10. References

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In any new subject, fresh ideas seek expression, straining the old language forms and thus giving rise to new meanings for existing words and phrases or forcing the creation of new ones. Since the diffusion of ideas is far from instantaneous, the probability of parallel developments at different establishments is high, whilst the probability of their using similar phraseology is low. Such a situation, which arose in the early days of computing and still, to some degree, persists, can prove a serious barrier to communication even between those workers closest to the subject, whilst the intelligent layman is often grossly misled, if not entirely baffled. Where translation between languages is also necessary, communication is made almost impossible.

The (entirely admirable) aim of the authors of the Vocabulary, which is based on earlier work in the UK undertaken by Committees of the BCS and BSI, is to reduce the rude matter of English computer jargon to some form of order and, at the same time, to form a basis for a multi-lingual dictionary in the field.

I feel that they are to be congratulated on the generally high quality of the start they have made. Moreover, the general layout and convenience of use are rather better than one often gets in such works of reference. It is to be hoped that the system used, which is designed to fit in with similarly indexed volumes in other languages, will prove to be satisfactory for translation. This problem is especially difficult as comparatively few words translate directly from one language to another in the fields covered.

In so fast-moving a field as computing, it is, of course, not surprising that some of the definitions are already inadequate or out of date. For instance, the meaning of "time-sharing" has suffered a sea-change since the Vocabulary was written and "emulator" is omitted, largely, one supposes, because no one had heard of it then. No doubt such changes will be taken care of in later editions, and it is encouraging to feel that the BCS is to retain the Committee concerned with a view to continuing the good work.

There are one or two surprising omissions—"octal," "vector," "scalar," "cumulative multiplication," and "downtime," to name a few noticeable ones. Of the preferences expressed for terms, perhaps the most controversial is "linear optimization" in place of the more common "linear programming." It is unfortunate that the word "programming" has become used in two such very different contexts as computer programming and Linear Programming, and doubly unfortunate that the two activities have become so closely linked in practice. Many people in the field of statistics and operational research will regard the preference expressed as a unilateral declaration of independence by the authors. In practice I fear that the Vocabulary is unlikely to have any impact on the widespread use of the term and its derivatives, such as "quadratic programming," "separable programming," which, incidentally, are not covered. Perhaps it would be best to recommend the use of "computer programming" to describe that activity wherever any ambiguity might arise.

Spelling is often a bone of contention among editors and purists. I am pleased to report that the spelling of "program" is consistent throughout, but the same cannot be said for the use of the ending "-ize." I, personally, prefer a consistent use of "-ize" to the mixture of "-ize" and "-ise" found in the Vocabulary. This little problem is more easily settled for me than the endings "-or" and "-er". One can argue that it should follow the general pattern that the first refers to people and the second to things. But I cannot seriously accept "processer" and "moniter" for "processor" and "monitor" —even though the OED *does* define "processor" as "one who walks in procession"!

Taken as a whole—and despite several detailed comments on definitions which I am forwarding to the Committee!—I welcome this book and feel that we are all indebted to the authors and to the members of the BCS Committee concerned for the immense pains they have taken to produce a definitive work in the field.

A. S. DOUGLAS