

# Transcultural literacies and meaning-making through fanfiction

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Digital technology has made intercultural contacts a daily activity for many people in the world. As a result, the globalization of cultural flows and the various ways that people appropriate these cultural flows have become hot topics for investigation, and the prefix 'trans' can now be seen in terms like translocalities, transnational, translanguaging and transculturing, underlying the fluidity and mix of cultures, languages and

localities in the digital environment.

These transcultural meaning-making practices frequently occur in the context of fandoms, which are online spaces made up of deeply engaged consumers with a shared interest in specific popular culture products. The term fanfiction is coined in the English language. It is fiction created by fans and for fans, which takes an original text or famous person as a starting point, which is created, usually, in a community or fandom and is distributed, mainly, online.

## **Learning incorporated into social practices**

In previous studies on literacy, expert researchers in this field, Liudmila Shafirova and Daniel Cassany, had shown that fan communities are an important field for studying the learning of a [second language](#) (L2) from a new perspective of literacy, the one that considers learning incorporated into social practices.

## **Transcultural meaning-making and literacies that arise during the amateur translation of a fanfiction novel from Russian to English**

A new study by Liudmila Shafirova, Daniel Cassany and Carme Bach, all members of the GR@EL research group of the UPF Department of Translation and Language Sciences, has explored the transcultural meaning-making and literacies that arise during the amateur [translation](#) of a fanfiction novel by from Russian to English. They have done so following the digital ethnography methodology, through online observations and interviews, and the results were published on 24 September in *Journal of Language and Intercultural Communication*.

As a [case study](#), the authors used the translation into English rendered by

fans of the fanfiction novel based on the US animated series "My Little Pony: Friendship is Magic," which is written in Russian. The brony fandom of interest here consists of fans from various post-Soviet republics who create and share animations, videos, fanfiction and fanart on different digital platforms. The fan translators—from Ukraine, Belarus, Estonia and Poland—translate this text from Russian into English, while using Russian as their lingua franca. The authors argue that translation activity of this sort can open up opportunities for the development of transcultural literacies.

### **The creation of transcultural meanings became apparent during discussions on how to adapt a Russian fanfiction novel to a global English-speaking audience**

"We applied digital ethnography to make observations of the translation process and interviews with the participants", the authors explain. The creation of transcultural meanings became apparent during discussions on how to adapt a Russian fanfiction novel to a global English-speaking audience. During the discussions, participants creatively combined different linguistic and cultural resources and positioned themselves as mediators between two readerships, which pushed them to reflect on literary and philosophical traditions of the Russian and English-speaking cultures and engage in transcultural literacies.

### **The main subjects of discussion among participants were semantics, the narrative style of the translation, and the values and ideology of the characters**

The discussions dealt with semantics, with the participants searching for the equivalents of idiosyncratic Russian expressions and proper nouns in

English in order to make the text more fluent; stylistics, to adapt Russian narrative style to something more appropriate to modern English literature, and the deepest discussions usually concerned bringing a character's actions into line with the values and ideology of English-language literature.

**More information:** Liudmila Shafirova et al, Transcultural literacies in online collaboration: a case study of fanfiction translation from Russian into English, *Language and Intercultural Communication* (2020). DOI: [10.1080/14708477.2020.1812621](https://doi.org/10.1080/14708477.2020.1812621)

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