

CORRESPONDENCE

Nurses and indexes

Has anyone else ever complained about the subject indices [*sic*] to *Nursing research abstracts*? I suppose we're lucky to have any at all, though I can't help feeling that they would be far more useful permanently displayed in library schools as a warning to all would-be indexers. Of the many quirks I have discovered to date, I think the following example deserves a wider audience.

While looking in vol. 2 (2) 1980 for items on an aspect of surgical urological nursing care, I was led to the following abstract:

80/141

GUMLEY C J C *et al*

Personality correlates in a sample of male nurse in the British Royal Air Force.

Journal of Advanced Nursing 1979 Jul vol 4 no 4
pp 355-364

This descriptive study provides data relevant to two currently popular views of the male nursing image. Firstly, that male nurses tend to prefer the more technological or administrative aspects of nursing and secondly, that they exhibit to an unusually high degree what are commonly thought of as being the more feminine personality traits. The sample consisted of 91 male RAF nurses working RAF hospitals, and was of predominantly English nationality. Of the 39 SRNs in the sample 65.8% preferred general nursing to the more technical areas such as intensive care, operating theatre, orthopaedic and renal. The preference for general nursing was even greater, 76.1%, amongst the 30 SENs surveyed. The Eysenck [*sic*] Personality Questionnaire (EPQ) and Level of Aspiration Test (LOA) were used to obtain measures of the personality traits of the sample. The scores obtained showed that the male RAF nurses were significantly less psychotic than male civilian nurses, male civilians or servicemen of similar age. They were also significantly less extroverted than servicemen as a whole and significantly more stable than the male civilian norm. A comparison of SRNs with SENs revealed only two significant differences. The SRNs were significantly less extroverted and had a significantly higher level of aspiration than the SENs. (Journal abstract)

—from *Nursing research abstracts* 2 (2) 1980, 4

On close examination I discovered this had been indexed under these terms:

Attitudes	Renal nursing
Attitudes of the nurse	Royal Air Force
Attitudes to work	Staff administration

Intensive care	State Enrolled Nurses
Male nurses	State Registered Nurses
Military hospitals	Surgical care
Operating theatre	Technology
Orthopaedic care	Tests
Personality	Urological care
Personality tests	

Oh, DHSS, you don't even conform to your own standards! Where are the entries at Administration, Aspirations, Eysenck Personality Questionnaire, Femininity, Image (of the nurse), Job satisfaction, Level of Aspiration Test, Psychosis and Staff? And what of those wasteful *see* references? Perhaps they don't occur in your specially-developed-for-nursing thesaurus. Moreover, you ought to know better than to treat Renal nursing and Urological care as synonymous.

How can we convince our library users that publications of this sort—and indexes in general—are A Good Thing, if this is the best we can offer them? It's like giving someone a bicycle with square wheels and expecting him to believe it will win the Tour de France.

Anyway, I've probably got it all wrong; I'll wake up one morning to find myself indexed as a case study in some DHSS ongoing research to establish personality correlates in nursing librarians following prolonged exposure to pseudo-post-coordinate indexes in book form.

Helga J. Perry
Librarian, Canterbury & Thanet District
School of Nursing

Anne Stodulski, Librarian in charge of *Index of Nursing Research*, replies:

Thank you for giving me this opportunity to reply to Miss Perry's letter concerning the subject indexing in *Nursing Research Abstracts* (NRA).

NRA, amongst other services, is produced from the *Index of Nursing Research* (INR), and the journal is designed to disseminate information to all those interested in UK nursing research. The INR is at present maintained by one part-time librarian. Subject indexing is controlled through the *INR Thesaurus* with additional free language terms. Terminological control in NRA should improve next year with the introduction of the DHSS Library Thesaurus/classification system using a dedicated minicomputer system capable of generating computerized indices [*sic*].

Miss Perry's main question concerns military nurses, which is only one of three items in the whole of the INR on this topic. Items are on average indexed under seven descriptors and, as she points out, this one has been indexed under 19, well above average. Though the additional terms that Miss Perry suggests could have been

used, every indexer has to decide what on balance will offer the best retrieval results for the majority of the users. Furthermore it was decided to keep both 'implied' and the more general terms, such as 'administration', to a minimum so as not to make the index unnecessarily cumbersome. 'See' references are of course included in the *INR Thesaurus*, but it was decided that for the journal direct references to the item number would be preferable.

Finally may I say that I welcome this evidence that NRA is used by the National Health Service, and constructive comments from librarians for the improvement of the journal are always welcome.

Yours sincerely
A. H. Stodulski, ALA
Librarian, *Index of Nursing Research*,
Department of Health and Social Security

Authors and indexers

Letter to Judith Butcher, author of *Copy-editing: the Cambridge handbook* (Cambridge University Press, 1975; 2nd edition, 1981):

Dear Miss Butcher,

I am enjoying and benefiting from reading the 2nd edition of your *Copy-editing: the Cambridge handbook* as much as I did the first. Congratulations on a superb book!

Noting the end of the introduction, however, which asks for readers to tell you of any reservations they may have, I am at last moved to write to you about one point that has often bothered me. In chapter 8, 'Indexes', Section 1, you write:

'If the index has been made by a professional indexer, it may be wisest to send a copy to the author for his approval . . .'

I realize that you intend to imply here that indexes are made only by (a) authors themselves or (b) professional indexers. If it were only so! To quote the Registrar of The Society of Indexers at a recent seminar on indexing, 'Each editor has a list of people willing to index . . . I have often thought that this list contains the names of old pals, ex-employees, former lovers, penniless relations, bored housewives, people seeking pin-money, and even moon-lighting editors themselves'. Authors, who by the terms of their contracts usually have to provide the index, seem often to call on much the same categories of distinctly non-professional indexers.

Especially in view of the fact that there are many sorts of index-maker, but even without that consideration, the passage from your book quoted above seems to me to imply that professional indexers may supply indexes which authors may not approve. (This could even be

extrapolated to suggest, do rather call on your list of penniless relations to find an indexer!)

In future editions of the book, perhaps you could emphasize unambiguously the importance of ensuring that indexing is undertaken by people skilled in its particular and complex techniques?

Yours sincerely
Hazel Bell

Reply received from Judith Butcher:

Dear Mrs Bell

How kind of you to take the trouble to write about the second edition of *Copy-editing*. I had never noticed the unfortunate ambiguity in my remark about the quality of indexes made by professional indexers; and no one pointed it out in the first edition. As you say, I was intending to imply that indexes are made only by authors themselves or by professional indexers. I shall certainly reword the passage when the book is reprinted; and if there is a second edition I can expand it along the lines you suggest.

I do think, though, that the publisher should send even a professional indexer's work to the author to approve. The publication of a book is a collaboration between author and publisher, and the author should have a chance to see and approve all the parts provided by other people; not only the index but also any illustrations obtained by the publisher. It is the author's name that is most prominently displayed on the book, and it is possible even for a professional indexer or picture researcher to make small mistakes in a specialized subject. An indexer may, for example, combine people or technical terms that sound the same but are different, or *vice versa*. In a book on theoretical economics which we published some years ago, the indexer had indexed the terms used on the page; but the author pointed out that the expert reader would in fact expect to find some of the concepts under other terms not always used in the text.

Yours sincerely
Judith Butcher

Comma-itis

It is, I think, my duty to report that there appears to be an epidemic of comma-itis in the country at present. The condition has, of course, been long with us, but having observed several severe cases of it recently I have devoted some time to studying it.

There is one clinical feature: an insistence on the use of commas in indexes in places where they serve no purpose at all and only add to time, effort and expense. Severe cases can be described as commatosed.

It is an occupational hazard of editors of publishing houses. Affected people appear to be in a younger age group, about 20-35 years, and to be of above average intelligence; both sexes appear to be equally affected. It is difficult to say more of them as one's conclusions are often only to be gained from their invariably pleasant and often charming voices heard over the telephone. They are often unaware that they are suffering from the condition; some appear to be totally unaware of its existence. When asked about a possible cause they attribute it to THEY (which appears to be a malign, overbearing, blind influence, a kind of nerve-gas) or to Practice of the House (a related condition characterized by acquiescence in old methods, resistance to change, an inability to adopt new ideas and practices—a condition common, in my experience in the young). Other theories of causation can be discussed: the first, which we should smartly dismiss; that it is due to infection by the comma bacillus (there actually is one); the second, favoured by psychoanalysis, that it is a regression to the curved position of the fetus *in utero*.

Prevention is by early training. Treatment is by psychotherapy (either behaviour therapy or in severe cases analysis) and is not always satisfactory, especially where adverse environmental conditions are bad. Relapse after apparent recovery is all too common. Cure can be certain only when the former patient spontaneously applies to become a member of SAUCI (Society for the Abolition of the Useless Comma in Indexes), to which all good indexers belong.

John Gibson, M.D.,
Stourport-on-Severn

Chemical abstracts is 75 this year

Chemical abstracts' seventy-fifth birthday is celebrated in *NFAIS newsletter* 24 (1) February 1982, 7-9, with a brief history of its growth. It began with three part-time editors, a secretary, and 129 unpaid volunteer abstractors. Their first issue contained 12,000 abstracts. Today Chemical Abstracts Service (CAS) abstracts, indexes, or cites more than half a million scientific papers and patents annually, and each weekly issue of *CA* contains almost 9000 abstracts.

The army of voluntary abstractors had grown to nearly 3000 by the mid-60s when computer-aided production of *CA* was decided upon. Now most of the indexing and abstracting is done simultaneously by full-time staff in the Columbus office, although the Royal Society of Chemistry provides abstracts and index entries for much of the British chemical literature, and volunteers around the world continue to help with unfamiliar languages and subjects.

CAS's chemists and computer specialists perfected techniques for the coding and computer storage and retrieval of chemical structure diagrams—the CAS Chemical Registry System, to which may be linked, through CAS ONLINE, searchers throughout the world. From March this year the service has been providing citations of the 10 most recent references pertinent to any subject found in a search. Besides this, more than 30 services or publications are available from CAS, whose original printed *CA* now provides only half its revenue.

M.P.

We note from the contents list (which is in English) of the *Journal of Japan Indexers Association* 5 (4) Nov. 1981, that there is an article by Shin'ichi Toda entitled 'Activities of the American Society of Indexers'.

'The English,' Herr Heinrich had said, 'do not understand indexing. It is the root of all good organization.'—from *Mr Britling sees it through* by H. G. Wells (1916).

Indexers as usherettes

I see the indexer, in all her variations (for indexing seems traditionally associated with women), persisting as an usherette in the pages of a book. Just as an usherette's cinema may be a flea-pit showing a junk film, the poor indexer may be shining his/her light into indifferent material in poor surroundings; but if she's doing her job, at least she won't let you trip over a step, sit on someone else's lap or walk into a wall.

Allan Bula

IFLA index

IFLA (International Federation of Library Associations) has, in its fifty-odd years, produced an enormous amount of documentation on the subject of libraries and their co-operation—not all of which is easy to track down, even through the thirteen IFLA centres in several countries. Notable efforts have been made by the Royal Library School in Denmark to cover the period 1968-78 in a detailed bibliographical index, and this is being continued both in Copenhagen and by the All-Union State Library of Foreign Literature (ASLFL) in Moscow. It is hoped not only to provide full author and subject indexing up to date, but also to take the work back to the origin of IFLA. A recent paper by E. V. Pereslegina outlines the project. IFLA has its British base at the British Library Lending Division, Boston Spa, Wetherby, West Yorkshire LS23 7BQ.

J.D.L.