Common Language Resources and Technology Infrastructure

CLARIN NL

Interim Evaluation Report
April 2009 - April 2013
By the CLARIN-NL International Advisory Panel

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Contents

Introduction

This is the report of the CLARIN-NL Interim Evaluation covering the period from April 2009 to April 2013 carried out by the CLARIN-NL International Advisory Panel (IAP). The IAP studied and commented the CLARIN-NL Mid-Term Self Evaluation and accompanying Fact Book. A response to the IAP comments on these documents was created in a separate document Response to the IAP comments and has led to minor revisions of the self-evaluation and the fact book. The IAP visited CLARIN-NL on September 4th, 2013. At this meeting, it discussed the draft versions of the Response to the IAP comments and of this Evaluation Report, and it attended presentations, posters and demos of a variety of CLARIN-NL subprojects. The final versions of the Response to the IAP comments and this report were created after this event and include additional comments and recommendations made on the basis of this event. The IAP was assisted in its work by the skilful and diligent services of Erica Renckens.

Overall Evaluation of the CLARIN-NL project

General

The CLARIN-NL project is the national project that designs and constructs the Netherlands part of the CLARIN infrastructure. The project started in April 2009 and will finish by April 2015. The Interim Evaluation reported on here covers the period from April 2009 through April 2013.

The CLARIN-NL project has very clearly stated objectives and a very transparent and reasonable set of criteria for success or failure. It is clear that a lot of work has been achieved and that CLARIN-NL really succeeded to be an example for other European countries. CLARIN-NL sets an example to the whole CLARIN community not only in terms of the activities but also by the way that it is managed and administered. The CLARIN initiative and its management have been truly exemplary.

The Netherlands is playing the leading role in the EU research community, as is clear from its hosting the CLARIN ERIC and from its important role in the technical aspects. Its leading role also became evident by the selection of the CKCC project as a demonstrator project in the call for humanities and social science projects by the CLARIN preparatory project, because it "[would] best demonstrate the use of LRT and would show the potential of a research infrastructure in the humanities" (CLARIN Newsletter 6, p. 3).[1]

For these reasons, the successful experience of CLARIN-NL should be shared so that other new efforts all over the world can benefit from it.

The IAP would like to compliment the authors on preparing the very informative Self-Evaluation Report (and the accompanying Fact Book). It is clearly written, comprehensive and insightful.

The report clearly states the overall and longer term objectives of the CLARIN-NL initiative, gives a detailed and frank assessment of the results achieved so far, and provides a good summary of the tasks lying ahead.

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[1] http://www.clarin.eu/sites/default/files/CLARIN_Newsletter_no_6.pdf

The report is thorough, balanced and fair. The report and the accompanying Fact Book set high level standards for the rest of the CLARIN.

More Detailed Comments

The self-study seems very carefully done and thorough in its response to the criteria for success that were set up in advance. The IAP appreciates the candid way the study approaches the issues of how well-used the projects are, and it seems to the IAP that it uses an appropriate amount of caution in describing the successes.

The discussion of the Technical Infrastructure, beginning on p. 11 seems especially careful, reasonable, and clear-sighted. The difficulties here are not glossed over, and the prospects for the future seem accurately assessed.

The "before" and "after" charts on pp. 14-15 show impressive progress in the CLARIN centres, though the centres should concentrate their efforts to become certified CLARIN centres in the very near future.

The IAP appreciates the discussion of the problems of implementing a metadata search and a federated content search and the relation between the two. The recognition that not as much progress has been made on all fronts as was projected is an important intermediate step towards solving this obviously difficult problem, and the adaptation of the original goals provides a good approach. The problems sketched, however, are not unique to CLARIN in the Netherlands and therefore a concerted European action seems appropriate.

The calls for resource curation and demonstrator projects are very well constructed, with clear and thorough discussion of project types, the roles of various participants, and the CLARIN requirements. The policy with regard to the importance of common standards and interoperability is good. There is both reasonable and substantial pressure to conform to best practices and standards and a realization that these cannot all be stipulated in advance, but must rather continue to evolve. The increasingly good quality of proposals over the 4 calls was partly a result of the effectiveness of the calls themselves, the evaluation process, and advice from CLARIN-NL.

The criteria for evaluation of projects in Call 1 are very clearly laid out. The strong emphasis on accepting only projects with settled intellectual property rights has been especially appropriate and important.

The addition of a set of ranked priorities in Calls 2-4 was an excellent way of encouraging proposals from research areas that had been under-represented in earlier proposals. The innovation of using a closed call in Call 3-4 was also an excellent way of trying to encourage humanities users to make use of the CLARIN infrastructure and tools. Some of the projects proposed were, naturally, not as sophisticated or well-planned as most of the projects submitted in the open call, but they should provide a way of increasing the uptake of technology in the humanities. The User Survey early in the CLARIN-NL project was also useful in this respect.

Now that the CLARIN-NL project is entering a phase in which it will integrate its results and make them better visible to the research community (e.g. via the portal that is being constructed), user

uptake requires the complete attention of the project. The project should also define and implement objective criteria for measuring usage.

The IAP perceived the Demonstration Event as evidence that the project has achieved a wide range of concrete results and showcases in a bottom up way. The diversity of result types as well as the widely diverse means in which these are presented and made accessible to researchers means that the project has been prolific, but also indicates that integration is a great remaining challenge. Such integration should go beyond listing results on a single webpage; it should aim at a more holistic user experience of the CLARIN-NL infrastructure through a more uniform and recognizable interface to every tool, demonstrator or application.

The imbalance in the fields of research for the CLARIN-NL projects that is displayed on pp. 24 and following is regrettable, but not really surprising, given the well-established place of computational tools and digital resources in linguistics and the well-known reluctance of many humanities scholars to embrace them. In the face of this, the results seem encouraging but can further improve.

The language technology infrastructure discussion is very full and good. Certainly this is one of the most successful and ambitious areas of research within CLARIN-NL.

The Data Curation Service seems, despite some problems and debate over what resources should have priority, another area of good success in CLARIN-NL.

The choice to begin with resources that do not have IPR issues is good. This is a rapidly-evolving area of concern worldwide and CLARIN-NL has generally handled it well. However, resources where IPR-issues have not been dealt with will enter the infrastructure, and the project should be prepared for that so that a maximal amount of resources can become available to the research community.

The modest success in the areas of visibility, availability, interoperability and user needs is understandable, given the stage the project is in, and the study makes some good suggestions for further improvements.

Given the difficulty of increasing digital literacy and the use of computational tools and methods in the humanities, the amount of success seems quite good and the prospects for more uptake in the lagging areas seem good.

The list of events, meetings, newsflashes, press, and presentations at the end of the Fact Book is an impressive record of the efforts to publicize and support the CLARIN-NL project, and the discussion of dissemination in the Self-Evaluation Report puts them in perspective. This is a difficult area for assessment, especially as most of the projects are still quite new, and some are not finished.

The relatively modest amount of proven use and integration into curricula seems about what could have been expected. It also seems reasonable to expect that this is an area in which accelerated increases are likely to occur as researchers publish and discuss their new research, as well as by the Education project that is starting in May 2013 (see p. 123).

It was clear from the beginning that ongoing funding would be an issue. It is hardly surprising that CLARIN-NL has not been able to fully solve the issue of sustainability, and the realization that the

more successful CLARIN-NL becomes, the more demands that are likely to be placed upon the infrastructure. No one has solved the problems of long-term data preservation and support for obsolete software and hardware, but it is important that CLARIN-NL has continued attention for this issue.

Recommendations by the IAP

The IAP formulated a number of specific recommendations for the CLARIN-NL project. They are listed here globally categorized by topic.

Dissemination & Outreach
• The successful experience of CLARIN-NL should be shared to benefit other new efforts involving broader geographical and temporal coverage of the Dutch language, and involving other languages in Europe and all over the world. Further and more extensive outreach should be cultivated.

Centre assessment and access to resources
• CLARIN-NL should work out a time table for CLARIN Centre assessment including DSA assessment with the relevant parties.

• CLARIN-NL should provide access to the CLAVAS and TTNWW tools and describe their functionality via the web or other means of dissemination.

• CLARIN-NL should provide details about the current state of language resources available to SSH users beyond the level of metadata and should take appropriate actions to promote the use of these resources.

• The integration of concrete results and show cases should go beyond listing on a single webpage; it should aim at a more holistic user experience of the CLARIN-NL infrastructure through a more uniform and recognizable interface to every tool, demonstrator or application.

User Involvement
• CLARIN-NL should consider broadening the scope of activities with potential user communities.

• It is so far not clear who the users are, what they use, and for which purposes. It is also not clear to what extent their needs are being met. CLARIN-NL should develop plans for systematic user evaluations or reports on concrete user experiences.

• CLARIN-NL should implement ways of tracking usage (e.g. by weblogs, number of licensees of particular resources, email exchanges helping users of resources, etc.).

Federated Content Search
• CLARIN-NL should actively participate in joint European efforts for tackling the problems of federated content search, since these problems are not specific to CLARIN centres in the Netherlands.

Sustainability

• More attention should be given to the formulation of a viable business model for the enhancement of the database cultivation and the maintenance of leading edge language technology.

IPR

• Though problems of IPR have been mostly avoided so far in the project, IPR issues should get more attention in order to ensure maximal availability of resources to the research community.

Appendix I: IAP Members

Prof. dr. Koenraad De Smedt – University of Bergen (Bergen, Norway) (since 2012)

Dr. Scott Farrar – University of Washington (Washington DC, USA)

Prof. dr. Jan Hajič – Charles University (Prague, Czech Republic) (since 2012)

Prof. dr. Erhard Hinrichs – Eberhard Karls University Tübingen (Tübingen, Germany) (since 2012)

Prof. dr. David Hoover – New York University (New York, USA)

Prof. dr. Clifford Lynch – Coalition for Networked Information (Washington DC, USA)

Prof. dr. Harold Short – King's College London (London, United Kingdom)

Prof. dr. Benjamin T'sou – The Hong Kong Institute of Education (Hong Kong, China)

Dr. Tamás Váradi – Hungarian Academy of Sciences (Budapest, Hungary)

Prof. dr. Hugo Van hamme – KU Leuven (Leuven, Belgium)

Appendix II: Evaluation Procedure and Timing

Date	Action	Who
Jun 1, 2013	Self-Evaluation and Fact Book sent to IAP	EB
Jul 15, 2013	IAP Comments on Self-Evaluation and Fact Book Sent to EB	IAP
Aug 15, 2013	Draft Evaluation Report and appendixes sent to IAP for comment	ES
Sep 4, 2013	IAP-Meeting	EB + IAP + ES
Sep 4, 2013	IAP Demonstrator Event	CLARIN-NL consortium + IAP
Sep 10, 2013	Pre-Final Evaluation Report and appendixes sent to IAP	ES
Sep 15, 2013	Approval Final Evaluation Report and appendixes	IAP
Sep 17, 2013	Publication of the Evaluation Report and appendixes on the CLARIN-NL website	EB

Appendix III: Abbreviations and Acronyms

Acronym	Expansion
CLARIN	Common Language Resources and Technologies Infrastructure
CLARIN ERIC	ERIC legal entity set up for the CLARIN infrastructure
CLARIN-NL	The Netherlands national project that aims to design and construct the Netherlands part of the European CLARIN infrastructure
EB	CLARIN-NL Executive Board
ERIC	European Research Infrastructure Consortium
ES	Evaluation Secretary
IAP	CLARIN-NL International Advisory Panel