

## **IATL: Institute for Advanced Teaching and Learning Strategic Project**

### **English/Law: Trial Scenes in Shakespeare's Plays**

#### **AiLAS (Auto-intuitive Live Archive Searching) research project**

Fatal Love: Shakespeare's Dramas of Language and Law in Performance through Advanced Archive Searching

Project team:

Professor Baz Kershaw (STPCPS)

Professor Carol Rutter (English) with Paul Raffield (Law)

Dr Sarab Anand (Computer Science)

Dr Nathan Griffiths (Computer Science)

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#### **Report:**

Though the AiLAS co-ordinator (Baz Kershaw) and technical team (Sarab Anand and Nathan Griffiths) were able to be fairly flexible in terms of their availability through the academic year, this project was severely affected by difficulties in scheduling the student workshops as planned.

There were delays in planning the first student workshop as it was quite late in Term 1 2010/11 by the time this aspect of the project got underway following the award of the IATL grant. Difficulties in fixing a date for when enough students might be available continued into Term 2, so that the first workshop did not take place until March 3<sup>rd</sup> 2011. Six English students attended the workshop and used AiLAS to explore the significance of objects in trial scenes, initially focussing on three of Shakespeare's plays and following a guide-sheet prepared by Baz Kershaw in consultation with Carol Rutter, Sarab Anand and Nathan Griffiths. Despite the small number attending, the results were very useful (see below).

In preparation for the second pair of workshops, those results formed the basis for making a key operational/technical improvement to the AiLAS system (see details below) by Anand, Griffiths and Tao Lee (contracted following his key input to the system during the Research Development Grant period). Anand also produced an excellent short video guide to using the system as introduction to the paired workshops; Kershaw consulted with Rutter about their focus and content and drew up initial guidelines.

During the Easter vacation and the first part of Term 3 a series of attempts was made to set up these further workshops, involving both English and Law students as planned, but this proved impossible to achieve before the examination period due to student commitments and other factors. In the event, the sessions were arranged for 18 May 2011, soon after the final examinations of both English and Law students. A minimum target of 15 students was set, partly to compensate for the low numbers achieved in the Term 2 workshop. Despite strenuous efforts on the part of Carol Rutter and Paul Raffield over several weeks, by one week before the workshop date only six English students had signed up for them and one of those was provisional.

The team therefore agreed to cancel the workshops as the numbers would not produce sound numerical data and there would be no Law students involved.

### **Results from Workshops:**

All six English students attending the one-day two workshop sessions in Term 2 completed five questionnaires (one combined) on the full day's investigations, which included tasks under the headings listed below. Given the low number of students attending, all responses are summarised below (n.b. repeated comments combined shown as 'statement (X)'; all suggestions for improvements added to General Comments list at end of this section):

Functionality – general comments (5 returns):

1. Graphs feature most useful tool in range of searches (2);
2. Word Clouds helpful in enabling faster use of references;
3. Synonyms from contemporary sources useful;
4. Neighbouring Words plus Word Clouds very useful to thematic/conceptual enquiries.

Functionality – single functions – positive features highlighted (5 returns):

1. Word Clouds very useful for all searches;
2. Graphs useful for patterns of usage across whole range of plays and for contextualising Keywords (2);
3. Keyword searches for comparing speeches across plays (2).

Functionality – two functions together – positive features highlighted (5 returns):

1. Word Clouds plus list of speeches (2);
2. word count plus Word Cloud;
3. Search Results plus Context option for individual speeches enhances interpretation/searching.

Search overview facility – Search Histories (4 returns):

1. very useful for ongoing project/for past searches becoming relevant (2);
2. good/great (2).

Search overview facility – MY AiLAS (4 returns):

1. useful for tracing ideas;
2. good/great (2).

AiLAS interface (5 returns):

1. very accessible/clear/nice/easy (5).

Further general comments, plus points not included above carried forward:

1. make clear that single/sub-group selection of plays is available (2).
2. strongly anticipating link to archive materials (Catalogue Domain); system works well, esp. given specific aims;
3. add Shakespeare historical context (existing link to Contextual Domain not used in workshop);

4. desirable adds:
  - export of Graphs to excel;
  - provide access to numerical data, i.e. 'contract' in MV 15 times (already available via Graphs function);
  - add multiple meanings of words, e.g. refine search through different meanings of same word;
  - add further editions of plays, e.g. Arden;
  - attach interviews to sections, e.g. find out actor motivation/ideas (already available via Catalogue Domain not used in workshop);
5. useful to:
  - add explanation of Word Clouds function (3);
  - include database for meter; e.g. how many hypermetrical lines in particular plays;
6. display and provide access to multiple functions simultaneously;
7. add more memory capacity to MY AiLAS;
8. add Synonyms based on Shakespeare's usage (besides contemporary examples);
9. add select all (speeches) function;
10. add direct access to Graphs at each stage of search.

### **Improvements to AiLAS system:**

Based on the workshop, user tagging of speeches in plays was added to the AiLAS knowledge domain (Shakespeare's plays). The tags also appear in the MY AiLAS so users can retrieve speeches they tagged in the past.

Also plans formed for a new querying mechanism for linking the Knowledge Domain and the Catalogue Domain (Northern Broadsides Theatre production archive).

### **Conclusion:**

The project workshop that was conducted led to very useful operational/technical improvements to the AiLAS system. Its pedagogic/academic results suggest that the objectives of the IATL project were likely achievable if the numbers of students planned for the workshops had been available as planned.

Baz Kershaw  
3 October 2011