

A Proposal for the Demarcation of Digital Humanities

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Introduction and Motivation

The problem of the demarcation of science has existed for millennia, and many philosophers have tried to develop precise descriptions of what science is and what it is not (Gauch, 2003; Resnik, 2000). Similarly, demarcating disciplines from each other is important, especially in the case of emerging disciplines. In the case of the Digital Humanities (DH), being clear about what DH is and what it is not (Huggett, 2012; Alvarado, 2012; eds. M. Terras et al., 2013) will help us, for example, to clearly define the

object and purpose of departments, research centres, associations and other institutions that work in DH; to guide students and junior researchers about the required training to become competent in DH; or to convey to research management authorities what they should promote to bolster and recognise DH as a discipline. In this work we propose an approach to the demarcation of DH based on levels and thresholds.

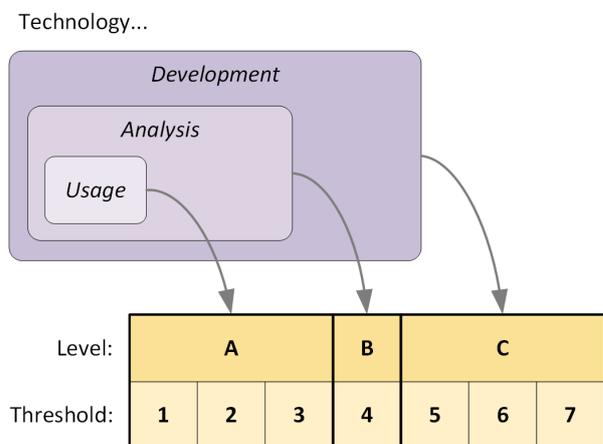
Demarcation Proposal

Given the emerging nature of DH, a threshold-based approach is proposed, so that a gradation is established from the lowest threshold to the highest. The projects and initiatives that do not reach the first threshold should not be considered part of DH, while those that exceed the highest one clearly should be. Those that fall between the lowest and highest threshold, thus, are considered to constitute DH to some degree.

The proposed approach aims to provide criteria to determine to what extent objects of diverse kinds are part of DH. These objects include research and development projects, research groups, departments or institutes, individual or group curricula, teaching contents, research products, events and activities, and others.

This proposal only intends to classify objects as belonging to DH with greater or lesser intensity. It does not aim to evaluate objects in terms of their quality or scientific value. Thus, the fact that an object is placed at a certain level according to this proposal does not indicate anything in relation to its quality or scientific value.

We propose the following thresholds and levels for the demarcation of DH.



Level A. Use

Situations in which existing digital technologies are *used* to address humanistic issues.

Threshold 1. Generic nominal application

Criterion: Generic digital technologies are applied nominally.

Threshold 2. Specialised or customised nominal application

Criterion: Specialised digital technologies, or customised generic digital technologies, are applied nominally.

Threshold 3. Non-nominal application

Criterion: Digital technologies are applied in a non-nominal way.

Level B. Analysis

Situations in which the practice and use of digital technologies are *analysed* in relation to humanistic issues.

Threshold 4. Analysis or evaluation

Criterion: A scientific analysis or systematic evaluation of the established practice or use of digital technologies in relation to the humanities is carried out, so that constructive criticism constitutes a research outcome and not a merely instrumental mechanism for decision-making on the adoption of one technology or another in a particular case.

Level C. Development

Situations in which new digital technologies are *developed* to be used in relation to the humanities. These new technologies possess new and original theoretical and/or methodological foundations.

Threshold 5. Basic Development

Criterion: Simple, closed and non-innovative digital tools are developed.

Threshold 6. Advanced Development

Criterion: New, open and innovative digital technologies are developed.

Threshold 7. Trans-disciplinary co-research

Criterion: Active research is carried out in the humanities and digital technologies at the same time, so that the advances of each field benefit the other (Gonzalez-Perez, 2017).

Conclusions

We are currently validating the proposed approach through empirical testing. Also, a dichotomous key for easier application will be developed soon.

We hope that this proposal contributes to the international debate on DH and helps establish the boundaries of the discipline so that it is properly recognised and promoted.

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