

# **Citim**

*An e-learning tool to allow people facing difficulties with the French language to understand better the working world.*

## **Introduction**

*Citim* has been developed in 2003-2004 by GRETA du Velay, a French training organisation close to the Ministry of National Education. It is freely accessible on <http://citim.velay.greta.fr> where we welcome feedback and input. The development of *Citim* has been made possible by the co-financing of the European Commission in the frame of the Aito Leonardo da Vinci pilot project "improving immigrants access to language and society" that was planning to develop training material according a common European methodology and to test the feasibility of a web-based solution. We decided to develop e-learning material adapted to learners non familiar with ICT.

## **1. Diagnostic**

A preliminary diagnostic has been elaborated in three directions: training material available for the target group, training methods and the environment of training.

### **1.1 Adapted training materials**

A survey of French training tools for immigrants and people facing difficulties with the French language enlighten the lack of training material using real life communication situations in local contexts. Commercial tools are not localised and do not offer localisation facilities. There are no multimedia tools combining the learning of the French language and the understanding of the work environment, organisation and legislation.

### **1.2 Individualisation of training requires adapted tools.**

Training methods are related to the training context. Most of the actions subsidised by French public funds favour the organisation of open training workshops. The number of learning hours depends on the level and availability of the learner (unemployed, part-time jobs, mother with children...). These workshops welcome a variety of learners who have different goals, different backgrounds and different levels: one can be a French guy, 20 years old, considered as illiterate, another one can be a Russian scientist knowing few words of French and another a 40 year old Turkish woman who is not able to read or write any language. These differences make these courses very demanding for trainers who have to be flexible and to invest a lot in the preparation of their courses. They usually make their own training supports using methods bought on the market and a combination of cut and pasted "real life" material. Reproducibility, reusability and transfer to other trainers are difficult.

## **2. Objectives**

Taking into account the results of the diagnostic, we decided to follow two main objectives, one method related and one content related:

- to provide trainers a support to manage individualised heterogeneous learners in workshops-like learning environments;
- to provide immigrants the relevant information about the French working context including its organisation and legislation, with local examples, local names and contact.

To reach this last objective, because of time constraints, we had to target what is usually called intermediary French level: *Citim* is not for beginners.

In addition *Citim* had to fulfil second level objectives:

- be scalable and upgradeable (the number of units, tests, the length of text... are not known in advance and they can evolve);
- support adaptation and localisation (e.g. to include local information);
- support other target languages and/or real life communication situations (e.g. at the doctor, at the post office...);
- facilitate the motivation of the learner;
- be easily disseminated.

A dynamic web-based tool was a solution to meet these requirements. As it had been shown in some *el4ei* observatory examples, it helps supporting and increasing the motivation of learners. In addition, as we didn't want

to restrict the access to *Citim* nor to limit its use to training centres, we plan to organise it and present it so that it is also usable on an autonomous, free base.

### 3. Development

Constitution of a multidisciplinary team: Trainers from various specialities have been involved in the elaboration of *Citim*. Their action was coordinated by a multidisciplinary steering committee: French as a foreign language trainer, thematic trainer (business and company environment), training engineer and computer specialist. This group has elaborated a model that has been tested with immigrants before being used to develop the full tool.

#### 3.1 Module organisation and content

##### 3.1.1 Composition of a learning unit

The content of a learning unit is entirely related to one topic is composed of two main parts that can be studied apart or considered as complementary (the second one coming after the first one). The objective of the first part, built on a dialog and offering live sounds is to give a first overview of the related topic. It is focused on the acquisition of the basic vocabulary as well as understanding the basics of the topic (e.g. main argument, problems raised, reasons why, evolution...). Grammatical construction is simple. The second one gives detailed information about the topic on an exposition mode. Everything important is explained. It requires a better level of French. Vocabulary and sentences are more complex, but they remain accessible and targeted to intermediary levels.

Composition of the first part:

- A dialog (male & female) (French text and French audio version)
- The narrative form of the dialog (French text, colloquial Arabic and Berber audio version. Other audio versions are planned, next one being Turkish)
- A comprehension questionnaire (French text), MCQ type

Composition of the second part:

- Information (theoretical and practical) on the topic addressed by this learning unit (French text)
- A comprehension questionnaire (French text), MCQ type
- Complementary information (Web links), useful forms or models (like .pdf files) to be used by the learner in real life situations
- Localised resources adapted to the administrative location of the learner (contacts, address...)
- Thematic comprehension questionnaire (MCQ type)

##### 3.1.2 Learning units

Up to now 22 modules (learning units) are built on the above model. They give a comprehensive overview of the work context through legislation and organisation: employment contract, seasonal work, wages, the GMW, the probationary period, the notion of company, the dismissal indemnities, public companies, the right to training, equality principle, attestation of employment, national insurance contributions, collective agreements, staff representation, etc.

*Citim* has also been tested - the foreign sound option being hidden - with native French speakers who face social integration, who have (almost) never worked and who have a false representation of the working environment. With *Citim*, they can get to understand better working rules, rights and duties linked to work, on a friendly way.

##### 3.1.3 Elaboration of *Citim*

Tasks have been divided as follow:

- Choice of topics to be developed (= learning units or modules). Writing of thematic texts and comprehension tests, selection of useful links, complementary information, useful forms to download by the thematic trainer.
- Re-writing of thematic texts and comprehension tests in a French more adapted to the target group, writing of dialogs, narrative forms and comprehension tests after the thematic text by FFL trainers.
- Selection of local information (contact, addresses...) by a documentalist.
- Reviewing of all texts by other FFL trainers.
- Registration of dialogs and tests (male and female actors).
- Adaptation of narrative texts in Dialectal Arabic and Berber by graduate native speakers.
- Registration of these texts.
- Integration of all material by a computer specialist.

##### 3.1.4 Upgradeability and scalability

The programming has been thought to plan the evolution of the tool in the following ways:

- Registration of narrative texts in other languages;
- Addition of topics;
- Change of topics (the scope can be changed);
- Adaptation to other languages.

Up to now localisation has been implemented for the Auvergne region (four “departments” = four administrative areas regarding work and employment). *Citim* allows any training organisation interested to enter the data corresponding to its geographical location and though to share it with other organisations. This facility can be related with internet principles: the free share of knowledge and information.

### 3.1.5 Motivational functions

They reside mainly in three directions.

- *Citim* is available through internet
- Immigrants can listen to their mother language (up to now dialectal Arabic and Berber) on the internet. We have noticed that they used to use this feature even if their understanding of the text was good. They are happy to hear these languages that can be considered as minority languages on the web through their computer. We know (also from the *e/4ei* observatory) that many people/groups do not access internet because they do not find content adapted to their need nor content related to their cultural frame. Giving immigrants the possibility to hear, through internet, their mother tongue language is a way to reduce the psychological and cultural distance between them and internet and, as a consequence, to make them familiar with internet.
- *Citim* offers local information.

## 3.2 Learning management system

A learning management tool has been designed to help the trainer in building a learning path after the 22 learning units adapted to his specific target. The objective is to have the learner work in autonomy with the tool while the trainer can pay better attention to other learners.

To help the trainer in building a learning path adapted to his specific target, it is possible to construct individualised learning paths. It starts by the selection of units according to learner's needs or focus. Once a unit is selected, the system advises to select the logical following one(s) (in bold). Selected units are displayed separately and it is always possible to change the selection or modify the order. Then according to the French level of the user, the tutor can choose to display or not the narrative form, the audio version, the complementary information, etc. To make parametering simpler and to spare time, three levels are pre-selected (low, intermediate, high). They can be chosen by a simple click in the “profile” section. Then *Citim* displays only the “necessary” information and support. E.g. it is not necessary to give access to the full theme development if the learner level is low, it is enough to let him practice with the dialog and the questions related to the dialog (this part gives already some useful information about the selected topics). This feature is also linked to accessibility: there is no need to confuse the learner with too much options and icons.

*Citim* is a support tool that can create and stimulate live discussions between learners and with the trainers. Trainers have space to make annotations. In that way they can share animation advices. They are encouraged to do so but we don't know how it will work.

When the learner has finished the learning path a summary is available for him/her and for the learner (time spend on each part, number of good answers).

At the end of each unit a menu is dedicated to the trainer. S/he can access the how-to page (welcome), the tutor's advice page, the learner follow-up page and s/he can also propose tips.

## 4. Adaptations for accessibility

### 4.1 *Citim* target is non familiar with ICT

Since the beginning, *Citim* has been planned to facilitate its use by non ICT skilled trainers and learners. Large and detailed explanatory pages are written for trainers who can browse a demonstration topic.

*Citim* is planned to be used trough a graphical browser (IE, Mozilla, Safari, Opera...) or through a text-based browser like the ones used by visually impaired.

As far as possible, simplification, alternative choices and guided features have been proposed.

- Full screen popup: the objective is to remove all the browser features that are not necessary (address bar, menus, icons...) to avoid confusion with beginners.
- Keyboard navigation for novice computer users (possibility to use the keyboard instead of the mouse).
- All actions are associated to a key (1, 2, 3, 4, 5, ↑, ↓)
- Possibility to choose the font size display (3 choices: small, medium, large).
- Guided browsing: if the tool is used in a mediated context, the training path and the options being selected by a tutor, once the learning path is started, it is just possible to continue, not to skip or change.

To solve some software installation problems (sounds requires a Flash plug-in, keyboard navigation requires the acceptance of JavaScript by the browser), and for organisations that have a slow internet connection, a CDROM version is planned. It will integrate all the material and necessary software and will run without any installation on the computer hard disk.

#### 4.2 Adaptations resulting of the first piloting

The observation and feedback of learners inexperienced with ICT has helped us detect many small problems that were creating barriers and could be discouraging in a soft use process. Solutions implemented help to provide a more accessible e-learning tool. By reading some of them we notice that obstacles can reside in many unpredictable features.

<i>Problem detected</i>	<i>Solution implemented</i>
The clicking zone of the sound icon is too small. A click and drop doesn't start the sound.	Enlarge the clicking zone around the sound icon with a margin. Start the sound even if the click is finished outside of the zone.
After a click on the sound icon, the sound starts 1 or 2 seconds late. Users systematically click several times.	This delay is due to the sound put in cache by Flash. This shouldn't happen with the CDROM version of <i>Citim</i> . On the web, the interface can be modified to solve this: a graphic sign will show that the sound has started and the repetitive clicks can be ignored.
In the test, after the answer display, the choice is between "try again/continue" or "stop the test". Most of users wonder what to do.	The result is displayed, then after a 2 seconds pause, the test continues automatically without asking anything to the learner. We keep the possibility to continue with a click.
The stop of the test is too visible in the menu. The learner shouldn't quit the test on his own. It is also an additional choice that may create insecurity.	Make less visible the test quit, e.g. by putting the link at the bottom page. The design has to be different from the learner's menu.
Users are motivated by the test, especially when they provide the right answer. The display of the good result is too plain.	A good answer can be underlined by a positive sound (or by an image).
At the end of the test, if the user clicks by mistake on "restart the test", he has to go through all the test once more.	Oblige the learner to do the test again if less than 25% good answers, between, 25% and 75% leave the choice and if more than 75% the following part is displayed.
...	...

Some problems are easily solved. Some would require more time, some are created by browsers incompatibility... The matter is to find a balance between the important features and the anecdotic ones. Targeting the transparent computer where the user doesn't need to adapt is the objective but we must keep in mind that the user will be soon confronted with the real ICT world, full of tricks and problems that s/he has to be aware of.

#### Conclusion: E-learning for all (learners, trainers, training organisations)

Why building *Citim*? Firstly, it fills a gap on the training material offered to facilitate the social and professional integration of immigrants (and/or people facing difficulties with the French language). Then *Citim* is built to allow learners non-familiar with ICT to help them discover and practice ICT at the same time they "learn" another subject. This cross-learning was one of the key result shown by the *eI4ei* observatory.

*Citim* has also involved many trainers that where not familiar with internet nor e-learning. In that sense the process itself that is cooperative is a factor of e-inclusion for trainers who have discovered possibilities offered by e-learning. An active involvement (with a share of responsibilities – everyone being participating in accordance to his/her speciality) of trainers to the elaboration of an e-learning tool is the best way to favour their professional and daily use of these tools for the benefit of learners.

