DIGITAL HUMANITIES AND SOUTH AFRICAN ACADEMIC LIBRARIES

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Stellenbosch University's 14th Annual Library Symposium

3 – 4 November 2016
Aims

• Define Digital Humanities / Development in South Africa

• Share some findings of a Special Report on Digital Humanities in Libraries in the USA

• Questions regarding DH in South African academic libraries

• South African Centre for Digital Language Resources (SADiLaR)

• Opportunity for collaboration.
Digital Humanities (DH) / Development in SA

- "Digital humanities (DH) is an area of scholarly activity at the intersection of computing and the disciplines of the humanities. The nature of this activity ranges broadly, from the practical, such as digitizing historical texts, to the philosophical, such as reflection on the nature of representation itself." (https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Digital_humanities)

- International growth of DH
  - DH departments / centres at most prominent universities globally (Oxford, Stanford...)
  - Academic courses at undergraduate and post-grad level (University College London...)

- Numerous digitisation projects and activities in SA, not directly DH focused

- 2016: Digital Humanities Association of Southern Africa (DHASA)

- 2016: South African Centre for Digital Language Resources (SADiLaR)
An institutional, professional, disciplinary & intellectual map for the digital humanities

"In 2015, *American Libraries* and Gale, part of Cengage Learning, partnered in a survey of academic librarians and faculty to assess the current and future roles of libraries in providing and supporting DH materials on campus."

"A total of 339 librarians and 409 humanities faculty completed the questionnaires, ...."

[https://americanlibrariesmagazine.org/2016/03/03/how-librarians-and-faculty-use-digital-humanities/](https://americanlibrariesmagazine.org/2016/03/03/how-librarians-and-faculty-use-digital-humanities/)
Faculty responses to the question: “Where do you feel a digital humanities center belongs at your institution?”

https://americanlibrariesmagazine.org/2016/03/03/how-librarians-and-faculty-use-digital-humanities/
"The sea change brought about by digital humanities (DH) resources is still rippling through academia. As Stewart Varner and Patricia Hswe write in their special report on “Digital Humanities in Libraries” (American Libraries, Jan./Feb. 2016), libraries are “unsure how they should respond as DH attracts more and more practitioners and its definition evolves to cover an ever-expanding range of techniques and methods.”

https://americanlibrariesmagazine.org/2016/03/03/how-librarians-and-faculty-use-digital-humanities/
"The role that the library plays in DH research is still evolving.

Four out of 10 librarians said that their DH services are “ad hoc.” Another 17% said they provided no services to users engaged in DH projects, although an equal number wrote that their library has a digital scholarship center that assists multiple disciplines."

https://americanlibrariesmagazine.org/2016/03/03/how-librarians-and-faculty-use-digital-humanities/
"Perhaps the survey findings are best summed up in two open-ended comments by a faculty member and a librarian."

"Faculty member: “‘Library’ is now an inadequate term. The new term should be ‘Academic Resource Center,’ a place that should position itself at the center of the new learning protocols. No discipline is untouched by digital involvement, and colleges need to market these centers as places where students can learn actively.”

"Librarian: “The primary need (....) is a more open attitude among staff and administration toward new roles for the library, a willingness among library staff to learn new skills or hire people who have them, and support from our library admin to allow us time to develop new roles. Of course, we also need researchers with the same attitudes who will ask us to collaborate with them on multiple projects.”"

https://americanlibrariesmagazine.org/2016/03/03/how-librarians-and-faculty-use-digital-humanities/
DH in South African academic libraries?

• Assuming that we are all aware of the DH challenges – do we have explicit strategies addressing these challenges?

• Any specific model to follow?
  • **Network model:** "... multiple units whose services were formed to meet a specific need and have developed over time come together to form a system of end-to-end support."
  • **Service model:** "... the service unit seeks to meet the demand expressed by faculty, often with a strong focus on meeting an individual's research needs."
  • **Lab model:** "... the lab tends to have a specific focus, tied either to the mission of the campus or the aims of the founders, which necessarily means that many do not take on responsibility for digital projects that fall outside their scope."
  • Any other?

[https://americanlibrariesmagazine.org/2016/03/03/how-librarians-and-faculty-use-digital-humanities/ ]
South African Centre for Digital Language Resources (SADiLaR)

• Department of Science and Technology (DST) South African Research Infrastructure Roadmap (SARIR): 13 new entities > 7 to start in 2016

• Other Departments such as Department of Arts and Culture (DAC)

• Focus: Creation, management and distribution of digital text and speech resources of official languages of South Africa

• Lifespan: provision made for 15 years (Implementation phase: 2016-2018)

• Funds available for Implementation phase: R67 million (Total R141 m for first 5 years)

• Career paths for staff: computational linguists, linguists, ICT specialist, DH specialist, programmers etc. – All in all 43 positions.
**DIGITISATION PROGRAM**

Long term continuous and systematic process of digitising valuable **non-digitised text resources** covering linguistic, literary, sociolinguistic, political, historical domains across all official languages as far as possible. (Including Natural Language Processing software)

Create **new digital text and speech resources** of **scientific relevance** across all official languages as part of **post graduate academic programs** and as **sponsored freestanding projects** by language communities and/or individuals involved.

Capacity building and reskilling of graduates in languages.

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**DIGITAL HUMANITIES (DH) PROGRAM**

Promote and facilitate **academic scholarship** within the realm of Digital Humanities with a focus on methodological and technical aspects.

National and international support for the development of **DH curricula** intersecting with traditional approaches in the humanities and social sciences.

Annual awareness and training campaigns and workshops by, *inter alia*, **Digital Humanities Association of Southern Africa (DHASA)** at

• tertiary academic institutions
• government departments
• private sector

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**SADiLaR PORTAL**

Distribution of Resources
National and International Links
Discussion Forums
BLOGS in each language to encourage multilingual use
Areas of application

• Technology development ...

**Reusable digital text, speech and multimodal data** of different renditions of official languages: annotated / markup for applications in machine translation, automatic speech recognition systems, spelling and grammar checking support systems, automatic summarization systems, etc.

• Academic research ...

**Within and across disciplines in the humanities and social sciences**: comparison of transliterated literary texts for studies in translation theory, language change (e.g. translated English texts in isiZulu in 1930); cognitive psychology....

• Community good ...

**Documenting narratives in language communities** for language preservation, cultural heritage, indigenous knowledge etc.
Practical example

Student A or Department B in University C wants to embark on a project involving a comparative stylistic evaluation of literary works of two prominent authors in isiXhosa and needs digital renditions of their works. How do we prevent duplication in the event of students from University D having the same need at the same point in time?
Opportunity for collaboration

- Given that SADiLaR is to be a national facility intended to
  - develop digital text and speech resources of the local languages (across disciplines),
  - engage in research capacity building in the field of Digital Humanities, and
  - facilitate maximum accessibility to digital resources at national and international levels,

it stands to reason that collaboration with academic libraries should be a high priority.

- SADiLaR as well as DHASA therefore would welcome further discussion with the library communities of Southern Africa.
Thank you for listening.

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