

The Impact of Logical Contradictions in Three Core TC 37 Standards for Their Practical Application: ISO 704, 1087-1 and 860

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Abstract

In this paper three ISO/TC 37 basic standards are studied to determine the degree of logical consistency both within each standard and among all three of them.

Unlike most technical committees, ISO/TC 37 produces standards that are applied by all other ISO technical committees as well as by people outside the standardisation environment, hence the importance of logical consistency of TC 37 published standards.

ISO 704 *Terminology work – Principles and methods*, ISO 1087-1 *Terminology work – Vocabulary – Part 1 Theory and application* and ISO 860 *Harmonization of concepts and terms* constitute the core work of TC 37. These were the first three published documents of the committee and their history dates back to the 1960s.

Because of their theoretical content these documents are usually the first contact with TC 37 standards of would-be terminology standardisers, thus there is a clear need for these three standards to be as perfect as humanly possible. Needless to say, if the main objective of these standards is to show users the basics of terminology, the least to be expected is that they actually comply with themselves and also with other TC 37 standards.

Unfortunately this is not the case with any of these three basic standards: some of the definitions provided are logically contradictory and terminologically incorrect, and there are contradictory statements both within documents and between documents, as it will be shown in the full paper. So the question arises: how on earth can we expect people using our standards to learn how to standardise and to manage their terminology if all we are showing is that we cannot do it ourselves?

Example:

ISO 704 (2006:19):

“In terminology work, the following definitions are recognized:

- intensional definitions
- extensional definitions

— ostensive definitions”

Note: In this context, ostensive definitions will not be considered, as these are a new addition of the revision of 704 and were not included in the 2000 edition.

ISO 1087-1 (2000: 3.3.1, 3.3.2, 3.3.3):

3.3.1

definition

representation of a concept by a descriptive statement which serves to differentiate it from related concepts

3.3.2

intensional definition

definition which describes the intension of a concept by stating the superordinate concept and the delimiting characteristics

3.3.3

extensional definition

description of a concept by enumerating all of its subordinate concepts under one criterion of subdivision

It can be seen that in 704 both intensional and extensional definitions are accepted as proper definitions. However, 1087-1 recognises intensional definitions but not extensional definitions, as it can be deduced from the definition provided: “description of a concept [...]”.

So, are extensional definitions, “definitions —representation of a concept—” or merely a description of a concept? This is just a minor example of inconsistencies found in these two standards.

Examples like this one are numerous within the context of these three standards, some a lot worse than others. What then is the implication of these series of inconsistencies for the application of these standards by the end user?

Therefore, the main purpose of this paper is for the whole of TC 37 to become truly aware of the need to produce logically consistent documents and to check and double check each document for consistency before it is published.

After all, we cannot afford to be the shoemaker’s barefooted son, can we?