



## ISO / TC 37 / SC 2 / WG 1

TC 37 – Terminology and other language resources

SC 2 – Layout of vocabularies

WG 1 – Coding systems

Convener: Håvard Hjulstad

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| Document:   | ISO / TC 37 / SC 2 / WG 1 <b>N 73</b>                   |
| <b>ISO / TC 37 / SC 2 / WG 1 “Coding systems”</b> |   |
| Subject:  | <b>Convener’s report</b>                                |
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| Date:   | 2001-07-23  |

### ISO/FDIS 639-1

Following the WG meeting in London 2000-08-16 the text for ISO/FDIS 639-1 was finalized. However, the submission of the document was somewhat delayed because some items needed finalization by the Joint Advisory Committee (ISO 639 RA-JAC).

The FDIS document was sent by the convener to ISO / TC 37 / SC 2 Secretariat for submission to ISO Central Secretariat toward the end of June 2001.

### The issue of “freezing”

One major issue has been “to freeze or not to freeze” ISO 639-1 following the publication of the new edition. “Freezing” would mean the following:

1. Items that currently have alpha-3 identifiers, but no alpha-2 identifiers, will not be assigned alpha-2 identifiers in the future; however
2. items that currently have neither alpha-3 nor alpha-2 identifiers may be candidates for both lists.

Good arguments have been presented in favour of “freezing”. Some applications have the rule that alpha-3 identifiers should be used if (and only if) no alpha-2 identifier exists. This rule would have to be changed if ISO 639-1 were to be developed further.

Others may claim that this rule is outside the scope and control of ISO 639-1, and that the standard should be developed further, in close cooperation with ISO 639-2.

ISO 639 has many uses and a great number of “manual” and “machine” applications. Careful consideration should be taken to the interest of all users before a definite decision is made.

It is the convener’s opinion that there is no need to make a “final and eternal” decision about “freezing” one way or the other, but that the JAC should be very careful indeed when/if assigning new alpha-2 identifiers.

### Language identifiers and language names

For some users the language identifiers are mere “random sequences of characters” without any meaning in themselves. For other users it does make a difference. One example: Early versions of 639-2 had a language called “Lappish” with the identifier “lap”. The name “Lappish” denotes the Sami language(s), and “Lappish” and “lapon” and other similar names are considered derogatory by the users of the Sami languages. One option would have been to correct the language name, but keep the identifier “lap” (as a “random sequence of letters”). That would have been an unacceptable solution in this instance.

People have feelings attached to the names of their nation and of their language, and to all representations of these names. This has to be respected. This may lead to changes in language names or language identifiers in the future. All this needs to be done very carefully, but occasionally it may need to be done.

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It has been decided in principle that ISO 639 (both parts) does not standardize the names of the languages, just the identifiers. Based on this principle, multiple names have been included in ISO 639-1 where needed, as they will be in future editions of ISO 639-2.

## **Future activities within ISO / TC 37 / SC 2 / WG 1**

Based on the discussion at the meeting in London 2000-08-16 the convener submitted document **N69** dated 2001-01-31 outlining some areas of “language coding”.

For the Toronto meeting 2001-08 the convener proposes two possible Work Items, outlined in documents **N71** and **N72**.

In addition, a document originating from the UK has been given document number **N74** of ISO / TC 37 / SC 2 / WG 1. This document picks up some of the thoughts that are laid down in document **N69**, but **N74** proposes a Technical Report (TR) where **N69** suggests that the information be stored in an “ISO 639 database”. The proposed TR would contain a very large number of languages for which no alpha-2 or alpha-3 identifiers have been assigned.

During the Toronto meeting an open workshop is planned to discuss the needs and feasibility of further language coding standardization activities. Following that discussion SC 2 needs to decide on possible projects and to prioritize and set time frames.