

The Society for the Study of the Indigenous Languages of the Americas

*** SSILA BULLETIN ***

An Information Service for SSILA Members

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-->> --Correspondence should be directed to the Editor-- <<--

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253.0 SSILA Business

- * Earlier abstract deadline for January 2008 LSA meeting
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The deadline for abstracts for paper and poster abstracts for the LSA Annual Meeting has been advanced this year to August 1 (for details see <http://www.lsadc.org/info/meet-annual.cfm>). It is not clear whether this decision -- which reflects LSA's expanded review process (all abstracts will be reviewed by the Program Committee AND by a panel of 70 external expert reviewers) -- will require SSILA to set the same earlier deadline. Since SSILA's first Call for Papers will go out in a few weeks, the Program Committee will have to make a determination soon. The Bulletin will keep you abreast of developments.

253.1 Correspondence

* ISO 639-3 change request review cycle has begun
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From Joan Spanne (iso639-3@sil.org) 3 March 2007:

March 30, 2007, was the closing date for sending in change request forms for consideration during the first three-month review period for Candidate Change Requests, which will take place April through June 2007. All Candidate Change Requests may be viewed via the Change Request Index:

http://www.sil.org/iso639-3/chg_requests.asp

This index permits sorting in various ways and has links to specific documentation for each change being proposed. The outcome of each Change Request will be announced in July 2007. Comments on any change request may be directed to iso639-3@sil.org; comments will also be posted to the Change Request documentation page for viewing by others. Please include the Change Request number in the subject line.

Please take a moment to look at proposed changes related to languages in your area of interest and send in your comments. This is your means of "voting" on changes to improve the ISO 639-3 standard.

You may also continue to propose additional changes, which will be considered in a review cycle later this year.

--Joan Spanne
ISO 639-3/RA, SIL International
Dallas, TX
iso639-3@sil.org

* A bird book?
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From Merritt Ruhlen (ruhlen@stanfordalumni.org) 22 March 2007:

A few years ago I thought I saw a book in the Stanford library that was a compendium of bird names in Native American languages, but I have been unable to find it. I was wondering if other readers of the Bulletin might know the title and author of this book.

--Merritt Ruhlen
Palo Alto, CA
ruhlen@stanfordalumni.org

* Learning Tzotzil
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From Lourdes Rodriguez (lrodrig1@health.usf.edu) 19 March 2007:

I was wondering how I can find a manual for learning Tzotzil. Do readers of the Bulletin have any suggestions?

--Lourdes Rodriguez
USF College of Medicine, Division of Geriatrics
Tampa, FL
lrodrig1@health.usf.edu

* Dena'ina Sukdu'a
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From Joan Tenenbaum (merlin059@centurytel.net) 7 March 2007:

It is with great pride and joy that I announce that "Dena'ina Sukdu'a: Traditional Stories of the Tanaina Athabaskans," my book of traditional stories that I recorded while doing my doctoral linguistic research in the early 1970s, has been released in its third edition, complete with an audio CD of six of the stories.

The book represents for me a huge accomplishment and a wonderful gift to the Dena'ina people. All proceeds from the book go towards more publications in Alaska Native Languages. The book can be ordered directly through the Alaska Native Language Center, P.O. Box 757680, Fairbanks, AK 99775 (907-474-7874, fyanlp@uaf.edu).

I also would like to take this opportunity to announce that the Stonington Gallery in Seattle, Washington will present a solo show of my work in September 2007 along with a book signing and a slide presentation about the work and the experiences which inspired it. The show will consist of jewelry based on the Dena'ina stories, the structure of the Dena'ina language and the experience of being a field linguist. The show will open Thursday September 6th and the slide lecture will be on Wednesday, September 12th. See <http://www.stoningtongallery.com> for details.

I am very excited about these events and the challenge of this very special body of work. This year promises to be a very exciting one for me!

--Joan Tenenbaum
www.joantenenbaum.com

* The straight dope on Illinois?
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From Brian Swann (swann@cooper.edu) 28 Feb 2007:

I read an article by the obnoxious Robert Novak: "Killing a Chief", lamenting the passing of Chief Illiniwek (NY Post, Feb. 22, 07). He makes the ludicrous assertion that "Illinois is Algonquian for 'tribe of superior men'." I know there are at least two more reasonable derivations of "Illinois", one, as I recall, coming out as something like "they speak the same language" and the other -- I can't recall. Could you run a query asking for the "accepted" translation of "Illinois"? (You might also mention the stupid article also). Thanks!

--Brian Swann
Cooper Union, New York City
(swann@cooper.edu)

* SSILA and the *Ethnologue*: Picking the wrong fight
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From Ken Whistler (kenw@sybase.com) 6 March 2007:

What I have seen of the debate over SIL and the ISO 639 registration standard for language codes strikes me as a lot of silliness. There is a lot to criticize in the *Ethnologue* and a lot to criticize in SIL, but the SSILA resolution strikes me as not knowledgeable about the ISO process, the nature of an ISO registration standard, the role of an ISO maintenance authority for a registry, or how to be effective in accomplishing changes for it.

First off, the IT "industry" per se has little interest in expanding the scope of ISO 639 to cover thousands of language codes, nor a vested interest in pushing the *Ethnologue's* particular scheme. What they *do* need, however, is an implementable scheme of language codes that is more complete and rationalized than the 2-letter language codes, and which has some prospect for stability and decent maintenance practices.

The *Ethnologue's* codes were grabbed because they were available and there clearly wasn't anything better. LinguistList's "Multi-Tree" project to "create a digital library of scholarly hypotheses about language relationships and subgroupings" (<http://linguistlist.org/multitree/>) is all very scholarly and proper, but not even close to a set of practical, usable codes. And what else is there, other than Ruhlen?

Worrying about the flaws in the *Ethnologue* coding is a little like saying that nobody should have ever implemented the Dewey Decimal System for organizing library books because doing so improperly constrained the study of the organization of human knowledge and resulted in the misclassification of books into improper categories.

Of course things got misclassified. Of course it was a hack. But it was created so that librarians could create manually searchable catalogs and know where to put their books. It was a *practical* problem for libraries -- not a final statement about the philosophy of knowledge.

There is a *practical* problem now for labeling billions of web pages and billions of XML documents with language tags. There are practical problems now for labelling machine-readable locales and giving language labels for collations and tagging text for spell-check, and on and on. 99.99% of the extent of that problem has to do with languages that are in fairly widespread use, which can use a rough-and-ready classification for most purposes, which may not match up against genetic categories anyway in many cases (e.g. the needs for labeling data in Chinese), and which don't need to wait on detailed and accurate delineation of all the subtle points of historic taxonomic relations.

Sure, ISO 639 represents a system of language codes. And sure, publication of codes in an ISO registry "promulgates" their usage in some sense. But neither ISO nor most of the implementing industry knows nor cares much about the details of the classification. For the most part, they just need labels that say "X" is different from "Y" and has someplace to go look up what "X" is supposed to be and what "Y" is supposed to be.

If it turns out that "X" is better treated as "X1" and "X2", well, if somebody registers "X1" and "X2", then we can have a label that

distinguishes "X1" from "X2". Or if it turns out that "X" turns out just to be a variety of "Y" and shouldn't really get a distinct label, we can add a note to the registry and stop using "Y" as a label.

There is a reason why I'm doing this all as an algebra, instead of turning to the *Ethnologue* and criticizing their classification of, say, indigenous California languages. The algebra of codes and labels is all ISO 639 is about. When you get down to it, it *isn't* an international standard for the taxonomy of languages at all. It neither is nor aspires to be.

The intellectual confusion that has set in here results in part simply from the fact that the Ethnologue codes were grandfathered in wholesale, and the *Ethnologue* is the result of an ongoing linguistic taxonomic project. I think that many of the linguists who are upset about this can't see past that perception of the issue.

When dealing with California data in specialized repositories, do you think I would feel constrained, in *any* way, by ISO 639 language codes? Not on your life! I'd be a fool to expect that ISO 639 codes would match up against detailed historical linguistic analysis, dialect distribution, and sociolinguistic or other status of language communities. And I'd feel perfectly at ease in creating my own set of codes for those, if I needed programmatic distinctions to be made in the repository (as, for example, labeling fields in a cross-dialect database). And I would expect no less in the way of sophistication from all the rest of the lexicographers and corpus and historical linguists out there.

If I needed to publish data on the web or in XML format for some other repository, I might (or might not) look for some generic ISO 639 language codes to help identify the data in a way that generic tools (e.g. search engines) could make use of. I might (or might not) seek to register one or more new language codes with ISO 639 if I felt that existing ones were inadequate. And I would get on with the scholastic enterprise at hand.

Another thing you need to keep in mind about ISO 639 -- another thing that most of the linguists engaged in this debate seem to keep missing -- is that it is a *registration* standard (actually several of them, for the 2-alpha codes, the 3-alpha codes, the 4-alpha codes, etc.). Registries are *never* completely well-rationalized, complete and consistent. The *standard* is about how to maintain the registry. And then the registry simply takes on a life of its own, as various parties, for various purposes, propose additional codes to be added to the registry, pursuant to the maintenance rules that the standard sets up for the registry.

Compare this to Unicode. There are very good reasons why the Unicode Standard is a character *encoding* standard and not a character *registration* standard. By treating the development of Unicode as an encoding standard, we in the UTC maintain complete and utter control (well, shared with ISO JTC1/SC2, actually) over its content. All new content can be vetted for consistency with the Unicode model, for non-overlap, for implementability knowing what we know about how operating systems work, for determination of complete sets of character properties, and so on. If it were a character *registry*, on the other hand, then the "bozo factor" would be enormous. Supplicants for registration basically are assumed to be right in their requirements, and are only vetted to ensure they follow the bureaucratic rules of the registration maintenance. A character encoding built that way would soon turn into an inconsistent, incoherent mess.

At this point, SSILA linguists should simply be asking themselves questions like: Do I have some language data that needs a code for generic software in public contexts (e.g. searchable web pages) for which none of the existing ISO 639 codes are appropriate? If so, should I commit to requesting a new language code from the maintenance agency? Or is the subtagging mechanism defined in RFC 4646 sufficient for my purposes?

Those are *reasonable* questions, and could result in reasonable, incremental improvements to the set of ISO 639 codes and in the tagging of language for some incremental set of documents on the web.

As far as I can see, there is no evidence that SIL isn't behaving appropriately as a registration authority. People are upset because they don't like and don't trust SIL and because they have problems with the *Ethnologue*. And they can't separate the two. If SSILA linguists actually care about improving the *Ethnologue*, cooperative feedback among colleagues to improve the classification would work much better than confrontation. I suspect, however, that some of the linguists involved actually *don't* want to improve the *Ethnologue* -- they just want both it and SIL to go away.

* * *

If SSILA (and other linguists) really want to see global standards established for linguistic classificatory/taxonomic data -- if you really want a better *Ethnologue* than the *Ethnologue* -- you need to put up or shut up.

If *I* were going to do this -- which I'm not, since I'm hopelessly overbooked on Unicode and Sybase work -- I would start a new *mission* website (pun intended) for the linguistic taxonomy of the world, dedicated to the project. And an organization to feed and care for it -- starting off with a trusted core of linguistic taxonomists who see eye-to-eye on the general problem. Then the organization could seek more membership and participation to help fill out the project -- but with careful control, as this is an area that attracts crazies like flies.

While I like the concept of the Multi-Tree project, it strikes me more as a home for ongoing research on the general problem, rather than as a public, proselytizing site standing on a soapbox and trying to publicize an alternative to the internet bandwidth attained by the *Ethnologue* and the clones of the Ruhlen classification.

I would then ruthlessly grab everything from the *Ethnologue*, Ruhlen, and any other world classification site you can run down that isn't just a copy of those two, so as to be able to claim comprehensiveness and an ongoing ability to match any category you come up with against what you would then be claiming were erroneous categories in the competition.

Then you would need a couple months, again behaving more as ruthless production editors under a deadline than as scholars, to bang all the data into what makes more sense, based on the participants' collective brain dump about the state of the field.

Then you push it all public, with a prominent mechanism for feedback and review -- with a good set of understandable procedures. And then you start posting prominent feedback resolution notices on an ongoing basis,

to demonstrate both that there are live, competent, and responsive linguists on the other end, and that the project is dedicated to a rapid cycle of incremental improvement.

And the project should be funded enough, at least to start with, to ensure that you have one competent technician running the website and updating the pages and maintaining the database, and hooking up the site to forms for feedback and so on. And it would be best if the whole project were run by an experienced software project manager, rather than an academic, so that it would run on internet time, instead of scholastic journal time.

And in the meantime, some competent people need to get out and start becoming wikiwarriors on the topic -- because, like it or not, what gets published on the various wikis on the topic of language classification is far more influential and important in the short run (and much of the long run) than what gets published in the peer-reviewed journals. You use the wiki articles to point to the language taxonomy site, and you use the language taxonomy site to point to the wikis.

Coin a memorable name. It will help get others to link to and remember what you are doing, and it will help the project rise through the search rankings.

Your goal is so that when somebody types "language classification" or your coined memorable name in Google or Yahoo! or MSN and clicks "I'm feeling lucky", bang! they're at your site. (Try that with "Unicode" on Google, for example.)

That, in a nutshell, is how, in 2007, you go about combating the influence and impact of ISO 639 and the *Ethnologue*.

--Ken Whistler
Oakland, CA
(kenw@sybase.com)

253.2 E-Journal for Mesoamerican Linguistics

From David Mora-Marin (davidmm@unc.edu) 6 March 2007:

The "Journal of Mesoamerican Languages and Linguistics" will begin publication soon as a peer-reviewed "co-journal" hosted on the LSA's new eLanguage platform (<http://www.elanguage.net>). The coverage will include:

- Articles (30-50 double-spaced pp.) on descriptive and theoretical topics; monographs will also be considered.
- Databases, audio files, and other documentation (size negotiable).
- Reports (15-25 pp.) on recent findings.
- Squibs and snippets (2-10 pp.) on Mesoamerican linguistics.
- Obituaries (3-5 pp.).
- Book reviews (3-5 pp.).
- Brief summaries (1 p.) of new books, journals, CDs, DVDs, on-line resources, etc., as well as status reports on on-going projects.
- News and announcements (1 p.) of activities and events of relevance to the field.

The languages of publication are English or Spanish. Manuscripts should be in IJAL style (<http://www.journals.uchicago.edu/msprep.html>), which follows the The Chicago Manual of Style. (Initial submissions need not conform fully to stylistic requirements, but once approved for publication authors will be required to adapt their manuscripts accordingly.)

Submission procedures

All manuscripts should be submitted to the General Editor, either directly (see below for address) or through the eLanguage website for the journal (URL to be determined soon). The manuscript should be anonymous: direct identifiers of the author should be avoided as much as possible. Each manuscript will be sent to an appropriate member or members of the Editorial Board and to at least two additional referees, who will also remain anonymous. The author should state in their cover letter or e-mail message whether there is a scholar or group of scholars who they do not want to review their manuscript, as well as a scholar or group of scholars who they believe would make for ideal reviewers of the manuscript. The General Editor will respect any request to avoid a certain scholar or group of scholars from reviewing a manuscript.

The referees will fill out a peer-review form in which they will express and document their opinions and recommendations regarding the manuscript. It will take about a week from the moment a manuscript is received to the moment that a set of referees for the manuscript is chosen. The referees will then have a period of two-to-three months (for articles and reports) to turn in their completed reviews; reviews of monograph and database contributions will take significantly longer. During that time (or afterward, prior to the time of publication of the manuscript) the referees will not share the manuscript with anyone--for the purpose of additional input for example--without permission from the General Editor.

Submissions of articles, reports, monographs, databases, squibs and snippets should be accompanied by two abstracts (each no more than 200 words), one in English and one in Spanish.

Once accepted, and after the author has submitted the final version of the manuscript, publication online will proceed swiftly, as soon as a critical mass of contributions is ready for the next issue.

Editorial board

In addition to the General Editor, the Editorial Board includes:

Judith Aissen, Deborah Augsburger, David Beck, Aaron Broadwell, Michal Brody, Lyle Campbell, Nora England, James Fox, Esther Herrera Zendejas, Andy Hofling, Kerry Hull, John Justeson, Terrence Kaufman, Susan Knowles-Berry, Alfonso Lacadena, John Lucy, Carolyn MacKay, Martha Macri, Laura Martin, Judith Maxwell, Pamela Munro, Enrique Palancar, John Robertson, Brian Stross, Frank Trechsel, and Søren Wichmann.

Editorial address

David Mora-Marín, General Editor. 325 Dey Hall CB #3155, Linguistics Department, UNC-Chapel Hill, Chapel Hill, NC 27599 (davidmm@unc.edu, 919/843-5621).

253.3 Upcoming Meetings and Workshops

* Argument Coding in Bolivian Lowland Languages (Villejuif, April 5-7)
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From Antoine Guillaume (Antoine.Guillaume@ish-lyon.cnrs.fr) 19 March, 2007:

A conference on "Argument coding systems in Bolivian lowland languages" is being held this weekend (5-7 April) at the Centre d'Études des Langues Indigènes d'Amérique, CNRS Campus, 7 rue Guy Môquet, 94801 Villejuif, France (Building D, ground floor level). It has been organized by Françoise Rose & Antoine Guillaume. The program includes:

Thursday 5 April

- (afternoon) -- Arawak and Tupi-Guarani languages:
14:00 Françoise ROSE (CELIA-CNRS/IRD, Paris), "Agreement in Mojeño Trinitario: specifying or not who the 3rd person is"
15:30 Swintha DANIELSEN (Radboud U Nijmegen), "Argument marking in Baure"
17:00 Östen DAHL (U Stockholm), "Argument coding in Sirionó"

Friday 6 April

- (morning) -- Isolates / Unclassified languages
9:30 Mily CREVELS (Radboud U Nijmegen), "The indexability hierarchy and voice in Itonama"
11:00 Katharina HAUDE (U Cologne), "Argument coding and alignment in Movima"

(afternoon) -- Tacanan languages
14:00 Marine VUILLERMET (DDL-CNRS/U Lyon 2), "Double Object Constructions and -ka Suffix: Two Special Features of Ese Ejja"
15:30 Carola EMKOW (U Berlin), "Grammatical relations in Araona"
17:00 Antoine GUILLAUME (DDL-CNRS/U Lyon 2), "Interpreting person marking in Reyesano"

Saturday 7 April

- (morning) -- Isolates / Unclassified languages
9:30 Rik van GIJN (MPI Nijmegen), "The case of non-canonically marked subjects in Yurakaré"
11:00 Jeanette SAKEL (U Manchester), "Mosetén and Chimane argument coding"

(afternoon) -- Panoan languages
14:00 Oliver IGGESEN (RCLT, La Trobe U), "Case-marking in Chacobo: Alignment splits, a suprasegmental marker, and how tone sandhi messes it all up"
15:00 Discussion: planning for future events, collective publication, etc.

* Northwest Indian Language Institute (Eugene, June 18-28)
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From Scott DeLancey (delancey@uoregon.edu) 7 March 2007:

The 10th Annual Northwest Indian Language Summer Institute will be held

<http://www.linguistics.ubc.ca/UBCWPL/>.
Contact the editors (linguistics-ubcwpl@mail.arts.ubc.ca) for updated information.

Electronic paper submissions should be sent to:

linguistics-ubcwpl@mail.arts.ubc.ca

Non-electronic (print) copies of paper submissions should be mailed to:

ICSNL 42, 2007
UBCWPL
c/o Department of Linguistics, UBC
E-270 1866 Main Mall
Vancouver, British Columbia V6T 1Z1
Canada

Abstracts of the papers will be posted on the conference website. Each person who submits a paper should send a short abstract (approximately 100 words), also by June 15, 2007, to:

kimary.shahin@ubc.ca.

For additional information on the conference itself, you can contact: Kimary Shahin (kimary.shahin@ubc.ca or (604) 448-9046) or Derek Inkster (drewby@interchange.ubc.ca).

We look forward to seeing you in Kelowna!

253.4 E-Mail Address Updates

The following additions or changes have been made to the SSILA e-mail list since the last Bulletin:

Appelbaum, Irene irene.appelbaum@umontana.edu
Butler, Lindsay lkbutter@email.arizona.edu
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White, Frederick Frederick.white@sru.edu

When your e-mail address changes, please notify us (golla@ssila.org).

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SSILA also publishes a quarterly hard-copy Newsletter that contains book reviews, notices of journal articles and recent dissertations, and other news and commentary. The Newsletter and other publications of the Society are distributed only to members or to institutional subscribers.

SSILA welcomes applications for membership from anyone interested in the scholarly study of the languages of the native peoples of North, Central, and South America. Dues for 2007 are \$16 (US) or \$20 (Canadian) and may be paid in advance for 2008 and 2009 at the 2007 rate. Checks or money orders should be made payable to "SSILA" and sent to: SSILA, P.O. Box 555, Arcata, CA 95518. For further information, visit the SSILA website (<http://www.ssila.org>).
