Content Language Headers

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Abstract

   This document defines a "Content-language:" header, for use in cases
   where one desires to indicate the language of something that has RFC
   822-like headers, like MIME body parts or Web documents, and an
   "Accept-Language:" header for use in cases where one wishes to
   indicate one's preferences with regard to language.

1. Introduction

   There are a number of languages presently or previously used by human
   beings in this world.

   A great number of these people would prefer to have information
   presented in a language which they understand.

   In some contexts, it is possible to have information available in
   more than one language, or it might be possible to provide tools
   (such as dictionaries) to assist in the understanding of a language.

   In other cases, it may be desirable to use a computer program to
   convert information from one format (such as plaintext) into another
   (such as computer-synthesized speech, or Braille, or high-quality
   print renderings).

   A prerequisite for any such function is a means of labelling the
   information content with an identifier for the language that is used
   in this information content, such as is defined by [TAGS]. This
   document specifies a protocol element for use with protocols that use
   RFC 822-like headers for carrying language tags as defined in [TAGS].

   The keywords "MUST", "MUST NOT", "REQUIRED", "SHALL", "SHALL NOT",
   "SHOULD", "SHOULD NOT", "RECOMMENDED", "MAY", and "OPTIONAL" in this
   document are to be interpreted as described in [RFC 2119].

2. The Content-language header

   The "Content-Language" header is intended for use in the case where
   one desires to indicate the language(s) of something that has RFC
   822-like headers, such as MIME body parts or Web documents.

   The RFC 822 EBNF of the Content-Language header is:

      Content-Language = "Content-Language" ":" 1#Language-tag

   In the more strict RFC 2234 ABNF:

      Content-Language = "Content-Language" ":" [CFWS] Language-List
      Language-List = Language-Tag [CFWS]
                         *("," [CFWS] Language-Tag [CFWS])

   The Content-Language header may list several languages in a comma-
   separated list.

   The CFWS construct is intended to function like the whitespace
   convention in RFC 822, which means also that one can place
   parenthesized comments anywhere in the language sequence, or use
   continuation lines. A formal definition is given in RFC 2822
   [RFC2822].

   In keeping with the tradition of RFC 2822, a more liberal "obsolete"
   grammar is also given:

      obs-content-language = "Content-Language" *WSP ":"
                         [CFWS] Language-List

   Like RFC 2822, this specification says that conforming
   implementations MUST accept the obs-content-language syntax, but MUST
   NOT generate it; all generated headers MUST conform to the Content-
   Language syntax.

2.1 Examples of Content-language values

    Voice recording from Liverpool downtown

        Content-type: audio/basic
        Content-Language: en-scouse

    Document in Mingo, an American Indian language which does not have an
    ISO 639 code:

        Content-type: text/plain
        Content-Language: i-mingo

    A English-French dictionary

        Content-type: application/dictionary
        Content-Language: en, fr (This is a dictionary)

    An official European Commission document (in a few of its official
    languages):

        Content-type: multipart/alternative
        Content-Language: da, de, el, en, fr, it

    An excerpt from Star Trek

        Content-type: video/mpeg
        Content-Language: i-klingon

3. The Accept-Language header

    The "Accept-Language" header is intended for use in cases where a
    user or a process desires to identify the preferred language(s) when
    RFC 822-like headers, such as MIME body parts or Web documents, are
    used.

    The RFC 822 EBNF of the Accept-Language header is:

        Accept-Language = "Accept-Language" ":"
                              1#(language-range [";" "q" "=" qvalue])

    A slightly more restrictive RFC 2234 ABNF definition is:

        Accept-Language = "Accept-Language:" [CFWS] language-q
                         *("," [CFWS] language-q)
        language-q = language-range [";" [CFWS] "q=" qvalue] [CFWS]
        qvalue   = ("0" ["." 0*3DIGIT])
                        / ("1" ["." 0*3("0")])

A more liberal RFC 2234 ABNF definition is:

```
Obs-accept-language = "Accept-Language" *WSP ":" [CFWS]
      obs-language-q *( "," [CFWS] obs-language-q ) [CFWS]
obs-language-q = language-range
        [ [CFWS] ";" [CFWS] "q" [CFWS] "=" qvalue ]
```

Like RFC 2822, this specification says that conforming
implementations MUST accept the obs-accept-language syntax, but MUST
NOT generate it; all generated messages MUST conform to the Accept-
Language syntax.

The syntax and semantics of language-range is defined in [TAGS]. The
Accept-Language header may list several language-ranges in a comma-
separated list, and each may include a quality value Q. If no Q
values are given, the language-ranges are given in priority order,
with the leftmost language-range being the most preferred language;
this is an extension to the HTTP/1.1 rules, but matches current
practice.

If Q values are given, refer to HTTP/1.1 [RFC 2616] for the details
on how to evaluate it.

4. Security Considerations

The only security issue that has been raised with language tags since
the publication of RFC 1766, which stated that "Security issues are
believed to be irrelevant to this memo", is a concern with language
ranges used in content negotiation - that they may be used to infer
the nationality of the sender, and thus identify potential targets
for surveillance.

This is a special case of the general problem that anything you send
is visible to the receiving party; it is useful to be aware that such
concerns can exist in some cases.

The exact magnitude of the threat, and any possible countermeasures,
is left to each application protocol.

5. Character set considerations

This document adds no new considerations beyond what is mentioned in
[TAGS].

6. Acknowledgements

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   Any list of contributors is bound to be incomplete; please regard the
   following as only a selection from the group of people who have
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   In alphabetical order:

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   RFC 1766, and has provided a great deal of input to this revision.
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   definitions.

7. References

   [TAGS]   Alvestrand, H., "Tags for the Identification of
                Languages", BCP 47, RFC 3066

   [ISO 639]   ISO 639:1988 (E/F) - Code for the representation of names
                of languages - The International Organization for
                Standardization, 1st edition, 1988-04-01 Prepared by
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   [ISO 639-2] ISO 639-2:1998 - Codes for the representation of names of
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               Masinter, L., Leach, P. and T. Berners-Lee, "Hypertext
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   [RFC 2822] Resnick, P., "Internet Message Format", RFC 2822, April
               2001.

Appendix A: Changes from RFC 1766

   The definition of the language tags has been split, and is now RFC
   3066. The differences parameter to multipart/alternative is no
   longer part of this standard, because no implementations of the
   function were ever found. Consult RFC 1766 if you need the
   information.

   The ABNF for content-language has been updated to use the RFC 2234
   ABNF.

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