

Language Policy In International Standardization Perceptions of the IEC Member Countries

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Introduction (1)

- English is dominant language also in international standardization
- Regional organizations: CEN, CENELEC, ETSI
- Global organizations: ISO, ITU, IEC
- In Europe, natural tendency to preserve national languages
- Discrimination of those who have to communicate in a foreign language

Introduction (2)

Language policies in international organizations

- Working languages both English and French, in early project stages French preferred
OIML, BIPM
- Working languages both English and French, communicating in both English and French
UNESCO, UPU, ISO, IEC
- Working languages both English and French, communicating in English only
WTO
- Working and communicating in English only
ECMA, ETSI
- Several official languages
ITU

Ethnolinguistic Background of International Standardization

- English as lingua franca
- Working in English as a foreign language
- Linguistic diversity versus unilingualism
- Foreign language use
- Anglo-Saxon dominance
- Role of French

Research Questions

- Language policy preferred by IEC member countries?
- To which extent should IEC be bilingual?
- Would an IEC which communicates in English only still be a truly international organization?
- Comparison with other international standards setting organizations

The IEC Case

Six sub-groups among the 20 responding countries

- 1a 14 CENELEC member countries
- 1b 6 CENELEC non-member countries
- 2a 7 countries with Romance languages
- 2b 13 other countries
- 3a 5 most important member countries
- 3b 15 remaining member countries

Results and Discussion (1)

- Moderate preference for both English and French in the technical work
- Strong preference for English only in communication
- With this policy, IEC would still be a truly international organization
- Perception of the majority:
Economic and technological attitudes have little effect on an NC's attitude,
Main working language has little effect on an organization's policy and program
- The five most important IEC member countries disagree with these views

Results and Discussion (2)

- Dominance of English and status of French are perceived as a necessity, not as hypothetical linguistic/cultural imperialism
- Older organizations (OIML, BIPM) use French more than the younger ones
- The issue “unilingualism versus bilingualism” is indeed related to IEC’s philosophy and mission
- IEC non-member countries had no opportunity to express their views