

# French-language indexing: resources, rules and guidelines

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*This article examines the extent of back-of-the-book indexing literature in French, and contrasts this with publications in English that provide guidelines and principles for indexes. The article includes a comparison of the English and French versions of the international standard ISO 999, and looks at two methods for translating indexes.*

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It has been estimated that only a small percentage of French books published in France have an index (Weinberg, 2000: 3), and that peculiarities of these indexes (Weinberg, 2000: 8–10; Robertson, 1995: 161–3; Diepeveen, 2006: 77) make them a poor cousin to what is published in English. My assessment for Quebec, based on consultation of books in French as well as communications with publishers there, is that French-language indexes in the Canadian province fare marginally better on both counts – but certainly not always. In sum, the quantity and quality of indexes is generally behind the rest of Canada and other English-speaking countries.

The sources quoted above point out that French publishers don't see indexes as a necessity and that they have a low level of awareness regarding their quality. It can be surmised that this is the case with readers too, who are used to what is published, and for whom consulting the table of contents, at times lengthy and quite detailed, is a suitable substitute.

My plan to assess the extent of published back-of-the-book indexing guidelines and principles in French quickly came to a halt. Titles readily available are so few as to be counted on two fingers: ISO 999 and a recent book by Jacques and Dominique Maniez (2009). Neither publication lists further resources and reference works pertaining to indexing rules and principles in French, with the exception of France's AFNOR standard NF Z 47-102. I couldn't find a library copy of this standard, but it may not be relevant since it is not listed in ISO 999 and hardly mentioned in the Maniezes' book.

These two writers state that their book is intended for authors and novice indexers, and hence it is of limited use to experienced indexers. This is especially so for those with access to English reference works, because Mulvany, Bonura, Stauber, Booth and the *Chicago manual of style* (CMS) are the sources of the principles and guidelines presented in their book, along with rules taken from the French version of ISO 999. This French version of standard ISO 999 is, with exceptions of little importance, simply a translation of the English, as was determined by a comparative reading detailed later in this article, and Calvert tells us the English version of ISO 999 is based on the British standard BS 3700:1988 (1996: 74). The conclusion points to the likelihood that there may be no, or very few, original indexing rules in French.

This is probably one reason why French-language publishers have a low awareness of quality in and necessity

of indexes. Turning to style guides, many in English include sections about indexing: CMS, *New Hart's rules*, *Butcher's copy-editing* and *The Canadian style*, although *APA style* lacks this. But not one of the French-language style guides consulted had a single sentence related to indexes.

In one European and three Canadian publications, all I found was a description of word-by-word and letter-by-letter alphabetization (in *Le français au bureau*) – and this was in the context of bibliographies, not indexes. Grevisse's *Le bon usage*, the ultimate language reference in French, lists nothing about indexing in the table of contents or the index. French speakers evidently do not see indexing as a part of the editorial process, the way that people working in English do.

All four publications consulted contain indexes. Those in *Le français au bureau* and *Le Ramat de la typographie* are, in my view, quite useful, but since there is nothing about index preparation in either, we might wonder where the rules for making their own indexes came from. Both indexes are exhaustive and respect good indexing practices, and so are unlikely to have been prepared using automatic functions in Word or a similar program, unlike the index in *Le guide du rédacteur* (done with WordPerfect; personal communication, 29 November 2010).

The latter provides an interesting example of the absence of indexing information. Published by the Translation Bureau, an agency of Public Works and Government Services Canada, the book is the French equivalent of *The Canadian style*. Both the print and online versions of the English contain a section about indexing (paragraphs 9.30 to 9.55, equal to 12 pages in print), its scope limited but similar to what is found in the other English style guides listed earlier. But the French versions, in print or online, have absolutely nothing on indexing. The five hits from a search using the word 'index' in the online version are all about the typography and placement of the index, not its preparation.

Returning to the lack of original indexing rules for French-language indexing, I could identify only two specific to French in ISO 999 (about singular and plural forms in headings, and transposing articles in the titles of documents). I cannot determine whether there are additional ones in the Maniezes' book since few rules have a clearly identified source, but very little seems unfamiliar. This leaves indexers working on French-language publications with the vital questions of how to approach indexing in general and what to do about French-language issues, not to mention where to turn to solve thornier problems. We

have no choice but to follow English rules, and when faced with situations specific to French we adapt the best we can, keeping in mind French language and grammar rules, the needs of users, the text at hand and occasional guidance from publishers. Even alphabetization rules are nonexistent in these four French-language publications. A good deal of importance is given to this in English generally, and specifically for indexing French names with prefixes, but all sources in French are silent on this topic.

At this point I sent a two-question survey to other ISC/SCI indexers working in French, asking them, first, their sources of information to solve indexing problems and for general guidance in indexing practice; and second, which rules or model(s) they followed when faced with an alphabetization issue involving French personal names. Answers to the first question were predictable: they mentioned mostly the English sources listed above, plus another few. The French sources are the Maniezes' book for half of us, and one indexer listed two other titles from ADBS éditions (*L'Analyse documentaire, Une approche méthodologique* by S. Waller and *Indice, index, indexation, Actes du colloque* – reviewed in *The Indexer* 29(3), 142), both seemingly more about theory than practice. Another indexer mentioned in passing *Le guide de la communication écrite* by Marie Malo, a writing guide for students that manages to summarize index preparation in half a page. Nobody uses ISO 999. As for the second question, it seems we agree that consulting dictionaries and replicating their order is the best solution: *Le Robert des noms propres* and the *Dictionnaire biographique du Canada* for Canadian situations.

Because so little information about back-of-the-book indexing is available in French, many French-speaking publishers seem unaware of generally agreed practices and guidelines. As a result, they may expect to receive the type of index common in French (containing long strings of locators, few subheadings, more names than concepts and ideas, and so on), they lack an understanding of the time and effort required to prepare an index, which translates to relatively low rates and poor recognition, and they may even provide questionable guidelines or disagree with decisions made by indexers. This can add complexity in dealings with clients, and at times is reflected by differing ideas of what an index is and what should be in it. This problem exists in English too, but it seems exacerbated in French because of this lack of rules and principles. It is difficult to invoke the 'according to indexing literature' answer. Smaller issues are also at play; for example, the words 'run-in' or 'run-on', 'double posting' and 'embedded indexing' have no official or accepted equivalents and are not clear to publishers.

Robertson (1995: 166) writes of a vicious circle of under-appreciation for indexes in Germany. The same is seemingly at work in French, for the reasons highlighted by Weinberg (2000). Problems include a lack of awareness about quality in indexes, perceiving them as unnecessary additions, seeing lengthy tables of contents as a substitute for an index, and believing that automated techniques can provide adequate indexes. There has been no evident progress since her study, and the paucity of French-language indexing resources, plus the fact that English indexing rules and principles form the basis of those in French, add more obstacles to improvement

in French Canada and France. While Weinberg lamented the absence of an indexing society in France in 2000, the bilingual ISC/SCI was not mentioned. It is still, to my knowledge, the sole organization providing some support to indexers working in French.

## Comparing the English and French versions of ISO 999

There are two striking characteristics to the French ISO 999 when compared with the English. The first, and most obvious, is the lack of an index, and the second is the fact that the text and examples are nearly identical to the English version. My conclusion is that the French version probably exists simply because of mandate reasons at the ISO.

Here I do not comment on the rules and principles in the standard: the analysis is restricted to my goal of determining whether the French version is a standard with specific rules and guidelines for back-of-the-book indexes in French publications. Note that the standard states it applies to 'periodicals, reports, patent documents, and other written and printed documents, and also to non-print materials' (ISO [English], 1996: 1).

My comparison of the text was done from cover to cover, sentence by sentence, and included the table of contents, titles and examples. Both versions of ISO 999 have a publication date of 11 November 1996. Normative references and the bibliography were identical in both documents. The Definitions section (index, locator, 'see' cross-reference and so on) in the French version gives the English equivalents, but there is no French terminology in English.

There is no mention, in the Scope or in any other section, that ISO 999 applies to indexing for a specific language, to several languages or to all languages. Only one sentence, in section 8.1, Basic order of filing characters, insinuates that the standard applies to any language, not only English or French: 'when modified characters are used, e.g. Ä, Å, å, â, à, á, they should be given values to enable them to be sorted according to local practice' (1996: 25). Examples in French and German are included in the English version. This is not so for every example, but it is the case for about one-third of examples for French (much less for German), covering a variety of topics, such as synonyms, prepositions, geographic names and titles of documents. The few German examples are included in the French version, and English examples and rules in it are examined below.

The table of contents, section numbering and titles are identical matches. So are sub-sections (in numbering, titles and further internal divisions) and the number of examples, the type (bold, capitals and italic) and layout. In short, in these respects the two standards are a perfect match throughout.

The texts of the standards are almost identical, to the point where it is clear to me that the text in the French ISO 999 is a translation of the English. There are only seven translated words that show a slight variation in meaning (in 32 pages of English text), and these are minor enough to undoubtedly relate to presenting the French text in a colloquial manner. They are concerns of translation, and

would have no repercussions on the indexing process or decisions.

The French version is so much like the English that English examples even take precedence in it. There are two places in the English standard where indexing rules specific to French are mentioned (one to do with singular and plural forms in headings, the other with transposing articles in the titles of documents) and in both cases the text is translated in exactly the same order in the French version. Likewise when we learn – as we do in the English, of course – that in English indexing the plural is generally used for countables and singular for non-countables (‘animals’ versus ‘freedom’).

To illustrate this, the English lists three examples in the Synonyms section, two in English and one in French; the same words are repeated in exactly the same order in the French version (with the French coming last in both). In the Orthography section, the English discusses spelling conventions using the ‘colour versus color’ example, and in French we find these exact English words too, without any French equivalents. In the few instances where examples in French have been created for the French version, they are mostly very similar concepts to the English, or even direct translations (for instance, from ‘botany *see also* plants’ to ‘botanique *voir aussi* plante’). Surprisingly, some examples have been left untranslated, such as in glosses to distinguish people of the same name (so we find ‘philosopher’ and ‘politician’ in a French example), and in some cases the translator did not even change ‘*see*’ to ‘*voir*’ (ISO [French], 1996: 19), for which there is no obvious reason.

The lack of an index, which spans over 13 pages in the English, is a puzzling omission. Assuming I am right to state that the French version is a translation, it would have been a simple matter to, at the very least, employ a bilingual speaker with knowledge of indexing to identify each entry from the English index and give the equivalent terms and concepts with their locators (not a difficult task since the terminology is all there). This would seem better than no index at all. If I am mistaken to state it is a translation, is there no index because they could not find a French-speaking indexer? Or perhaps even at ISO they share the common view in France that the index is not a necessary part of a French-language publication? It seems unlikely that a need to restrict the number of pages is the rationale behind this absence of an index.

In conclusion, all this leads me to believe that the reason there is an ISO indexing standard in French is not because French-language indexing is of any importance to the ISO, but rather because its mandate is to publish in both English and French. Consequently, no one indexing in French, or writing about indexing rules and principles in French, has any obligation to consult the French version of ISO 999 since the English contains the two ISO rules specific to French-language indexing, as well as most examples applying to French.

## Translating the index or indexing the translation, redux

Requests for translations of English indexes into French are not unusual for a French-speaking indexer, especially in

Canada. One possible reason is the client can be confident of the contents of the finished French index, since it should mirror the English. This is especially true if the commissioner of the index does not have the language skills to assess the French index, but knows that the English index is adequate.

For large international organizations regularly publishing in English and other languages, I assume they request index translations because the non-English versions of the text are usually translations and the index may as well follow this model. This way, publications are similar from beginning to end.

There are surely other reasons for such requests, but most important is for the new index to meet quality standards equivalent to those of English indexes, and to prove at least equally adequate for its users. There are, conceivably, three replies to requests for a translation.

Many believe any translation of an index is a poor option, and that only an original index in the second language will meet the needs of the readers. Others have an almost opposite view, and think a mere copy of an index – done by passing the index over to a translator and then adjusting the page numbers – can result in an adequate tool. There is another possibility, where the original index provides the model, and it is reproduced using the translated text and its terminology.

Earlier articles in this journal have opined that the best option is indexing the translation rather than translating the index. While I tend to agree, there are cases where the latter can lead to acceptable results. Here, I would like to discuss the two approaches to translating indexes mentioned in the previous paragraph and highlight factors that affect the quality and usefulness of the resulting index. There may be other ways to prepare the index of a translation, and further discussions and studies on this topic are encouraged.

Often, the ideal answer to an index translation request is to explain to the client how an original index in the second language would likely provide a better result. This is not always possible; it may be that the client wants a translation. They may expect the French version to closely resemble the English, and choosing to prepare an original index may lead to the added and time-consuming step of having to compare both indexes at the end to ensure that discrepancies can be explained. On the other hand, discussions with clients for indexing the translation instead may be a worthwhile investment and satisfy everyone. In ‘Translation and indexing’ (*The Indexer*, 16(2): 125), a number of indexers who worked in languages other than English invoked reasons why indexing the translation is better. These included the difficulty of getting into another indexer’s mind (for instance, where do the entries start and finish?), the quality of the original index (the publisher could end up with two groups of unhappy readers) and the drudgery of repagination and re-alphabetization (this last point is not an issue nowadays since indexing software will do this instantly).

A first approach to translating an index – where it is done by a translator, independently from the text – might not even have made its way in this article if it hadn’t been published in *Key Words*, the ASI’s quarterly bulletin. Here is a summary of the method for one English document translated into two

other languages (Rooney, 2006): prepare the English index; pass it to a translation company (not the text, just the index); replace the English entries with the translated ones; order the translated index in page order; compare the new entries to the text and insert new page numbers (if necessary); re-alphabetize with some editing. This method presupposes some knowledge of the second language by the indexer.

But this understanding should be advanced enough to avoid these pitfalls: non-inclusion of colloquial cross-references for synonyms and alternative wordings, inaccurate representation of keywords and concepts with no equivalent terms in the second language, replication of errors found in the first index, and failure to identify and treat accordingly multiple uses of a single term. Even with an outstanding index in the original language, there is no guarantee that the headings in the second language will match the terminology in the text, although the risks may be reduced if the indexer analyses the entries or the translator of the index terms is the same person who translated the text. In addition, and crucially, the quality and adequacy of the resulting index are probably left unchecked with this method.

More inadequacies can be imagined if the translation of an index is left to translators with no background in indexing, or to indexers with no skills in the translated language. One common mistake is to use translated expressions in their natural order when the important word does not come in front, for example translating 'women's health' by 'santé des femmes' and then placing it under the letter S in a health report. But even if equipped with indexing principles and good intentions, this method of translating indexes seems best avoided by indexers with partial knowledge of the second language, except for some uncommon languages. And to add a less rational element, imagine what we would think of it if someone applied this approach to preparing an English index from an original in another language, rather than looking for an indexer who is a fluent English speaker.

The second approach seems a reasonable compromise, then, but it comes with three essential conditions: high quality of both the translation and original index, the indexer having native-level skills in the two languages, and access to the original index in page number order. The first step in this method is to identify where each page of the original falls within the translation, and then to read this translated section and locate each entry of the original index in the new text. This way the text provides the wording for the entries, at times will offer cross-references or new headings, will identify issues of multiple meanings and equivalency in concepts and may even allow the correction of errors made in the original index. Other steps in the preparation and quality control of indexes with this method are as would be done in usual circumstances. Variations on this approach are obviously possible if similar goals are key, such as when the WTO's *Repertory* indexes were translated into French and Spanish (Sandford et al., 2005: 220).

This method is by no means perfect, but it is infinitely better than the first approach. A drawback is the lengthy nature of the process; in fact my experience shows that this method can take almost as long as the first indexer took to index the original text (and without the original index in

page number order it would be even longer). But it leads to creating an index that follows the format and length of the original, and thus avoids the potentially time-consuming step of comparing indexes at the end. Of the three reasons mentioned in the 1988 article, only 'getting in another indexer's mind' needs to be dealt with if using this method (repagination being evident and quality of the translation a basic requirement), and while this can cause delays and some confusion, especially in the first pages, the issue of where entries start and finish should be based on the translated text rather than having to respect the intentions of the original indexer. Another concern is accepting that concepts in the original index are worthy of inclusion and that those omitted are so for good reasons, but the step of reading the new text allows the translated-version indexer to judge whether entries need to be added, altered or deleted.

In the end, even indexing the translation may include challenges. When choosing to translate the index, the crucial factor is that 'indexers . . . should work only in languages and cultures they are sufficiently familiar with' (Booth, 2006: 91). Indexers who meet these criteria can be found easily through online directories of indexing societies and lists such as index-l.

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# Chicken or egg theory: do we truly know how they search?

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*Many factors hinder image searching on the web, including an overabundance of available images, along with an indexing vocabulary that is incomprehensible or too specialized to be useful. In addition, users do not necessarily seek the same image with the same concepts or with the same terms. This article presents the preliminary results of a study proposing to explore the behaviours of image searchers in order to extract relevant knowledge for the eventual development of a bilingual taxonomy (French and English) dedicated to indexing ordinary digital images that could be used in both monolingual and multilingual retrieval contexts.*

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## Introduction

Even with our knowledge of evolutionary theory, we still ask the question 'Which came first, the chicken or the egg?' Although it seems obvious that the egg came first, people still ask. In the same manner, we could ask, 'Which comes first, indexing or retrieval?' Of course, the answer also seems evident. Indexing will spring to mind. However, the conundrum remains. How can we index if we do not have retrieval in mind? And if retrieval remains the ultimate goal when indexing, maybe it is time to revisit how end-users are actually conducting their searches.

Access to information, text or other resources represents a challenge both socially and culturally. Although the mechanisms to access resources such as visual images have evolved over recent years, they are still too complex for most users to adopt. Indeed, users do not necessarily seek the same image with the same concepts or with the same terms. In general, two types of queries are used for the retrieval of images. First, the individual may submit a picture or drawing and the tracking system will attempt to locate it using aspects such

as shape, colour and texture. These low-level physical characteristics may be interesting in the case of browsing: that is, when individuals do not have a clear idea of what they want. Systems using these low-level features, however, are not yet widely available on the web. Consequently, Internet users tend to mainly use text to formulate their queries, even though images are visual information sources with little or no text associated with them. For now, successful image retrieval is largely based on appropriate manual indexing, since automated image content analysis is still limited.

Inevitably, another level of difficulty surfaces when the language of the query is different from the language used for indexing. This is what we call retrieval in multilingual context. The retrieval of images still poses a problem for the majority of individuals, especially for images associated with text written in different languages, unknown to users. For cross-language image retrieval (CLIR), the language of the texts used to annotate the images should not affect retrieval: that is, users should be able to formulate a query to search for images in their native language, making the target language transparent. Detailed observations of the