

Foreword to the Special Issue “A Shared Task for the Digital Humanities: Annotating Narrative Levels”

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This volume is the first of two, and it documents activities that we have been conducting in the past years. They are best described as “organizing shared tasks with/in/for the digital humanities” and have evolved significantly since we started.

Research in digital humanities entails a number of unique challenges, some of which are caused by the collaboration model that digital humanities projects often work in. This collaboration creates a lot of friction, but comes with huge potential: Different collaboration partners can *specialize* in different aspects of the shared goal. While a shared goal and a common language is still needed, each party does not have to know everything about the other party’s focus area. A (proto-)typical division of labor lends itself to the digital humanities: Computer scientists work on the technical aspects, while humanities scholars focus on the content side. Still, it turns out that knowing what each party is working on does not suffice, because content and technology need to be re-integrated at some point. How exactly this integration takes place depends on the specific project design and is a matter of *interface*.

While our initiative is concerned with narrative levels in concrete terms, it does, more abstractly, also establish such an interface: when it comes to transporting knowledge about the research subject itself, annotated data serves as an interface between humanists and computer scientists. In addition to annotated data as interface, the shared task format itself can already be seen as an interface for scholars and researchers to interact. This interaction does not have to be direct and it does not have to take place in the same project, the same country, or even in the same decade.

The initiative consists of two separate, but tightly linked shared tasks. The first one focuses on annotation guidelines for narrative levels and produces a balanced and consensual assessment of guidelines. The guideline that is best suited to the goal is then used for corpus annotation. The second shared task aims at automatizing the detection of narrative levels and will employ the annotated corpus in order to achieve this. The core benefit of this approach is that the resulting automatic detection systems incorporate the conceptual thinking that went into the guidelines in the first task. Decisions on the complexity and granularity of the concepts to be detected are made by the scholars who developed the annotation guidelines, and they do not have to make compromises for pragmatic or technical reasons. Consequently, fast success in terms of automatization is not guaranteed. The automatization task might be challenging for years to come, but at least the task definition is adequate for analyzing literature in the future.

Since this is a new format that has not been employed before in the digital humanities, this volume contains an extensive introduction covering the motivation and reasoning behind the first shared task in detail, a discussion of the evaluation setup and, finally, the guidelines as they were submitted, discussed and evaluated during a workshop we held.

Writing guidelines, however, is an iterative process. Therefore, this special issue will receive an update in the form of a second volume, which will contain the improved guidelines, based on the discussion and evaluation from the first shared task.

Shared tasks depend entirely on their participants. Initially, we could not be certain at all that this activity would attract a critical mass of interested researchers and scholars. As of now, we are very happy that such a diverse crowd participated in the first shared task, and we would like to emphasize their commitment and thank them sincerely for not only having discussed narrative levels with us in a remarkably intensive way but also, in some cases, taking on transatlantic flights to participate.

The participants of the first phase of the shared task are:¹

- Matthias Bauer, guideline VI, English literature, Tübingen University, Germany
- Florian Barth, guideline V, digital humanities/literary studies, Stuttgart University, Germany
- Kristina Burghardt, guideline VI, English literature, Tübingen University, Germany
- Joshua Eisenberg, guideline I, natural language processing, Florida International University, Miami, U.S.A.
- Adam Ek, guideline VII, computational linguistics, Stockholm University, Sweden
- Mark Finlayson, guideline I, natural language processing, Florida International University, Miami, U.S.A.
- Adam Hammond, guideline VIII, English literature, University of Toronto, Canada
- Anna Kasaty, guideline VII, computational linguistics, Stockholm University, Sweden
- Edward Kearns, guideline II, English, National University of Ireland Galway, Ireland
- Nora Ketschik, guideline IV, literary studies/digital humanities, Stuttgart University, Germany
- Benjamin Krautter, guideline IV, (computational) literary studies, Stuttgart University, Germany
- Miriam Lahrsoy, guideline VI, English literature, Tübingen University, Germany
- Sandra Murr, guideline IV, literary studies/digital humanities, Stuttgart University, Germany
- Ella Ujhelyi, guideline VI, English literature, Tübingen University, Germany
- Mats Wirén, guideline VII, computational linguistics, Stockholm University, Sweden
- Yvonne Zimmermann, guideline IV, literary studies, Stuttgart University, Germany

There are, next to the participants, a number of people that supported this initiative in various stages, for which we are very grateful. We thank Jannik Strötgen, who was involved in the initial steps of planning, but has left academia since.

¹ There were eight submissions, but Guideline III was withdrawn after the workshop. While it was still evaluated as the others, we therefore leave its authors anonymous.

We are also thankful to our advisory board, consisting of Janina Jacke, Fotis Jan-nidis, Jonas Kuhn, and Jan Christoph Meister. The shared task has been—and still is—supported by the Volkswagen foundation, which generously funded the workshop in Hamburg and subsequent work. The Centre for Reflected Text Ana-lytics (CRETA) at Stuttgart University provided the funding for the student anno-tators. We thank CRETA for the funding and Hanna Winter, Tanja Preuß, Nina Stark, and Linda Kessler for the annotation work. Katharina Krüger and Carla Sökefeld supported the realization of the workshop and did a lot of preparatory work, Carla Sökefeld and Felicitas Otte supported the writing of this introduc-tion. We would also like to thank the authors of the guideline reviews who will-ingly agreed to be part of this endeavour. And finally we would like to express our warmest thanks to Andrew Piper and the editorial board of Cultural Analyt-ics for their flexibility to publish this—at least up until now—unorthodox format as a special issue.



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