
ARTICLE – DIGITAL MODERN LANGUAGES

Preface

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When presented with the opportunity to contribute to a two-day workshop involving experts from Modern Languages and Digital Humanities, it appeared to me an unmissable and rare opportunity to come together with professionals from across disciplines that at times, are viewed on two separate spectrums. Unsurprisingly, the two days involved a number of curious encounters and conversations as we discussed our experiences from differing levels of education and shared perspectives about the intersection between Languages and the Digital Humanities. Three things struck me in particular as emergent from the two days of discussions:

Firstly, the wealth of creative ideas and enthusiasm of all involved to join together more clearly Digital Humanities and Modern Languages in a way that could cascade to all levels of learning and teaching. We benefitted from a diverse set of experts spanning Higher Education Institutions and the schools sector which made for valuable discussions about ‘what matters’ where digital technology and Modern Languages was concerned. It was evident that at a schools level there was increasing emphasis on improved digital competency and literacy, and that this needed to be translated more successfully to Higher Education Institutions, particularly where language learning is concerned.

Secondly, the clear and positive vision for how Modern Languages and Digital Humanities could contribute to learning experiences, but also the structural challenges in making this happen. Whilst colleagues all shared enthusiasm for the mission, there was wide experience of institutional reluctance to engage in dialogues where Digital Humanities and Modern Languages were concerned. There was much discussion of how to present the opportunity that digital and linguistic advances presented not only to the learner but also to the teacher. It was felt that time pressures and the need to ‘keep-up-to-date’ with the digital agenda allowed little space for positive responses where Digital Humanities is concerned. This certainly influenced discussion about how to attack and structure a tutorial that would be manageable to a teacher that felt ‘out of their comfort zone’.

Thirdly, the idea that there is no such thing as a digital native. Whilst the vision of the twenty-first century learner is one with a handheld device rather than a pen and paper, it is important to acknowledge that learners’ experiences of the digital are incredibly varied, and more often than not, connected primarily to social interactions, not educational ones. This means that when constructing and curating meaningful uses of digital technology into the language learning classroom, we need to consider how to structure the experience in a

way that is accessible to all learners. Moreover, it became increasingly clear that when considering Digital Humanities it was not sufficient to understand only what could be feasibly and successfully transferred digitally, but more importantly what could be enhanced and improved in this transformation. This transformation poses inevitable challenges but also infinite opportunities.

A few thoughts from an excellent two days which I look forward to building upon over the coming months.

Author Information

Lucy Jenkins achieved First Class honours in English Literature and Italian at Cardiff University in 2014. Achieving a scholarship for excellence, she pursued a Master's degree in European Studies, also at Cardiff University, and graduated with a Distinction in 2015. Currently, Lucy is the National Coordinator for the MFL Student Mentoring Project, based at Cardiff University, and has progressed to create the role of Project Development Manager for Language Horizons, a DfE funded digital mentoring project for languages. In the last year Lucy has also acted as a research assistant on an AHRC Open World Research Initiative project and on small GW4 and ESRC grants. Lucy is developing her expertise in pedagogical approaches to language learning both at a research and practical level. Currently working with particular interest on the interface between mentoring, learner motivation and online technology, Lucy has been instrumental in developing Language Horizons, and is looking to advance her work on engagement factors impacting upon uptake of MFLs as well as pedagogical approaches to teaching languages. Lucy is also keenly developing her ability to work with policy makers to impact upon decisions made for language policy in Wales. This is particularly pertinent with the introduction of the New Curriculum for Wales.

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