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**Codes for the representation of names of  
languages —**

Part 6:  
**Alpha-4 code for comprehensive  
coverage of language variants**

*Codes pour la représentation des noms de langues —*

*Partie 6: Code alpha-4 pour un traitement exhaustif des variantes  
linguistiques*



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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 639-6 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*
- *Part 4: General principles of coding of the representation of names of languages and related entities, and application guidelines*
- *Part 5: Alpha-3 code for language families and groups*
- *Part 6: Alpha-4 code for comprehensive coverage of language variants*

## Introduction

Within language-dependent resources, where use, re-use and interchange are of significant importance to industry and academia alike, it is important to be able to fully document the data being captured within a resource. One important element of these resources is the language itself. It is important therefore to be able to identify the language of the resource as precisely and accurately as possible for the purposes of interoperability and quality of information content. The ISO 639 series of standards has been developed with these important goals in mind and this part of ISO 639 is concerned with capability for increased precision and accuracy. Specifically, this part of ISO 639 is concerned with the identification and documentation of language variants. Other parts of ISO 639 govern the identification of languages, language families and language groups and establish general principles for managing and developing codes.

The terms and definitions in this part of ISO 639 have, where appropriate, been harmonized with ISO 639-3.

This part of ISO 639 provides an alpha-4 language identifier and a unique language reference name forming the language code element for language variants. It also establishes a hierarchical framework that enables the relationship between language variants, language families, language groups and languages to be shown.

The alpha-4 language identifiers and language reference names, standardized in accordance with this part of ISO 639, are both complementary to, and compatible with, the alpha-2 and alpha-3 codes in other parts of the ISO 639 series of standards.

The ISO 639 series of standards provides a coherent means for the identification of languages from the highly generic to the highly specific. This part contributes to the objective of facilitating seamless transfer between these standards so that users are able to combine and use language identifiers for language variants, languages, macrolanguages, language groups and language families with minimal effort, whilst allowing a stand-alone system for future development and extensibility.

The alpha-4 language identifiers and the language reference names are provided for use in a broad range of applications, including terminology and lexicography, information and documentation (e.g. for education, archival and retrieval processes, information services, cultural heritage and “bridging the digital divide”), linguistics and information technology (search engines).

All language codes are to be regarded as open lists that can be extended and refined in accordance with the registration procedures within each standard. The registration and maintenance procedures for this part of ISO 639 have been adopted from ISO/IEC 11179-6.

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