

Proposal for a Multilingual DH in the UK and Ireland Community Interest Group

Working Group Name:

Multilingual DH in the UK and Ireland

Coordinators:

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Potential participants:

The group will be of primary interest to digital humanities researchers in the UK and Ireland who currently work across multiple languages. As well as those who work more explicitly in the field of languages research, the group is aimed at the broader range of humanities researchers across areas such as history, classics or literary studies who conduct digital research through multiple languages and/or about multilingual contexts. We believe, however, that the CIG's focus has a wider appeal beyond university-based researchers, as illustrated by for example the knowledge justice campaigning work of the Whose Knowledge? foundation on the multilingual internet ([State of the Internet's Languages Report 2022](#)) and discussions around multilingual publishing led by groups such as the [Programming Historian](#). The CIG will further be of interest to the many archivists, curators and librarians in the GLAM sector in the UK and Ireland who work with digital/digitized materials in multiple languages. The CIG will also be aimed at research software analysts or engineers and technical leads interested in better understanding the challenges involved in conducting and supporting multilingual digital research. While the convening team are all based in HEIs, they will ensure a wider range of participants in the group through their existing connections with practitioners in organisations such as the British Library, university presses and language technology initiatives. Equally, while the convenors do not themselves work on the UK and Ireland's officially recognised languages, they will make particular effort to involve colleagues who use and conduct research on Irish, Welsh, Scottish Gaelic, Scots and British Sign Language.

Abstract:

The Multilingual DH CIG seeks to foster and expand multilingual digital research and practices within the UK and Ireland's community of digital humanities researchers and related practitioners. In doing so, it aims to better recognize and value the multilingual composition and expertise of this community, and to more explicitly address the anglophone assumptions that dominate our digital research and practices. While foregrounding the research and sociocultural contexts of the UK and Ireland, the group seeks to work in collaboration with international initiatives to foster more language-inclusive research and digital infrastructures, and to raise awareness of the ways language intersects with other forms of exclusion in our field and in wider society. It will also provide a vital forum for multilingual researchers in the UK and Ireland to discuss the challenges and issues they face in their work, and to work with practitioners in areas such as academic publishing, libraries and archives, and research software engineering to better support multilingual digital research and practices.

Relevance:

This group builds on a number of recent initiatives that have developed in recent years, both internationally and within the UK and Ireland. In particular, the two coordinators Spence and Wells founded the UK-led Digital Modern Languages seminar series in 2019 to bring together and raise the visibility of Modern Languages research that engages with digital culture, media and technologies. In

addition to a wide-ranging series of events covering subjects such as digital East Asian Studies and digital languages pedagogies in schools, the series also led to a new publishing outlet in the form of the [Digital Modern Languages section](#) on the Modern Languages Open platform (Liverpool University Press), which provides a unique space for publishing digital research conducted in and about languages other than English.

Internationally, the importance of fostering and furthering multilingual approaches to DH has become a priority in recent years, particularly with the growing recognition of the ways multilingualism intersects with questions of equity and social justice (see for example the recent ACH call for papers: <https://ach2023.ach.org/en/cfp/>). A number of multilingual DH groups and networks have been established by researchers in the US and Europe, with Dombrowski establishing an [international multilingual DH network](#) in 2019 (approved as an ADHO SIG in 2023) and a DARIAH-EU multilingual DH working group established in 2022.

While explicitly seeking to collaborate with these initiatives with which the coordinators already have close relationships, the CIG would play a distinct but complementary role. Firstly, while the Digital Modern Languages initiative has been influential in strengthening the presence and visibility of digital research within Modern Languages, particularly in the UK, it tends to be aimed at a different audience with a remit to disseminate wider languages-based research. Secondly, although colleagues in Modern Languages departments have a particularly key role to play given their primary focus on research in and about languages other than English, it is vital to both recognize and foster multilingual approaches to DH across the humanities and in ways that more explicitly connect with those who do not identify with the disciplinary field of Modern Languages.

Equally, while UK- and Ireland-based researchers can and should engage with international multilingual DH groups, it is vital to form a CIG within the UK-Ireland Association in order to explicitly counter the anglophone assumptions and biases that operate in particular ways in relation to the UK and Irish research and wider societal contexts. In this respect, the CIG will focus both on raising the visibility of the UK and Ireland's other official languages in digital research, as well as valuing and widening the multilingual knowledges and expertise of the UK and Ireland's DH community. Given the multicultural nature of both the UK and Ireland, it is a priority for the group to foster DH work that responds also to the rise in anti-immigrant and isolationist sentiment and associated forms of 'linguaphobia' in the UK and Ireland. In doing so, the CIG seeks to contribute actively to the Association's commitment to inclusivity and diversity, and to foster politically and socially engaged understandings of multilingual DH research not only at a theoretical level but also through an emphasis on forms of digital activism.

Aims & Activities:

Overall, the CIG has a dual aim of ensuring multilingualism is foregrounded within the Association's own practices and activities, as well as using the Association to advocate more widely for multilingualism to be explicitly addressed in digital research practices and infrastructures. In this respect, we propose a two-stage approach, focusing first on strengthening the internal multilingual policies of the Association, before more external-facing activities. This is necessary for ensuring the CIG and wider Association ensures it models best practice within its own activities, as well as ensuring the CIG has an achievable objective on which to focus during its first year of activity. Our planned programme of activities is as follows:

Year 1

- **Spring/Summer 2023:** Initial meeting of the CIG, drawing on both the coordinators' existing networks and a wider open call for members, to discuss and collaboratively agree the aims and objectives of the group, building on those identified above.

- **Autumn 2023:** The CIG will organise a public workshop – drawing on the Association’s highly successful workshop model – to share ideas and approaches for fostering best practice in multilingual DH within the Association. In addition to members of the CIG, we will invite external representatives who have been involved in developing similar guidelines or models of best practice to share their experiences (e.g. Dombrowski who founded the multilingual DH network; Horvath who chairs the DARIAH working group; Quiroga who has led on multilingualism within the Programming Historian; Pozo who is the Languages Coordinator at Whose Knowledge?).
- **Winter/Spring 2024:** Following the workshop the CIG will develop and publish a report and associated guidelines for the Association on strengthening Multilingual DH within its activities and practices.

Year 2:

- **Summer/Autumn 2024:** Following the delivery of its first objective, the CIG will meet to agree its future objectives, and in particular to begin planning more external-facing activities to begin in Autumn 2024. While we recognize the need for concrete and achievable plans, the purpose of the CIG is to function as a collective space for discussion and collaboratively agreed objectives and activities. As a minimum, we would however envision a further public workshop in Autumn 2024 focusing on a specific issue raised by the CIG and identifying practitioners in a specific area such as publishing or software development to engage with in relation to this issue. Drawing on our existing networks, we would also seek to collaborate on this workshop with one of the international multilingual DH groups mentioned previously.

In terms of sustainability, we would highlight that Spence and Wells have experience of sustaining similar initiatives without dedicated funding (while the Digital Modern Languages initiative initially arose from AHRC-funded projects, it has and will continue with expanded teams of convenors and collaborators). In the short-term, they have the resources to coordinate online meetings and workshops, particularly through Wells’ access to support with organising and managing events at the School of Advanced Study. In this respect, online meetings/events will be prioritised to support accessibility and ensure participation in the group’s activities remains sustainable for its members. Equally, Multilingual DH is an ongoing research focus to which all of the coordinators are committed (see e.g. Spence with Brandao and Wells’ 2021 report on [‘Disrupting Digital Monolingualism’](#) and Nilsson-Fernández and Dombrowski’s 2022 chapter on [‘Multilingual Digital Humanities’](#)), and it is likely to be the focus of their own future funding applications that would seek to incorporate explicit support for the CIG’s future activities. Establishing strong international connections with similar groups will further allow us to combine resources and efforts to support sustainability. We also have existing connections with Doctoral and Early Career Researchers who are leading on research in this area, and who in the longer term may be interested in joining the convening team to ensure continual renewal of ideas and initiatives to foster and expand multilingual digital research.