

'FEEDBACK MEANS THE WORLD TO ME': CONSTRUCTING PROXIMITY IN CANON- COMPLIANT FANFICTION

'FEEDBACK MEANS THE WORLD TO ME': LA CONSTRUCCIÓN DE LA PROXIMIDAD EN LA FANFICCIÓN AJUSTADA AL CANON

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Abstract

This paper examines the linguistic strategies used in English to create proximity within the online fandom community. The study applies close reading techniques to analyse three works of fanfiction belonging to a canon-compliant subgenre. It explores how authors from diverse socio-cultural backgrounds establish a relationship with their readers by demonstrating their affiliation with fandom (proximity of membership) and dedication to the source material (proximity of commitment). To investigate these techniques, the study employs the model of proximity defined by Hyland (2010), extended by the findings of Suau-Jiménez (2019, 2020). The analysis includes both the main text and the metatext, revealing similarities in the techniques used by the authors to establish proximity through organisation, argument, credibility, stance and engagement.

Keywords: proximity, interpersonality, fanfiction, fan studies, genre.

Resumen

Este artículo examina las estrategias lingüísticas empleadas en inglés para crear proximidad dentro de la comunidad de fan en línea. El estudio incorpora técnicas de lectura atenta para analizar tres *fanfictions* o fanficciones pertenecientes a un

subgénero que se ajusta al canon. Explora el modo en el que autores de diversos orígenes socioculturales establecen vínculos con sus lectores demostrando su afiliación al *fandom* o comunidad fan (proximidad de pertenencia) y su dedicación al material original (proximidad de compromiso). Para investigar estas técnicas, el estudio emplea el modelo de proximidad definido por Hyland (2010), ampliado por los hallazgos de Suau-Jiménez (2019, 2020). El análisis incluye tanto el texto principal como el metatexto y revela que hay similitudes en las técnicas empleadas por los autores para establecer las facetas que constituyen la proximidad: organización, argumentación, credibilidad, postura y compromiso.

Palabras clave: proximidad, interpersonalidad, ficciones, estudios sobre aficionados, género.

1. Introduction

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This paper is an attempt to explore how reader interaction is encouraged by the linguistic strategies used in English by fanfiction writers. The first section of the article introduces fandom as a community with defined practices, such as the creation of fanfiction. In the following parts, fanfiction will be described as a form of communication between writers and readers. Furthermore, I will briefly present research on fanfiction and introduce the notion of proximity, which may be constructed within fanfiction to facilitate interaction and engagement among members of the community, and present the analysis of the study data. In the last section, I will discuss the results and attempt to determine how fanfiction writers may construct proximity in canon-compliant fanfiction and how they use language to present and justify their writing.

1.1. What is a Fandom?

The word “fan” comes from the Latin *fanaticus*, which describes a devotee (Jenkins 1992). Fans participate in activities to express their deep affection for a certain product or person; they form a community and create texts, art and music based on their common interest. An online group that shares traditions, opinions, perspectives and social norms is called a fandom (Kobus 2018). Each fandom has its object of affection such as a video game, book or television series. A fandom is characterised by their practices of “prosumption”, meaning consumption and production. “Prosumer”, a term coined by Alvin Toffler (1980), was defined as an agent who both consumes a product and produces it in remade form. These practices of “prosumption” include critical reinterpretation (Silberstein-Bamford 2023), appropriation, immersion (Van Steenhuyse 2011) and creative output.

Fans form groups and function as communities with defined practices, constituting a participatory culture “inviting many forms of participation and levels of engagement” (Jenkins 1992: 2). Fanfiction writing is one of the practices used for initiating interaction and discussion among members of the community.

1.2. What is Fanfiction?

Fanfiction is one of the most popular forms of production within fandom. It allows the writer to disaggregate and reorganise the source material and create a text based on another text (Hellekson and Busse 2014). By reusing features from a well-established universe, such as characters or settings, fanfiction develops a new narrative which refines the source material and makes it flawless in the eyes of the author (Oberc 2015). Fanfiction is the result of deep analysis of source material and expands on certain scenes, plotlines and character personalities. It is a process of “retelling” carried out in a participatory culture, which allows people to assume multiple roles simultaneously, that is, author, receiver and critic. Online writing allows everyone, regardless of their gender, age or social status, to express their opinions, be creative or engage in discussion with the help of the story (Menise 2020).

Classifying fanfiction can be difficult because each fandom has its own set of terms and conventions. Fanfiction is not a single uniform category; instead, we can only identify certain patterns and trends within it. Several taxonomies have been developed for fanfiction over the years (see Bacon-Smith 1992; Jenkins 1992; Pugh 2005; Kobus 2018), although there is no official system of categorisation to date. This study focuses on canon-compliant fanfiction, a type of fanfiction that does not change the original storyline and whose main purpose is to explain and elaborate on certain aspects of the plot (Kobus 2018). The story may be set before, during or after the events of the original work. Writers often interpret the original events and draw conclusions, which are then incorporated into the new text. In canon-compliant fanfiction, any additions to the plot must be implemented convincingly to ensure the reader understands how they improve upon the original. These additions function in much the same way as arguments.¹ An argument is a new element of the plot which aims to enhance and complement the original work, increasing the satisfaction of both the author and the readers.

A fandom has an in-group register, which is also a criterion for membership. It is assumed that several genres of fanfiction coexist within a fandom, and members employ specific terminology to refer to original material. To be a member of a fandom, one must possess a satisfactory comprehension of the source material and the related terminology. Similarly, discourse communities also require “a threshold of members with a suitable degree of relevant content and discursual expertise”

(Swales 1990: 27). A fandom may be considered a discourse community that uses specialised terminology and tropes to achieve its communicative goals.

1.3. Interactions in Digital Fanfiction Writing

In participatory cultures, shared practices such as writing and reading fanfiction serve as means of communication. Communicative events happen mostly in the metatext (e.g. author's notes, comments, tags) and across multiple websites (author's social media), where every fan may participate.

With the emergence of the Web 2.0, most fandom activities shifted to the internet, and several websites were established to serve as repositories for user-generated content and to facilitate interaction. In the context of fanfiction, authors may either post their work all at once or release it in a serialised format, with new chapters being published on a schedule or whenever they find time. Some authors may choose to release their work in parts to gather feedback from readers.

The most popular webpage for posting fanfiction, Archive of Our Own (AO3), allows users to interact with fanfiction passively and actively through two levels—textual and metatextual. The textual level concerns the story itself, while the metatextual level allows for interaction between the author and readers. For fanfiction to be published on AO3, it needs to have a proper description and appropriate tagging, as the fans use tags to search for content. Tags are metatextual markers that inform the reader of the type of content they may anticipate. The AO3 syntax of tagging is not specifically regulated and may be seen as a distinctive mode of communication, or a space where the author may include their informal reflections. At the end of each chapter, readers can post their comments. The comments section also enables the readers to engage in conversation between themselves or with the author. When the format of fanfiction is serialised, AO3 allows the user to subscribe to a particular piece and be notified of new updates via email. Readers may give 'kudos' to a work (equivalent to a 'like' on social media) or bookmark it, that is, save it to a user account or private collection so they may return to the story without the fear of forgetting the title or author. A comment section may be used as a means of communication, but the author of fanfiction may also communicate with readers using the author's notes, which appear before the main text. The author's notes may give reasons why the story was written or explain certain cultural conventions, but they are predominantly used to share the author's thoughts, ask readers for opinions and show gratitude to readers for reading the story. In the author's notes, writers may also provide links to their social media profiles so they can stay in touch with readers outside AO3.

Fanfiction may be divided into parts, although the lines separating them are often blurred. Texts open with an introduction, which informs readers about when and where in the source material's timeline the fanfiction takes place, while the main body presents the arguments (author's additions) followed by the ending.

The participatory nature of a fandom allows everybody to be a creator. Fanfiction writers post under pseudonyms and seldom disclose personal information such as nationality, age or gender. A fandom may be considered a safe space, and fanfiction writing encourages participants to explore their gender identity or sexual preferences without revealing their identity to the public (see Dym et al. 2019; Dym and Fiesler 2020). Fanfiction provides a means for writers to reflect on and interpret the emotions evoked by the source material, as well as to modify and enhance the story to make it more engaging and satisfying for both the author and the reader.

AO3 is a platform for fans to exchange feedback. Public reviews are encouraged and valued. Readers can choose to interact with the work of other fans by sharing their opinions on the story or the writing. Feedback can reassure authors and lead them to improve their writing by offering constructive criticism. As Cheng and Frens noted, such exchanges improve interpretive skills, allowing for reflection on both source material and fanfiction from different perspectives. The ability to improve writing based on feedback applies to creative, professional and academic writing (2022: 402). Furthermore, more dedicated writers of fanfiction often collaborate with a 'beta-reader', who reviews their work before publication.

Fanfiction is part of an online gifting culture, which determines the amount and type of interaction expected between members and the assumed reciprocity of contributions. Metatext is used to perform various fan activities including criticism and appraisals. Every individual may feel a need to engage with fan creations, whether directly or indirectly, by liking a work of fanfiction or leaving a comment (Kobus 2018). Individuals give and receive fan products, resulting in the creation of social relationships centred around a mutual object of affection (Hellekson 2009). Reciprocity can deepen the bond between individuals and may increase the prestige of good authors, earning them renown for their selfless creations (Kobus 2018).

To have their work assessed, writers need to establish a certain level of interaction with the audience. This can be achieved through the use of metatext, engagement markers and the organisation of the fanfiction itself, which includes the effective portrayal of characters, a well-constructed narrative and an emotional resonance with the reader that may prompt them to engage with the text. It has been observed that fans tend to document their observations and discuss any rejection or reinterpretation of the established material in the metatext (Bennett 2014).

1.4. Previous Studies on Fanfiction

One of the most prominent studies on fan behaviour is Henry Jenkins's *Textual Poachers: Television Fans & Participatory Culture* (1992), which uses De Certeau's (1984) notion of poaching to describe fans as meaning-makers while placing them in a position of resistance to the publishing industry. At first, analyses falsely treated fans as a homogenous group (Bronwen 2011) and focused heavily on feminist and gender overtones found in fanfiction. Russ (2014) states that fanfiction is explicitly feminist pornography, while Lamb and Veith (2014) argue that fanfiction is a sphere where explicit sexual content must be understood as a woman's desire for equality in a relationship, which does not fall under societal hierarchies of gender roles. Woledge (2006) observes that in fanfiction texts, a woman's hidden desire for intercourse is reshaped as the highest form of trust and emotional connection. In recent years, there has been an increasing amount of literature on power dynamics within digitally-mediated communities, such as the work by Harris (1998) and Jancovich (2002), who explored how fans' migration to the internet space has impacted their activity and their relationship with social hierarchies, using theories developed by Foucault and Bourdieu. Furthermore, scholars studied how fans are attached to media and how they interact with it in relation to fanfiction (see Gray 2003; van Monsjou and Mar 2019). Fanfiction has been considered a feminist genre (see Bacon-Smith 1992; Bury 2005; Woledge 2006) and a space for activism (see Allred and Gray 2021), identity expression (see Dym et al. 2019; Dym and Fiesler 2020) and communal literacy acquisition (see DeLuca 2018; Rodriguez Aragon and Davis 2019).

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The anthology *The Fan Fiction Studies Reader* (2014), edited by Karen Hellekson and Kristine Busse, provides an overview of fan studies and situates this scholarly work mainly within the realms of media and cultural studies. The book explores fan creations and the ways they are written and distributed.

However, this existing research has been limited to fanfiction's psychological, social and cultural aspects, while its linguistic features have not been sufficiently explored. Previous linguistic research into the genre has mostly contributed to second language acquisition (see Black 2005, 2006), self-taught critical literacy (see Edfeldt et al. 2012) or linguistic practices in mixed-language fanfiction (see Leppänen 2012). What seems to be lacking is a thorough exploration of the linguistic facets of fanfiction written in English. This paper aims to explore the linguistic aspects of discourse within and around fanfiction.

Fanfiction is a reader-oriented type of writing. Fanfiction authors must convince readers of the validity of their additions to receive a positive reception. This behaviour is also present in other reader-oriented genres. In research articles, writers establish proximity to enhance the credibility of their claims. Fanfiction

authors may also use proximity to persuade readers, as this notion focuses on positioning the author in relation to their text and community, which ought to satisfy the reader's expectations (Hyland 2010). Compared to other subgenres, proximity may be most prominently visible in canon-compliant fanfiction due to its purpose of enhancing the original work: authors may make specific language choices to establish proximity, therefore increasing the validity of their additions.

Proximity fosters reader-oriented writing, as the recipient needs to recognise the structure and anticipate the writer's purposes. Proximity has been applied to academic writing (see Hyland 2010; Dressen-Hammouda 2014; Zhang and Cheung 2018; Herrando-Rodrigo 2019) and is assumed to be part of the process of negotiating authors' claims in articles. Furthermore, proximity has been applied to multimodal discourse (see Scotto di Carlo 2014; Tereszkievicz and Szczyrbak 2022). Different facets of proximity (credibility and stance) portrayed in promotional genres have been studied (see Suau-Jiménez 2019, 2020), but there appears to be little or no research on proximity in fanfiction. Proximity may be a crucial element in understanding the intrinsic reciprocity associated with writing practices within fandom.

This article will seek to reveal ways in which fanfiction writers construct proximity in canon-compliant fanfiction and how they use language to present and justify their argument using Hyland's (2010) framework of proximity as expanded by the findings of Suau-Jiménez (2019, 2020).

1.5. Proximity

Proximity is a well-researched notion among academic, popular science and educational genres (see Hyland 2010; Dressen-Hammouda 2014; Scotto di Carlo 2014; Zhang and Cheung 2018; Herrando-Rodrigo 2019; Luzón Marco 2019; Hyland and Zou 2021; Tereszkievicz and Szczyrbak 2022; Bocanegra-Valle 2023, among others), whereas studies of proximity in other genres seem to be scarce (see Suau-Jiménez 2016, 2019, 2020). Proximity has been chosen as the theoretical framework for this research due to its applicability to reader-oriented writing such as fanfiction. Whereas terms such as metadiscourse, interdiscursivity, interpersonality and stance may also concern closeness between interactants, they touch upon different relational aspects. Metadiscourse concerns linguistic resources that organise the discourse, helping the reader interpret the text as intended by the author (Hyland 2004). In contrast, proximity focuses on specific strategies within metadiscourse. Interdiscursivity refers to connections between different texts. One facet of proximity—credibility—may also draw on shared knowledge from other texts. Both interpersonality, which concerns the relationship between the writer

and the reader, and stance, which refers to the writer's attitude towards the information, are incorporated into the notion of proximity (Hyland 2010). Therefore, proximity seems to be the most comprehensive notion with which to analyse linguistic strategies used to model the relation between the author, the reader and the presented content in the fanfiction genre.

In the context of academic discourse, Hyland argues that authors use a variety of linguistic resources to represent themselves and their material while fulfilling the audience's expectations. Authors were observed to use meticulously chosen lexis to establish readers as "interactants" (2010: 116) with whom they discuss arguments within the norms of the community. Similar observations have also been made outside strictly academic contexts. Both Wang and Csomay (2024) and Scotto di Carlo (2014), using Hyland's concept of proximity, studied how speakers in TED talks pass their knowledge on to non-expert listeners through linguistic strategies of engagement and persuasion. Various facets of proximity in promotional discourse, such as stance and credibility, have been researched by Suau-Jiménez (2016, 2019, 2020), who suggested that travel agencies and hotels construct proximity to encourage customers to choose their services.

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Proximity may be divided into proximity of membership and proximity of commitment (Hyland 2010). Proximity of membership refers to the author's use of linguistic conventions to present themselves as knowledgeable members of the community. In fandom, this is achieved through a deep comprehension of the source material and a proficiency in the use of vocabulary and register that mirrors the original. Proximity of commitment reveals the author's attitude towards the original text, that is, which elements they appreciate, which parts of the material are in their opinion underdeveloped, and which elements should be elaborated upon to derive more satisfaction from the reading. These two facets of proximity are used to emphasise the "recipient design" of the text, which refers to the various ways in which a writer may express respect and sensitivity towards other readers through a carefully chosen lexicon and range of topics (Sacks et al. 1974: 727). Fanfiction writers may need to establish proximity as an invitation to the reader to enter the discourse and analyse the validity of their contributions.

Proximity is created through aspects such as organisation, argument, credibility, stance and engagement (Hyland 2010). Here, it is worth noting that Hyland's model was originally proposed as applicable to English-language academic and popular science genres. Suau-Jiménez (2016) argues that proximity is achieved differently according to the genre in which it is constructed and is a result of at least three variables: language, genre and discipline. These variables render specific patterns of genre-related rhetorical functions. In later research, Suau-Jiménez et al. (2021) proposed a new concept called discursive interpersonality. The notion of

discursive interpersonality focuses on each text and its discourse as the starting point for analysis. It encompasses a broader variety of strategies according to each genre's features, which include verbal, visual and lexical-grammatical markers (self-nomination, evaluative adjectives, imperative verbs) not included in Hyland's previous model.

Organisation refers to the form of the presented argument (Tereszkiewicz and Szczyrbak 2022), such as the structure of the text and the location of the main argument. The argument adheres to the readers' expectations, and it attempts to show the author's respect and engagement with the field of research. In fanfiction, an author's reinterpretation of elements from the original material can be considered an argument. Arguments may include added scenes that seek to further explore certain events not present in the source material, or they may elaborate on abandoned or unresolved themes from the original text. Proper organisation impacts the reader's experience, as the reader may anticipate the parts in the fanfiction where additions have been integrated to enrich the original narrative. Organisation may also portray modifications as convincing and plausible for the audience.

In research articles, credibility is established by demonstrating expertise in research methods and meticulous work while maintaining objectivity. In popularisation, credibility is maintained by using direct quotes and reporting verbs to attribute statements to the scientist (Tereszkiewicz and Szczyrbak 2022). Suau-Jiménez (2016) and Suau-Jiménez et al. (2021) highlight that in promotional genres, the involvement of the reader is more marked. Writers may try to attain credibility through direct allusions (*you/the readers*) or imperative verbs or personalised agentive self-mentions (*I, me, my, our*) as they try to persuade the reader in a friendly, trustworthy way. The same may be said for fanfiction: credibility may be achieved through references to the source material and the author's self-mentions in the metatext.

Stance linguistically portrays the author's perspective. Stance represents the "attitudinal dimension" (Hyland 2005: 176), that is, how writers present themselves and convey their opinions. In scientific writing, authors often use modals (*should, can*) and hedging (*seems, appear*) to qualify their commitment and present their arguments as plausible, opening up space for discussion, whereas in popular science articles, this tentativeness is often removed, and the scientists are presented as expert contributors through the use of boosters. Popularisations tend to emphasise the ingenuity of research findings through evaluative adjectives like *great* or *crazy* (Scotto di Carlo 2014: 600). In some genres, stance and engagement markers (inclusive *we*) may overlap (Suau-Jiménez 2016), although they have different functions. The authors may appear more persuasive if they personalise the

text (through self-nomination), demonstrate membership (plural *we*) or use attitudinal markers such as *imposing* or *magnificent* (Suau-Jiménez et al. 2021: 128). The research paper's author responds to an ongoing discourse and anticipates the reader's response, who may only find particular arguments valid. Writers of fanfiction also have to situate themselves within the existing discourse and persuasively present their interpretation. As will be shown in the findings and discussion sections, fanfiction is a highly affective and interaction-driven channel of communication, full of evaluative adjectives and pronouns used to express the author's position and persuade readers.

Engagement is the direct address to readers to make them feel involved and inspire interaction (Tereszkiewicz and Szczyrbak 2022). Engagement is reader-oriented, as it uses inclusive pronouns, direct questions, personal anecdotes and references to shared knowledge. In research articles, engagement is maintained by inclusive *we* to indicate that the author is part of the same community and shares the same area of interest, whereas in popular texts, inclusive *we* assumes solidarity. Xia and Hafner (2021) observed that in the online popularisation process assisted by audio-visuals, the speaker creates a participatory relationship between the speaker and the audience through the use of the first person plural and its possessive adjective. Furthermore, engagement can be increased by combining gestures, humour, informality (lack of punctuation, slang, emoji) and visuals. In fanfiction, these behaviours function on both the metatextual level (where authors may make humorous remarks or directly ask readers for feedback) and the textual level (where they may incorporate visuals) of fanfiction writing.

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2. Methodology and Material

To conduct this study, a case study approach was adopted, and a corpus consisting of three fanfictions was gathered from the Archive of Our Own website, the site of choice for authors who write in English. Each is part of the subgenre known as canon-compliant fanfiction and is based on different source material. AO3 allows the writer to publish under a pseudonym; however, authors may refer readers to their social media accounts in the metatext. In the present case, two of the three authors studied have shared personal information on social media outlets (see Table 1). Canon-compliant was selected as the subgenre studied due to its restrictive form. Arguments or contributions have to be carefully crafted so they fit the original narrative while being a valuable addition. Texts were selected based on their tags (canon-compliant) or clearly established timeframe within source material in the work's description. To provide variety in the study, chosen texts are based on different source materials and have been written by different authors. As

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the writer must assure the audience that they are a member of the community and are knowledgeable of the original text through specific language cues, the texts were analysed in search of proximity-creating linguistic techniques, which position authors as competent colleagues who bring innovative contributions to the community.

Title	Author (gender, age, nationality)	Type of source material	Number of words	Date of publication online	Serialisation
"Whoops, I Almost Killed You Again 天官賜苦，鬼拂圍忌" (WIAKYA)	TentativeWanderer (unknown, 20+, unknown)	Book	5,664	2020-12-11	Published weekly over a month
"hey son, i killed your daddy" (HSIKYD)	MissingNoo (nonbinary, 26, American)	Manga	8,942	2021-06-07	Published fully
"I Love You the Same" (ILYTS)	Yllirya (female, 26, unknown)	Video Game	3,901	2023-11-10	Published fully

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Table 1. Corpus presentation

This study adopts the concept of proximity (Hyland 2010) broadened by Suau-Jiménez's (2019, 2020) findings to demonstrate how different authors construct proximity through organisation, argument, credibility, stance and engagement. Using close reading techniques, linguistic features are identified for each of the five facets that help the writer establish a connection with their readers, both in the main text and in the metatext.

3. Findings

3.1. Organisation

In the context of fanfiction, organisation may refer to both the textual and metatextual levels. On the textual level, each text starts with the introduction of the time and space, locating the novel event on the canon² timeline. Locating the action within a timeframe requires knowledge about the chronology of the events and specific nomenclature which situates the author as an expert with proper qualifications, thus expressing membership in the fandom (Examples 1 and 2):

- (1) When had it started? He wasn't sure. The change seemed gradual. What had changed over the past few months? Most notably, his acquisition of an interesting new housemate in Puji Shrine, roughly five months ago.

(WIAKYA, 2021)

- (2) It starts out as a deceptively nice day for this. [...] The Kyoto exchange event is over and a collective sigh has passed through the school, a deep breath none of them even realized they were holding.

(HSIKYD, 2021)

Mentioning the important events from the source material (Example 1: “housemate”; Example 2: “Kyoto exchange event”) confirms the author’s expertise and belonging to the target community. Example 1 also uses rhetorical questions to initiate interaction with the reader and represents the train of thought of the main character, who in the original book often speaks to himself. Both examples establish approximate location and time, shaping the spatio-temporal characteristics of the argument in the context of important original situations. Both examples use lexicon associated with the passing of time and motion (“started”, “gradual”, “changed”, “over” in Example 1; “passed” in Example 2) to enrich the dynamics of the narrative before the introduction of the argument (additional scenes).

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In the third fanfiction, which is based on a game, the introduction is placed in the metatext. In the description and tags (Example 3: “Tag: After 4.2 AQ”), the author specifies that this new scene takes place directly after an important plot line (called AQ—archon quest). In the notes, the writer states that they attempt to explore the emotional trauma that the characters endured during the events (Example 3: “fic is the result of these. I couldn’t go by how Neuvi can feel in his old position”). Locating the event within the timeframe is done outside the text itself:

- (3) Tag: After 4.2 AQ

Notes: 4.2 AQ left me with a lot of feelings and this fic is the result of these. I couldn’t go by how Neuvi can feel in his old position—even before the AQ— but especially now in the light of the new events and truth. Knowing what is in his future. (ILYTS, 2023)

- a. **deeply, Wriothesley who would do anything for Neuvillette, reasoning, Confession**

Considering the metatextual level of fanfiction, some visual tools may be used at the beginning or end of a chapter to provide context and strike a less formal tone. In the present case, visuals are only used in the first fanfiction, which is based on a popular Chinese novel. They segment the text and provide humorous commentary on the previous chapter, at the same time engaging the reader. As demonstrated in

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Example 4, the author uses intertextuality to reference both the internet-specific mode of communication known as memes and the original source by creating a comic image (as indicated by the watermark of the site where the original meme was modified with text boxes —Kapwing). The author establishes a connection between their work and the audience’s common knowledge by referencing the important event from the source material (giving the ashes), which was originally not fully developed. This also sets a humorous tone for the fanfiction.

(4)



(WIAKYA 2021)

- a. Humor, Plot, Xie Lian/Misfortune, Danger, Canon Compliant, Feelings, plot with feelings, Filling in the plot hole of, how Hua Cheng managed to “survive” Xie Lian’s curse, Written and proofread to an exacting standard, Serious Injuries

In two fanfictions, the main addition is foregrounded on the metatextual level in the tags. As tags appear before the main text, the reader may anticipate the contributions and their purpose (“reasoning” in Example 3a; “Filling in the plot hole of how Hua Cheng managed to ‘survive’ Xie Lian’s curse” in Example 4a).

3.2. Argument Presentation

Not all arguments are well-received. To conduct a proper discussion, arguments must be negotiated as credible contributions to existing knowledge. In fanfiction, an argument is a new addition that satisfies the audience’s needs and is relevant to the established universe. If the source material is an ongoing series, the authors often argue for innovations in the most topical fragments:

- (5) Renovations, that's new. Wriothesley only nods, not seeing the need to ask for more as he's sure this will be explained soon. He trails along Neuvillelette as he leads them to the audience's area —and it's a smaller disaster. [...] To sit in the empty Opera Epiclese's partially ruined interior and [...] To look at the stage that hosted their sufferings.

(ILYTS, 2023)

Example 5 is an excerpt from a fanfiction of a regularly updated video game and refers to the newest events from the game's story. The destruction of the theatre's interior is a significant event in the game's story. However, the source material does not mention the main characters' reaction to the loss of the building. The author presents their interpretation of possible reactions and links it to the original event. This addition (argument) addresses the needs of the gamers who were unsatisfied with the lack of continuity or coherence within the game itself.

Entextualisation may take different forms to meet the audience's needs. As shown by Examples 6 and 7, it may take the form of quotations from the source and character-focused narrative (“In two or three years, my kid will get sold to the Zen'in clan. Do whatever you want” in Example 6 is a quote from the source material) or references to the cultural aspects of the original material (in Example 7, “zhang” is a Chinese unit of length, varying depending on dynasty). Proximity is also constructed by specific language choices, including terminology or references to characters and objects from the original source, which establish a link between the new text and the canon (“gege” and “san lang” in Example 8 are official nicknames for the characters in the book). Shared knowledge also adds to the readers' engagement.

- (6) Something flashes across Megumi's expression. Whether it's hatred or hope, Gojo can't quite tell. “What the hell is that supposed to mean?”
‘In two or three years, my kid will get sold to the Zen'in clan. Do whatever you want.’

“Before he died, he told me he'd planned to sell you to the Zen'in clan”,

(HSIKYD, 2021)

- (7) In the past, whenever he went fishing, there would hardly be any fish fit for human consumption within a one-zhang radius of him.

(WIAKYA, 2021)

- (8) Xie Lian confessed, “San Lang, I...I lost the ring you gave me”. Hua Cheng said, “I know”. Before Xie Lian could feel properly mortified,

Hua Cheng added, “Don’t worry, gege, nothing bad will happen to it, I promise”.

(WIAKYA, 2021)

3.3. Credibility

Authors establish credibility in fanfiction by demonstrating knowledge of cultural norms followed in the original story setting (Example 9: “hebao”) or by the proper use of honorifics (Example 10: “Okkotsu-senpai”).

(9) Notes:

Drawstring pouch: hebao 荷包, for storing small objects, hung at the waist. For pics, see <https://ziseviolet.tumblr.com/tagged/hebao>

(WIAKYA, 2021)

(10) Megumi cuts in, “[...] and tried to kill Okkotsu-senpai?”

(HSIKYD, 2021)

Credibility is also maintained when an author portrays commitment and deep knowledge of the material. ILYTS is a fanfiction of a video game, with characters inspired by particular nations and their cultures. The source material implies that, in addition to the global language, constructed for the game, different nations within the game use real-life languages, based on the culture they are inspired by. This information is less known by casual fans, so the author may use this fact to develop the characters further and portray them switching between the native and the second language when under emotional turmoil (Example 11). The author may also reference more obscure or hidden elements of the plotline, demonstrating their expertise on the subject matter (Example 12: “usurper of his predecessor” or “Mekas are still working”). Code-switching and recontextualisation of specific terminology can signal to the reader that the writer is knowledgeable about the source material and is not just a casual fan.

(11) “I am yours, *Mon Chéri*. I love you now and I will love you forever. You have my word”.

(ILYTS, 2023)

(12) [...] the byproducts of the usurper of his predecessor and him, the ones he could, he *should* hate —that freed all of them. He, somehow, even made it happen that the Mekas are still working in the city [...]

(ILYTS, 2023, emphasis in original)

In some genres, credibility may be increased if the reader is more directly acknowledged (Suau-Jiménez 2020). This may be achieved by direct allusions (Example 13: “few readers”), self-mentions (Example 14: “went straight to my heart”; Example 15: “means the world to me”) or imperative verbs (Example 13: “Talk to me”; Example 14: “happy reading!”; Example 15: “find me”), as in the following passages:

(13) Talk to me [...] The first few readers might not have seen it 'cause I added it later.

(WIAKYA, 2021)

(14) went straight to my heart [...] happy reading!

(HSIKYD, 2021)

(15) Feedback means the world to me [...] find me also on twt :)

(ILYTS, 2023)

3.4. Stance

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Stance in fanfiction is almost unidentifiable on the textual level, but tags and author’s notes are abundant in stance-taking expressions. Stance is mostly indicated by attitude markers (Example 16: “I just love them” and “so much”; Example 17: “IMPORTANT”; Example 18: “joyful enough”), self-nomination (Example 18: “talk to me”; Example 20: “means the world to me”) and opening a space for discussion (Example 20: “I’d love to read your thoughts”). Stance may also be represented by a visual resource such as emojis (Example 22).

(16) Additional Tags: god. I just love them both so much.

(HSIKYD, 2021)

(17) IMPORTANT!!!: AO3 is screwing with my upload time. [...] I’m writing this to manage your expectations.

(WIAKYA, 2021)

(18) Dear people who were/are joyful enough to talk to me.

(WIAKYA, 2021)

(19) hey, i hope you enjoyed this! thank you so much for reading.

(HSIKYD, 2021)

(20) Feedback means the world to me, I’d love to read your thoughts, let it be even just a few words or a bunch of emotes. I’m immensely grateful for all!♥

(ILYTS, 2023)

- (26) [...] the way she phrased her order [...] “Attack Hua Cheng”? Attack until when/until what happens?

(WIAKYA, 2021)

In the author’s notes, a number of engagement markers have been included. In these fanfictions, the author’s notes appear to be structured similarly. First, the writer may thank the reader for choosing their text to read (Example 28: “thank you so much for reading”; Example 29: “Thank you for reading!”); then they try to further establish a bond with the audience by sharing their social media accounts (Example 27: “My Twitter: @TTTVWanderer”; Example 28: “you can also find me on tumblr!”; Example 29: “find me also on twt”) while encouraging the audience to leave comments regarding the accuracy of the fanfiction in relation to the canon material (Example 27: “I welcome constructive criticism!”; Example 28: “comments and kudos always make my day!”; Example 29: “Feedback means the world to me”).

- (27) Notes:

I welcome constructive criticism! Even stuff that’s not exactly criticism, but suggestions or preferences. I like seeing different points of view, and I’m not going to let them affect me unduly, so do me a favour and tell me if you felt something was off.

👉 Click kudos to feed me. 🇺🇸 Click comment to bless me. 😊 Share this fic to PURIFY. MY. SOUL! [...]

My Twitter: @TTTVWanderer

My Tumblr: @tentative-wanderer

(WIAKYA, 2021)

- (28) Notes:

hey, i hope you enjoyed this! thank you so much for reading. i think toji’s such an interesting character [...]

in the meantime, i don’t really use twitter, but i’ve got an instagram meme/shitpost page that’s mostly jjk right now. you can also find me on tumblr!

comments and kudos always make my day! thanks again!

(HSIKYD, 2021)

- (29) Notes:

Thank you for reading! Feedback means the world to me, I’d love to read your thoughts, let it be even just a few words or a bunch of emotes. I’m immensely grateful for all!♥

find me also on twt 😊

(ILYTS, 2023)

The reader's attention is attracted by the author's notes which directly address them and encourage them to interact through discourse markers ("in the meantime" in Example 28), personal thoughts ("i think toji's such an interesting character" in Example 28) and non-verbal communication (emoji in Example 27; Example 29).

Additionally, engagement can be enhanced by referencing real-life events. In fanfiction, the author's notes may refer to personal or real-life events to facilitate discussion (Example 30: "Happy Winter Solstice! [...] I bet many people are celebrating it this weekend"). The use of appropriate register and slang can increase the accessibility of the material, promoting open interaction (Example 31: "lonely dawg. No-pressure").

(30) Happy Winter Solstice! Technically it's not here yet but I bet many people are celebrating it this weekend

(WIAKYA, 2021)

(31) Or just come chat with this lonely dawg. No-pressure chats in which it's okay if you or I reply super late.

(WIAKYA, 2021)

In fanfiction metatext, there are numerous examples of informality, indicated by colloquialisms, slang, emoticons and emojis. These elements may provide a sense of genuineness and entertainment, which encourages author-reader communication.

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4. Discussion and Concluding Remarks

The objective of this study was to determine ways in which fanfiction writers may construct proximity in canon-compliant fanfiction and how they use language to present and justify their argument. Interpersonality within the discourse community is crucial; in the fanfiction genre, the relation between the writer and their audience is reciprocal, as the author provides the fan with content, and the reader offers their commentary or critique.


The study demonstrates that proximity may play a crucial role in facilitating interaction and discussion among participants. Writers establish proximity of membership by displaying their expertise within the area of shared interest, using specific terminology, informality and proper organisation. Authors achieve credibility in fanfiction through self-mentions, referencing obscure elements of the original storyline, incorporating quotations and providing additional explanations in metatext. The argument should be framed through cultural references, specific language choices and overall recognisability to link the text with the original material. Proximity of commitment is formed through stance and by displaying personal attitudes. Addressing the audience directly and informally may increase

their engagement by reducing the tension of the interaction. Proximity is a means for the author to encourage the reader to engage in discussion about the validity of a particular addition.


Established proximity may result in interaction in the comment section, as fans, encouraged by the authors' direct address and requests for feedback, provide commentary in the form of praise (as shown in Example 32: "this was beautiful"), critique (as shown in Example 33: "you should add"), and discussions about elements in the fanfiction (as shown in Example 34).

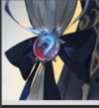
(32)  **mxthos** Mon 07 Jun 2021 09:00PM UTC
Oh wow this was beautiful
Reply Thread Block

(HSIKYD, 2021)

(33)  **vanetta** Tue 08 Jun 2021 01:05AM CEST
This was really cute.
Though I think you should add the 'Jujutsu Kaisen Manga Spoilers' tag to this fic, so that anime-onlys don't read it and get spoiled.
Reply Thread Block

(HSIKYD, 2021)

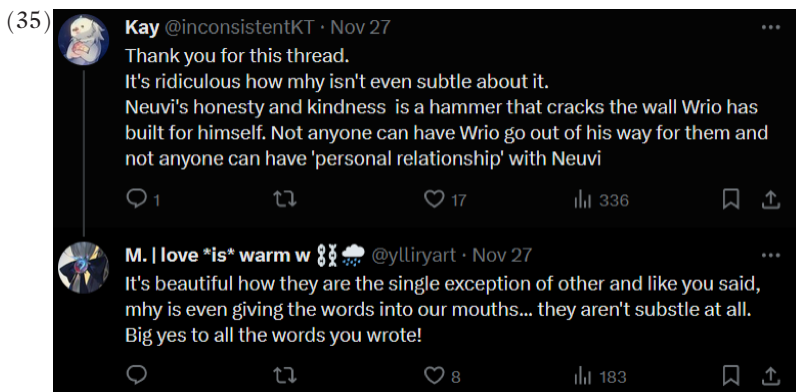
(34)  **LavyYulu** Sat 11 Nov 2023 05:45AM PST
Aaaa! God this was so perfect! Neuvillette angst post-4.2 is SUCH an untapped market!! Especially since I'm, like, 100% sure he was about to or even DID cry during the archon quest!
Man needs a hug and I need more people to write him sobbing.
Reply Thread

 **yllirya** Sat 11 Nov 2023 09:04AM PST
I didn't have much time to check around but as I see, people tend to skip over Neuvi's hurt because it's not fully spelt out and some don't even think deep into it – while there is just so much to talk about.
Neuvi DID cry during AQ, when he flew up, if you stop the frame that shows his face then a faint streak of tears is visible on his cheek (I truly can't believe the theory that it's just water). I wish he could have been hugged there, he would have deserved it.
My best idea was to allow him to break a little later – he has to be so very strong if he would like to bear with all the duties he took on himself. I trust him that he can do it all – physically at least. I think he needs to learn to rely on others a little and let a few of them close to help him manage everything – but as Wrio is there, I also trust them to figure this part out.
Haha I hope my rant was welcomed, thank you for reading&commenting!♥
Reply Thread Parent Thread Block

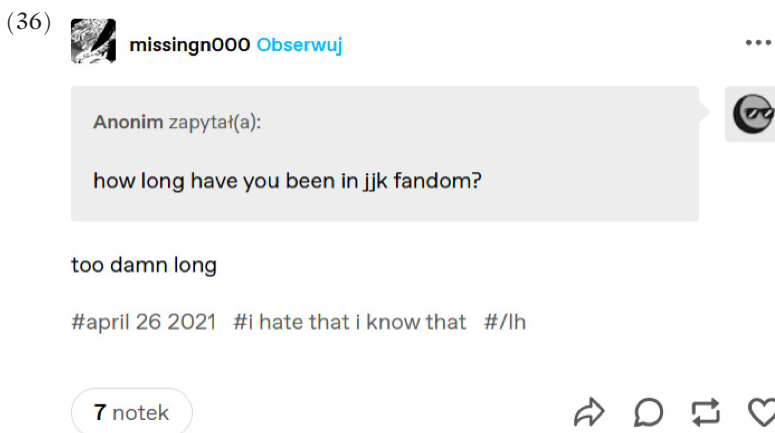
(ILYTS, 2023)

Constructing Proximity in Canon-compliant Fanfiction

The analysis of the collected data indicates that proximity seems to be present in fanfiction text and metatext. Establishing proximity in canon-compliant fanfiction may facilitate discussion through various tools, such as the comment section or authors' social media (only two of three writers shared their social media profiles in author's notes):



(X account of ILYTS author – yllirya)



(Tumblr account of HSIKYD author – MissingNoo0)

However, it is important to acknowledge the limitations of this study. The corpus analysed is relatively small, consisting of only three fanfictions, totalling 18,507

words and representing only one subgenre. Furthermore, full information about the authors' background was inaccessible.

Nevertheless, the texts were written by different authors and were based on different materials, each representing a different medium, that is, a book, a manga, and a video game. It is worth noting that these fanfictions were published in different years and reflect different stages of the source material. While the book is complete, the manga and video game are ongoing franchises that are constantly evolving. Despite these differences, proximity was achieved through similar means, facilitating further discussion and engagement.

Further research is needed to investigate the creation of proximity in different subgenres of fanfiction and textual contexts. Additionally, methods for creating proximity in fanfictions about real-life people or historical figures should be explored. As fanfiction is a hybrid genre, proximity may be achieved differently according to the tags and subgenres, which may also be taken into consideration.

Notes

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1. Arguments in academic writing are additions to the existing knowledge that the author wants the readers to accept. They need to adhere to readers' expectation and to be adequately justified (Hyland 2005).

2. Source material which serves as the foundation for fan creations and is a unifying force within the fandom community. May be used as an adjective to mean "original".

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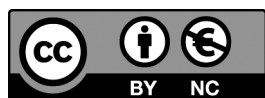
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