The British Standards Institution and its Recommendations for Indexes

When planning the meeting on the revised British Standard on Indexing (BS 3700 : 1976 Recommendations for the preparation of indexes to books, periodicals and other publications), it was agreed with Miss Mary Piggott that I should set the background to the subject by speaking about the British Standards Institution and how BS 3700 fits into its activities. This was because of my association with the Institution which dates back to the mid-1940s when I represented the Library Association on the Committee on Alphabetical Arrangement, the chairman of which was the late Dr. S. C. Bradford who was librarian of the Science Library.

But first I should say something about the International Standards Organization (ISO). This organization consists of representatives of all the national standards organizations and arranges meetings of experts from various countries to prepare standards on a variety of subjects which it considers worthy of international standardization. When published, these international standards are sent to all national organizations so that they may consider them for adoption in their own country.

Most countries have a standards organization which prepares standards on its own initiative and adopts standards published by ISO, sometimes with variations because certain aspects or provisions are not acceptable to the national committee, or not applicable in the country concerned. These are published as national standards and are usually stated to be in accordance with, or based on, particular ISO standards, when this is the case.

These national standards organizations liaise very closely with ISO and with one another. The American equivalent to the British Standards Institution is the American National Standards Institute Inc., and the Australian one is the Standards Association of Australia.

What is the British Standards Institution? First of all, let me say what it is not; it is not a government department. It is the recognized body in the United Kingdom for the preparation, publication and promulgation of national standards, and represents the U.K. in the ISO, in the International Electrotechnical Commission (IEC) and in West European organizations concerned with the harmonization of standards.

The scope of standards work includes: glossaries of terms, definitions and symbols; methods of test; specifications for quality, safety, performance or dimensions; preferred sizes and types; codes of practice. It is also concerned with the certification and approval of products as complying with standards and with the international aspects of this subject; for this purpose a Centre is maintained at Hemel Hempstead which provides testing facilities and authorizes the use of the familiar Kitemark in respect of goods tested and found to be manufactured in compliance with a British Standard.

The Institution is financed by voluntary subscriptions and an annual government grant, the sale of its publications and fees for testing and certification. Subscribing members of BSI include trade and technical associations, professional bodies, public authorities, manufacturers and large-scale distributors and purchasers.

BSI is probably best known for its publications of standards and codes of practice of which there are over 10,000.

In the library at BSI headquarters in Park Street, London, are available complete sets of

* A meeting of the Society held on 11th January 1977 and addressed by Mr L. M. Harrod and Miss Mary Piggott, two members of the Committee which drew up the Standard.
British, international and overseas standards and their related indexes and catalogues; also current and file copies of the journals issued by the various standards bodies.

The main function of BSI being the production of standards (whether they lay down processes of manufacture, details of size or thickness of a finished product, or recommendations on the preparation of indexes, or whatever), and the publication of the standards, its work is largely administrative. Once it has been decided to prepare a standard, BSI organizes a committee of experts by inviting the relevant professional or trade associations and government departments to nominate a representative, calls the meetings and provides staff to keep minutes of discussions and decisions. The members of the various committees or panels attend in their own, or their employers', time, and at their expense, or at the expense of the body represented. Meetings are held as often as is found practicable (monthly is common) and may last a day or half a day according to the urgency of the work or the convenience of their members.

Some committees have sub-committees, or panels, which deal with particular aspects of the committee's main subject. The committee which produced BS 5408:1976 Glossary of documentation terms had about six panels of three of which both our Chairman and I were members.

The work of the preparation of standards is taken very seriously by the committee members, and sometimes quite long discussions take place, every aspect of what might appear to the uninitiated to be a minor matter being considered. Where agreement cannot be arrived at, a compromise may be reached; quite often a member may change his mind as a result of the discussion.

When a committee has completed its deliberations, a draft of the standard is sent to all relevant organizations and some individuals known to be interested 'for comment'. Very often the comments are acted upon, sometimes they express a bias, a 'bee in the bonnet', or a misunderstanding; but they are all considered. The draft of BS 3700 occupied fifteen foolscap pages; the resulting comments totalled 181 and took eighteen pages and influenced the final Recommendations.

When a standard is finally agreed and so certified by the committee chairman it is passed to the BSI editorial department to make sure that its style of presentation coincides with the BSI house rules. It is then published, again in accordance with the house rules for format and typography.

There are those who consider that the present style of presentation of the standards is less satisfactory than the former format; matters of adverse criticism are: the larger page size, the use of the textpaper for the cover, instead of the former tinted 'board', which results in greater wear and tear on the publication, and the complete absence of indentation (except within examples) in the typographical lay-out which slows down speedy consultation of the text. But the committee which drew up the standard was responsible only for the text; its presentation conforms to the BSI house style.

Other comments have been made that the standards in general are expensive—which in terms of the numbers of pages you get for your money compared with some other kinds of publication is legitimate, but it must be realized from the little I have said about the organization (which by no means indicates all the activities of BSI) that it is by its very nature an expensive one to administer and that there is only a limited sale for its standards. They are not the sort of publication which can be produced in terms of thousands and be reprinted because of popular demand in a few months, and therefore be produced and sold for a pound or so.

Finally, a word about the relationship of the two standards 1749 and 3700. The result of the deliberations of the committee to which I referred at the beginning of my talk was the publication of BS 1749 Alphabetical arrangement in 1951. It became apparent that this was only a part of the wider field of indexing and the committee was reconvened and began to work on preparing a standard on indexing with the result that BS 3700 Recommendations for the preparation of indexes for books, periodicals and other publications was published in 1964. The Foreword to this states that it was prepared with the full participation of the Society of Indexers.

In the intervening years there had been many new developments in librarianship, publishing and allied fields, and information retrieval systems had become increasingly dependent upon the computer. The result was that Alphabetical arrangement was given complete reconsideration and brought up to date bearing in mind those developments. It will be realized that such thorough revision takes a long time,
but this revised edition was published in 1969 with the title Specification for alphabetical arrangement and the filing order of numerals and symbols. This revision indicated, largely because of the development that was continuing to take place in the fields which caused the revision of 1749 and also some contradictions which now existed between the two standards, that 3700 should be examined with a view to its revision. The result was a complete re-appraisal of the subject and the eventuating publication in 1976 of Recommendations for the preparation of indexes to books, periodicals and other publications—to give it its full title. It will be noted that it is not a specification, as is 1749, but a set of recommendations, indicating incidentally that indexing is not an exact science but an art and allowing its practitioners scope to exercise their skills and judgement according to the needs of each particular work being indexed. Inevitably it has to deal with alphabetization but it does not do so fully; it refers readers to 1749 for the fuller treatment.

It is the practice for BSI to consider every five years whether a standard needs revision; BS 1749 is being so considered at the present moment, and it is quite likely that some revisions will be made when this takes place.

L. M. Harrod

BS 3700:1976 is a revision of an existing standard promulgated in 1964. The revision committee had therefore the advantage of having a working text before them from the beginning. At the same time they were under the constraint of the text’s being a standard. The object of proposing standardization being to persuade people to abandon their idiosyncratic preferences or haphazard ways and conform to a generally accepted code, it would have been irresponsible not to preserve as much of the original as changing conditions allowed, and not to remember Montaigne’s advice, phrased in the title of one of his essays as ‘De ne changer aisément une loi reçue’. To change a standard too radically or too frequently patently defeats the object of standardization. In the course of his essay Montaigne does, however, relate an anecdote of a country woman who used daily to carry a baby calf across the farmyard before it was able to walk and went on doing so even after it was a grown animal.

So we examined the existing text against what we knew of current practice and found that for the most part we wanted not to make changes but to produce further clarification. This was done partly by rearranging the sequence of topics, partly by rewording and new examples, and partly by introducing further explanatory matter—although we had to keep reminding ourselves that our instructions were to produce a standard and not a manual.

The bull that was no longer a calf—if I may put it that way—seemed likely to be the section on alphabetical arrangement, since a revision of BS 1749 on alphabetical arrangement had come out in 1969.

The increase in the number of sections in the new standard, from six to seven, is due solely to the separate numbering, as Section 2, of the paragraph which refers to other British Standards cited in the text.

Scope

The standard is entitled Recommendations for the preparation of indexes to books, periodicals and other publications. It regards the publications as single items, that is, it offers guidance on producing the index to a book, or to a volume or a run of a periodical and not the index to a collection of books in a library or to the periodical literature of a subject or range of subjects. It is addressed primarily to the indexer working on his own and not to the commercial indexing organization. For the most part it disregards the requirements of mechanical aids to the manipulation of entries. (Naturally, the general principles of indexing as specifically as appears to be necessary and using appropriate entry words and required connecting references apply in all types of indexing, and occasionally the standard does make reference to features of machine-aided indexing systems.)

Coverage

BS 3700 conforms to the pattern of British Standards by beginning with a brief statement of its scope, followed by definitions of the technical terms used.

It goes on to advise the indexer to suit the index to the work itself and, in choosing names and concepts from the text, to provide for the publication’s most likely users, foreseeing, so far as he can, the users’ possible approaches. From this alone, it is evident that the standard cannot lay down detailed rules, but can only
give guidance on handling each unique text and draw attention to the questions the indexer must ask himself at every stage of decision making.

The first of the questions is: how many indexes should be made for any single publication? Apart from saying that a single sequence is generally preferable for books on the humanities, and that too many separate indexes may confuse the reader, the Standard does not commit itself on this point. Each index should be preceded by a note to explain its construction, omissions and other peculiarities.

Choice and form of heading and subheadings

Help is then given on the choice and form of headings and subheadings and necessary references. Two publications used by librarians as standard rule books are referred to for detailed guidance on the forms of proper names.

Here the new edition has been considerably expanded and, we hope, made clearer by division into sections for personal names, corporate names, geographical names, names of publications and common names. The section on the use of subheadings has also been expanded and more examples have been added.

A warning is given against amassing a large number of page references against a single heading and this is emphasized by a set of examples which show how different aspects of a subject should be made into separate entries by the use of subheadings. Subheadings which require their own sequence of sub-subheadings may often be better placed as main entries in their own right.

A suggestion which does not appear in the earlier edition is that in setting out headings and subheadings, a conventionalized single-line entry, using punctuation marks with assigned and consistent meanings, may be used instead of successive indentations, as in an example borrowed from British Technology Index:

HEATING, Gas-fired: Equipment: Safety
(which the user interprets as Safety of equipment used in gas-fired heating). The line can automatically be rearranged to make added entries and references.

Another new suggestion is that prepositions may be dropped from the ends of entries where no ambiguity would result, e.g., with the word 'Heading' as the entry word and 'inversion' as the subheading, there is no loss of clarity in not saying 'Heading, inversion of'.

The Standard requires specific page references, e.g., 3-11, and not 3ff or 3 et seq, and prefers to indicate isolated mention of a subject on consecutive pages by giving each page number, deprecating the use of the word passim.

Cross-references

A section on cross-references summarizes usage of 'see' and 'see also' cross-references, and suggests double entry rather than a 'see' reference where this would take up no more space.

Arrangement

The section on arrangement in indexes begins by saying that 'alphabetical arrangement is generally the most practical, and therefore the commonest, method of displaying indexes to publications. If any other arrangement is seen unquestionably to be more suitable for a particular work, the arrangement chosen should be clearly stated and, if necessary, explained... Within an alphabetical index, subheadings may occasionally be more suitably arranged by a method other than alphabetical'.

In view of the revision of BS 1749 the committee debated whether to omit the section on alphabetization altogether and simply refer to the detailed Standard. Our Standard is not, as has been said, intended to be a fully fleshed textbook of indexes, but even a skeleton requires all its bones, so we decided to retain a skeletal section on alphabetical arrangement so that the reader who expected a complete synopsis of recommended practice should not be disappointed, or frustrated, to discover that even for this he needed not one standard but two. It goes without saying that reference is made to BS 1749, which is cited—and in a bibliographical standard at that—without a date!

In deference to the computer's inability (without elaborate programming) to translate symbols into words in the appropriate language, or to spell out abbreviated words, the revised edition of BS 1749 declares its aim to have been 'to produce rules which in general can be followed without the exercise of intellectual judgement'. However, there is much flexibility in the rules which follow, and our Standard contrives to be compatible with one or other of the alternatives allowed in BS 1749 while not differing radically from its own previous edition.

The revised standard for alphabetization (BS 1749) prefers separate sequences for symbols, Roman numerals and Arabic numerals as entry words, all to precede the main alpha-
Betical sequence. Our Standard therefore advocates this arrangement, but permits, as does also BS 1749, the old practice of arranging such signs as if spelled out in words in the appropriate language, where few such signs are used.

Like BS 1749, our revised Standard inserts a new paragraph on the arrangement of chemical formulae, which are to be regarded each as a separate word and arranged as written and sub-arranged by subscript numeral so that all compounds of a single element are grouped together.

There is no change in our Standard's attitude to filing word-by-word or letter-by-letter. Both are still allowed. BS 1749 says letter-by-letter filing is not recommended (although it is allowed).

A slight change of emphasis is discernible in our Standard's treatment of hyphenated words. The earlier edition prefers them to be arranged as single entities, letter-by-letter, but does not insist. The new edition says, 'Hyphens and oblique strokes are normally treated as spaces for the purposes of word-by-word alphabetization', although a little later, it says, 'Hyphenated common nouns may be arranged letter-by-letter'. We require an apostrophe to be disregarded and the word in which it occurs to be treated as one word. BS 1749 treats both the apostrophe and the hyphen as spaces, the latter even when it merely connects a prefix to its word.

The revision committee, prompted, so far as I remember, by one of the comments received on the draft which was circulated, makes a point of warning: 'No matter which system of alphabetization is chosen, care should be taken to group in one alphabetical sequence all the subheadings that qualify a single heading', and gives some examples.

There are slight differences between the two editions of BS 3700 in the section on the arrangement of homonyms. Both texts advocate arrangement in the order of 1. person or organization, 2. place, 3. subject, and 4. title of a publication, and both go on to specify 'If there are several entries in any one category, they should be differentiated and arranged (alphabetically or otherwise) by qualifying expressions taken from the text or supplied in parentheses'. Both then give examples of similar personal-name entry words, but hierarchical order for such entries as those for saints, popes and kings, permitted as an alternative by the first edition (and still to be found in BS 1749 : 1969) is not suggested by the new edition. Neither does the new edition (or BS 1749 : 1969) single out geographical names for subarrangement by non-alphabetical organization in a schedule of precedence.

Presentation

The last section of the standard deals with the presentation of the index. It again draws attention to the value of an introductory note. For the sake of saving space, it suggests two, or even three, columns across the page, but warns that if indention for each subheading, which is preferred, is not feasible, punctuation must clearly separate subheadings. Punctuation signs may have a semantic as well as a separating function, as in the BTI example quoted. Variation in type may also be used semantically, to indicate references to important passages of the text, illustrations, maps, etc., but not to such an extent as to confuse the user.

The index to a single volume preferably follows the text and is numbered in the same sequence of pages as the text. For a separately published index, correct and detailed bibliographical identification of volumes and parts covered is essential.

The Index

Appended to the standard is its own index, compiled by Mr Harrod. This begins with an introductory note which is a model of its kind. I quote it in full. 'This index has deliberately been made somewhat more comprehensive than might ordinarily be required.

The method of alphabetization used is word-by-word.

The references are not to page numbers but to clause numbers and, because of their complexity in many cases, they are separated by semicolons instead of the more usual commas.

References in bold characters denote sections and clauses that are wholly concerned with the subjects to which they refer.'

The index which follows is an integrated set of examples of headings, subheadings, references and cross-references.

From the foregoing comparison of the first and second editions of the British Standard Recommendations for the preparation of indexes . . . , I think the conclusion emerges that there are no fundamental changes required in our practice, and that we do not need to set down any monstrous bull which we had been unaware of carrying.
In the discussion which followed the two papers, some dissatisfaction was expressed that the recommendations 'lacked teeth' and had in several instances left to the individual indexer the choice between alternative procedures, such as whether one or more indexes should be made for a single work or whether alphabetical arrangement should be letter-by-letter or word-by-word. It was pointed out in reply that a rigid code would not suit all types of index, and that choices should be made to suit the work in hand, and having been made should be applied consistently throughout any particular index.

Among specific points raised was the suggestion that italic type, recommended in clauses 6.2.3.2 and 6.3, should be replaced by the use of parentheses for economy in type-setting; that more than five page references constituted 'a string'; that transposition of initials and forenames occurring at the beginning of corporate names should be permitted (5.2.2.7). It was also pointed out that the use of the full point after abbreviated words had been inconsistent in the standard. It had. But the style of an index must follow the style of the text: house styles vary, and examples of abbreviations both with and without the point were given, consistency being maintained (it was hoped) within any single set of examples.

Mary Piggott


Leif Kajberg

This paper gives a summarized description of the main points to be considered in connection with the compiling of a cumulated index to Libri: International Library Review vols 1-25. Also touched on are the general problems facing the indexer concerned with the indexing of periodical publications including the assignment of priorities to special parts of the textual material to be indexed, the maintenance of consistency, and the difficulties stemming from the poor state of terminology in library and information science.

Cumulative or collective indexes to periodical publications in library and information science are not an unknown phenomenon. They range from the decennial index to the scholarly journal Zentralblatt für Bibliothekswesen, 1937-1966, to the recent LISA Cumulative Index 1969-1973. Other recent products are the Collective Index to the Journal of the American Society of Information Science, Volumes 1-25, and the other ASIS publication, Cumulative Index to the Annual Review of Information Science and Technology Volumes 1-10 which supersedes the Cumulative Index to Volumes 1-7 published by ASIS in 1972. Besides, mention may be made of the collective index to Nachrichten für Dokumentation, covering the period 1950-1969, published by the German Society for Documentation. The subject indexes included in this index are UDC-classified sequences. Finally, a notice in Information Science Abstracts vol. 11, 1976, No. 2 informs us that a cumulated index to vols. 1-10 (1966 through 1975) is to be prepared for publication.