Since most research of the Tunes & Tales project involves the development of tools, algorithms and computational models — which typically belong to the domain of e-humanities — our primary source of output targeted journals and conference proceedings dealing with computational humanities (Natural Language Processing, Music Information Retrieval). We take it to be one of our biggest successes that we also managed to publish our findings in more traditional ethnological journals. Our articles found their way to international prestigious journals such as Fabula, Folklore and Journal of American Folklore. Moreover, our research caught the attention of other makers of folktales and folk song databases, with whom we most likely will cooperate in the near future in order to develop international harvesters to run queries in several folktales databases at the same time.

A major setback during our program was that our project leader Louis Griep became terminally ill and passed away in 2016. He was an inspiration to us all, and his natural leadership, musical talents, enthusiasm, scientific insights, and fund raising qualities will be dearly missed. Some of his tasks were taken over by second project applicant Theo Meder.

The full Tunes & Tales team with all research, documentation and technical assistants (2015)

Worth mentioning is furthermore that we organized the Third International Workshop on Folk Music Analysis (FMA2013) at the Meertens Institute, which served as a platform for integration of traditional research and new, computational approaches in ethnomusicology. Within the project the Master’s course on Computational Musicology was developed by Peter van Kranenburg for the Research Master’s program in Musicology at Utrecht University. As of the deliverables of the project, the Meertens Tune Collections were released. These consist of a series of data sets in which the melodic data of the Dutch Song Database is provided for research purposes. The data have already been used in a number of computational folk song studies.

After publication of the two dissertations by Berit Janssco and Folgert Karsdorp, the Tunes & Tales project has contributed to the emerging discipline of e-humanities with new tools (such as the motif finder MOMFER and a melody search engine). Additionally, the project has enhanced our understanding of the processes involved in oral and literary transmission, as well as cultural evolution. One key finding of the project is the presence of a number of biases in story transmission. It was found, for example, that story transmission involves an age bias, in which younger versions of a story are more likely to be retold than older versions. Another bias in story transmission involves the nature of the actors of a story (i.e. the character cast). It was shown that stories revolving around marvellous and slightly counterintuitive characters have a transmission advantage over stories without such characters. Although we believe to have made major leaps forward in our understanding of transmission of tunes and tales, we were unable to provide enough data for a overarching theory of transmission for both tunes and tales. Further research in this direction is necessary, for instance to match the results for both tunes and tales, both in ‘behaviour’ and ‘size’ (a non-semantically based phrase of a melody tends to be smaller than a semantically based motif within a text). Both dissertations show that we are on the right track, but it will take more time before we can explain the transmission of (un)stable motifs in one evolutionary model. In some respects we can already predict what motifs will remain popular and what motifs are more likely to vanish, but again, constructing an accurate model with full predictive power will take more time and research.

Key publications


Online databases and tools

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