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Don Revill, Librarian of Liverpool Polytechnic, gave the seminar an excellent start with a thoughtful, provocative paper, 'The subject approach: the library manager, the user and psychology'. We should think of novices when designing subject indexes, suggested Mr Revill, adopting an ergonomics approach that adapts the index environment to the user. A good subject index would present information via identified responses; contain built-in safety features to decrease sensitivity to minor errors; contain the most used and recognizable terms; duplicate all access keys (including alternative spellings) rather than providing cross-references (which can easily be achieved using automated methods); recognize human frailty; and be a learning system. The importance of title entries was stressed, since users tend to remember titles rather than authors, though Mr Revill conceded that this made desirable the devising of more meaningful titles by authors and publishers. Several times Mr Revill said that he hoped 'we' (i.e., cataloguers and indexers) were advising British Telecom on how to make Prestel indexing more effective—should the Society of Indexers perhaps take a lead here? He concluded by referring to the 'TOTE' approach to the use of subject indexes:

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and suggesting that we should aim at the 'TOE' approach:

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- 'Fatigue loadings and damage are discussed in the light of actual and design loadings';
- 'In the light of recent criticism . . .';
- 'absorption of energy from the light beam follows the Beer-Lambert law';
- 'there was no difference in the light and law doses if the initial dose was low'.

Mr Austin made the important, if fairly obvious, observation that a major problem of subject indexing is discovering what the subject is before deciding what terms should represent it, which is not covered in manuals of subject indexing. He then described a forthcoming international standard on vocabulary control, and British Standard 5723 : 1979 (Guidelines for the establishment and development of monolingual thesauri). I wonder whether other indexers make as little reference to this standard as I do? We should know and use it, and it is, suggested Mr Austin, based on 'codified commonsense'.

I found the next paper, 'LCSH and online subject access' by Nigel Metcalfe (Head of Library Services, OCLC Europe) the least useful of the seminar. The fact that I was able to make no notes on Mr Metcalfe's description of research by OCLC (Online Computer Library Center) into the use of 'online public access catalogs' (or OPACs) in the United States may reflect on the research rather than on the speaker. Many of us had doubts about the design of the research and most were aware of the shortcomings of the Library of Congress Subject Headings.

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Subject indexes: production and use in the I T age

K. G. B. Bakewell

Principal Lecturer, School of Librarianship and Information Studies, Liverpool Polytechnic

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displayed a peculiar reluctance to be interviewed. Conversely, she felt, on reflection, that it would have been better to have investigated reactions in a 'real' working environment in a smaller number of core libraries; this might have provided more opportunities to ascertain the reactions of users as well as librarians, and would have prevented the frustration of spending so much time in trains travelling to and from the 91 organizations visited.

Ms Peters would have liked to interview more librarians in schools and institutes of education, some of whom were known to have strong views on the use of PRECIS for British education index, but they mostly displayed a peculiar reluctance to be interviewed. Conversely, she felt, on reflection, that it would have been better to have investigated reactions in a 'real' working environment in a smaller number of core libraries; this might have provided more opportunities to ascertain the reactions of users as well as librarians, and would have prevented the frustration of spending so much time in trains travelling to and from the 91 organizations visited.

The over-riding conclusion of the Peters report was that the reception of PRECIS by users has been generally favourable, most criticisms being directed towards its use in the various published indexes rather than towards PRECIS as a system. One user perhaps summed it up in saying, 'I cannot speak too highly of PRECIS. How could Derek Austin come up with such a simple system which also works?'

Few would expect to be stimulated by a paper entitled 'Keyword catalogues at Liverpool Polytechnic Library', but Graham Chan, Liverpool Polytechnic's Systems Librarian, demonstrated that a dull (though informative) title did not have to herald a dull paper. Mr Chan believed, like his Chief Librarian, that title entries should be a major feature of library catalogues and that entries based on keywords in the title would be helpful to users. However, at Liverpool Polytechnic the cataloguers indicate the keywords under which entries should be generated rather than allow the computer to do this automatically. As well as making it easier to avoid unhelpful entries, such as the 'light' and 'law' entries quoted by Derek Austin, this also makes it possible to avoid an excessive number of entries under commonly occurring terms. The cataloguer has, too, the opportunity to 'enrich' uninformative titles with suitable terms, though little of this is done at Liverpool on the grounds that authors not using sensible titles deserve not to have their work found! Liverpool Polytechnic Library provides a more conventional subject index and a classified catalogue as well as the keyword index, but use appears to indicate that the latter is far the more popular. Like Don Revill, Graham Chan favours simplicity in indexing: the term 'user friendly' should, he pointed out, apply to manual systems as well as to computers.

Allan Foster, Deputy Librarian of Preston Polytechnic, and author of a now standard guide to online data bases, spoke on 'Online data bases: criteria for selection and use in subject searching'. The criteria to be considered include data base coverage; access (including charging methods, speed of transmission and the need for special equipment); simplicity or economy of command languages; how the data bases are loaded; search field and searching features; costs; training provided (and whether any charge is made for this); user support (such as document delivery services); subject coverage; sources covered (including type of literature and language); the selection policy for sources and the currency of documents being added to the data base; and the indexing methods used. Mr Foster joined the band of speakers concerned about meaningless titles.

The final paper, 'Microcomputers in libraries and indexing', was given by Paul Burton (Chief Librarian at Leith Nautical College), whose report on Microcomputer applications in academic libraries, the research for which was supported by the British Library Research and Development Department, was published in Summer 1983 as Library and Information Research Report no. 16. 'Indexing' in the context of Mr Burton's paper meant 'library-type' indexing, and he said nothing of applications to 'back-of-the-book indexing': however, his reading list on Microcomputers in libraries, compiled for the Library Association Library, does include Dr A. C. Purton's survey of microcomputers for home indexing published in The Indexer 13 (1) (April 1982), 27-31. (Copies of this reading list may be obtained from Reader Services, Library Association Library, 7 Ridgmount Street, London, WC1E 7AE.)

Mr Burton provided an interesting survey of the applications of microcomputers to library housekeeping operations (such as ordering, accounting and issuing) as well as to production of catalogues and indexes. He summarized the advantages of microcomputers without overlooking limitations.

Like all Library Association Cataloguing and Indexing Group seminars, this concluded with an 'open forum' held in the bar. Ably led by Rodney Brunt, a lecturer in Queen's University of Belfast's Department of Library and Information Studies, delegates argued over a range of topics raised in the seven papers, particular attention
being given to the questions of whether libraries do or should provide subject indexes and how detailed they need to be in the information technology age. An enjoyable end to a most enjoyable seminar!

Reference


**NFAIS Silver Anniversary**

Stella Keenan

Senior Lecturer, Department of Library and Information Studies, Loughborough University of Technology

In January 1958 fourteen founder-members formed the National Federation of Science Abstracting and Indexing Services, with the following purposes:

- to provide a communication forum for the membership and the information community
- to develop standards, where necessary, for interchange of products
- to encourage special services for interdisciplinary and mission-oriented requirements
- to work together in developing machine-readable data bases and techniques for producing them
- to help provide access to primary documents cited through the Federation or through libraries and document centres, both government and non-government.

Today, with its membership more than tripled and its name changed to National Federation of Abstracting and Information Services (NFAIS) to reflect its welcome to any organization concerned with providing access to the world’s literature, from input through processing, publishing, and on to final use, its members include such diverse organizations as the Philosophy Documentation Center, the Institute for Scientific Information, Chemical Abstracts Service, Population Index, Library of Parliament (Canada) and Information Access Corporation. Roughly half the membership has a science-technology emphasis; the other half is concerned with business, law, social science and humanities information.

In 1983 the Federation celebrated its 25th anniversary, holding a conference from 27 February to 2 March. The theme, ‘Information transfer—incentives for innovation’, focused on new technologies for information transfer and dissemination. One session considered public sector/private sector information problems and solutions, and included speakers from the Executive Office of the President, the Association of American Publishers, and the National Library of Medicine. Marketing and training were the subjects of another session, while speakers from the US government and private industry discussed the next era of the information age. Melvin S. Day (Indian Head) reviewed the developments of abstracting and indexing services, and identified online information retrieval and the use of microcomputers as the two major technological advances. He projected that ‘the future trend will be toward decentralization, with dependence on the major online [Federation] members being limited to those cases where the data is not available locally or where it is more economical to go to the large online vendor. Herein lies an opportunity for the abstracting and indexing services to provide for local manipulation, subsets of their data bases in accordance with standard profiles or even customized profiles’.

A regular feature of recent Federation conferences has been a session on new technology organized by Dr Rita G. Lerner of the American Institute of Physics. Developments discussed in this year’s new technology session were IBM’s EPISODE system, the use of laser printers and recent developments in OCR (Optical Character Recognition). Carol Risher (Association of American Publishers) discussed current issues facing publishers in implementing new technological developments.

The Miles Conrad Memorial Lecture was established in 1966 by the Federation’s Board of Directors to honour G. Miles Conrad, the first President. The 1983 Lecture was delivered by John E. Creps, Jnr., Past President of the Federation and recently retired from Engineering Information, Inc. His lecture presented a ‘psychohistorical’ approach to scientific information. Psycho-history is defined by Isaac Asimov as ‘that branch of mathematics that deals with the reactions of human conglomerates to fixed social and economic stimuli’. John Creps suggested that today’s information services consist of needs which are met by the two conglomerate concepts of packages and time. In using these three ideas of need, package and time, systems may be characterized either ‘as a need-oriented system requiring a breakthrough in the area of packaging or time, or a time-