Micro-Paper 64: *Fandom*

Elizabeth (Effy) Agudelo

BA Candidate in English-Spanish Education Universidad Pontificia Bolivariana, Sede Central Medellín | LSLP Student-Researcher

maria.agudelor@upb.edu.co

Defining the Term

The notion of "fan" dates to half of the nineteenth century. According to some historians, the term was designated to refer to spectators who crammed into Swedish singer Jenny Lind's American tour spectacle. People who were part of the mobs, then, were depicted as violent and associated with metaphors of animalism or savagery. A new negative connotation toward music and theatre lovers emerged from overcrowding and social disorder, often depicted in the press.

As a response to the awareness of crowd management, engineering solutions translated in innovating ways to use barriers and platforms were implemented in order to control the masses. However, other scholars broach baseball historians that justified a sense of "fanaticism" among audiences who congregated as close as possible to the players, what generated a disruptive environment and distracted the players.

Moving beyond its pejorative perception of obsession, madness and even excessive forms of religious belief, there is no denying that the subculture of "fandom" has expanded from the mere act of being a "fanatic" of something or someone, to the participation in groups where activities like reading and writing "fanfiction" about their shared taste were carried out. Such is the case of the Star Trek fandom in 1960.

With the boom of New Media and Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs), fans have embraced their practices virtually, meeting in online spaces. In this sense, members of a community construct meaning through artistic representations that, at the same time, shape their identity.

Connecting it to LSLP

Following our research lines at LSLP, we have observed how people of all ages interact with second languages in varied contexts driven by their common interests. Citizens gather around a particular form of fandom to forge affinity relationships in both physical and virtual spaces. Literacy practices are developed in everyday interactions that transcend old discourses about what means to be a fan of any genre, transforming them into a field of study that explores the implications of community belonging in learning a second language.

The necessity of studying fandom in platforms like fanfiction.net, where users write stories borrowing the plotline or a character's features to create their own stories, arises from the idea that people are including other languages in their everyday discourses. Whether it is about a game, a film, a book or a musical band, people post fictions to be recognized by others as fans, integrating themselves with the fanfiction community. Fandom.com is another example of an interface that allows fans to connect to one another.

Expanding Second Language Research

Fandom studies has shown the power of community building. In this regard, a more in-depth inquiry concerning language learning is required, due to the emergence of linguistic and cultural divergence. Through artifacts, understood as any product resulting from people's creations, folx are displaying different versions of themselves. This gives them a status of second language users, with which they are able to construct wider meanings inspired by the world as well as the word.

Popular culture has revealed how cities are always in motion and evolve at their inhabitants' pace. Languages are at the core of human communication, tearing down barriers of space and geographic location. ICTs have also aided real-time information flow and exchange, thus bringing people together. Thanks to digital resources and social networks, fandom is still a research phenomenon that remains essential to explore people's willingness to get immersed into a community and to use other languages despite their level of appropriation.

References

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