

Project evaluation

Title: Russian movie theater project

Developers: Sasha Prokhorov, Lena Prokhorova, Tom Elvins

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Evaluated by: acn, ect, djb

Project grade: A

Great work this semester! We appreciate the amount of time and hard work that you put into this course, and the results as shown by your finished site are impressive. You have all come a long way in familiarizing yourselves with the technologies of the course, and we hope that you will continue exploring and learning about these technologies and others as you expand your project.

About / Methodology

Your “About” and “Methodology” sections are a great introduction to the site. The “About” page is clear and concise, and we like that you’ve included a picture (in a cinematically appropriate sepia tone, at that!), which most project teams don’t do. Your research question is laid out clearly and we like the way you outlined the different topics and areas that your project covers.

Your “Methodology” section is detailed and comprehensive, and it’s an excellent resource for showing site visitors how you went about developing the project. We appreciate in particular the ways in which you have described not only the technical process, but also the thought process behind your research question, and especially your citations of other scholarly works that had an influence on shaping your research goals. Your professional expertise really shows through here, and this write-up can serve as an example to be emulated in future semesters.

Your use of an “index” file to log all references was thoughtful and well executed. It seems that it was useful both behind the scenes in your own analysis and for the finished product, where you allow users to peruse the index to see all of the various references gathered in one place. The role of the index as a component of the public site still has much unrealized potential, about which see below, but all in all we think it’s a strong and original components of the project.

The number of interviews that you used for the project was judicious. The quantity was sufficient to get across a proof of concept, and to begin to producing interesting results, but also not more than you could manage in the space of a single semester. What we most appreciate is that in planning to build and expand upon the project later, you’ve thought

about scalability in your methodology. Having the index file, which can easily be modified to incorporate new data, and developing XSLT and XQuery files that can easily accommodate more information will make this process exciting and fruitful. We look forward to seeing your progress!

Visualization / Analysis

Your visualization and analysis are solid overall, and we appreciate the number and quality of graphic visualizations that you produced for this project. Your bar graphs work well for displaying comparative data, and it is a nice feature that for at least one, you included the query that allowed you to generate that information (although we might have moved that to a separate page and linked to it, as a way of separating the content that will be of interest to film historians from the methods that are important to digital humanists). As several of the report results are split by gender, it is good that you had the forethought to weigh the results by interview, although a bit more information as to how this weighting was done would be helpful—and we think that your presentation of the data in the bar graphs could have been improved with a bit more write-up and analysis in general. The write-up beneath most of the graphs is mostly an explanation of what the visuals already show, rather than true analysis of the quantitative results, and although you do discuss the meaning of your results on the “Qualitative Analysis” page, we wonder whether the graph and discussion would have worked together more effectively had you displayed them on the screen at the same time, and whether that would have made it easier for you to elaborate further on the discussion.

The analysis for the network graphs is much more thorough. We appreciate in particular the way you highlight the peculiarity in the “Persons Network” of the one young male interviewee’s network being completely disconnected from the remainder of the interviewees’. You may already know that the technical term for a disconnected network is a “clique”, but as with any technical jargon, it may be best not to use it in a description intended for those who have come for the discussion of cinema, and who are not familiar with the methodology of network analysis.

Your “Qualitative Analysis” page is sufficient for now as an overall analysis. The results are fairly general and inconclusive, but that’s to be expected as the project is still operating on a small scale, and we agree with your decision to offer tentative conclusions with the information that you’ve gathered, instead of making broader claims that would not be supported as well by your data at present.

Aesthetics / UI / UX

The visual appeal of the site overall is excellent! The general aesthetic is appealingly simple, which allows the user to focus on the content. The menu bar is effective for navigating

the different sections of the project, and while not currently active throughout the entire site, the Russian / English toggle switch is appreciated. You may already know that users typically prefer a sticky language toggle, that is, one that remembers the language preference from page to page. The usual way to set this is with a cookie, where the page loading checks the language preference stored in the cookie each time it loads a new page. There's an example of this operating in a limited way at

<http://repertorium.obdurodon.org/browse.php>; click on the flags in the upper right and then navigate to other page on the site, and in areas where we support language choice, the pages should remember the user's preference. On this site we download the text in all three languages at once and use JavaScript to show the one selected and hide the others, but an alternative approach that just downloads the correct one in the first place may be more appropriate for some types of projects. In case you're curious about how we did it, our JavaScript is at <http://repertorium.obdurodon.org/js/lgToggle.js>.

Your reading view works well for allowing a user to explore your texts, and we appreciate the simple layout of these pages, which makes a lot of information and interactivity available to the user all at once. The JavaScript-enabled interactivity is a great start for allowing the user to explore, but could be expanded further in the future. For example, you might think of a way that allows the user to link back from a particular reference to that reference's entry in the Index. That is, when the user hovers over, say, the span “на Черном море,” you could have a small pop-up bubble that could link back to the moment in the Index file describing the Black Sea. We'd suggest tickling the padding settings in the sidebars; for example, the left padding in the left sidebar looks good, but it makes the narrower top padding in same sidebar look crowded, so we'd suggest boosting the latter a bit. There's a blank space at the top of the middle (main) area, but we would have expected the top of that central panel to be at the same vertical position as the tops of the sidebars. These adjustments can be tricky, and we often don't notice the awkward moments on our own project sites because we've seen them too often; you (Sasha and Lena) might want to ask your William and Mary students for a UX critique, since they're probably good representatives of likely users (and eventual contributors of content!).

We'd also suggest rethinking the presentation of information in the left and right sidebars. What you've done is terrific as a first step and we wouldn't expect more than that in a crowded single semester, but looking forward, if one goal of tabulating personal and possessive pronouns is to contrast individual and collective experiences, doesn't the separation of personal from possessive in the left sidebar make that type of comparison harder? We can click on “Personal plural” to see “Мы” and “Possessive Plural” to see “У нас” or “наш”, but we don't see an easy way to highlight both at the same time. When “Place” shows us (for the Danilenko interview) three geographic places plus about ten occurrences of “кинотеатр” in various cases, would it be more useful to display “кинотеатр” just once,

with “10” after it in parentheses, and perhaps a show/hide way of unfolding the examples with a bit of context on demand? The lists in the right sidebar seem to be in document order, and that’s useful for seeing where in the interview the speaker employs particular words or phrases, but it’s not as friendly for searching as an alphabetized list would be. Should words used by the interviewer be included in the report (as they are now; for example, “Спартак” occurs twice in the Danilenko interview, once by Roberts and once by Danilenko), or only those used by the interviewee? When we click on something in the right sidebar, the location of the hit is no longer hidden at the top of the page, as it was in an earlier iteration, and that’s an important improvement, but would it be better to go above the top of the utterance itself to show the name of the speaker, which is now cut off (perhaps by that mysterious blank space above the central panel that we mentioned earlier)?

The index reading view is also very well done. What you have now is excellent, and being able to see the various references all in one place is very neat and provides a lot of information. We also appreciate the linking, both to IMDB pages in the case of movie titles and to various interviews for the epithets (e.g., Gregory Peck is described as “известным” by Sorkina), but would it have been more helpful to link to the specific location of the reference in the interview, and not just to the interview as a whole? This page could use more prose to explain its purpose and how to navigate the page, and perhaps some sort of JavaScript-enabled functionality for showing and hiding, given the amount of information. Although this page works well as is, it is also a candidate for further development. For example, the lists of national cinemas and places seem to have links to interviews where those are described with adjectives, but there doesn’t seem to be any easy way for a visitor to see the specific interview moments (or even just a list of the interviews themselves) where, say, “Hong Kong” is mentioned, since there aren’t any adjectives listed for it.

We would strongly suggest sorting the lists in some way, since although the links to types of references at the top provide a first facet for entry, a user who selects, say “Persons” cannot then find a specific person except by reading through the list in order. Alphabetizing these lists would be an easy and helpful modification. There are some editorial inconsistencies, such as that Agatha Christie is a “writer” (small “w”) although most roles are capitalized, and “popogrebskii” isn’t capitalized although surnames otherwise are. These types of inconsistencies intrude easily into this type of project; can you think of a way to control for them with Schematron? Some nationalities are “USSR” and others are “Soviet” and others are “Russia” and others are “Russian Empire”. Perhaps some of these were deliberate to distinguish pre- and post-Soviet persons, but we’re less certain about others, and some sort of explanation at the top would probably be helpful in any case. Some of your genres are capitalized and others aren’t; most surprisingly, “Disney” as a genre isn’t capitalized, although it might seem to have the strongest claim of all on capitalization by virtue of also being a personal surname.

There are some other inconsistencies and odd moments that should be worked out moving forward. For instance, clicking on the main “Analysis” tab of the menu brings the user to <http://rmtp.obdurodon.org/xhtml/analysis.xhtml>. However, except for an <h1> tag at the top of the document, this same exact content is replicated in the <http://rmtp.obdurodon.org/qualitativeAnalysis.xhtml> page. There seems to be some inconsistency with the use of the <hr> tag throughout the site, as well. For instance, “Analysis” and “Index of References” feature an <hr> tag under their leading <h1> tags, but “Methodology,” “Interviews,” and “About” do not. Whether the pages have an <hr> or not doesn’t really matter, but what does matter is consistency throughout the site. You could control this by making the <hr> part of an SSI and using an SSI variable to accommodate the different titles above the <hr>. We do that on the course pages; see the discussion in the “Boilerplate” section of <http://dh.obdurodon.org/house-style.xhtml>.

There are a few small enhancements that you could add to this site to make it more user friendly. For example, clicking on the “Interviews” menu button takes the user to a list of the XML and XHTML files. While it may seem intuitive and natural to experienced DHers like yourselves, it’s better to stay away from technical terms. How about changing “XHTML” to “Reading View” or something more recognizable to those unfamiliar with the technologies? For some strategies used elsewhere to deal with this issue, see the table at <http://menology.obdurodon.org/> or the little orange “XML” lozenge at <http://repertorium.obdurodon.org/browse.php>, although both of those do expose the three-letter technological acronym to the public. We stole the lozenge approach from Perseus. Is it wise?

With respect to layout we’d suggest making tables (such as on <http://rmtp.obdurodon.org/xhtml/interviews.xhtml> and <http://rmtp.obdurodon.org/xhtml/quantitativeAnalysis.xhtml>) adjust to the width of the data, rather than of the browser window. Currently, in a wide window on a wide screen, the table looks stretched, with excess white space in each cell. On <http://rmtp.obdurodon.org/xhtml/graphicAnalysis.xhtml> there is some excessive vertical white space (especially below “Pronouns in Interviews by Gender”). On the same page, the small ticks on the Y axis are too short and close together to serve as useful visual points of reference for the bars, and we wonder whether perhaps faint gray lines across the entire graph at the 50% and 100% positions, or at those plus 25% and 75%, would have been more helpful. It looks odd to us that the graphs begin at different horizontal locations, and the captions over the graphs are in varied fonts and weights.

Fine-tuning the UI of a project site can be difficult and tedious, so don’t be discouraged that there’s still work to be done. We don’t see the inconsistencies in our own work because we’re too familiar with it, each correction risks introducing new errors, and for many developers UI (and front end in general) just isn’t very interesting. Our own project sites ex-

emply the same types of issues as yours when we begin developing them, too, so we'd encourage you to take justifiable pride in all of the ambitious achievements that you've already accomplished, and to dive into the expansion and fine-tuning that will make the site more consistent and even more professional with respect to UX and UI.

Overall

This is a very successful project, and you've accomplished a lot so far. We're looking forward to working with you and seeing what emerges as you continue the development!