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“The namespace discussion”

Proposal 1 and proposal 2 are not mutually exclusive – indeed, if proposal 1 is accepted, then it may be desirable if proposal 2 was also accepted.

Proposal 1 - “Namespace change”

To change the namespace for the strict schemas for Part 1.

The new namespace should no longer contain a year.

Implications

- The year in the namespace for the strict schemas will no longer be in conflict with the year of the standard.
- It will be possible to distinguish between ISO/IEC 29500 strict documents and ISO/IEC 29500 transitional documents using the namespace. Note that it is already possible to distinguish between ISO/IEC 29500 strict and transitional documents using the conformance attribute.
- Changing the namespace will empower implementers to use ISO/IEC 29500:2008 Part 3 (Markup Compatibility and Extensibility) to take advantage of new features in ISO/IEC 29500 while maintaining compatibility with existing applications supporting only ECMA-376 1st Ed.
- Converting a document from ISO/IEC 29500 transitional to ISO/IEC 29500 strict will always require changing the namespace name, and the addition of a conformance attribute or modification of the value of an existing conformance attribute. It may require changes to the content.
- Attempting to open an ISO/IEC 29500 strict document in an application that only understands ECMA 376 1st Ed. will have application-dependent behaviour. It will likely display an error.
 - MS Office 2007 SP1 will display an error. When opening a spreadsheet with an unknown namespace for the “sheet part”, it will display empty content for this particular sheet.
 - For OpenOffice.org 3.0.1 (OOo), if the namespace is unknown for the Workbook part, OOo resets and deletes all data in the spreadsheet across sheets. The behaviour of OOo seems to indicate that if the amount of unknown content is small, OOo will “silently lose data” whereas if the amount of unknown content is large, OOo will prompt the user with an error message indicating input/output error.
- “Simple tools” processing ISO/IEC 29500 or ECMA-376 1st Ed. documents will require as a minimum one code path that acts on ISO/IEC 29500 strict and one code path that acts on ISO/IEC 29500 transitional and ECMA 376 1st Ed. documents if they wish to act on all three document types. This code path may differ only in the namespace used.

Notes

The original Swiss proposal was to change the date in the namespace from 2006 to 2008. This approach is being adjusted to reflect better practice in namespace URIs.

Changing the namespace for Part 2 should be considered as a separate issue. However, if the namespace is changed for both Part 1 and Part 2, the two proposals should be synchronized.

It is not anticipated that the namespace would be changed in future.

Proposal 2 - “Conformance attribute”

To change the conformance attribute to support the attribute including version information as part of the conformance information.

Implications

- Converting a document from ISO/IEC 29500 transitional to ISO/IEC 29500 strict will always require addition of a conformance attribute or modification of the value of an existing conformance attribute. It may require changes to the content.
- Attempting to open an ISO/IEC 29500 strict document in an application that only understands ECMA 376 1st Ed. will have application-dependent behaviour.
 - In the case of MS Office 2007 SP1, if an ISO-8601 date is being used in a strict spreadsheet, the document will open but the dates will be silently corrupted.
 - In the case of OpenOffice.org 3.0.1, it seems to disregard the conformance attribute and “silently lose data”.
 - For existing documents that do not use e.g. ISO-8601 dates, comments in spreadsheets, bitmasks or object embedding (i.e. the vast majority of existing documents), ISO/IEC 29500 strict documents will be opened with no errors or with only insignificant errors.
- “Simple tools” acting on OOXML documents may be able to use a single code path for acting on documents in ISO/IEC 29500 strict, in ISO/IEC 29500 transitional, and in ECMA 376 1st Ed. (provided they do not rely on any features that differ between the three versions).
- In most cases, documents complying with the strict conformance class using the conformance attribute will load in existing applications supporting only ECMA-376 1st Ed. without any problems.

Notes

In the future, it is expected that additional allowed values would be added to the conformance attribute to distinguish between ISO/IEC 29500:2008 documents and ISO/IEC 29500:20xx documents.

True of both approaches

- Attempting to open an ISO/IEC 29500 transitional document in an application that only understands ECMA 376 1st Ed. will depend on whether the transitional document uses any of the new syntax (e.g. ISO 8601 dates, comments in spreadsheets, bitmasks or object embedding) added at the BRM.
 - If the transitional document uses the new syntax, behaviour will be application defined. ISO 8601 dates will be corrupted in MS Office and OpenOffice.org as described above (an application bug). Most documents will most likely be opened with no errors.
 - If the transitional document does not use the new syntax then it is very likely to open correctly (apart from application lack of features and bugs)

- It is possible but relatively hard to distinguish between ISO/IEC 29500 transitional documents and ECMA-376 1st Ed. documents – it is necessary to process the content of the document.

Neither proposal suggests that the namespace for the transitional schema should be changed. The implication of changing the namespace for the transitional schema would be:

- Existing applications supporting only ECMA-376 1st Ed. will likely fail to load transitional documents since the namespace will be unknown to them – despite the fact that the markup will be virtually identical.
- All existing applications for processing ECMA-376 1st Ed. documents would be very likely not to work for processing ISO/IEC 29500 transitional documents.

There is consensus that the impact of changing the namespace for the transitional schema on the "ecosystem" of documents, users and implementers would be drastic and undesirable. However, changing the namespace for the strict schemas only (Proposal 1), or amending the allowed values for the conformance attribute (Proposal 2) provides a way for implementers to take advantage of Part 1 of ISO/IEC 29500 only, while simultaneously allowing other implementers, by conscious choice, to continue to participate in the existing "ecosystem".

Neither proposal will allow implementations of other standards using ISO/IEC 29500 Part 2 (OPC) to distinguish if an OPC package conforms to ECMA-376 1st Ed. or ISO/IEC 29500-2:2008.