

of the *SCI* and Web of Science, it is not a monopoly supplier of bibliometric statistics derived from these bibliographic information products.

Bibliographic and bibliometric use are two distinct types of use of scientific information, each with its own set of operational and quality criteria. The ISI's information products are primarily developed for bibliographic use. When conducted properly, bibliometrics can unravel relationships that were previously unknown, and put new issues on the political agenda. It can be informative in providing condensed overviews of publication and citation frequencies, and

accurate if proper data-collection procedures are applied.

Anyone confronted with bibliometric statistics derived from the *SCI*, intended to be applied at the level of individuals or research groups or departments, should know the answers to the questions summarised in the Box.

These minimum criteria are crucial for assessment of the accuracy, validity and usefulness of bibliometric statistics.

Henk F. Moed

Centre for Science and Technology Studies (CWTS), Leiden University, PO Box 9555, 2300 RB Leiden, The Netherlands.

Statistics hide impact of non-English journals

Sir— Your opinion article (*Nature* **415**, 101; 2002) provides timely cautions about the errors of *Science Citation Index (SCI)* data compiled by the Institute for Scientific Information (ISI). As Chinese scientific publishers, editors and researchers, we wish to point out that these errors are far more serious for journals published in non-English-speaking countries. The ISI's coverage of scientific journals from these countries is far too limited, and the livelihood of many decent journals has been an unintended casualty.

The ISI misses the fact that non-English-language journals often have alternative names. The *Chinese Journal of Geophysics*—*Chinese Edition* is also called *Diqiu Wuli Xuebao*, *Acta Geophysica Sinica* and *Chinese J. Geophys.* for historical reasons. In 2000, this journal was cited more than 260 times, yet the ISI's *Journal Citation Reports 2001* gives it a total citation score of 13.

The ISI fails to note that many English-language editions of journals published in China have Chinese-edition counterparts, with different contents and domestic and ISSN registration numbers, and should be considered as different journals. Among China's 12 English-language journals indexed by *SCI*, 8 also have Chinese editions. In 1998, for example, 91 of the 147 cited items for papers published during 1996 in the *Chinese Science Bulletin*, a prominent science journal, were incorrect: 52 of the 91 errors were attributions to the bulletin, although these citations were actually to the Chinese edition.

In addition to your reminder to people to use citation statistics prudently, we suggest the ISI should pay more attention to journals in non-English-speaking countries. Even though the ISI should not be held responsible for problems in doing science in developing countries, it can certainly be more accurate in its analysis of

scientific achievements in places such as China, and hence help to promote international scientific communication.

Shengli Ren*, **Guang'an Zu***,
Hong-fei Wang†

**Department of Publication, National Natural Science Foundation of China, 83 Shuangqing Road, Haidian District, Beijing 100085, China*

†Institute of Chemistry, Chinese Academy of Sciences, No 2, 1st North Street, Zhong Guang Cun, Haidian District, Beijing 100080, China

Strange results mean it's worth checking ISI data

Sir— Like the editors of *Nature* (see *Nature* **415**, 101; 2002), we too realize that it is in our best interests to carry out editorial checks of data from the Institute of Scientific Information (ISI). In 1998, *The Lancet's* impact factor, as calculated by ISI, dropped to 11.79 from a previous stable value of about 17 for the previous four years. In 1997, *The Lancet* had decided to divide letters into Correspondence (not counted in ISI's denominator) and Research Letters (peer-reviewed and containing original data, hence coded by the ISI as citable for the denominator). This division increased our number of citable items and thus we attributed most of the drop to this change, an assumption confirmed by the ISI.

Recently, we noted that the number of citable items listed for 2000 was higher (821) than informal calculation would suggest. After hand-coding each issue, we found that 684 items should form the denominator.

Meanwhile, out of editorial interest, we looked at citation data for 1999 in a file purchased from the ISI (based on papers published in 1997 and 1998). As *Nature* did, we also found examples of unexpectedly low numbers of citations for large trials that had only a group name in the author byline compared with those that had at least one named author. The International Stroke Trial (*Lancet* **349**,

1569–1581; 1997), for example, was listed as having one citation in 1999. The ISI confirmed to us that group names are a potential landmine for citation accuracy and said it was in the process of developing a new program to address this issue.

Kathleen D. Hopkins, Laragh Gollogly, Sarah Ogden, Richard Horton

The Lancet, 84 Theobald's Road, London WC1X 8RR, UK

See also the News Feature "The counting house" on pages 726–729 of this issue.

Habilitation not just alive in France, but growing

Sir— In your News Feature (*Nature* **415**, 257; 2002), you suggest that the *Habilitation* postdoctoral thesis is "unique to German-speaking countries". Sadly, not so. *L'habilitation à diriger des recherches* is alive and kicking in France, and is an obligation for anyone who supervises a PhD student. Although not usually as large as its German equivalent (mine was only 15,000 words long), the rules governing its size are effectively determined by each faculty. There is a tendency for it to creep up to the size of the old *thèse d'état*, usually more than 100,000 words long, which it was designed to replace in 1988.

Matthew Cobb

Laboratoire d'Ecologie, Université Paris-6, 75005 Paris, France

Getting space camera back on track soon

Sir— The headline on your News in Brief "Equipment failure derails space projects" (*Nature* **414**, 835; 2001) does a disservice to at least one of the projects discussed, the NASA–European Space Agency Cassini mission to Saturn. Your article accurately states that Cassini engineers are making progress in fixing haze on images that is thought to result from contamination on the camera's optics or detector. It is, however, incorrect to say that Cassini has been derailed by this problem.

Franklin O'Donnell

Jet Propulsion Laboratory, 4800 Oak Grove Drive, Pasadena, California 91109, USA

Errata In the Correspondence "How scientists can take the initiative in schools" by Mo Afzal (*Nature* **415**, 364; 2002), the citation *Nature* **414**, 1; 2001 should have read *Nature* **414**, 673; 2001.

In the Correspondence "False samples are not the same as blind controls" by L. S. Mills (*Nature* **415**, 471, 2002), reference 5 was incorrect. The correct reference in full is: M. K. Schwartz *et al.* *Nature* **415**, 520–522 (2002).