

Address



02/10/10

Dear Madam or Sir,

External Evaluation Report to NEH regarding progress on the Text-Image Linking Environment project, August 2010

The Text-Image Linking Environment (TILE) project has now completed its first year of development. The aim of this report is to both to give account of progress over the past year, and to recommend future work as the project delivers its suite of online tools over the forthcoming year. Items recommended here come from contact with those working on the project, and the attendance of various meetings regarding the TILE project at the Digital Humanities 2010 conference.

Although reports on the blog and website have been relatively few and far between, I was relieved to see that the project has made good progress. The first six months of development time were devoted to building a prototype that linked with the Shakespeare's Quarto Archive, and the next six months spent on developing tools and a user interface. There was also interest in producing end user publication tools, and a prototype was developed with the Archimedes palimpsest project, but the TILE project has now chosen to focus on the development of the primary suite of tools that are the primary output of TILE. Although there has been considerable interest in the publication environment, it was recommended that the primary tool be focussed on to ensure that it would be developed, tested, delivered, and supported adequately within the remaining time span of the grant.

A prototype tool is now available at <http://mith.umd.edu/tile/software/>. The image markup tool has been expanded (building on the AXE system and extending its image annotation functionality). The Auto-recogniser has been implemented, which automatically recognises lines in a text and links them to transcripts on the documents. The text tagger, which allows users to specify a relax schema and to tag text using this schema, was in development at the time of the meeting and additional functionality was suggested to ensure that the needs of users working with different schemas could be incorporated, such as translators for TEI and Mets. The tool has been built in modular fashion, as described in the grant application, and it is hoped that this will allow it to become embedded in other suites of online tools. Technical testing needs to be undertaken before this tool is available for public launch, to ensure that it is as bug free as possible before asking opinions of others.

Until now, there has been little or no user testing beyond the core team, and it was recommended that a program of user testing be developed to ensure that the tool was as useful and usable by as wide a user base as possible. Various recommendations were made as to how to proceed, including gaining feedback from local users (who could be watched by the development team as they used the tool, to elicit feedback about the interface) and to extending the testing to a core team of online users (who could be employed to test the tool remotely, without any expert from the team to hand, as would be the usual working environment for those applying the tool to their work). There is also the option to user test using graduate students in relevant disciplines: for example, a testing session could be organised with the graduate students in my MA in Digital Resources in the Humanities module, at University College London, which would give the project the opportunity to do a user testing session with 30 or so graduate students with an interest in the area. The project members were asked to contact me towards the end of the summer so that this could be arranged.

The project needs to pay close attention to how it teaches users (especially remote users) about the functionalities of the tool: TILE needs develop a pedagogic strategy. TILE should provide user documentation, how to videos, frequently asked questions, and online tutorials to ensure that as wide a variety of people can understand how to use the tools as possible. A support email should also be set up, so people can easily get in contact should there be any problems.

It was also discussed with the project what their exit strategy was – when will the tool be “done”, and what will it mean to leave it in a “finished” state at the end of the grant? It was recommended that adequate technical documentation also be provided for those working on TILE beyond the period of this project. A publicity and outreach strategy should also be developed, to ensure that the tool reaches as wide a variety of scholars as possible.

It was also recommended that the tool switch on Google Analytics at the launch of the full suite of tools, so that they have the facility to report back on use of the TILE tools. Writing up a paper regarding the user aspects of the project (user testing, feedback, and usage statistics) may also be an interesting publication outcome for the project. The project should also detail the other scholars, institutions, and research projects that are using the tool, particularly those that embed the modular aspects into their own sites, to demonstrate the impact of their research and development.

I am excited that the TILE project should, within the next month, be reaching the stage of user testing and garnering user feedback, to allow for further development and bug testing. A full launch of the tool should be possible in the spring, by the very latest, and the developers will still be on hand to deal with any technical issues that arise when the tool is rolled out across a larger user base.

I feel that the TILE project has made good progress, and in focussing on developing and releasing the core aspects of the tool as described in the grant proposal, is well along the way to ensuring that the tool is actually delivered. The project has also dealt admirably with the fact that many working on the tool are split across different institutions, and seems to be working well as a community. I would encourage them to make a little more effort with their digital identity online: regular blogging and updating of the website will increase interest in the project and highlight the fact that the release of the tools will be imminent. Overall, however, the TILE project remains a very exciting initiative that has clear deliverables that should be possible within the remaining timeframe of the grant, given the enthusiasm and dedication of the project team.

A summary of my recommendations for the project are presented below,



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Evaluator Recommendations

The recommendations given to the TILE team can be summed up as follows:

- a) Concentrate on producing the core suite of tools before returning to the publication environment, to ensure that they are developed, tested, and supported adequately during the funded grant.
- b) A program of user testing should be rolled out, to work with both local and online users in testing the tool, and ensuring its usability. In particular, a user testing session could be undertaken in relevant teaching programs, such as the MA module in Digital Resources in the Humanities at UCL.
- c) Documentation, and online tutorials, should be provided online to ensure that potential audiences can get the most out of the online tool.
- d) Adequate technical documentation should also be provided regarding the TILE tool to ensure sustainability beyond the funded phase of the project.
- e) A publicity strategy should be outlined, to ensure the tool is as widely publicised as possible.
- f) Google Analytics should be used to record usage of the tool, and records should be kept regarding impact.
- g) The project should regularly update their website and blog, and be careful to maintain their digital identity and build their online profile.