A first proposal for a possible prototype of a TLS-Satellite

> About
>
> The content of this repository is a snapshot of the TLS on HXWD created 2024-06-18. It is an attempt to provide access to this database with minimal efforts. The database, which is maintained in XML format, has been exported to a static set of interlinked files in Markdown format. It is also informed by the Diakoff principles, but does not implement them in a slavish way -- here the emphasis is most emphatically on the second principle, **flexibility**. This flexibility is to a great deal achieved by using an editor, rather than a web browser, which will allow the user to change everything (and find out which changes actually break the system...).
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> For the display interface, an existing application called Obsidian is used. While this is **not** an open source program, it is available free of charge on computers running *Linux*, *MacOS* or Windows operating systems and on mobile platforms running iOS, iPadOS or Android. Although Markdown is a widely used text format, the files available here make use of constructs that are not generally supported in other applications, and therefore can only be used with Obsidian. As of this writing, only the core elements of the TLS have been exported, which includes
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> - Concepts
> - Bibliography
> - TLS Lexical entities ('Words')
> - Syntactic functions For the time being, we will call this combination of a set of Markdown files (which in Obsidian are called a 'vault') and the application Obsidian, which operates on this **tls-md**.
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> `tls-md` is an attempt to make using the TLS easier for new users, and to allow experimenting with new ways of presenting the data to the user and annotating the texts.
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> While the parts that have been included here are in itself complete, there is only a very small number of texts available at the moment.
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> Here are some use cases that drives the development.

> TLS

> The Thesaurus Linguae Sericae (TLS) is a analytical tool for pre-modern Chinese started by Christoph Harbsmeier in the 1990s. It was originally using a Filemaker database; since 2019 the editing process has been moved to an online database at HXWD.org this time named for the Chinese name of the TLS, which is 漢學文典.

> Diakoff principles
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> These principles have been laid out by Harry Diakoff after a lengthy study of the current TLS system and are meant to inform strategies for further development of the project. They have been delivered orally at the meeting of 2024-06-14 under the title "Near term and long term changes to the TLS: benefits and costs"; this write-up is not by Harry, but rather by #chris .
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> **Speed**
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> - the system should at any point respond as quickly as possible.
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> **Flexibility**
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> - Utmost flexibility with respect to display and usage of the data is desirable.
> - The phrase boundaries (colon boundaries, as Harry called them) should be malleable and not carved in stone due to the way the system is designed.
> - Multiple views of a texts should be possible.
> - Multiple ways of markup should be possible, which might suggest use of standoff markup.
> - Cross linking on many levels to other resources should be possible.
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> **Discussion**
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> - Users should be encouraged to engage in discussion about the interpretation presented here and not take them as given.
> - Such discussion threads should be possible for annotations, translation, edits etc.
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> **Pedagogical dimension**
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> - The system has a great potential for use at every level of engagement with the language.
> - For learners of Chinese.

- For students of linguistic annotation.
- For operators who want to learn the details of how to apply the descriptive and analytical tools.

Harry's presentation actually had a lot more to it, but this is just a very sketchy outline.

Use cases

How can this resource be used? Here is a number of envisioned use cases:

1. Add annotations. This can be (a) done with a text that has been exported from the TLS and (b) with any other text that has been copied to this vault.
2. Experiment with new ways to display the data: Since all of this can be edited, it is very easy to use this as a base to create mock-ups to communicate desired ways of displaying the material.
3. Add translations.
4. As a research tool in addition to and beyond the scope of the TLS. It is possible to create research notes and link material from the database
5. A teacher could make a derived version of this for her class, with the specific texts that are to be read. This can be done in a way that will allow the students to push their changes (homework) back to the teacher and the teacher to easily peruse them. To make this feasible in practice some infrastructure has to be developed.

Markdown

A very simple text format, named in contrast to formats based on markup languages such as XML or HTML. It uses only a few special syntactic constructs to make it possible to represent headings, lists, links, bold or italic text.

Originally proposed by John Gruber and Aaron Swartz in 2004, there is no standard body overseeing its development, which lead to a variety of variants.

The way Markdown is used in Obsidian is detailed here

Obsidian

A note editor which uses Markdown as its internal format. Available for download here Individual files are called 'notes' here and can be easily linked to each other. They can be displayed either in **'reading mode'**, where the text looks similar to the display in a web browser, or **'editing mode'**. Editing can be done in **'live preview'** mode, where the text looks similar to the reading mode. Some features are not available in live preview, for these cases **'Source mode'** can be used, which shows the text exactly as it appears in the file. Obsidian is written in Typescript, a variant of Javascript. It can be extended using plugins. A vibrant user community has produced thousands of plugins, of which the most popular ones have been downloaded more then 2 million times (as of June 2024). One interesting feature of Obsidian is that it allows 'transclusion' of links: include the content of a note or a portion of it in another note for display, while the text is still only kept in one place. To mark a link as transclusion, an exclamation mark ! is prepended to the link, e.g:

> “KR5c0057_042” is not created yet. Click to create.

Quo vadis

Where do we go from here?

The question at some point will be how to proceed.

Relationship of the two projects

In an early phase of discussions about this project, we started to call this the **TLS-Satellite** and the established website the **Mothership**, in a way like a small explorer ship will leave a space ship to explore a newly found planet, but with a limited load of supplies and facilities and the prospect of returning after a few days.

As things are proceeding now, I think there is room for more independence here, so it might be more appropriate to call this now the **TLS Companion** -- exploring the space alongside the older ship, seeing with new eyes and bringing qualities to the undertaking that will benefit the whole, which consists of both projects and more.

Workgroup anyone?

If this seems agreeable, I would like to establish a task force or working group that could oversee the further development here. We might schedule meetings outside of this group, but probably mostly communicate through Mail, GitHub and the like. We could even see if we can find another discussion method that could be pressed into service for the whole project.

Changes in both directions

Once the format on both sides has been confirmed, pipelines can be established to ensure flow of information in both directions. Cleaning up the Concept files, or make the Syntactical functions consistent and well documented are tasks that can be much easier be completed in an editor, rather than in the browser. In addition to that, we can also use this opportunity to implement an editorial pipeline, where changes are signed off before becoming pushed to the website. This would complete a transition from a one-person-project to a true collaborative project that has been in the making for a long time.