Language Policy In International Standardization
Perceptions of the IEC Member Countries

Hans Teichmann
Henk de Vries
Albert Feilzer

Erasmus University, Rotterdam, The Netherlands
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• Ethnolinguistic background of international standardization
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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