

FOUNDCAT: Towards Deploying CAT Tools in University Classes for Improving Foreign Language Acquisition

Gary Evans and Alexander Ferrein and Winfried Kock

FH Aachen University of Applied Sciences

Aachen, Germany

{gary.evans, ferrein, kock}@fh-aachen.de

Abstract

The FOUNDCAT project (Free, Open UNiversity Development using Computer-Aided Translations) aims at integrating state-of-the-art CAT tools into learning management software platforms such as Moodle for teaching German undergraduate students to broaden their English language skills.

The FOUNDCAT project has recently received funding from the German "Stifteverband" for the development of software and teaching concepts as part of "Fellowship für Innovationen in der digitalen Hochschullehre" (Fellowship for innovations in digital university teaching).¹ The project began work in March 2017 and aims to be completed by the end of the winter semester 2017/18.

With the advent of massive open online courses (MOOCs) and flipped classroom concepts, teachers are becoming aware that eLearning has much greater potential than just providing a collection of PDF documents, or videos on a download server. Computer-aided translation (CAT) tools can be successfully applied in a number of teaching activities.

Our objective is not to teach language students to become proficient in using computer-aided translation tools. We are primarily teaching German undergraduate students to broaden their English language skills. To help students memorize technical terms more easily and also enhance their language proficiency in general, we have been deploying CAT tools in our English

classes, resulting in positive responses from participants. While translating into a second language is unusual in the translation world, it has proven to be educational when learning a second language. Duolingo Immersions (which is not longer available online) utilised this method as part of language acquisition. The focus is not so much on the product (the translation), but rather the process of translating. Peer and client (teacher) reviews offer the opportunity to analyse translated segments and provide feedback in the form of comments and tracked changes to help improve L2 language proficiency.

Numerous open source CAT tools are available (e.g. OmegaT, Pootle, Weblate etc.). The main elements of CAT tools include term bases, machine translations and translation memories. Students either create translatable content themselves or select open source content (e.g. Wikipedia, or FH Aachen content). Segments are then chosen by students, translated and then peer reviewed in an iterative process resulting in translations for further analysis. The ability to comment on segments allows students to flag errors and target specific areas for improvement, hence individualising students' needs in a scalable learning environment. The inclusion of gaming elements (peer grading, levels, badges etc.) aims to add to student motivation.

We aim to extend our LMS-based courses so that FOUNDCAT can be embedded into the online LMS course. We are currently evaluating Weblate for suitability. We will assess the usability for our purpose of teaching English and evaluate how such tools can best be integrated into LMS platforms for language acquisition in general.

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¹<https://www.stifteverband.org/lehrfellows/2016/ferrein>