BOOK REVIEWS

KNIGHT, G. Norman: Indexing, The Art of. A Guide to the Indexing of Books and Periodicals. London: G.Allen & Unwin 1979. 218 p., ISBN 0-04-029002-6

What advice should be given to someone new to indexing, someone, say, whose publisher tells him to prepare an index for his book? Conceivably advice would vary depending on the nature of the indexing novice: Does he want to get the job done as quickly as possible? If so, he might be advised simply to follow one of the indexing standards, British, American or Indian. Does he have theoretical interests, i.e., does he want to know what makes a good index, how one chooses among alternative methods of indexing or how to program a machine to index? This more ambitious novice might be well advised to pursue study in a graduate library or information management school or, on his own, to read extensively in the rich literature on indexing. Is the novice a humanist who has just discovered indexing and is absolutely delighted with the idea of doing it? Good advice here might be to direct him to Mr. Knight's 200+ page book, which, though titled *Indexing, The Art of,* might as appropriately have been called *The Joy of Indexing.*

G. Norman Knight finished writing this book in his 86th year, but he died before it was publishd. He seems to have been well known and loved in indexing circles in England. In the 1920's he started to index books as a spare time activity and for thirty years or so worked solitarily at it without knowing any other indexers. In 1956, however, he began looking for some and in a year's time he had found 65. Together they inaugurated The Society of Indexers. He seems to have been devoted to indexing in a way that would amaze some of today's critical and sophisticated students of the subject. His book, chatty, amusing, simplistic, opinionated and revealing of the man, is, on the one hand, touching and, on the other, exasperating.

First what the book covers: the particular conventions used by Mr. Knight in his indexing, e.g. rules for determining choice of proper name and subject heading; the mechanics of indexing, e.g., whether to use slips of paper or cards and whether cards should be housed in shoeboxes (suitable boxes can also be obtained from friendly stationers and sweet shops, p. 34); practical advice, in admirable detail, on how to edit indexes and correct proofs; special aspects of indexing, e.g., the indexing of periodicals and newspapers and the making of cumulative indexes; examples of humour in indexing; information on the Society of Indexers and the Australian, American and Canadian affiliates, and on the Wheatley medal and Carey award; finally, an excellent index.

In his Preface Mr. Knight portrays his book as a guide to authors whose publishers have demanded indexes of them (p. 13). Later in the book, however, he trusts that the book will become a text (p. 102). It is not clear what sort of course could make use of his book as a text. As he himself observes, the book is rather elementary (p. 13). It is elementary in the sense that it is a compendium of practical experience, and a somewhat private experience at that. As such it seldom achieves high-level generalization or the kind of insight theory can contribute. It is also elementary in its obliviousness to debatable issues, in its minimal reference to published literature, particularly to the result of indexing research. This elementariness, or what might be better termed lack of a scholarly and/or scientific sensitivity gives the book a slightly oldfashioned quality. Some examples of these complaints follow.

One of the most confusing aspects of the indexing procedure is to decide at what level of specificity to operate. Mr. Knight treats specificity, in part, under the somewhat idiosyncratic heading "Particularization of Headings", and his advice is, uncomplicated he says, to couple each heading with a qualification, since rarely does an unqualified heading make a satisfactory entry (p. 45). In another place, following but not crediting Cutter, he plumps for specific entry as opposed to classified entry, and like Cutter he confuses specific with direct entry (p. 97). Finally he assumes the position that common sense imposes a limit to degree of specificity (p. 99). The literature on specificity is large, some of it reporting the results of research (what is optimum specificity?), some of it philosophical (what is specificity?) and some of it practical (how is specificity to be achieved?) By contrast Mr. Knight's guidelines seem a little homespun.

Instructing by example rather than precept, can lead to confusion and lack of direction, an instance being Mr. Knight's treatment of inversion. His first mention of inversion is to observe that whether "coins, copper" or "copper coins" is preferable depends on whether the text being indexed is intended for a metallurgist or a numismatist, but the less inversion the better (p. 47). He returns to the subject later and says that the two elements in a compound heading frequently call for inversion (p. 89). Shortly thereafter he says classified entry is to be avoided, except (following but not crediting Metcalfe) if the modifier "qualifies" (p. 89). Finally, in the context of newspaper indexing, he says that compound phrases with an accepted meaning are never inverted (p. 146). What guidance then is given on how to handle compound phrases?

Other advice is similarly waffly; for instance, in the difficult matter of deciding what proper names to include in an index, an instruction given is to not recognize nonentities (p. 144). We already have Indexing Standards. If an indexing manual, espousing a different set of conventions is to be written, then there is an obligation on the writer to contribute intellectually something beyond the Standards, perhaps to provide a rationale for them or to take issue with them. What should not be done is simply to act as if they were not there, for this would present to the beginning indexer alternative and conflicting rule systems. How is he to choose among them? At times Mr. Knight references the British Standards, but often he ignores them, categorically stating his own convention, e.g. "whenever there is a possible choice, subject headings should be used in the plural form" (p. 146, when talking of newspaper indexing.) Singular-plural conventions in indexing have been thought about carefully not only by those who have compiled the Indexing Standards, but also by thesaurus makers and linguists.

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The book is dated. This is apparent in the few references it does make. Perhaps the reference to the 1969 *Anglo American Cataloging Rules* is warranted, but surely not the references to the old British Standard (BS: 3700: 1964). In the chapter on newspaper indexing a footnote acknowledges that the text is based largely on a 1942 book on the topic, and it shows. Comfortable now with the New York Times Information Bank, it is a little wry to read that "newspaper indexing should be kept permanently on cards" (p. 140). Some of the comments made in the book give it an aura of bygone leisurely times, when no one thought to scrutinize the indexing operation, for instance to subject it to cost-effectiveness considerations. This is particularly apparent in the chapter on preparing cumulative indexes. In compiling such an index it is suggested that each entry be rechecked with the text (p. 156) and it might even be suggested (in a quote, p. 159), that a good approach to preparing a cumulative index to several volumes, would be to scrap already existing indexing to the individual volumes and begin afresh! Cumulative indexes also should be kept on cards in holed drawers with metal rods in them that are lockable, so the cards will not be stolen (p. 160).

The gist of the preceding paragraphs is that the book would not be useful as a text in a university course. But this criticism should be put in perspective. The Rt. Hon. Harold Macmillan, OM, PC, FRS, in the foreword to the book, opines that it "must surely prove to be the definitive work on the art of the index" (p. 11). The telling word is "art". A surprising quote used by Mr. Knight reads "Indexing is now an art, not an accident" (p. 141). One would have expected the word "science" in place of "accident", since it is usually science to which art is contrasted. Nevermind. We can hope that indexing is not a random activity and speculate on the extent to which it is a science rather than an art. Cyril Cleverdon did much to awaken awareness of the possibility that indexing could be scientific. His work was of paradigmatic significance. Mr. Knight seems to be working within another, older paradigm. However, there is no question but that he contributes to educating the intuition and instilling enthusiasm; in these respects his book is quite remarkable. It probably is the definitive work on the *art* of the index.

Elaine Svenonius

SUPPER, Reinhard: **Neuere Methoden der intellektuellen Indexierung**. Britische Systeme unter besonderer Berücksichtigung von PRECIS. München/New York/London/Paris: Verlag Dokumentation Saur KG 1978. 255 p., ISBN 3-7940-3721-9, = Beitr. z. Inform.- u. Dokumentationswiss., Folge 11

Arbeiten über Dokumentationssprachen im Grenzbereich zur natürlichen Sprache wecken in zunehmendem Maße Interesse, weil mehr und mehr versucht wird, dem Anfrager leichteren Zutritt zu den Informationssystemen zu verschaffen.

Von natürlicher Sprache ist dabei meist im Zusammenhang mit automatischen Analyse- und Aufbereitungsverfahren die Rede; Intellektuelle Indexierung für maschinengestützte Dokumentation kommt in dieser Diskussion in der Regel zu kurz.

Gerade deshalb erscheint die an der FU Berlin vorgelegte Magisterarbeit von Reinhard Supper interessant: Die Arbeit trägt der Tatsache Rechnung, daß in Großbritannien Fragen der Indexierung intensiv diskutiert werden, was u.a. in den Aktivitäten der Classification Research Group (CRG) seinen Ausdruck findet.

Der zentrale Teil der Arbeit beschäftigt sich mit dem computergestützten Indexierungssystem PRECIS, das von Derek Austin in der Forschungsabteilung der British Library für die British National Bibliography (BNB) Anfang der 70er Jahre entwickelt wurde. Daneben werden auch Farradane's "Relational Indexing", Coates' "British Technology Index", Lynch's "Articulated Index" sowie die Kettenregister breiter behandelt.

Mit den englischen Systemen verbindet den Autor, daß er eine Zeitlang am North London Polytechnic Bibliotheks- und Informationswissenschaft studiert hat und dort J. Mills und D. Langridge seine Lehrer waren.

Zu PRECIS hat der Autor ein ganz persönliches Verhältnis, einmal durch seine Gespräche mit Austin und dessen Stab, zum andern auch durch seine Arbeiten zur Anpassung der Systembeschreibung an die Anforderungen der deutschen Sprache.

In der von Beispielen reichlich belegten Erläuterung der wichtigsten Verfahrensweisen spiegelt sich deshalb hohe Authentizität wider; insbesondere wird klar, daß sich die Terminus-Wahl im PRECIS-Verfahren durch die Erfordernisse der Grammatik bestimmt, indem nämlich die Termini daraufhin befragt werden müssen, ob sie den Anforderungen der jeweils vorgegebenen Rollen entsprechen. Dies ist ebenso folgerichtig wie einsichtig, hat sich aber als Auffassung noch durchweg nicht allgemein durchgesetzt. So geht etwa die deutsche DIN-Norm zur intellektuellen Indexierung noch immer von der Meinung aus, daß es genüge, syntaktische Regeln einem stehenden Vokabular gleichsam "aufzusetzen".

Wiedergegeben wird die letzte Fassung des Systems. Die gedanklichen Pfade, die zu dieser Fassung führten, insbesondere seine klassifikatorische Herkunft, werden detailgetreu nachgezeichnet; die verblüffende Nähe zu Chomskys Tiefenstrukturen wird aufgezeigt und die Universalität und gute Adaptierbarkeit von PRECIS an die Erfordernisse einiger wichtiger nichtenglischer Sprachen erörtert. Die Flektionen des Deutschen stellten charakteristischerweise für die existierenden Codes eine unlösbare Aufgabe dar und erforderten deshalb zusätzliche Verarbeitungsregeln.

Der Leser findet ferner eine lückenlose Kritik des PRECIS-Systems bis zur Schließung des Manuskripts Anfang 1978, deren meiste Stimmen sich auf die erste Version von PRECIS beziehen, die bis 1974 eingesetzt war. Die guten Testergebnisse werden erläutert. Der Autor setzt sich auch mit den allerdings nicht sehr zahlreichen reservierten oder negativen Äußerungen zu PRECIS auseinander. Schließlich werden Fragen praktischer Akzeptanz und der Vergleichbarkeit mit anderen Indexierungssystemen diskutiert.

Das Werk von Supper lenkt die Aufmerksamkeit auf eine ganz moderne, hochaktuelle Entwicklungslinie der inhaltlichen Erschließung, wenn auch das Objekt der Arbeit schwerpunktmäßig das Registermachen darstellt und nicht die Online-Recherche.

Die Terminologie der Arbeit ist sauber, stützt sich weitgehend auf die Arbeiten des KTS (Komitee für Terminologie und Sprachfragen der DGD) und erläutert Abweichungen, wo diese nötig erscheinen. Umfangrei-

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