MULTILINGUAL FAN FICTION: WRITING (TRANS)LOCAL IDENTITIES AND COMMUNITIES

Abstract


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Fan fiction involves the writing, reading and discussion of novels, stories, poems and songs by fans of cult TV series, films and fiction, on web sites founded and monitored by fans themselves. It is based on and intervenes in for example characters, plot and themes of a cult ‘text’ originally produced by someone else with a legal right to them.

In this article I will approach fan fiction as complex discourse and literacy practice. On the one hand, as can be validated by even a cursory comparison of fan fiction by writers with different national and linguistic backgrounds, it is one means through which translocal fan cultures, identities, relationships and communities are created, maintained, negotiated and struggled over. All over the world, fan fiction draws on and rearticulates in quite uniform ways discourses, genres, and textual and stylistic conventions for building fictional texts. On the other hand, fan fiction ties closely with the local identities and life worlds of writers. One indication of this is its frequent code and style shifts. For example, non-native writers of English can choose to write in English, but also in their own mother tongue, or even use a ‘mixed language’, alternating and mixing two (or more) codes. Further, while both native and non-native writers can strive to imitate the styles and contents of the cult texts, they may - and often do - incorporate more personal, social or cultural styles, textual elements and contents in their fan fiction.

More specifically, I will report on a study of a corpus of nearly 200 fan fictional texts written by Finnish adolescents and young adults in wholly, primarily or partly in English. A major theoretical premise in my analysis is that in order to understand the patterns of language used by fan fiction writers and the social and discursive functions of their uses of English, along Finnish, an approach selectively combining insights from discourse analysis, new literacy studies, sociolinguistics and cultural studies is necessary. Drawing on this kind of cross-disciplinary framework, I will show what kinds of forms and types of English are used, and how they alternate with and are linked to the use of Finnish in these texts. In addition, an important aim is to show how English and Finnish have a number of different functions, ranging from stylistic, to textual, intertextual, social and discursive ones. It will be argued that, situated at the intersection of the domains of fans’ everyday lives, popular media, and the Web, fan fiction has a key role in on-going linguistic and cultural change in Finland, traditionally an EFL country with a fairly homogenous cultural identity. It is one influential site through which English spreads and establishes itself as a resource for Finns, in their everyday life as well as in the negotiation of (trans)local identities and communities.

References


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