

PRAGMATIC FUNCTIONS OF FAN FICTION

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Summary

The present paper deals with investigating pragmatic functions of fan fiction. We define fan fiction as a corpus of texts (fanfics) written by non-professional authors based on a certain work of culture (book, film, TV series, etc.). Being on the Internet creates a number of features in fan fiction texts: conditional anonymity (nicknames), interactivity, hyper-authorship, verbal and visual interconnection, etc. Fan fiction is a multifaceted activity that fosters creativity, community, skill development, representation, and critical engagement. The conducted analysis showed that the megatextual structural elements of fan fiction can be conditionally divided into: technical, related to the volume of the text, visit statistics, the date of the last update, the degree of completion of the fan fiction; and meaningful, in which the rating, pairing, genre, some information about the chronotope and the plot are displayed in the descriptions; author's notes, from which the main themes and motives of the future fan fiction become clear. These megatextual elements give the reader a preliminary idea of the content of the text, so their correct design plays a big role in communities. On the one hand, the megatext contributes to the self-identification of the members of the fan fiction culture, and indicates belonging to this group. On the other hand, skillful, competent design speaks of a certain level of the writer and attracts more readers to his text.

Key words: fan fiction, fanfic, megatextual elements, pragmatic functions.

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1. Introduction

At the beginning of the 21st century, with the rapid development of communication and information technologies, interest in the secondary type of discourse is growing. The constant processes of modeling this discourse in the cyberspace are due to the continuous increase in the number of English-language texts of modern mass culture.

The relevance of our research is determined, firstly, by the need to study the functioning of language in various spheres of life in the English-speaking society, secondly, by the rapid development of language, social and discursive practices in the global communicative environment, and, thirdly, by the lack of domestic scientific works that apply a cognitive-communicative approach to the analysis of the phenomenon of secondary discourse on the textual material.

The aim of the present paper is to reveal the pragmatic peculiarities of English fan fiction.

2. Literature review

Fan fiction is a corpus of texts (fanfics) written by non-professional authors based on one or another work of culture (book, film, TV series, etc.) (*Driscoll, 2006*).

Being in the network creates a number of features in fan fiction texts: conditional anonymity (nicknames), interactivity, hyper-authorship, the relationship between verbal and visual,

etc. These features are similar in many respects to the features of written forms of modern folklore, the so called naive literature. A fanfic is an emotional response of the community (fandom) to a media event (the release of a long-awaited book, a new movie, an event among celebrities, etc.); a specific text that reflects the fan's (author's) vision of the development of the original work. Early works on fan fiction often dealt with this phenomenon from a gender perspective, as the practice of fan fiction is mostly feminine. The most common source for fan fiction research was fandom material from popular television series at the time. The main focus of the study of fandoms was the practices and values of their participants, the characteristics of the fan as a person, as well as the distinctive features of the culture that the participants of the fandoms created (*Bronwen, 2011; Black, 2005*).

Fan fiction is characterized by a complex system of relationships between the canon and the fanfiction, the author and the reader. First of all, it is not entirely clear what the fiction writer takes from the canon and how it is interpreted when creating fan fiction. Secondly, it is difficult to draw a clear line between the author and the reader of fan fiction, since the culture of fan fiction does not divide these roles, but, on the contrary, promotes their fusion (*Derecho, 2006*).

The interest of the reader becomes a defining moment in the culture of fan fiction, as Henry Jenkins also said. Such a culture, where the place of the fan turns out to be a priority, Jenkins proposes to call “convergence culture” (*Jenkins, 1992*), where the fan is both the creator of the text and the reader of other fan works.

3. Materials and methods

The material of the research was the fan fiction texts of popular fandoms (in particular, Sherlock, Merlin, Supernatural, Pride and Prejudice), which were published on large English fan fiction resources – *FanFiction.net, Archive of our own*. The work relies substantially on the application of *contextual-interpretative method*.

4. Results and discussion

The presence of megatextual elements is an integral part of fan fiction, which is not only and not so much borrowed elements of the canon, but a certain tradition of their interpretation, as well as a number of ways of structural and meaningful design of texts, which are actualized in this particular work. We can divide megatextual elements in fan fiction into:

- text units (discussion, descriptions, author's notes, title), that is, everything that has a text form and expresses a direct relationship to the content of the fan fiction;
- supratextual units (place of publication, degree of completion, size, rating, pairing, genre, dedication, etc.) – everything that gives an idea not only about the content of the text not yet read, but also about its form and structure.

With the exception of reviews, all major fanfic megatextual categories (rating, pairing, and genre), along with warnings, text size, and status, are placed by the ficwriter before the main fanfic text in a form commonly referred to in communities as a “fanfic cap”. It is the “cap” that accumulates the main indicators of the content of the fanfic, and also indicates the author and the fandom in which the fanfic writer works.

The information contained in the “hat” of fan fiction can be conditionally divided into:

- 1) technical, related to the amount of text, statistics of visits, date of last update, degree of completeness of fan fiction;

2) meaningful, in which the rating, pairing, genre, some information about the chronotope and the plot are displayed in the descriptions; author's notes, from which the main themes and motives of the future fan fiction become clear.

The conditionality of the division is that the substantive characteristics to one degree or another complement the technical ones, and the technical ones, in turn, in one way or another give additional insight into the content of the text. Yes, a large number of readings indicates a relatively high quality of fan fiction, and the dates of publication and updates duplicate the information we already have about the canon, the type of hosting encodes the general theme (romantic stories), even the information that the author missed when filling in the standard header is filled with other elements of megatext and does not remain undiscovered.

The system of images in English fan fiction has its own unique features that differ from traditional literature.

The secondary nature of images. Fan fiction uses characters and settings that are already known to readers from original works (books, films, series, etc.). This allows writers to focus on character development or alternate storylines instead of creating new universes.

Alternative realities and character development. Authors often create alternate universes (AU – Alternate Universe) where famous characters behave or develop differently. This allows to explore new sides of the characters' personalities and put them in non-standard situations.

Romantic lines and gender roles are of utmost importance. In fanfiction, significant attention is paid to romantic relationships between characters. This may include developing storylines that were not revealed or even hinted at in the original works.

Interactivity and reactivity. Fanfiction is often published on platforms where readers can comment, express their opinions, and even influence the further development of the plot. This creates a more interactive environment for authors and readers.

Crossovers. This is a combination of characters or plots from different works in one fan fiction. Such stories allow to create unique situations and interactions between characters from different universes.

Author's freedom. Fan fiction gives authors complete freedom in using famous characters and universes to express their ideas. It breaks taboos, experiments with genres and creates new approaches to familiar subjects.

Language and style. Since fanfiction is often written by non-professional authors, style and language can vary greatly. Fan fiction authors often pay special attention to details that may be missed or understated in the original works. This may include a deeper exploration of minor characters or expanding descriptions of famous scenes. These features make fan fiction a unique genre that allows fans to delve deeper into their favorite universes and explore new aspects of familiar characters and plots.

In contrast to today's conflicting views on the linguistic essence of fan fiction, it is considered an independent direction of secondary literature, which differs from other manifestations of secondary literature, firstly, in its environment: fan fiction today is the prerogative of the Internet environment. Secondly, thanks to the immanent freedom of creativity that characterizes fan fiction, the works of this direction are characterized by instability, openness to innovation by authors who, until a certain moment, were faithful readers of some famous writer.

In addition to the complex system of genres and categories, fiction writers have created a system of warnings that warn the reader about what he may encounter while reading the story. Fan fiction, like any other forms of creativity, can have a caveat system to help readers understand the content and potential limitations of the story. Typical warnings that can be used in fanfiction include:

Rating which indicates age restrictions for readers, as some stories may contain distortion, violence, sexual content or other material that may not be acceptable to some audience groups. The rating may be indicated by letters (eg, G, PG, PG-13, R) or numbers (eg, 13+, 18+).

Content warning that indicates themes that may be present in the story and may cause discomfort or triggers for some readers. For example, these may be warnings about violence, death, sexuality, drugs, suicide or other sensitive topics.

Spoiler warning. This indicates that the story may contain spoilers for the original work on which the fanfic is based. This may be useful for readers who have not yet finished the original work or do not wish to know the events in advance.

Language and style warning which indicates that the story may contain foul language, profanity, or other elements that may be objectionable to some readers.

Character warning which shows that the story may contain interpretations of characters that may differ from the original sources or may be directed at a certain audience.

Warnings in fan fiction are important because they help readers know what to expect from the story and choose material, they are more comfortable reading.

Closely related to the presence of warnings is the *rating of fan fiction* – an informal rating system of the content of the work, adopted by the authors in order to give the reader a preliminary idea of what to expect, as well as the extent to which the content of the fan fiction is suitable for different age groups. A fan fiction rating indicates the age limits for readers and helps them determine what content they can expect in a story. Ratings can be indicated by letters (e.g., G, PG, PG-13, R) or numbers (e.g., 13+, 18+):

1. G (General Audience). This rating is suitable for all age groups. G-rated stories have a general theme and are suitable for all readers.

2. PG (Parental Guidance). This rating may contain material that may not be suitable for children under a certain age. It is recommended for children who need to be supervised by parents or adults.

3. PG-13. This rating is recommended for children ages 13 and up. It may contain material that may not be suitable for minors, such as violence, mild sexuality or the use of foul language.

4. R (Restricted). This rating is recommended for adults or teenagers over 17 years of age. It may contain intense violence, sexual content, or other material that may not be suitable for younger audiences.

Fan fiction serves several pragmatic functions, offering a rich array of benefits for both writers and readers. Fan fiction allows writers to creatively express themselves by expanding on existing universes. They can explore alternative storylines, develop characters more deeply, or experiment with different genres and styles. Another pragmatic aspect is community building as writing and reading fan fiction fosters a sense of community among fans. Online platforms provide spaces for fans to share their work, give feedback, and bond over shared interests, creating a supportive environment.

For many writers, fan fiction is a valuable tool for honing their writing skills. It offers practice in storytelling, character development, and stylistic experimentation without the pressure of creating an entirely original world. Fan fiction often addresses gaps in representation found in mainstream media. Writers can create stories that include more diverse characters in terms of race, gender, sexuality, and other identities, offering inclusive narratives that resonate with a wider audience. Engaging with fan fiction can be therapeutic. It provides an outlet for processing emotions, exploring personal issues, and finding comfort in familiar worlds and characters. Fan fiction also encourages critical engagement with source material. Writers and

readers analyze and reinterpret canonical texts, questioning and expanding upon the original content, often leading to deeper understanding and appreciation.

Finally, fan fiction allows for the creation of alternative narratives and “what-if” scenarios, which can be particularly appealing to fans dissatisfied with certain aspects of the original story. This reimagining can lead to innovative and thought-provoking new perspectives on well-loved characters and plots. Fan fiction can also serve as an educational tool. It helps develop literacy skills, including reading comprehension, critical thinking, and writing proficiency. Some educators even use fan fiction in classrooms to engage students in creative writing and literary analysis.

5. Conclusions

We define fan fiction as a corpus of texts (fanfics) written by non-professional authors based on a certain work of culture (book, film, TV series, etc.). Being on the Internet creates a number of features in fan fiction texts: conditional anonymity (nicknames), interactivity, hyper-authorship, interconnection verbal and visual, etc. Fan fiction is more than just a hobby for many; it is a multifaceted activity that fosters creativity, community, skill development, representation, and critical engagement.

The conducted analysis showed that the megatextual structural elements of fan fiction can be conditionally divided into: technical, related to the volume of the text, visit statistics, the date of the last update, the degree of completion of the fan fiction; and meaningful, in which the rating, pairing, genre, some information about the chronotope and the plot are displayed in the descriptions; author's notes, from which the main themes and motives of the future fan fiction become clear. These megatextual elements give the reader a preliminary idea of the content of the text, so their correct design plays a big role in communities. On the one hand, the megatext contributes to the self-identification of the members of the fan fiction culture, and indicates belonging to this group. On the other hand, skillful, competent design speaks of a certain level of the writer and attracts more readers to his text.

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