NLP4DH 2024

The 4th International Conference on Natural Language Processing for Digital Humanities

Proceedings of the Conference

November 16, 2024

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ISBN 979-8-89176-181-0

Preface

Textual sources are a cornerstone for research in the digital humanities, especially when larger datasets are involved. In such cases, the use of natural language processing (NLP) technologies becomes indispensable. However, a significant challenge arises as NLP is often tailored to standard written languages, which can differ substantially from the genres and text types of primary interest to today's digital humanists. This complexity increases when research is conducted on minority languages, historical texts, or dialectal materials.

NLP, with its strong foundation in computer science, tends to focus on optimizing numerical outcomes and addressing abstract tasks like machine translation, poem generation, or sentiment analysis. In contrast, digital humanities, deeply rooted in the humanities, focuses on concrete research questions aimed at understanding specific phenomena rather than merely solving a problem. Where NLP strives to validate its methods, digital humanists often take methodological validity as a given, treating these tools as a means to an end rather than the end goal itself. This fundamental difference in approach highlights the need for more collaborative spaces where scholars from both fields can come together to exchange knowledge and methodologies.

Digital humanists are increasingly aware of the limitations of current NLP tools, while the NLP community has already developed several viable solutions. However, both fields would greatly benefit from enhanced communication. For instance, techniques like model fine-tuning and retraining, widely used in NLP, could be harnessed to improve results for diverse linguistic varieties. Similarly, research in the digital humanities frequently produces open datasets, offering opportunities for comparative analysis across different NLP strategies. This workshop aimed to stimulate such dialogue, encouraging the sharing of examples that illustrate how NLP tools can best address the research questions central to the humanities.

This year NLP4DH received 81 submissions which was our highest number yet.

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