

CENT - Computer Enabled Neuroplasticity Treatment: a modular, extensible platform for neurofeedback with lightweight wearable EEG devices

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ABSTRACT

Biofeedback/neurofeedback is a growing clinical field. Tools for administering feedback treatment tend to be proprietary and fixed/non-extensible. Thus there is a need for a biofeedback platform which is entirely open source, extensible and free. We present the Computer Enabled Neuroplasticity Treatment (CENT) platform to meet this need.

Keywords: neurofeedback, electroencephalography, ADHD, computer-enabled, Qt

Story/structure is:

1. Introduction + motivation

- we needed a NFB platform and didn't find anything suitable (why not?)
- we developed CENT platform at the same time as setting up the clinical trial
- we aimed for lots of good things: modular, extensible, state of the art technology, effective but simple UI, minimal but extensible feature set
- other systems exist but CENT fills a niche because...

2. Related work

- Other neurofeedback platforms [DONE!]
- Abundance of wearable EEG devices [DONE!]

3. Architecture - describe the tech. Show where to get it and the compatible parts

- CENT-core
- OV-signal proc [DONE!]
- CENT-extensions

4. Validation

- Malmi therapy

5. Discussion

- We saw a need and filled it
- Pros and cons
- CENT vs. "Meditation toys"
- Usage scenario
- Future work: Interfacing with bestest systems (like MIDAS)

6. Conclusion: CENT platform is great, buy 6!

1 INTRODUCTION

Neurofeedback (NFB) is a growing field, with extensive clinical use, a large body of research literature, and applications also in performance enhancement, entertainment, and stress relief. However tools for administering feedback treatment tend to be proprietary and fixed/non-extensible. Thus there is a need for a biofeedback platform which is both robust, and entirely open source, extensible and free. We present the Computer Enabled Neuroplasticity Treatment (CENT) platform to meet this need.

1.1 Background

NFB, also called electroencephalography (EEG) biofeedback, is operant conditioning of specific temporal, spatial and frequency features extracted from scalp-recorded electrical potentials (Lubar and Shouse, 1976).

NFB has been described as “a mechanism that may be used to stimulate and/or regulate cerebral activity, which in turn may influence cognitive processing” (Vernon et al., 2003). The specific model of effect has been described variously as ‘repairing’ a presumed cause of disorder to ‘normalise’ behaviour, or instead as a tool to enhance cognitive states (see Gevensleben et al. (2014) for a thorough discussion). Either model can be applied in a clinical setting, while the latter enhancement model could also be applied in any non-clinical setting.

Part of its value is that NFB can be personalized to suit the specific clinical presentation, or performance enhancement requirements, provided that there is requisite theoretical and observational data to guide the personalisation. In clinical settings, the personalisation is often done by reference to quantitative or ‘qEEG’-guided normative databases. Hammond (2010) discusses this in detail, illustrating the heterogeneity in qEEG patterns associated with symptoms and discussing the requirements and need for qEEG analysis guided by normative databases. Johnstone et al. (2005) provided a review of such databases, along with a review of qEEG profiles, which are “manifestations seen between genome and behaviour” that they term ‘intermediate’ EEG endophenotypes.

Beside the neurophysiological aspects of NFB, the psychology and experience of NFB are considered by many to be equally important. Calderon and Thompson (2004) have conceptualized biofeedback as a three-step process that consists of

- becoming aware of a physiological response,
- learning to control the response, and
- transferring control of the response to everyday life.

The first two steps of the model - becoming aware and learning to control the electrical activity of the brain - constitute NFB learning. The third step refers to transfer of the NFB learning, often measured in the literature by performance on a neurocognitive test of the treated function (e.g. attention) and/or self-reported symptoms.

Two of the more widely-used clinical NFB protocols are ‘theta-beta’ (TB) and ‘sensorimotor rhythm’ (SMR), which are those currently supported in the CENT platform. TB and SMR protocols are based on sub-second frequency-band features.

TB protocol assumes a model where theta power is elevated above normal, and therefore uses an inhibition target for theta power and a reinforcement target for beta power. EEG recording is often at a frontal site. The rationale behind TB training has been described in at least two different ways: as the rectification of cortical hypoarousal (Barry et al., 2003), and as the reinforcement of working memory (Vernon et al., 2003).

SMR protocol reinforces beta power, usually low or mid beta, often with an inhibition target for theta. The site is above the sensorimotor strip, often lateral, such that the beta oscillations correspond to the sensorimotor rhythm. The rationale for SMR training has been proposed as either facilitating attention (Vernon et al., 2003), or the improvement of sleep through an increase in beta spindles, with concomitant effects on cognitive function (Arns et al., 2014).

These protocols contrast with another widely-studied protocol, Slow Cortical Potentials (SCP) training, which feeds back the time domain DC component. SCP targets the Contingent Negative Variation (CNV) Event Related Potential, which Mayer et al. (2015) defined as “a slow negative shift over central sites that develops following the presentation of warning stimulus in expectancy of an imperative stimulus that

requires a response”. SCP uses two opposed cortical regulation targets to be trained in random consecutive order. The TB and SMR protocols do not include such an explicit set of counter-poised targets to induce self-regulation, relying instead on a single target of reinforcement/inhibition, which is trained repeatedly.

Challenges The field of NFB makes progress, but in technical terms it does so slowly. The protocols introduced by Lubar and Shouse (1976) and others have remained unchanged for 40 years. As with any technology, progress relies not just on research, but also on adoption and exploration of the potential by developers. Rapid advances have recently been made in EEG-amplifier hardware and signal processing software, yet the software needed to facilitate open and rapid research and development in clinical NFB is lacking (see below). Opening the field calls for software which is robust, and entirely open source, extensible and free.

1.2 Neurofeedback software

Currently a large number of different NFB software packages exist, most of which are still actively used or still in development. The recent boom of wearable biosensors (such as cheap, commercial EEG devices like the Muse and Melon headbands) has also boosted the number of available personal NFB applications. Despite the popularity, very little literature exists reviewing NFB platforms. One report estimates the usefulness of various BCI frameworks for conducting NFB, and lists design considerations for such a system Huster et al. (2014). In this section we attempt to comprehensively cover different types of software packages available for NFB.

All available NFB solutions share three basic characteristics which are: 1. a method of interfacing with an EEG device, 2. capability to process the acquired EEG data in real-time and 3. the ability to generate feedback for the user. Outside these parameters different software packages can have vastly different properties. For instance hardware devices supported, licensing, and intended usage all vary greatly between different NFB solutions. The NFB software can roughly be divided into two categories: clinical and non-clinical. The clinical category contains software that is solely intended for various NFB therapies (ADHD therapy being the most common). The other software packages are aimed more for personal cognitive neuromodulation and entrainment (such as meditation and stress management). We have compiled a list (table 1) which, to our knowledge, contains all of the currently available software packages intended for NFB.

Table 1 lists 33 NFB software, alongside their respective licenses and other information. The 'License' column indicates which license was used when the software was published. In some cases a software package was released with the source code but without a specified license, as noted by a question mark. The 'Merit' column refers to scientific merit, defined here as the highest ranking publication the corresponding software was used in. The rankings were extracted from the Finnish Publication Forum, which is a nationally-accepted quality assessment forum for publication channels. Rank values for publication venues are 0 (no rank assigned by the forum), 1 (basic), 2 (leading), and 3 (highest)¹. The merit value indicates whether the software has been used in NFB related research. For instance the BioExplorer software has been used to study the increase local gamma and beta band activity through NFB Keizer et al. (2010) and the EEGer4 to study the effect of music on alpha/theta NFB Gruzelier et al. (2014).

The 'Last Update' column indicates the latest known time of publication for either software or documentation updates. This column indicates whether or not a project is still in active development. Twenty of the software packages are still clearly active (updates less than one year old), and seven more have received updates in the last three years, but the remaining six projects have been dormant for between four and twelve years.

Finally, in the last column the use case for each software (clinical vs non-clinical) is listed. The use case was determined on the basis of the developers' own descriptions from the web-page of the software.

Table 2 summarises data on license (open-source vs. proprietary) and intended use (clinical vs. non-clinical). This illustrates that the majority of available software are commercial with proprietary licenses. Although there are almost the same number of clinical and non-clinical software, all of clinical use software have a proprietary license. From this review, it is apparent that there is a clear lack of open-source solutions for clinical NFB. The closest option for such a platform would be the proprietary NeuroRT suite by Mensia Technologies, which like the CENT system, is built on top of the open-source

¹For more information see <http://www.julkaisuforum.fi/en/publication-forum>

System	License	Merit	Last Update	Clinical use
BioEra	Prop.	1	2015-06-22	No
BrainBay	GPL	1	2014-12-03	No
BrainAthlon	?	1	2004-01-01	No
EEGMIR	?	0	2003-12-30	No
ElectricGuru	?	0	2002-01-21	No
BioExplorer	Prop.	2	2012-09-26	No
BioGraph Infiniti	Prop.	1	2013-06-05	Yes
BioTrace+	Prop.	2	2015-07-23	Yes
BrainFeedbackPro	Prop.	0	2015-11-19	Yes
TruScan Neurofeedback	Prop.	0	2015-11-19	Yes
BrainMaster	Prop.	1	2015-10-09	Yes
BrainPaint	Prop.	2	2012-01-01	Yes
Cygnnet	Prop.	1	2015-11-01	Yes
eBioo	Prop.	0	2015-03-01	Yes
EEGer4	Prop.	2	2013-06-10	Yes
EventIDE	Prop.	0	2015-08-18	No
Mind Workstation	Prop.	0	2011-08-31	Yes
MindReflector	Prop.	0	2013-09-19	Yes
Neurofield	Prop.	1	2015-02-06	Yes
neuromore Studio	Prop.	0	2015-11-06	No
NeurOptimal	Prop.	0	2015-07-01	Yes
NeuroRT	Prop.	0	2015-11-04	Yes
OpenViBE	AGPL	1	2015-10-02	No
SmartMind3	Prop.	1	2015-01-01	Yes
Melon - Brain Training	Prop.	0	2015-02-28	No
Muse App	Prop.	0	2015-12-16	No
Neurosurfer	Prop.	0	2015-02-15	Yes
BrainWaveOSC	?	0	2014-07-30	No
OpenNFB	GPL	0	2015-11-19	No
WaveTuner	?	0	2013-10-16	No
AlphaTrainer	?	0	2014-05-20	No
Mindrun	MIT	0	2015-09-29	N
Resonanz	GPL	0	2015-07-23	No

Table 1. Currently available neurofeedback software packages

OpenViBE platform. However, there is no NFB software for clinical use that is truly open-source from end-to-end, including both the signal processing back-end and the patient management front-end.

	Non-clinical	Clinical
Proprietary	6	15
Open-source	11	0

Table 2. Division of use case and license in neurofeedback software packages

1.3 Wearable EEG sensors

In recent years there has been a sharp increase in the availability of ambulatory EEG sensors. This is partly due to technological advances, and also to the popularity of the quantified self movement. The quality of these devices varies from purely consumer-grade (also known as lifestyle applications) to more expensive but near laboratory-grade devices. The suitability of each device for NFB therapy must be tested, but the current trend looks promising as the devices are readily available and cheap compared to laboratory EEG.

The standard software that usually accompanies these devices seems to be more oriented for self

quantification and cognitive enhancement. For instance the application intended for the MUSE band teaches meditation techniques. This is not surprising as the devices are targeted for people interested in quantified self movement. Devices like the MUSE, however, provide a communication protocol that allows other software to access the raw data of the device. Therefore, it is plausible that these devices can be used as an input to NFB software. The modification necessary would require that NFB software itself could be modified which further increases the need for open source solutions.

1.4 CENT platform

The CENT platform was developed to facilitate the CENT clinical trial of NFB treatment for adult ADHD, conducted at the University of Helsinki, Finland ². In the context of the CENT trial, the CENT platform was used with 25 patients, during approximately 40 NFB sessions of 1 hour per patient. Two separate models of EEG amplifier were supported during this trial, along with two NFB protocols (TB and SMR), in two different modes (normal and inverse). Thus in total eight separate conditions of NFB training were supported by the platform. More detail is given in section 3 below.

The CENT platform was designed to connect light-weight EEG amplifiers to a simple, easy-to-use interface for running NFB sessions. The platform's workflow is fixed but adaptable, with configurable settings for personalisation of the treatment, including:

- capability to modify the spectral values recorded at baseline, thereby increasing or decreasing difficulty of the task
- different games with different levels of stimulation and different 'look and feel'
- options to review performance

With the existing range of features, the platform demonstrates its utility for the task of clinical neurofeedback. Additionally, with an open, robust, modular architecture it is ideal for extension to add new features or explore other application possibilities.

Outline In the rest of this paper, we will first describe in section 2 the CENT platform, including the core architecture, the signal processing framework, and the options for adding software extensions. Then, in section 3, we will describe a validating example of how the platform was used. Finally in section 4 we discuss the implications for the platform, and possible future work and conclusions.

2 METHODS - ARCHITECTURE

2.1 Platform architecture

The CENT platform is built on Qt. . .

todo: platform technology

2.2 Signal processing

2.2.1 Overview of signal processing architecture

The signal processing back-end of the CENT system was implemented using the open-source OpenViBE platform Renard et al. (2010). The OpenViBE platform consists of a visual modelling language (similar to LabView or Simulink) which enables the design of various signal processing protocols, called *scenarios* in the OpenViBE terminology. The scenarios can be drawn by connecting boxes representing various operations to each other in order to produce to a flowchart of how the data is processed. CENT integrates a fully functional version of OpenViBE which means that the original editor can be used to design new protocols or to modify the existing ones.

The signal processing back-end of the CENT system contains multiple OpenViBE scenarios. A list of scenarios required for a typical NFB session can be found in table 3. Scenario-files can be found in the *scenarios* subfolder of the CENT installation. Scenarios themselves are constructed using existing modules known as 'Boxes'. Boxes range from very simple (such as squaring each signal value) to more advanced (such as linear discriminant analysis or support vector machine classifications). Information between boxes is passed as streams of data. OpenViBE has multiple different streams but the two most

²Clinical trial registered with ISRCTN, DOI 10.1186/ISRCTN13915109

important for the CENT system are 'Signals' and 'Stimulations'. Signals are simply chunks of EEG data that contain a buffer of the raw voltage values and the sampling rate used to acquire them. Stimulations are similar to trigger codes in most EEG applications and can be used to convey meta information like classification results or signal quality. Most of the common EEG signal analysis operations can be completed using a different combination of available boxes and streams. It is important to note that due to the open source nature of OpenViBE it is also possible to write new boxes for desired functionality.

cent_monitoring_and_noise.xml	Scenario for online monitoring of the signal and checking the signal quality
cent_baseline.xml	Baseline measurement
cent_generate_configuration.xml	A utility scenario used to generate configuration files required for the actual session
cent_game.xml	The main scenario for the therapy session

Table 3. List of OpenViBE scenarios used in CENT

Parameters for different boxes can either be set manually in the designer or they can be specified in a separate XML configuration file. Functionality of OpenViBE scenarios can be expanded using scripts written in Lua or Python languages. For more detailed explanation of box configuration see section GG.

Although box system is very flexible and grants much freedom in experiment design the implementations of even simple routines tend to be large. For example feature extraction of signal powers from few frequency bands can require the use of multiple boxes. Furthermore the implementation of these processes requires a certain level of knowledge regarding signal processing and might not be intuitive to the end user. For this reason to end user will not need to modify the OpenViBE scenarios in order to use the CENT system. Most of the necessary changes to the parameters can be done from within the CENT system and through configuration files.

The overall aim of the signal processing back-end is to classify the mental state of the patient to ADHD and non-ADHD based on the power modulations of theta and beta power bands of the EEG. In practice this is done by first acquiring a baseline recording of the theta and beta powers. Baseline is 60 second EEG recording where patient is just sitting still and staring at the fixation cross displayed on the monitor. In the subsequent game session the current power values of theta and beta are compared to the baseline values to determine shifts in the mental state. According to literature ADHD patient have excessive activity in the theta band and lower than average activity in the beta band. The desired effect is thus a decrease in theta and an increase in beta band. The change (whether positive or negative) is registered by the signal analysis module and passed back to the CENT system. The behaviour of the game is then modified based on this classification result. The patient receives the feedback as either success or failure in the game and thus slowly learns to modify their neural patterns.

This section briefly describes the operation of each of the scenario files. Each scenario can be divided into functional subelements that correspond to a certain step in a typical BCI processing chain. More information on the behaviour of the subelements can be found in the Signal processing protocol section, where structure and behaviour of different components are described.

Monitoring and noise Monitoring scenario is responsible for displaying the live EEG and current noise level at the beginning of the therapy session. This scenario is mainly a tool for making sure that the electrodes are properly fixed and that the data streaming is working. Figure 1 shows the structure of the scenario. The scenario structure is relatively simple consisting only of acquisition client, filters and a noise calculator. The same structure is also used inside baseline and game scenarios.

Baseline Baseline scenario is used to determine the baseline values for theta and beta power bands. During the baseline recording patient will be fixating on a cross displayed by the CENT system. Therapist screen will display the live EEG as well as the noise bar. Duration of the baseline recording is 60 seconds with 10 second offsets at the beginning and end of the recording. The recorded data is split to segments of 5 seconds and for each segment the power values are calculated using the same procedure as in the game scenario (this procedure is explained in greater detail in section NN). Finally the segments are averaged to produce the final baseline values for the session. In addition to the baseline values a complete power spectrum is calculated using the entire recording. Both the baseline values and the spectrum are displayed after the baseline recording for quality assurance.

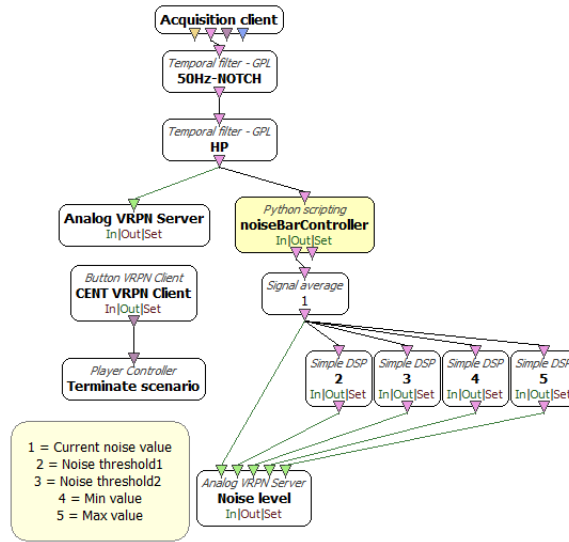


Figure 1. OpenViBE scenario for signal and noise check.

Generate configuration Configuration generation scenario is a utility tool used to generate configuration files for the feature extraction in the game trial. The scenario displays no data and the execution only lasts seconds. The scenario takes the baseline values calculated in the previous section and uses them to automatically configure the main game trial. Figure 3 displays the corresponding OpenViBE implementation.

Game Game scenario evaluates the current mental state of the patient and send information back to CENT. The scenario calculates power values for theta and beta using 1 second epochs and compares them to the values calculated during baseline measurement. The game scenario does not actually do anything related to the game as the actual game mechanics are handled by an external plugin. The OpenViBE implementation of the game trial is visible in figure 4

2.2.2 Signal Processing Protocol

NFB signal processing protocol is closely related to the protocol used with brain-computer interfaces (BCI). It thus follows that the signal processing operations performed in a NFB session can be described by borrowing terminology from the field of BCI. In BCI a typical signal processing protocol is divided into four different steps: preprocessing, feature extraction, classification and translation. Preprocessing consists of removing noise and other artifacts from the signal. Feature extraction removes unnecessary parts of the signal and classification assigns one of the predefined classes to the incoming signal. Finally the translation performs the action related to the assigned class (such as moving a cursor etc.). In NFB instead of a translation a feedback signal is sent back to the patient i.e., the game reacts to the current neural state. Different signal processing sections of the game scenario have been highlighted in figure 5. The operation of each section is covered in the following sections.

Preprocessing The EEG signal is passed into OpenViBE through a custom acquisition driver provided by the manufacturer of the EEG device. This driver can send both the EEG data and Stimulation messages to OpenViBE. The EEG device (Enobio) samples the data with internal sampling rate of 250 Hz which is then passed as packages containing several samples to the OpenViBE. The packet size in OpenViBE terminology is called a 'chunk' and the size of the chunk can be specified in the software. Multiple chunks can be combined in an epoch of specified length in seconds. Almost all of the OpenViBE scenarios start from the 'Acquisition client'-box which receives data from the acquisition server running under CENT. Acquisition is not a separate scenario but a part of all the signal processing scenarios of the CENT system. Incoming EEG signal is also saved to a GDF file for later analysis. In addition to the data, also the resulting classification labels (stimulations) are registered for each epoch. None of the filters used in visualization or feature extraction are applied to the saved data.

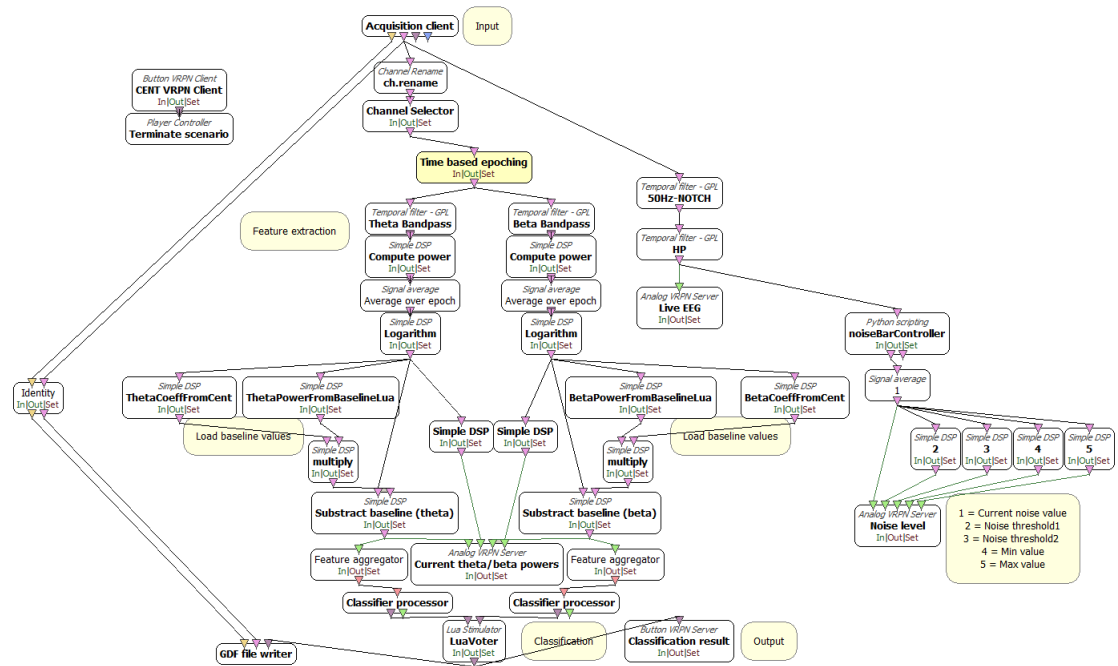


Figure 4. OpenViBE scenario for the game trial.

done with 1D Linear Discriminant Analysis (LDA) classifier. Both of the extracted features are classified as either OVTK_StimulationId_Target (for not-ADHD) and OVTK_StimulationId_NonTarget (for ADHD). Because the version of OpenViBE used in CENT only supports binary classifiers (classifiers with only two possible outputs) the two classifier outputs are combined using a voting classifier implemented in Lua script (luaVoter.lua).

2.2.3 System Configuration

As stated earlier the parameters of the signal processing protocol can be configured using XML formatted configuration files. Configuration files can be found in the IEP directory. The adjustable parameters are listed below along with a description of what they do.

Box configuration

noiseBarController Can set parameters for noise detection. Adjustable parameters are EOG threshold and EOG window. Noise detection is also capable of detecting EMG activity but this feature is not currently used.

Time Based Epoching Can set the duration of EEG epochs used in classification. Default value is 500ms with 500ms interval between epochs. Epoch length defines the amount of data used for each classification but also sets the interval of feedback to the patient

Theta/Beta Bandpass Can adjust the bandpass filters used to calculate powers in theta and beta bands. See IAF section for configuring the passbands according to the individual alpha frequency.

Classifier processor Can change the classification algorithm and parameters for the two classification processors. The two currently supported algorithms are Linear discriminant analysis and Support vector machines.

2.2.4 Individual alpha frequency

In EEG literature the oscillatory activity of the brain is divided into different frequency ranges denoted by letters from the greek alphabet. The activity in different frequency bands correlates to different mental activities. These values, however, represent a grand average over a large population and might not produce the best possible result in NFB when applied to an individual subject. Earlier research suggests that

individual variations in the frequency ranges exist among subjects and there is a method for assigning individual frequency bands for different subjects Klimesch (1999).

In CENT signal analysis individual frequency bands will be determined in the preliminary calibration session of the CENT system to a particular subject. Calibration will consist of recording EEG in eyes-closed condition for few minutes and then analysing the data with an IAF tool also provided in the software package. Alpha peak is extracted from the data by first computing the spectrum and then looking for a peak value in the 7-14 Hz range. Once the peak value has been found other frequency bands can be computed, relative to this peak value (for more details regarding this method see Babiloni et al. (2010)). Once IAF corrected frequency bands have been calculated they can be written into a OpenViBE box configuration files and used in feature extraction. Should the IAF frequency bands not be available or if the calibration fails, frequency bands from the literature are used instead.

2.3 Software extensions

todo: write about this modular, extensible stuff

3 RESULTS - VALIDATION

3.1 Clinical trial

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4 DISCUSSION

- We saw a need and filled it
- Pros and cons
- CENT vs. “Meditation toys”
- Usage scenario
- Future work: Interfacing with bestest systems (like MIDAS)

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4.1 Conclusion

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Author credits:

- BC co-designed the platform UI, designed the clinical trial where it was used, developed the Matlab tool for results review, and co-authored the draft
- JT co-designed and developed the OpenVibe ‘scenarios’, co-authored the draft, etc, etc [insert what you did]
- TI tested and debugged the CENT platform, co-authored the draft, etc, etc [insert what you did]

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- Arthur Zielazny co-designed the platform UI and the CENT Qt framework
- Robert Rabenel co-designed and developed the CENT Qt framework
- N. N. co-developed the CENT Qt framework(?) and the movie player application

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Some L^AT_EX Examples

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Item	Quantity
Widgets	42
Gadgets	13

Table 4. An example table.

Mathematics

L^AT_EX is great at typesetting mathematics. Let X_1, X_2, \dots, X_n be a sequence of independent and identically distributed random variables with $E[X_i] = \mu$ and $\text{Var}[X_i] = \sigma^2 < \infty$, and let

$$S_n = \frac{X_1 + X_2 + \dots + X_n}{n} = \frac{1}{n} \sum_{i=1}^n X_i$$

denote their mean. Then as n approaches infinity, the random variables $\sqrt{n}(S_n - \mu)$ converge in distribution to a normal $\mathcal{N}(0, \sigma^2)$.

Lists

You can make lists with automatic numbering ...

1. Like this,
2. and like this.

... or bullet points ...

- Like this,
- and like this.

... or with words and descriptions ...

Word Definition

Concept Explanation

Idea Text

We hope you find writeL^AT_EX useful for your PeerJ submission, and please let us know if you have any feedback. Further examples with dummy text are included in the following pages.

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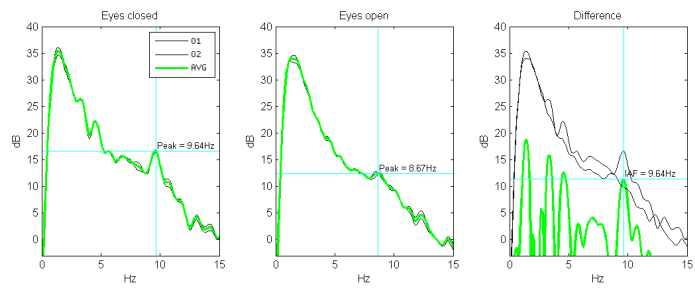


Figure 6. One method for calculating the individual alpha frequency (IAF).