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United States Patent [19]

Burrows

[11] **Patent Number: 5,765,149**

[45] **Date of Patent: Jun. 9, 1998**

[54] **MODIFIED COLLECTION FREQUENCY RANKING METHOD**

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[21] Appl. No.: **695,057**

[22] Filed: **Aug. 9, 1996**

[51] **Int. Cl.**[6] **G06F 17/30**

[52] **U.S. Cl.** **707/5**; 707/102

[58] **Field of Search** 395/613, 610, 395/603, 615, 605; 707/5, 102

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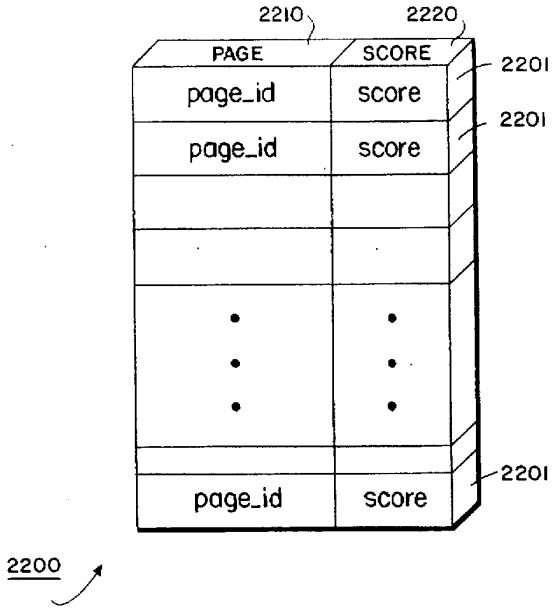
Primary Examiner—Wayne Amsbury

Attorney, Agent, or Firm—Dirk Brinkman

[57] **ABSTRACT**

There is provided an information processing system in which files on plural file servers having different file management manners can be efficiently accessed by a single client program, a control method for the information processing system, and a storage medium for storing programs for performing the control. A gateway program **20** is provided on a first server information processing device **120**, and an agent program **30** which is operated in conformity with the gateway program **20** is provided on a second server information processing device **130**, whereby a copy of the directory structure of files on the second server information processing device is created on the first server information processing device **120**. In addition, at the time when the copy is created, data in a file are not copied, and the data copy is performed only when the file is opened by an application program **8***a* of a client information processing device **110**.

3 Claims, 26 Drawing Sheets



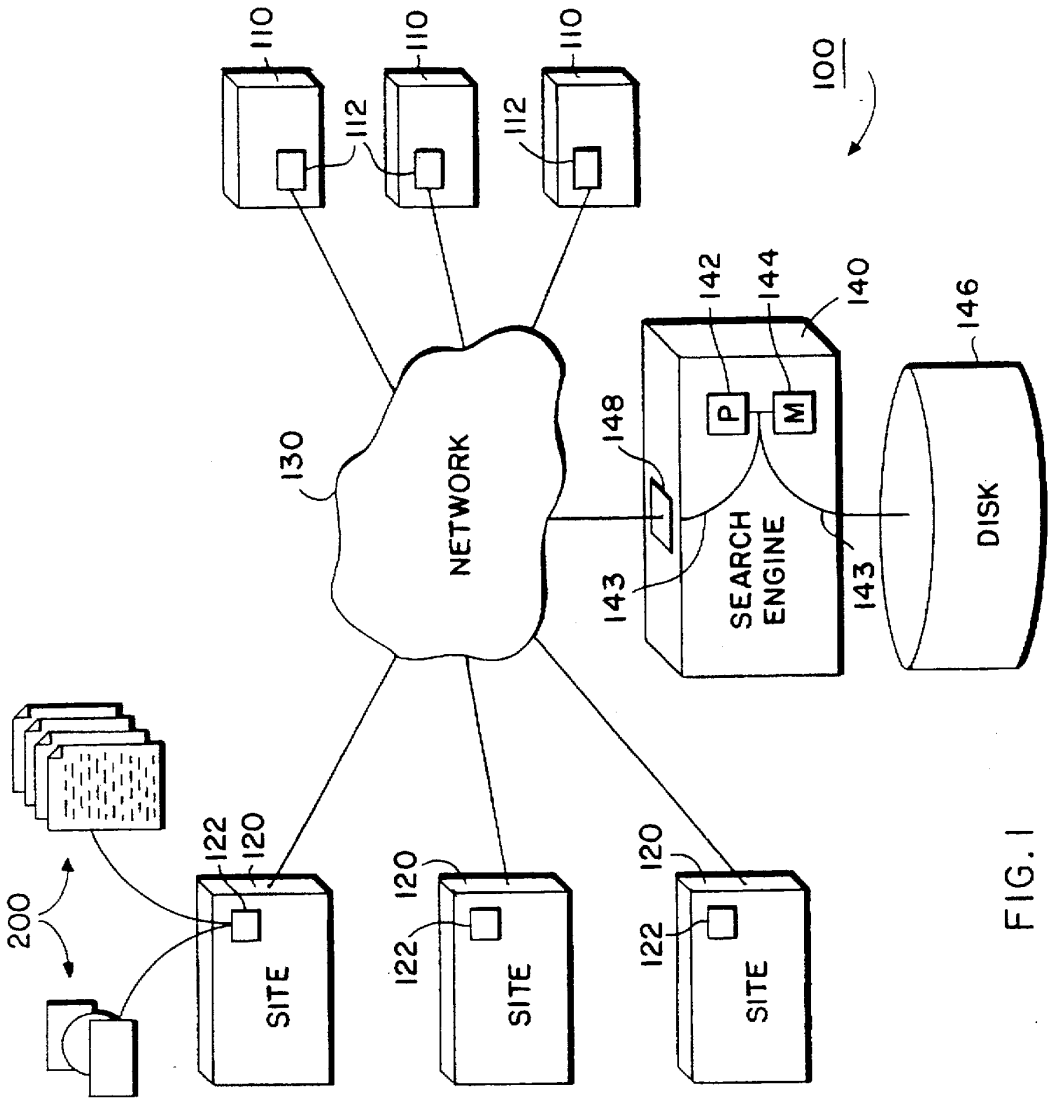

110
110
110
112
112
100
142
144
140
146
148
P
M
130
NETWORK
SEARCH ENGINE
DISK
143
143
200
122
120
120
120
122
122
SITE
SITE
SITE

FIG. 1

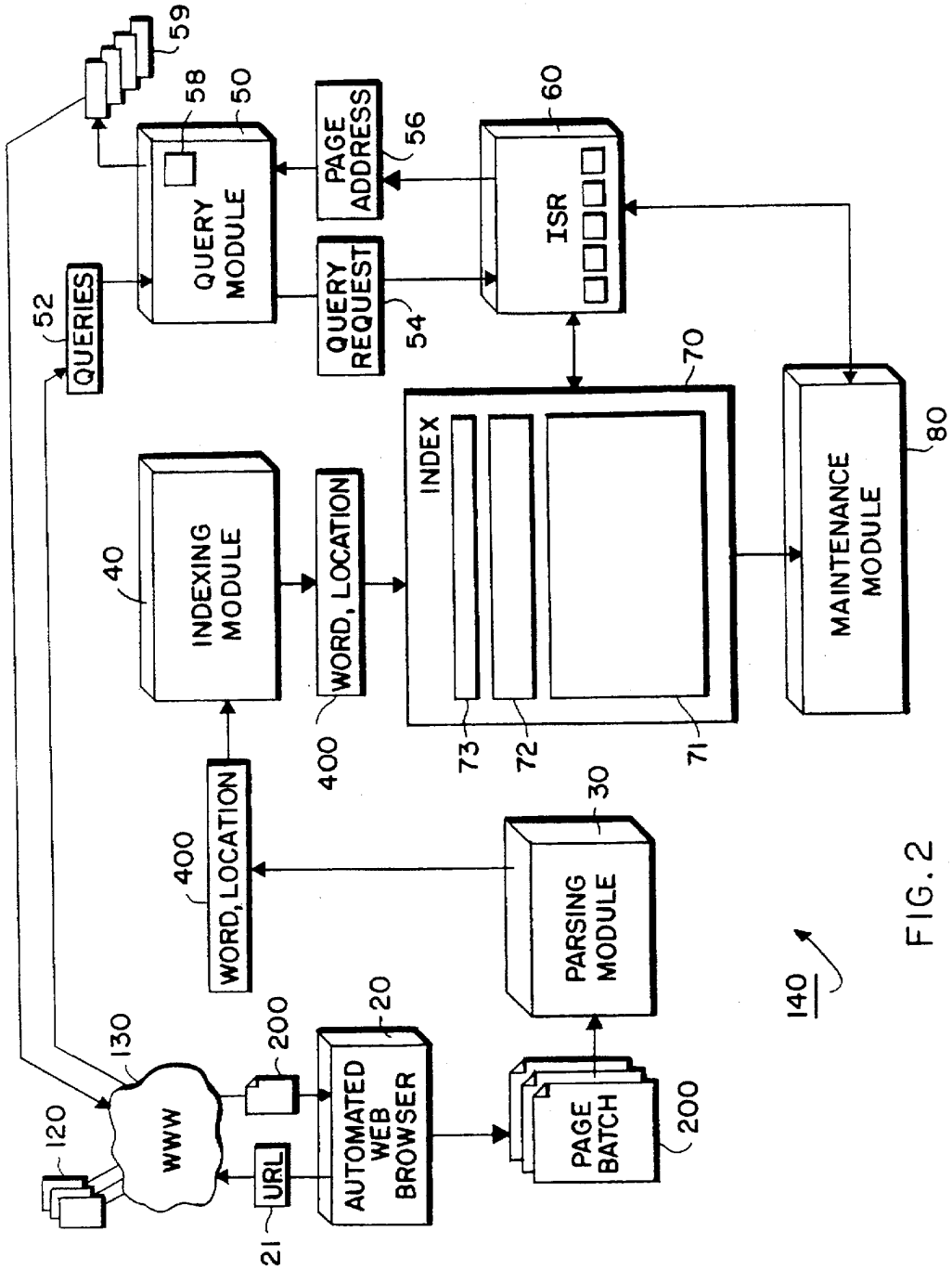

59
58
50
QUERY MODULE
52
QUERIES
PAGE ADDRESS
56
QUERY REQUEST
54
60
ISR
70
INDEX
73
72
71
INDEXING MODULE
40
WORD, LOCATION
400
MAINTENANCE MODULE
80
WORD, LOCATION
400
PARSING MODULE
30
140
130
WWW
120
200
URL
21
AUTOMATED WEB BROWSER
20
PAGE BATCH
200

FIG. 2

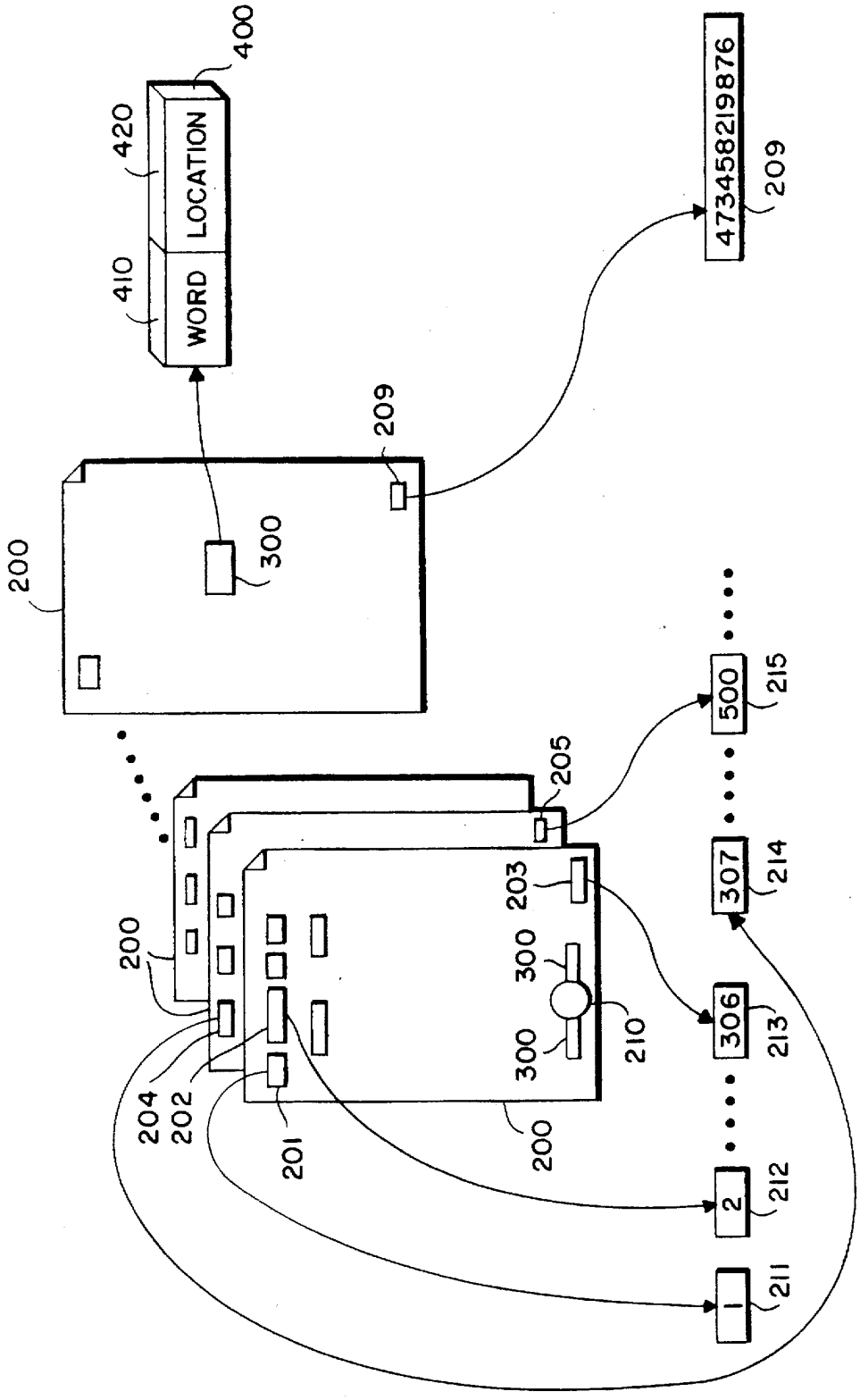

400
420
LOCATION
410
WORD
473458219876
209
209
200
300
205
500
215
307
214
306
213
2
212
1
211
203
300
300
210
200
200
204
202
201

FIG. 3

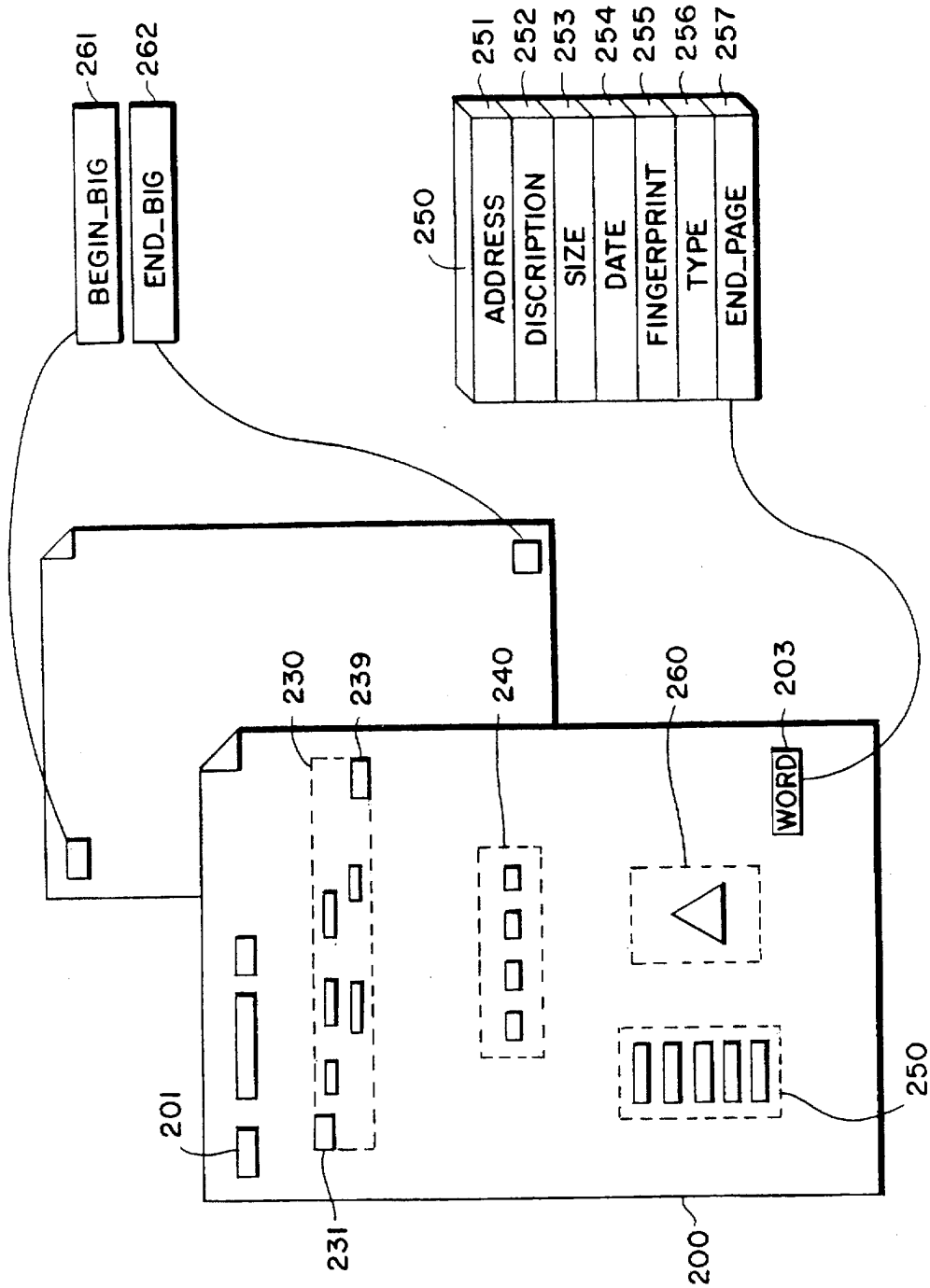

261
BEGIN_BIG
262
END_BIG
250
251
ADDRESS
252
DISCRIPTION
253
SIZE
254
DATE
255
FINGERPRINT
256
TYPE
257
END_PAGE
230
239
240
260
203
WORD
201
231
200
250

FIG. 4

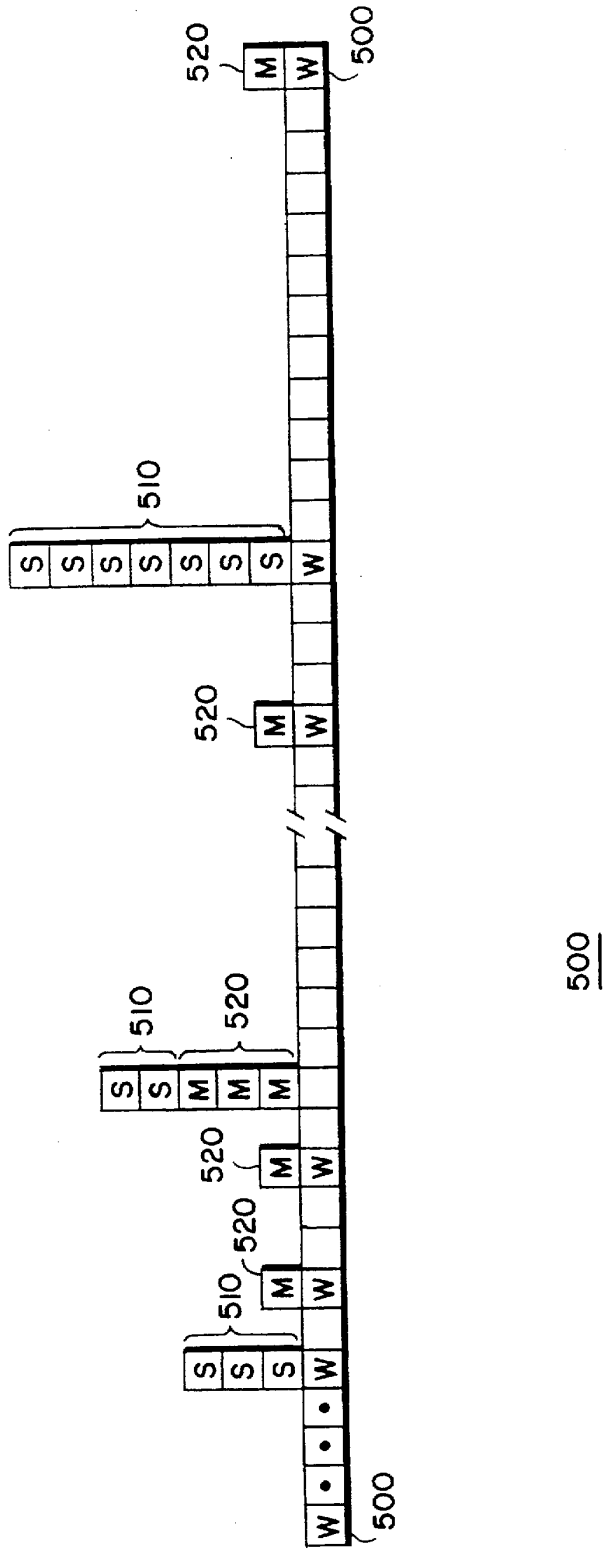

520
M
W
500
510
S
S
S
S
S
S
S
W
520
M
W
510
520
S
S
M
M
M
520
M
W
520
M
W
510
S
S
S
W
W
500
500

FIG. 5

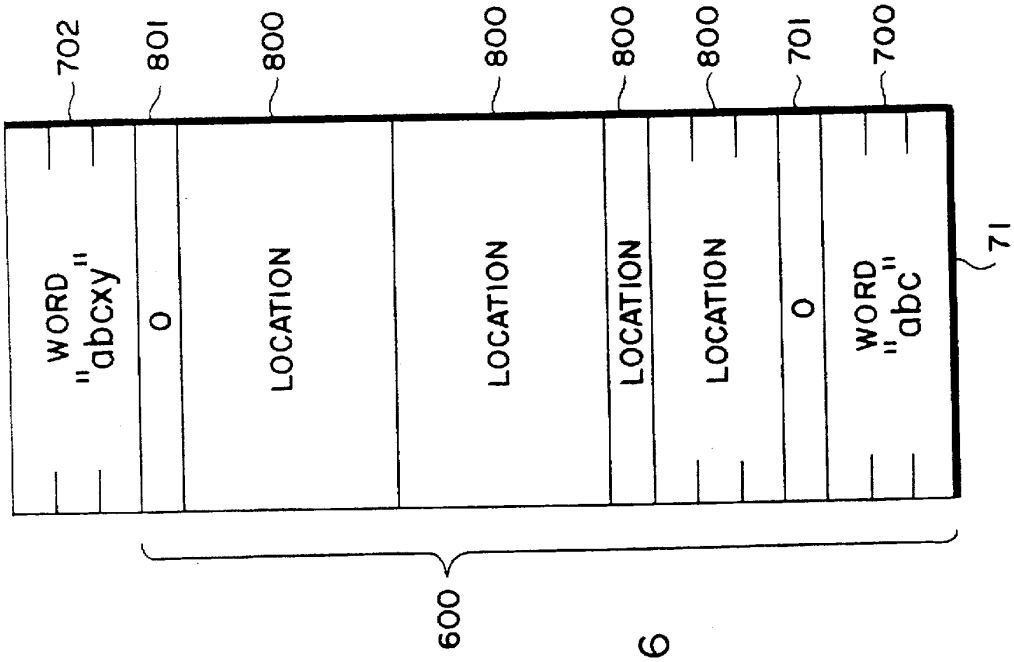

702
801
800
800
800
800
701
700
WORD "abcxy"
0
LOCATION
LOCATION
LOCATION
LOCATION
0
WORD "abc"
71
600

FIG.6

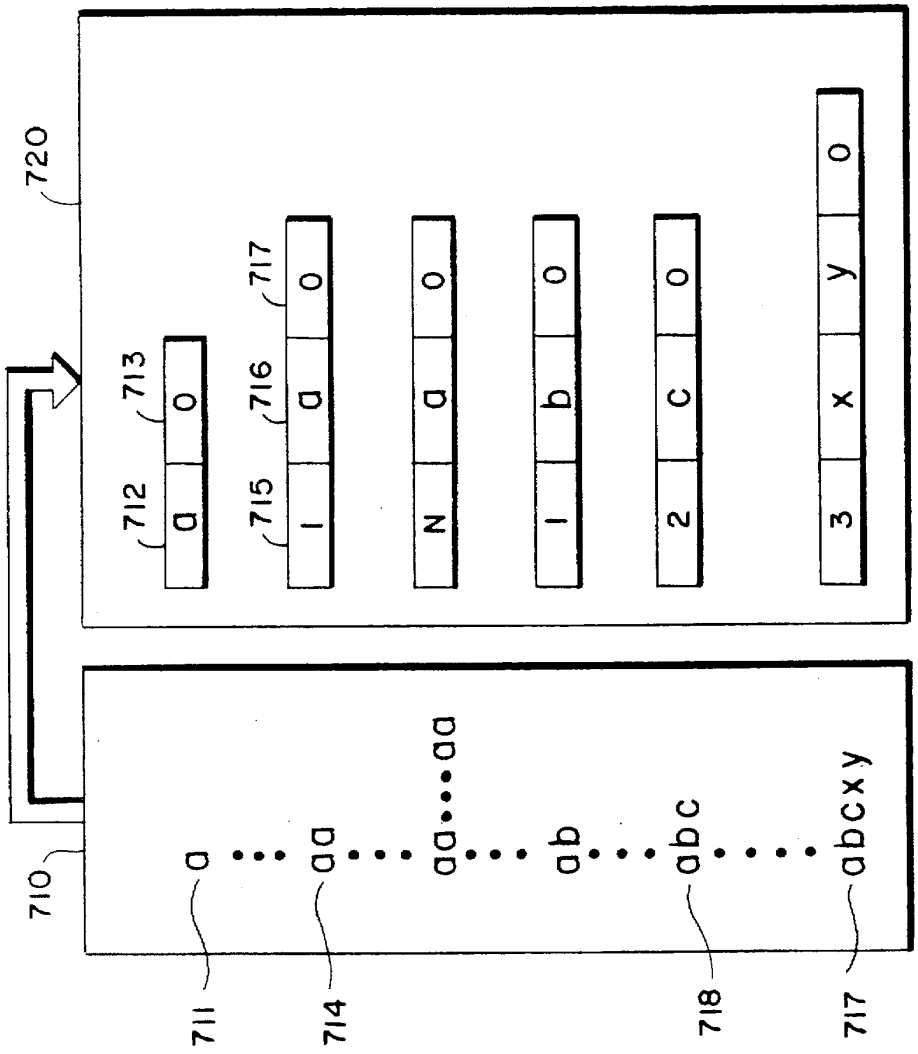

720
710
712
713
715
716
717
a
0
1
a
0
N
a
0
1
b
0
2
c
0
3
x
y
0
a
aa
aa...aa
ab
abc
abcxy
711
714
718
717

FIG. 7

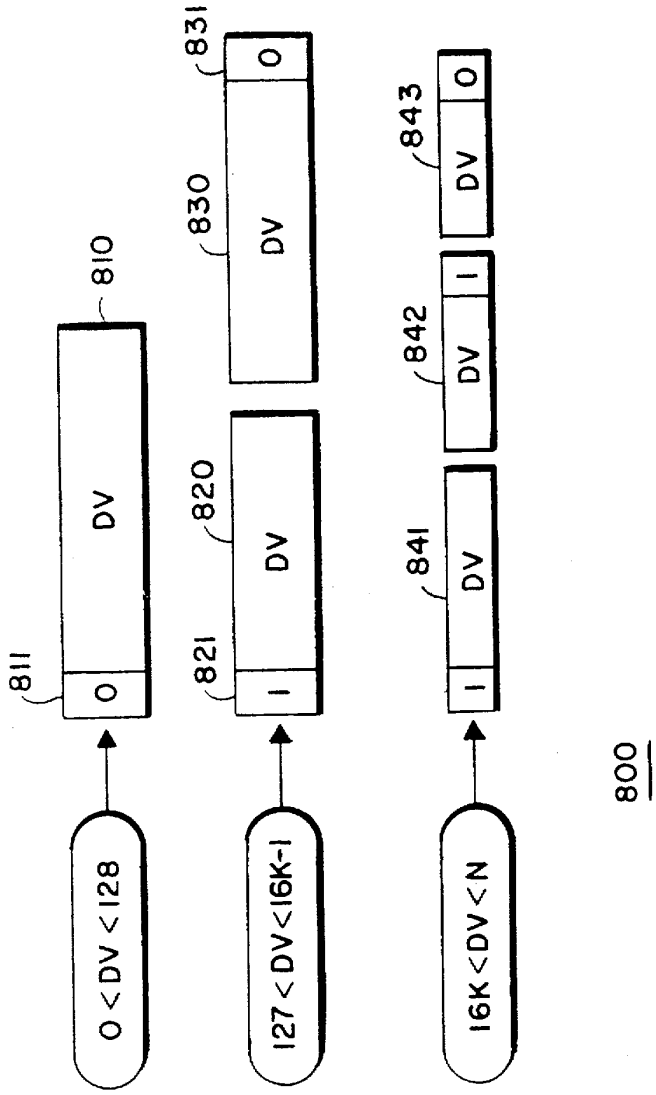

0 < DV < 128
127 < DV < 16K-1
16K < DV < N
811
810
0
DV
821
820
1
DV
831
830
0
DV
841
842
843
1
DV
1
DV
0
DV
800

FIG. 8

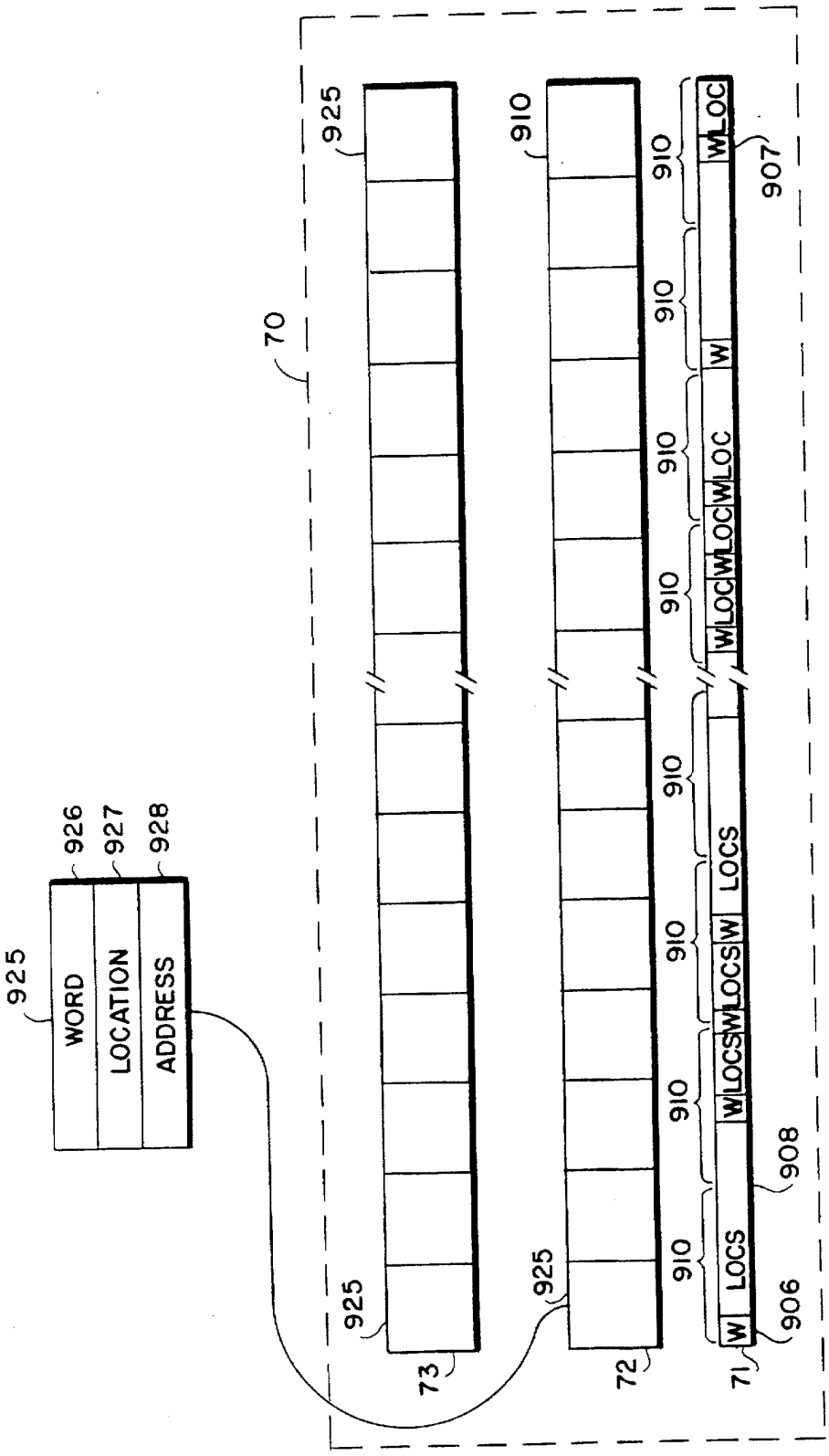

925
WORD
LOCATION
ADDRESS
926
927
928
70
925
910
907
W
LOC
LOCS
908
906
71
72
73

FIG. 9

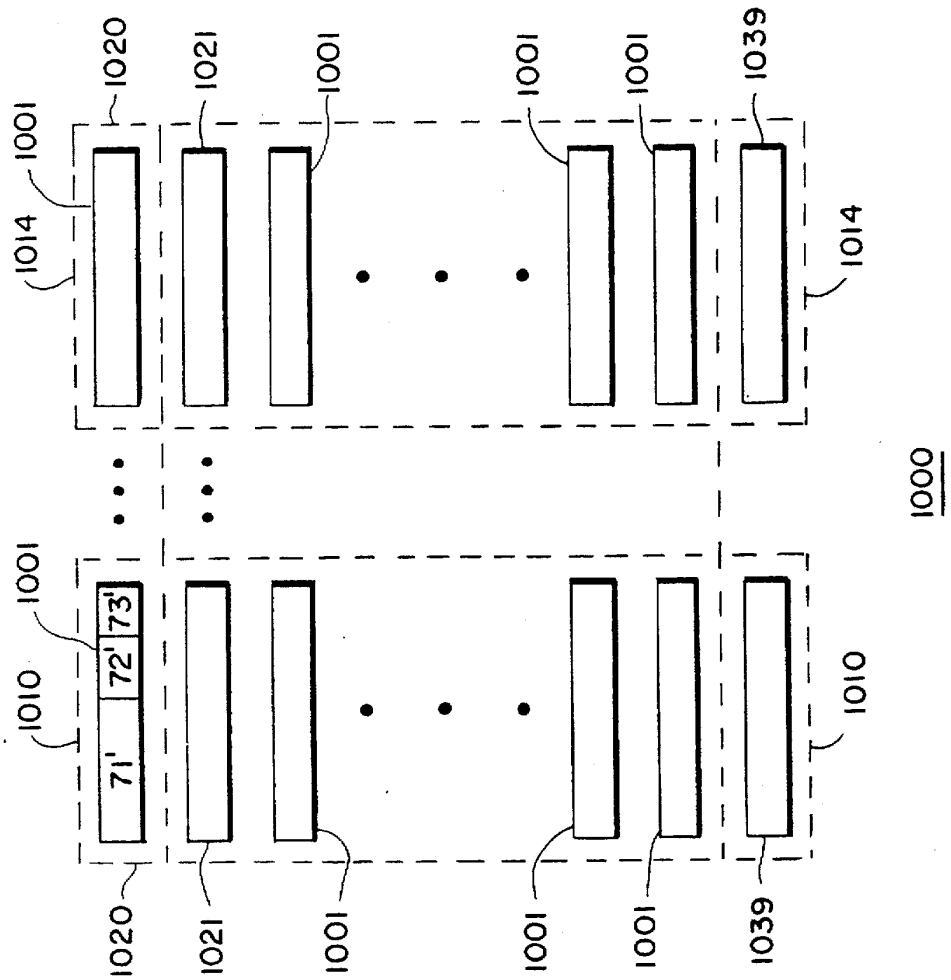

1020
1021
1001
1001
1001
1039
1001
1014
1014
1000
1001
1010
71'
72'
73'
1010
1020
1021
1001
1001
1001
1039

FIG. 10

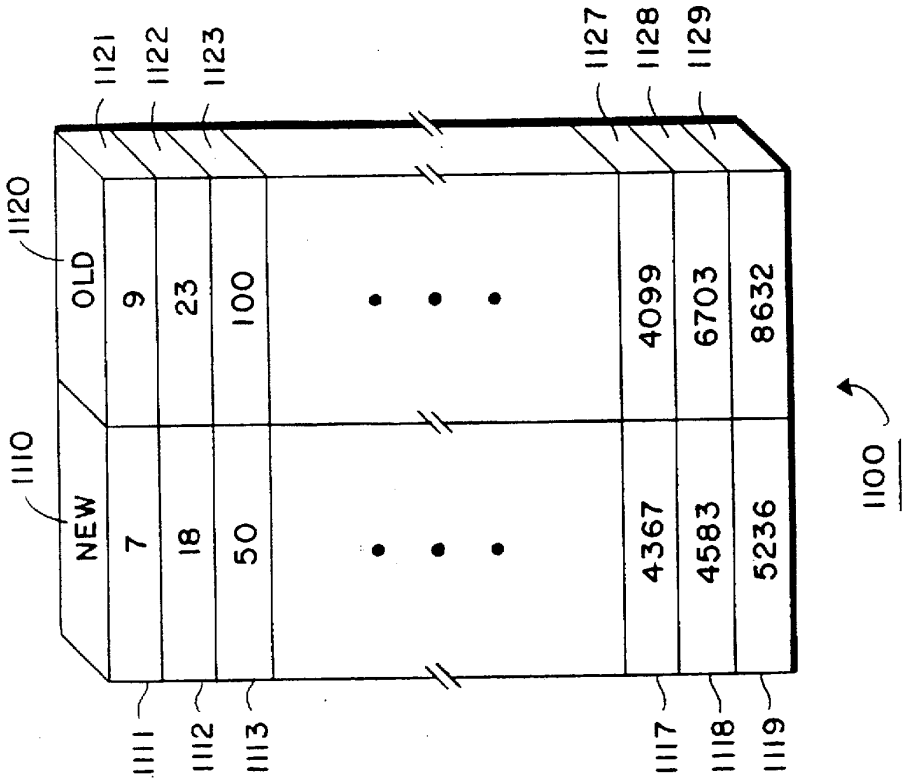

1120
1110
OLD
NEW
9
7
23
18
100
50
4099
4367
6703
4583
8632
5236
1121
1122
1123
1127
1128
1129
1111
1112
1113
1117
1118
1119
1100

FIG. 11

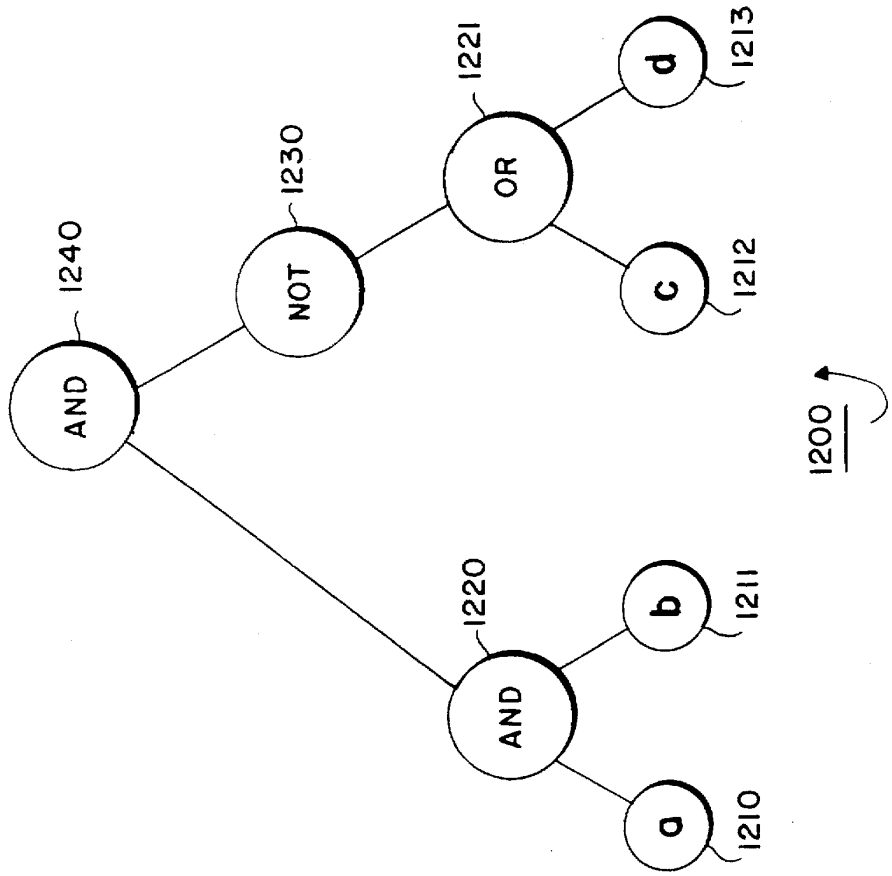

AND
1240
NOT
1230
OR
1221
AND
1220
a
1210
b
1211
c
1212
d
1213
1200

FIG. 12

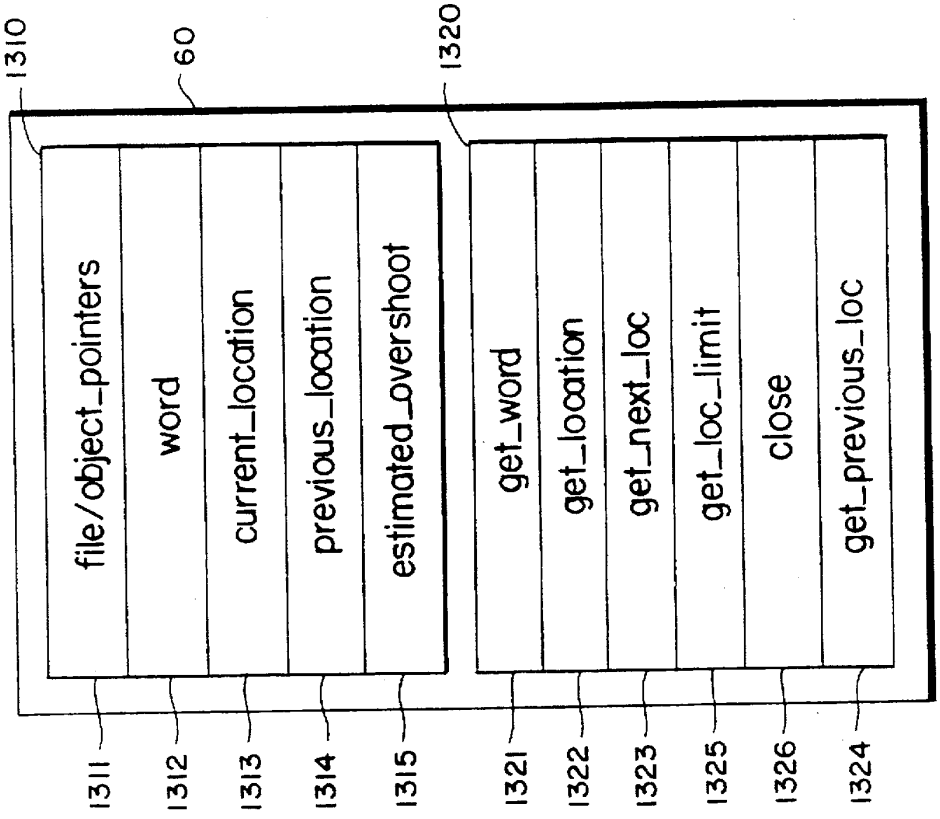

1310
60
1320
file/object_pointers
word
current_location
previous_location
estimated_overshoot
get_word
get_location
get_next_loc
get_loc_limit
close
get_previous_loc
1311
1312
1313
1314
1315
1321
1322
1323
1325
1326
1324

FIG. 13

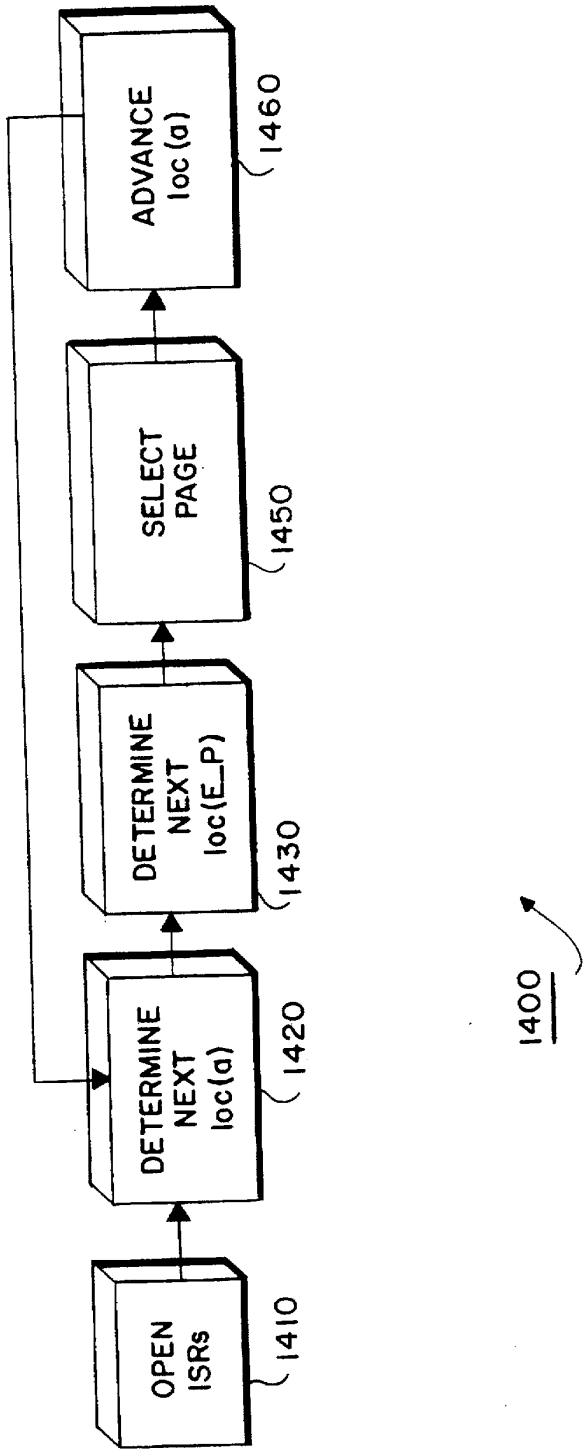

OPEN ISRs
1410
DETERMINE NEXT loc(a)
1420
DETERMINE NEXT loc(E_P)
1430
SELECT PAGE
1450
ADVANCE loc(a)
1460
1400

FIG. 14

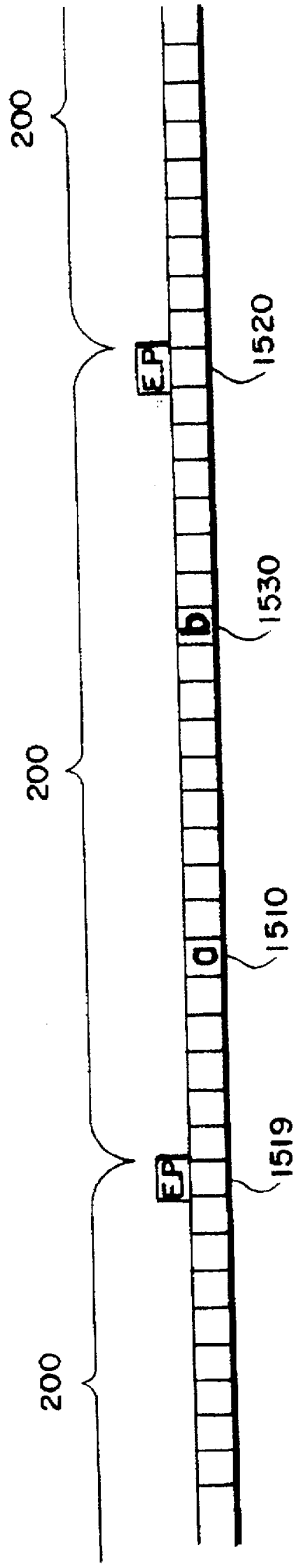


FIG.15

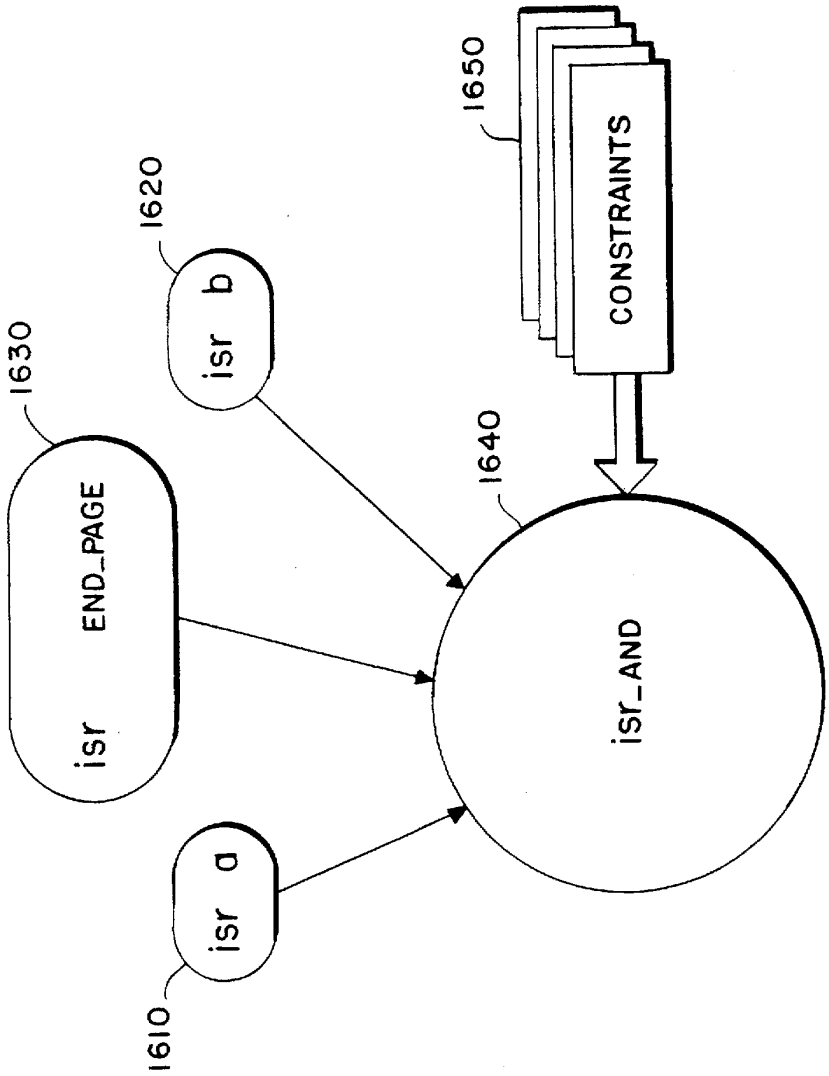

1630
isr END_PAGE
1620
isr b
1610
isr a
1640
isr_AND
1650
CONSTRAINTS

FIG. 16

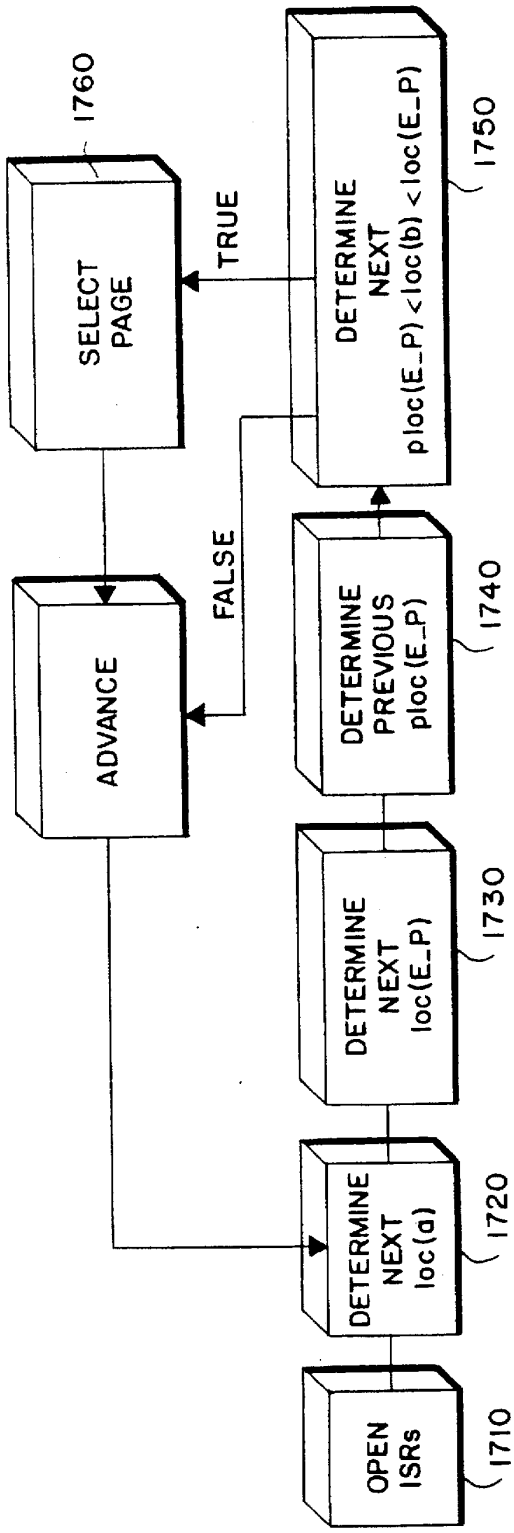

OPEN ISRs
1710
DETERMINE NEXT loc(a)
1720
DETERMINE NEXT loc(E_P)
1730
DETERMINE PREVIOUS ploc(E_P)
1740
DETERMINE NEXT ploc(E_P) < loc(b) < loc(E_P)
1750
TRUE
FALSE
ADVANCE
SELECT PAGE
1760

FIG. 17

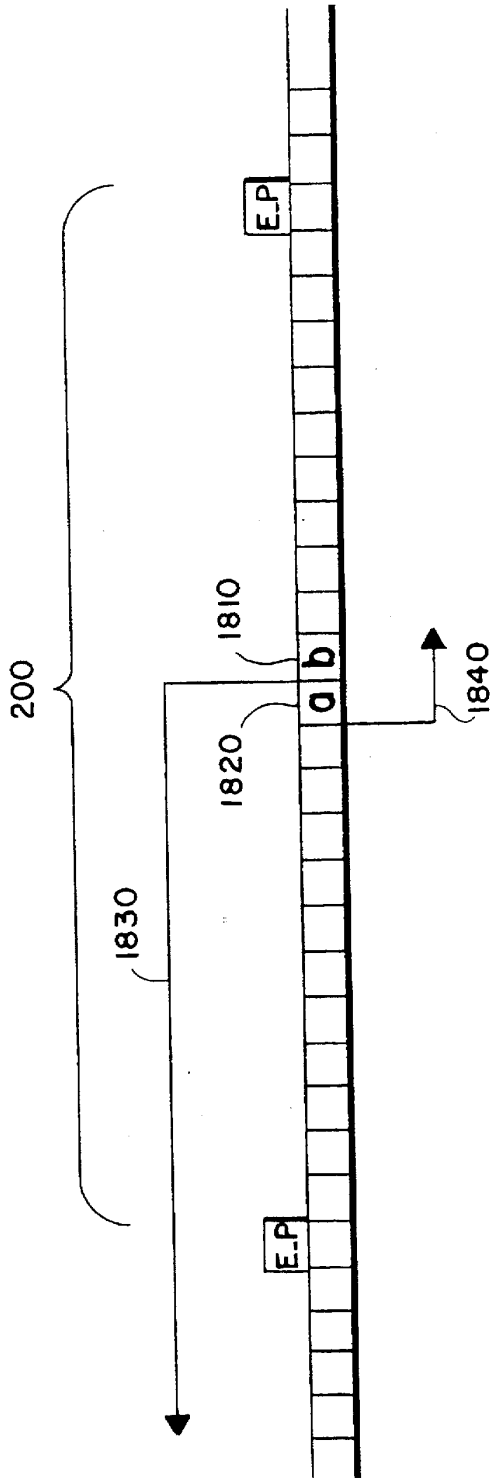


FIG. 18

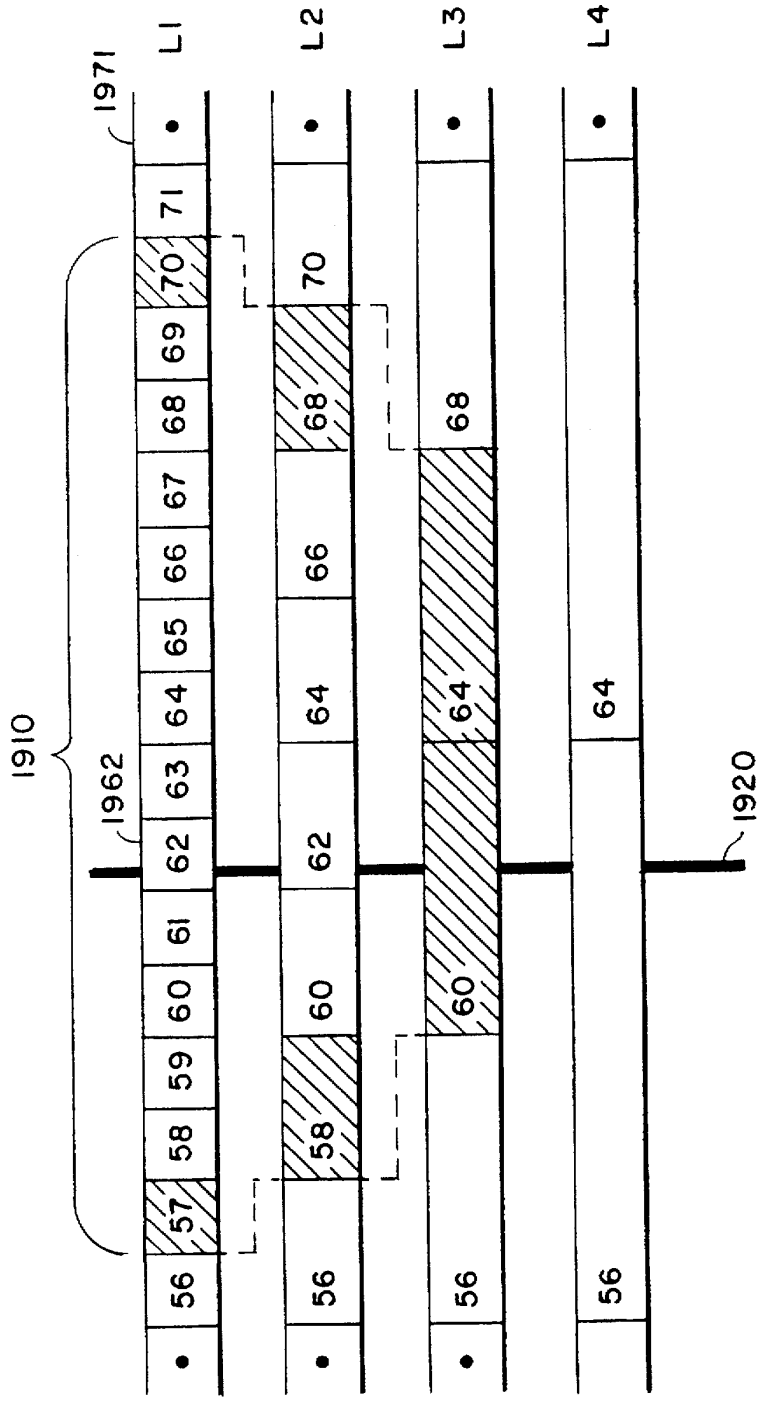

1910
1962
1971
1920
L1
L2
L3
L4
56
57
58
59
60
61
62
63
64
65
66
67
68
69
70
71

FIG. 19

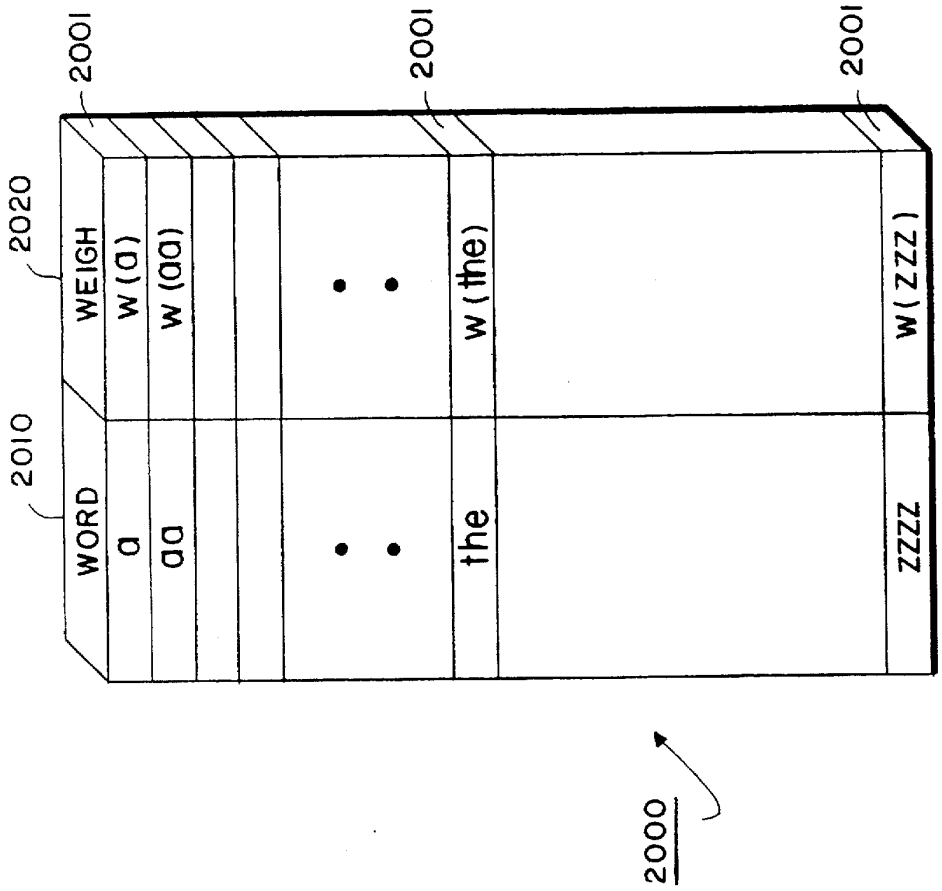

2000
2010
2020
2001
2001
2001
WORD
WEIGH
a
w(a)
aa
w(aa)
the
w(the)
zzzz
w(zzz)

FIG. 20

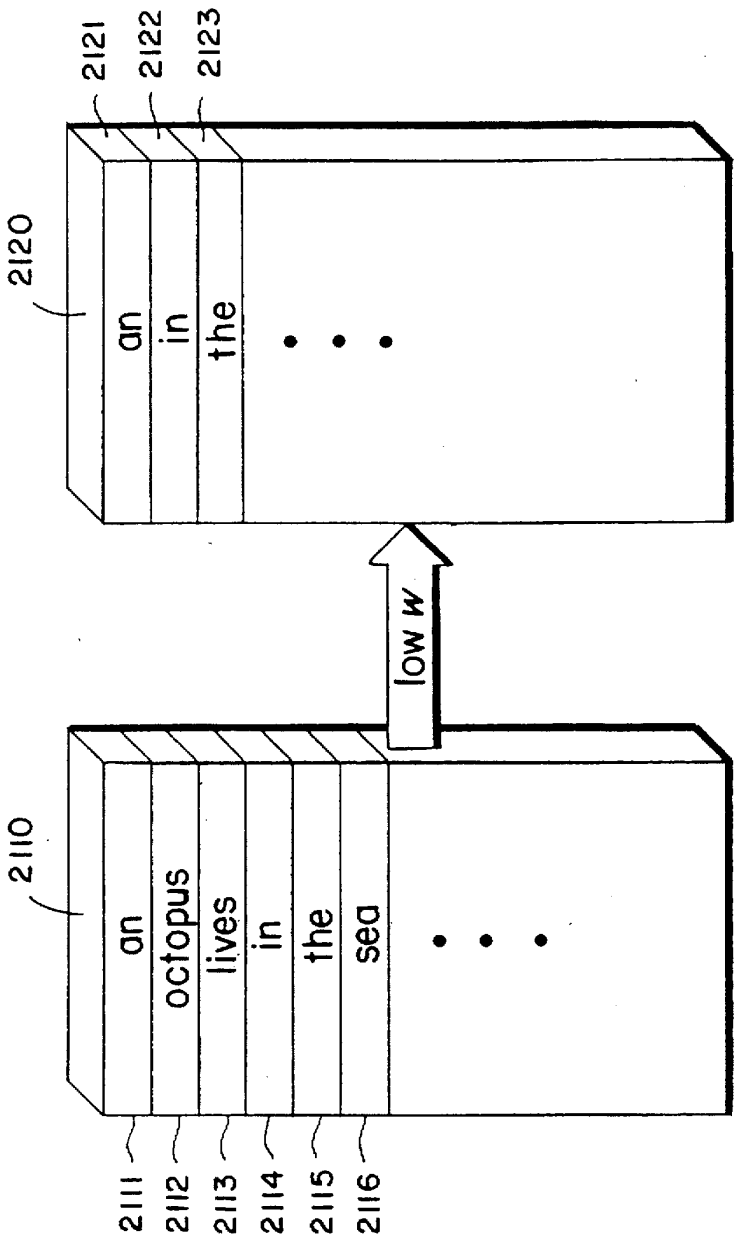

2110
an
octopus
lives
in
the
sea
2111
2112
2113
2114
2115
2116
low w
2120
an
in
the
2121
2122
2123

FIG. 21

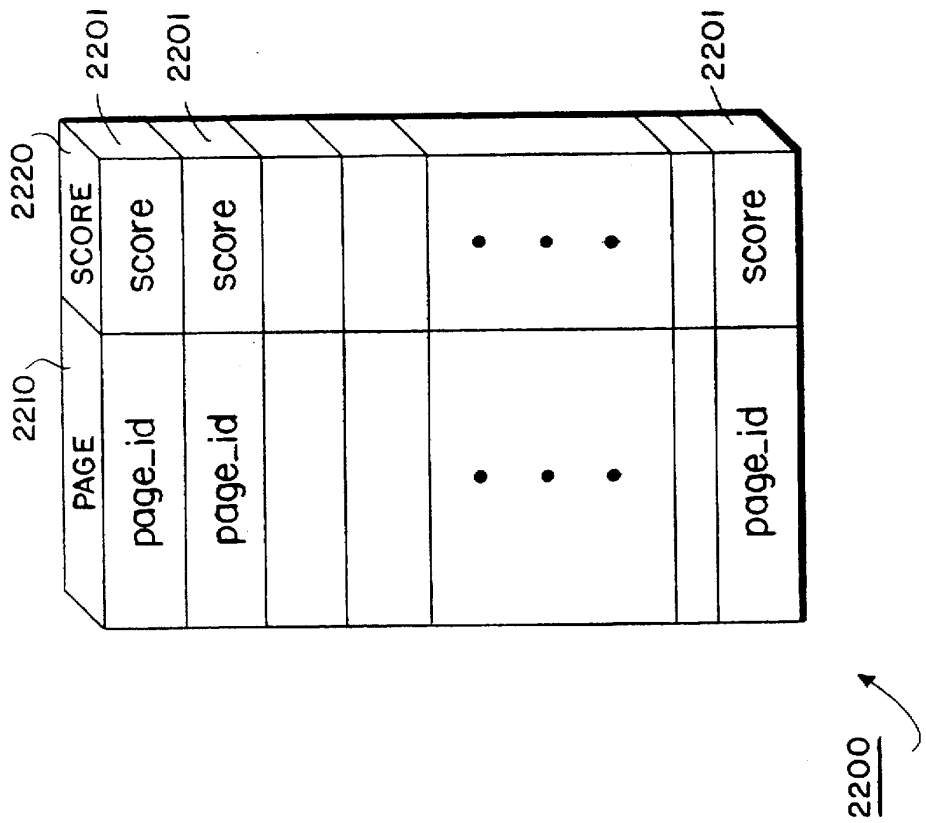

2220
2210
PAGE
SCORE
page_id
score
page_id
score
page_id
score
2201
2201
2201
2200

FIG. 22

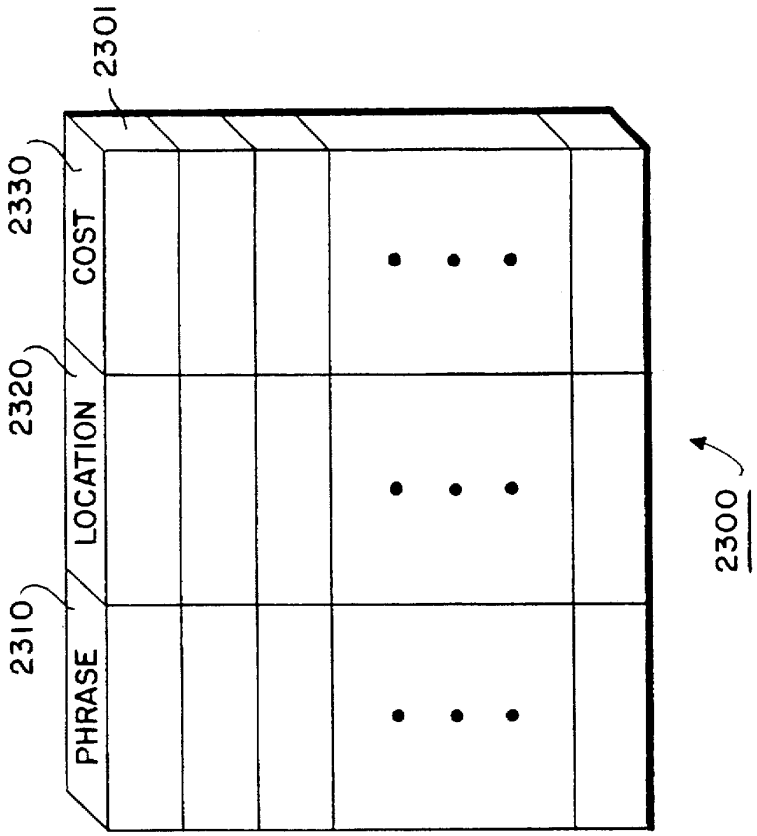
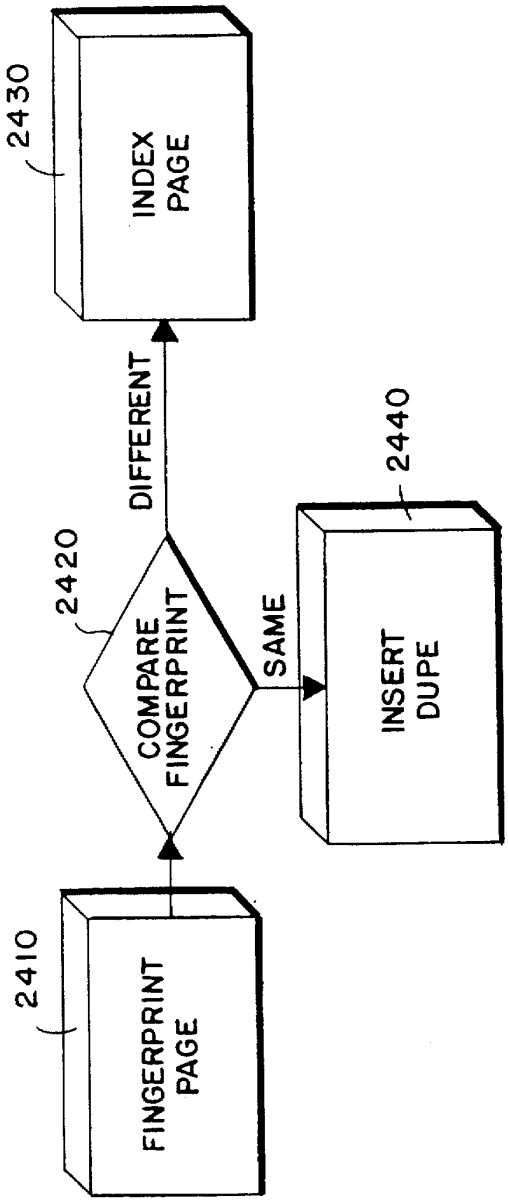


FIG. 23


2410
FINGERPRINT PAGE
2420
COMPARE FINGERPRINT
DIFFERENT
SAME
2430
INDEX PAGE
2440
INSERT DUPE

2400

FIG. 24

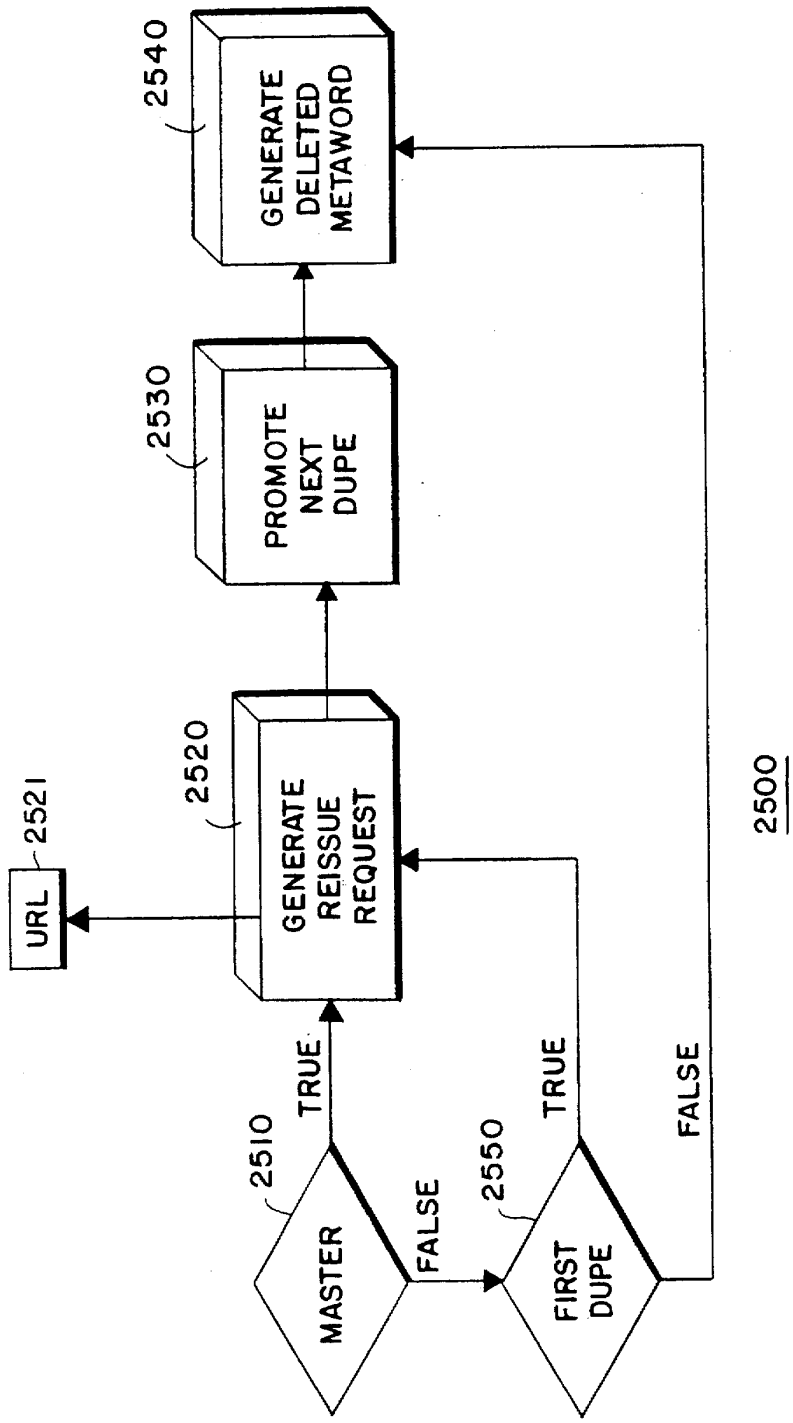

2540
GENERATE DELETED METAWORD
2530
PROMOTE NEXT DUPE
2520
GENERATE REISSUE REQUEST
2521
URL
2510
MASTER
TRUE
FALSE
2550
FIRST DUPE
TRUE
FALSE
2500

FIG. 25

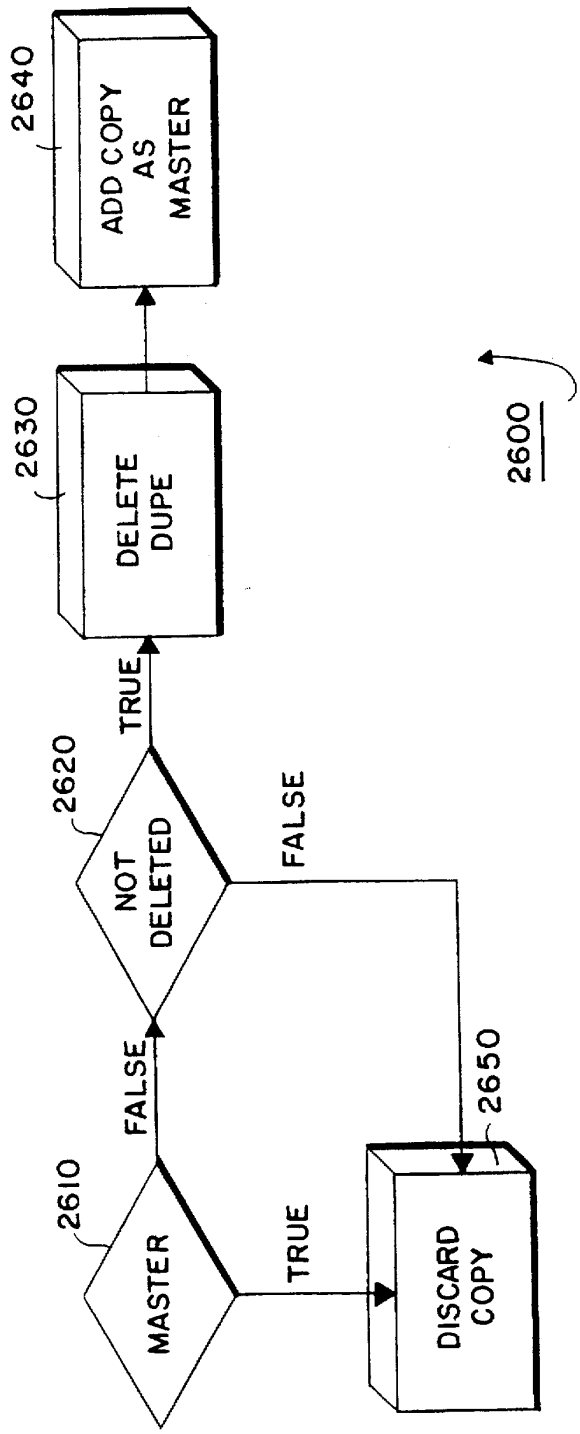

2610
MASTER
FALSE
TRUE
2620
NOT DELETED
TRUE
FALSE
2630
DELETE DUPE
2640
ADD COPY AS MASTER
2650
DISCARD COPY
2600

FIG. 26

MODIFIED COLLECTION FREQUENCY RANKING METHOD

FIELD OF THE INVENTION

This invention relates generally to ranking records of a database which have been located by searching an index to the database, and more particularly to ranking the records for presentation based on the content of the records.

BACKGROUND OF THE INVENTION

In the prior art, it has been well known that computer systems can be used to index databases, and to search the index to locate records qualified by queries. In recent years, a unique distributed database has emerged in the form of the World-Wide-Web (Web). The database records of the Web are in the form of pages accessible via the Internet. Here, tens of millions of pages are accessible by anyone having a communications link to the Internet.

The pages are dispersed over millions of different computer systems all over the world. Users of the Internet constantly desire to locate specific pages containing information of interest. The pages can be expressed in any number of different character sets such as English, French, German, Spanish, Cyrillic, Kanakata, and Mandarin. In addition, the pages can include specialized components, such as embedded "forms," executable programs, JAVA applets, and hypertext.

Moreover, the pages can be constructed using various formatting conventions, for example, ASCII text, Postscript files, html files, and Acrobat files. The pages can include links to multimedia information content other than text, such as audio, graphics, and moving pictures.

Search engines have been provided to allow users to locate Web pages of interest. These search engines typically have a query interface where the users specify terms and operators which they want to use to qualify pages.

There are a number of problems with presenting pages located by searching an index to the Web. First, the number of pages accessible through the Web is very large, so the number of qualifying pages is going to be correspondingly large. In addition, many Web users are unsophisticated, so there is a large likelihood that queries will be loosely specified yielding many pages which may not be of interest to the users. The number of qualifying pages may number in the tens of thousands.

It is desired to present search results in a usable manner so that users are not burdened with perusing all qualifying records.

SUMMARY OF THE INVENTION

The invention provides a computer implemented method for searching an index to locate records of a database. The searching is based on a query and scores assigned to located records qualified by the query.

The records of the database are indexed by storing index entries in a memory. Each index entry includes a word entry representing a unique portion of information of the database, and one or more location entries indicating where the unique portion of information represented by the word entry occurs in the records of the database. While indexing the database, a weight is assigned to each index entry to indicate the relative frequency of occurrence of the portion of information corresponding to the index entry.

A query for searching the index is parsed into terms and operators. Each term is associated with a corresponding index entry. The index entries corresponding to the terms are sequentially searched to locate records of the database which are qualified by the terms and operators of the query. Each located record is scored according to the number of times portions of information corresponding to the terms of the query occur in each record and their associated weights. The assigning weight can be based on a difference between the number of records indexed and the number of records including the portion of information corresponding to the word entry of the index entry. The scores and identities of the located records are stored in entries of a ranking list. The ranking list has a predetermined number of entries. The entries can be ordered according to the scores.

In response to the ranking list becoming full, a determination can be made to see if any as yet unlocated records of the database could receive a score higher than one of the records identified in the ranking list based on index entries having a lowest weight. If not, then the searching can proceed only using the index entries having weights higher than index entries having the lowest weight.

BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE DRAWINGS

FIG. **1** is a block diagram of a distributed database storing multimedia information indexed and searched according to the invention;

FIG. **2** is a block diagram of a search engine including an index;

FIG. **3** is a block diagram of pages parsed by the search engine of FIG. **2**;

FIG. **4** is a block diagram of content attributes generated by the search engine;

FIG. **5** is a sequential representation of the content and attributes of the pages of FIG. **3**;

FIG. **6** is a block diagram of sequential words and their locations;

FIG. **7** is a block diagram of a compression of words;

FIG. **8** is a block diagram of a compression of locations;

FIG. **9** is a logical to physical mapping of the index;

FIG. **10** is a block diagram of an array of files used to arrange the index;

FIG. **11** is a block diagram of a remapping table used while deleting entries;

FIG. **12** is a tree representation of a query processed by the search engine;

FIG. **13** is a block diagram of an index stream reader object;

FIG. **14** is a flow diagram of a query search using the logical OR operator;

FIG. **15** is a linear representation of a page to be searched using the logical AND operator;

FIG. **16** is a flow diagram of basic index stream reader objects linked to each other by a compound stream reader which is subject to constraints;

FIG. **17** is a flow diagram of a query search using the logical AND operator;

FIG. **18** is a linear representation of adjacent words;

FIG. **19** is a block diagram of range-based metaword values;

FIG. **20** is a table for storing word weights;

FIG. **21** is a block diagram of query word lists;

FIG. **22** is a block diagram of a page ranking list;

FIG. **23** is a block diagram of a query phrase log;

FIG. 24 shows a process for detecting duplicate pages;

FIG. 25 is a flow diagram of a process for deleting pages; and

FIG. 26 is a flow diagram of a process for indexing reissue pages.

DETAILED DESCRIPTION OF PREFERRED EMBODIMENTS

Introduction

FIG. 1 shows a distributed computer system **100** including a database to be indexed. The distributed system **100** includes client computers **110** connected to server computers (sites) **120** via a network **130**. The network **130** can use Internet communications protocols (IP) to allow the clients **110** to communicate with the servers **120**.

The client computers **110** can be PCs, workstations, or larger or smaller computer systems. Each client **110** typically includes one or more processors, memories, and input/output devices. The servers **120** can be similarly configured. However, in many instances server sites **120** include many computers, perhaps connected by a separate private network. In fact, the network **130** may include hundreds of thousands of individual networks of computers.

Although the client computers **110** are shown separate from the server computers **120**, it should be understood that a single computer can perform the client and server roles.

During operation of the distributed system **100**, users of the clients **110** desire to access information records **122** stored by the servers **120** using, for example, the World-Wide-Web (WWW), or in short the "Web." The records of information **122** can be in the form of Web pages **200**. The pages **200** can be data records including as content plain textual information, or more complex digitally encoded multimedia content, such as software programs, graphics, audio signals, videos, and so forth.

It should be understood that although this description focusses on locating information on the World-Wide-Web, the system can also be used for locating and indexing information via other wide or local area networks (WANs and LANs), or information stored in a single computer using other communications protocols.

The clients **110** can execute Web browser programs **112**, such as NAVIGATOR, EXPLORER or MOSAIC to locate the pages or records **200**. The browser programs **112** allow the users to enter addresses of specific Web pages **200** to be retrieved. Typically, the address of a Web page is specified as a Universal Resource Locator (URL). In addition, once a page has been retrieved, the browser programs **112** can provide access to other pages or records by "clicking" on hyperlinks to previously retrieved Web pages. Such hyperlinks provide an automated way to enter the URL of another page, and to retrieve that page.

In order to identify pages of interest among the millions of pages which are available on the Web, a search engine **140** is provided. The search engine **140** includes means for parsing the pages, means for indexing the parsed pages, means for searching the index, and means for presenting information about the pages **200** located.

The search engine **140** can be configured as one or more clusters of symmetric multi-processors (P) **142**, for example, Digital Equipment Corporation ALPHA processors, memories (M) **144**, disk storage devices **146**, and network interfaces **148** are connected to each other by high speed communications buses **143**. Although, the ALPHA processors **142** are 64 bit RISC processors, the search engine **140** can be any type of processor which has sufficient processing power and memories, including 32 bit CISC processors. For smaller databases, the search engine can be run on the computer storing the database.

Search Engine Overview

FIG. 2 shows the components of the search engine **140**. The search engine **140** can include an automated Web browser **20**, a parsing module **30**, an indexing module **40**, a query module **50**, index stream readers (ISR) **60**, an index **70**, and a maintenance module **80**.

Browsing

During the operation of the search engine **140**, the automated browser **20**, sometimes known as a "robot," periodically sends out requests **21** over the network **130**. The requests **21** include URLs. In response to the requests **21**, the sites **120** return the records or pages **200** to the browser **20**. The browser **20** can locate pages by following hyperlinks embedded in previously acquired pages. The browser **20** is described more completely in U.S. patent application Ser. No. 08/571,748 filed by Louis M. Monier on Dec. 13, 1995 entitled "System and Method for Locating Pages on the World-Wide-Web."

Parsing

The pages **200** can be presented to the parsing module **30** as they are received or in batches which may amount to ten thousand pages or more, at one time. The parsing module **30** breaks down the portions of information of the pages **200** into fundamental indexable elements or atomic pairs **400**. As described in greater detail below, each pair **400** comprises a word and its location. The word is a literal representation of the parsed portion of information, the location is a numeric value. The pages are parsed in order of the location of the words such that a location of the first word of a next page follows a location of the last word of a previous page. The parsing module **30** assigns increasing integer numbers to the locations, although other sequential orderings are also possible.

Indexing

The indexing module **50** sorts the pairs **400**, first in word order, and second in location order. The sorted pairs **400** are used to generate the index **70** of the words of the pages **200**. The index **70** is described in greater detail below. Abstractly, the index **70** can be pictured as comprising a compressed data structures **71**, and summary data structures **72–73**. The compressed data structure **71** is a compression of the word location pairs **400**. The data structure **72** is a summary of the structure **71**, and the data structure **73** is a summary of data structure **72**. The structures **71** and **72** can be stored on disk, and the structure **73** can be stored in DRAM.

In the data structure **71**, each word representing a unique portion of information of the pages **200** is stored only once. All of the locations which are instances of the word in the pages **200** are stored following the word. The locations follow the word in order according to their locations. The locations essentially are pointers to the parsed portions of information.

It should be understood that the number of different unique words can be well over one hundred million, since any combination of characters can form words of the pages **200**. Also, many frequently occurring words, such as the

words "the," "of," "a," etc., may appear at hundreds of millions of different locations. The extremely large size of the index **70**, and its increasing size present special processing problems.

As described below, the data structures of the index **70** are optimized for query access. This means that the word-location pairs **400** are compressed to reduce storage, and uncompressing is minimized in order to preserve processor cycles during searching. Furthermore, the data structures of the index **70** also allow concurrent maintenance of the index **70** to delete old entries and to add new entries while queries are processed.

Querying

Users interact with the index **70** via the query module **50** by providing queries **52**. Users can be located remotely or locally with respect to the search engine **140**. The terms of a query can include words and phrases, e.g., multiple words inclosed in quotation marks ("). The terms can be related by Boolean operators such as OR, AND, and NOT to form expressions. The queries **52**, as described in greater detail below, may also include terms which express ranges of values, or approximate locations of words to each other.

During operation, the query module **50** analyzes the queries **52** to generate query requests **54**. The query requests invoke a small number of basic types of object-oriented index stream readers (ISRs) **60**, described below. The index stream readers **60** sequentially scan the data structures **71–73** in a manner to minimize the amount of data that need to be uncompressed.

As a result of searching the index **70** by the stream reader objects **60**, addresses **56** of pages which are qualified by the queries are identified. A presentation module **58** delivers information **59** about the qualifying pages to the users. The information **59** can include a summary of the pages located. Using the summary information, the users can access the identified pages with Web browsing software, or other techniques.

Maintaining

As described below, the maintenance module **80** is used to add and delete information of the index **70**. Modified pages can be handled as a delete and add operation. A particular problem solved is to allow substantially continuous access to the index **70** by millions of users each day as the index **70** is concurrently updated. The maintenance module **80** also effectively deals with duplicate Web pages containing substantially identical content.

The components of the search engine **140** are now described in greater detail.

The Parsing Module

Words

As shown in FIG. **3**, the records or pages **200** are parsed by the parsing module **30** in the order that pages are received from the browser **20**. The parsing module **30**, in a collating order of the sequential locations of the content, breaks the information of the pages **200** down into discrete indexable elements or individual "words" **300**. Each word **300** is separated from adjacent words by a word separator **210** indicated by a circle. In the index **70** each word is stored as a "literal" or character based value. It should be understood, that the terms page **200**, word **300**, and separator **210** are used to represent many different possible content modalities and data record specifications.

Pages

A page **200** can be defined as a data record including a collection of portions of information or "words" having a common database address, e.g., a URL. This means that a page can effectively be a data record of any size, from a single word, to many words, e.g., a large document, a data file, a book, a program, or a sequence of images.

In addition, the digitized information which is stored by the records or pages **200** can represent a number of different presentation modalities. The page **200** can be expressed using the ASCII, or other character sets such as iconic, scientific, mathematical, musical, Hebrew, Cyrillic, Greek, Japanese.

On the Web, it has become common to represent information using a Hyper Text Markup Language (html). In this case, the pages can include other "marks" which indicate how the "words" of the page are to be processed and presented. Pages can include programs, for example JAVA applets, which may require specialized parsing. The information of some pages can be expressed in a programming language, for example, Postscript (.ps), or Acrobat (.pdf) files. The pages **200** can encode multimedia items including digitized graphic, audio or video components.

The pages or data records **200** do not necessarily need to be Web pages. For example, the pages can be composed of portions of information of other databases, for example, all of the case law in the United States. Even if such pages do contain hyperlinks, they may contain other types of links. In this context, the links mean references in one document which can be used to find other documents. Although hyperlinks are one example, many other types of links may be processed.

For example, in court cases, the "links" are citations to other cases. The "pages" can be the patents of the United States Patent and Trademark Office. Now the "links" can be the prior art references cited.

Additionally, the pages **200** can be electronic mail memos stored in PCs. For "audio" pages, the words may be composed of encoded phonemes. In any case, no matter what the modality of the underlying information, the words are always represented in the index as literals.

Word Separators

Textual words are a concatenation of numbers and characters, for example "the", and "ombαT23." In one possible parsing technique, characters other than numbers or letters are considered word separators **210**. For example, blanks and characters such as "@#.<?~,%" are word separators. Word separators **210** are not indexed.

It should be understood that the parsing module **30** can be provided with a first list of literal characters or marks which can form words, and a second list of marks, or other criteria, e.g., white space, which are to be considered as separators **210**. Separate lists can be maintained in the search engine **140** for different types of pages.

In the cases where a programming language such as Postscript or Acrobat is used to represent information to be indexed, the parsing module **30** can detect word separation by the language instructions which are responsible for generating discrete words.

The parsing of the pages into words and locations can be context independent or context dependent. For example, if a page **200** is known to be expressed in a script where the location of words is in another collating order, for example, from right to left, or top to bottom, the parsing can proceed accordingly.

Word and Location Pairs

In summary, each page **200** is broken down into a sequence of pairs **400** according to the collating order of the locations of the words **300**. Each pair **400** stores the word **410** and its the location **420**. The locations of the words indicate the relative order in which the parsing module identified the words **300** in the pages **200**.

Each page has a first word and a last word. For example in FIG. **3**, the first word **201** of the very first page which is parsed has an associated location "1" **211**, the next word **202** has a location "2" **212**, the last word **203** has a location "306" **213**. This means the first page has three-hundred and six indexable words.

The first word **204** of the second page has an associated location of "307." The last word **205** of the second page has a location "500" **215**. This means that second page includes 194 (500–306) words. From the perspective of the parsing module **30**, the first word of a next page is considered to be positionally adjacent to the last word of a previous page. The last word **209** of the very last page that is parsed has, for example, a location "473458219876" **209**.

The word **410** determine the value of the "content" at a particular location. As stated above, content can be represented in a variety of different modalities. For example, the word "a" may be expressed as a binary encoding of the ASCII value of "a." In one implementation, the locations **420** incrementally increase by one for each word parsed. Other sequential numbering schemes for locations can also be used.

Synonyms

Besides explicitly producing the pair [word, location] for each recognized word, the parser can also implicitly produce one or more synonymous pairs for expressly identified words. For example, if the identified word **201** on the first page is "To", in addition to producing the pair [1,To], the parsing module **30** can also produce, for the same location, the pair [1, to]. That is, the parsing module **30** produces two pairs for the same location. This step is useful to subsequently allow case insensitive searches by the query module **50**. The parsing module **50** can also select synonyms from lists maintained in language translation dictionaries.

Punctuation

If the parsing module **30** admits non-alphanumeric characters in words, additional pairs may be produced for single locations. For example, the parsing module **30** can be directed to treat punctuation immediately adjacent to letters or numbers as part of the word. For example, if the second word **202** is a concatenation of the characters "5,234,236", "023-45-3678" or "Ph.D", the characters could very well be considered to form single words.

In the case of the value "Ph.D," the parsing module **30** can produce the pairs [2, Ph], [2,.] [3, D], and [2,ph], [2,.], [3,d] to facilitate searches where the input query is any sequence of characters substantially similar to the explicitly expressed words. This allows query phrases that are specified with both precise and imprecise punctuation marks.

Accents

Furthermore, the parsing module **30** can implicitly produce additional pairs for words which include accented characters. For example the word "Ecu" can also be indexed as values "ecu," "Ecu." and "ecu," all at the same location. This allows for the searching of pages expressed in characters of one alphabet using characters of another alphabet not necessarily including the accented characters. Thus for example, a user with an "American" style keyboard can search foreign language pages.

Proper Names

The parsing module can also locate words which are likely to be related, such as proper names, e.g., James Joyce. If two adjacent words both begin with an upper case letter, in addition to producing a pair for the first name and the last name, a pair can also be produced which is a concatenation of the first and last names. This will speed up processing of queries which include proper names as terms.

Attributes and Metawords

As shown in FIG. **4**, in addition to recognizing locations and words, the parsing module **30** also detects and encodes attributes about the content of the records or pages. Attributes can be associated with entire pages, portions of pages **230**, **240**, **250**, and **260**, e.g., fields, or individual words **203**.

Attribute values, as defined herein, are expressed as "metawords." Metawords are also stored as literals, this means that the search engine **140** treats metawords the same as words. Therefore, a metaword is associated with a location to form a pair [metaword, location]. For a record attribute, which relate to an entire record, the location of the last word of the page is associated with the attribute. For field attributes which relate to a portions of the record, the first and last word of the fields are associated with the attributes.

For example, the page **200** of FIG. **4** can have associated page attributes **250**. Page attributes **250** can include □ADDRESS□ **251**, □DESCRIPTION□ **252**, □SIZE□ **253**, □DATE□ **254**, □FINGERPRINT□ **255**, □TYPE□ **256**, and □END_PAGE□ **257**, for example. The symbol "□," represents one or more characters which cannot be confused with the characters normally found in words, for example "space," "underscore," and "space" (sp_sp).

The ADDRESS **251** encodes, for an exemplary Web page, the URL. The DESCRIPTION **252** may be the first two or three lines of the page. This information can help a user identify a page that would be of interest.

The SIZE **253** can be expressed as the number of bytes of a page. The size information can help a user determine the amount of bandwidth needed to "download" the page, and the amount of memory needed to store the page. The DATE **254** can be the date that the page was generated, or last modified. In the case of multiple versions of extant pages, the most recent page may be more significant to users. The SIZE and DATE attributes can be searched using range-based values.

For example, a search can request to locate information of pages with a certain size or date range. Therefore, these attributes are stored in a specialized (power-of-two) manner as multiple attributes, described in greater detail below.

The FINGERPRINT **255** represents the entire content of the page. The fingerprint **255** can be produced by applying one-way polynomial functions to the digitized content. Typically, the fingerprint is expressed as an integer value. Fingerprinting techniques ensure that duplicate pages having identical content have identical fingerprints. With very high probabilities, pages containing different content will have different fingerprints.

The TYPE attribute **256** may distinguish pages having different multimedia content or formatting characteristics.

Other types of page related attributes which have been determined to be useful are □BEGIN_BIG□ **261**, and □END_BIG□ **262**. Here, "BIG" means that the number of words of the page exceeds some predetermined threshold value, e.g. 16K. By making the □BEGIN_BIG□ and □END_BIG□ attribute values a searchable metaword, traversal of the index **70** can be accelerated if the number of words in most pages is less than the threshold value, as explained in greater detail below. The locations of these two attributes are respectively associated with the first and last words of big pages.

End Page

For each page, the parsing module also synthesizes an □END_PAGE□ attribute **257**. The □END_PAGE□ attribute **257** is used extensively by the index stream readers **60** of FIG. **2** to converge on pages containing words or phrases specified in the queries **52**. This is due to the fact that the ultimate selection criteria for qualifying content information is page specific. By inserting the □END_PAGE□ attribute value in the index **70** as a metaword, searching the index as described below can be more efficient.

The locations associated with attributes may be locations of the words expressing the content to which the attributes apply. For example, if the last word **203** of the page **200** of FIG. **4** has a location **306**, as shown in FIG. **3**, then in addition to producing the pair [**306**, word], the parsing module **30** also produces the attribute pair [**306**, □END_PAGE□]. This mean locations associated with this metaword clearly define page boundaries. Alternatively, the attributes can have the first and last locations of the set of words (field) associated with the attributes.

Explicit Page Breaks

During parsing, it is possible to allocate one or more locations between the pages as the locations where attributes are stored. For example, one or more locations could be set aside between the last location of a previous page and the first location of a next page for indicating page related attribute values.

Title

Attribute values or metawords can be generated for portions of a page. For example, the words of the field **230** may be the "title" of the page **200**. In this case the "title" has a first word **231** and a last word **239**. In "html" pages, the titles can be expressly noted. In other types of text, the title may be deduced from the relative placement of the words on the page, for example, first line centered. For titles, the parsing module **30** can generate a □BEGIN_TITLE□ pair and an □END_TITLE□ pair to be respectively associated with the locations of the first and last words of the title.

Cite

The field **240** can be identified by the parsing module **30** as a citation field expressed, for example in italic, underlined, or quoted characters. In this case, the parsing module can generate □BEGIN_CITE□ and □END_CITE□ metawords to directly index the title.

Tables

The field **250** can have table attributes. In this case, the vertical and horizontal arrangement of the words may determine the collating order of their locations.

Graphics

The field **260** may be identified as a graphic symbol. In this case, the attribute values or metawords can encode, for example, □BEGIN_GRAPHIC, and □END_GRAPHIC□.

Other Attributes

Attributes can also be associated with individual words, for example, a word may have an □AUTHOR□ attribute, a □LINK□, or an □AUDIO□ attribute, and so forth. Other indexable attributes can include image tags, e.g., "comet.jpg," host (site) names, e.g., "digital.com," or Web newsgroup, "rec.humor," or user specified attributes.

The Productions of the Parsing Module

FIG. **5** abstractly shows a view of the words and metawords of the pages **200** as produced by the parsing module **30**. The parsing module **30** produces a sequence of pairs **500** in a collating order according to the locations of the words **300** of the various pages **200**. Some of the words may also cause the parsing module **30** to generate synonymous words (S) **510** for the same location. Metawords (M) **520** are generated to describe page, field, or word related attributes.

The Indexing Module

As stated above, the indexing module **40** generates an index **70** of the content of the records or pages **200**. The internal data structures **71–73** of the index **70** are now described first with reference to FIG. **6**.

It should be noted, that in the following description, the term "word" is used to include both words and metawords as defined above, unless expressly noted otherwise. Making words and metawords substantially indistinguishable as literals greatly improves the efficiencies of the data structures and processing steps of the search engine **140**.

In order to prepare the pairs **400** to be indexed, the pairs are sorted first in word order, and second in location order.

Sequential Fully Populated Word and Location Entries

In the compressed data structure **71**, as shown in FIG. **6**, a word entry **700** of a first index entry **600**, e.g., the literal "abc," is followed by the locations **800** where the word **700** occurs. The word **700** is stored as one or more 8-bit bytes. The bytes which comprises the word are followed by a terminating byte **701** having a zero value.

Each location entry **800** is expressed as one or more bytes. The last location entry for a particular word includes a zero byte **801** as a terminator. In the data structure **71**, the last location of a word is immediately followed by the next index entry including the word entry **702**, e.g., the literal "abcxy," and its locations.

In an index of the Web, the word "the" might appear at hundreds of millions of different locations. Therefore, in the index **70**, the entry for the word "the" is followed by millions of location entries. Altogether, the search engine **140** may include hundreds of millions of different words entries. In addition, as the number of pages of the Web increase, so does the size of the index **70**.

Therefore, the search engine **140** uses a number of different compressing techniques to decrease the amount of storage required for the index. In addition, summarizing techniques are used to reduce the processing requirements while searching the compressed data of the index.

Compressing Word Entries

FIG. **7** shows a prefix compressing technique which can be used to map from words **710** to compressed words **720**. Recall that the index maintains the words in a collating order of their values. If the first possible indexed word has a value

"a," then the compressing yields one or more bytes representing the value of the character "a", followed by a zero byte **713**.

The next indexed word **714**, e.g., "aa" may have some prefix characters in common with the preceding word. In this case, the compressing indicates the number of common prefix characters **715**, e.g., "1" followed by the different postfix characters **716**, followed by the terminating zero byte **717**, and so forth. For example, the word "abcxy" **719** has three prefix characters in common with the previously encoded word "abc" **718** and the different characters are "xy." If a word has no prefix characters in common with a preceding word, then the word is encoded as for the first word.

Compressing Location Entries

FIG. **8** shows a delta value compressing technique which can be applied to the locations **800** of FIG. **6**. The technique takes advantage of the fact that frequently occurring words such as "the," "of", "in," etc., are located close to each other. Therefore, compressing the locations minimizes the number of bytes consumed to express the numerous locations of common words which appear close to each other.

Each location of a word is expressed by a delta value (DV). The delta value means that the location is expressed as a relative offset in locations from a previous location. The first location for a particular word can be the offset from location "0." For example, if a first occurrence of the word "the" is at location "100", and next occurrences are at locations "130" and "135," the delta values are respectively expressed as 100, 30, and 5.

If the delta value is in the range of 0<DV<128, the DV **810** is encoded as a single byte **810** with the low order (left-most) bit **811** set to zero, see FIG. **8**. The remaining seven bits express the DV. If the DV is in the range 127<DV<16K−1, the DV encoding consists of a first byte **820** with the low order bit **821** set to a logical one to indicate that a continuation byte **830** follows. The continuation byte **830** has the high order bit **831** set to a logical zero signalling the end of the delta value encoding.

For delta values 16K or greater, the first byte **841** has the low order bit set to a one, the other bytes **842** have the high order bit set to a one, and the last byte **843** has the high order bit set to zero to indicate the end of the delta encoding for a particular location.

The compressing technique is optimized for delta values in the range of 1 to 16K−1, since the majority of delta values are expected to fall within this range. Thus, delta values in this range can be uncompressed by shifting the content of two bytes by one. Because the high order bit of the second byte is zero, no further processing, like bit clearing, is required to extract the delta value.

Scanning the Word and Location Entries

Delta value compressing as described herein allows the index stream readers **60** of FIG. **2** to "scan" the index at a great rate while uncompressing and trying to reach a target location. The most frequently occurring delta values, e.g., one and two byte delta values, only require six machine executable instructions to recover and evaluate a next location. With dual-issue processors, the index stream readers **60**, which do the bulk of the work in the search engine **140**, can process a next locations in three machine cycles. This may mean, for a 300+ MHz processor, that the stream readers could process a stream of delta values at a rate of approximately 100,000,000 locations per second.

It should be understood, that other types of loss-less compressing techniques can be used to reduce the amount of storage for the word and location entries in the compressed data structure **71** of FIG. **2**. In addition to compressing with software procedures, the compressing could also be performed by hardware means, using for example, Huffman or Lempel-Ziv codings.

The Logical and Physical Data Structure of the Index

FIG. **9** shows the data structures **71–73** of the index **70** of FIG. **2** in greater detail. The data structure **71** maps the compressed entries (words and locations) onto a physical media of the search engine **140**, e.g., the memories **144** and disk **146** of FIG. **1**. Logically, the compressed data structure **71** sequentially stores the words (and metawords) having unique (binary encoded) values in a collating order according to their values. There is a lowest valued word **906** and a highest valued word **907**. Each word is immediately followed by the set of locations (locs) **908** where the word appears in the numerous pages. The locations are stored in an increasing positional order.

Physically, the word and location entries of the compressed data structure **71** are stored in fixed size blocks **910** of disk files. The blocks **910** can be 2 KB, 4 KB, 8 KB, 16 KB, or any other size convenient for physical I/O and memory mapping. The physical media includes the disk **146** for persistent storage, and the memories **144** for volatile storage while the search engine **140** is operational.

Word and location entries are allowed to straddle block boundaries to fully populate the compressed data structure **71**. Creating the blocks **910** for an exhaustive search of the Web may take several days of continuous processing of batches of pages **200**.

Summaries of the Compressed Data Structure

As the first level compressed data structure **71** is being generated, a second level summary data structure **72** can also generated. The summary data structure **72** is generated using a sampling technique. The technique periodically "samples" the location entries **800** being placed in the compressed data structure **71**. For example, a sample is taken whenever about a hundred bytes have been written to the compressed data structure **71**. Since the average size of the location entries is approximately two bytes, a sample is taken about fifty entries.

It should be understood that the compressed data structure **71** can be sampled at higher or lower byte rates. Sampling at a higher rate improves the granularity of the summary, but increases its size, and sampling at a lower rates decreases granularity and storage.

The samples are used to generate summary entries **925** in the second level summary data structure **72**. Each summary entry **925** includes the word **926** associated with the sample, and the sampled location associated with the word. In addition, the summary entry **925** includes a pointer **928** of the next entry in the compressed data structure **71** following the sampled entry. The summary data structure **72** can also be mapped into fixed size blocks or disk files to fully populate the summary data structure **72**.

If the summary entries **925** store uncompressed words and locations, the summary data structure **72** can be searched in a non-sequential manner. For example, a binary search technique can be used on the summary data structure **72** to rapidly locate a starting point for a more fine grained

sequential search of the compressed data structure **71**. If some of the summary entries **925** are compressed, storage space can be reduced, while allowing a modified binary searches.

For example, during operation of the search engine **140**, as explained in greater detail below, the summary data structure **72** can first be searched to find a summary entry **925** having a location **927** closest to, but not greater than a target location. The pointer **928** of that summary entry can then be used as a starting address to begin scanning the compressed data structure **71**. The location **927** of the summary entry can be the base for adding the delta value of the next entry of the compressed data structure **71** referenced by the address of the summary entry.

In the event that the size of the summary data structure **72** becomes too large to store entirely in the dynamic memories **144**, the third level summary data structure **73** can dynamically be generated. For example, the summary data structure **72** can be scanned while periodically taking samples to generate the summary entries of the data structure **73**. The summary data structure **72** can be sampled at a rate which is the same or different than the sampling rate used to build the summary data structure **72**. The summary entries **925** of the third level summary data structure **73** are similar in construction to the entries of the second level. The top level summary data structure can be sized to fit entirely in the memories **144**.

As an advantage of these structures **71–73**, a very large index can be searched using a minimal number of time-consuming disk I/O operations. If all of the top level summary data structure **73** is stored in dynamic memories **144**, and the sampling rates are relatively high, e.g., one sample every hundred bytes, then at most two disk access are required to begin the sequential reading of location delta values of the compresses structure **71**.

The Maintenance Module

The index **70** is optimized for searching, hence the parsimonious compressing and summary entries. Keeping such a large index current presents special problems because this type of structure may be less suitable for conventional maintenance operation. For example, it may periodically be necessary to admit modified or new entries, and to expunge deleted entries.

Deleting a single page may require the reordering of millions of location values of the data structures of the index **70** of FIG. **9** because of "holes" left by deleted words and location entries. For any page which is deleted, all of the locations of the following pages need to be adjusted, byte by byte. For example, if a deleted page includes 888 words, the locations of the following pages need to be reduced by 888.

Adding a page presents additional complexities. For words which already have entries in the index, now locations need to be added. New unique words and their locations in the added pages need to be inserted in the index structure in their correct collating order.

A Two-Dimensional Array of Files to Store the Index

As shown in FIG. **10**, the index **70** is organized as a two-dimensional array **1000** of data structures **1001** to allow concurrent searching and maintaining of the index **70**. By having multiple data structures **1001**, the index **70** can be updated incrementally on a per data structure basis. The array **1000** includes a plurality of tiers **1010–1014** and a plurality of buckets **1020–1039**, e.g., respectively columns and rows. The dimensionality of the array **1000** is described below.

Each data structure **1001** includes for example, two disk files. One file **71'** to store a portion of the compressed data structure, and a second file **72'** for storing the corresponding summary data structures **72**. The third data structure **73** is stored in the memories **144**.

By partitioning the index **70** over the multiple data structures **1001**, the updating problems stated above are minimized since the size of the files concurrently being modified is greatly reduced. Multiple files allow small changes to be made to the index **70** without incurring too much additional maintenance overhead.

Buckets

The words (and their associated locations) are allocated to the buckets **1020–1029** according to a hash encoding of the (binary encoded value) of the words. For example, the hashing can disperse the words (and their locations) over twenty buckets **1020–1039**. The sequential ordering of the words within a particular bucket is maintained. The hashing merely serves to evenly distribute the words (and their locations) over the buckets.

By keeping the number of buckets relatively small, e.g., approximately twenty, frequently occurring words do not unnecessarily overload any one bucket. For example, the bulk of the Web pages are expressed in the English language. In English text, the word "the" normally appears about every fiftieth word. If the number of buckets was made to be larger than about fifty, one of the buckets would likely contain a disproportionate number of location entries, e.g., the locations of the word "the."

Tiers

The tiers **1010–1014** are produced as follows. Recall that the parsing of the pages **200** can proceed in batches. Each batch is encoded as one of the tiers. During parsing and indexing, a first batch of pages would produce the first tier **1010**, a next batch the next tier, etc., a fifth batch would produce the tier **1014**. The number of tiers extant at any one time is dependent on how frequently merging takes place, see below.

As additional tiers are generated, the subsequent tiers of a particular bucket essentially become extensions of previous tiers of the same bucket. That is, the locations of words in later generated tiers of a particular bucket follow the locations of words in earlier generated tiers of the same bucket.

Merging Tiers

The search engine **140** is designed to reduce the number of tiers. This produces optimum performance, since switching from one tier to another while searching the index requires higher level and more time consuming system services.

Therefore, the maintenance module **80** periodically merges a following tier with a previously generated tier. While merging tiers, the collating order of the word and location entries is preserved. In order to maximize the efficiency during a merge/sort, subsequent tiers are merged into a previous tier only if the amount of data in a subsequent (later) tier are at least as much as the data stored in the previous tier of the same bucket.

If the number of bytes in the index is N, then the time to update is N log N bound, as opposed to N^2 bound should a

single data structure be used. This makes the updating of an extremely large index that is optimized for searching tractable.

Deleting Entries

During merge/sort, deleted entries of the index are expunged. The deleting of entries proceeds as follows. Remember, all words and metawords and their locations are sequentially indexed. Therefore, deleting a page can affect a large portion of the index **70**.

Deleted pages can be detected by the automated browser **20** of FIG. **1**. For example, the browser **20** periodically searches the Web to determine if a previously indexed page is still active. If the page is gone, the browser **20** can inform the maintenance module **80**. Deleted pages can be noted in the index by attaching a "deleted" attribute to the page. The deleted attribute can have a special attribute value, for example, □DELETED□. The location associated with the deleted attribute can be the same as the location of the last word of the page to be deleted.

Once a page has a deleted status, words associated with the page are ignored during searching. Deleted pages can be identified by modifying the queries, described below, to check if a page has an associated □DELETED□ attribute.

During merge/sort, index entries of a subsequent one tier are merged with those of a previous trier of the same bucket. The union of the merged index entries are placed in a new tier having "new" locations. Deleted word or location entries are expunged.

Note, the manner in which the tiers were generated guaranties that the locations stored in a subsequent tier are an extension of the locations stored in the previous tier. In order to make the index available during merging, a location remapping table is used to map locations of the new space into equivalent locations expressed in the old space.

Remapping Table

As shown in FIG. **11**, the remapping table **1100** for the entire index **70** includes a first column **1110** of locations **1111–1119** which reflect the "new" or merged portion of the index, and a second column **1120** of "old" locations **1121–1129**. For the example mapping shown, the first entries **1111** and **1121** indicate that location "9" in the old space, is equivalent to location "7" in the new merged space, e.g., locations "7" and "8" in the old space are deleted.

During a merge/sort of the tiers of the various buckets, some of the data structures **1001** will be processed before others. This means that some files of the data structures **1001** will have their locations expressed in "new" space, and other files will still be expressed in "old" space. Therefore, associated with each data structure **1001** is an "old/new" indication.

The query module **50** treats all words as being defined in terms of locations of the old space, until all of the buckets have been converted to the new space. Therefore, while the index stream readers **60** of FIG. **2** are scanning the index **70**, locations of words found in the "new" space are mapped back to "old" space locations using the mapping table **1100**, until the merge/sort operation has completed.

In order to allow the deletion of pages to proceed in a deterministic fashion, the □DELETED□, □END_PAGE□, □BEGIN_BIG□ and □END_BIG□ attributes are hashed into a bucket whose tiers are merged last, for example, bucket **1039** of FIG. **10**. Thus, these page related attribute will not be deleted until all words of the deleted pages have been processed.

The Query Module

The operation of the search engine **140** with respect to the query module **50** and the index stream reader objects **60** is now described in greater detail. Although the FIG. **2**, shows the query module **50** interacting with users via the network **130**, it should be understood that the search engine **140** can also be configured to process locally generated queries. This would be the case where the database indexed, the client programs, the search engine **140**, and the index **70** all reside on a single computer system, e.g., a PC or workstation.

Query Expressions

Each of the queries **52** can be in the form of an expression of a query language. Terms of the expression can be a single word or metaword, multiple words, or phrases, or even parts of words. For example, the query expression can be "fruit," meaning find all pages which include at least the word "fruit." A multiple word query could be paraphrased as:

find all pages including the words "fruit" and "vegetable," meaning find pages including both the word "fruit" and the word "vegetable."

Phrase

Phrases are multiple words or characters enclosed by quotation marks, for example, "the cow jumped over the moon." In this case, a qualifying page must contain the words or characters exactly is indicated in the quoted phrase.

Partial Words

A partial stem-word can be specified with the "*" character, for example as "fruit*" to locate pages containing the words fruit, fruity, fruitful, or fruitfly, and so forth.

Query Operators

Logical

In the case where the query expression includes multiple terms, the terms can be related by operators. The operators can be the Boolean operators AND, OR, NOT.

Positional

Positional operators can include NEAR, BEFORE, and AFTER. The NEAR operator means that the a word must be within, for example, ten locations of another word. A query "a before b" specifies that the word must appear before the word "b" in the same page, and the query "a after b" means that the word "a" must appear after the word "b."

Precedence

Expressions can be formed with parenthesis to indicate processing precedence ordering. For example, the query expression "(vegetables and fruit) and (not (cheese or apples))" locates all pages that include at least the words "vegetable" and "fruit," but not the words "cheese" or "apple."

Case

In general, the parsing of the individual words of queries is similar to the parsing done by the parsing module **30**. This includes the treatment of capitalization, punctuation, and accents. Thus, a search for the word "wombat" will also locate pages with the word "WoMbat," or "wOmbAT." That is, words expressed in lower case characters will match on

any other form of the character such as upper case, accent, etc, since the query parser will produce the appropriate synonyms.

Punctuation

Since the search engine **140** generally ignores word separators, a term of the expression can be specified as an exact phrase by enclosing the characters of the phrase within quotes. For example, a query including the phrase "is the wombat lost?" must exactly match on the quoted characters.

Range-based Values

Query expressions can also include range-based terms, such as dates or sizes. For example, "1/1/95–31/12/95" means any date in the year 1995. The handling of range-based values in the index **70** is explained in greater detail below.

Parsing Queries

As shown in FIG. **12**, the query module **50** can represent the query expression "(vegetables and fruit) and (not (cheese or apples))" as a query tree **1200**. The bottom level leaf nodes **1210–1213** respectively represent the basic words "vegetables, fruit, cheese, and apple" (a,b,c,d). The AND node **1220** is applied on the words vegetable and fruit, and the OR node **1221** is applied to the words cheese and apple. The NOT node **1230** is applied on the node **1221**, and the AND node **1240** joins the two main branches of the tree **1200**.

Index Stream Reader Objects

In order to locate pages which are qualified by a query, the query module **50** communicates with the index **70** via object oriented interfaces, for example, the index stream reader objects (ISRs) **60**. Each ISR object **60** is an encapsulation of a data structure and methods which operate on the data structure. The encapsulated data structure reference portions of the index **70**, for example the files **71'**, **72'**, **73'** of the data structures **1001** of FIG. **10**. Since the query module **50** interfaces with each object via a single object "handle," the query module **50** does not need to know the internal workings of the ISRs **60**. Furthermore, the objects can be polymorphic. This means similar objects can be viewed via a common interface.

As an advantage of the index **70**, the search engine **140** can employ a very small number of basic types of stream reader objects **60**. With these ISR objects **60**, the query module **50** can resolve any query expression.

Object References

As shown in a general form in FIG. **13**, an ISR object **60** includes data references **1310** and method references **1320**. Some of the objects do not need to use all of the references. The data references **1310** can include a file/object_pointer **1311**, a word **1312**, a current_location **1313**, a previous_location **1314**, and an estimated_overshoot **1315**. The methods **1320** referenced can be get_word **1321**, get_location **1322**, get_next_loc **1323**, get_loc_limit **1325**, close, and for some objects, get_previous_loc **1324**.

Data References

The file/object_pointer **1311**, for a simple or basic object references, the files **71'**, **72'**, and **73'** of the data structures **1001**. For a complex or compound object, the pointer **1311** references other objects. The word **1312** indicates which unique word or metaword is currently being searched by the ISR object. The current_location **1313** references a current location of the word during index stream processing. The previous_location **1314** can reference, for some objects, a previously processed location.

The estimated_overshoot **1315** is described in greater detail below with respect to a compound index stream reader which determines a conjunctions of other index stream readers (isr_AND). The estimated_overshoot is used to optimize the scanning of the index by the isr_AND stream reader object.

Method References

In general, the methods of an object, if successful, produce a TRUE condition, and possibly a value. If a particular method is not performed successfully, a logical FALSE condition is returned.

Get_word

The get_word method **1321** yields the value of the word **1312**. The method **1321** can be referenced by the query module **50** as "get_word isr," where "isr" is the "handle" of the index stream reader object.

Get_loc

The get_loc method **1322** yields the current_location **1313** associated with the word of a particular index stream reader, e.g. "get_loc isr." The two methods **1321** and **1322** have no side effects on the ISRs, e.g., they return values while leaving pointers unchanged.

Get_next_location

The get_next_loc method **1323** advances the current_location **1313** to the next immediate location where the word occurs, if there is one, otherwise the method **1323** yields a logical FALSE condition.

cl Get_loc_limit

The get_loc_limit method **1325** can have a reference in the form of "get_loc_limit isr, target location, limit." That is, the get_loc_limit method **1325** takes three arguments, isr, a target location, and limit location. This method advances the current_location pointer **1313** to a next location which is at least as great as a target location, or alternatively, if that would cause the current_location **1313** to exceed the limit, the method may do nothing, and return a FALSE condition.

Close

The method close **1326** deletes the object.

Get_previous_loc

The get_previous_loc method **1324** produces the previous location of a word with respect to the current location, if there is one, otherwise a logical FALSE condition is returned. This method does not change the current-location **1313**. It should be noted, as explained below, that in the case of an isr_and an isr_not object, it is not possible to determine the previous location.

This method is useful to determine the range of locations which are part of a specific page. For example, if the index stream reader object is reading locations for the END_PAGE metaword, the current and previous locations define the range of locations of a page.

The Basic Index Stream Reader

A simple or basic isr object operates only on the location entries for one specific word. This means that advancing the current_location pointer **1313** is a relatively inexpensive operation. It should be noted that the current_location **1313** can only be advanced, and not reversed because of the delta value compression. This means, that the get_previous method **124** can only retrieve the location immediately previous to the current location.

Some query operations may be very time consuming to perform. For example, take the query:

find all pages containing "wombat," and not "a the." The word "wombat" will occur relatively infrequent. However, finding pages which do not contain the phrase "a the" can take many processing steps. Even though the phrase "a the" occurs infrequently, the words "a" and "the" independently will have a high frequency of occurrence. In this case, if the get_loc_limit method **1325** determines that advancing the current_location will be expensive, it may do nothing. Therefore, the get_loc_limit implementation, may decide not to advance the current_location **1313**, and return a FALSE condition.

As will be demonstrated, the get_loc_limit method **1325** has some important properties when applied to the index **70**. Recall, the get_loc_limit method advances the current location to a next location which is at least as great as a target location, unless that would cause the current_location to exceed the limit. This means that the get_loc_limit method can jump over intermediate locations to reach the target location where to resume the scan.

This jumping over locations can be accomplished by having the get_loc_limit method first scan the summary data structure **73**, and then the summary data structure **72** to rapidly close in on the target location. By scanning the summary data structures **73** and **72** first, the uncompressing of many delta values of the compressed data structure **71** can be skipped.

Since the index **70** has a small number of interfaces, the interfaces can be highly optimized for searching, since optimization opportunities are well localized. In addition, the same interfaces that are used for searching the index can also be used by the merge/sort operation.

Opening Basic ISR Objects

During operation of the search engine **140**, ISR objects **60** can be generated by the query module **50** with an OPEN procedure. In a basic form, the call to the OPEN procedure can be "OPEN isr x." Where "isr" indicates that an index stream reader object is requested for a valued word (or metaword) x, the OPEN procedure returns the "handle" of the object and the methods which are included with the object.

During operation, the isr x can return the locations of the word x using the method get_next_loc **1323** or the get_loc_limit method **1325**. The locations can be recovered by adding a next delta value to the value of the previously determined location. It should be understood that in the case where the index includes multiple tiers **1014**, the index stream readers sequentially progress through the tiers of the bucket into which the word x was hashed.

Opening Compound ISR Objects

The OPEN procedure can also generate index stream reader objects which relate a combination of previously opened readers. For example, the OPEN call can be of the form "OPEN isr_type (isr, . . . , isr), where isr_type can be "OR," "AND," or "NOT." and "isr, . . . , isr" are the handles of previously generated ISR objects.

For example, to perform the search for the union of the words "cheese" or "apple," the query module **50** can do the calls "OPEN isr cheese" and "OPEN isr apple," followed by OPEN isr_or (isr_cheese, isr_apple), where "isr_cheese," and "isr_apple" are the handles of the objects generated by the "OPEN isr x" calls. In this case, the methods of the isr_OR perform a merge and sort of the locations produced by the isr_cheese and isr_apple index stream objects. In other words, the isr_OR produces its output from the input of two other ISRs.

To perform the search for the conjunction of the words "vegetable" and "fruit," the calls can be "OPEN isr vegetable," "OPEN isr fruit," followed by "OPEN isr_AND (isr_vegetable, isr_fruit)". In general, ISR objects can reference any number of other ISR objects to generate an object oriented representation of, for example, the tree **1200** of FIG. **12** which logically represents an input query **52**.

Opening ISRs for Metawords

While processing a query, additional index streams can be opened for words other than those explicitly specified in the terms of a query. For example, index stream readers for the metaword attributes □END_PAGE□, and □DELETED□ are typically opened so that page specific determinations can be made, e.g., skip over the locations of deleted pages.

Finding Qualifying Pages

FIG. **14** shows a process **1400** for locating pages which contain at least one occurrence of a particular word, e.g. a query states:

find all pages containing the word "vegetable."

It should be understood that the process **1400** can be adapted to locate pages containing at least one of a set of words. In general, the process **1400** performs the search for the union of the words, e.g., "cheese," or "apple".

In step **1410**, the OPEN procedure is called to open ISRs for the word "vegetable" (a), and the metaword END_PAGE (E_P), e.g., OPEN isr a, isr E_P. In step **1420**, search the index **70** to determine a next location for the word a, e.g., determine loc(a) using the get_next_loc method of the isr_a object. Once the next occurrence of the word a has been located, determine the location (loc(E_P)) of an END_PAGE metaword which is at least loc(a) using the get-loc-limit, step **1430**. In step **1450**, select the page identified by loc(E_P) as a qualified page. Advance the location for the a stream to be at least one greater than loc(E_P), and repeat step **1420** until the end of the a stream is reached and all pages including at least one occurrence of the word a have been selected.

AND Index Stream Reader

An operation of the index stream readers **60** with respect to the logical AND operation is described with reference to FIGS. **15–17**. For example with reference to FIG. **15**, a user desires to locate pages **200** including at least one occurrence **1510** of the word (or metawords) a and at least one occurrence **1530** of the word (or metaword) b. This could be expressed in a query as:

find all pages containing the words "vegetable" and "fruit."

As shown in FIG. **16**, open basic readers isr a **1610**, isr b **1620**, isr E_P **1530** for the metaword □END_PAGE□, as

well as a compound isr_AND **1540** logically linking the ISRs **1610**, **1620**, and **1630**, step **1710** of process **1700** of FIG. **17**. After, the index stream readers have been opened, the methods of the isr_AND reader are referenced to perform the search. This will cause the methods of the basic stream readers linked by the isr_AND object to be referenced to find locations for the specified words.

Index Stream Reader Constraints

The isr_AND object **1640** is different from the other ISR objects in that it operates in conjunction with one or more "constraints" **1650**. As defined herein, constraints give the isr_AND objects a powerful mechanism to rapidly scan through multiple location streams.

Recall, each unique word of the index is associated with one set of incrementally increasing locations, e.g., a location stream. Also recall, scanning locations of the compressed data structure **71** of FIG. **9** requires the sequential reading of each byte of every location for a particular word; for many words this can be millions of locations. This is required because of the delta value encodings. A next location can only be determined from a previous location.

Constrained Unidirectional Scanning

Because of the manner in which the locations are compressed, scanning the compressed data structure **71** can only proceed in one direction, without backing up. If the index **70** is searched at a lowest level, every byte must be read in sequential order. However, the sampled entries of the summary data structures **72–73** can be searched while skipping over many locations. In fact, the summary data structures can be processed by methods more efficient than sequential searching, for example, binary searching methods.

The constraints **1650** enable low-level (inexpensive) procedures to quickly traverse locations by first using the summary data structures **72–73** and then the compressed data structure **71** to reach a desired target location without having to invoke higher level (expensive) procedures, or uncompressing an excessive number of delta values. Constrained stream readers provide a substantial performance advantage for the search engine **140** of FIG. **1**.

In a simple form, a constraint can be expressed as:

$$C(a) \leqq C(b) \pm K,$$

where

C(a) means the current location of a word (or metaword) a,

C(b) means the current location of a word (or metaword) b; and

K is a constant.

To find words whose locations are next to each other, the value of K is 1, and the constraints can be:

$$C(a) \leqq C(b)+1, \text{ and}$$

$$C(b) \leqq C(a)-1.$$

For words that are to be "near" each other, the value of K can be ten.

Alternatively constraints can also be in the form:

$$P(a) \leqq P(b) \pm K,$$

$$C(a) \leqq P(b) \pm K, \text{ or}$$

$$P(a) \leqq C(b) \pm K,$$

where P means the previous location of a, or b. Recall, some ISRs keep track of the previously determined location.

Handling Terminating Conditions

In order to correctly handle terminating conditions such as determining a previous location for the first location of a word, or a next location for the last location of a word, two additional indicators can be used in specifying constraints. For example:

$$C(b) \leqq C^E(b) \pm K, \text{ or}$$

$$P^B(b) \leqq C(b) \pm K$$

where, C^E means the index stream is allowed to locate a "next" location at the "end", or a previous location at the "beginning." This convention enables the processing of words or phrases associated with the first and last occurrence of the word, phrase, or group of words, e.g., a title.

General Form of Constraints

Therefore, more generally, the constraints can be expressed as the family:

$$C|P(a) \leqq C|P(b) \leqq K,$$

where the symbol "|" stands for logical OR.

The constraints **1650**, in part, determine how the get_loc_limit method determines a next location for the isr_AND object. Logically, the constraints operate as follows.

Clearly, for a constraint to be satisfied, the value of the right side (loc(b)±K) must be greater than or equal to the value of the left side (loc(a)). This means that the current location of the right side stream, adjusted by K, must be at least equal to the location of the left side stream. If the constraint is unsatisfied, the right side stream is "behind."

Satisfying Constraints

The constraint could be satisfied by "backing-up" the left side stream. However, because of delta value compressing, it is only possible to move the streams forward. Therefore, the only way to satisfy a constraint is to advance the right side stream. A simple way to do this is to use the left side location as, at least, a minimal target location for the right side stream using the get-loc-limit method. This is intended to satisfy the constraint, although it may make other constraints false. Note, if a stream is at the last location, the scanning process can be terminated.

Favoring Selected Constraints

As stated before, most queries invoke multiple stream readers, each possibly using multiple constraints **1650**. Therefore, by carefully deciding which of the constraints to satisfy first, the scanning of the index can be accelerated. For example, a constraint which moves the current location forward by many thousands, should be favored over one which only increases the current location by a small amount. When all constraints are satisfied, the query has been resolved for a particular page.

Now again with reference to FIG. **17**, after opening the ISRs, in step **1720**, determine, a next location (loc(a)) **1510**

(FIG. 15) of the word a. Then, in step **1730** using the isr_E_P object **1630**, determine a next location (loc(E_P)) **1520** of the metaword □END_PAGE□. In step **1740**, determine the previous location (ploc(E_P) **1519** of the metaword □END_PAGE□ using, for example, the get_prev_loc method **1312** of the isr_E_P.

Then, in step **1750**, determine a next location (loc(b)) of the word b constrained to be greater than the previous □END_PAGE□ location (ploc(E_P)) **1519**, but less than or equal to the next □END_PAGE□ location (loc(E_P)) **1520**. This constrained search can be performed by the get_loc_limit method **1325** using the locations **1519** of the previous END_PAGE metawords as the constraint values, then a test can be performed on the next loc(E_P) **1520**.

Thus, a sample search for two words within the same page can be bounded by the constraints;

$P(E\_P) \leqq C(a)-1$, and

$C(a) \leqq C(E\_P)$, for word a, and

$P(E\_P) \leqq C(b)-1$, and

$C(b) \leqq C(E\_P)$, for word b.

When all of these constraints are satisfied, a qualified page has been found.

These constraints are obviously dependent on how a specific implementation indicates page boundaries. Other constraints can be formulated for different page boundary designations.

Should the query include the further restriction that the word "cooking" (c) should be in a title field, the search can be conducted by opening the index stream reader objects for the word c, and the metawords □BEGIN_TITLE□ (B_T) and □END_TITLE□ (E_T). Furthermore, the isr_AND object **1640** is supplied with the additional constraints:

$P(B\_T) \leqq C(c)$.

$C(c) \leqq C(E\_T)$, and

$C(E\_T) \leqq C^{E}(B\_T)$.

Note the use here terminating indicators on the constraints to properly handle end-point conditions.

Finding Pages with Adjacent Query Words

FIG. **18** shows how the constraints **1650** of FIG. **16** can be used to further refine the selection of pages so that pages are only selected if the word b **1810** is immediately preceded by the word a **1820**, e.g., the phrase "a b". Constraint **1830**, e.g., $C(a) \leqq C(b)-1$, specifies that the word a must occur somewhere before the word b. A constraint **1840**, e.g., $C(b) \leqq C(a)+1$, specifies that the word a must come at most one word before the word b. Satisfying both constraints demands that the words a and b be immediately adjacent in locations.

Finding Pages with Words Near Each Other

By making the constant value of the constraints larger than 1, e.g., ten, the NEAR operator can be implemented. For example, the constraints:

$C(a) \leqq C(b)+10$, and

$C(b) \leqq C(a)+10$

locates words within 10 of each other. Note, the constraints do not specify the relative order of the words a and b.

Operation of isr_AND Index Stream Reader

In general, with the isr_AND object, the operation is as follows. For any given set of current locations of the words of the input streams, determine if any one constraint is unsatisfied, and satisfy that constraint. Better performance can be obtained by selecting the constraint which is likely to advance the current location the farthest.

A constraint can be satisfied by calling get_loc_limit using the sum of the left side value and −K as the target location. As stated before, this may dissatisfy other constraints. Therefore, this process is repeated until all constraints are satisfied, which indicates a match, or until a terminating condition is reached. Note, the get_loc_limit may search the summary data structures **72–73** before the compressed data structure **71**.

NOT Index Stream Reader

The isr_NOT method produces all locations where the specified word does not occur. Because of the potentially large number of locations which may qualify, the isr_NOT is designed to do a "lazy" evaluation of locations. Lazy means the identification of locations is deferred until a last possible moment. Typically, the isr_NOT reader is used with compound stream readers that match for a subset of END_PAGE locations.

Optimizing the Scanning of the Stream Readers

While processing queries, many constraints may need to be evaluated or satisfied in order to locate qualifying pages. In general, the time to resolve a query is proportional to how fast the index can be searched for a given number of ISRs. Therefore, each ISR of FIG. **13** also maintains the estimated_overshoot value **1315**. The overshoot is an estimate at a search rate.

Overshoot

The estimated_overshoot **1315** is determined as follows. Each time that an ISR determines a new current_location **1313** using the get_loc_limit method **1325**, the running average number of locations advanced beyond the initial target location is determined. The target location is specified as an argument for the get_loc_limit method. The estimated_overshoot **1315** is a relative indication of how "fast" a particular index stream reader is advancing through the locations.

For example, if at any given moment there are a number of unsatisfied constraints, the best constraint to satisfy first is the one which will maximize the current location of the isr advanced. The current location is maximized when the sum of the constraint's target value (that is, the value of the left-hand side of the constraint, minus K) and the estimated_overshoot **1315** of the stream of the right-hand side is a maximum.

Distinguished Streams

It is also important to correctly handle queries which on their face may seem to be identical. For example, the queries:

find all pages containing both the words a and b; [1]

find all a where b is also in the same page; and [1]

find all b where a is also in the same page. [1]

All three queries fundamentally use the ISRs, isr_a, isr_b, and isr_E_P and use the same constraints. However, it is important that the correct stream is selected for advancement when all constraints are satisfied, e.g., when a qualifying page or record has been identified.

For query [1,] the END_PAGE index stream needs to be advanced first e.g., get_next E_P, since the user is interested in "pages." For query [2], the a stream should be first advanced when all constraints are satisfied, otherwise matches are going to be erroneously missed. For query [3], the b stream is first advanced if all constraints are satisfied. The stream that is being advanced first is called the distinguishing stream. If this convention is followed, qualifying pages will not be missed.

Using Big Page Attributes

The processing of queries can further be accelerated by taking note of the fact that a relatively small number of pages are considerably larger than most pages. Therefore, relatively large pages have the additional attributes of □BEGIN_BIG□ and □END_BIG□. Performance can be improved by focusing on the "big" metaword streams, because the "big page" attributes occurs relatively infrequently compared to the □END_PAGE□ attribute.

The improvement, which assumes that big pages include more than 16K words, is implemented as follows. During query processing consider the following two additional constraints, assuming that the query is looking for a match on the words a and b:

$$C(a) \leqq C(b)+16384, \text{ and}$$

$$C(b) \leqq C(a)+16384.$$

These two constraints require that the words a and b must be within 16384 locations of each other. This is very similar to the constraints that would be used in resolving a proximity query. Since these constraints do not require an evaluation of the isr_E_P, the index can be traversed much more rapidly.

During operation, a determination is made if the words a and b are within a "big" page, e.g., a page with more than 16K words. If this condition is false, then the words must be in a "small" page. In this case, enable the above two constraints. Otherwise, if the condition is true, then disable the two constraints.

Since "big" pages occur relatively infrequently, there will only be a relatively small number of locations associated with the metawords for the attributes □BEGIN_BIG□ and □END_BIG□. Consequently, the estimated_overshoot for the stream readers associated with these metawords will be relatively high, for example, at least 16K. It has been determined that the addition of these two constraints alone can speed up traversal of the index **70** by as much as a factor of two.

Queries Using Range-Based Values

The index **70**, and processes which operate thereon, not only can be used to search for "words" having discrete literal values as described above, but also to locate words within a range of numeric values, such as integers. For example, the page attributes □SIZE□ **253** can be expressed as an integer value, as can the attribute □DATE□ **254**, e.g., as a "Julian" date. There are advantages in allowing users to state a query generally in the form of:

find a word a in pages which were generated after 31/12/1995, or

find a word a in pages including 57 to 70 words.

Range-Based Metawords

The number line begins with integers 1 and 2, and as shown in FIG. **19**, has a portion . . . , 56, 57, . . . , 70, 71, . . . , and so forth. The integers represent values on which range-based query operations are desired, e.g., dates, and page sizes. The ranges can be selected from an interval of a predetermined size, e.g., 16, 4K, 512K, etc.

The predetermined interval can be used to generate a plurality of sets of subintervals. For example, a first set of subintervals **L1–L4**, as shown in FIG. **19**. The first set, e.g., level **L1** has one subinterval for each integer value.

The subintervals can be represented by literal metawords, e.g., 1_1, 2_1, . . . , 56_1, 57_1, . . . , 70_1, 71_1, etc, where the first number represents the starting value, and the second number length of the interval. For clarity, the usual "□" designation of metawords is not used.

The next subset of intervals, for example, the intervals of the level **L2** shows a groups of adjacent subintervals of the previous set, e.g., level **L1**. In one grouping, the size of the subintervals doubles for each next set, until the entire interval is covered in one subinterval, e.g., 1, 2, 4, 8 etc. The combinations of the second level **L2** can be represented by the metawords 2_2, 4,_2, . . . , 56_2, 58_2, . . . , 70_2, 71_2, and so forth.

A next set, level **L3**, can then be encoded by metawords representing the adjacent groups of the previous level 2 as 4_4, 8_3, . . . , 56_3, 60_3, 64_3, 68_3, size "four." Additional levels can be encoded 8_4, 16_4, . . . , 56_4, 64_4, . . . , and so forth. The number of levels needed to encode a range of N integers, with doubling of sizes, is a function of $\log_2$ N, where N is the number of possible rage-based integer values to be encoded.

During parsing of the pages by the parser **30**, if a word **1962** with a range attribute is recognized, encode the value of the word ("62") as follows. First, generate a [location, word] pair as one normally would for any word, for example, the pair [location, 61]. Second, generate range-based metawords pairs for all possible subintervals which include the word. For example, using FIG. **19** as a reference, the vertical line **1920** passes through the word "62" and all combinations which include word of levels **L1–L4**.

Therefore, the additional metaword pairs which will be generated include [location, 62_1], [location, 62_2], [location, 60_3], and [location, 56_4], all for the same location as the word "62". Similarly, the word ("71") **1971** could be encoded as [loc, 71], [loc, 71_1], [loc, 702], [loc, 68_3], and [loc, 64_4], and so forth. The succeeding values for each level can be determined by bit shift and bit clear operations using the literal values.

During operation, a range-based query specifies:

find all pages having a size in the range 57 through 70 bytes.

The range "57–70" can be converted to a Boolean search for the range-based metawords in the desired range. That is, search the word entries corresponding the subintervals whose concatenation exactly spans the range of the search term. If the selected metawords which exactly span the range are minimized, then the search time is also minimized since a minimum number of f index stream readers need to be used.

Therefore, the metawords which are to be used for scanning the index are selected from the "bottom" level up. For

example, the metawords 57_1, 58_2, 60_3, 64_3, 68_2, and 70_1 exactly span the range "57–70" as shown by the cross hashing.

With a $\log_2$ based encoding at most 2L−1 metawords need to be searched if L levels are used for the expression of the range-based values. Julian date ranges can adequately be handled with sixteen levels of encoding, e.g., at most thirty-one metawords during a query. It should be understood that this technique could be expanded to handle fixed-point numbers as well. Other groupings of adjacent values can also be used, for example threes, fours, etc.

As an advantage of this encoding, uniform data structures and interfaces, e.g., the index **70** and stream readers **60**, can be used for encoding and searching a range of values without a substantial increase in data storage and processing time. In addition, range-based searches benefit from the optimization improvements implemented for discrete-valued searches.

The Ranking of Qualified Pages

The ISRs **60**, as described above, produce a list of identified pages **200** which are qualified by the queries **52**. Since the number of pages indexed by the search engine **140** can be rather large, it is not unusual that this list may include references to tens of thousands of pages. This is frequently the case for queries composed by novice users because of the rather imprecise nature in which their queries are composed.

Therefore, there needs to be a way to rank order the list in a meaningful manner. A modified collection frequency weighing technique can be used to rank the pages. Then, the list can be presented to the users in a rank order where the pages having a higher rank are presented first.

Word Weighing

To perform the ranking, each indexed word is assigned a weight w. A score W for a page is the sum of the weight w for each occurrence of a word specified in the query which also appears, or in the case of the NOT operator does not appear, in a qualified page. Thus, should a page include all words, a higher score W is produced. Also, should a word with a relatively high weight appear frequently in a qualified page, that page will receive a yet higher score. Low weight words will minimally contribute to the score of a page.

As shown in FIG. **20**, a word weighing table **2000** can be maintained. The table **2000** contains an entry **2001** for each unique word **2010** of the index **70**. Associated with each word **2010** is its weight w **2020**, e.g., w(a), w(aa), and so forth. One way to determine the weight w of a word in the index **70** can be:

$$w=\log P-\log N,$$

where P is the number of pages indexed, and N is the number of pages which contain a particular word to be weighed. Then, should a particular word, for example "the," appear in almost every page, its weight w will be close to zero. Hence, commonly occurring words specified in a query will contribute negligibly to the total score or weight W of a qualified page, and pages including rare words will receive a relatively higher score.

Dealing with Common and Rare Words

One problem with this technique is that a query may include both common and rare words. For example, a query is stated as:

find all pages including the words "an" and "octopus."

Finding the pages including the word "octopus" will proceed quickly. However, finding the pages which include the word "an" will require a substantial amount of processing because words such as "an" may appear at millions of locations.

Word Lists

Therefore, as shown in FIG. **21**, first and second related query word lists **2110** and **2120** are maintained for each query processed. Initially, the first list **2110** includes entries **2111–2116** for each word specified in a query, for example:

find all pages including the words "an octopus lives in the sea."

In this case, the list **2110** initially includes an entry for every basic index stream reader which is used to read locations where the word x appears.

Ranking List

In addition, as shown in FIG. **22**, a ranking list **2200** of qualified pages is maintained. The ranking list **2200** includes one entry **2201** for each qualified page. Each entry **2201** includes an identification (page_id) **2210** of a qualified page, and a score (W) **2220** associated with the identified page. The entries **2201** are maintained in a rank order according to the scores **2220**.

The Top 500

The number of entries **2201** in the list **2200** can be limited to some predetermined number, for example, five hundred. This means that only the pages having the "top 500" scores will be presented to the user. It should be understood, that this number can vary, depending on a specific implementation, or perhaps, user supplied parameters.

During operation, identifications **2210** and scores **2220** of qualified pages are entered into the list **2200** in W rank order. When the ranking list **2200** fills up, it contains 500 entries **2201**. At this point, a determination can be made to see if it is possible for any of the words **2111–2116** of the first list **2210** having a relative low weight w, e.g., "an," "in," and "the" could possibly promote any as yet unqualified page to the "top 500" list **2200**.

For example, if the score of the lowest ranked page is 809,048, and the weight of the low weight words is about 0.0000001, then it is impossible for any of the low weight words to promote an as yet unidentified page to the "top 500" list **2200**.

In this case, the words with a low weight w, e.g., "an" **2111**, "in" **2114**, and "the" **2115** of the list **2110** are deleted (X) from the first list **2110** and entered as entries **2121–2123** of the second list **2120**. Now, the scanning of the index can proceed with a focus on the words **2112**, **2113**, and **2115** remaining in the first list **2110**.

If a page is subsequently qualified because it includes a highly weighted word, then the weights of the words of the second list **2120** are still taken into consideration in order to determine the correct score W of the page. However, index stream readers scanning for locations of low weight words will be disabled while first locating pages including words having a relatively high weight w. Partitioning words into multiple lists **2110** and **2120** according to their weight greatly improves the performance of the search engine **140**.

Concurrently, it also possible to limit the amount of weight a high frequency word (low weight) can contribute to the scores **2020** of any one page. Thus, pages which have been deliberately constructed to contain a large number of low weight words will not necessarily be promoted to the top 500 list **2200**.

However, with this approach it may still take a substantial amount of processing to fill the "top 500" ranking list **2200**. This is due to the fact that the list **2200** will initially be filled with entries of qualified pages whose scores may be derived from low weight words.

Statistical Projection Ranking

As a refinement, a statistical projection technique can be employed to accelerate the movement of low weight words from the first list **2110** to the second list **2120**. The statistical projection is based on the assumption that in an extremely large index the relative frequency of occurrence of the various words over the pages is constant. For example, the frequency of occurrence of the words "the" in a first small fraction of the indexed pages **200** is the same as in the remaining pages.

Therefore, while processing a query, as soon as a small fraction, for example 3%, of the index **70** has been processed, a statistical projection is made to see if any word on the first list **2110** could solely promote a page to the top 500 list **2200** based on the scores obtained for the first 3% of the index. In this case, the low weight word of the first list **2110** is immediately moved to the second list **2120** even if the top 500 list has not yet been filled with entries **2201**.

Safety Margins for Statistical Projection

As a further refinement, the following safety margin can be built into the statistical projection. After 3% of the index **70** has been processed, a determination can be made to see if the top 500 list **2200** is at least, for example, 15% filled, e.g., the list **2200** includes at least 75 entries. This will make it highly likely that by the time the end of the index is reached, the ranking list **2200** could probably have about 2475 (100/3×75) entries. This number is much larger than 500. Consequently, moving words from the first list **2110** to the second list **2120** based on a small sample will more than likely produce the correct result, particularly if the "small" 3% sample is based on words indexed from perhaps a million pages or more.

By the time that all pages of the index have been searched during a sequential scan, it can easily be determined if the statistical projections were made correctly. If not, the query can be reprocessed with increased safety margins.

A further improvement can be made for queries which contain more than one word. In this case, while determining the score for a qualified page based on the weights of a low frequency word, also determine which words of the second list **2120** have not yet been detected in the page. Then, determine if the score would qualify the page for the top 500 list **2120** even if the page would include any or all of the low frequency words. If it would not, then the page can be discarded immediately without having to search for low weight words.

Furthermore, if the entries of the lists **2110** and **2120** are maintained in an order according to their weights w, then words which are more likely to produce a qualifying score will be processed first. Note, words with a greater weight are also ones with fewer locations to process, this increases the chance that many locations of "expensive" to process low weight words need to be processed at all.

Other Rankings

So far, the ranking of qualified pages for presentation to the users has been based on processing with the index stream reader isr_E_P. That is, the score for a particular qualified page is determined from the words having locations less than or equal to the location of a next END_PAGE attribute, having a location greater than the location of a previous END_PAGE. It is also possible to combine ranking operations with a Boolean query, that only pages or records that match the Boolean query are ranked.

Optimization of Index in Response to Queries

Even with the efficiencies of the index structures and processes as described above, it may still be the case that some queries consume a substantial number of processing cycles. This may be a particular problem if a phrase, e.g., a concatenation of immediately adjacent words, of a slow-to-process query appears frequently. This is normal for the Web, "hot" topics get a lot of attention.

For example, a frequent and slow to process query may include the terms Netscape 1.2. Recall, the parser **30** would parse the term 1.2 as two words separated by a punctuation mark (.). Because the words "1" and "2" separately will occur relatively frequently, a large number of locations will be associated with these words.

The query module **50** has feed-back capabilities. This means, as an advantage, that the query module **50** itself can also generate new entries for the index **70**. This feature can be implemented as follows.

The Query Journal

As shown in FIG. **23**, the query module **50** maintains a journal or logging file **2300** while operating. Each entry **2301** of the log **2300** records a phrase **2310**, a location **2320** of the phrase, and the cost **2330** of processing the phrase. Periodically, perhaps once a day, the log **2300** is processed. For phrases having a relatively high processing cost, e.g., the phrase "1.2", a new metaword is dynamically placed in the index **70**. The metaword is a concatenation of the words of the phrase, for example, □1.2□,. The location can be the location associated with the first word of the phrase.

Once the synonymous "phrase" metaword has been placed in the index **70**, searches for the phrase can be greatly accelerated since only a single ISR, for example, isr_1.2, needs to used. Prior to the existence of the dynamically generated metaword, at least three ISRs (isr_1, isr_2, and isr_AND (isr_1, isr_2), plus several constraints were required in order to resolve the term "1.2." Also, the word "1.2" will have fewer associated locations.

After the metaword has been placed in the index **70**, the parser **30** can also recognize entries placed in the index **70** by the query module **50**, in addition to indexing the words of the phrase separately as it normally would. Therefore, as an advantage, the search engine **140** is self-optimizing in response to the query load.

Duplicate Pages

As stated above, the search engine **140** is particularly suited for indexing a large number of information records, such as the many millions of pages **200** of the World-Wide-Web. Because there are so many pages, and because it relatively easy to copy pages, the same page may frequently appear at different addresses as "duplicate" pages.

A duplicate page is defined as a page having a different address (URL), but having an identical fingerprint as a previously indexed "master" page. It is estimated that as many as 25% of the Web pages may be duplicates of other pages. Therefore, the search engine **140** is provided with means for economically handling duplicate pages.

Fingerprints

As shown in FIG. **24**, while parsing a current page, in step **2410** of a process **2400**, first determine the fingerprint **255** of the current page. In step **2420**, compare the fingerprint **255** of the current page with the fingerprints of previously indexed pages. Note, with the index structure **70** as described above, this is can be done by performing a search in the index **70** for the metaword which expresses the value of the fingerprint.

If there is no identical fingerprint entry in the index **70**, then the current page is different, and the current page can be parsed and indexed as a master page in step **2430**. Otherwise, if the current page is a duplicate, e.g., it has the same content as a previously indexed page, then, generate the pairs, [location, □FINGERPRINT□], and [location, □ADDRESS□] in step **2440**. The □FINGERPRINT□ metaword can be recognizably marked to indicate that it is a duplicate, and not a master. Because only one copy of a master page is indexed, managing duplicate pages which are deleted, or no longer available, becomes a problem.

Deleting Duplicate Pages

FIG. **25** shows a process **2500** for deleting pages. In step **2510**, determine if the page to be deleted is a master page. If true, then generate a reissue request **2521** for the automated browser **20** of FIG. **2** using the address (URL) of the next recorded duplicate page. Then, in step **2530**, promote the next duplicate page to be a master page. In step **2540**, generate a "deleted" metaword pair [location, □DELETED□], where location is the location of the last word of the page to be deleted. Otherwise, if false, e.i, this is not a master page, then in step **2550**, determine if the page to be deleted is the next recorded duplicate of the page to be deleted and there is no master page, proceed with step **2520** if true. Otherwise, if false, proceed with step **2540**.

Reissue Requests

The intent of the reissue request **2521** is to retrieve a copy of the page to be deleted, then the content of the retrieved copy can be reindexed. Note that there may be several reissue requests outstanding for a particular deleted page. This is because the behavior of the Web is undeterministic.

Requests may not be honored, sites storing copies of deleted pages may become unavailable, or the requests or replies to the requests are lost. Pages previously available may move behind a firewall at a later time. That is, delivery of pages over the Web is not guaranteed. Also, a duplicate page can be deleted before a copy of the master page can be successfully retrieved.

Dealing with Responses to Reissue Requests

FIG. **26** shows a procedure **2600** for correctly processing copies of pages received in response to reissue requests **2521** generated by the procedure **2500** of FIG. **25**. In step **2610**, determine if there is a master for the copy. If false, then determine if the next duplicate of the copy is not deleted in step **2630**. If true, then in step **2630**, delete the duplicate page, and add the copy as the master in step **2640**. If a master page already exists when the copy is retrieved, discard the copy in step **2650**. This can happen when several reissue requests are generated before the master page is reconstructed.

Although specific features of the invention are shown in some drawings and not others, this is only for the convenience of describing each feature. Those skilled in the prior art will appreciate that the invention may be practiced in other ways while still remaining within the scope and spirit of the appended claims.

I claim:

1. A computer implemented method for ranking records of a database located during a search of an index to the database, comprising:

indexing the records of the database by storing index entries in a memory to create the index, each index entry including a word entry representing a unique portion of information of the database and one or more location entries indicating where the unique portion of information represented by the word entry occurs in the records of the database;

assigning a weight to each index entry according to a relative frequency of occurrence of the portion of information in the database;

parsing a query into terms and operators, each term associated with a corresponding index entry;

sequentially searching index entries to locate records of the database which are qualified by the terms and operators of the query;

scoring each located record according to the number of times portions of information corresponding to the terms of the query occur in each record and their associated weights;

storing the scores and identities of the located records in entries of a ranking list, the ranking list having a predetermined number of entries; and

in response to the ranking list becoming full, determining if any unlocated records of the database can receive a score higher than one of the records stored of the ranking list using index entries having a lowest weight, and if not, searching the index using index entries having weights higher than index entries having the lowest weight.

2. The method of claim **1** further comprising:

assigning the weight to each index entry according to a difference between the number of records indexed and the number of records including the portion of information corresponding to the word entry of the index entry.

3. The method of claim **1** further comprising:

ordering the entries of the ranking list according to the scores.

* * * * *