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The `l3str-convert` package: string encoding conversions

The L^AT_EX3 Project*

Released 2017/05/13

1 Encoding and escaping schemes

Traditionally, string encodings only specify how strings of characters should be stored as bytes. However, the resulting lists of bytes are often to be used in contexts where only a restricted subset of bytes are permitted (*e.g.*, PDF string objects, URLs). Hence, storing a string of characters is done in two steps.

- The code points (“character codes”) are expressed as bytes following a given “encoding”. This can be UTF-16, ISO 8859-1, *etc.* See Table 1 for a list of supported encodings.¹
- Bytes are translated to T_EX tokens through a given “escaping”. Those are defined for the most part by the pdf file format. See Table 2 for a list of escaping methods supported.²

*E-mail: latex-team@latex-project.org

¹Encodings and escapings will be added as they are requested.

Table 1: Supported encodings. Non-alphanumeric characters are ignored, and capital letters are lower-cased before searching for the encoding in this list.

$\langle Encoding \rangle$	description
utf8	UTF-8
utf16	UTF-16, with byte-order mark
utf16be	UTF-16, big-endian
utf16le	UTF-16, little-endian
utf32	UTF-32, with byte-order mark
utf32be	UTF-32, big-endian
utf32le	UTF-32, little-endian
iso88591, latin1	ISO 8859-1
iso88592, latin2	ISO 8859-2
iso88593, latin3	ISO 8859-3
iso88594, latin4	ISO 8859-4
iso88595	ISO 8859-5
iso88596	ISO 8859-6
iso88597	ISO 8859-7
iso88598	ISO 8859-8
iso88599, latin5	ISO 8859-9
iso885910, latin6	ISO 8859-10
iso885911	ISO 8859-11
iso885913, latin7	ISO 8859-13
iso885914, latin8	ISO 8859-14
iso885915, latin9	ISO 8859-15
iso885916, latin10	ISO 8859-16
clist	comma-list of integers
$\langle empty \rangle$	native (Unicode) string

Table 2: Supported escapings. Non-alphanumeric characters are ignored, and capital letters are lower-cased before searching for the escaping in this list.

$\langle Escaping \rangle$	description
bytes, or empty	arbitrary bytes
hex, hexadecimal	byte = two hexadecimal digits
name	see <code>\pdfescapename</code>
string	see <code>\pdfescapestring</code>
url	encoding used in URLs

2 Conversion functions

`\str_set_convert:Nnnn`
`\str_gset_convert:Nnnn`

`\str_set_convert:Nnnn` $\langle str\ var \rangle$ $\{\langle string \rangle\}$ $\{\langle name\ 1 \rangle\}$ $\{\langle name\ 2 \rangle\}$

This function converts the $\langle string \rangle$ from the encoding given by $\langle name\ 1 \rangle$ to the encoding given by $\langle name\ 2 \rangle$, and stores the result in the $\langle str\ var \rangle$. Each $\langle name \rangle$ can have the form $\langle encoding \rangle$ or $\langle encoding \rangle / \langle escaping \rangle$, where the possible values of $\langle encoding \rangle$ and $\langle escaping \rangle$ are given in Tables 1 and 2, respectively. The default escaping is to input and output bytes directly. The special case of an empty $\langle name \rangle$ indicates the use of “native” strings, 8-bit for pdfTeX, and Unicode strings for the other two engines.

For example,

`\str_set_convert:Nnnn \l_foo_str { Hello! } { } { utf16/hex }`

results in the variable `\l_foo_str` holding the string `FEFF00480065006C006C006F0021`. This is obtained by converting each character in the (native) string `Hello!` to the UTF-16 encoding, and expressing each byte as a pair of hexadecimal digits. Note the presence of a (big-endian) byte order mark “FEFF”, which can be avoided by specifying the encoding `utf16be/hex`.

An error is raised if the $\langle string \rangle$ is not valid according to the $\langle escaping\ 1 \rangle$ and $\langle encoding\ 1 \rangle$, or if it cannot be reencoded in the $\langle encoding\ 2 \rangle$ and $\langle escaping\ 2 \rangle$ (for instance, if a character does not exist in the $\langle encoding\ 2 \rangle$). Erroneous input is replaced by the Unicode replacement character “FFFD”, and characters which cannot be reencoded are replaced by either the replacement character “FFFD” if it exists in the $\langle encoding\ 2 \rangle$, or an encoding-specific replacement character, or the question mark character.

`\str_set_convert:NnnnTF`
`\str_gset_convert:NnnnTF`

`\str_set_convert:NnnnTF` $\langle str\ var \rangle$ $\{\langle string \rangle\}$ $\{\langle name\ 1 \rangle\}$ $\{\langle name\ 2 \rangle\}$ $\{\langle true\ code \rangle\}$
 $\{\langle false\ code \rangle\}$

As `\str_set_convert:Nnnn`, converts the $\langle string \rangle$ from the encoding given by $\langle name\ 1 \rangle$ to the encoding given by $\langle name\ 2 \rangle$, and assigns the result to $\langle str\ var \rangle$. Contrarily to `\str_set_convert:Nnnn`, the conditional variant does not raise errors in case the $\langle string \rangle$ is not valid according to the $\langle name\ 1 \rangle$ encoding, or cannot be expressed in the $\langle name\ 2 \rangle$ encoding. Instead, the $\langle false\ code \rangle$ is performed.

3 Internal string functions

`__str_hexadecimal_use:NTF`

`__str_hexadecimal_use:NTF` $\langle token \rangle$ $\{\langle true\ code \rangle\}$ $\{\langle false\ code \rangle\}$

If the $\langle token \rangle$ is a hexadecimal digit (upper case or lower case), its upper-case version is left in the input stream, followed by the $\langle true\ code \rangle$. Otherwise, the $\langle false\ code \rangle$ is left in the input stream.

TeXhackers note: This function fails on some inputs if the escape character is a hexadecimal digit. We are thus careful to set the escape character to a known (safe) value before using it.

4 Possibilities, and things to do

Encoding/escaping-related tasks.

- In XeTeX/LuaTeX, would it be better to use the `^^^~`.... approach to build a string from a given list of character codes? Namely, within a group, assign 0-9a-f and all characters we want to category “other”, then assign `^` the category superscript, and use `\scantokens`.
- Change `\str_set_convert:Nnnn` to expand its last two arguments.
- Describe the internal format in the code comments. Refuse code points in ["D800,"DFFF] in the internal representation?
- Add documentation about each encoding and escaping method, and add examples.
- The `hex` unescaping should raise an error for odd-token count strings.
- Decide what bytes should be escaped in the `url` escaping. Perhaps `! ' () * - . / 0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 _` are safe, and all other characters should be escaped?
- Automate generation of 8-bit mapping files.
- Change the framework for 8-bit encodings: for decoding from 8-bit to Unicode, use 256 integer registers; for encoding, use a tree-box.
- More encodings (see Heiko’s `stringenc`). CESU?
- More escapings: ASCII85, shell escapes, lua escapes, *etc.*?

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