

Indexing international biomedical literature: a progress report

Since our previous report in this journal, 'Indexes of German-language biomedical abstracting journals—a new production method'¹, indexing progress has been made both for our extensive biomedical abstract journals and our primary journals, with a computer-supported procedure. We would like to share our reasons for going in this direction, and our experience of doing so, which may be of interest to others with similar problems.

The approach

External independent scientists read the current scientific literature from all over the world for our abstract journals (*Zentralblätter*). They critically select suitable papers, which are then passed on to the subject specialists, scientists who are active in research and clinical practice. They review publications on medicine in many languages. This kind of co-operative effort ensures the high quality of these abstract journals. Users are kept constantly informed about current literature and facts in their fields of interest, and they can also consult the respective indexes on specific subjects. From 1982, more collective abstracts and reviews will be produced and indexed than previously.

The indexing rules

We have established specified rules as follows: the number of key words chosen per article for the primary and secondary terms ('word chains'), use of broader and narrower terms, use of singular and plural, of combined terms and multiword terms, of small and capital letters (German, English, Latin), adaption of abbreviations and acronyms as well as numbers and terms from the nomenclature of chemistry and physics, and the use of Greek letters.

Expansion to primary journals

The procedure described below^{1,2} has also been in use for several years to produce indexes for primary journals. The key words for each article also are classified as primary and secondary terms and are separated by semi-colons. In the index, primary terms are listed alphabetically; the individual primary terms are arranged in such a way that each appears once in first place. The secondary terms follow the primary ones. This is the same way that biomedical primary journals in scientific publishing obtain the comprehensive data in indexes encompassing several years and in index volumes.

Automatic data processing and future possibilities

A Honeywell computer is used for data typing,

proofs, and data transfer with magnetic tapes: model 61/60-2 with 32 KB main storage and 12 KB microprogram storage, a communication processor of 8 KB, into which 8-16 screens can be connected.

All indexing 'word chains' can be stored on a similarly connected magnetic disk. These same 'word chains' can be used in several different sections of the *Zentralblätter* if the abstracts appear in several sections. It will also be possible to use the notation of the table of contents, within sections, in order to classify the abstracts automatically.

At present we are considering whether a document delivery service for abstracted and indexed original articles might be put to use by further extending automatic data processing.

References

1. Thuss, J. Indexes of German-language biomedical abstracting journals—a new production method. *The Indexer* 10 (2) Oct. 1976, 87.
2. Skolnik, H. The multiterm index. *Journal of Chemical Documentation* 10 (2) 1970, 81-4.

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Courses for publishers

From an indexers' viewpoint, it is encouraging to learn that the Publishers Group Training Services organization has arranged a series of 2-day courses for copy editors, one of which—entitled 'Proof reading and indexing'—includes a section intended to give candidates an understanding of the principles of indexing and its importance. Instruction is given on requirements for an index, style of index entries, user's needs, needs of the indexer, extent of the index, and principles of a good index.

Bryn Morgan, in charge of Publishers Group Training Services, says the course 'is designed to help those house editors who deal with book indexes to understand the basic principles of what constitutes a good index, and how to recognize a bad one. Our intention is to help editors to take a greater interest in their indexes, perhaps to become rather more critical and demanding, rather than simply dismiss it as the "bit at the end".'

The Society wishes Mr. Morgan and his staff every success in this laudable endeavour.