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DEUTSCHES BIBLIOTHEKSINSTITUT: PRECIS: für die Anwendung in deutschen Bibliotheken überarbeitete und vereinfachte Form des syntaktischen Indexierungsverfahrens der British Library. (Im Auftrag d. dt. Bibliotheksinstituts. Projektleiter: Bernd Maassen). – Berlin: DBI, 1984. 310 p., DBI-Materialien: 35, ISBN 3-87068-835-1.

A work of this kind calls for some kind of historical context. In 1979, a special "Kommission für Sacherschließung" (Commission for Subject Indexing) was established in West Germany with two primary tasks: firstly, to investigate current techniques for subject indexing; secondly, to propose an indexing system for adoption on a federal-wide basis. The suggested system should be suitable for all kinds of libraries, and it should also be amenable to computerization. The "Deutsche Bibliothek" in Frankfurt (the German National Library) agreed to adopt the chosen system from 1986 onwards.

In the event, the Commission spent very little time investigating new techniques, nor did they seriously consider computerization. Instead, they concentrated mainly on the production of yet another code of practice for the construction of subject headings; despite the fact that a great many traditional subject heading systems are already in use in West German libraries. The staff in the Deutsche Bibliothek felt that at least one modern system should also be studied, and selected PRECIS on the ground that it was designed from the outset with computer production in mind, it had already been used to generate indexes in German, and it has potential value as a means for international data exchange since its techniques are based upon procedures recommended in International Standards. The Deutsche Bibliothek set up a special 2-year project to study PRECIS, and the work under review is the final report on this research project.

This work differs in two main respects from previous books on PRECIS: firstly, it is in German, not English; secondly, it does not deal with PRECIS-as-is, but sets out to describe a special "simplified" version that was developed as part of the project. At this point I need to declare a personal interest in the work under review, since I was engaged on a part-time basis as an outside consultant for the project, advising on PRECIS procedures and checking much of the output. I also attended a number of meetings of the advisory committee that supervised the work, and had frequent contact with the principal research workers.

When the research project was established in Frankfurt, the Commission that had investigated the subject heading system assumed a new role as the Advisory Committee for the PRECIS Project. At least in theory this should have ensured an unusually high level of coordination between the two projects, but this ideal was marred in practice by the fact that the Commission, when the PRECIS Project was launched, has published a version of its own Code of Practice for subject headings, and had already introduced this new code into a major library cooperative (in Bavaria), despite an agreement that no decision would be implemented until after the PRECIS Project was finished.

The Commission, in its role as the PRECIS Advisory Committee, was largely responsible for the research into a simplified version of PRECIS. Before any serious attempt has been made to study the system, certain pre-conditions were established:
— it was decided that the system has too many role operators, and their number had to be reduced to about 10. The reasons for choosing this arbitrary number were never explained,
— it was also decided that the terms used in PRECIS strings and entries should be chosen and/or constructed according to the new code of practice for subject headings. In this context, it should be remembered that the subject heading system has no syntax and does not allow the use of prepositions or other function words. In addition, its rules for vocabulary control are vague and rudimentary, and do not accord with any of the national or international standards that are accepted as the basis for vocabulary control in PRECIS. In many cases the system resorts to repetition as a means for explaining relationships (e.g. "nuclear waste" + "waste disposal"). Anyone familiar with these different types of indexing language will realise that phrases intended as subject headings would usually be quite unsuitable as terms in a grammar-based string-input system such as PRECIS. Imposing these headings led to tedious redundancies and a serious lack of syntactical precision in many entries.

These preconditions ensured from the outset that an objective study of PRECIS would be virtually impossible. This conclusion emerges clearly enough from the document under review, which contains not only a description of the "simplified" PRECIS used at the Deutsche Bibliothek but also includes the final report of the Project. Without the latter, the former would make little sense to any reader who is familiar with PRECIS as a working system. The report avoids any explicit reference to the political issues underlying the project, but a careful study of its description of the work (and, in particular, its references to PRECIS "simplification") offers a number of clues.

Stated frankly, it would apprear that the Advisory Committee set out to ensure that any feature of PRECIS that does not occur in their own system should not be available to the PRECIS research team. In some cases, they then criticised PRECIS for not possessing a feature that they had deliberately removed. For example, PRECIS possesses a set of special codes to deal with inflections on nouns in German and similar languages — these are easy to apply by any indexer familiar with one of these languages, and the computer program for generating inflected entries has been available for some time. One of the first tasks of the Advisory Committee

was to remove these codes from the system, without testing them in any way, on the ground that they are too complex. The validity of this reason might, however, be questioned when one considers that the Chairman of the Committee (Dr. Fritz Junginger, Bayerische Staatsbibliothek, Munich) then wrote an article (1) where he criticized PRECIS on the grounds that the use of prepositions in some of its entries would hinder comprehension due to a lack of correct case endings on nouns.

Given this background, it is clear that the research workers at the Deutsche Bibliothek, Francine Conrad and Ingrid Schäfer-Link, faced an extremely difficult task. To their very great credit, their version of PRECIS is at least recognizable as PRECIS, albeit in a somewhat battered form. They also succeeded in writing a very clear explanation of 'their' version of the system, presented here in three parts:
— firstly, a broad overview of PRECIS and its main features;
— secondly, a more detailed description of the system; arranged (usefully) by the role operators. This contains an explanation of the function and use of each of the operators used by the research team, accompanied by examples;
— thirdly, a part with the rather misleading title "Zusätzliche Indexierungshilfen" ("Additional indexing aids"). This deals with some of the operators that had been removed by the Advisory Committee; this choice of title was apparently the only way in which reference could be made to these excluded components.
The construction and use of the PRECIS thesaurus (including its basis for vocabulary control, and its use as the source of *See* and *See also* references in the printed index) were not mentioned at all — nothing resembling this feature exists in the subject heading system.

As it stands, this introduction would have made little sense as a separate publication. It is, however, accompanied not only by the report on the Project (in 20 pages), but also by more than 200 pages of demonstration indexes. Three sets of indexes have been reprinted:
(i) a collection of the various examples used in the explanatory account, set down as a single alphabetical sequence;
(ii) a special test index intended to show the effects of "simplification",
(iii) a further test index consisting of PRECIS entries together with subject headings for the same works constructed according to the new "Regeln für Schlagwortkatalog" (RSWK). This section is likely to be especially illuminating to any indexer who knows PRECIS procedures, since it contains the manipulation strings that were used in this part of the test.

All the simplification measures are explicitly accounted for in the project report. Since most of these measures consisted in deleting, rather than changing, standard PRECIS codes and procedures (some exceptions are noted below), parts of the text could be read as a straightforward description of the system. However, the present work cannot be recommended without reservations as an introduction to PRECIS for German-speaking readers, for the following reasons:
— The description of the system is incomplete. No mention at all is made of the thesaurus, and the excluded codes and procedures are described only at a summary level.
— In a few cases (e.g. operators "s" and "2") the scope and function of some components were substantially altered without regard for the underlying logic.
— Many of the indexing terms used in the examples were chosen or constructed with little or no regard for vocabulary control as defined in the PRECIS "Manual" (2nd edition) or the international standard on which the "Manual" is based (ISO 2788, 2nd edition). The same procedures presumably occur in the recent DIN standard for thesaurus construction, since this is also based on the new international standard.

This study may, however, have value beyond its intended purpose: it could serve as a case study for any reader interested in "simplified" PRECIS (or generally in the idea of simplifying an indexing system). The simplification measures fall into groups such as the following:
— some, such as the removal of the inflection codes, had little or no effect on the indexer's task; they might perhaps save 10 or so seconds when writing an average string containing connectives. They would, however, directly affect the user through the production of unidiomatic or even incomprehensible index entries.
— in other cases the function of one operator were unloaded onto another. At the beginning of the project, for example, all the "dependent elements" (parts, kinds and assemblies) were handled by the operator "p" (parts). The other dependent element codes then had to be re-introduced when it became clear that subject analysis had been seriously impaired by their removal.
— some reductions in the scope of the system affected both the indexer and the user. Traditional German subject heading systems, and also the new code of practice developed by the Commission for Subject Indexing, possess no means for generating entries under selected parts of compound terms (e.g. nouns as well as adjectives). The differencing procedures in PRECIS were therefore removed deliberately from the system used in Frankfurt, and adjectives that might have been chosen as leads had to be reexpressed as nouns. This unnatural approach imposed an extra load not only on the indexer but also upon the user, who could no longer distinguish between, say, "Indian creation myths" and "Myths on the creation of India".

Reviewing this work in hindsight, it might have value as evidence that PRECIS does not possess superfluous codes and procedures. Why should it? In particular, it is interesting to note how PRECIS as a working system still remained recognizable after a series of hatchet blows yielded for political reasons and with a minimum of understanding. In no case was a change made as a result of an objective study of the system and its workings. In every case, reduction in the scope of the system (sometimes proposed "off the top of the head" in the course of an Advisory Committee meeting) led to uncertainty, if not confusion, among the indexers. In this context it should be pointed out that a statement on page XXVI of the report, "The project workers as well as voluntary

participants from the indexing department of the Deutsche Bibliothek consider that indexing with simplified PRECIS is easier ('einfacher') than indexing with full PRECIS", reflects the political background of the project rather than the facts. In the first place, no basis for such a comparison existed, since the project workers had very limited experience with full PRECIS, while the volunteers from the DB indexing department had received no exposure at all. Secondly (and writing as a checker for a major part of the indexing produced during the project), I feel it is worth noting that indexing took longer and became less consistent as a result of the "simplification". The error rate also rose, and the great majority of these errors could be traced directly and without difficulty to the so-called "simplification" measures.

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SERRAI, Alfredo: Dai "loci communes" alla bibliometria. Roma: Bulzoni 1984. 237 p.

The fundamental problems concerning the theory of cataloging, the Bibliography as a discipline and bibliometric studies as well, are examined in four essays, published now for the first time, by Alfredo Serrai. The first two essays deal with problems concerning semantic cataloging: the longer one, devoted to *I luoghi topici* — followed by an Appendix by Maria Cochetti, in which are gathered all the editions of *loci communes* issued in the 16° and 17° century — analyzes the connection between dialectic-rhetoric *loci communes* and others *loci* used as indexes and information retrieval tools. The research is conducted in both the philosophical (from Aristotle, Cicero and Ramus to Descartes, F. Bacon and the logic of Port-Royal) and the bibliographical — literary fields. Dealing with the problem of the transformation of rhetoric *loci communes* into topics and subjects, the essays shows that *loci communes* in the literary field were used both as recurrent items of the literary and poetic tradition, and as headings to arrange the materials in systematic anthologies. The essay points out also how *loci communes* took on a great importance in the teaching field: according to Erasmus, they were coincident with the maxims and the aphorisms of the favourite authors, that were used for religious and ethical purposes; on the other hand, according to the tradition initiated by Melanchthon, *loci communes* symbolized the fundamental topics of the theories or the sciences analyzed. However, it was by Gesner and before him by Pellikan that *loci communes* really took on the function of semantic indexes. In

fact Gesner, although the third part of the *Bibliotheca universalis* was never issued concerning the arrangement by *loci communes* of the materials of the previous two parts (and that Serrai already analyzed in *I loci communes nell'opera bibliografica di Gesner,* "Annali della Scuola Speciale per Archivisti e Bibliothecari dell' Università di Roma", XIV, 1974 (1978), p. 5–21) nevertheless gave us a complete evidence of the function of indexes that *loci communes* took on.

An interesting fact is that *loci communes,* i.e. the fundamental topics of the research in the culture of the 13° century, formed also the semantic structure used by R. Grosseteste — franciscan philosopher and bishop of Lincoln — to index the works that he read; this semantic structure is examined in the second essay: *La catalogazione semantica di Roberto Grossatesta.* Contained in a manuscript of the Bibliothèque de la Ville at Lyon, the Grosseteste's *Tabula* (four pages of symbols and their meanings used by the philosopher to catalog the works and to retrieve easily topics of interest from them) according to Serrai was a real subject catalog. The semantic structure was classified into nine groups, each concerning semantically associated topics; but it did not allow to understand each single symbol without considering the whole group, and therefore it was not easy to constitute and to consult such a catalog: that was a real shortcoming. In spite of these deficiencies, the Grosseteste's example shows once more that the level of a culture is in some positive relation to the level of construction and of use of the indexes.

The third essay — *Bibliografia e catalogazione: unicuique suum* — discussing the problems related to Bibliography as a discipline, Serrai accepts the systematization of Bibliography made up by F. Bowers, but suggests to include cataloging in the field of Bibliography. The question is aroused especially in the discussion of the difference between bibliographical description and library cataloging: according to G.T. Tanselle, the difference is based on the fact that Bibliography is devoted to describe the "ideal copy" of an edition, whereas the cataloger limits himself to describe a "particular copy". Serrai points out that the cataloger makes up a description that starts from a particular copy but is not valid only for the specific copy that he is handling. The difference established by Tanselle between Bibliography and Cataloging is not satisfactory, because cataloging does not use such constellation of data as would be essential to distinguish a concrete copy from another one. According to Serrai, the fundamental difference between the bibliographical description and library cataloging is of a strictly logical nature, depends ultimately on the number of data used in the description. The descriptions aforesaid are different owing to the different degree of depth and accuracy of the data selected and scheduled, therefore there is a connection between the nature of the description and the totality of of the examples that a description can be applied to. This corresponds to what R. Du Rietz explained by the concept of "bibliotype".

The last essay, on *La validità delle distribuzioni bibliometriche,* analyzes the validity of the statistical approach, and in particular the validity of the study of bibliometric distributions, as the Bradford's law. Bibliometric distributions, instead of being predictive or usable