem within scope:  avoidance languages, secret languages, ceremonial languages, play languages, urban languages, youth languages, special-purpose languages. Such languages are very limited as to domain of use or are specifically meant to exclude others from communication or are so dynamic and unstable as to lack widespread norms of use. By contrast, a "full" language is:

- Used in a variety of domains
- Used to support communication across all genders and all ages
- Stable enough to be widely understood across the whole area of the language

The Registration Authority has begun considering these additional criteria when evaluating whether a requested for a new code should be adopted.

Two kinds of languages that are granted codes in the standard require special consideration: contact languages and constructed languages. Such languages come into existence relatively suddenly and are not full languages when they first appear. They are thus not in scope for coding in ISO 639-3 at first.  However, this can change over time. As they are used by successive generations, they may emerge as full languages as they begin to meet the above three criteria.