

To improve the access to technical information provided by international publications, we also believe that it is important to offer English text of the abstract and the drawing selected. In view of the above, taking into account enhanced searching functions and accompanying changes in the method of reference, as well as development of machine translation techniques, improvement in systems and their efficient operation should be considered. Our comments on this are as follows, and your consideration would be greatly appreciated.

International publications are searched under some circumstances. We will give two examples: the first case is search for patent rights held by other companies related to one's business; and the second case is search for prior art documents over which the patentability of the invention for which an application is to be filed might be rejected. In the first case, what should be carefully studied is the claims of the patent which has been actually granted in each country, and thus international publications are searched as a clue to identification of a family that may be related to the business. For this reason, these publications are often only reviewed as a reference material. In the second case, international publications disclosing art relevant to somewhere in the full text of an international publication are searched for. In both cases, the abstracts of international publications are mainly referred to for the purpose of narrowing related documents. Nowadays, however, IT systems have advanced search features and enable us to perform a full-text search for a predetermined string of text to select the target documents. Therefore, the number of cases where a searcher actually reads the abstract of an international publication to determine whether or not the international publication should be investigated in detail is decreasing. In many cases, it is substantially possible, by referring to the claims instead of the abstract, to determine whether to review international publications in detail.

Then, another opinion is that more efficient search would result from providing international publications in machine readable or text searchable format than improving the quality of the abstract.

To make the length of abstracts closer to the length recommended in PCT Rules such as Rule 8.1(b) from the current state, it may be effective to introduce examples of abstracts prepared with an appropriate length. More desirably, introduction of examples of both good writing and bad writing for one case would be helpful for those who draft abstracts to understand how they should be drafted.

Presently, PCT Rule 8.1(b) defines the number of words recommended in the abstract. It may be possible to change this recommendation to a requirement, but we disagree with making such a requirement regardless of whether it is for abstracts written in English or in other languages at the time of filing non-English applications. When it is hypothesized that the requirement for length of English abstracts is made, applicants who file non-English international applications will have to confirm the length of the translated abstract before international filing. We are afraid that such requirement might eliminate one of the benefits of the PCT system for applicants who file international applications in a non-English language which are that they can postpone the incursion of the translation costs until the national phase entry.

As a comment on the translation expense incurred in the International Bureau as one of the backgrounds in paragraph 3 of PCT/WG/9/16, taking it into account that abstracts are referred to merely as useful information and that the quality of machine translation has recently been increasing, there is opinion that the quality of machine translated abstract can be sufficient. We recognize that if machine translation effectively reduces the costs, it is also worth considering to prepare an English abstract using machine translation.

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