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Information technology — General-Purpose Datatypes (GPD)

Technologies de l'information — Types de données

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Contents

Page

Foreword.....	vi
0 Introduction	vii
1 Scope	1
2 Normative references	1
3 Terms and definitions	2
4 Conformance.....	8
4.1 Direct conformance	8
4.2 Indirect conformance	9
4.3 Conformance of a mapping standard	9
4.4 GPD program conformance.....	10
5 Conventions used in this International Standard.....	10
5.1 Formal syntax.....	10
5.2 Text conventions	11
6 Fundamental notions	11
6.1 Datatype	11
6.2 Value space	12
6.3 Datatype properties	12
6.3.1 Equality	13
6.3.2 Order	13
6.3.3 Bound.....	13
6.3.4 Cardinality	14
6.3.5 Exact and approximate	14
6.3.6 Numeric.....	14
6.4 Primitive and non-primitive datatypes	15
6.5 Datatype generator	15
6.6 Characterizing operations	15
6.7 Datatype families	16
6.8 Aggregate datatypes	17
6.8.1 Homogeneity	17
6.8.2 Size.....	17
6.8.3 Uniqueness.....	17
6.8.4 Aggregate-imposed identifier uniqueness.....	18
6.8.5 Aggregate-imposed ordering	18
6.8.6 Access method	18
6.8.7 Recursive structure	19
6.8.8 Structured and unstructured	19
6.8.9 Mandatory and optional components.....	19
6.9 Provisions associated with datatypes.....	19
7 Elements of the Datatype Specification Language	21
7.1 IDN character-set	21
7.2 Whitespace	22
7.3 Lexical objects	23
7.3.1 Identifiers	23
7.3.2 Digit-string.....	23
7.3.3 Character-literal and string-literal.....	23
7.3.4 Keywords.....	24
7.4 Annotations	24
7.5 Values	25

This is a preview of "ISO/IEC 11404:2007". [Click here to purchase the full version from the ANSI store.](#)

7.5.1	Independent values	25
7.5.2	Dependent values	26
7.6	GPD program text	27
8	Datatypes	27
8.1	Primitive datatypes	28
8.1.1	Boolean	29
8.1.2	State.....	30
8.1.3	Enumerated.....	31
8.1.4	Character.....	32
8.1.5	Ordinal.....	33
8.1.6	Date-and-Time	34
8.1.7	Integer	35
8.1.8	Rational	36
8.1.9	Scaled.....	37
8.1.10	Real.....	38
8.1.11	Complex	40
8.1.12	Void.....	41
8.2	Subtypes and extended types	42
8.2.1	Range	43
8.2.2	Selecting	43
8.2.3	Excluding	44
8.2.4	Size	44
8.2.5	Explicit subtypes.....	45
8.2.6	Extended	45
8.3	Generated datatypes.....	46
8.3.1	Choice	47
8.3.2	Pointer	49
8.3.3	Procedure.....	50
8.4	Aggregate Datatypes	53
8.4.1	Record	55
8.4.2	Class	56
8.4.3	Set.....	58
8.4.4	Bag.....	59
8.4.5	Sequence	60
8.4.6	Array	61
8.4.7	Table	64
8.5	Defined datatypes	66
8.6	Provisions	66
8.6.1	General parameters for provisions	67
8.6.2	Aggregate-specific features.....	70
8.6.3	Aggregate-component-identifier uniqueness	70
8.6.4	Usage-specific features	71
9	Declarations.....	72
9.1	Type declarations.....	72
9.1.1	Renaming declarations.....	73
9.1.2	New datatype declarations.....	73
9.1.3	New generator declarations	73
9.2	Value declarations	73
9.3	Termination declarations	74
9.4	Normative datatype declarations	74
9.5	Lexical operations.....	74
9.5.1	Import	74
9.5.2	Macro.....	75
10	Defined datatypes and generators	75
10.1	Defined datatypes	75
10.1.1	Natural number.....	76
10.1.2	Modulo.....	76
10.1.3	Bit.....	77

This is a preview of "ISO/IEC 11404:2007". [Click here to purchase the full version from the ANSI store.](#)

10.1.4	Bit string	77
10.1.5	Character string	77
10.1.6	Time interval.....	79
10.1.7	Octet.....	79
10.1.8	Octet string.....	79
10.1.9	Private	80
10.1.10	Object identifier.....	80
10.2	Defined generators	82
10.2.1	Stack	82
10.2.2	Tree	83
10.2.3	Optional	83
11	Mappings	84
11.1	Outward Mappings.....	85
11.2	Inward Mappings.....	86
11.3	Reverse Inward Mapping	87
11.4	Support of Datatypes	87
11.4.1	Support of equality	87
11.4.2	Support of order.....	88
11.4.3	Support of bounds.....	88
11.4.4	Support of cardinality.....	88
11.4.5	Support for the exact or approximate property.....	88
11.4.6	Support for the numeric property	88
11.4.7	Support for the mandatory components.....	88
Annex A	(informative) Character-set standards.....	89
Annex B	(informative) Recommendation for the placement of annotations.....	91
Annex C	(informative) Implementation notions of datatypes	93
Bibliography	96

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Foreword

ISO (the International Organization for Standardization) and IEC (the International Electrotechnical Commission) form the specialized system for worldwide standardization. National bodies that are members of ISO or IEC participate in the development of International Standards through technical committees established by the respective organization to deal with particular fields of technical activity. ISO and IEC technical committees collaborate in fields of mutual interest. Other international organizations, governmental and non-governmental, in liaison with ISO and IEC, also take part in the work. In the field of information technology, ISO and IEC have established a joint technical committee, ISO/IEC JTC 1.

International Standards are drafted in accordance with the rules given in the ISO/IEC Directives, Part 2.

The main task of the joint technical committee is to prepare International Standards. Draft International Standards adopted by the joint technical committee are circulated to national bodies for voting. Publication as an International Standard requires approval by at least 75 % of the national bodies casting a vote.

Attention is drawn to the possibility that some of the elements of this document may be the subject of patent rights. ISO and IEC shall not be held responsible for identifying any or all such patent rights.

ISO/IEC 11404 was prepared by Joint Technical Committee ISO/IEC JTC 1, *Information technology*, Subcommittee SC 22, *Programming languages, their environments and system software interfaces*.

This second edition cancels and replaces the first edition (ISO/IEC 11404:1996), which has been technically revised.

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0 Introduction

0.1 Introduction to the second edition

This second edition of ISO/IEC 11404 incorporates recent technologies and improvements since the first edition (ISO/IEC 11404:1996). The following improvements have been incorporated into the second edition.

- *Title change to reflect actual usage.* The use of ISO/IEC 11404 is no longer simply a tool for communicating among programming languages (old title: *Language-independent datatypes*). ISO/IEC 11404 is used for formal description of conceptual datatypes in binding (or binding-independent) standards and used as formalization of metadata for data elements, data element concepts, and value domains (see ISO/IEC 11179-3). The old title was potentially misleading because readers might believe that ISO/IEC 11404 is only useful for programming languages. The new title, *General-Purpose Datatypes* captures the essence of ISO/IEC 11404 and its use.
- *Incorporation of latest technologies.* Provide enhancements to the use of ISO/IEC 11404 as a datatype nomenclature reference for current programming languages, interface languages and data representation languages, specifically Java, IDL, Express, and XML.
- *Support for semi-structured and unstructured data aggregates.* Semi-structured data and unstructured data includes aggregates where datotyping and navigation may be unknown or unspecified in advance. For example, some systems permit “discovery” (or “introspection”) of data. In some cases, the datatype may be unknown in advance (e.g. at compilation time), but may be discovered and processed at runtime (e.g. via datatype libraries or metadata registries).
- *Support for data longevity, versioning, and migration.* There is a need to support, from a datotyping perspective, obsolete and reserved features, such as data elements and permissible values (enumerations and states). Marking features as “obsolete” allows processing, compilation, and runtime systems to “flag” or diagnose old (deprecated) features, while still maintaining compatibility, so that it is possible to support transitions from past to present. Similarly, marking features as “reserved” allows processing, compilation, and runtime systems to “flag” or diagnose potential incompatibilities with future systems, so that it is possible to support transitions from present to future.
- *Extensibility of datatypes and value spaces.* There is a need to support some kind of extensibility concept. For example: (1) a GPD specification of an aggregate contains the elements A and B. (2) An application creates an aggregate with the elements A, B, and C. (3) Are the application's “extensions” of the aggregate acceptable/in conformity with the GPD specification in (1)? The answer to (3) is dependent upon the intent and design of the specification in (1): in some cases extensions are permitted, in some cases extensions are not permitted. The extensibility concept would allow the user of GPD datatypes to describe the kind of extensions permitted. This feature is particularly important in (a) data conformance and (b) application runtime environments that permit “discovery” or “introspection”. This feature is available via the “provision()” capability.

Features that are not incorporated within GPD include the following:

- *Namespace capability.* Given the larger number of declarations, a namespace capability is necessary.
- *Data representation.* Although these features are a part of GPD annotations, there is no standardization of data representation in these annotations. This step is an important link for data interoperability.

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0.2 Introduction to the first edition (ISO/IEC 11404:1996)

Many specifications of software services and applications libraries are, or are in the process of becoming, International Standards. The interfaces to these libraries are often described by defining the form of reference, e.g. the "procedure call", to each of the separate functions or services in the library, as it must appear in a user program written in some standard programming language (Fortran, COBOL, Pascal, etc.). Such an interface specification is commonly referred to as the "<language> binding of <service>", e.g. the "Fortran binding of PHIGS" (ISO/IEC 9593-1:1990, *Information processing systems — Computer graphics — Programmer's Hierarchical Interactive Graphics System (PHIGS) language bindings — Part 1: FORTRAN*).

This approach leads directly to a situation in which the standardization of a new service library immediately requires the standardization of the interface bindings to every standard programming language whose users might reasonably be expected to use the service, and the standardization of a new programming language immediately requires the standardization of the interface binding to every standard service package which users of that language might reasonably be expected to use. To avoid this n-to-m binding problem, ISO/IEC JTC 1, *Information technology* assigned to SC 22 the task of developing an International Standard for language-independent procedure calling and a parallel International Standard for language-independent datatypes, which could be used to describe the parameters to such procedures.

This International Standard provides the specification for the language-independent datatypes. It defines a set of datatypes, independent of any particular programming language specification or implementation, that is rich enough so that any common datatype in a standard programming language or service package can be mapped to some datatype in the set.

The purpose of this International Standard is to facilitate commonality and interchange of datatype notions, at the conceptual level, among different languages and language-related entities. Each datatype specified in this International Standard has a certain basic set of properties sufficient to set it apart from the others and to facilitate identification of the corresponding (or nearest corresponding) datatype to be found in other standards. Hence, this International Standard provides a single common reference model for all standards which use the concept datatype. It is expected that each programming language standard will define a mapping from the datatypes supported by that programming language into the datatypes specified herein, semantically identifying its datatypes with datatypes of the reference model, and thereby with corresponding datatypes in other programming languages.

It is further expected that each programming language standard will define a mapping from those language-independent (LI) datatypes which that language can reasonably support into datatypes which may be specified in the programming language. At the same time, this International Standard will be used, among other applications, to define a "language-independent binding" of the parameters to the procedure calls constituting the principal elements of the standard interface to each of the standard services. The production of such service bindings and language mappings leads, in cooperation with the parallel language-independent procedure calling mechanism, to a situation in which no further "<language> binding of <service>" documents need to be produced: Each service interface, by defining its parameters using LI datatypes, effectively defines the binding of such parameters to any standard programming language; and each language, by its mapping from the LI datatypes into the language datatypes, effectively defines the binding to that language of parameters to any of the standard services.