LODinG: Linked Open Data in the Humanities

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Abstract

We are presenting *LODinG – Linked Open Data in the Humanities* (abbreviated from *Linked Open Data in den Geisteswissenschaften*), a recently launched research initiative exploring the intersection of Linked Open Data (LOD) and a range of areas of work within the Humanities. We focus on effective methods of collecting, modeling, linking, releasing and analyzing machine-readable information relevant to (digital) humanities research in the form of LOD. LODinG combines the sources and methods of digital humanities, general and computational linguistics, digital lexicography, German and Romance philology, Sinology, translatology, cultural and literary studies, media studies, information science and law to explore and expand the potential of the LOD paradigm for such a diverse and multidisciplinary field. The project's primary objectives are to improve the methods of extracting, modeling and analyzing multilingual data in the LOD paradigm; to demonstrate the application of the linguistic LOD to various methods and domains within and beyond the humanities; and to develop a modular, cross-domain data model for the humanities.

Keywords: Linked Open Data, Humanities, Digital Humanities, Knowledge Graphs

1. Background

The potential of implementing the Linked Open Data (LOD) paradigm in the field of (Digital) Humanities is immense and has already been discovered by many scholars (Zhao, 2023). The interconnectedness of data from different, even seemingly unrelated disciplines has already allowed for a more comprehensive description of linguistic, cultural, sociological, and/or historical phenomena, often providing previously unnoticed contexts. A key finding of (Zhao, 2023) is that fields such as linguistics or actors like libraries have been producing new LOD resources for some time; however, projects emerging from other areas of the humanities primarily use existing LOD resources to uniquely identify and disambiguate entities relevant to their domain, but only rarely produce substantial new LOD resources themselves.

Despite the availability of conceptual reference models (such as CIDOC-CRM; (Faraj and Micsik, 2021)), ontology representation frameworks (e.g., OWL) and Semantic Web technologies (e.g., RDF; (Hitzler, 2021)), different disciplines in the humanities develop independent ways of categorizing entities. In the humanities, the domain-specific terminology often circulates within a particular area of research and rarely takes advantage of conceptual interlinking of uniquely-identified items. Descriptive studies that refrain from placing their entities within the structures of a formalized ontology significantly reduce their interdisciplinary potential and leave the opportunities that lie in knowledge networks undiscovered. Furthermore, the lack of presence of linguistic LOD (LLOD) across the disciplines canonically associated with the humanities limits the existing data to digitally-structured sources only and renounces the methods that can benefit from the exploration of robust knowledge graphs (KGs).

Relevant work specifically at the intersection of literary studies and LOD is emerging recently, such as the GOLEM project (Graphs and Ontologies for Literary Evolution Models) at Groningen University (Pianzola et al., 2023) or the MEDIATE project at Radboud University (Montoya, 2021). Similarly, initiatives such as the one aiming to 'lodify' the European Literary Text Collection (ELTeC) Odebrecht et al. (2021) are building bridges between linguistics and literary studies (Ikonić Nešić et al., 2022; Schöch et al., 2021). LODinG, however, takes up and expands on the questions opened by its preceding research initiative, i.e., MiMoText - Mining and Modeling Text (2019-2023) hosted by Trier University and coordinated by the Trier Center for Digital Humanities (TCDH). LODinG's predecessor has developed a KG for the domain of the French novel of the Enlightenment, the *MiMoTextBase*. The project team used computational methods to extract information from a wide range of sources - from bibliographic resources and primary texts from the 18th century to current research literature (Schöch et al., 2022). The information ranges from bibliographic data (such as places and dates of publication) to book formats, themes, narrative locations, protagonists and sentiment trajectories or stylistic similarities between texts. The LOD paradigm allows this heterogeneous information to be linked to form a common body of knowledge. Its contents are

formally modeled and linked to each other. In addition, the extracted information is also linked to external knowledge resources such as Wikidata. The numerous query options that this allows – including federated queries originating from both *Mi-MoTextBase* and *Wikidata* – open up entirely new perspectives on both well-known and lesser-known literary-historical knowledge. With LODinG, we can now extend this paradigm to a much wider range of domains within and beyond the humanities.

Against this background, the presented project LODinG - initiated by a group of researchers at Trier University, Germany, and coordinated by the Trier Center for Digital Humanities - aims to explore the potential of the LOD paradigm at the intersection of gualitative and guantitative studies in the humanities. The project seeks to enrich the methods of annotation and information extraction applied to domain data relevant to a range of fields in the humanities. The initiative is currently exploring the potential of bridging multiple semi-structured datasets using formally-modeled, domain-adapted and modular ontologies and taxonomies pertinent to literary studies, linguistics, digital lexicography, scholarly editing, media studies, scientometrics and law. The LOD paradigm is a cornerstone of innovation in (digital) humanities. It enables the linking of multidisciplinary data using a coherent ontological classification and interoperable formats. The project aims to promote the interdisciplinary and transparent research supported by state-of-the-art data management infrastructure driven by knowledge networks. Overall it aims to bring a new quality of interdisciplinary reasoning to the area of data science and the humanities.

2. Objectives

The presented project emphasizes an interdisciplinary approach to building a modular ontology using LOD. It combines the methods commonly used to build, explore and query knowledge networks with the apparatus traditionally employed in Natural Language Processing and Information Retrieval. Furthermore, LODinG aims not only to explore the potential of existing digital resources in the context of LOD but also to generate, publish and integrate new resources. Finally, the project aims to demonstrate the potential of linguistic LOD for innovative research endeavors in the humanities. To further present the potential of LOD in interdisciplinary research, LODinG bridges multimodal and multilingual areas of study, including Romance studies, German studies, Sinology and law, and demonstrates the possibilities arising from computing multimodal KGs embedded in linguistic, literary, cultural and legal contexts.

The LODinG project conceptualizes and deploys

the knowledge networks that enable querying, statistical analysis, data visualization, and linking to open datasets via formal modeling of entities and properties and the application of a modular, humangenerated ontology. At the conceptual level, we use named entity recognition and other information retrieval tasks to provide entities (such as people, places, organizations, motifs, methods, works or themes, etc.) with unique identifiers and labels that allow us to build robust linked knowledge networks. Furthermore, with the application of LOD, the already existing criteria for classifying the entities and creating typologies can be easily inspected to reconsider their analytical value. Such an approach helps to strike a balance between typologies driven by too many categories, resulting in overly specific information, on the one hand, and too few categories, carrying the risk of deriving inaccurate generalizations, on the other.

3. Areas of activity

LODinG is organized in closely interlinked areas of activity, each focusing on different aspects of linguistic LOD (LLOD). In the scope of LODinG, we will explore the enormous potential of LOD for innovative research in the humanities with a focus on linguistics, law, as well as literary, cultural and media studies.

The first research area focuses on the lexical level of the language system and examines the neologisms coined as a result of the Covid pandemic crisis. This work bridges the fields of German lexicology and digital lexicography. In addition to studying recent lexical phenomena, this subproject introduces a diachronic perspective by taking into account historical lexicons rich in pandemic-related vocabulary (Zacherl, 2022). This sub-project applies LOD and LLOD methods based on the semantics by reference (McCrae et al., 2012; Cimiano et al., 2020) framework. The research agenda of this subproject also includes the exploration of the semantic domain related to infections and diseases through the prism of standard Semantic Web data (Wandl-Vogt and Declerck, 2014). The diachronic perspective on established synsets would enable tracing of lexical changes of the analyzed set of lexemes as well as multiword expressions semantically related to infectious diseases. Furthermore, this subproject of LODinG emphasizes the importance of the representation of dictionary entries in the linguistic LOD framework and provides support for the integration of lexicons into the Semantic Web (Passarotti et al., 2020; Khan et al., 2022; Lindemann et al., 2022).

The second area of research in LODinG focuses on the terminology frequently used in historical medical and botanical sources from the early modern period of Romance and Germanic texts. In addition to linguistic LOD, this subproject is based on the methodological apparatus of translatology and scholarly editing in a LOD context (Spadini et al., 2021). This work package aims to compare historical sources containing standardized botanical nomina propria from different languages. The comparison will be done through direct source-target translation and interlanguage interference. The use of the latter approach may reveal the influence of an intermediate language that is typologically and phylogenetically distant the from source and target languages on equivalent matching in translation. Several historical sources dating back to the 16th century have already been digitized in the preparatory stage for this analysis (Moulin, 2018). The use of supervised OCR and LLOD methods will enable the triangulation of quantitative and qualitative analyses planned for this project.

The third area of work combines the methods of digital humanities and computer science. This subproject focuses on extracting statements related e.g. to datasets, methods and results, utilizing, in part, the OpenAlex resource. Currently, the production of scientific works far exceeds the reading capacity of researchers and research teams. Traditional indexing solutions, such as keywords, abridged abstracts and reviews often fail to address central questions of publications. Algorithmic, scalable methods of information extraction and synthesis are becoming increasingly important, supporting semantic publishing (Shotton, 2009; Schöch, 2021; Verma et al., 2023). To address the question of the lack of socalled *semantic statements*, this subproject aims to employ the LLOD methods in combination with manual tagging and machine content retrieval to semantically annotate a collection of works spanning across the field of the humanities. The subproject focuses on transforming abstracts and keywords into a limited number of machine-readable LOD statements (Metzger et al., 2011). This subproject partly departs from the OpenAlex platform, that contains metadata and LOD statements, but so far is lacking a systematic domain-dependent content modelling and a solid architecture of a formal ontology. The identified area for improvement and LODinG's involvement is to supplement the available data with content analyses and provide additional domain-specific context.

The fourth area of work builds upon the previous subproject and combines sinology with computer science. It focuses on scientific literature published in Modern Standard Chinese and converts its findings into machine-readable synthetic LOD statements. This work will compare the performance of entity extraction methods excerpted from the source language on available non-Chinese sources. The analyses of information extraction will be conducted from a cross-linguistic perspective. The project aims to develop language-specific tools for information extraction and synthesis. The goal is to provide non-Chinese readers with a toolkit to discover Chinese-language scholarly literature based on linguistic LOD. This approach provides an alternative to common machine translation solutions, which often lack high-quality training data that involves matching specialized terminology across multiple languages.

The fifth subproject introduces the synergy between cultural studies and Natural Language Processing. The material of focus, namely wine labels, consists of items that are constrained to a specific domain and often combine text and image. The coherence between the text and image on wine labels varies, sometimes resulting in the juxtaposition of opaque concepts that do not clearly correspond with one another. This is a good starting point for investigating the potential of combining text and image analyses to build more robust KGs. The subproject employs textual content and images from wine labels to develop robust multimodal knowledge representation networks. Today, some Large Language Models (LLMs) are trained using multimodal data that combine lexical input and images (Wu et al., 2023; Zhang et al., 2024). This means they support multimodal indexing processes, where text and image recognition can benefit from each other. The challenge is to harness the power of generative LLMs to make them sufficiently robust and predictable to create standards-based LOD. Thus, the objective of this subproject is to investigate the potential of this method for indexing collections of wine labels scraped from the web. The subproject aims to create a more generalizable process by starting with in-domain source material that could then be extended to other types of sources such as postcards, geographical maps, advertisements, or book illustrations.

The sixth area of work focuses on the conceptual indexing of multilingual European texts. The primary goal of this subproject is to develop a multilingual parallel corpus of European legal texts thematically related to digitization processes, datasets and digital data processing (such as Digital Services Act, Regulation EU 2022/2065). This work package aims to identify differences in legally-binding terminology among all official EU languages. Additionally, using LOD, the subproject will develop methods for transparent equivalent matching, supported by conceptual indexing. To accomplish these objectives, this work package includes the following consecutive steps: automatic sentence-level alignment of legal texts; identification of key jurisprudential concepts and their integration into the LOD framework; multilingual annotation (both manual and automatic) of the identified concepts; and conceptdriven search to identify mismatches across selected languages. This workflow is based on a set of similar tasks involving a multilingual corpus that comprises translations of an 18th-century legal text (Bretschneider et al., 2020). Such an approach enables the identification of contextual or conceptual discrepancies across multiple languages, which is particularly important in legal texts.

The seventh area of work in LODinG exhibits a cross-sectional character. Its aim is to integrate the standardized entries of all above-mentioned work areas into a modular ontology that supports federated gueries (Shimizu et al., 2023, 2022; Cimiano et al., 2020). This will be accomplished by using established techniques for constructing ontology and metadata structures, glossing, cataloging, employing semantic networks, and comparing taxonomies (Borek et al., 2021). We plan to contribute, wherever possible, to recent and emerging initiatives that strengthen the alignment of vocabularies and KGs and the potential of federation (Steller et al., 2024). The subproject aims to integrate both domain-specific and cross-domain general elements. Currently, only a limited set of predicates are being used across domains, such as person, place, publication, discipline, century, country, or continent. To bridge domain- and discipline-specific entities, a larger set of predicates will be implemented including methods, procedures, epochs, subdomains, phenomena etc. (Bodard, 2021; Burrows and Nurmikko-Fuller, 2020). We aim to employ Wikidata identifiers along with other available authority file data allowing for the enhancement of KGs. Striving for a balance between a project-specific micro-perspective and an overarching macro-perspective, the objective is twofold: (1) to utilize and develop domain-specific resources to generate new research perspectives, and (2) to support and promote overarching integration in the LOD paradigm enabling cross-disciplinary and cross-domain linking and reuse of information (Brown, 2022; Santini et al., 2024).

The final work area focuses on developing technical solutions necessary to achieve the project's goals. This cross-cutting area aims to create an environment that promotes interoperability of data curated in the above-mentioned subprojects. This work area also aims to ensure the quality of research data management strategies used by LODinG. Furthermore, this infrastructural project aims to create interfaces for unstructured data, enabling non-standard formats to adapt to the LOD framework. The tools developed within the scope of this work package will allow for data annotation using standardized classifiers and facilitating interlinking between disciplines traditionally associated with the research area of the humanities.

A further goal of this work area is to examine

the intersections between information extraction, ontology design, KG engineering and artificial intelligence. We plan to host several local Wikibase instances and to anchor LODinG in the *Wikibase ecosystem* (Diefenbach et al., 2021; Faulhaber, 2022; Simons, 2023; Rossenova, Lozana et al., 2023). Through our membership in the Wikibase Stakeholder Group, we aim to further contribute to this environment and develop its workflows and tool chains, for example, to semi-automatically convert exports from the semantic annotation tool IN-CEpTION or manual annotations from the virtual research environment FuD into LOD statements (Klie et al., 2018; Bamberg et al., 2023).

4. Anticipated Results

The LODinG initiative is still in its early stages, having been launched only at the beginning of 2024. However, we can outline several areas in which we anticipate results and outcomes. These areas pertain to domain-specific results from various work areas, capacity building and networking. Additionally, a modular cross-domain ontology for the humanities is proposed. LODinG aims to research, design, and publish interconnections between various standards, practices, knowledge domains, tools, and models with different focal points. The research will introduce and exemplify new applications of LOD within and across various disciplines in the humanities, while also rethinking LOD as a research paradigm. The LOD framework is expected to be suitable for both gualitative (hermeneutic and contextualizing) and quantitative (algorithmic and statistical) research, making it attractive to scholars from various areas of the humanities.

LODinG focuses on using LOD for multilingual and multimodal resources. The project aims to enrich a set of indexed entities involving several languages, addressing the dominance of English in models and tools for information extraction. Furthermore, LODinG has potential in multimodal applications of LOD, such as combining lexical information with images.

The experiences from the undertaken tasks will be documented extensively to provide guidance for other projects or published as best practices guidelines. The presented project offers an interdisciplinary platform to explore the effectiveness and necessity of domain-specific solutions, as well as the potential for holistic linguistic LOD infrastructures.

The novelty of LODinG lies in combining quantitative and qualitative research methods from various fields in the humanities with the LOD paradigm. We believe that such a multidisciplinary orientation of our research project has a potential to open a new chapter in digital humanities.

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