

Letter to the Editor

Continuing relevance of superimposed coding

Dear Sir,

In his elegant review of Peter Luhn's many contributions to information science, Harry East implies that problems like superimposed coding are no longer relevant. I can't agree. Every futurist has told us how vastly increased memories would reduce the need for efficient coding schemes. But as soon as main frame computers began to give way to minis, we already saw the advent of micros. The memories on these machines are larger than the mainframes I used on my dissertation (Univac I), but they are still inadequate to many information storage problems. We used superimposed coding methods successfully in the design of *Sci-Mate* software. Users do not have to understand the details of the theory behind superimposed coding. I didn't when I first used it with the IBM 101

statistical machine and neither did Peter Luhn when he saw it demonstrated at the Welsh Medical Library in 1952. I have no doubt that Calvin Mooers did when he developed Zato-coding but when Claire Schultz applied it to her use of the 101, she too used it heuristically. Coding schemes will always be interesting because we have an insatiable appetite for information.

Yours sincerely

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