

Specification for

The representation of names of languages

UDC 003.62:[802/809 + 914/919 + 06]

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Committees responsible for this British Standard

The preparation of this British Standard was entrusted by the Information and Documentation Standards Committee (DOT/-) to Technical Committee DOT/14, upon which the following bodies were represented:

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This British Standard, having been prepared under the direction of the Information and Documentation Standards Committee, was published under the authority of the Board of BSI and comes into effect on 28 February 1989

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First published February 1965
First revision February 1989

The following BSI references relate to the work on this standard:
Committee reference DOT/14
Draft for comment 84/63228 DC

ISBN 0 580 17158 2

Amendments issued since publication

Amd. No.	Date of issue	Comments

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National foreword

This British Standard has been prepared under the direction of the Information and Documentation Standards Committee. It is identical with ISO 639 “*Code for the representation of names of languages*”, which was developed by Technical Committee ISO/TC 37, Terminology (principles and coordination), and was published in 1988 by the International Organization for Standardization (ISO). It supersedes the previous edition, BS 3862:1965, which is now withdrawn.

Terminology and conventions. The text of the International Standard has been approved as suitable for publication as a British Standard without deviation. Some terminology and certain conventions are not identical with those used in British Standards; attention is drawn especially to the following.

Wherever the words “International Standard” appear, referring to this standard, they should be read as “British Standard”.

Cross-reference

International Standard	Corresponding British Standard
ISO 3166:1988	BS 5374:1989 ^a Specification for codes for the representation of names of countries (Identical)

^a In preparation. A revision of BS 5374:1981 which is identical with the 1981 edition of ISO 3166.

Additional information. This standard is the national implementation of ISO 639:1988; as such, only the English text has been reproduced. If the French text is required, reference should be made to the original ISO publication.

The United Kingdom disapproved of the classified list of languages and their symbols arranged by families, contained in the Annex, on the grounds that it was unnecessary and, indeed, contentious (it is often not easy to determine with any certainty to which group a particular language belongs). Its inclusion does not, however, affect the use of the code specified in this standard.

NOTE *Typographical errors.* In clause 1, lines 1 and 2, “presentation” should be read as “representation”.

In 4.1, line 8, “i.e.” should be read as “e.g.”.

A British Standard does not purport to include all the necessary provisions of a contract. Users of British Standards are responsible for their correct application.

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Summary of pages

This document comprises a front cover, an inside front cover, pages i and ii, pages 1 to 12, an inside back cover and a back cover.

This standard has been updated (see copyright date) and may have had amendments incorporated. This will be indicated in the amendment table on the inside front cover.

1 Scope and field of application

This International Standard provides a code for the presentation of names of languages. The symbols were devised primarily for use in terminology, lexicography and linguistics, but they may be used for any application requiring the expression of languages in coded form. It also includes guidance on the use of language symbols in some of these applications.

2 Reference

ISO 3166, *Code for the representation of names of countries*.

3 Definition

For the purpose of this International Standard the following definition applies.

language code

a set of symbols used to designate languages

4 Language symbols

4.1 Form of the language symbols

The language symbols are created from the original language name, if in Latin spelling, or from the language name converted into Latin characters. If a country, where the language concerned has the status of a national language, requests a certain language symbol, preference is given to this symbol whenever possible. Two-letter lower-case symbol are used.

When adapting this International Standard to languages using other alphabets (i.e. Cyrillic), symbols shall be formed according to the principles of this International Standard.

4.2 Creation of new language symbols

For the purpose of allocating additional language symbols, the ISO Council has designated Infoterm, Österreichisches; Normungsinstitut (ON), Postfach 130, A-1021 Vienna, Austria, as the Registration Authority for ISO 639.

4.3 Application of language symbols

Language symbols can be used in the following particular instances.

4.3.1 To indicate the language used

a) Generally:

Example: In a list of delegates issued at an ISO meeting, the symbols en, fr and ru indicate whether the delegates spoke in (en) English, (fr) French or (ru) Russian.

b) At the head of documents:

The original language of a document may be indicated by the respective language symbol.

Examples:

(Document of the United Nations:)
ST/DCS/1/Rev. 2 en fr

(Document of the International Monetary Fund:)
GLO.3-86 en fr es

c) In bibliographies:

In multilingual bibliographies, language symbols precede the titles of the publications or are given in a separate line before the bibliographic reference.

In the case of bibliographic references to vocabularies containing definitions, the symbol(s) for the language(s) of the definition are presented in italics (or underlined).

Example:

en fr ru

ISO. Fork-lift trucks — Hook-on type fork arms — Vocabulaire/Chariots élévateurs à fourche — Bras de fourche — Bras de fourche à tenons — Vocabulaire/Pogruz*iki vilo*nye — Zahvaty vilo*nye — Terminologija. Genève: ISO, Dec. 1974, 4 p., A4 (ISO 2331:1974).

4.3.2 To indicate the language to which a term belongs

a) In documents on terminology, language symbols, either singly or in groups, precede the terms. If in groups, the symbols are separated by a blank.

Examples:

1) en positron
de Positron
it positrone
fr positon
es positrón

2) en fr ion
de lon
sv pl jon

b) In vocabularies and dictionaries, language symbols are especially useful to distinguish similar forms in languages such as Italian and Spanish or Norwegian and Danish. They precede the term to which they refer.

Examples:

1) en ion
de lon
fr ion
it ione
es ion
ru ion

2) en ion // de lon

fr ion // it ione // es ion //

ru ion

In multilingual alphabetically ordered lists of words, language symbols follow the terms to which they refer, so as not to interfere with the alphabetic sequence.

Examples:

ion en fr es	positon	fr
	positron	en sv
	positrón	es
lon de	Positron	de
ione it	positrone	it
jon sv pl	pozyton	pl

4.4 Application of the country symbols

Country symbols (the alpha-2 symbols from ISO 3166) may be combined with language symbols to denote the area in which a term is used (for examples, see the last column in the Annex).

Country symbols may be added to terms that are not used in all countries where the language is spoken, in such instances, the terms may be followed by synonyms associated with other country symbols. Country symbols should be separated by blanks.

Examples:

1) The element for connecting a commutator segment to the winding is called fr jonction au collecteur; en commutator lug GB; commutator riser US.

2) en GB flame proof; en US explosion-proof

fr antidéflagrant

it antideflagrante

de explosionsgeschützt

4.5 Application of other symbols

Among the documents which may be used as sources of terms and definitions, National and International Standards, recommendations and agreements command attention on the first instance by their authority. Symbols such as BS (= British Standard), NF (= Norme Française), etc. may be put after a term or definition to indicate the authoritative source.

Examples:

en mean particle diameter BS: The arithmetic mean of the individual diameters BS

fr absorption photoélectrique NF