

Title: Implementing the ISO 639-2 code for Sign Languages

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Date: 2000-02-07

Linguists have long recognized that Sign Languages are true languages, and the world's Sign Languages, used by Deaf and hearing people, have been provided with an identifying code in ISO 639-2, the International Standard which specifies 3-letter codes to identify the names of languages.

The code is a single 3-letter code, *sgn* . As necessary, other codes may be appended to that code (according to clause 4.4 of ISO 639-2) to specify different Sign Languages. Such extensions cannot be added to ISO 639-2 itself, as it does not register extended codes. However, extended codes may be registered with [IETF](#) according to [RFC 1766](#) when warranted. The list of registered extended codes is available from IANA and an [index](#) to it is available.

Most of the Sign Languages in the tables below can be identified by the country in which they are used, by appending the 2-letter country code from [ISO 3166-1](#). A number of them additionally require one of the regional extensions specified in ISO 3166-2 (where more than one Sign Language occurs in a country). A few of the extensions are language codes taken from ISO 639-2; these are used where geographical delimitation is not feasible.

NOTE: The use of country and region codes is not intended to be comprehensive. American Sign Language (sgn-US) is used in Canada; Plains Sign Talk (sgn-US-SD) is not limited to the state of South Dakota. The codes are intended to be identifying, not encyclopaedic.

By convention, the language code is written in small letters, and the country code and regional extension are written in capital letters.

In each table, the first column (Name & Link) presents the name of the Sign Language and sometimes gives an HTML link to an external source for information about it. The second column (Acronym) gives a conventional acronym reported as an alternate name by the Deaf Action Committee for Sign Writing ([DAC](#)) or by the Summer Institute of Linguistics ([SIL](#)). The third column (SIL code) and fourth column (SIL country page) link to pages from the 13th edition of the [SIL Ethnologue](#). In the fifth column (Code) is the [registered](#) or provisional RFC 1766 extended identifier. In the sixth column (Comment) a note is added to explain an extension when it consists of more than just the country code.

The list here is derived mostly from the Ethnologue's pages on [Deaf Sign Languages](#) and other [Sign Languages](#). The SIL itself recognizes that for many of these languages, further investigation is required in order to ascertain their status. When Everson Gunn Teoranta ([EGT](#)), as the Registration Authority for Sign Language extensions, has positive information regarding the uniqueness of a Sign Language, the code is registered with IETF and noted here in Table A. The remaining codes (in Table B) must be considered provisional until they are verified by experts. Appropriate verification entails the following:

1. A linguistic description (such as a formal grammar or dictionary)
2. Evidence of at least 5 additional documents in which the language is illustrated (printed or video)

A number of transcription systems exist to write Sign Languages for research purposes. Among these are [Stokoe](#), [HamNoSys](#), [Bergmann](#), [SignFont](#), [Newkirk](#), Eshkol-Wahmann, Liddell Movement-Hold, [SignPS](#), Labanotation, Benesh Movement Notation, numerous glossing systems, and life-like illustrations placed in special sequences. These transcription systems were not designed to be daily writing systems for Sign Languages; their sole purpose is to record linguistic analysis of signs for research studies.

The Sutton [SignWriting](#) system was designed to be a daily writing system for signers. At present, Deaf children, Deaf adults, and hearing signers in over 18 countries are writing their native signed languages with SignWriting symbols. It is being tested in schools and appears to raise literacy levels of born-deaf children, by providing a written base for their native (signed) language and the written (spoken) language of the majority in the countries in which they live. SignWriting is the only writing system used to publish written Sign Language literature, and offers a large number of publications of books, textbooks, and dictionaries, as well as the development of SignWriting software.

Documentation can be in any of these writing systems, and multimedia recordings such as video are also acceptable. The point is not to prefer any particular representation of a given Sign Language, but to determine if it is a unique Sign Language that cannot be identified with any other Sign Language. While there exists a French Canadian Sign Language (sgn-CA-QC) and a Nova Scotian Sign Language (sgn-CA-NS), there is no unique "Canadian Sign Language" (*sgn-CA) since this language is identical to American Sign Language (sgn-US). If Chadian Sign Language (sgn-TD) turned out also to be identical to American Sign Language (SIL says it shows ASL influence), it would be incorrect to provide a unique code for it.

Table A: Registered Codes

These codes have been proposed for registration, but cannot be formally registered before the revision of RFC 1766 allows ISO 639-2 3-letter elements to appear in the first position. The RFC is currently being revised.

| Name & link | Acronym | SIL code | SIL country page | Code | Comment |
|--|---------|---------------------|--------------------------------|--------|---------|
| American Sign Language | ASL | ASE | USA, Canada | sgn-US | |
| British Sign Language | BSL | BHO | United Kingdom | sgn-GB | |
| Irish Sign Language | ISL | ISG | Ireland | sgn-IE | |
| Nicaraguan Sign Language | ISN | NCS | Nicaragua | sgn-NI | |

Table B: Provisional Codes

| Name & link | Acronym | SIL code | SIL country page | Code (provisional) | Comment |
|---|---------|---------------------|--|--------------------|--------------------|
| Adamorobe Sign Language | | ADS | Ghana | sgn-GH-EP | Eastern region |
| Algerian Sign Language | | ASP | Algeria | sgn-DZ | |
| Argentine Sign Language | LSA | AED | Argentina | sgn-AR | |
| Armenian Sign Language | | AEN | Armenia | sgn-AM | |
| Australian Aboriginal Sign Language | | ASW | Australia | sgn-AU-NT | Northern Territory |
| Australian Sign Language | Auslan | ASF | Australia | sgn-AU | |
| Austrian Sign Language | ÖGS | ASQ | Austria | sgn-AT | |
| Bali Sign Language | | BQF | Indonesia, Java & Bali | sgn-ID-BA | Bali |
| Belgian-Flemish Sign Language | | BVS | Belgium | sgn-BE-VLG | Vlaamse Gewest |
| Belgian-French Sign Language | | BVS | Belgium | sgn-BE-WAL | Région Wallonne |
| Bolivian Sign Language | | BVL | Bolivia | sgn-BO | |
| Brazilian Sign Language | LIBRAS | BZS | Brazil | sgn-BR | |
| Bulgarian Sign Language | | BQN | Bulgaria | sgn-BG | |
| Catalonian Sign Language | | CSC | Spain | sgn-ES-CT | Cataluña |
| Chadian Sign Language | | CDS | Chad | sgn-TD | |
| Chilean Sign Language | | CSG | Chile | sgn-CL | |
| Chinese Sign Language | | CSL | China | sgn-CN | |
| Colombian Sign Language | | CSN | Colombia | sgn-CO | |
| Costa Rican Sign Language | | CSR | Costa Rica | sgn-CR | |
| Czech Sign Language | | CSE | Czech Republic | sgn-CZ | |

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|---------------------------------------|------|---------------------|--|------------|-------------------|
| Danish Sign Language | DTS | DSL | Denmark | sgn-DK | |
| Dutch Sign Language | NGT | DSE | Netherlands | sgn-NL | |
| Ecuadorian Sign Language | | ECS | Ecuador | sgn-EC | |
| El Salvadoran Sign Language | | ESN | El Salvador | sgn-SV | |
| Eskimo Sign Language | | ESL | Canada | sgn-CA-NU | Nunavut |
| Ethiopian Sign Language | | ETH | Ethiopia | sgn-ET | |
| Finnish Sign Language | | FSE | Finland | sgn-FI | |
| French Canadian Sign Language | LSQ | FCS | Canada | sgn-CA-QC | Québec |
| French Sign Language | LSF | FSL | France | sgn-FR | |
| German Sign Language | DGS | GSG | Germany | sgn-DE | |
| Ghanaian Sign Language | | GSE | Ghana | sgn-GH | |
| Greek Sign Language | | GSS | Greece | sgn-GR | |
| Guatemalan Sign Language | | GSM | Guatemala | sgn-GT | |
| Hawai'i Pidgin Sign Language | | HPS | USA | sgn-US-HI | Hawai'i |
| Hong Kong Sign Language | HKSL | | Hong Kong | sgn-HK | <i>not in SIL</i> |
| Icelandic Sign Language | | ICL | Iceland | sgn-IS | |
| Indonesian Sign Language | | INL | Indonesia, Java & Bali | sgn-ID | |
| Indopakistani Sign Language | IPSL | INS | India, Pakistan | sgn-IN | |
| Israeli Sign Language | | ISL | Israel | sgn-IL | |
| Italian Sign Language | LIS | ISE | Italy | sgn-IT | |
| Jamaican Country Sign Language | | JCS | Jamaica | sgn-JM | |
| Japanese Sign Language | | JSL | Japan | sgn-JP | |
| Jordanian Sign Language | LIU | JOS | Jordan | sgn-JO | |
| Kenyan Sign Language | | XKI | Kenya | sgn-KE | |
| Korean Sign Language | | KVK | Korea, South | sgn-KR | |
| Kuala Lumpur Sign Language | | KGI | Malaysia, Peninsular | sgn-MY-B | Selangor |
| Latvian Sign Language | | LSL | Latvia | sgn-LV | |
| Libyan Sign Language | | LBS | Libya | sgn-LY | |
| Lithuanian Sign Language | | LLS | Lithuania | sgn-LT | |
| Lyons Sign Language | | LSG | France | sgn-FR-69 | Rhône |
| Malaysian Sign Language | | XML | Malaysia, Peninsular | sgn-MY | |
| Maltese Sign Language | LSMA | MDL | Malta | sgn-MT | |
| Martha's Vineyard Sign Language | | MRE | USA | sgn-US-MA | Massachussetts |
| Mayan Sign Language | | MSD | Mexico | sgn-MX-YUC | Yucatán |
| Mexican Sign Language | LSM | MFS | Mexico | sgn-MX | |
| Monastic Sign Language | | MZG | Holy See | sgn-VA | |
| Mongolian Sign Language | | QMM | Mongolia | sgn-MN | |
| Moroccan Sign Language | | XMS | Morocco | sgn-MA | |
| Namibian Sign Language | | NBS | Namibia | sgn-NA | |

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|---|------|---------------------|--------------------------------------|------------|----------------------------|
| Nepalese Sign Language | | NSP | Nepal | sgn-NP | |
| New Zealand Sign Language | | NZS | New Zealand | sgn-NZ | |
| Nigerian Sign Language | | NSI | Nigeria | sgn-NG | |
| Norwegian Sign Language | NTS | NSL | Norway | sgn-NO | |
| Nova Scotian Sign Language | | NSR | Canada | sgn-CA-NS | Nova Scotia |
| Old Kentish Sign Language | | OKL | United Kingdom | sgn-GB-KEN | Kent |
| Penang Sign Language | | PSG | Malaysia, Peninsular | sgn-MY-P | Pulau Pinang |
| Persian Sign Language | | PSC | Iran | sgn-IR | |
| Peruvian Sign Language | | PRL | Peru | sgn-PE | |
| Philippine Sign Language | | PSP | Philippines | sgn-PH | |
| Plains Sign Talk | PST | PSD | USA | sgn-US-SD | South Dakota |
| Polish Sign Language | | PSO | Poland | sgn-PL | |
| Portuguese Sign Language | LGP | PSR | Portugal | sgn-PT | |
| Providencia Sign Language | | PRO | Colombia | sgn-CO-SAP | Providencia Island |
| Puerto Rican Sign Language | PRSL | PSL | Puerto Rico | sgn-PR | |
| Rennellese Sign Language | | RSI | Solomon Islands | sgn-SB | |
| Romanian Sign Language | | RMS | Romania | sgn-RO | |
| Russian Sign Language | | RSL | Russia, Europe | sgn-RU | |
| Saudi Arabian Sign Language | | SDL | Saudi Arabia | sgn-SA | |
| Scandinavian Pidgin Sign Language | | SPF | Sweden | sgn-SE-crp | Sweden & Creole (language) |
| Singapore Sign Language | | SLS | Singapore | sgn-SG | |
| Slovakian Sign Language | | SVK | Slovakia | sgn-SK | |
| South African Sign Language | | SFS | South Africa | sgn-ZA | |
| Spanish Sign Language | LSE | SSP | Spain | sgn-ES | |
| Sri Lankan Sign Language | | SQS | Sri Lanka | sgn-LK | |
| Swedish Sign Language | STS | SWL | Sweden | sgn-SE | |
| Swiss-French Sign Language | | SSR | Switzerland | sgn-CH-GE | Genève |
| Swiss-German Sign Language | | SGG | Switzerland | sgn-CH-ZH | Zürich |
| Swiss-Italian Sign Language | | SLF | Switzerland | sgn-CH-TI | Ticino |
| Taiwanese Sign Language | TSL | TSS | Taiwan | sgn-TW | |
| Tanzanian Sign Language | | TZA | Tanzania | sgn-TZ | |
| Thai Sign Language | | TSQ | Thailand | sgn-TH | |
| Tunisian Sign Language | | TSE | Tunisia | sgn-TN | |
| Turkish Sign Language | | TSM | Turkey | sgn-TR | |
| Ugandan Sign Language | | UGN | Uganda | sgn-UG | |
| Ukrainian Sign Language | | UKL | Ukraine | sgn-UA | |
| Urubú-Kaapor Sign Language | | UKS | Brazil | sgn-BR-MA | Maranhão |
| Uruguayan Sign Language | | UGY | Uruguay | sgn-UY | |
| Venezuelan Sign Language | | VSL | Venezuela | sgn-VE | |

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|---------------------------|--|---------------------|--------------------------------------|------------|-----------------------------|
| Yiddish Sign Language | | YDS | Israel | sgn-IL-yid | Israel & Yiddish (language) |
| Yugoslavian Sign Language | | YSL | Yugoslavia, Slovenia | sgn-YU | |
| Zambian Sign Language | | ZSL | Zambia | sgn-ZM | |
| Zimbabwe Sign Language | | ZIB | Zimbabwe | sgn-ZW | |

Table C: Signed Spoken Languages

SIL's Ethnologue reports a number of signed versions of spoken languages. The list below may not be complete, but it can be seen that by suffixing an ISO 639-2 Bibliographic language code to the Sign Language code and then following that with a country code, adequate precision can be obtained.

| Name & Link | Acronym | SIL Code | SIL Country | 639-2 + ext. (proposed) | Comment |
|-------------------|---------|----------|--------------------------------|-------------------------|---------|
| Signed Afrikaans | | | South Africa | sgn-afr-ZA | |
| Signed Chinese | | | Taiwan | sgn-chi-TW | |
| Signed Danish | | | Denmark | sgn-dan-DK | |
| Signed Dutch | | | Belgium | sgn-dut-BE | |
| Signed Dutch | | | Netherlands | sgn-dut-NL | |
| Signed English | | | United Kingdom | sgn-eng-GB | |
| Signed English | | | Ireland | sgn-eng-IE | |
| Signed English | | | USA | sgn-eng-US | |
| Signed Finnish | | | Finland | sgn-fin-FI | |
| Signed French | | | Belgium | sgn-fre-BE | |
| Signed French | | | Canada | sgn-fre-CA | |
| Signed French | | | France | sgn-fre-FR | |
| Signed Japanese | | | Japan | sgn-jpn-JP | |
| Signed Norwegian | | | Norway | sgn-nor-NO | |
| Signed Portuguese | | | Portugal | sgn-por-PT | |
| Signed Swedish | | | Sweden | sgn-swe-SE | |

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