

Variant Rules

REVISION 7 - 2014-07-08

1 Overview

Label Generation Rulesets (LGR) define permissible labels, but may also define the condition under which variant labels may exist and their status (disposition).

Successfully defining variant rules for an LGR is not trivial. A number of considerations and constraints have to be taken into account. This document describes the basic constraints and use cases for variant rules in an LGR by using a more readable notation than the XML format defined in [XML-LGR]. When it comes time to capture the LGR in a formal definition, the format in this document can be converted to the XML format fairly directly.

From the perspective of a user of the DNS, variants are experienced as variant labels; two (or more) labels that are functionally “the same” under the conventions of the writing system used, even though their code point sequences are different. An LGR specification, on the other hand, defines variant mappings between code points, and only in a secondary step, derives from these mappings the variant labels. For a discussion of this process as it relates to the root zone, see [Procedure].

By assigning a “type” to the variant mappings and carefully constructing the derivation of variant label dispositions from these types, the designer of an LGR can control whether some or all of the variant labels created from an original label should be available for allocation (to the original applicant) or whether some or all of these labels should be blocked instead and remain not allocatable (to anyone).

The choice between these alternatives would be based on the expectations of the users of the particular zone, and is not the subject of this document. Instead, this document attempts to point out how to design an LGR to achieve the selected design choice for handling variants.

2 Variant Relationships

A variant relationship is fundamentally a "same as", in other words, it is an equivalence relationship. Now the strictest sense of "same as" would be equality, and for equality we have both symmetry

$$A = B \Rightarrow B = A$$

and transitivity

$$A = B \text{ and } B = C \Rightarrow A = C$$

The variant relationship with its expanded sense of "same as" must really satisfy the same constraint. Once we say A is the "same as" B, we also assert that B is the "same as" A. In this document, the symbol " \sim " means "has a variant relationship with". Thus we get

$$A \sim B \Rightarrow B \sim A$$

Likewise, if we make the same claim for B and C ($B \sim C$) then we do get $A \sim C$, because if B is "the same" as both A and C then A must be "the same as" C:

$$A \sim B \text{ and } B \sim C \Rightarrow A \sim C$$

3 Variant Mappings

So far, we have treated variant relationships as simple "same as" ignoring that each relationship consists of a pair of reciprocal mappings. In this document, the symbol " \rightarrow " means "maps to".

$$A \sim B \Rightarrow A \rightarrow B, B \rightarrow A$$

These mappings are not defined between labels, but between code points (or code point sequences). In the transitive case, given

$$A \sim B \Rightarrow A \rightarrow B, B \rightarrow A$$

$$A \sim C \Rightarrow A \rightarrow C, C \rightarrow A$$

we also get

$$B \sim C \Rightarrow B \rightarrow C, C \rightarrow B$$

for a total of six possible mappings. Conventionally, these are listed in tables in order of the source code point, like so

```
A → B
A → C
B → A
B → C
C → A
C → B
```

As we can see, each of A, B and C can be mapped two ways.

4 Variant Labels

To create a variant label, each code point in the original label is successively replaced by all variant code points defined by a mapping from the original code point. For a label AAA (the

letter “A” three times), the variant labels (given the mappings from transitive example above) would be

AAB
 ABA
 ABB
 BAA
 BAB
 BBA
 BBB
 AAC
 ...
 CCC

5 Variant Types and Label Dispositions

Assume we wanted to allow a variant relation between the letters Ö and O, and perhaps also between Ò and O as well as Ó and O. By transitivity we would have

$$O \sim \ddot{O} \sim \acute{O} \sim \grave{O}$$

However, we would like to distinguish the case where someone applies for OOO from the case where someone applies for the label ÖÖÖ. In the former case we would like to allocate only the label OOO, but in the latter case, perhaps because people have been used to dropping accents on internet addresses, we would like to also allow the allocation of either the original label ÖÖÖ or the variant label OOO, or both, but not of any of the other possible variant labels, like OOÓ or OÖÓ.

How do we make that distinction?

The answer lies in labeling the mapping $O \rightarrow \ddot{O}$ with the type "blocked" and the mapping $\ddot{O} \rightarrow O$ with the type "allocatable". In this document, the symbol " $x \rightarrow$ " means "maps with type blocked" and the symbol " $a \rightarrow$ " means "maps with type allocatable". Thus:

$$\begin{array}{l} O \ x \rightarrow \ddot{O} \\ \ddot{O} \ a \rightarrow O \end{array}$$

When we generate all permutations of labels, we use mappings with different types depending from which code points we start.

In creating an LGR with variants, all variant mappings are always labeled with a type. By default, these types correspond directly to the dispositions for variant labels, with the most restrictive type determining the disposition of the variant label. However, as we shall see later, it is sometimes useful to assign types from a wider array of values than the final dispositions for the labels and then define explicitly how to derive label dispositions from them.

6 Allocatable Variants

If we start with $\ddot{O}\ddot{O}\ddot{O}$, the permutation 000 will have been the result of applying only mappings with type "a" (allocatable) and by tracking which types were used in generating the label we know whether we can allocate both the label 000 and the original label $\ddot{O}\ddot{O}\ddot{O}$.

We record the variant types by for each of the for the variant **mappings** used in creating the permutation in an ordered list. Such an ordered list of variant types is called a "variant type list". In running text it is enclosed in square brackets. For example $[a\ x\ -]$ means the variant label was derived from a variant mapping with the "a" variant type in the first code point position, "x" in the second code point position, and that the third position is the original code point ("-" means "no variant mapping").

For our example permutation we get the following variant type list (brackets dropped):

$$\ddot{O}\ddot{O}\ddot{O} \rightarrow 000 : a\ a\ a$$

From the variant type list we derive a "variant type set", denoted by curly braces, that contains an unordered set of *unique* variant types in the variant type list. For the variant type list for the given permutation, $[a\ a\ a]$, the variant type set is $\{a\}$, which has a single element "a".

Deciding to allow the allocation of a variant label then amounts to deriving a disposition for the variant **label** from the variant type set created from the variant mappings that were used to create the label. For example

$$\text{if "all variants" = "a"} \Rightarrow \text{set label disposition to "allocatable"}$$

would allow 000 to be allocated, because the types of all variants used in creating the mappings are "a".

7 Blocked variants

Blocked variants are not available to another registrant. They therefore protect the applicant of the original label from someone else registering a label that is "the same as" under some user-perceived metric. Blocked variants can be a useful tool even for scripts for which no allocatable labels are ever defined.

If we start with 000 , the permutation $\ddot{O}\ddot{O}\ddot{O}$ will have been the result of applying only mappings with type "blocked" and we cannot allocate the label $\ddot{O}\ddot{O}\ddot{O}$, only the original label 000 . This corresponds to the following derivation:

$$\text{if "any variants" = "x"} \Rightarrow \text{set label disposition to "blocked"}$$

To prevent allocating $\ddot{O}\acute{O}\acute{O}$ as a variant label for $\ddot{O}\ddot{O}\ddot{O}$ we further need to make sure that the mapping $\ddot{O} \rightarrow \acute{O}$ has been defined with type "blocked" as in

$$\ddot{O} \ x \rightarrow \acute{O}$$

so that

$$\ddot{O}\ddot{O} \rightarrow \acute{O}\acute{O}: - \ x \ a.$$

Thus the set {x a} contains at least one “x” and satisfies the derivation of a blocked disposition for $\acute{O}\acute{O}$. Here, “-” means that because of the absence of a mapping $\ddot{O} \rightarrow \acute{O}$ there is no variant type.

8 Pure Variant Labels

Now, if we wanted to prevent allocation of $\acute{O}\ddot{O}$ when we start from $\ddot{O}\ddot{O}$, we would need a rule disallowing a mix of original code points and variant code points, which is easily accomplished by use of the “only-variants” qualifier, which requires that the label consist entirely of variants and all the variants are from the same set of types.

if “only-variants” = “a” \Rightarrow set label disposition to “allocatable”

The two code points \ddot{O} in $\ddot{O}\ddot{O}$ are not arrived at by variant mappings, because the code points are unchanged and no variant mappings are defined for $\ddot{O} \rightarrow \ddot{O}$. So, in our example, the set of variant mapping types is

$$\ddot{O}\ddot{O} \rightarrow \ddot{O}\ddot{O}: - \ a \ -$$

but unlike the “all-variants” condition, “only-variants” requires a variant type list [a a a] (no - allowed). By adding a final derivation

else if “any-variants” = “a” \Rightarrow set label disposition to “blocked”

and executing that derivation only on any remaining labels, we disallow $\acute{O}\ddot{O}$ when starting from $\ddot{O}\ddot{O}$, but still allow $\acute{O}\acute{O}$.

Derivation conditions are always applied in order, with later derivations only applying to labels that did not match any earlier conditions, as indicated by the use of “else” in the last example. In other words, they form a cascade.

9 Reflexive Variants

But what if we started from $\acute{O}\ddot{O}$? We would expect $\acute{O}\acute{O}$ to be allocatable, but the disposition set would be

$$\acute{O}\ddot{O} \rightarrow \acute{O}\acute{O}: a \ - \ a$$

because the \acute{O} is the original code point. Here is where we use a reflexive mapping, by realizing that \acute{O} is “the same as” \acute{O} , which is normally redundant, but allows us to specify a disposition on the mapping

$0 \ a \rightarrow 0$

with that, the variant type list for $\text{ÖÖÖ} \rightarrow 000$ becomes:

$\text{ÖÖÖ} \rightarrow 000$: a a a

and the label 000 again passes the derivation condition

if “only-variants” = “a” \Rightarrow set label disposition to “allocatable”

as desired. This use of reflexive variants is typical whenever derivations with the “only-variants” qualifier are used.

10 Limiting Allocatable Variants by Subtyping

As we have seen, the number of variant labels can potentially be large, due to combinatorics.

To recap, in the standard case a code point C can have (up to) two types of variant mappings

$C \ x \rightarrow X$
 $C \ a \rightarrow A$

where $a \rightarrow$ means a variant mapping with disposition “allocatable”, and $x \rightarrow$ means “blocked”. By convention, we name the target code point with the corresponding uppercase letter.

Subtyping is a mechanism that allows us to distinguish among different types of allocatable variants. For example, we can define three new types: “s”, “t” and “b”. “s” and “t” are mutually incompatible, but “b” is compatible with either “s” or “t” (in this case, “b” stands for “both”). With this, a code point C might have (up to) four types of variant mappings

$C \ x \rightarrow X$
 $C \ s \rightarrow S$
 $C \ t \rightarrow T$
 $C \ b \rightarrow B$

and explicit reflexive mappings of one of these types

$C \ s \rightarrow C$
 $C \ t \rightarrow C$
 $C \ b \rightarrow C$

As before, all mappings must have one and only one type, but each code point may map to any number of other code points.

We define the compatibility of “b” with “t” or “s” by our choice of derivation conditions as follows

if “only-variants” = “s” or “b” \Rightarrow allocatable

else if “only-variants” = “t” or “b” \Rightarrow allocatable
 else if “any-variants” = “s” or “t” or “b” or “x” \Rightarrow blocked

An original label of four code points

CCCC

may have many variant labels such as this example listed with its corresponding variant type list:

CCCC \rightarrow XSTB : x s t b

This variant label is blocked because to get from C to B required $x \rightarrow$. (Because variant mappings are defined for specific source code points, we need to show the starting label for each of these examples, not merely the code points in the variant label.) The variant label

CCCC \rightarrow SSBB : s s b b

is allocatable, because the variant type list contains only allocatable mappings of subtype *s* or *b*, which we have defined as being compatible by our choice of derivations. The actual set of variant types {*s*, *b*} has only two members, but the examples are easier to follow if we list each disposition. The label

CCCC \rightarrow TTBB : t t b b

is again allocatable, because the variant type set {*t*, *b*} contains only allocatable mappings of the mutually compatible allocatable subtypes *t* or *b*. In contrast,

CCCC \rightarrow SSTT : s s t t

is not allocatable, because the type set contains incompatible subtypes *t* and *s* and thus would be blocked by the final derivation.

The variant labels

CCCC \rightarrow CSBB : c s b b

CCCC \rightarrow CTBB : c t b b

are only allocatable based on the subtype for the $C \rightarrow C$ mapping, which is denoted here by *c* and (depending on what was chosen for the disposition on the reflexive mapping) could correspond to *s*, *t*, or *b*.

If it is *s*, the first of these two labels is allocatable; if it is *t*, the second of these two labels is allocatable; if it is *b*, both labels are allocatable.

So far, the scheme doesn't seem to have brought any huge reduction in allocatable variant labels, but that is because we tacitly assumed that C could have all three types of allocatable variants *s*, *t*, and *b* at the same time.

In a real world example, the types *s*, *t* and *b* are assigned so that each code point *C* normally has at most one non-reflexive variant mapping labeled with one of these subtypes, and all other mappings would be assigned type *x* (blocked). This holds true for most code points in existing tables (such as those used in current IDN TLDs), although certain code points have exceptionally complex variant relations and may have an extra mapping.

11 Allowing Mixed Originals

If the desire is to allow original labels (but not variant labels) that are *s/t* mixed, then the scheme needs to be slightly refined to distinguish between reflexive and non-reflexive variants. In this document, the symbol “*r-n*” means “a reflexive (identity) mapping of type ‘*n*’”.

With this convention, and redefining the derivations

if “only-variants” = “*s*” or “*r-s*” or “*b*” or “*r-b*” ⇒ allocatable
 else if “only-variants” = “*t*” or “*r-t*” or “*b*” or “*r-b*” ⇒ allocatable
 else if “any-variants” = “*s*” or “*t*” or “*b*” or “*x*” ⇒ blocked
 else ⇒ allocatable

any labels that contain *only* reflexive mappings of otherwise mixed type (in other words, any mixed original label) now fall through and their disposition is set to “allocatable” in the final derivation.

12 Corresponding XML Notation

The XML format defined in [XML-LGR] corresponds fairly directly to the notation used in this document. A variant relation

$$C \ x \rightarrow X$$

is expressed as

```
<char cp="nnnn"><var cp="mmmm" type="blocked" /></char>
```

where we assume that *nnnn* and *mmmm* are the Unicode code values for *C* and *X*, respectively. A reflexive mapping would use the same code point value for <char> and <var> element. Multiple <var> elements may be nested inside a single <char> element, but their “cp” values must be distinct (unless other distinguishing attributes are present that are not part of the discussed here).

A derivation of a variant label disposition

if “only-variants” = “*s*” or “*b*” ⇒ allocatable

is expressed as


```
<action disp="allocatable" only-variants="s b" />
```

Instead of using "if" and "else if" the <action> elements implicitly form a cascade, where the first action triggered defines the disposition of the label. The order of action elements is thus significant.

For the full specification of the XML format see [XML-LGR].

13 References

[Procedure] Internet Corporation for Assigned Names and Numbers, "Procedure to Develop and Maintain the Label Generation Rules for the Root Zone in Respect of IDNA Labels." (Los Angeles, California: ICANN, March, 2013)

<http://www.icann.org/en/resources/idn/variant-tlds/draft-lgr-procedure-20mar13-en.pdf>

[XML-LGR] Davies, K. and A. Freytag, "Representing Label Generation Rulesets using XML", <http://tools.ietf.org/html/draft-davies-idntables-07/>. Visited 2014-03-18.