Conclusion

The most important thought I want to leave with you is the do-it-yourself idea. I've made this plea in talks to groups in the United States, and usually hear in reply something like "Well, if we had your money . . .," etc. But there are many installations over there whose EDP budget approaches or exceeds ours, and I think it would be fine if some of them shook off their timidity. Nor is it simply a question of money or size—there are all possible gradations of the do-it-yourself principle—even a very small outfit can profit by taking the minimum step of adopting more rigid tape conventions for example —I'm not advocating the whole hog or none at all.

Hence, to computer users I would say: try some do-it-yourself software—you may find you like it. To computer manufacturers, I would suggest that software for new systems be set up in modular fashion, so as not to handicap the user who wants to substitute his own ideas here and there.

Acknowledgements

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Reference

FINELLI, JOHN J. (1960). "Development of EDP Units," *The Computer Bulletin*, June 1960, Vol. 4, p. 10.

Correspondence

To the Editor,
The Computer Journal.

Character recognition

Sir,

I would like to comment on the article, "Character Recognition," by F. H. Sharman in your July issue.

Firstly, I consider that this paper has done a valuable service in bringing out U.K. views on Character Recognition, that have been dormant for some time, and that these views can now fruitfully be discussed. However, these views, as presented in the paper may be initially biased due to the fact that organizations who expressed "no use foreseen" were nevertheless included in the analysis of answers to the subsequent questions. For example, Table 2, Section *b* shows 7 out of 15 organizations having "no use foreseen," but Tables 4, Section *b*, 5 Section *b*, and 7 Section *b* show many more than 8 organizations' answers being analyzed.

The authors have clearly met misunderstanding of errors and rejections, and their clear-cut distinction in Section 10 is to be applauded. On the other hand, I feel they trod on dangerous ground, in acting as judges, by declaring that "The replies which indicated a rejection rate similar to that experienced with punched cards was probably the most realistic." By use of an intelligent total system with context correction within a document, or within a batch, this may be achievable; but considering a document reader by itself, faced with marginal quality printing, then it would be ambitious to suppose that it could match a card reader.

Regarding errors, the authors were themselves not wholly consistent when they stated in Section 3, that "steps are taken to eliminate these (input errors) with cards and paper tape, so techniques have been devised to ensure accuracy in Character Recognition." Later in Section 10, they state that the requirement for no misreads is a "state of bliss which has never been achieved in any form of input."

This goes to show how precise one's wording must be when writing on this subject . . . unless I am alone in my interpretation of "eliminate".

Certainly any form of input mechanism has a finite error rate and be it 10^{-5} or 10^{-7} it is *never* zero; it is wishful thinking to assume that integrated circuits, self adaptive systems or what have you, will change this state of affairs.

The summary is quite fair, particularly in its final paragraph. The only points that I would dispute in it relate to proportionally spaced and easily read fonts. For the former it is my view that people liking proportionally spaced fonts really applaud the print quality since these fonts are almost, if not always, used on electric typewriters with good class ribbons. Further, if one is looking for an easily-read font the ECMA B font is a very good candidate for this.

Yours faithfully,

J. BAULDREAY.

Rydal,
Heathfield,
Royston, Herts.
21 September, 1965.