The English Language Needs the Word Libre

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1 Preliminary Rough Notes

1.1 The two meanings of ”free”

The are two meanings to the word free.

* free as in freedom or freedom of speech * free as in free of charge.

The two meanings of the term free are often illustrated with the phrases ”w:en:free as in beer,” which alludes to monetary price or cost but has little to do with freedom, and ”w:en:free as in speech”. The usage of ”free” in ”free content” carries the latter meaning – free as in speech – because the emphasis is on everyone’s freedom to engage with the content, understand it, modify it, and share it with others.

Many languages other than English use two different words for these distinct concepts. In English, it is sometimes useful to use two less common but more precise words, both adopted from French:

* libre (meaning free as in speech) and * gratis (meaning free as in beer).

In these terms, free-content works are always libre, often but not necessarily gratis.

Overall, this is confusing, because when using the term ”free”, it sometimes mean free of charge, sometimes free of speech, and sometimes both !

Free is too confusing.

Other languages: French Libre/Gratuit – Farsi/Persian Azad/Moft and Majani.

Free Software movement has shown the problem. Free Beer dominates Free Speech. Libre Software would have been better.

How we needed Libre Services.

Linguistic analysis.

Language evolve and adapts. This is a good time to push for adoption of Libre.

2 Gratis versus Libre

Gratis versus Libre is the distinction between zero price and freedom. Gratis has been adopted as a (relatively uncommon) English word. However, libre has not, and there is no English adjective signifying only freedom. This distinction is of utmost importance in dealing with information as property.

2.1 Gratis

Gratis is an adjective in Latin and various Romance and Germanic languages meaning ”free,” in the sense that one does not have to pay for some good or service (free of charge).

2.2 Libre

Libre is a word in various Romance languages, e.g. Spanish and French (descended from the Latin word Liber) that denotes the state of being free, as in ”having freedom”. GNU programmers often talk about free as in free speech (libre) and free as in free beer (gratis), as the word free in English does not distinguish between these meanings. Free software (with a capital F) usually means the former.

2.3 Free as in beer versus free as in speech

In hacker slang, gratis is typically referred to as free as in beer while libre is referred to as free as in speech. The Jargon File is a glossary of hacker slang. ...

Free as in beer refers to things which are available at no monetary cost (like free beer at a party). While one is permitted to use the object (e.g., drink the beer) without payment, one does not necessarily receive any rights (e.g. take the beer home) or ownership. It can be contrasted with the expressions free as in speech, free as in freedom, or free as in rights, which refer to something which is free of restrictions, as in the freedom of speech. One is permitted to use the object, reproduce it, repurpose it, and generally do what one will with it; usually the only restrictions applied are that credit be given to any entity that contributed to any resulting object and that such object be free as in speech as well. An example of a license with such grants and conditions is the Creative Commons Attribution Share-Alike license.

Since the advent of the free software movement, these terms have entered frequent use for categorising computer programs according to the licenses and legal fetters that cover them, and both this expression and the term gratis are used to distinguish freeware (gratis software) from free software.