Comments received for
ISO 639-3 Change Request
2008-095

Outcome: Name change: adopted
Language split: rejected
Effective date: 2009-01-16

Registration Authority decision on Change Request no. 2008-093: to split the code element "[tcf] Malinaltepec Tlapanec" into two separate language varieties

The request to retire the code element for Malinaltepec Tlapanec and divide it into two distinct languages, Malinaltepec Me'phaa [txk] (new identifier with a more restricted scope of denotation) and Huehuetepec Me'phaa [thb], is rejected for insufficient linguistic evidence. The requester has cited as primary evidence the work done by the Me'phaa Language Development Committee and the Instituto Nacional de Lenguas Indígenas (INALI). This evidence is strongly sociolinguistic, and does not present any recent data relating to linguistic differences; there is simply the comment regarding now discredited intellibility testing of 1970 being biased by learned bilingualism. The need to have distinct written materials in the two varieties does not in itself constitute sufficient evidence to identify them as separate languages. The movement toward separation is one that the Registration Authority does not support without very clear evidence that is linguistic as well as sociolinguistic.

The Registration Authority agrees with the the proposed name change, to use the indigenous name to identify the language (now also coming into wider use in English), rather than a pejorative exonym. However, considering that name "Tlapanec" is still far more widely used, in comparison with the name "Me'phaa", throughout the literature, in reference tools and resources, and generally on the Internet, it would be unhelpful to remove it altogether from the standard. In view of its pejorative nature, it is no longer used as the Reference Name. While the reference name is not intended to have any special status in comparison with other names used in the standard with a given code element (it is intended for convenience of users of the downloadable code tables), and therefore is not generally changed if the specific name form is retained, it is the intention of the Registration Authority to avoid use of pejorative names as reference names. Therefore, the name of the existing code element will be updated accordingly, even though the split is not approved.