

Contributed Papers

THE DEADLINE FOR THE RECEIPT OF ABSTRACTS AND PRELIMINARY VERSIONS OF 20-MINUTE CONTRIBUTED PAPERS IS 1ST FEBRUARY, 1985.

Short Course

A Short Course of relevance to the Conference will be held in association with NASECODE IV on 17th and 18th June, 1985.

All publications associated with NASECODE I, NASECODE II and NASECODE III Conferences held in 1979, 1981 and 1983 respectively and the Lecture Notes of the NASECODE II and NASECODE III Short Courses are available from Boole Press Limited.

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WORDS

TRILLION. On 7 June the *Standard*, reporting on 'America's ballooning budget deficit,' wrote that Federal government spending last year was 'running at \$1.5 trillion a year... (A trillion has 12 noughts)'. Twelve? Surely a trillion is a million times a million: 18 noughts. Then I remembered how in 1974 Mr Callaghan, then Prime Minister, had given his blessing in a parliamentary answer to the American billion (nine noughts) against ours (12 noughts).

The struggle has been going on for some time. According to the OED, two Frenchmen of the late 1400s and early 1500s, N. Chuquet and Etienne de la Roche, explained billion, trillion etc as 'successive powers of a million [i.e. six noughts for each jump], the trillion being the third power of a million ... as always used in England.' Then, in the mid-1600s, the 'erroneous custom' was established in France of 'calling a thousand millions a billion and a million millions a trillion, an entire perversion of the nomenclature of Chuquet and de la Roche, an error unfortunately followed by some in the US.'

Unfortunately or not, the Americans seem to be winning. Trillion with 12 noughts, says the forthcoming Vol. IV of A Supplement to the OED, 'is increasingly common in British usage.' (Incidentally, a centillion, a million to the power of 100, has - English style - 600 noughts, which would fill at least 12 of these lines.)

From *The Observer*, Sunday 17 June, 1984. (Compare with "Word Conservation", *I.M.S. Newsletter*, No. 7 (March 1983), page 88.