



LSLP Micro-Paper 109: *Cosplay as Literacy Practice*

Yaritza Alanis Berrio

BA Candidate in Spanish-English Education
Universidad Pontificia Bolivariana, Sede Central Medellín

yaritza.alanis@upb.edu.co |  <https://orcid.org/0009-0005-8354-4656>

Defining the Term

Cosplay is a portmanteau of costume and role-play. Takahashi Nobuyuki first coined the term in 1984 after visiting the Los Angeles Worldcon and witnessing American costuming practices. After returning to Japan, he began using the term *kosupure* in Japanese magazines, which led to the English term *Cosplay*. The phenomenon has gained a great deal of recognition in the last decades

Cosplay refers to an art form in which individuals portray characters they admire. These characters come from popular media such as video games, anime, and manga, among others, and it is considered a subculture. People not only dress up but also behave like the character, adopting their mannerisms; therefore, it combines creativity, imagination, and community interaction.

Cosplay is not rigid; in fact, it is hard to define what counts as cosplay, since people can cosplay their own characters or represent a character's highlights. The only requirement is that it be recognizable to the average viewer. One key element is community, since cosplay has always been a shared activity, directly and indirectly, through conventions. Directly, through character collaborations, and indirectly, among attendees and cosplayers.

Connecting it to LSLP

At LSLP, we focus on analyzing diverse literacy methods. Cosplay relates to the research teams as a source of reinterpretation: a character acts as a text, reread according to societal expectations or personal standards, altering style, fabric use, and mannerisms. It allows the ownership and mixing of multiple languages and cultures. It serves as a staple for [Language-as-Victory](#) and a main theme of interest (videogames and popular media) through [visual literacy](#), expressed in the cosplayer's costume and mannerisms.

We also argue that cosplay is both a [community](#) practice and an [affinity space](#), either one-on-one or online through tutorials or niche communities, which in turn can help reshape how cosplayers rethink the [cities](#) they inhabit. In that sense, cosplay shapes culture by influencing how people relate to, support, and interact with themselves and each other. This is demonstrated, on the one hand, through the appropriation of a [second language](#) or specific attire: most characters have lines or communicate in another language. Therefore, if one wants to embody said character, one would learn its expressions, despite the personal modifications done according to culture, religion, or

personal taste; for example, in some cultures it is inappropriate for women to show their hair; therefore, if they want to do cosplay, they preserve their hijab and style it as a wing; even some cosplayers integrate [fabric and accessories](#) from their own culture. Any alteration to character representation is a remixed interpretation that lets the individual rethink the space they exist in and coexist with.

Expanding Second Language Research

Although second language research has largely overlooked it, cosplay is a powerful cultural tool that lets people reinterpret and remix source materials to fit their environment. In the classroom, it fits within the broader picture of play-based pedagogies, where dressing up isn't essential; even without portraying a character, students can still form attachment to and identity with characters in curriculum readings, bridging heritage culture and the second language.

Teachers can incorporate cosplay across the curriculum because it requires [background knowledge](#) about the character, their speech, and how to adapt it to current needs, the context they lived in, fabric tailoring, accessory crafting, and budgeting.

Principally, it aids the literacy learning process since the visual component is often self-descriptive. On a larger scale, cosplay helps students use language in context by applying the four main language skills (reading, writing, speaking, and listening). Moreover, cosplaying reduces performance anxiety and inhibitions. Furthermore, it gives learners agency as active producers of culture rather than passive consumers.

References

- Aljanahi, M. H., & Alsheikh, N. (2021). "There is no such thing as copying in cosplay": Cosplay as a remixed literacy practice. *Journal of Adolescent & Adult Literacy*, 65(3), 209-218. <https://doi.org/10.1002/jaal.1193>
- Jones, K., Mays, K., Santiago, A., Cisse, M. M., & Barr, R. (2026). Girls of Color Transforming Media Spaces Through Critical Participation. *Journal of Literacy Research*, 58(1), 5-30. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1086296X261438487>
- Szwed, A., & Walker, A. M. (2017). Cosplay in the ELL Classroom. *English in Texas*, 47(2), 13-18. <https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/EJ1262860.pdf>

Declaration of Generative AI and AI-assisted Technologies in the Writing Process

The author wrote the different drafts of this text without AI assistance. Before uploading the micro-paper, final edits were made using Grammarly. The author takes full responsibility for the publication's content.



LSLP Micro-Paper 109 – 2025

© 2024 Literacies in Second Languages Project

<https://lslp.org>

#howbigdowewanttodreamtoday #buildingthefieldonemicropaperatathetime #legioinvictalegioaeterna