

The MATE Workbench

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A major problem faced by developers of spoken language dialogue systems and other language engineering products concerns the re-use of corpora or tools in different development or customisation projects. So far, most projects have had to either develop the necessary resources from scratch or to acquire resources from previous projects followed by a painstaking adaptation process. Both approaches are time-consuming and often inefficient.

The MATE project [<http://mate.nis.sdu.dk>] aims to facilitate the re-use of language resources by addressing the problems of creating, acquiring and maintaining spoken language corpora. On the basis of results from projects world-wide on spoken dialogue annotation and tools [Klein et al. 1998], MATE has developed a standard framework for the annotation of spoken dialogue corpora at multiple levels, including prosody, (morpho-)syntax, co-reference, dialogue acts, and communication problems, as well as the interaction among the levels [Dybkjær et al. 1998]. MATE proposes state-of-the-art best practice coding schemes for its annotation levels and is currently completing the first version of a workbench, i.e. a set of integrated tools, in support of the annotation framework and the best practice schemes [Isard et al. 1998].

The MATE Workbench makes it possible to produce and exploit corpora more efficiently, and with greater accuracy and consistency. The Workbench builds upon a widely accepted encoding framework and formal coding language (XML), broad-coverage best practice coding schemes for the coding levels addressed, coding import/export mechanisms, an easy-to-use interface for coding and for adding new coding schemes, and emphasis on coding best practice procedures.

The MATE Workbench includes the following functionalities:

- acquisition and manual or semi-automatic annotation and modification of data using the MATE annotation framework;
- presentation and visualisation of spoken dialogue corpora and annotations at different levels, according to user-defined partial views;
- extraction and retrieval from annotated corpora according to any combination of constraints from both the transcribed dialogue text and any type of annotation;
- statistical procedures for determining inter-coder consistency, frequency of object language phenomena etc.;
- import/export of annotated data and easy integration of results of external tools.

The Workbench is implemented in Java to make it platform-independent. It has a modular architecture that facilitates updates and addition of new tools and annotation schemes by other users. This will compensate for the unavoidable limitations of Workbench functionality as regards, e.g., the ability to import an unlimited range of corpus file formats or provide an unlimited number of annotation schemes. The demo will present the architecture of the Workbench and demonstrate the functionalities implemented so far. In the following we briefly describe the full set of Workbench functionalities. A first version of the Workbench is scheduled for completion by the end of May 1999.

The Workbench comes with a simple and basic coding module for orthographic transcription. A sound window is available to support the transcription process. One or more best practice coding modules are provided for each of the MATE coding levels including cross-level coding. Roughly speaking, a coding module includes or describes everything that is needed in order to perform a certain kind of markup of spoken language corpora. A coding module prescribes what constitutes a coding, including

the representation of markup and the relations to other codings [Dybkjær et al. 1998]. Users may specify their own coding modules either by opening existing ones, modifying them and saving them under a new name (the coding modules provided as part of the Workbench should not be changed), or by creating completely new coding modules by filling in an empty coding module form which is provided by the Workbench and which has an easy-to-use interface with no programming skills required. An understanding of basic XML concepts, such as the notation of elements and attributes will of course be needed. By creating new coding modules users may add new coding levels to the Workbench, e.g. the user could create a coding module addressing the level of semantics.

The Workbench comes with a number of default style sheets which define how output to the user is visually represented. For instance, a corpus may be displayed in musical score format, or phenomena of interest in the corpus may be given a certain colour or shown in boldface. If the user wants to modify a style sheet or define a new style sheet, a fairly detailed understanding of XML concepts and structure is required. However, we are investigating how a more user-friendly interface to style sheet specification can be enabled.

The Workbench enables information extraction of any kind from annotated XML corpora. Using a powerful query language [Mengel and Heid 1999], the user specifies the query. The answer is a set of XML references to existing corpora. By the use of style sheets the extracted information may be exported to file formats other than XML, for instance to HTML in order to serve as input to a browser.

The query mechanism also makes it possible to extract statistical information from corpora. For instance, the user may query the number of occurrences of the token “Thursday” in a corpus or ask for the number of (marked-up) nouns in the corpus. Computation of important reliability measures, such as kappa values, will be enabled.

The basic file format used by the Workbench is XML. Support is provided for conversion from certain other file formats. For the time being, converters to XML from XLabels and BAS Partitur are available. To enable conversion from XML to other file formats, the user will have to write and add a converter to the Workbench. This is done by simply extending the ConversionTool Java class and placing the new converter in a dedicated directory. Export to file formats other than XML will be developed. Any XML file can be converted into a supported format by using style sheets. However, by adding converters in the same way as for import more advanced functionalities can be achieved than by using style sheets.

User-friendliness is a central aspect in Workbench development. The aim is that users who do not know about, or who do not want to bother with, formal TEI conformant DTD specification and XML should still be able to use the Workbench for a variety of purposes. Online help facilities will be available to the user.

Acknowledgements: The work described is being carried out on Grant No. LE4-8370, MATE (Multi-level Annotation Tools Engineering), from the European Commission’s Telematics/Language Engineering Programme. The support is gratefully acknowledged. We would also like to thank all MATE partners. Without the joint efforts of the project consortium it would not have been possible to build the MATE Workbench.

References:

- All MATE deliverables will eventually become available at the MATE web site at <http://mate.nis.sdu.dk>.
- Dybkjær, L., Bernsen, N. O., Dybkjær, H., McKelvie, D. and Mengel, A.: The MATE Markup Framework. MATE Deliverable D1.2, November 1998.
- Isard, A., McKelvie, D., Cappelli, B., Dybkjær, L., Evert, S., Fitschen, A., Heid, U., Kipp, M., Klein, M., Mengel, A., Møller, M. B. and Reithinger, N.: Specification of Workbench Architecture. MATE Deliverable D3.1, August 1998.
- Klein, M., Bernsen, N. O., Davies, S., Dybkjær, L., Garrido, J., Kasch, H., Mengel, A., Pirrelli, V., Poesio, M., Quazza, S. and Soria, S.: Supported Coding Schemes. MATE Deliverable D1.1, July 1998.
- Mengel, A. and Heid, U.: Query Language for Access to Speech Corpora. Forum Acusticum, Berlin. (ASA, EAA, DEGA) 14-19 March 1999.

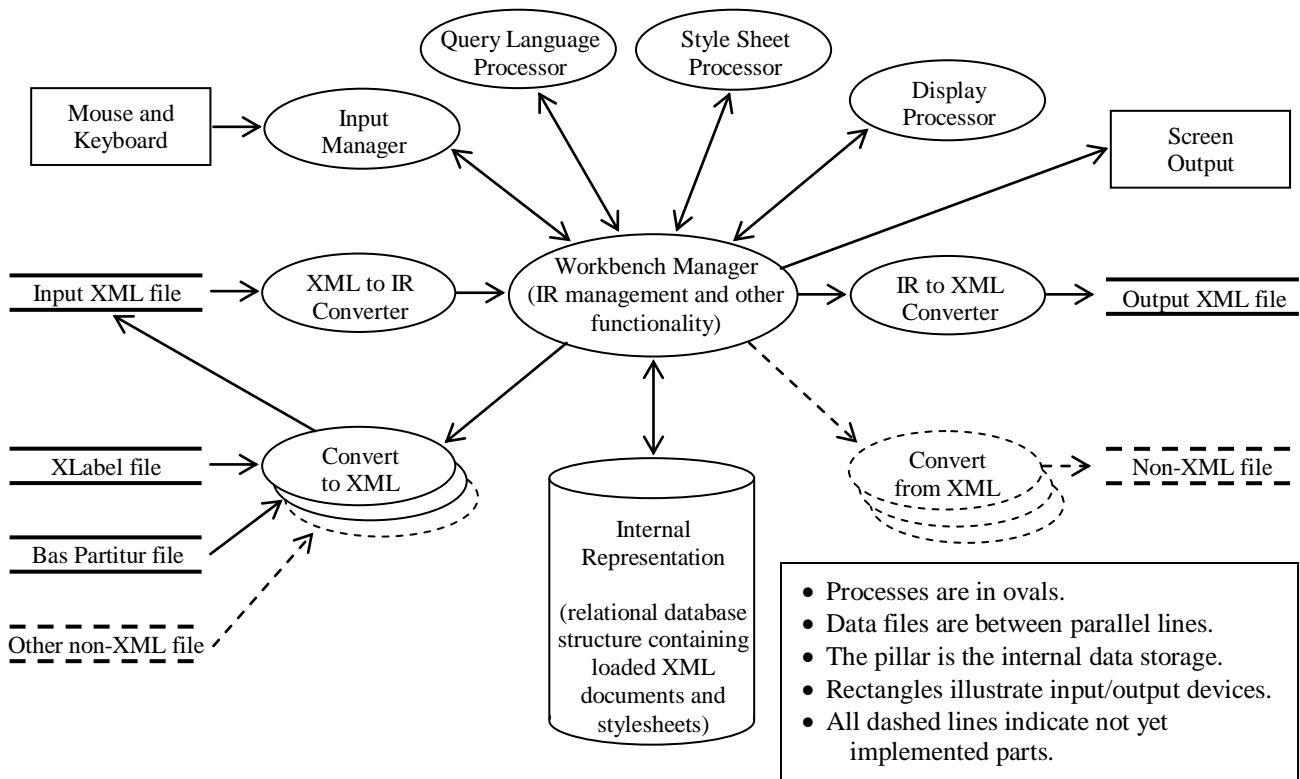
Detailed description of hardware and software requirements expected to be provided by the local organiser

We will bring a portable PC on which all our software will be placed.

All we need for demonstrating the workbench is a data projector and cables for connecting the portable PC to the projector.

Script Outline

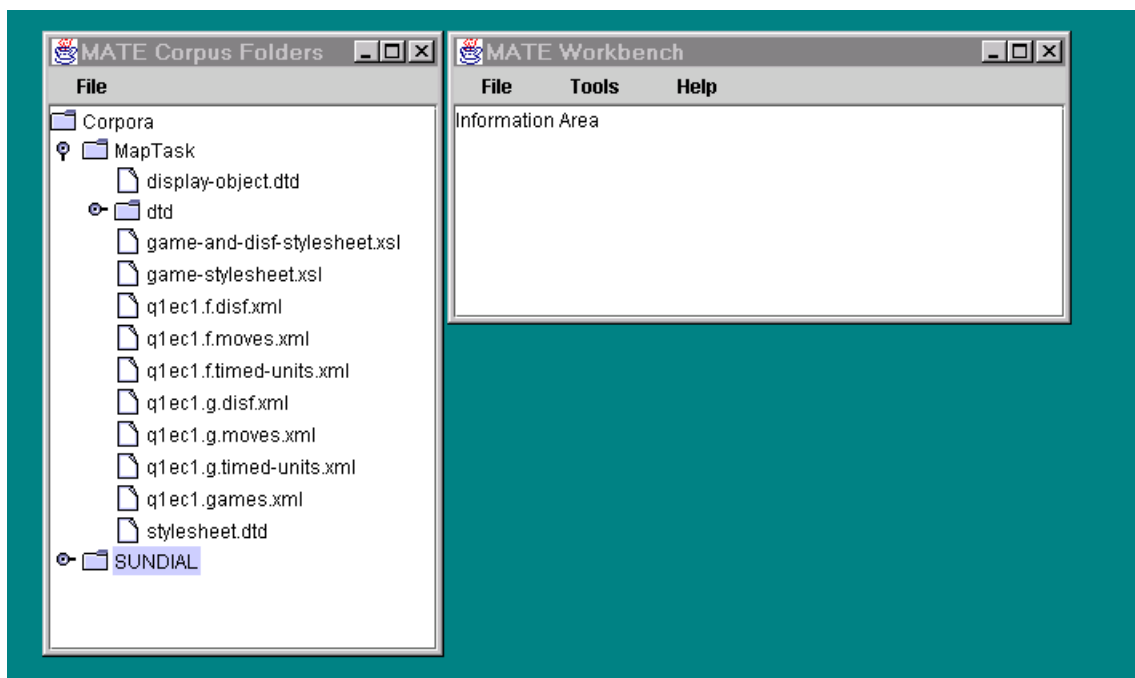
1. Workbench architecture



This data flow diagram provides an overview of the architecture of the workbench. The central processing is performed by the Workbench Manager which works on one or more XML files converted to the internal representation format plus one or more style sheets. On the basis of these files and through interaction with different processors it is able to perform the tasks described in the abstract above. Arrows indicate the main lines of the communication flow.

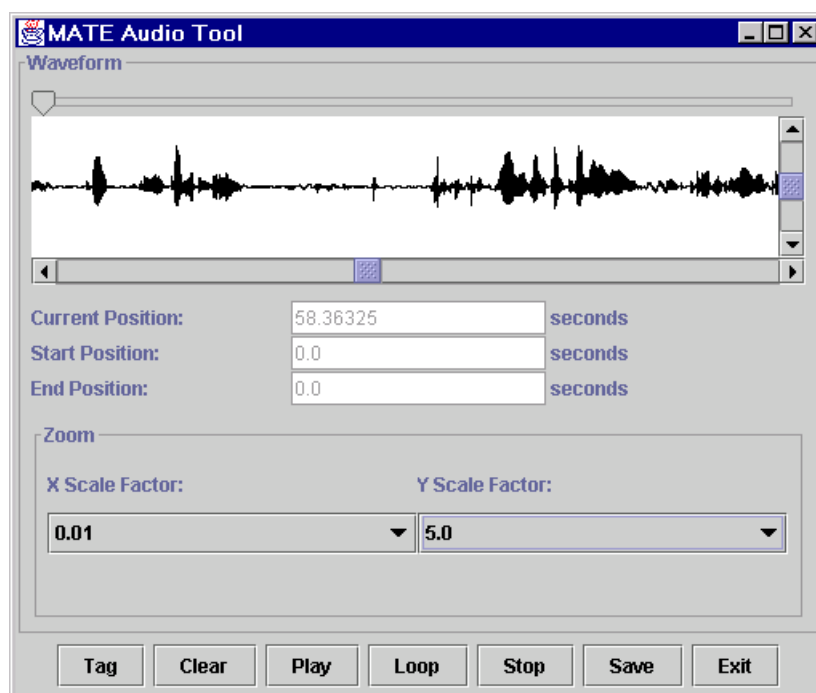
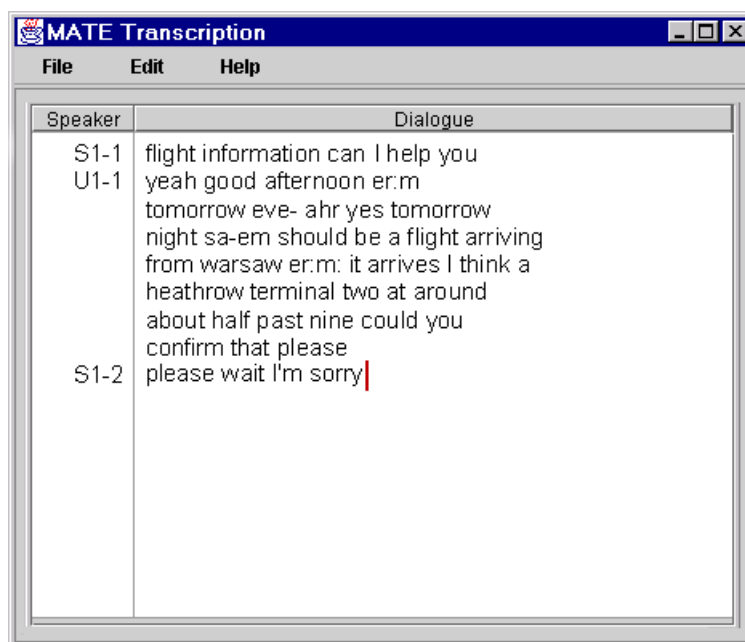
2. Main functionality

- *Start up*



This figure shows the start up screen of the MATE workbench. A list of the available corpus files are displayed in the corpus folder window.

- *Transcription*



The workbench supports simple orthographic transcription and enables the user to listen to the audio file while transcribing. Note that the transcription window shown here is a very preliminary version. Tags for transcription will be made available.

- Annotation

The screenshot shows the MATE Coding interface. The main window is titled "MATE Coding" and has a menu bar with "File", "Edit", and "Help". The main area is divided into three columns: "Speaker", "Dialogue", and "CP markup".

Speaker	Dialogue	CP markup
S1-1	flight information can I help you	
U1-1	yeah good afternoon er:m tomorrow eve- ahr yes tomorrow night sa-em should be a flight arriving from warsaw er:m: it arrives I think a heathrow terminal two at around about half past nine could you confirm that please	
S1-2	please wait I'm sorry there are no british airways flights from warsaw please try polish airlines	GG3-VT1
U1-2	hm: er:m you sure of that no british airways flights from warsaw to london	
S1-3	no	
U1-3	er:m okay is there a flight that arrives at heathrow terminal two at nine thirty please wait flight pee oh two eight	

Below the dialogue transcript, there is a section for the communication problem annotation:

GG3-VT1	<i>Flight information is false. The system apparently only handles BA flight information. Later in the dialogue the system does know about BA flights from Warsaw.</i>
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At the bottom of the window, there are two panels: "Guidelines" and "Violation Types".

Guidelines:

GG1	Say enough
SG1	Feedback on commitments
SG2	Feedback on information
GG2	Do not say too much
GG3	Tell the truth

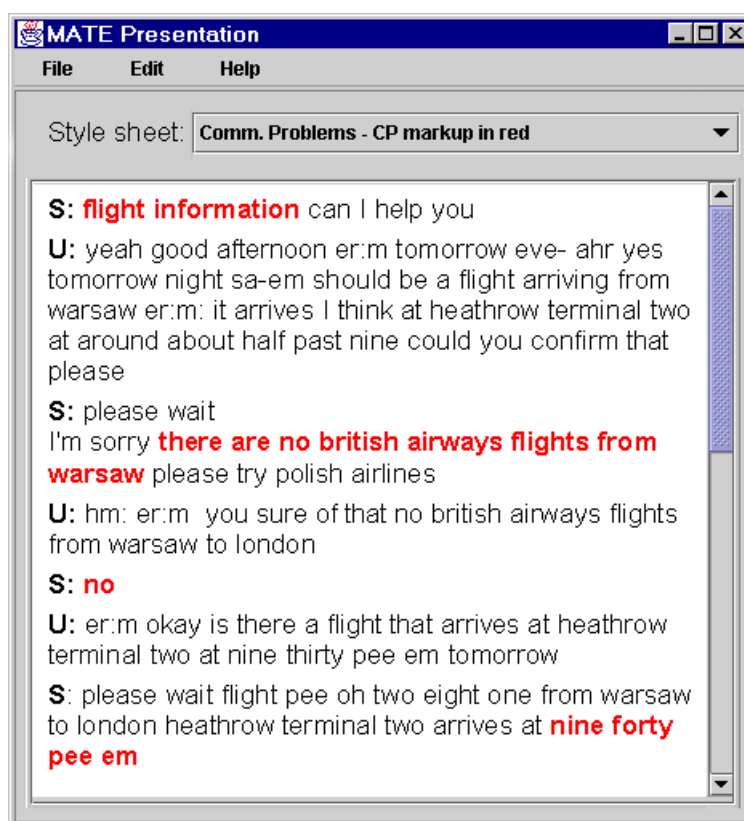
Below the guidelines list, there is a text box: "Do not say what you believe to be false."

Violation Types:

GG1	VT1	...
GG3	VT1	Flight information is false. The system apparently only handles BA flight information. Later in the dialogue the system does know about BA flights from Warsaw.

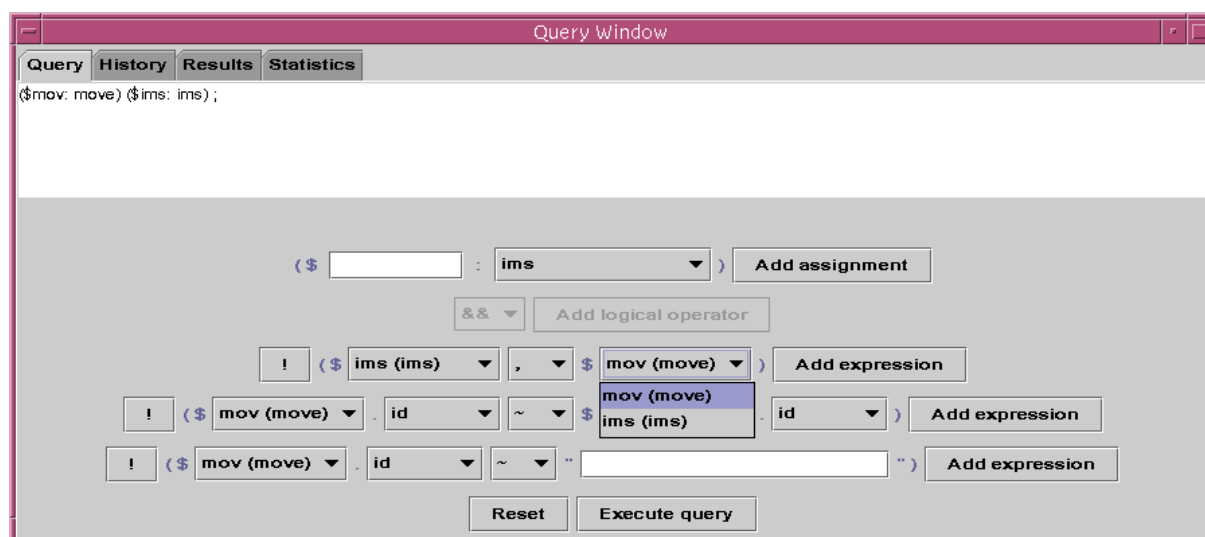
One of the levels supported by the Workbench is communication problems. The figure shows annotation of a communication problem on the basis of the best practice communication problem coding module provided as part of the Workbench. The basic structure of the coding window is roughly the same across levels. The phenomena (in this case guidelines and violation types) which are being tagged will of course be coding module dependent and vary across levels.

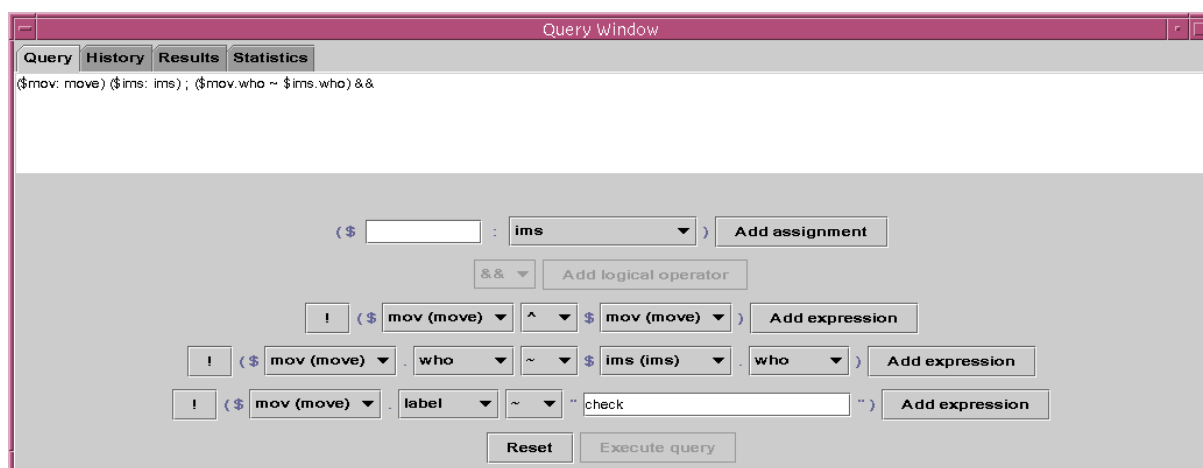
- *Presentation*



Style sheets define the precise layout and display of information. The figure shows a very simple display of the communication problems (in red) annotated in a dialogue. Clicking on a highlighted area will activate more detailed information on the communication problem.

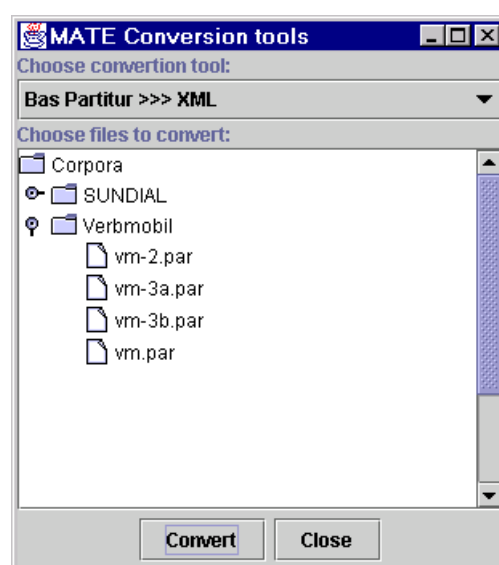
- *Information extraction*





The user may ask queries to one or more corpora and thus extract information from them, including statistic information. The above two figures show snap shots from entering a query. The interactive query formulation interface guides the user when specifying query expressions: The elements available in the corpora and their attributes are displayed. Buttons and fields are enabled or disabled depending on the actual status of the query string specified so far. Thus the user will not have to care about the formal correctness of the query string but can concentrate on the contents of the query.

- *Import/Export*



The Workbench supports the import of files from Xlabels and BAS Partitur to XML. Clicking on 'vm.par' and then clicking on 'Convert' in the figure will start conversion of this file into XML. Tools for export will be developed.

3. Extensibility

The MATE Workbench provides several examples of coding schemes, and pre-defined stylesheets for displaying relevant information to the user. These might do for most users. If it turns out that they do not cover the user's needs, s/he has several opportunities for modifying and/or adding functionality to the Workbench. These possibilities are not yet fully implemented but we hope to be able to demonstrate at least some of them this summer. The primary possibilities of extension include the creation of new coding modules, style sheets, conversion tools, and, more broadly, new modules.