

Indexing Depth of Monographs vs. Journal Articles: a Comparative Study/ Yehuda Kimchy

Abstract

The objective of this study was to compare the indexing depth of monographs, according to subject headings, with the indexing depth of articles in journals, according to descriptors, during two periods of time: 1950 – 1981 vs. 1987 – 2001.

For the sake of comparison, 100 monographs and 100 journal articles in Hebrew as well as 100 monographs and 100 journal articles in English were chosen from each of the periods, totaling 400 publications from each period. The monographs were chosen at random from the online catalog of Bar-Ilan University's libraries system (ALEPH system), whereas the articles were selected from RAMBI INDEX (list of articles in Judaic studies) and from the Szold Database Index, a collection of articles in social sciences.

Findings: With respect to monographs, the comparison between the two periods showed a significant increase in the average number of subject headings assigned for both Hebrew and English monographs. This finding may be attributed to the computerization of the libraries over the years and to the increased consciousness and awareness of the importance of indexing for the information retrieval process.

With respect to journal articles, the average number of descriptors assigned to articles, both in Hebrew and in English, declined during the second period. This finding is quite surprising and difficult to explain especially in view of the developments described above.

In comparing languages, it was ascertained that more subject headings were assigned to monographs in Hebrew than in English during both periods, which may be attributed to a different policy of the catalogers at Bar-Ilan University. This is not the

case with respect to articles, where there was a fewer number of descriptors in the Hebrew articles during the first period than in the English articles.

In comparing monographs with journal articles, it was found that the average number of descriptors assigned to articles during the first period was significantly greater compared to the number of subject headings assigned to monographs, both in Hebrew and in English.

The situation is reverse during the second period due to a rise in the average number of subject headings assigned to monographs and a drop in the number of descriptors assigned to articles in journals. This decline is quite puzzling in light of the growing awareness of the importance of indexing, and it may partially stem from a desire to save indexing time because of the vast body of publications.

The rise in the number of subject headings assigned to monographs is an encouraging finding as far as information seeking is concerned. However, it should be emphasized that monographs are still under-indexed in view of the fact that they are much longer than articles.

It is recommended to conduct further studies to corroborate these findings and to change the monographs cataloging policy towards assigning more subject headings to each monograph, thereby achieving a greater indexing depth for better and more efficient retrieval of the information it contains.

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