LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Abbreviations and acronyms

The bibliography of reference books for abbreviations and acronyms appended to Blake & Gibson’s article ‘Medical abbreviations and acronyms’ (The Indexer 14, (3) April 1985; 205–6) omits what is probably the most extensive source for these elusive and sometimes intriguing little things, namely, Acronyms, initialisms, and abbreviations dictionary (Detroit: Gale Research) issued every two years, the latest edition being for 1985–6; this is complemented by International acronyms, initialisms, and abbreviations dictionary (same publisher, 1985) which focuses on non-English items. Checking the items cited in the article, I found 27 (out of 35 total) in the Gale volumes; that is, almost exactly 80%, including MAD which has 41 different explications, one of which is in pharmacology, namely Methylantrostenediol!

As to UNESCO vs. Unesco; the reason for this ‘transmogrification’ is simply that the organization itself chose several years ago to use what was originally an acronym as their official form of name on their letterhead, as a publisher’s imprint, and for other purposes.

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Going Dutch

As a person who was educated in Dutch and obtained his librarian’s certificate following a Dutch language course (University of Louvain), I would like to comment on the question of prefixes in Dutch and Afrikaans surnames.

In Indexing, the art of it is stated that for Netherlands (I would prefer the term ‘Dutch’) names, prefixes are in general inverted and do not form keywords, but for Afrikaans this is not the case. Since Afrikaans is a form of Dutch, why not? Why does Chr. De Wet, the Afrikaans statesman, belong under D while Ant. Van Dyck, the painter, is not placed under V?

To find out how this problem was approached elsewhere, I consulted the cumulative index to the 6th edition of the Winter Prins encyclopedie, a leading Dutch language publication. Here I found that names with Van prefixes are sometimes inverted and sometimes not. Names with De prefixes, however, mostly are inverted. The preface does not give any explanation for this system.

In Belgium, prefixes such as De, Van and Ver are mostly used as keywords in telephone directories etc., an exception being the Central Library of the City of Antwerp; whereas Holland seems to prefer to drop the prefixes.

An example will illustrate the reason for my preference for keeping the prefixes and using them as keywords. Take a fairly widespread name like Van Der Auwera. This may be used in different ways: as above, or as Vander Auwera, Vande Rauwera, or Vander-auwera. Each bearer of one of these names will religiously stick to his or her way of spelling it. The problem arises when the name has to be put in alphabetical order. Invert it, and you have:

Auwera, Van der
Auwera, Vander
Derauwera, Van
Vanderauwera.

If they were all put under V, this would make things much easier for everyone.

Following my teachers’ advice, unless specifically instructed to the contrary I always use this system: De etc. is D, while Van etc. is V. This means fewer problems and only marginally more D and V entries. Perhaps other readers would like to comment.

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Who pays the indexer?

The Minimum Terms of Agreement between author and publishers now being discussed by a number of publishing companies are summarized in The Author 96 (3) Autumn 1985, 57–8. Item 5 states: ‘The cost of indexing (if not done by the author) to be shared equally.’

‘Confessions of a card-index bride’

The intriguing title on the cover of Illustrated magazine, 10 March 1956. An eager indexer who found the old copy was disappointed to find the story only that of a ‘card index’ couple brought together by a marriage bureau, under the heading ‘Gay finds a husband under Index E’.

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