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COMPARISON OF ZASSHI KIJI SAKUIN ON NACSIS-IR VS. NDL CD-ROM LINE: EXPERIENCES OF THE UNIVERSITY OF PITTSBURGH

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Introduction

My topic is the electronic formats of the Zasshi Kiji Sakuin, or Japanese Periodical Index. Without getting into the legitimate issue of whether the printed version should be continued, I will focus on some of the problems with electronic versions of Zasshi Kiji Sakuin, especially in the context of a changing library environment. First I will discuss briefly the changing nature of our services to provide a background for discussion and to define our requirements for electronic resources in East Asian libraries. By doing so, I hope that our voice will be heard by the producers of the electronic resources in Japan and that this will help them to reflect our needs in their products.

Library user expectations

Regardless of the specific operating environment, faster, better, cheaper services have become the mantra of all customer services. Although we are not in the commercial service industry, library users are no exception to this trend. Recent changes in political and economic status of Japan and other Asian nations in the global economy expanded the types of users from area specialists to non-area specialists who conduct comparative studies, policy and trade analysis, and so on. Since many of them are collecting information on moving targets, more and more library users seek up to the minute information. In my work at the Japan Information Center (JIC) at the University of Pittsburgh, this situation has only accelerated: users demand a speedy information retrieval system that offers the most up-to-date information.

Impact of changing environment on reference services, or, what does this mean to us?

Proliferation of electronic forms of information has been changing the concept of distance between the information and end-users. Especially the Internet seems to have contributed to this changing notion of distance. More and more Japanese information is becoming available on the Internet, and this trend has increased the user’s expectations for a more speedy retrieval of information. This requires us constantly to chase the mushrooming sources of electronic information, learn about them, and know how to use them.

*This paper was originally presented in a somewhat modified form, with overhead illustrations, at the Annual Meeting of the Japanese Materials Committee of the Council on East Asian Libraries in Chicago March 13, 1997.
Comparison of electronic formats of Zasshi Kiji Sakuin

Bearing this environment in mind, I will now relate our experiences based on a test use of Zasshi Kiji Sakuin in electronic format at the University of Pittsburgh. I would like to thank NACSIS, Kinokuniya, and Maruzen for their cooperation.

There is no debate that electronic form is faster and preferred by the end-user. That being said, I will focus in this paper on the problems we have encountered. Despite these problems, we nonetheless decided that Zasshi Kiji Sakuin will enhance our reference services tremendously and have decided to try both CD-ROM and online versions of Zasshi Kiji Sakuin this year.

Zasshi Kiji Sakuin in electronic format

Currently two types of electronic format for Zasshi Kiji Sakuin are available. One is a stand-alone CD-ROM called NDL CD-ROM Line put out by Kinokuniya and the other is an online database accessible through NACSIS-IR, the system of the National Center for Science Information.

1. Coverage

The NDL CD-ROM Line has the current which covers from 1990 forward and the archival versions which cover from 1985-1989. We used the demo version which covers until 1994. NACSIS-IR, on the other hand, covers 1984 onward, one year earlier than the CD-ROM version.

2. Hours

NACSIS-IR does not run 24 hours a day. Hence, because of the time differential between Tokyo and Pittsburgh, we are able to use the system only in the mornings (our office hours are from 8:30 to 5:00). Inquiries which should be referred to Zasshi Kiji Sakuin tend to come in the afternoon in our library, which makes NACSIS-IR’s schedule rather inconvenient. To make a simple comparison, some of the Library of Congress catalogs are available 24 hours a day seven days a week through the World Wide Web. I would like to see NACSIS-IR become available 24 hours a day Monday through Friday at least.

While the CD-ROM version is more accessible and available at the user’s convenience, there are problems with “freshness.” The current edition of CD-ROM is updated only twice a year as opposed to the online version which is updated every other week.

3. Cost

A one-year subscription to the current edition of the CD-ROM version of Zasshi Kiji Sakuin is 180,000 yen or approximately $1500. This is a lease contract; the library does not own the CD-ROM. The price for the archival edition is the same, the difference being that you own the CD-ROM. The current edition could be a rather expensive investment depending on how often your
Whether or not NACSIS-IR is an expensive database to use depends on the database you use. It has two types of charges, Type A and Type B. Users of Type A databases pay 50 yen per minute plus 13 yen per record they want to see. Type B databases cost 30 yen every time you call up the database. Zasshi Kiji Sakuin is a Type A database. That means if you conduct a 20 minutes search and you retrieve thirty records, it would cost 1390 yen plus 5% sales tax. Depending on how often you use it and how many records you ask to see, NACSIS-IR can be quite expensive.

4. Lack of user friendliness

The proliferation of electronic databases has made intermediary searching by a librarian for the user for every electronic resource impossible. As a result, we have to depend on the end-users’ capabilities to do their own searches. This means an increased need for user instruction, as well as for librarians who can teach the peculiarity of each system. This trend will be accelerated as the end-user online system becomes prevalent. A survey conducted in 1994 among ARL members in general indicates a trend from using CD-ROM and locally loaded tapes to end-user online searching of a remotely accessible database, such as OCLC’s First Search (Tenopir 1995).

As the number of electronic resources increase, it becomes imperative for libraries to have self-explanatory and easily explainable systems. In this regard, the online Zasshi Kiji Sakuin through NACSIS-IR has a major drawback as a reference tool in the future. In my view, it is rather an old system and not user friendly. While the search commands are not difficult to learn, they are quite cumbersome, not self-explanatory, and counter-intuitive. Most databases now allow doing a simple search by keying in the combinations of words and Boolean operators in one search. But in NACSIS-IR, you have to make the data sets first and then combine them with Boolean operators.

For instance, if I want materials on Japanese foreign direct investment in Southeast Asia or China, for a typical search in many databases you would type in: Japan AND investment AND (China OR Southeast Asia) in one line.

However, in NACSIS-IR the typical would be first to make a data set which includes both Japan and investment. Then you make the second data set with the words either Southeast Asia or China. Finally, you combine the first and second data sets to get the results. As you can see, this requires the users to know how to use the search commands while other databases allow the users to rely on their common sense without flipping through manuals. Furthermore, because you have to type each command separately, it adds more search time. Remember: NACSIS charges 50 yen per minute for the use of Zasshi Kiji Sakuin.

The CD-ROM version of Zasshi Kiji Sakuin offers Menu Search and Command Search. In the Menu Search, there are ten categories. Users can type in a search similar to Japan AND investment AND (China OR Southeast Asia) in one line. However, a user has to type the same
word again if he or she wants to search more than one category at once, whereas the online version searches several categories such as Title of the article, and Journal Title by typing the command once.

Another point I should mention is that when several Boolean operators are combined in one search, the CD-ROM takes a long time to return the results. The above-mentioned search took more than five minutes.

I encountered similar problems in response time with the online version. The response time of NACSIS-IR is sometimes incredibly slow. This increases the cost for the connecting time if you use a Type A database. According to NACSIS, this is because of the very heavy Internet traffic between NACSIS and the United States. NACSIS does have a plan to update the line from 6 Mb/s to 45 Mb/s after October 1997. Time will tell if this increase will be in line with projections calling for ever-increasing traffic.

5. Hardware, software, and related matters

Finally I would like to touch on hardware and software needed to run these two forms of Zasshi Kiji Sakuin. This has been a major headache for us. Currently we use two computers, both Gateway 2000 P5-90. One runs on English DOS and Windows and the other on Japanese DOS called COS/V and Japanese Windows--WindowJ. We also use a Newgen Printer which has Japanese fonts in its hardware.

In order to access NACSIS-IR, we use the one with English DOS and Windows. However, to see and type Japanese characters, we had to install two software packages in it, Twinbridge and EWAN. We have not yet used the computer with Japanese DOS and Windows because the machine was not connected to the Internet until recently.

To run the CD-ROM version, we use a machine with Japanese DOS and Windows. I understand that the CD-ROM version will not run on English DOS and Windows.

The problems

There are problems related to the hardware and software in both systems, and they have caused much frustration. First, some of the characters turn into meaningless strings of symbols.

Printing out the results is a problem for both online and CD-ROM versions. NACSIS-IR does not allow downloading search results to your terminals. The fastest acceptable alternative is to do a cut and paste on the screen. In other words, using the copy command EWAN, I copy the search and paste it on the word-processing program such as MS-Word.

But printing from the online version is simple compared to the problems of printing from the CD-
ROM version. The CD-ROM version I tested was the Japanese DOS version. [The Windows version should be available in May.] When I tried to print out search results by using the printout command, it printed complete gibberish because of printer incompatibility. This was a major headache. Finally, about two months ago I found a temporary solution: download the search results and open a file in the Notepad (or Memocho in Japanese) in Windows Accessories. In this way you can at least read the records and print them out, although they are in MARC format with all the tags and thus not easy to read.

Conclusion

Certainly the electronic formats of Zasshi Kiji Sakuin definitely enhance our capabilities as a resource center. That being said, both online and CD-ROM versions have some drawbacks in relation to the changing reference environment. Some of these are technical, short-term problems, such as printer compatibility. However, I see the user unfriendliness of the online system, infrequency of updates, and long retrieval time for the CD-ROM version as problematic in the long run. NACSIS plans to make their databases searchable on the WWW, but we do not know when that will happen. I think it is important to convey all these concerns to the producers of these electronic resources in Japan.

What your organization should do about Zasshi Kiji Sakuin depends on the number of inquiries you get, the budget, and how your organization would like to provide the index to your patrons. If you have a manageable number of reference questions and can do intermediary searches for patrons, the online version might be cheaper. However, if you plan to let end-users do their own searches on a daily basis, the CD-ROM version has a definite cost advantage over the online version as well as freeing up the librarian’s time.

NACSIS is currently offering a trial service to access certain databases through their web page, (http://www.nacsis.ac.jp/guest-e.html) although Zasshi Kiji Sakuin is not accessible on this service. I recommend checking it and testing the water.

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