



## **Special issue on digital culture and humanities**

Anna Wing-bo Tso, PhD, Hang Seng University of Hong Kong

Winnie Siu-yee Ho, PhD, University of Hong Kong

Stephie Minjung Kang, Michigan State University

### **Introduction**

Digital technology originates from science, but its application has brought about transformations and revolutions to myriads of humanities disciplines in terms of research, practice and teaching. For example, the rise of digital media is constantly changing our perception of the world in the aspects of politics, economies, social lives and culture. Meanwhile, traditional cultural texts, forms and scholarly works are transformed whilst new cultural practices are created. The emergence of virtual/augmented reality has also generated new cultural forms and interactions, which in turn intervene and reshape the non-virtual reality in communities. Needless to say, one of the most significant instances of new cultural practices is the development of social movements and activism. The technology of new media and social network has played a core role in social activism. Studying digital culture and humanities is an adventure into the future of the interrelations between technology, culture and society. By putting digital technology under scrutiny, this special issue of *Digital Culture and Humanities* examines social impacts in the emergence of digital culture, especially how changes in the form of cultural production affect language expressions and communication. It seeks to provide a wide array of new thoughts on various facets of digital culture in the globalizing world.

Alongside examining digital culture, this special issue also aims to address the ever-changing educational implications in Digital Humanities (DH). As a rapidly growing sub-field of the humanities, DH has aroused public interest and attracted the attention of many institutions all over the world. Many universities in the U.K., the U.S., Canada and Australia, including Oxford, King's College, University College London, Leeds, Sussex, York, Glasgow, UCLA, Maryland, McGill, UBC, Sydney, and Flinders, have all offered DH programmes at both undergraduate and postgraduate levels. More and more universities start to found departments and research centres on DH too. Senior secondary schools have begun to provide courses in relation to digital media and cultural practices. Digital and mobile culture and technologies have become inevitable parts of our everyday lives to a large extent. With a view to investigating how DH and its educational implications, this special issue looks into the chances and challenges students, teachers and researchers are having when adopting digital technology in learning and pedagogical practices.

As JOGLTEP seeks globally situated digital literacies, pedagogies, and communities, the contributors in this issue are from all around the world—Hong Kong, China, the Philippines, Australia, and the US—discussing emerging digital culture and pedagogical vantage of DH in classrooms in their local contexts. With the current global pandemic obliging educators and researcher everywhere to imagine distance learning as the priority, we believe that the contributors provide a timely and globally networked space for broad possibilities in the digital world.

## **PART I: Dynamics in Digital Culture**

The first three articles serves to provide a lucid account of how the emergence of digital media can change the way people think, communicate, and interact with one another. Through addressing questions about multimodal literacy, information literacy for higher education, as well as media literacy, part one invites the reader to explore new possible modes of critical thinking as they rethink their understanding of the discourse in creativity, community art, and popular culture.

In the first paper in this section, “Enhancing digital literacy through the understanding of multimodal creativity in social media: a case study of Elon Musk’s social-influencer discourse in his Twitter posts,” **Dr. Locky Law** of The University of Hong Kong introduces innovative frameworks for the multimodal analysis of linguistic creativity. The reader is invited to appreciate the beauty of creativity occurring in between texts and images in social media. By illustrating Elon Musk’s multimodal creativity patterns and strategies in his tweets, the study reminds teachers and students that a high level of technical, cognitive and socio-cultural awareness is core to mastering digital literacy. Practical theories, analytical frameworks and the technical know-how are needed for teaching digital literacy, which is not an easy task.

Similarly, the second paper in the section, “Pedagogical experiment with Digital Humanities in cultural management: Using information literacy to teach public and community art in Hong Kong”, **Dr. Jane Zheng** and **Leo Ma** of The Chinese University of Hong Kong reveal the challenges of applying information literacy in a community art project, where students underwent 3D modeling training workshops, produced SketchUp illustrations, and developed a learning portfolio of their information literacy during the course. As the authors provide a review of the assessment results and summarize their teaching experience, they report on the university students’ lack of motivation to do the cultural project creatively in digital modes, and more disappointingly, the lack of willingness to work and reflect independently with technology when solving complex problems. This finding is in line with the results released from the U.S. International Computer and Information Literacy Study (IICILS) in 2018 – teachers may have over-estimated the information literacy and computational thinking skills of most students. Be they digital natives surrounded by digital culture in their everyday lives, students do need educational support from technology specialists and teachers as they develop information literacy and critical thinking.

The third paper in the session, “Of makeup hauls and Holy Grails: Examining the conceptions of beauty in an online discussion thread”, written by **Jaimee Serrano** of Ateneo De Manila University, reports on the language use in an online beauty platform in the Philippines. From interviews and the corpus research of numerous digital interactions gathered from an online beauty forum with about 1,150 makeup enthusiasts and active participants, the author scrutinizes the gender ideology, conceptions of beauty, and identity construction manifested in community of practice founded on such common interest as makeup and skin care products. Implicitly and explicitly, the core concerns of critical media analysis have been raised: (1) Who created the message? (2) What techniques are used to attract the reader’s/audience’s attention? (3) How might different people perceive the message differently? (4) What values and points of view are represented in, or omitted from, the message? (5) Where did the message come from? The case study affirms the importance of promoting media literacy education alongside digital literacy and information literacy. While there is neither a one-size-fit-all curriculum nor a canonical pedagogy for teaching critical media literacy, it is imperative to empower students and the general public with critical thinking and media analysis skills.

## **PART II: Digital Humanities and Its Educational Implications**

In part two of the special issue, four papers, all with a special focus on language learning in the digital world, have been collected. The internet is a sea of language resources. In a digital setting surrounded by emails, blogs, chat rooms, discussion forums, search engines, social media, and online fan-fiction, what language phenomena can be

observed? What are the challenges and opportunities for language and learning in the digital age?

In the first paper in this section, “Comparing the effects of implicit and explicit technology instruction in an L2 writing context”, **Bethany Martens** of the Ohio State University sets out to compare the effects of explicit and implicit iPad Pro instruction in two ESL academic writing classes for undergraduates. As research findings reveal, explicit technology instruction on the learning process enhanced students’ participation, facilitated “in depth” application exploration, encouraged autonomy in student-exploration, and increased student questions directed toward the ESL teacher. On the other hand, main affordances of implicit technology instruction on the language learning process increased sharing and peer collaboration between classmates. Similar to explicit instruction, implicit technological implementation also increased student engagement, learning autonomy and collaborative exploration to some degree. The author suggests that technology objectives are now inseparable from the learning process. They are a core component for holistic learning.

Likewise, in the second paper in this section, “Effects of captioned videos on learners’ comprehension”, **Dr. Sijia Guo** of Macquarie University, **Dr. Helena Sit** and **Dr. Shen Chen** of the University of Newcastle, Australia join hands to examine how technology can make language teaching and learning efficient and effective at university. The investigation of L2 learners’ use of captions while watching video in Chinese indicates that among the 66 participants of a year-one Chinese language course studying at a university in Australia, captioned videos were beneficial and useful to both learners of Chinese with a Chinese heritage background and other learners with a non-heritage background. The research findings have significant implications on how to design and develop practical audio-visual transmedia materials for language teaching in the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

In “An investigation of the effectiveness of English language apps for EFL vocabulary building,” **Dr. Anna Tso** discusses the latest development of EFL in the development of digital applications. Her paper uses two frameworks for evaluating the effectiveness of EFL language apps popular in the market, such as *Atlas English Vocabulary*, *Magoosh*, *BBC Learning English*, *Cambridge Dictionary English*, *Longman Dictionary English*, *Collins English*, *CV Engineer*, *Resumaker*, *Top Resume*, etc. Through an overview of the formulaic app designs popular among app users, the author remarks that most EFL vocabulary apps enhance learning by engaging learners in mechanical drilling. They have yet to allow sufficient room for creativity (constructivist learning), situated and collaborative learning opportunities. Content-wise, the best EFL apps should assist learners in mastering as many vocabulary learning strategies as possible, which include vocabulary use, phonological, morphological, and contextual analysis.

Last but not least, in “Second language acquisition in the digital world: Use of language learning apps as an individual difference,” **Dmitrii Pastushenkov** of Michigan

State University asks the question of whether language apps can make a difference in learning foreign languages in an instructed setting. Do apps make a difference in learning in an ecologically valid instructed setting over an extended period of time? The author provides a quantitative approach in understanding the significance of language learning apps in the process of language acquisition. As the paper mentions the limitations of current research, more big questions regarding second and foreign language learning pop into the mind the reader: should teachers guide students to use certain apps more systematically? What features in the apps used could be enhanced? How effective is edutainment? What is the loss and gain in an app that is appealing, but may not be so educational? While a student may have improved his/her proficiency by playing an apps, is the app going to hamper the user's other developments mentally, physically, and psychological? The conundrums are yet to be solved, and the reader is encouraged to further the research in the area.

**Acknowledgements:** A special thanks to Hailey Deyo and Renee Prvulov who supported editing this special issue. We also like to thank Drs. Marohang Limbu and Kate Birdsall for their logistical supports.