A Digital Humanities Approach to Wikipedia Studies

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Abstract

The aim of this project is to contribute to a deeper understanding of Wikipedia and sister Wikimedia projects from new perspectives, as the largest Digital Humanities project ever seen: https://diff.wikimedia.org/2016/08/17/wikipedia-largest-digital-humanities-project/.

In fact the convergence of interests between Wikimedia Studies and the wider research fields of Digital Humanities is still largely unexplored, and literature on this topic is relatively scarce.

Introduction

The multilingual knowledge ecosystem of Wikipedia is increasingly considered as a fascinating 'object' which is worth being investigated in its own right from a Digital Humanities perspective. More specifically the immense potential of the 'byproduct' of Wikipedia-based translation-oriented teaching activities (consisting of a good number of Wikipedia-derived parallel texts) mostly runs the risk of remaining unexplored and being wasted. In particular, the identification of translation foci (Shuttleworth 2017), the creation of parallel entries via translation, and their potential for reuse in the compilation of parallel/comparable multilingual resources for trainee and professional translators through translation memories, would deserve dedicated follow-up research-oriented activities, along with the study of the pedagogical implications the collaborative practices which Wikipedia-based translation and editing tasks entail.

It is against this background that the projects aims to answer the following research questions:

- Which issues in the Digital Humanities are addressed by Wikimedia projects?

- How can multilingual data produced in the context of Wikipedia-based teaching activities projects (translatathons editathons..) be used for research purposes?
- Do teaching activities with Wikimedia contribute to the development of a Digital Humanities pedagogy?

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Related work

In recent years the multilingual collaborative knowledge ecosystem of Wikipedia has attracted some interest form researchers and practitioners in the humanities, as a stimulating environment in which the global dynamics of knowledge building and dissemination can be explored and experienced, specially in a teaching context (Kill 2012; Calzada Perez 2019; Gatto 2020; 2022; forthcoming). In this latter respect, the potential of Wikimedia projects has also been met with some interest in Digital umanities pedagogy (Kill 2012).

At the level of practice a number of projects have been developed, with the aim of enhancing the students' awareness of their own potential as prosumers (producers and consumers at the same time) of knowledge in the digital world, where Wikimedia projects also prove to be a perfect place for the development of key transversal competences, as required in higher education today, including digital citizenship and ethic responsibility.

Methods

We will answer these questions by focusing on the following themes:

1. Literature review on Wikimedia projects from the persprctive of Digital Humanities
2. Analysis of data derived from Wikimedia related projects (translation marathons, editathons) from a digital Humanites Perspective (focus on quantitative/qualitative analysis of language data; investigation of the collobarative process.
3. Surveys on the impact of Wikimedia-based teaching activires on the students

Expected output

- Better inderstanding of Wikipedia/Wikivoyage as a multilingual collaborative ecosystem
- Creation of parallel/Comparable resources based on Wikipedia translation marathons and editathon
- Scientific publications
- Events

Community impact plan

The research projects includes teaching acitivities based on Wikimedia projects, especially translation marathons of Wikipedia articles and editathons on Wikivoyage. In this way our project might also contribute to the Wikimedia community in the following:

. Increase the number of editors though Transl/editatathon connected to the project (see previous activities by the same applicant);

- Counterbalance the trend a potential trend towards using AI and Machine Translation in contributing to Wikimedia projects.

Our project is also expected to have in impact in contributing to bridging the gap between Wikimedia and the academia. By supporting the contribution to Wikimedia projects by the students at our university we also impact the Strategy "Provide for safety and inclusion" (specifically gender gap) as our student groups include moslty women and many embers from the LGBT+community.

Budget

The budget will be spent in:

1) salary for one 9-month research contract to carry out the following tasks: 9000 USD

2) Final conference and other dissemination activities: 3000 USD

Past Contribution

A number of projects by the author have been funded by the Wikimedia Foundation, Wikimedia Italia, and the University of Bari:

2017/2018 and 2018/2019 - Translatathon@Uniba

2020/2021 and 2022/2023 - A WikiVoyage to Puglia. Transl/Editathon@Uniba

2022 - Bloody Sunday

More info at https://it.wikipedia.org/wiki/Progetto:Coordinamento/Universit%C3%A0/UNIBA/Translatathon

The author has also published research articles and book chapters about Wikipedia/Wikivoage (2012, 2016, 2020, 2022, 2023; forthcoming).

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