



BSI Standards Publication

A typology of language registers

National foreword

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A typology of language registers

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Foreword

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The procedures used to develop this document and those intended for its further maintenance are described in the ISO/IEC Directives, Part 1. In particular the different approval criteria needed for the different types of ISO documents should be noted. This document was drafted in accordance with the editorial rules of the ISO/IEC Directives, Part 2 (see www.iso.org/directives).

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For an explanation on the voluntary nature of standards, the meaning of ISO specific terms and expressions related to conformity assessment, as well as information about ISO's adherence to the World Trade Organization (WTO) principles in the Technical Barriers to Trade (TBT) see the following URL: www.iso.org/iso/foreword.html.

This document was prepared by Technical Committee ISO/TC 37, *Language and terminology*, Subcommittee SC 1, *Principles and methods*.

Introduction

This document aims to clarify ambiguities arising from the use of the term 'register' to designate different concepts. It aims to examine different conceptualizations of language registers amongst linguistic theorists so that useful definitions can be agreed on for use in, for example, standardization work. It also aims to contribute to developing new means of providing comprehensive coverage of language variants.

Computational management of language resources requires appropriate descriptors and tags for different language varieties.

A typology of language registers will aid appropriate communication in business and commerce, for example where a marketing campaign needs to address consumers in a friendly, informal register, or in medicine where there is a need to understand clearly the difference between technical communication between professionals on the one hand, and clear and simple communication for public health campaigns on the other.

There is as yet no common agreement on terms and concepts for individual language registers, or way to map their relationship to each other.

As dialects can have a geographic designation, language registers can be designated by their linguistic patterns, both lexico-grammatical and discoursal-semantic patterns associated with situations.

A description of a language register needs to state whether it is a written or a spoken register, or expressed by some other modality. It is therefore multifaceted and polyhierarchical, fitting in with existing ISO standards such as ISO 24620-1 and ISO 639 in order to attain maximum impact. It lays the groundwork for developing codes for language registers at a future date. This document proposes an overview of all relevant language registers and does not intend to create standards for each individual register. It will, however, help to identify and inform further areas for elaboration.

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A typology of language registers

1 Scope

This document gives the general principles for language registers in both descriptive and prescriptive environments. It defines key concepts and describes examples of different language registers that can be applied across all or many languages and those that are language-specific. It lays down guidelines for the use of appropriate language registers needed in a wide range of environments. These include:

- terminology work, where it contributes to the development of a wide range of standards;
- translation, so that appropriate language levels can be chosen in target languages, to match that of the source language;
- lexicography, to improve descriptors of non-geographic language variants;
- second language teaching and learning, so that students can avoid pitfalls associated with inappropriate language use;
- software, to improve tagging of language variants in computer applications.

2 Normative references

There are no normative references in this document.

3 Terms and definitions

For the purposes of this document, the following terms and definitions apply.

3.1

language variety

largest subset of an individual language that is homogeneous both with regard to a certain criterion for linguistic variation and with regard to a certain structural criterion for linguistic variation

3.2

code switching

changing backwards and forwards between two or more languages or language varieties in conversation

3.3

language register

language variety (3.1) used for a particular purpose or in an event of language use, depending on the type of situation, especially its degree of formality

Note 1 to entry: An individual usually has more than one language register in their verbal repertoire and can vary their use of register according to their perception of what is appropriate for different purposes or domains.

3.4

common register

language register (3.3) used in addressing or referring to non-royal persons

3.5

royal register

language register (3.3) used in addressing or referring to royal persons