**ORTEGA — Psst!**

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**Psst! An Informal Approach to Expanding the Linguistic Range of the Digital Humanities**

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Global Outlook::Digital Humanities (GO::DH) is a Special Interest Group (SIG) of the Alliance of Digital Humanities Organisations (ADHO). Its purpose is to help break down barriers that hinder communication and collaboration among researchers and students of the digital arts, humanities, and cultural heritage sectors across political, economic, and regional boundaries (Global Outlook::Digital Humanities, 2013).

The origins of GO::DH lie in Melissa Terras’ infographic ‘Quantifying Digital Humanities’ (Terras, 2012). This posting contained a map showing the distribution of physical centres in the digital humanities (as defined by members of ADHO communities) across the globe. Its most striking feature, however, were the absences: apart from a thin band of centres across the Northern Hemisphere and in Australia, New Zealand, and South Africa, the majority of the world appeared as ‘empty space’. While digital work in the humanities was being conducted by researchers, teachers, and scholars in these areas, it remained for the most part invisible to researchers in the ‘Global North’ associated with the largest international digital humanities societies and organisations. There was a literal disconnect between researchers in these (largely mid- and low-income economic) ‘unknown’ regions and those appearing on the map (for the most part found in high-income regions): the researchers were simply not part of the same digital, academic, and social networks. Although the digital humanities as we define it is, relative to the humanities more broadly, a highly international and collaborative endeavour, it remains the case that our internationalisation and collaborative activity are primarily conducted on an East-West basis among a relatively small number of generally contiguous, high-income economies (O’Donnell, 2012; see also Fiormonte, 2012; Galina, 2013).

The GO::DH approach to breaking down these barriers is extremely practical: the organization develops complementary strengths, interests, abilities, and experiences of its membership through special projects, events, activities, and publicity (Priego and O’Donnell, 2013; Priego and Gil, 2013). Its core activities are discovery, community-building, research, and advocacy. It helps its members learn more about digital work in the arts, humanities, and cultural heritage sectors; it acts to foster collaboration and cooperation across regions and economies; it coordinates research on and in support of the use of technology in these areas across the globe; and it advocates for a global perspective on work in this sector.

This paper discusses in particular approaches that the SIG has taken in the last two years towards promoting multilingualism within the digital humanities, primarily through the ‘whisper campaign’ (first rolled out at DH2014). It concludes with information on the translation toolkit currently under development by authors.

**The Whisper Campaign**

The whisper campaign from DH2014 in Lausanne is one of the more prominent GO::DH initiatives. This project, which came together very quickly in the weeks leading up to the conference, involved the distribution of buttons to conference attendees on which they could write languages they were able to interpret for others.

The model for this project came from the 2012 INKE conference in Havana, Cuba (INKE, 2012). Although the language of the conference was English, and although most participants at the conference could work in English to a greater or lesser degree, the conference organisers also decided to promote an informal system through which those with stronger English skills could help those with weaker ones. When speakers who preferred to speak in Spanish presented, the same system was used, with Spanish speakers in this case translating for Anglophone attendees.

Two members of the GO::DH executive in attendance at that conference, Alex Gil and Daniel Paul O’Donnell, were quite taken with this model and began to wonder whether this could be used in other DH contexts. The need for such an approach was further confirmed at DH 2013, when several members of GO::DH saw examples of presenters or conference attendees struggling with questions or answers in English.

The final push for the whisper campaign came in the form of an unconference session on multilingualism led by Élika Ortega at DHSI2014 in which participants were asked to come up with ideas on how to ‘knit an exchange network of DH scholarship in various languages’ (Ortega, 2014). In his concluding keynote, Gil argued that the initiatives proposed at this workshop would help ‘open language to the community, where a translation of the website or any forum post depends on the community itself’ (Gil, 2014). In a subsequent discussion on the GO::DH mailing list, O’Donnell suggested that ‘most people find it easier to receive information in weaker languages than produce it’, while Isabel Galina proposed using the (then) upcoming DH2014 meeting as an opportunity to put together a concrete plan of action: ‘Maybe somewhere where you can sign up and say, “I am willing to help out with the following languages” or “I need help in this language”? A volunteer system for helping out in sessions that require it?’ (Global Outlook::Digital Humanities, 2014).

With some buttons ordered by Ortega and some felt-tipped markers, the project was implemented for less than $200. While there were relatively few examples of ad hoc translation at DH2014 (though there were a large number of volunteers), the greater impact is seen in its influence on subsequent meetings: organisers at the Society for the History of Authorship, Reading, and Publishing (SHARP) meeting and OurMarathon project, for example, have sought to either incorporate the same model or use it to inspire efforts to make sure their practice is open to languages other than English. We will also be offering the service again at DH2015.

**The Translation Toolkit**

The success of the whisper campaign—both in practical terms at DH2014 and in its wider effect at bringing multilingual issues to the fore—has inspired members of the executive to develop a ‘translators toolkit’. This is a collection of tips for best practices and tools that have been compiled with help from the broader DH community. Examples of these practices include promoting the use of multilingual slides during presentations, allowing presenters and attendees to request live translation (via the whisperers themselves), creating multilingual posters, matching multilingual chairs to multilingual sessions, and compiling a multilingual glossary of DH terms. Ultimately, the initiative could lead to the creation of a directory of whisperers and multilingual reviewers.

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