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(Revision of ANSI/NISO Z39.53-1994)

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Codes for the Representation of Languages for Information Interchange

Abstract: A standardized 3-character code to indicate language in the exchange of information is defined. Codes are given for languages, contemporary and historical.

An American National Standard
Developed by the
National Information Standards Organization

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Foreword

(This foreword is not part of the American National Standard for Codes for the Representation of Languages for Information Interchange, ANSI/NISO Z39.53-2001. It is included for information only.)

This standard was originally prepared by Standards Committee C, Language Codes, which was organized in 1979. Charged with “providing a standard code for indicating languages for information interchange purposes,” the committee produced a standard based on the list of MARC language codes developed by the Library of Congress in cooperation with the National Agricultural Library and the National Library of Medicine. This code list is now published as the MARC Code List for Languages.

Practical application of the MARC language codes has shown that in order to serve as an appropriate retrieval device for information, a standard list of language codes must reflect the linguistic content of the universal collection to which it is applied, with language codes assigned as needed to distinguish information in a given language or group of languages. The MARC language codes constitute such a list.

The committee’s decision to base the standard on the existing MARC list took into account these contributing factors: (a) several years’ successful application of the MARC language codes resulting in many millions of bibliographic records containing the accepted MARC codes, (b) the mnemonic relationship of the MARC codes to the English language names of the languages with English being the operational language of most American libraries, information services, and publishers, and (c) the flexibility inherent in a three-character code. The MARC list may be consulted for references to alternative forms of language names, as well as for the assignments to collective codes of languages for which individual codes have not been established.

This revised edition reflects a thorough review of the document and includes changes which are a result of requests and demonstrated need from users and implementors. In addition, it includes numerous changes necessary for compatibility with bibliographic language codes in ISO 639-2 (*Codes for the representation of names of languages: alpha-3 code*). The MARC code list is kept consistent with both ANSI/NISO Z39.53 and ISO 639-2/B.

NISO acknowledges with thanks the contributions of Rebecca Guenther, Library of Congress Network Development and MARC Standards Office, in revising this standard.

This standard was processed and approved for submittal to ANSI by the National Information Standards Organization. It was balloted by the NISO Voting Members February 9, 2001 - March 23, 2001. It will next be reviewed in 2006. Suggestions for improving this standard are welcome. They should be sent to the National Information Standards Organization, 4733 Bethesda Avenue, Suite 300, Bethesda, MD 20814. NISO approval of this standard does not necessarily imply that all Voting Members voted for its approval. At the time it approved this standard, NISO had the following members:

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