Digital Humanities: The role of the digital in English philology

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The turn toward the digital is arguably the most powerful and influential among the various so-called turns we have seen in the recent past. Digital data abound in all walks of life and have a profound impact on our social and cultural interaction whether through the internet, social media or other forms of digital communication. Research has thus been concerned in recent years with shedding light on the ways in which digital interaction has influenced language and linguistic interaction, how our reception and production of text has been altered by the now not so new "new media", how literature has been changed through new forms of textual organisation such as hypertext, and how the digital revolution has changed the way we generally communicate and transmit knowledge.

Yet the digital has also had a profound impact on theory and methodology. These influences have been especially profound in the philologies as much of the digitally transmitted data is encoded by means of language and artefacts that come in various shapes of text. Digital data require digital methods. These offer ways of looking at philological data that have put philological research on a new footing by not only offering access to ever larger amounts of data and allowing ever faster ways of sifting through these data, but also by enforcing a new rigour of research through what has come to be known under the terms algorithmisation and operationalisation. In the face of large amounts of data and the computational implementations of our research questions, we are forced to rethink our research strategies and the formulation of our hypotheses in order to make them work on new types of data. This has enabled us to re-address many old research questions and put them to the test against the more solid foundation of larger amounts of data, but it has also led to new research questions and new findings that would not have been available to linguists in the pre-digital age. Linguistics is a prime example of a discipline that has received new impetus through a digitally enforced (re-)turn towards empiricism accompanied by a new rigour of research that has changed the face of the discipline by introducing theories and methods previously rather alien to the humanities such as computational implementations of search patterns over text, statistical methods and large data-sets. Linguistics has been thriving on digital corpora and computational methods over the past 50 years since the advent of the first digital corpora and computers at the philologist's desktop and the main impact has come from English. But what is more, in recent years certain areas of literary studies have likewise been turning towards using linguistic theories and methods in their research and even employing statistical methods in areas such as literary genre analysis and authorship recognition.

The turn towards the digital in linguistics and literary studies can thus be interpreted as a simultaneous turn towards a redefinition of the philologies and rethinking of our research in the light of large amounts of digital data and computational and statistical methods forcing us to operationalize our research in new and exciting ways.

In this workshop, various fields of English philology are invited to share their views on these developments and exemplify the ways in which the digital turn has an impact on their research. Broadly, these are:

- Corpus (and computational) linguistics
- Literary stylistics / Computational stylistics
- Digital cultural studies

In this section we will be discussing the ways in which digital data and methods have fundamentally changed our research and teaching by enabling different approaches to the phenomena under study.

We are inviting contributions from researchers exemplifying computational implementations of innovative research questions and of "old" research questions shedding interesting light on the findings by either confirming or refuting these on the basis of digital methods and data, statistical approaches to all kinds of digital corpora and text collections, research that adopts current digital tools to new fields of study, methodological papers focussing on linguistic, literary, cultural, computational and/or digital fields of interest.

Please send abstracts for contributions to this section (ca 300 words, excluding references) to Sabine Bartsch (bartsch@linglit.tu-darmstadt.de) and Ilka Mindt (mindt@mail.uni-paderborn.de) until 15 October 2016.

References:

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http://www.digitalhumanities.org/companion/