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## From the president

Boris Veytsman

My previous column discussed various licenses used for  $\TeX$ -related software, and mentioned that 56% of CTAN packages use the LPPL, the license developed by the  $\LaTeX$ 3 project. The LPPL insists on the right of the users to know whether they are dealing with the original package or with a modified version — and the right of the maintainers of a package to preserve its integrity. This insistence is quite unusual in the other parts of the free software movements. I can fork Emacs, change its functions (for example, mapping Ctrl-X Ctrl-S by default to the deletion of all files in the current directory), and still distribute the result as Emacs. I cannot do this with the current  $\LaTeX$  packages, however: I can change the code, but I must prominently advertise to the users that they are *not* using the “real  $\LaTeX$ ”.

While technically this license was created for  $\LaTeX$  and its packages, its spirit is, in my opinion, traditional for the  $\TeX$  world in general. Knuth’s distribution conditions for the original  $\TeX$  code were basically “you may do whatever you want with this program, but if you want to call it  $\TeX$ , it must pass this suite of tests”. The old-timers may remember a quite strong reaction from DEK when certain Linux distributions included a copy of Computer Modern fonts with slightly modified shapes. It is not surprising, however, that the Latin Modern fonts, which are based on Computer Modern, but do not pretend to be Computer Modern, have not caused objections by Knuth.

This feature was met with certain resistance in the free software community. I remember it being dismissed as an attempt at “a poor person’s trademark”, and it was questioned whether LPPL is too limiting to be considered free software. Of course any license with the exception of the purely public domain CC-0 limits the rights of users (some people, for example, consider the requirements of the GPL far too onerous). The question is in the balance between these limitations and the benefits to the community. The  $\LaTeX$  team was able to convince the gatekeepers of free software licensing that their license has an acceptable balance.

One of the reasons for this insistence on integrity of software in the  $\TeX$  world may be the following. As Chris Rowley observed a decade ago,  $\TeX$  and especially  $\LaTeX$  became *the* language of the scientific community. Any language serves not just the communication of information, but also its preservation. One of the concerns of DEK during the design

of  $\TeX$  was the requirement that documents should be typeset identically on all computers. It is well known that this led to  $\TeX$  using integer arithmetic with the unit of length being 5.4 nm. If we want our documents to be the same on all computers, we also want them to be the same in all times. The  $\TeX$  community has always put a great emphasis on the stability of historical documents, trying to preserve them with nanometer scale accuracy. Of course, macro packages written by ordinary people rather than DEK are not as stable as his  $\TeX$ , but the effort to make the old documents compilable, producing the same results today as many years ago is quite extraordinary for the software community.

To tell the truth, many software developers are not too concerned about backward compatibility or legacy code. While the sheer disdain that Python maintainers seem to feel towards their users is rather rare, the expectation that users constantly adjust their programs to keep them working is quite common. The huge effort that the  $\LaTeX$ 3 team puts into compatibility with old documents is almost unheard of. This work would be impossible without the guarantee of integrity provided by the LPPL.

Another aspect of this is the attention the community pays to continuing maintenance of old packages when the original author moves on. The Oberdiek Packages Support Group ([github.com/ho-tex](https://github.com/ho-tex)) is a great example of this. A number of Heiko’s packages became key libraries for much  $\LaTeX$  code. Due to the stewardship of the Group we can be assured these packages are going to be supported in the future. Now it looks like we might need another effort in this direction. Peter Wilson, the author of *memoir*, *fonttable*, *ledmac*, *ledpar*, *cutwin* and 83 other packages including unique fonts, document styles and much more, retired some time ago. Many have been adopted by other people and groups, with the majority taken by Will Robertson. Now Will, after years of great work maintaining these packages, wishes to focus on other tasks. There are now talks with the  $\LaTeX$  team about taking them over. We also need maintainers for other old but still important code by other authors.

We are trying to prevent code from becoming unmaintained. Thus if you are a package author, and you feel you are no longer able to support your work, or if you are looking for a package to maintain, please contact us. We will be happy to match outgoing and incoming maintainers, and help to continue the  $\TeX$  tradition of care about history and preservation.

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