

Terminology versus Standardization

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We are all familiar with the standardization technical committee ISO/TC 37 "Terminology Principles", which was established by Eugen Wuster, the prominent Austrian engineer, who did so much for terminology. Engineers are peculiar creatures, and I count myself among their number. Sometimes, instead of being solely concerned with design of machines and the proper method for screwing bolts, engineers who are working on standardization may start proposing terms and considering how terms are interconnected.

The discipline of standardization has spread throughout the world and embraces all fields, not only technical but also scientific as well as economic. The internationalization of banking is due to the development of standardization in this field. The functioning of credit cards is a simple example.

This paper is not going to address standardization. Space restrictions preclude anything approaching a complete coverage of standardization theory and how it is related to terminology. The truth is that standardization depends on terminology, and this paper will make a few suggestions as to why terminology societies need to work closely with standardization bodies.

Simply put, standardization can be described as the formulation, issuing and implementation of standards, i.e. texts containing specifications that are needed to give instructions to professionals.

In order to avoid having heaven fall on our heads, as Asterix feared here in Lutecia, standards possess a common characteristic: they must have been adopted by a standardization body.

Currently, most major countries have a national standardization body. There are 110 in all, including one in each member state of the European Union, with the exception of Luxembourg, as well as in most other European countries.

National standardization bodies co-operate within the framework of the International Organization for Standardization (ISO) and, depending on their internal structure, within the framework of the International Electrotechnical Commission (IEC), which is the international organization for electrotechnical standardization. Separate electrotechnical standardization bodies exist in some countries. Similarly, there is the International Telecommunication Union (ITU) for standardization on telecommunications.

Each national standardization body develops national standards. Together they work to produce International Standards which are disseminated by ISO and IEC. The national standardization bodies of EU and EFTA countries may also belong to regional standardization organizations, including the Comité Européen de Normalisation (CEN) for general standardization, Comité Européen de Normalisation

Electrotechnique (Cenelec) for electrotechnical standardization and European Telecommunication Standards Institute (ETSI) for telecommunication standardization. These organizations produce common European standards (EN).

One of the main difficulties, perhaps even the greatest difficulty, associated with standardization is that standards have to be written in such a way that anybody implementing them will follow the same course of action as everybody else. People who are completely unconnected and unknown to each other have to understand and to do exactly the same thing. This means that standards must be unambiguous and every term used in them must have only one meaning. Unless this is achieved, we cannot speak about standardization.

Therefore, standardization bodies must ensure that the technical committees responsible for elaborating standards are made up of appropriate members.

In spite of the importance and wide-ranging effects of standardization, relatively few people are involved in the process of developing standards. This is not a reference to the staff of the standardization bodies, but rather a reference to the lack of people from industry, commerce, and other more general walks of life. Those few people who are members of standardization committees are typically subject field experts. They understand the precise meaning of terms and are able to incorporate the correct subject field terminology into the standards. In my experience, I have observed that such knowledgeable persons gain even more knowledge and become

more involved in terminology after having participated in standardization committees. This is one reason that standards contain the correct terminology of the subject field.

The terminology contained in standards has two great advantages. Firstly, is the most precise terminology available in each of the given languages. This means that terminology associations in each country should support the terminology used in standards, help standardizers to identify correct terms and develop appropriate neologisms, and vigorously promote the establishment of standard terminology. Secondly, because there is a close correspondence between national, European and international standards, corresponding terms contained in standards written in different languages can be considered as valid translations to be used in bilingual or multilingual dictionaries.

The discipline of standardization has spread all over the world. Standards are voluntarily followed by every state, organization, institution or enterprise and as a result, order has been achieved. The unfinished tower of Babel will be completed when terminology accomplishes a feat similar to that achieved by standardization.

The European Association for Terminology (EAFTE) can advance the cause of European multilingualism by working closely with European standardization organizations and by encouraging its member societies to co-operate with corresponding national standardization bodies.



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