

TERMINOLOGY AND STANDARDISATION

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Introduction

To start with a definition of "standards": a "standard" is a conspicuous object, raised on a pole to indicate the rallying point of an army or fleet. The Royal Standard is used to symbolise the presence of the Queen. But in a technical context, the standard gauge for a railway is 4 ft 8½ inches or 1435 millimetres, a distance decided upon by Royal Commission in 1845-6. By extension, a document which prescribes such standards is also called a standard. If a manufacturer provides a technical specification for his photocopier, this is not a standard, but if a recognized and authoritative body lays down a technical specification that all photocopiers should meet, then this becomes a standard. Given the variety of products on the market, in recent years, there has been a trend away from this type of standard specification. The activity, known as standardization, gives rise to national standards bodies. In Britain this is the British Standards Institution (generally known as BSI). Almost any document produced by such a body could be regarded as a "standard", however, just to complicate matters, BSI produces handbooks and complementary documents of various kinds which are not standards in themselves.

Fallacies

The merits of standardizing the height of tables are self-evident. But standardization scare stories are part of the staple diet of the UK press, particularly if it can lay the blame on someone in "Europe". Thus the *Independent on Sunday* carried a story "The EU... has decreed that condom dimensions should be harmonised across the seamless Continent". In fact this is another instance where size does not matter, and the standard referred to is concerned with test methods and seeks to give consumers confidence that the condoms they purchase will be effective as contraceptives – not have any holes or split during use, etc.

Another common misconception, one might say obsession, is that standardization makes everything the same. Thus the tourism trade rejected standardization of hotel services, saying "we don't want all hotels across the world to be identical!"

Standards and regulations

The concept of standardization also includes the voluntary use of standards for collective benefit. Standards do not in themselves impose any obligations of

adherence. On the other hand Regulations which the law requires to be implemented may refer to standards in such a way as to make compliance with them compulsory. This practice is not common in the UK but is quite widespread in some other countries.

Types of standards

“Standards are prepared for various reasons and many uses. To this end, there are different types of standards such as vocabularies, methods, specifications and codes of practice, guides or recommendations. An important distinction is drawn between a specification (that prescribes requirements to be fulfilled) and a code of practice (comprising guidance and recommendations to be followed).”

The global standardization system

“Standardization takes place at international, regional and national levels. International and regional standardization is achieved mainly through the collective efforts of national standards bodies. The international and regional organizations are linked by collaboration agreements and, together with the national standards bodies, form a global standardization system. They have adopted agreed procedures and modes of cooperation.” From a UK perspective, the levels are represented at the national level by BSI, at the regional level by the European Committee for Standardization (known as CEN) and at the international level by the International Organization for Standardization (known as ISO). This is the basic structure from which there is a divergent structure for the Telecommunications and Electrotechnical fields.

A British Standard entitled “A standard for standards” (BS 0) can be seen on the BSI website www.bsi-global.com. This is in three parts (a) General principles; (b) Committee procedures; and (c) Structure, drafting and presentation. It is worth noting that national standards bodies aim to avoid duplication of effort by contributing to international or regional standardization rather than developing national standards. As far as the UK is concerned international standards may be adopted or not – it is a matter of choice. ISO standards appear in English and French versions, and sometimes in a Russian version. In a three-language multilingual vocabulary there are three columns across the page with the equivalent terms and definitions in each language in a row.

With European standards the policies on implementation are slightly different. BSI is obliged to give the status of national standards to standards prepared by the European organizations, and to withdraw conflicting national standards. European standards are produced in English, French and German versions. There are no standards on terminology methods at the European level (except the CEN rules for drafting European standards), but there are a number of multilingual vocabularies.

Sector organisation

The development of standards within BSI and ISO takes place within a framework of industrial sectors. Normally a number of standards in the same area are needed, so it is convenient to involve the same group of people or cooperating organisations in similar pieces of work.

One of the ISO sectors is concerned with Terminology. Its reference is TC (or Technical Committee) 37. It bears the title of "Terminology and language and content resources", and Dr Christian Galinsky, who sent our Association the message of welcome and support referred to at our last conference, is its Secretary. I won't go into too much detail, because if you go to the ISO website, which is www.iso.org and select standards development, you will be given a list of technical committees. Under TC 37 you will find the terms of reference, the sub-committees, the business plan, and the standards published or under development. I will come back later to the standards under development.

TS/1

In BSI we have a technical committee - TS/1 - which shadows the international technical committee. This means that whatever comes out of TC 37 is referred to TS/1 for consideration and comment. I am the Chairman of the Committee, and Chris Cox is the Secretary. He is also a founder member of the Association.

Standards development in TS/1

Where ISO TC 37 undertakes the development of a standard, and BSI is not the prime mover, TS/1 is involved at six stages. At all the relevant stages the TC 37 sub-committee concerned has to evaluate the comments from all the countries and add up all the votes cast one way or the other. Thresholds have to be met and if there are too many negative votes or too much critical comment, a replacement document has to be prepared and the stage repeated.

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| Stage 1. | National vote on the proposal for new work |
| Stage 2. | Experts participating in the work receive papers from the working group, make comments, engage in discussions, take advice from other known experts in the UK, and, if requested, produce draft text for inclusion in the standard, possibly a chapter, a section or some examples. |
| Stage 3. | The UK submits detailed comments on the Committee Draft prepared by the Working Group of experts and votes on whether the standard should go forward as a draft for public comment. |
| Stage 4. | The availability of a draft for public comment is announced with a view to obtaining the widest possible expression of opinion on the standard. TS/1 examines UK public comments and decides which of them to submit to ISO, and votes on the document as a whole on behalf of the UK. |
| Stage 5. | Formal vote on final draft |
| Stage 6. | ISO Publication (TS/1 decides whether it wants this standard to be a British Standard as well) |

Published standards are subject to review every five years.

Committee membership

BSI standards development is independent of government but is substantially dependent on government support. In sectors in which commercial interests are less strong, documentation and terminology for example, it is more difficult to find people with relevant experience, willing to participate in the committee work without payment and without even having their expenses reimbursed. In such cases there is often a heavy reliance on government or quasi-government representatives and on people from the universities.

ATL participation

BSI describes every person or organisation having a concerned interest in standardization as a stakeholder. BSI prefers to draw on representative organisations like our Association for the majority of its committee members. ATL should therefore think about appointing one or more people to represent it on TS/1. Some members of ATL, from the University of Wales for example, are already active in TS/1, and one of them could be asked to represent ATL, but we have an opportunity to appoint some new people to TS/1 as the discussions at our last conference suggested that other members were interested in the terminology standards and were either already using them or had opinions on them.

As to the work load, in a typical year the committee meets about three times, and about four draft standards that have to be commented on are received from ISO. Active participation has its price – in my experience, the more you say, the more you are asked to contribute. It would also be a mistake to think that, with so many countries participating in the work, the contribution from a single country wouldn't carry much weight or be much valued.

There are opportunities to submit comment on documents without joining a BSI committee - I have already mentioned the public comment consultation. A note on the TC 37 documents currently out for public comment could be maintained on the ATL web site. However copyright issues affect this process. Standards bodies do not want drafts which have a monetary value to be widely circulated free of charge to people who have no intention of commenting on them. We cannot therefore put documents on our website, or provide direct links to where they may be found. A draft for public comment (which may be as near to the final thing as a publisher's proof) carries a price, and anyone who is not a committee member and wishes to evaluate it before deciding whether to comment has to purchase it first.

I don't want to labour this point because Chris Cox and I have a plan which we hope will appeal to members. The first part of the plan is to appoint a number of ATL members to TS/1 and for each of them to choose an area (or areas) of interest within the TC 37 programme. For purposes of discussion, we have designated five spheres of activity. This does not imply that five members are required, although it is clear that

the range is so wide that no one member would want to cover them all. On the other hand, we could decide we are not interested in some of the topics.

- 1: Terminology principles, harmonization, presentation and quality of terminology products
- 2: Socio terminology
- 3: Computer applications, e.g. Data structures for term banks
- 4: Dictionaries and lexicography
- 5: Language codes

Following the appointment of members, when a new TC 37 document is produced. An announcement will be posted on the web site and/or to the discussion group (prompt action will be necessary on this to enable the subsequent steps to be carried out, the comment period for the more formal stages being a maximum of three months);

ATL members interested in a specific draft will be invited (through the website) to contact a specific ATL TS/1 member;

The ATL TS/1 member will establish a list of ATL members interested in the draft and electronically distribute the document to them

The ATL TS/1 member will coordinate the comments received from this group and submit them to TS/1. (Other TS/1 members will submit their own comments to the Committee Secretary, and TS/1 will decide on the UK vote).

The e-mail list of ATL members interested in a particular draft standard can be carried forward from one document to the next one on a similar subject. If just a few members are interested in the standardization activity, and they express an interest in a wide range of topics, then a relatively permanent e-mail list of names could be maintained and all new documents for comment sent to them through the ATL representative(s) on TS/1.

If you would like to think about this proposal between now and the AGM this afternoon, we could take the question of ATL representation on TS/1 under any other business.

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