Why are Humanities papers so hard to read?

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Introduction.

For a computer scientist, what little academic reading is required is often short and to the point.

A humanities minor such as DH is a completely different experience: the readings took me far longer to finish.

I wanted to find out whether there really is a difference between DH and CS papers, and whether it could be quantified.

Methods.

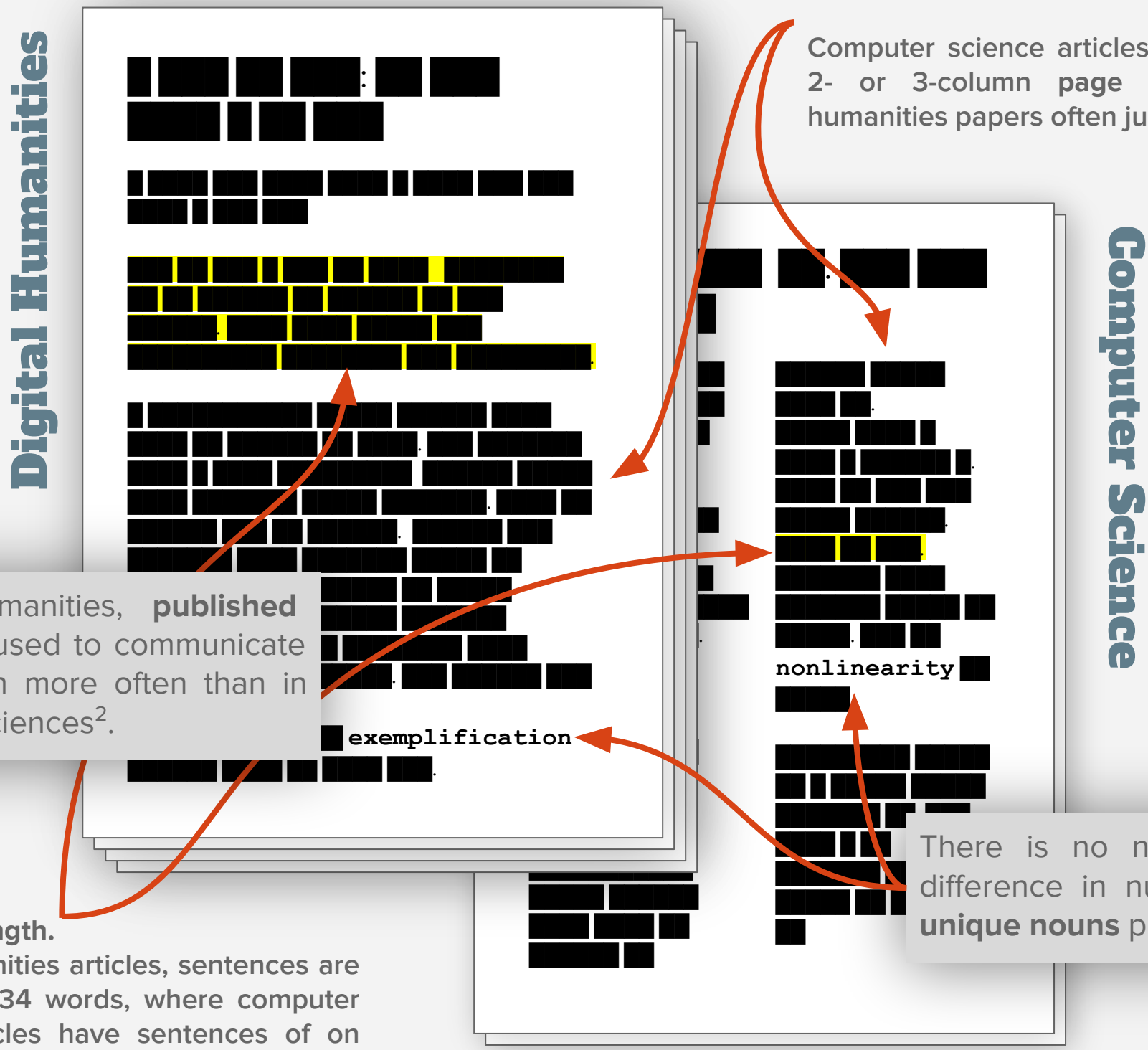
This research is based on my personal experience, and so my data selection is not representative of the whole fields.

Quantitative data analysis was done using Python with NLP libraries such as NLTK, and plotting libraries such as Seaborn.

Article formats.

In the humanities, the articles are often longer and contain more **sections**[1]:

Computer science articles often use a 2- or 3-column **page layout**, but humanities papers often just the one.



In the humanities, **published books** are used to communicate on research more often than in the exact sciences[2].

There is no noticeable difference in number of **unique nouns** per text[3].

Sentence length.

In the humanities articles, sentences are on average 34 words, where computer science articles have sentences of on average 24 words[3]. **An increase of 40%!**

Conclusion.

With longer sentences and often wider columns, it is no wonder that humanities articles are harder to read. Formatting might help preventing your eyes from sliding off the longer sentences.

The number of unique nouns does not differ significantly between the fields: being slower to read can be explained by being less experienced with the jargon used in research in the humanities.

Further work.

This research focused on articles, but including books for the data on humanities texts could be more representative.

Another thing to look for is the difference in structure: existence of standard sections, their order, and length.

Finally, this research could be performed on a dataset that is representative for both fields.

1: Request article selection by email **2:** Prof.dr. F.H. van Lunteren, OBAS **3:** Request source code access by email