Common Language Resources and Technology Infrastructure

CLARIN

February 2010

Initial CLARIN Service Provider Federation

What is it?

The CLARIN Service Provider Federation consists of a set of formal agreements and some software technology specifications to authenticate and identify the researchers in a secure way when they work on distributed language resources and applications.

The CLARIN data and service centers form a Service Provider Federation similar to a publisher of electronic books, based on resource deposition agreements. To carry out this task, the CLARIN centers sign formal agreements with all interested national identity federations, which include an increasing number of research institutes and universities. It is the duty of the research institutes to guarantee that all their researchers and students are registered according to agreed-on and trustworthy procedures. Such a procedure is normally enforced by a contract between the research institutes and their national identity federation. Due to such contracts, only one signed document is required in order to allow, e.g., all the researchers of the many Finnish universities into the CLARIN Trust Domain.

The initial Service Provider Federation currently covers 5 institutes from 3 countries and all researchers in these 3 countries. After proper testing and configuration, it is the intention of the CLARIN Service Provider Federation to rapidly expand to other countries with national Identity Federations in order to include a number of their institutes as Service Providers. This will be carried out in a pragmatic and efficient way.

What is it for?

The initial CLARIN Service Provider Federation already gives more than one million researchers and students from 3 countries access to all the resources and applications of the participating centers. In addition, current browser technology allows each researcher to use a single sign-on when accessing all the centers consecutively.

As explained in the Short Guide on the CLARIN Trust Domain, the CLARIN Service Provider Federation is built on trust, which is one of the fundamental concepts determining the acceptance of any infrastructure. Trust has many dimensions ranging from robustness, availability and cost effectiveness of the offered services, to the way protection of data, applications and workspaces is dealt with. The CLARIN Trust Domain deals with the latter aspect, i.e. we trust that researchers who access services are indeed who they claim to be. As researchers start moving towards an e-Science scenario, gradually moving away from the download first principle where they do all their computation and data manipulation on a private notebook or a local server, they need to rest assured that their workspace is protected, that access restrictions cannot be bypassed, that rules of ethical conduct are not compromised by improperly identified users, etc.

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Who can use it?

This Short Guide is primarily intended for interested researchers and centers informing them about the opportunities that become available by signing the trust agreements and by setting up the software technology for distributed authentication.

When can it be used?

Researchers in Finland, Germany and the Netherlands who are members of universities and research institutes participating in the corresponding national identity federations can now make use of this new feature. This will be extended to new countries, on the one hand, and to additional centers, on the other hand. Currently, these methods may seem an additional effort, but in a few years they will be common practice.

How does it work?

The federation building step:

- Centers wishing to become members of the Service Provider Federation need to sign a document including rules describing their duties. One rule is that one organization (currently the MPI and in future the CLARIN ERIC) on behalf of the others signs agreements with national identity federations. Once the document is signed and the SAML-based federated identity technology (such as Shibboleth or SimpleSAMLphp) has been installed, the new center accepts the user credentials that are provided by the home institutes of the researchers within the CLARIN Trust Domain.

- Additional countries can be included when their national identity federations (IdF) sign agreements with the CLARIN Service Provider Federation in which the rules of proper conduct are described. Once such an agreement has been signed, all researchers covered by the IdF will immediately be included, and thus their identity, as granted by their home institutes, will be accepted by all parties.

The usage step:

- Researchers typically wish to access resources provided by a CLARIN Service Provider. In general, they first need to be registered at a research institute or university that is part of a national IdF, which guarantees proper conduct and proper administration of the user attributes. The CLARIN Service Providers will cater for exceptions.

- Once registered, the researcher can use one identity to access resources and applications from different CLARIN Service Providers. Once logged in and authenticated with a web browser, the user attributes are stored and can be reused when logging in to another site, i.e. only one log-in is required for each browser session.

- When a researcher accesses resources or applications, it is the responsibility of the CLARIN Service Provider to verify that the user attributes of the researcher entail the required permission.

identity provider   service provider

trust domain
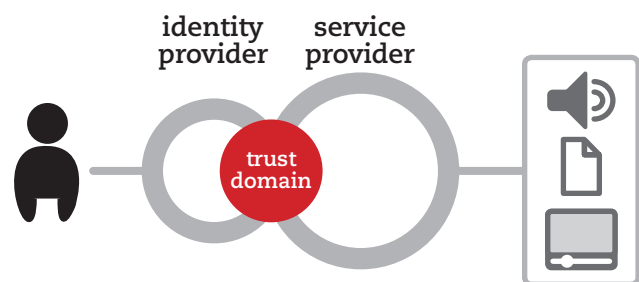
Who is responsible?

In CLARIN two teams are responsible: (a) the team at University of Helsinki is responsible for all aspects that have to do with agreements, IPR issues etc. (b) the team at MPI is responsible for the technological aspects.

Whom to contact?

For the CLARIN infrastructure initiative, the official website offers most recent information: http://www.clarin.eu

For all legal and ethical aspects, you can contact: Krister Lindén (UHEL): Krister.Linden@helsinki.fi

For all technological aspects, you can contact Dieter van Uytvanck (MPI): Dieter.vanUytvanck@mpi.nl

Where to find more information?

The official CLARIN web-site is the source of all information:
http://www.clarin.eu

CLARIN Federation Document:
http://www.clarin.eu/deliverables

CLARIN Trust Domain Short Guide:
http://www.clarin.eu/documents/short-guides