

Concept system and terms for language varieties according to ISO

Kostas Valeontis

ABSTRACT

The international normative document ISO/TR 21636 (ISO Technical Report), which is under development by the working group ISO/TC37/SC2/WG1 *Language varieties*, delimits and defines the basic concepts of the domain (Language varieties). The work of the international WG is attended by the Greek National Committee ELOT/TC 21, the Greek mirror committee to ISO/TC 37 which is supported by the Technical Chamber of Greece. In this paper, the concept definitions given by this ISO/TR are studied and the existing concept relations are examined, the latter belonging to all three relation types used in terminology: *generic relations*, *partitive relations* and *associative relations*. Concepts defined: the *human language* as a means of communication among all humans; *individual languages* as supersets comprising all *idiolects* of their *speakers*, and *linguistic variation* with its dimensions as sets of *external criteria* according which different *language varieties* are identified as subsets of each individual language. All concepts defined are placed in a unique concept system, which includes all three concept relations being a mixed concept system. Greek equivalent terms proposed for all English terms of the TR are comprised in the Greek–English Glossary of the Annex.

0 Introduction

The under development Technical Report ISO/TR 21636:2021, henceforth referred as “ISO/TR”, is intended to cover the standardization need of making it possible to refer not only to one or more discrete *individual languages* but also to one or more discrete *language varieties*. Therefore, in the framework of international standardization, the work done by ISO/TC37/SC2/WG1 was to identify and well define the various dimensions of *linguistic variation* and the relevant *language varieties* based on them.

According to ISO/TR, the potential interested domains, consequently potential usage areas, include information and communication technologies, libraries, mass media, internet communities, documentation, archival science, linguistic research (specifically sociolinguistics, ethnolinguistics) and sociology¹.

The limited space and time does not permit to cite the definitions of the 58 basic concepts of the domain (Language varieties) defined in the Technical Report; however, the *essential*

¹ The topic of this paper is about the interlingual aspect of *linguistic variation* as “seen” by ISO/TR. Recently in Greece, two important books have been published under the title *Γλωσσική ποικιλία* (Language variety): a volume dedicated to Angeliki Ralli (Archakis, Koutsoukos, Xydopoulos and Papazachariou, 2019) and a monograph (Tsingou, 2020).

2 What about the *human language* and the *individual languages*?

The term *human language* represents/designates the concept ‘means of communication between humans characterized by systematic use of sounds, visual-spatial signs (by movements or gestures), characters or other written symbols or signs that can be combined to express or communicate meaning or a message between humans’.

Let us imagine a ‘set of expressions of *human language* used by a given individual person, at a given time, in a given type of situation, and in a given medium’. Such a set is an *idiolect*, the given person is the *speaker* using this *idiolect*, whereas the given situation is an *event of language use*. This set also includes the cases of a *speaker* with *enhanced communicative functioning abilities* or with *communicative functioning constraints*.

A ‘largest set of idiolects which are interconnected through high mutual intelligibility and used by different speakers’ defines an individual language, which may be a *natural language* – which is spoken or had been spoken by a language community (e.g. Ancient Greek, Latin, Modern Greek, English etc.) – or a *constructed language*, ‘whose rules are explicitly established prior to its use’ (e.g. Esperanto).

In any *individual language*, there are various subsets defined according to some criteria. The very existence of such subsets is the *linguistic variation*; two categories of criteria are distinguished: *external criteria for linguistic variation* and *structural criteria for linguistic variation* (the former are not based on the linguistic features of the idiolects’ systems in contrast with the latter). Each one of these subsets is a *language variety*.

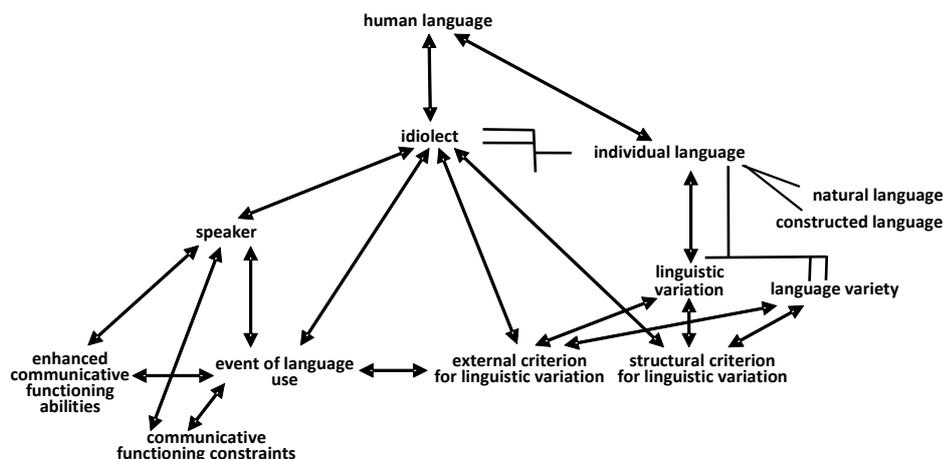


Figure 1

The *concepts* mentioned above (by their terms) are shown on the *concept diagram* in Figure 1 together with the *concept relations* among them. Thus: an *individual language* is a *comprehensive concept* (a *whole*) constituted of *partitive concepts* (*parts*) which are on one hand all the *idiolects* and on the other hand all the *language varieties*. However, at the same time, it is also a *generic concept* (*genus*) subdivided into two *specific concepts* (*species*): the *natural language* and the *constructed language*.

3 Linguistic variation dimensions as criteria of subdivision of an individual language into its language varieties

Any *linguistic variation dimension* is composed of one or more *external criteria for linguistic variation* of the same kind. The ISO/TR distinguishes the following 8 *linguistic variation dimensions*:

- 1 *Space dimension* (various geographical locations and regions)
- 2 *Time dimension* (various spans of time)
- 3 *Social dimension* (various social groups)
- 4 *Medium dimension* (various media for communication)
- 5 *Situation dimension* (various types of situation)
- 6 *Person dimension* (various personal characteristics of the speaker)
- 7 *Proficiency dimension* (various grades of proficiency of the speaker)
- 8 *Communicative functioning dimension* (various functional abilities of the speaker)

The concept diagram including all concepts just mentioned above is shown on Figure 2.

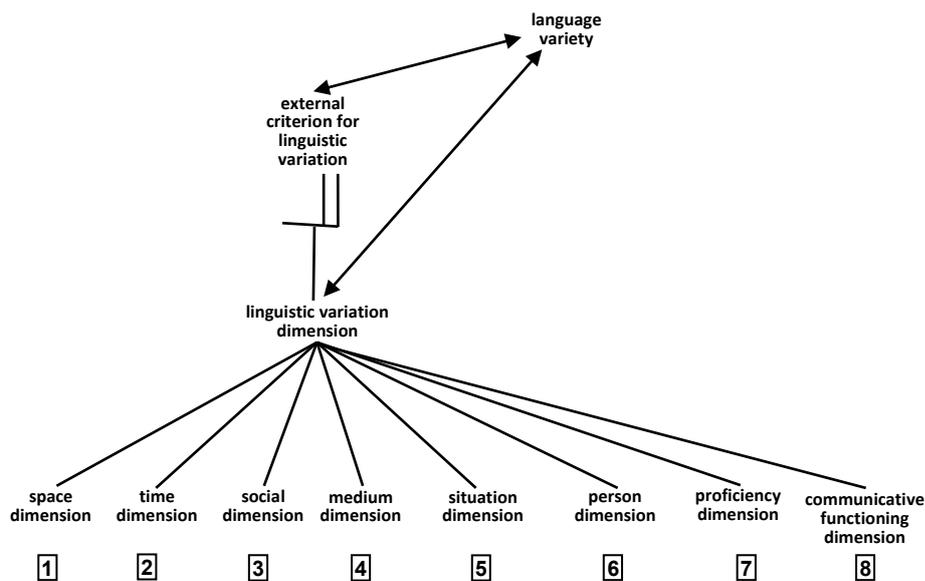


Figure 2

4 Kinds of *language variety* defined in the ISO/TR according to the relevant *linguistic variation dimensions*

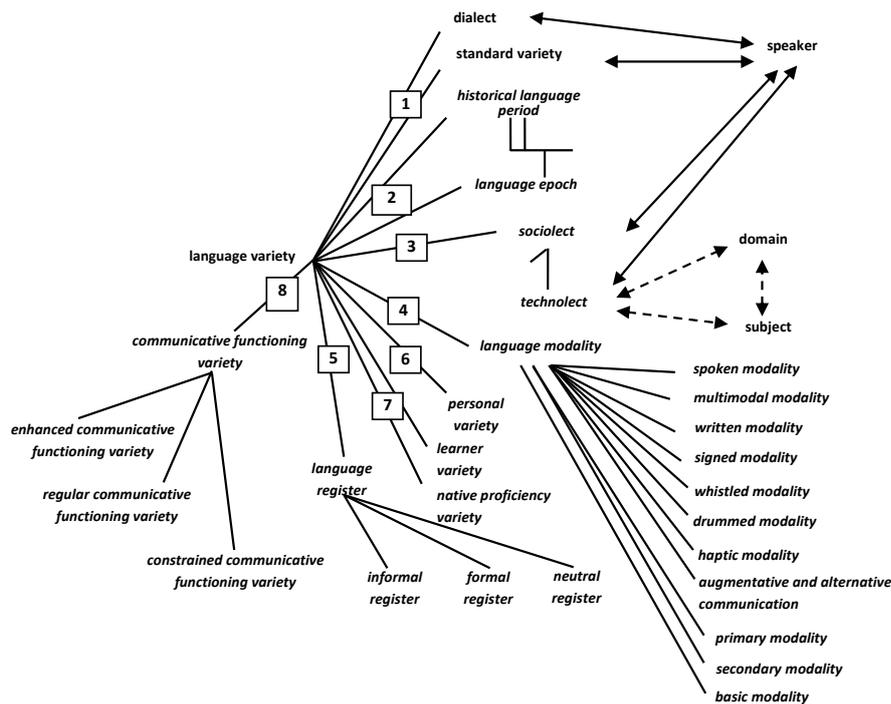


Figure 3

All kinds of *language variety* resulting from applying the 8 *linguistic variation dimensions* mentioned above as *criteria of subdivision* are shown in Figure 3.

- the *standard variety* and the *dialect* (*linguistic variation dimension 1*),
- the *historical language period* and the *language epoch* (*linguistic variation dimension 2*), connected with a *partitive relation*,
- the *sociolect* (*linguistic variation dimension 3*) and, its specific concept, the *technoelect* (for a ‘community having special knowledge in a particular domain or subject’),
- the *language modality* (*linguistic variation dimension 4*) with its multiple species: *spoken modality*, *multimodal modality* (simultaneously speech together with gestures, facial expressions etc.), *written modality*, *signed modality*, *whistled modality*, *drummed modality*, *haptic modality*, *augmentative and alternative communication*, as well as *primary modality* and *secondary modality*, but also *basic modality* from which other *language modalities* are derived,

- the *language register*³ (*linguistic variation dimension 5*) with its three major specific registers: *formal register*, *informal register* and *neutral register*,
- the *personal variety* (*linguistic variation dimension 6*),
- the *learner variety* and the *native proficiency variety* (*linguistic variation dimension 7*) and
- the *communicative functioning variety* (*linguistic variation dimension 8*) with its three specific concepts: *enhanced communicative functioning variety*, *regular communicative functioning variety* and *constrained communicative functioning variety*.

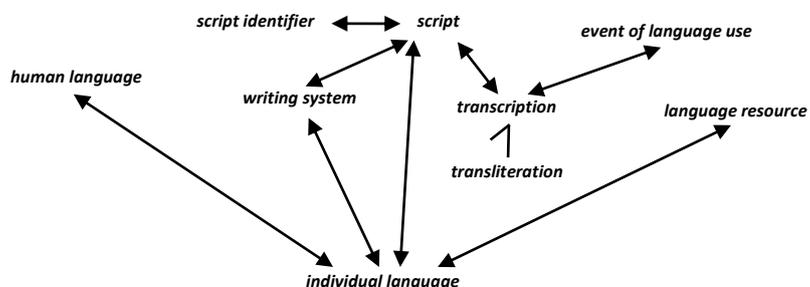


Figure 4

The entire *concept system* under the ISO/TR is completed with the *concepts* of the *concept diagram* in Figure 4, which refer to the documentation of *language resources*. Each *individual language*, in its *written modality*, is written in a certain *writing system* with a certain *script*, while to any of its written texts, or *event of language uses*, a *transcription* ('representation in a written form different from the original representation') may be applied, which is a *transliteration* if fully reversible (i.e. if it enables the reconstruction of the original script without any loss of information about graphic characters).

³ Among the various equivalent Greek terms for the concept 'language register' (επίπεδο ύφους, επίπεδο χρήσης, χρηστικό επίπεδο, επίπεδο λόγου etc) referred in (Tsingou, 2020) the one used in this paper is *επίπεδο ύφους*, which has been adopted by the committee ELOT/TC 21, while M. Tsingou herself uses the term *επίπεδο χρήσης* in her monograph. It should be noted that currently, ELOT/TC 21 is preparing the ELOT National Standard corresponding to the Technical Report ISO/TR 20694:2018 *A typology of language registers*, which includes more *language registers* than the three included here.

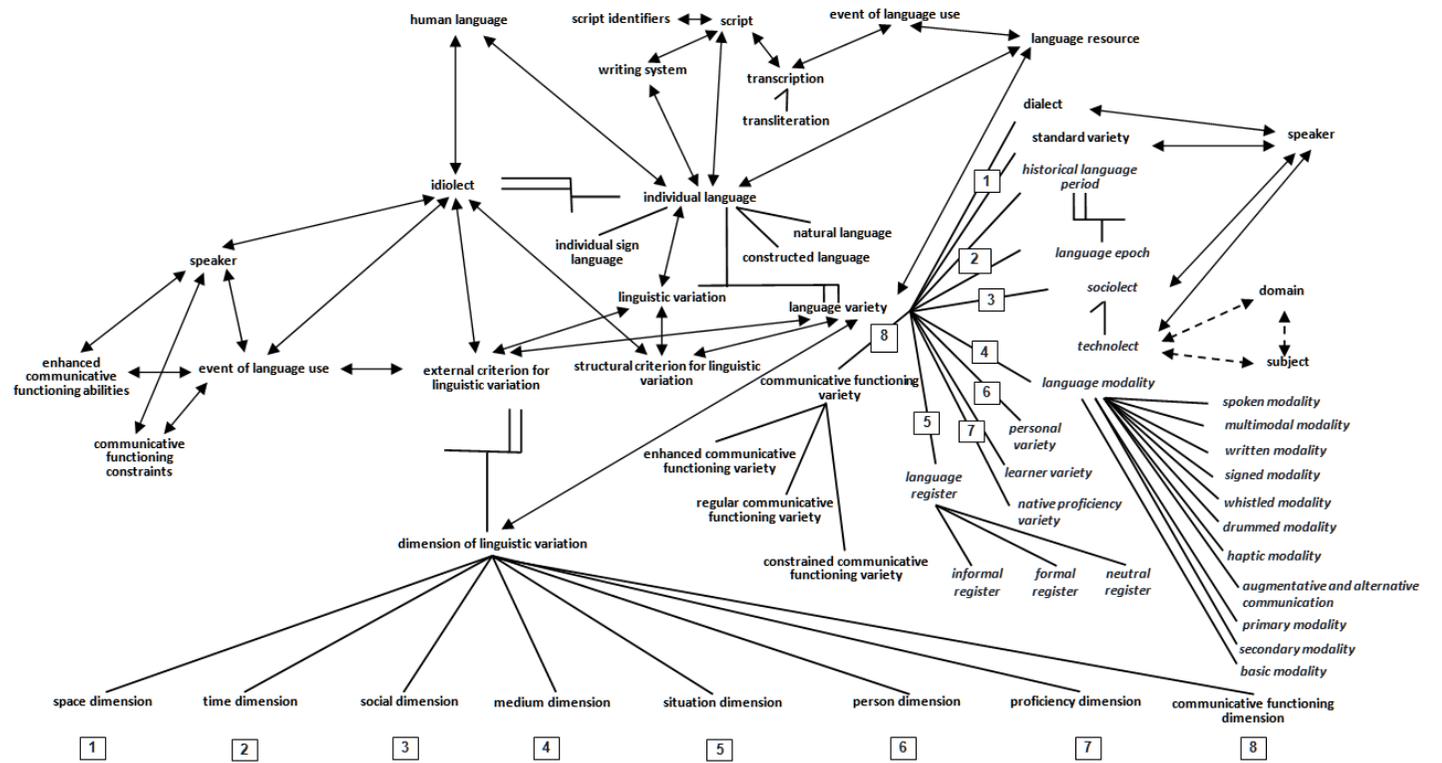


Figure 5

Figure 5 shows the *concept diagram* of the entire *concept system*, which is a composition of the *concept diagrams* in figures 1, 2, 3 and 4. In this *concept diagram*, the *individual sign language* has been added as an *individual language* whose *basic modality* is the *signed modality*⁴.

5 Synopsizing

Synopsizing, the *concept relations* connecting the *concepts* defined in ISO/TR 21636 *Identification and description of language varieties* (ISO/TR) have been studied in this paper; according to these relations four component *concept systems* have been identified, composing an entire *concept system*. The partial *concept diagrams* have been constructed as well as the entire *concept diagram* and Greek equivalent terms have been proposed for all English terms of the ISO/TR in accordance with the Greek terminology adopted by the committee ELOT/TC 21, which follows the further development of the ISO/TR and soon will be called to decide on the Greek national vote for its approval. All equivalent Greek–English terms are included in the Greek–English Glossary in the Annex.

References

- Archakis, A., Koutsoukos, N., Xydopoulos, G. and Papazachariou, D. (Ed. 2019). *Language variety – Studies dedicated to Angeliki Ralli*. Athens: Kapa Ekdotiki
- ELETO (2018). *General and special terms in the domain of terminology* (Edition 6) (Available at: http://www.eleto.gr/download/Bodies/TE21-TerminologyTerms_GR.pdf)
- ELOT 561-1:2006 *Terminology work – Vocabulary – Part 1: Theory and application*
- ELOT 402:2010 *Terminology work – Principles and methods*
- Tsingou, M. (2020). *Language variety – Definition and dimensions*, Athens, Diavlos Editions
- ISO 704:2009 *Terminology work – Principles and methods*
- ISO 1087:2019 *Terminology work and terminology science – Vocabulary*
- ISO/TR 20694:2018 *A typology of language registers*
- ISO/TR 21636:2021 (Rev. 3.1) *Identification and description of language varieties*.
- Valeontis, K. (2018). *62 Basic knowledge items of terminology* (Available at: http://www.eleto.gr/download/Conferences/ELETO-TE21-EDO_Conference/Gnosmata_Orologias_2018-11-08_EN_V01.pdf)

⁴ whose strict definition is: visual-spatial language modality that uses a combination of hand shapes, palm orientation and movement of the hand, arm, mouth, head or body, and facial expression'.

ANNEX

Greek-English glossary of terms in Technical Report ISO/TR 21636
 (in alphabetical order)

αναγνωριστικό πίνακα χαρακτηροσειράς	script identifier
ανεπίσημο επίπεδο ύφους, άτυπο επίπεδο ύφους	informal register, informal language register
ανθρώπινη γλώσσα	human language
απτική τροπικότητα	haptic modality, haptic language modality, tactile modality, tactile language modality
βασική τροπικότητα	basic modality, basic language modality
γλωσσική ποικιλία	language variety
γλωσσική ποικιλότητα	linguistic variation, language variation
γλωσσική τροπικότητα	language modality
γλωσσικός πόρος	language resource, LR
γραπτή τροπικότητα	written modality, written language modality
δευτερογενής τροπικότητα	secondary modality, secondary language modality
διάλεκτος	dialect
διάσταση γλωσσικής ποικιλότητας	dimension of linguistic variation
διάσταση επάρκειας	proficiency dimension
διάσταση επικοινωνιακής λειτουργίας	communicative functioning dimension
δομικό κριτήριο γλωσσικής ποικιλότητας	structural criterion for linguistic variation
εξωτερικό κριτήριο γλωσσικής ποικιλότητας	external criterion for linguistic variation
επαυξημένη και εναλλακτική επικοινωνία	augmentative and alternative communication, AAC
επίπεδο ύφους	language register
επίσημο επίπεδο ύφους, τυπικό επίπεδο ύφους	formal register, formal language register
ιδιόλεκτος	idiolect
ικανότητες βελτιωμένης επικοινωνιακής λειτουργίας	enhanced communicative functioning abilities
ιστορική ποικιλία, ιστορική περίοδος (μιας γλώσσας)	historical language period, language period, historical period (of a language)
κατασκευασμένη γλώσσα	constructed language
καταστασιακή διάσταση, διάσταση επικοινωνιακής κατάστασης	situation dimension
κοινωνική διάσταση, διάσταση κοινωνικής ομάδας	social group dimension
κοινωνιόλεκτος	sociolect
μεσική διάσταση, διάσταση του μέσου	medium dimension
μεταγραμμатισμός	transliteration
μεταγραφή	transcription
νοηματική τροπικότητα	signed modality, signed language modality

ξεχωριστή γλώσσα, ξεχωριστή ανθρώπινη γλώσσα	individual language, individual human language
ξεχωριστή νοηματική γλώσσα	individual sign language
ομιλητής/ομιλήτρια	speaker
ομιλούμενη τροπικότητα	spoken modality, spoken language modality
ουδέτερο επίπεδο ύφους	neutral register, neutral language register
περιορισμοί επικοινωνιακής λειτουργίας	communicative functioning constraints
πίνακας χαρακτηροσειράς	script
ποικιλία (του) μαθητή	learner variety
ποικιλία βελτιωμένης επικοινωνιακής λειτουργίας	enhanced communicative functioning variety
ποικιλία επικοινωνιακής λειτουργίας	communicative functioning variety
ποικιλία εποχής, εποχική ποικιλία, εποχή (μιας) γλώσσας	language epoch, epoch of a language
ποικιλία κανονικής επικοινωνιακής λειτουργίας	regular communicative functioning variety
ποικιλία μητρικής γλώσσας	native proficiency variety
ποικιλία περιορισμένης επικοινωνιακής λειτουργίας	constrained communicative functioning variety
πολυτροπικότητα, πολυτροπική τροπικότητα	multimodal modality, multimodal language modality
προσωπική διάσταση, διάσταση ξεχωριστού ομιλητή	person dimension, individual speaker dimension
προσωπική ποικιλία	personal variety
πρότυπη ποικιλία, κοινή ποικιλία	standard variety
πρωτογενής τροπικότητα	primary modality, primary language modality
συμβάν γλωσσικής χρήσης	event of language use, language use event
σύστημα γραφής	writing system
σφυριχτή τροπικότητα	whistled modality, whistled language modality
τεχνόλεκτος	technolect
τυμπανιστική τροπικότητα	drummed modality, drummed language modality
φυσική γλώσσα	natural language
χρονική διάσταση	time dimension
χωρική διάσταση	space dimension

Kostas Valeontis

Physicist-Electronic Engineer

Leader of terminology working groups

President of the Hellenic Society for Terminology (ELETO)

E-mail: valeonti@otenet.gr