

IETF	N.
Tomkinson	
Internet-Draft	N.
Borenstein	
Intended status: Standards Track	Mimecast
Ltd	
Expires: April 17, 2016	October 15,
2015	

**Multiple Language Content Type  
draft-tomkinson-slim-multilangcontent-02**

Abstract

This document defines an addition to the Multipurpose Internet Mail Extensions (MIME) standard to make it possible to send one message that contains multiple language versions of the same information. The translations would be identified by a language code and selected by the email client based on a user's language settings or locale.

Status of This Memo

This Internet-Draft is submitted in full conformance with the provisions of [BCP 78](#) and [BCP 79](#).

Internet-Drafts are working documents of the Internet Engineering Task Force (IETF). Note that other groups may also distribute working documents as Internet-Drafts. The list of current Internet-Drafts is at <http://datatracker.ietf.org/drafts/current/>.

Internet-Drafts are draft documents valid for a maximum of six months and may be updated, replaced, or obsoleted by other documents at any time. It is inappropriate to use Internet-Drafts as reference material or to cite them other than as "work in progress."

This Internet-Draft will expire on April 17, 2016.

Copyright Notice

Copyright (c) 2015 IETF Trust and the persons identified as the document authors. All rights reserved.

This document is subject to [BCP 78](#) and the IETF Trust's Legal Provisions Relating to IETF Documents (<http://trustee.ietf.org/license-info>) in effect on the date of publication of this document. Please review these documents carefully, as they describe your rights and restrictions with respect to this document. Code Components extracted from this document must include Simplified BSD License text as described in Section 4.e of the Trust Legal Provisions and are provided without warranty as described in the Simplified BSD License.



## **1. Introduction**

Since the invention of email and the rapid spread of the Internet, more and more people have been able to communicate in more and more countries and in more and more languages. But during this time of technological evolution, email has remained a single-language communication tool, whether it is English to English, Spanish to Spanish or Japanese to Japanese.

Also during this time, many corporations have established their offices in multi-cultural cities and formed departments and teams that span continents, cultures and languages, so the need to communicate efficiently with little margin for miscommunication has grown exponentially.

The objective of this document is to define an addition to the Multipurpose Internet Mail Extensions (MIME) standard, to make it possible to send a single message to a group of people in such a way that all of the recipients can read the email in their preferred language. The methods of translation of the message content are beyond the scope of this document, but the structure of the email itself is defined herein.

Whilst this document depends on identification of language in message

parts for non-real-time communication, there is a companion document that is concerned with a similar problem for real-time communication:

[\[I-D.gellens-slim-negotiating-human-language\]](#)

### **1.1. Requirements Language**

The key words "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](#) [[RFC2119](#)].

## **2. The Content-Type Header Field**

The "multipart/multilingual" MIME subtype allows the sending of a message in a number of different languages with the translations embedded in the same message. This MIME subtype helps the receiving email client make sense of the message structure.

The multipart subtype "multipart/multilingual" has similar semantics to "multipart/alternative" (as discussed in [RFC 2046](#) [[RFC2046](#)]) in that each of the message parts is an alternative version of the same information. The primary difference between "multipart/multilingual"

and "multipart/alternative" is that when using "multipart/multilingual", the message part to select for rendering is chosen based on the values of the Content-Language field and optionally the



Translation-Type parameter of the Content-Language field instead of the ordering of the parts and the Content-Types.

The syntax for this multipart subtype conforms to the common syntax for subtypes of multipart given in [section 5.1.1. of RFC 2046 \[RFC2046\]](#). An example "multipart/multilingual" Content-Type header field would look like this:

```
Content-Type: multipart/multilingual; boundary=01189998819991197253
```

### **3. The Message Parts**

A multipart/multilingual message will have a number of message parts:

exactly one multilingual preface, one or more language message parts and zero or one unmatched message part. The details of these are described below.

#### **3.1. The Multilingual Preface**

In order for the message to be received and displayed in non-conforming email clients, the message SHOULD contain an explanatory message part which MUST NOT be marked with a Content-Language field and MUST be the first of the message parts. Because non-conforming email clients are expected to treat the message as multipart/mixed (in accordance with sections [5.1.3](#) and [5.1.7](#) of [RFC 2046 \[RFC2046\]](#)) they may show all of the message parts sequentially or as attachments. Including and showing this explanatory part will help the message recipient understand the message structure.

This initial message part SHOULD explain briefly to the recipient that the message contains multiple languages and the parts may be rendered sequentially or as attachments. This SHOULD be presented in the same languages that are provided in the subsequent language message parts.

Whilst this section of the message is useful for backward compatibility, it will normally only be shown when rendered by a non-conforming email client, because conforming email clients SHOULD only show the single language message part identified by the user's preferred language (or locale) and the language message part's Content-Language.

For the correct display of the multilingual preface in a non-conforming email client, the sender MAY use the Content-Disposition field with a value of 'inline' in conformance with [RFC 2183 \[RFC2183\]](#) (which defines the Content-Disposition field). If provided, this SHOULD be placed at the multipart/multilingual level and in the

multilingual preface. This makes it clear to a non-conforming email

Tomkinson & Borenstein Expires April 17, 2016

[Page

3]

client that the multilingual preface should be displayed immediately to the recipient, followed by any subsequent parts marked as 'inline'.

For an example of a multilingual preface, see the examples in [Section 8](#).

### **3.2. The Language Message Parts**

The language message parts are translations of the same message content. These message parts MAY be ordered so that the first part after the multilingual preface is in the language believed to be the most likely to be recognised by the recipient. All of the language message parts MUST have a Content-Language field and a Content-Type field, they SHOULD have a Subject field and MAY have a Translation-Type parameter applied to the Content-Language field.

The Content-Type for each individual language part MAY be any MIME type (including multipart subtypes such as multipart/alternative). However, it is RECOMMENDED that the Content-Type of the language parts is kept as simple as possible for interoperability with existing email clients. The language parts are not required to have matching Content-Types or multipart structures. For example, there might be an English part of type "text/html" followed by a Spanish part of type "application/pdf" followed by a Chinese part of type "image/jpeg". Whatever the content-type, the contents SHOULD be composed for optimal viewing in the specified language.

For a non-multipart type, it is RECOMMENDED that the sender applies

a

Name parameter to the Content-Type field. This will help the recipient identify the translations when the translations are rendered as attachments by a non-conforming email client.

An example of this parameter is as follows:

```
Content-Type: text/plain; name="english.txt"
```

### **3.3. The Unmatched Message Part**

If there is content intended for the recipient to see if they have a preferred language other than one of those specified in the language parts, another part MAY be provided. This would also be useful when a language independent graphic is available. When this unmatched part is present, it MUST be the last part, MUST NOT have a Content-Language field and SHOULD NOT have a Subject field.





#### **4. Message Part Selection**

The logic for selecting the message part to render and present to the recipient is quite straightforward and is summarised in the next few paragraphs.

Firstly, if the email client does not understand multipart/multilingual then it SHOULD treat the message as if it was multipart/mixed and render message parts accordingly.

If the email client does understand multipart/multilingual then it SHOULD ignore the multilingual preface and select the best match for the user's preferred language from the language message parts available. Also, the user may prefer to see the original message content in their second language over a machine translation in their first language. The Translation-Type parameter of the Content-Language field value can be used for further selection based on this preference. The selection of language part may be implemented in a variety of ways and is a matter for the email client and its user preferences. The goal is to render the most appropriate translation for the user. Similarly, the subject to display (for example in a message listing) should be chosen from the selected language message part if it is available.

If there is no match for the user's preferred language (or there is no preferred language information available) the email client SHOULD select the unmatched part (if one exists) or the first language part (directly after the multilingual preface) if an unmatched part does not exist. The top-level Subject header field value should be used whenever a suitable translation cannot be identified.

If there is no translation type preference information available, the values of the Translation-Type parameter may be ignored.

Additionally, interactive implementations MAY offer the user a choice from among the available languages.

#### **5. The Content-Language Field**

The Content-Language field in the individual language message parts is used to identify the language in which the message part is written. Based on the value of this field, a conforming email client can determine which message part to display (given the user's language settings or locale).

The Content-Language MUST comply with [RFC 3282](#) [[RFC3282](#)] (which defines the Content-Language field) and [BCP 47](#)/RFC 5646 [[RFC5646](#)]

(which defines the structure and semantics for the language code

Tomkinson & Borenstein Expires April 17, 2016  
5]

[Page

values). While [RFC 5646](#) provides a mechanism accommodating increasingly fine-grained distinctions, in the interest of maximum interoperability, each Content-Language value SHOULD be restricted to

the largest granularity of language tags; in other words, it is RECOMMENDED to specify only a Primary-subtag and NOT to include subtags (e.g., for region or dialect) unless the languages might be mutually incomprehensible without them. Examples of this field for English, German and an instruction manual in Spanish and French, could look like the following:

Content-Language: en

Content-Language: de

Content-Language: es, fr

## **6. The Translation-Type Parameter**

The Translation-Type parameter can be applied to the Content-Language

field in the individual language message parts and is used to identify the type of translation. Based on the value of this parameter and the user's preferences, a conforming email client can determine which message part to display.

This parameter can have one of three possible values: 'original', 'human' or 'automated' although other values may be added in the future. A value of 'original' is given in the language message part that is in the original language. A value of 'human' is used when a language message part is translated by a human translator or a human has checked and corrected an automated translation. A value of 'automated' is used when a language message part has been translated by an electronic agent without proofreading or subsequent correction.

Examples of this parameter include:

Content-Language: en; translation-type=original

Content-Language: fr; translation-type=human

## **7. The Subject Field in the Language Message parts**

On receipt of the message, conforming email clients will need to render the subject in the correct language for the recipient. To enable this the Subject field SHOULD be provided in each language message part. The value for this field should be a translation of the email subject.

US-ASCII and 'encoded-word' examples of this field include:



Subject: A really simple email subject

Subject: =?iso-8859-1?Q?un\_asunto\_de\_correo\_electr=F3nico\_sencillo?=

See [RFC 2047](#) [[RFC2047](#)] for the specification of 'encoded-word'.

## **8. Examples**

### **8.1. An Example of a Simple Multiple language email message**









## **8.2. An Example of a Complex Multiple language email message**

Below is an example of a more complex multiple language email message

formatted using the method detailed in this document. Note that the language message parts have multipart contents and would therefore require further processing to determine the content to display.

From: Nik  
To: Nathaniel  
Subject: example of a message in Spanish and English  
Content-Type: multipart/multilingual; boundary=01189998819991197253  
Content-Disposition: inline

--01189998819991197253  
Content-Disposition: inline

This is a message in multiple languages. It says the same thing in each language. If you can read it in one language, you can ignore the other translations. The other translations may be presented as attachments or grouped together.

Este es un mensaje en varios idiomas. Dice lo mismo en cada idioma. Si puede leerlo en un idioma, puede ignorar las otras traducciones. Las otras traducciones pueden presentarse como archivos adjuntos o agrupados.

--01189998819991197253  
Content-Language: en; translation-type=original  
Content-Type: multipart/alternative; boundary=multipartaltboundary  
Subject: example of a message in Spanish and English

--multipartaltboundary  
Content-Type: text/plain; name="english.txt"

Hello, this message content is provided in your language.

--multipartaltboundary  
Content-Type: text/html; name="english.html"

<html><body><p>Hello, this message content is provided in your language.<p></body></html>

--multipartaltboundary--

--01189998819991197253  
Content-Language: es; translation-type=human  
Content-Type: multipart/mixed; boundary=multipartmixboundary  
Subject: =?iso-8859-1?Q?ejemplo\_pr=E1ctico\_de\_mensaje\_



en\_espa=F1o1\_e\_ingl=E9s?=-

--multipartmixboundary  
Content-Type:application/pdf; name="espanol.pdf"

..PDF file in Spanish here..

--multipartmixboundary  
Content-Type:image/jpeg; name="espanol.jpg"

..JPEG image showing Spanish content here..

--multipartmixboundary--

--01189998819991197253  
Content-Type: image/gif  
Content-Disposition: inline

..GIF image showing iconic or language-independent content here..

--01189998819991197253--

## **9. Changes from Previous Versions**

### **9.1. Changes from [draft-tomkinson-multilangcontent-01](#) to [draft-tomkinson-slim-multilangcontent-00](#)**

- o File name and version number changed to reflect the proposed WG name SLIM (Selection of Language for Internet Media).
- o Replaced the Subject-Translation field in the language message parts with Subject and provided US-ASCII and non-US-ASCII examples.
- o Introduced the language-independent unmatched message part.
- o Many wording improvements and clarifications throughout the document.

### **9.2. Changes from [draft-tomkinson-slim-multilangcontent-00](#) to [draft-tomkinson-slim-multilangcontent-01](#)**

- o Added Translation-Type in each language message part to identify the source of the translation (original/human/automated).



### **9.3.** Changes from [draft-tomkinson-slim-multilangcontent-01](#) to [draft-tomkinson-slim-multilangcontent-02](#)

- o Changed Translation-Type to be a parameter for the Content-Language field rather than a new separate field.
- o Added a paragraph about using Content-Disposition field to help non-conforming mail clients correctly render the multilingual preface.
- o Recommended using a Name parameter on the language part Content-Type to help the recipient identify the translations in non-conforming mail clients.
- o Many wording improvements and clarifications throughout the document.

## **10.** Acknowledgements

The authors are grateful for the helpful input received from many people but would especially like to acknowledge the help of Harald Alvestrand, Stephane Bortzmeyer, Eric Burger, Mark Davis, Doug Ewell,

Randall Gellens, Gunnar Hellstrom, Alexey Melnikov, Fiona Tomkinson, Simon Tyler and Daniel Vargha. The authors would also like to thank Fernando Alvaro and Luis de Pablo for their work on the Spanish translations.

## **11.** IANA Considerations

The multipart/multilingual MIME type will be registered with IANA.

## **12.** Security Considerations

This document has no additional security considerations beyond those that apply to the standards and procedures on which it is built.

## **13.** References

### **13.1.** Normative References

- [RFC2046] Freed, N. and N. Borenstein, "Multipurpose Internet Mail Extensions (MIME) Part Two: Media Types", [RFC 2046](#), DOI 10.17487/RFC2046, November 1996, <<http://www.rfc-editor.org/info/rfc2046>>.



- [RFC2047] Moore, K., "MIME (Multipurpose Internet Mail Extensions) Part Three: Message Header Extensions for Non-ASCII Text",  
[RFC 2047](http://www.rfc-editor.org/info/rfc2047), DOI 10.17487/RFC2047, November 1996,  
<<http://www.rfc-editor.org/info/rfc2047>>.
- [RFC2119] Bradner, S., "Key words for use in RFCs to Indicate Requirement Levels", [BCP 14](http://www.rfc-editor.org/info/rfc2119), [RFC 2119](http://www.rfc-editor.org/info/rfc2119),  
DOI 10.17487/RFC2119, March 1997,  
<<http://www.rfc-editor.org/info/rfc2119>>.
- [RFC2183] Troost, R., Dorner, S., and K. Moore, Ed., "Communicating Presentation Information in Internet Messages: The Content-Disposition Header Field", [RFC 2183](http://www.rfc-editor.org/info/rfc2183),  
DOI 10.17487/RFC2183, August 1997,  
<<http://www.rfc-editor.org/info/rfc2183>>.
- [RFC3282] Alvestrand, H., "Content Language Headers", [RFC 3282](http://www.rfc-editor.org/info/rfc3282),  
DOI 10.17487/RFC3282, May 2002,  
<<http://www.rfc-editor.org/info/rfc3282>>.
- [RFC5646] Phillips, A., Ed. and M. Davis, Ed., "Tags for Identifying Languages", [BCP 47](http://www.rfc-editor.org/info/rfc5646), [RFC 5646](http://www.rfc-editor.org/info/rfc5646), DOI 10.17487/RFC5646,  
September 2009, <<http://www.rfc-editor.org/info/rfc5646>>.

### **13.2. Informational References**

- [I-D.gellens-slim-negotiating-human-language]  
Gellens, R., "Negotiating Human Language in Real-Time Communications", [draft-gellens-slim-negotiating-human-language-02](http://www.rfc-editor.org/info/rfc5646) (work in progress), July 2015.

#### Authors' Addresses

Nik Tomkinson  
Mimecast Ltd  
CityPoint, One Ropemaker Street  
London EC2Y 9AW  
United Kingdom

Email: [rfc.nik.tomkinson@gmail.com](mailto:rfc.nik.tomkinson@gmail.com)





Internet-Draft  
2015

Multiple Language Content Type

October

Nathaniel Borenstein  
Mimecast Ltd  
480 Pleasant Street  
Watertown MA 02472  
North America

Email: [nsb@mimecast.com](mailto:nsb@mimecast.com)

