Authentic Text ICALL (ATICALL) Exercise Generation & Information Retrieval for Language Learning

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Introduction

- The use of NLP in ICALL has primarily centered on diagnosing learner errors and, more recently, testing and assessment.
- Idea: Explore how NLP technology can support other aspects of second language learning.
- Our specific focus: What can NLP contribute to awareness of language forms and rules, an important component of adult second language acquisition?
  - WERTi: Automatic generation of language awareness activities based on real-world texts.
  - IR4LL: Retrieval of authentic texts at the appropriate level for language learners

Pedagogical grounding of our research

Awareness

Awareness (Schmidt 1995):

- Noticing
  - "conscious registration of an event"
  - low level of awareness
  - implicit learning

  E.g.: noticing that sometimes speakers of Spanish omit the subject pronoun
- Understanding
  - "recognition of a general principle, rule or pattern"
  - higher level of awareness
  - explicit learning
  - generalization can be internally generated or externally provided

  E.g. understanding that Spanish is a pro-drop language

Pedagogical grounding of our research

The role of awareness

- Research on awareness shows:
  - There is no learning without noticing.
  - Awareness without input is not sufficient.
  - "Learning takes place within the learner's mind and cannot be completely engineered by teachers or syllabus designers."
  - One can only provide opportunities for developing learner awareness.

⇒ Consequences:

- Learners have to be exposed to linguistic features to acquire them.
- Learners have to notice those features.
- Tools presenting such linguistic features in a contextualized way, allowing for student interaction, can be helpful.

Pedagogical grounding of our research

Linguistic information and how it is conveyed

- A wide range of linguistic features can be relevant for awareness, incl. morphological, syntactic, semantic, and pragmatic information (cf. Schmidt 1995, p. 30).
- Linguistic information can be conveyed to the learner
  - using explicit linguistic terminology/representations, e.g.:
    - parts of speech
    - verbal tense, mood and aspect
    - sentence classification
    - syntactic analyses (shown as trees or sentence diagrams)
  - using implicit presentation, e.g.:
    - coloring, underlining, moving, etc
    - pointing to correct or incorrect uses

  ⇒ Awareness activities can include both implicit and explicit presentation of linguistic features.

Modeling FLT practice

- A common pedagogical practice in FLT moves from target language presentation, to practice, on to production.
- Proposal: Create sequences of linguistic awareness activities following the initial stages of such a progression:
  I. Receptive presentation
  II. Productive presentation
  III. Controlled practice
- What makes this idea interesting?
  - NLP technology can identify certain relevant linguistic categories and forms in real-life texts.
  - The contents of these texts can be selected by the learners based on their interests.
  - The sentences turned into exercises can remain fully contextualized as part of the text selected by learner.
  - Automatic feedback for the activities is feasible since the original text is known.

The activity progression in WERTi

Using real world web-based texts (such as news articles) we provide a progression of activities:

Step 1. Receptive presentation

Ex. The system colors examples of targeted items.

Step 2. Productive presentation

Ex. The learner is asked to find and mouse-click all tokens of the targeted category. The system shows correct picks in green, incorrect ones in red.

Step 3. Controlled practice

Ex. The learner is asked to
- reorder words/phrases given (scrambled) list
- complete fill-in-the-blank (FIB) slots
  - created for tokens of targeted category
  - given some information, where needed (e.g., stems)

Examples and Target types

- Examples:
  - FIB Determiners
  - Colored Gerunds
- Types of targets:
  - Lexical targets:
    - prepositions
    - determeriners
  - Lexical form targets with contextual triggers:
    - gerunds vs. *to*-infinitives
    - *if* conditionals
    - tense and aspect
  - Syntactic targets with discourse context triggers:
    - active vs. passive

What is involved in realizing such an approach?

- Two components can be distinguished:
  1. Obtaining and selecting appropriate texts:
     - Texts obtained through web search using terms provided by the language learner
       – restrict web to news sites (e.g., Reuters)
       – alternative: specific corpora
     - Texts could be filtered according to aspects relevant to lanuage learning (text readability, frequency of relevant constructions, etc. → IR4LL discussion below)
  2. Identifying the targets in the selected texts and creating
     - receptive and productive presentations, and
     - controlled practice exercises using the texts.
- We illustrate the approach, focusing on the second component, by showcasing an activity progression targeting prepositions.

Realizing the proposal

Creating an activity sequence

- The system first annotates the web page text using efficient and robust NLP tools performing
  - tokenization → tokens
  - lemmatization → word roots
  - part-of-speech tagging → lexical categories
  - morphological analysis → morphological properties
  - shallow parsing → phrasal categories
- The language items targeted by the activity are identified using regular expression matching of target and contextual items in the annotated text.
- The nature of the activity determines the complexity of the annotation and the regular expressions required:
  - Preposition activity: single instances of a lexical category
  - Tense and aspect: sequences of auxiliaries, inflected forms, and specific lexical items (contextual cues)

Prototype realization

- Original prototype in Python, integrated into the Apache2 webserver using mod_python, including:
  - searching in the Reuters site providing news webpages
  - linguistic annotation using NLTK (Bird & Loper 2004), TreeTagger (Schmid 1994)
- Recently reimplemented as UIMA-based Java servlet on Tomcat server (Aleks Dimitrov, Ramon Ziai, Niels Ott).
- The annotated text is mapped into Color, Click, and FIB presentation code (HTML and JavaScript), and fully integrated in the original web page.
- Only a standard web browser is needed to use the system.
- We are working on integrating further target patterns and activities. Prototypes available at:
  - WERTi: http://purl.org/net/WERTi
  - WERTi2: http://delos.sfs.uni-tuebingen.de:8080/WERTi

Realizing the proposal

Some challenges

- Annotation errors:
  - Statistical NLP tools are efficient and robust
  - Such tools make errors, e.g., 3–5% for POS tagging.
  - What impact do such errors have for the envisaged use?
  - It is known where errors are likely to arise (cf., e.g., Dickinson & Meurers 2003; Dickinson 2005), so one can avoid basing activities on likely error locations.
- The complexity of real life:
  - Real-life texts from the web often have
    - complex structure
    - mark-up and integrated multimedia
  - It is nontrivial to combine that web page structure with the activity based on the annotated text base.

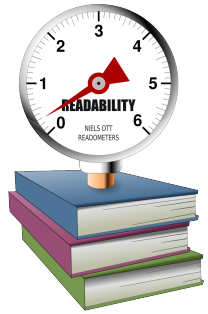
Finding texts appropriate for language learners

- How can one find authentic texts as reading material or for activity generation (e.g., WERTi)?
- Such texts should
  - be in the language of interest
  - have the appropriate level of complexity for the learner
  - contain enough good instances of the language patterns and rules targeted by the activities.
- How about simply using the web and a standard web search engine (e.g., google)?
  - Pro: The Web is huge, and up-to-date information on virtually any topic is available.
  - Cons: Standard search engines are not aware of reading complexity and language patterns.

⇒ Create a dedicated search engine for language learning: IR4LL (Ott 2009)

IR4LL Proposal

- Create a search engine that is aware of variations in text difficulty.
- Challenges and research questions:
  - How to measure text difficulty?
  - Is there enough variety in text difficulty on the web?
    - Are there enough 'easy' web pages?



Readability and how to measure it

- Readability or text difficulty: refers to the understandability or comprehensibility of a text (Klare 1963).
- The more reading proficient the reader, the less readable texts need to be in order to be understood by this reader.
- Traditional readability formulas try to measure the readability on a scale, e.g. the U.S. grade level scale.

U.S. grade level scale

Scale based on Gunning (1968, p. 40):

Grade Level	Named Grade	
17	College	graduate
16		senior
15		junior
14		sophomore
13		freshman
12	High School	senior
11		junior
10		sophomore
9		freshman
8	Eight grade	
7	Seventh grade	
6	Sixth grade	

Traditional Readability Formulas

- Over two hundred traditional readability formulas have been developed (cf. Dubey 2004).
- They are generally developed for special purposes, such as determining the complexity of military training manuals (Caylor et al. 1973).
- A frequently used traditional readability measure is the Flesch-Kincaid formula (Kincaid et al. 1975)

Example: Flesch-Kincaid

- Computes U.S. grade level needed to read a text.
- Derived empirically from set of hand-classified documents.

$$\text{Flesch-Kincaid} = -15.59 + 11.8 \cdot AWL_s + 0.39 \cdot ASL$$

Where

$AWL_s = \frac{\text{Number of Syllables}}{\text{Number of Words}}$ Average word length counted in syllables.

$ASL = \frac{\text{Number of Words}}{\text{Number of Sentences}}$ Average sentence length.

- Idea:
  - The longer the word, the harder it is. (and the less common it is, cf. Zipf 1936)
  - The longer the sentence, the harder it is to understand.

Another example: Dale & Chall (1948)

$$\text{Dale-Chall} = 0.1579 \cdot DS + 0.0496 \cdot ASL + 3.6365$$

Where

DS = Dale Score — The percentage of words outside the Dale list of 3000 words.

$ASL = \frac{\text{Number of Words}}{\text{Number of Sentences}}$ Average sentence length.

- Adds the idea of a specific list of “easy” words.
- List produced by “testing forth-graders on their knowledge in reading of a list of approximately 10,000 words”.
- The more words are outside the set of “easy” words, the more difficult the text is.

Traditional readability measures: Evaluation

- Pros:
  - Relatively simple to use.
  - ‘Simple’ NLP only: tokenizer, stemming, sentence splitter, sometimes syllable counter
- Cons:
  - Originally developed and validated using very small and often highly specific data sets (e.g., technical manuals).
  - No explicit validation of automatic analysis compared to original human analysis (e.g., syllable counting)
  - Measures such as sentence length are relative to domain.
  - Underlying assumptions (e.g., ‘long sentences are difficult’) are rather crude generalizations.

Lexical Frequency Profiles (LFPs)

- Introduced by Laufer & Nation (1995) for the purpose of measuring the vocabulary used by learners.
- Ott (2009) uses LFPs 'upside down': measuring vocabulary in texts for learners, not by learners.
- LFPs work with 3 word lists:
  - First 1000 words of the General Service List (West 1953).
    - General Service List: list of words sorted by frequency
  - Second 1000 words of the General Service List.
  - Academic Word List (Coxhead 2000).
    - Underlying assumption: lists are mutually exclusive.

Lexical Frequency Profile: Example

Results for a typical Wikipedia article:

Word List	Tokens		Types		Families
GSL 1	2202	75.39%	542	54.25%	384
GSL 2	121	4.14%	94	9.41%	78
AWL	245	8.39%	136	13.61%	109
Others	353	12.08%	227	22.72%	n.a.
Total	2921	100%	999	100%	n.a.

- Families: related by simple morphological processes
  - e.g., *happy*, *happily*, and *happyness* are in same family

Vocabulary-based measures

- Pros:
  - Vocabulary is an important issue for learners.
  - 'Simple' NLP only: tokenizer, lemmatizer, perhaps tagger.
  - Measure can be informed by controlled vocabulary lists of text books.
  - Lists can also be extracted from corpora.
- Cons:
  - Vocabulary changes constantly, e.g., the General Service List was published in 1953 and correspondingly does not contain words such as *Internet* or *e-mail*?
  - Vocabulary is domain-specific:
    Does the Academic Word List contain words of your field of research?

Syntactic Complexity

- Vocabulary useful indicator, but if sentences are complex, learners will still have trouble understanding them.
- Sentence length as used in readability formulas simplistic.
- How can syntactic complexity be measured?
- Two simple units (Hunt 1965):
  - Clause: "a structure with a subject and a finite verb"
  - T-unit: "a main clause plus any subordinate clauses"

Measuring syntactic complexity

Lu (2009) automates 14 measures of syntactic complexity which have been discussed as correlating with L2 proficiency:

Type	Measure
Length of production	Mean length of clause Mean length of sentence Mean length of T-unit
Sentence complexity	Mean number of clauses per sentence
Subordination	Mean number of clauses per T-unit Mean number of complex T-units per T-unit Mean number of dependent clauses per clause Mean number of dependent clauses per T-unit
Coordination	Mean number of coordinate phrases per clause Mean number of coordinate phrases per T-unit Mean number of T-units per sentence
Particular structures	Mean number of complex nominals per clause Mean number of complex nominals per T-unit Mean number of verb phrases per T-unit

Textbook structures

- Textbooks introduce linguistic categories and forms in order of perceived complexity.
- For the purpose of teaching grammar, particular structures are especially relevant, e.g. ‘give me a text with a lot of gerunds’.
  - Ott & Ziai (2008) developed a constraint grammar-based approach for classifying *-ing* forms into gerunds, participles, and the progressive forms.

Textbook structures: Example

Linguistic structures taught in a textbook for English (Klett: Green Line 4, Weisshaar 2008):

Unit	Structures taught
1	Present perfect progressive with *since* and *for* Past perfect progressive Attributive use of adjectives after nouns Adverbs of degree
2	Perfect infinitive with modal verbs Passive infinitive with full verbs and modals
3	Gerund as subject, object, and after verbs and adjectives with prepositions Object plus *-ing* form Present and past progressive passive Passive with verbs with prepositions
4	Verb plus object plus infinitive Infinitive after question words and after superlatives Infinitives vs. Gerund
5	Non-defining relative clauses Participles as adjectives

Information Retrieval

Manning et al. (2008, ch. 1):

> *“Information Retrieval is finding material (usually documents) of an unstructured nature (usually text) that satisfies an information need from within large collections (usually stored on computers).”*

Indexing does the trick in IR!

Simply put:

- Usually one has documents that contain words (“terms”).
- Re-sort everything so that one has terms that are associated with documents → indexing.
- Result: the terms from the query can be mapped to terms in the index at low cost, giving you the corresponding documents quickly.

Example: Boolean index

Doc1:
`Jon loves Vickie.`
Doc2:
`Vickie likes Jackie.`
Doc3:
`Jackie loves Ian.`
`Ian loves Jackie.`

	Doc1	Doc2	Doc3
Ian	0	0	1
Jackie	0	1	1
Jon	1	0	0
likes	0	1	0
loves	1	0	1
Vickie	1	1	0

Index with weights: Example

- TF·IDF (Term Frequency · Inverse Document Frequency): Weigh terms which occur in fewer documents more highly.

Doc1:
`Jon loves Vickie.`
Doc2:
`Vickie likes Jackie.`
Doc3:
`Jackie loves Ian.`
`Ian loves Jackie.`

	Doc1	Doc2	Doc3
Ian	0	0	0.95
Jackie	0	0.48	0.35
Jon	0.48	0	0
likes	0	0.48	0
loves	0.18	0	0.35
Vickie	0.18	0.18	0

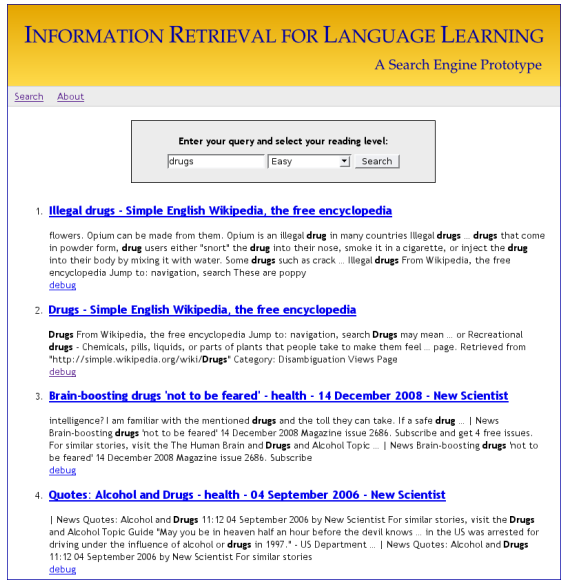
Text models

- In addition to the words themselves, any information about a text can be used as an index.
  - Here: readability measures
- All measures are stored in a table for each text, the so-called text model.
- The table contains the key (name) for each measure and a value.

Example of a text model (extract)

Type	Key	Value
General	Character Count	14249
General	Sentence Count	111
General	Token Count	2542
General	Type-Token Ratio	0.3703
LFP	Academic Word List Token Ratio	0.0816
LFP	Academic Word List Type Ratio	0.1389
LFP	General Service List 1k Token Ratio	0.1389
LFP	General Service List 1k Type Ratio	0.4191
LFP	General Service List 2k Token Ratio	0.0557
LFP	General Service List 2k Type Ratio	0.0841
LFP	Off-List Token Ratio	1.3119
LFP	Off-List Type Ratio	0.1325
Readability	Automatic Readability Index	12.7182
Readability	Flesch Reading Ease	57.6363
Readability	Gunning Fog Index	19.4510
Readability	Original Dale-Chall Score	8.8971

Demo: http://drni.de/zap/ir4ll



ATICALL
Niels Ott and Detmar Meurers
Introduction
Pedagogical grounding
The WERTi system
Modeling FLT practice
Progression in WERTi
Examples and Target types
Realizing proposal
Creating ex. progression
Prototype realization
Some challenges
IR4LL (Ott 2009)
Measuring Text Difficulty
Readability Formulas
Lexical Fequency Profiles
Syntactic Complexity
Textbook structures
A Search Engine Prototype
Information Retrieval
Adding Text Difficulty
Towards Evaluation
Summary
Appendix
Prototype screenshots
IR4ICALL NLP pipeline

Towards Evaluation

- An experiment with 190.872 unique documents downloaded from 7 online encyclopedias.
- Encyclopedias are likely to contain articles on one topic each, but with different text difficulty.
- Sample of 7.000 text models (1.000 models for each site).

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Introduction
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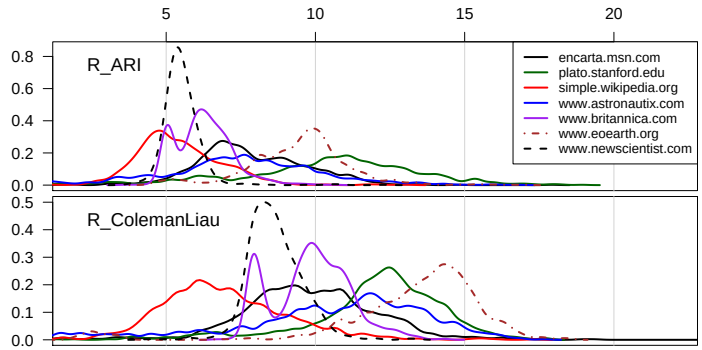
The WERTi system
Modeling FLT practice
Progression in WERTi
Examples and Target types
Realizing proposal
Creating ex. progression
Prototype realization
Some challenges
IR4LL (Ott 2009)
Measuring Text Difficulty
Readability Formulas
Lexical Fequency Profiles
Syntactic Complexity
Textbook structures
A Search Engine Prototype
Information Retrieval
Adding Text Difficulty
Towards Evaluation
Summary
Appendix
Prototype screenshots
IR4ICALL NLP pipeline

Towards Evaluation: Some results

Distribution of scores from two grade level-based measures:



- This type of evaluation gives only a first impression.
- A gold standard (annotated corpus) should be created and used instead.

ATICALL
Niels Ott and Detmar Meurers
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The WERTi system
Modeling FLT practice
Progression in WERTi
Examples and Target types
Realizing proposal
Creating ex. progression
Prototype realization
Some challenges
IR4LL (Ott 2009)
Measuring Text Difficulty
Readability Formulas
Lexical Fequency Profiles
Syntactic Complexity
Textbook structures
A Search Engine Prototype
Information Retrieval
Adding Text Difficulty
Towards Evaluation
Summary
Appendix
Prototype screenshots
IR4ICALL NLP pipeline

Summary

- Fostering language awareness is a well-motivated component of FLT.
- We discussed WERTi: web-based activity generator based on real-world texts selected by the learner.
  - a learner-driven approach, in which learners can
    - generate as many activities as they want
    - choose texts that match their interests
  - activities that remain fully contextualized as whole articles with the original web presentation intact
  - learner interaction with simple feedback based on the original text and linguistic analysis
- Develop search for real-world texts supporting a range of reading difficulty measures and specific linguistic categories → IR4LL.

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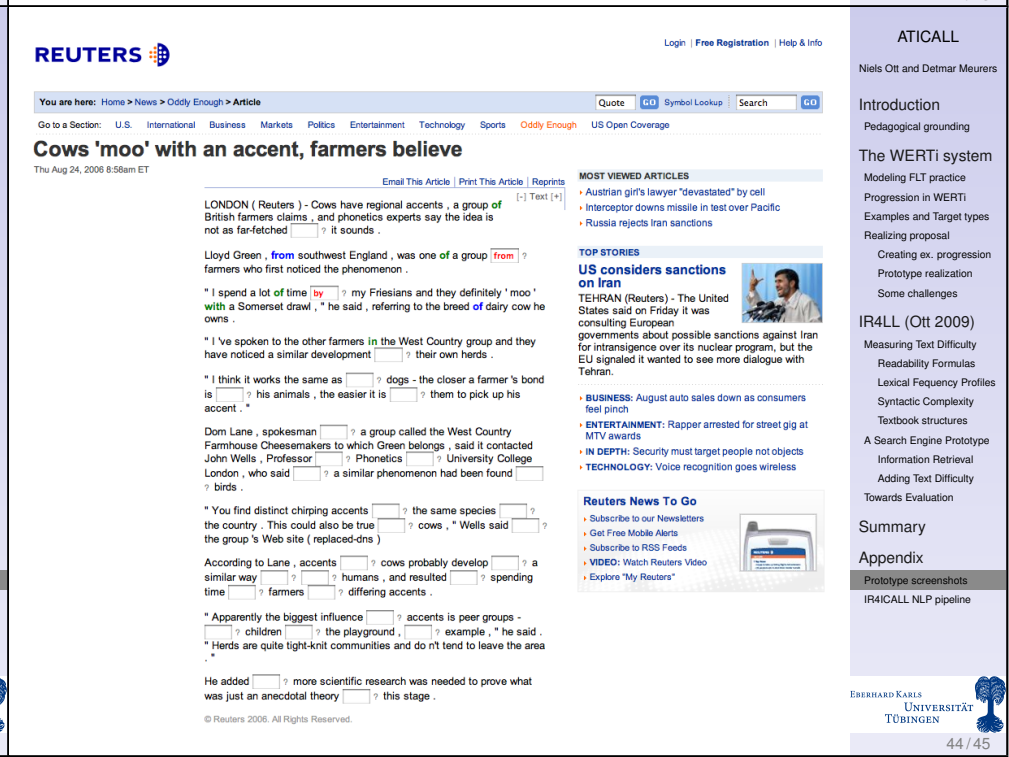
ATICALL
Niels Ott and Detmar Meurers
Introduction
Pedagogical grounding
The WERTi system
Modeling FLT practice
Progression in WERTi
Examples and Target types
Realizing proposal
Creating ex. progression
Prototype realization
Some challenges
IR4LL (Ott 2009)
Measuring Text Difficulty
Readability Formulas
Lexical Fequency Profiles
Syntactic Complexity
Textbook structures
A Search Engine Prototype
Information Retrieval
Adding Text Difficulty
Towards Evaluation
Summary
Appendix
Prototype screenshots
IR4ICALL NLP pipeline
Eberhard Karls Universität Tübingen
38 / 45

ATICALL
Niels Ott and Detmar Meurers
Introduction
Pedagogical grounding
The WERTi system
Modeling FLT practice
Progression in WERTi
Examples and Target types
Realizing proposal
Creating ex. progression
Prototype realization
Some challenges
IR4LL (Ott 2009)
Measuring Text Difficulty
Readability Formulas
Lexical Fequency Profiles
Syntactic Complexity
Textbook structures
A Search Engine Prototype
Information Retrieval
Adding Text Difficulty
Towards Evaluation
Summary
Appendix
Prototype screenshots
IR4ICALL NLP pipeline
Eberhard Karls Universität Tübingen
39 / 45

ATICALL
Niels Ott and Detmar Meurers
Introduction
Pedagogical grounding
The WERTi system
Modeling FLT practice
Progression in WERTi
Examples and Target types
Realizing proposal
Creating ex. progression
Prototype realization
Some challenges
IR4LL (Ott 2009)
Measuring Text Difficulty
Readability Formulas
Lexical Fequency Profiles
Syntactic Complexity
Textbook structures
A Search Engine Prototype
Information Retrieval
Adding Text Difficulty
Towards Evaluation
Summary
Appendix
Prototype screenshots
IR4ICALL NLP pipeline
Eberhard Karls Universität Tübingen
40 / 45



NLP pipelines in the indexer