"I REALLY HAVE NO IDEA WHAT NON-FANDOM PEOPLE DO WITH THEIR LIVES". A MULTIMODAL AND CORPUS-BASED ANALYSIS OF FANFICTION

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Abstract – Fandom is a growing phenomenon in the contemporary user-generated mediascape, inasmuch as it is capitalizing on the unprecedented possibilities of publication, distribution and interaction made available by digital technologies (Hellekson, Busse 2006; Stein, Busse 2012). In transmedia storytelling, integral elements of a story are dispersed systematically across various delivery channels with the goal of creating a networked entertainment experience (Jenkins 2006, 2007). Stories are no longer experienced through linear narratives, but they are accessed through several "points of entries" that encourage a customized reading/viewing/writing practice: the global fanfiction experience. Fanfiction is explored of this study from two distinct but complementary theoretical and methodological standpoints. Building on previous studies on the matter (Thomas 2010; Sindoni 2013) and drawing on a mono-generic corpus, LJFic, the research questions that this paper addresses deal with diatypic variation (Halliday 1991) in fanfiction from both linguistic and multimodal perspectives. Keyness analyses have been carried out using two different reference corpora (FLOB and COCA), assuming that such analyses can shed light on a range of linguistic issues, for example with regard to spoken/written variation (approximating Biber's MF/MD analysis, 1988) and with a focus on the most prominent lexical items for the investigation of the entries' aboutness (Scott, Tribble 2006; Bondi, Scott 2010). However, a purely computational analysis cannot account for the multimodal nature of fanfiction. To fill this gap, a sample of entries will be analysed qualitatively, by unearthing and unpacking the multimodal resources involved.

Keywords: fandom and fanfiction; blog; multimodality; corpus analysis; keyness analysis.

> *Dip your toe into fandom... The water's warm.*
> (Anonymous fan).

> *Fanfiction isn't copying – it's a* celebration.
> *One long party, from the first capital letter to the last full stop!*
> (Jasper Fforde, *One of Our Thursdays is Missing*).

1. Introduction to transmedia storytelling

1.1. Entering the world of fandom

Fandom has come to the fore in lay and academic discourse in relatively recent times, especially when it comes to *digital fandom* (Baym 2000; Gray *et al.* 2007; Booth 2010). However, its origins can be traced back to 1893, when a direct antecedent of fandom appeared disguised in the public expression of mourning for the death of Sherlock Holmes, accompanied by the practice of writing letters of condolence to his fictional partner, Doctor John Holmes, by their innumerable fans (Stein, Busse 2012; Miller 2014).

The *Merriam Webster Dictionary* defines fandom as "the state or attitude of being fan" and traces its first known usage back to 1903.[1] The ensemble of social and cultural practices can be considered as precursors in a nutshell of the current tradition of fandom that is holding sway in the contemporary digital mediascape (Bradley 2005; Coppa 2006; Hellekson, Busse 2006). Fandom is a portmanteau term including *fan* and the suffix *–dom*, (as in *kingdom*) and it refers to all the social and discursive practices which fans are involved in. A remarkable example of these practices is represented by *fanfiction*, that is a digital genre emerging from the practice of manipulating already existing stories or characters by fans (also abbreviated as *fan-fic*). Fans expand characters, plots, and settings drawn from an original narrative work, as is the case of fanfiction about the *Harry Potter* book series, the *Twilight* saga or *Game of Thrones*.

Fandom today is a *webridised* activity (Moschini 2014) in that it is an emerging form of textuality hybridised by web-based practices, which imply the predominance of user-generated contents. As has been convincingly shown by Moschini (2014), webridisation also typically involves high degrees of intertextuality (e.g. mixing characters from different fictions, for example Harry Potter having adventures with the Hobbit, also called *cross-over fanfiction*) and metatextuality (e.g. fictions that self-reflectively comment on themselves, for example hinting at plot connections with the original books, films or TV series). Forms of webridisation can be ideally studied via multimodal frameworks of analysis. Furthermore, the process of webridisation is a circular one, as digital media are influencing corporate media artefacts (e.g. TV series, films, cartoons) and the latter, in turn, are influencing the way in which the former are re-shaped. Postmodern storytelling is thus instantiated in the practice of "transmediality" or "convergence culture" (Jenkins 2006, 2007), which means that integral elements of a story are dispersed systematically across various delivery channels with the ultimate goal of creating a *networked* entertainment interactive experience, as has been also argued by Thomas (2010), expanding ideas initially developed by Bolter and Grusin (2000). As Jenkins claims (2007), each medium plays a different role in the construction of the unfolding of the story: for example, in *The Matrix* franchise, key bits and pieces of information are dispersed in the trilogy of films, in two comic books, in several short animated films and video games. Authors are inspired by an "encyclopaedic impulse" and viewers are urged to be involved in complex and networked fictional worlds (Jenkins 2007). Such enhanced forms of engagements with digital media encourage viewers to live an immersive experience in the fictional world/s. Corporate media interests are covered by huge franchises that are sold via different forms of merchandise. Furthermore, fans' appetite is whet as they are driven into interrelated fictional worlds, where parallel stories are interwoven using parallel media.

Traversing these worlds may result in multiple practices that are acted out in the form, for example, of cross-over fanfiction, cosplay (i.e. that is a performance art in which participants wear costumes to represent a character or a story), fanart (e.g. fanvids or songfics, respectively videos and songs created by fans) that, in turn, are semiotic moves that underlie several types of crossings, such as going through stories, modifying bodies, transducting and transiting intersemiotically across genres. Hence stories and characters enter a mirror game that multiplies possibilities of interactions and intersections vis-à-vis media, cultures, form(at)s of production/reception (i.e. reading vs. writing), and form(at)s of interactivity. In other words, elements from an original, authored and copyrighted story

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[1] http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/fandom (16.11.2014).

"I really have no idea what non-fandom people do with their lives". A multimodal and corpus-based analysis of fanfiction

279

are re-used to write another story that in turn is used to create another story, possibly employing different media to this end. For example, the controversial novel *Fifty Shades of Grey* by E.L. James was originally written as a fanfiction with characters taken from the *Twilight* saga written by Stephenie Meyer. However, textual manipulations are virtually endless: *Fifty Shades of Grey* has been turned into many other fanfictions by fans, who altered the story and the main characters, also optionally changing media (for example creating videos with clips taken from the film released in 2015).

Stories, which used to be experienced linearly and through the *logic of time* (Kress 2003; Kress, van Leeuwen 2006), are now turned into imaginary universes where fans can get access through multiple points of entry. As transmedia narratives are no longer based on linear stories or individual characters, the extension of stories can provide insights into the characters, and generate the impulse to create *other* stories by departing from the "original" one. Furthermore, Jenkins (2007) argues that transmedia storytelling is the ideal aesthetics for the era of collective intelligence, a label coined by Levy (1994), who referred to new social structures that allow the production, distribution and circulation of knowledge within networked societies. Cooperation is possible within systems of networks and people collaborate by drawing on each other's expertise. For example, the ABC celebrated series *Lost* was disseminated with hidden clues that fans were engaged in finding across the whole eight seasons. Their collaborative work is an example of the efforts, time and energy that fans spend in the attempt at reconstructing a story (or part of a story, or of a character) they are interested in, a story that is dispersed in multiple narrative rivulets. The introduction of potential new plots and developments is part of a conscious attempt at stimulating fans to self-produce and experiment with new storylines to flesh out fictional characters (Thomas 2010).

This has important implications for media and digital dissemination of globalised culture, such as the Internet, a globalised space for communication characterised by *translocality*, i.e. having both local and global impact. The Internet is in effect a driving force within the whole phenomenon of fandom, not only because it is a powerful means of dissemination, but also because it gives the chance to appropriate, negotiate, critique and remould globalised images (Leppänen 2012).

Accessing globalised images and drawing from virtually open-ended and ever-changing narrative repositories requires multimodal literacies (Jewitt, Kress 2003), also in terms of the ability to cross over media, channels, genres and communities. However, despite the heteroglossic and multimodal nature that is implied in fanfiction, it is still rather unclear how fanfiction is articulated as a digital genre in both verbal and multimodal terms. Thomas, for example, argues that:

> It seems curious, then, that the stories published on these sites are in essence *indistinguishable* from their print-based equivalents, and appear to *eschew* the possibility of utilizing the multimodal resources at their disposal. (Thomas 2010, pp. 142-143, emphasis mine)

Other studies that explore the role of written language and the interplay with other resources have shown that a fine-grained study of digital texts require fine-grained tools of analysis that apply different but compatible methods (Sindoni 2013, forthcoming). In the following subsection, the research questions addressed and the general rationale adopted in this study will be presented.

1.2. Research questions and rationale of the study

The research questions addressed in this paper are:

- How is it possible to tackle multisemiotic events, such as fanfiction, in digital and web-based platforms?
- Is the language of fanfiction different from *professional fiction*, that is fiction published by professional authors in conventional (i.e. printed) outlets, for example in the ability to master traditional written genres, such as fiction? If so, where are these differences mainly to be found? In the authors' expertise, in the outlets for publication or in other, more covert language and ideological taxonomies?
- Assuming that verbal and multimodal resources are extensively used in digital-based fanfiction, how can we gauge language and multimodal variation? Furthermore, which, if any, of these resources are used more extensively overall?

Drawing on previous studies on fanfiction (Sindoni 2013, forthcoming) and on a monogeneric corpus of fanfiction entries from dedicated blogs taken from the *LiveJournal*, this paper explores: 1) verbal data with particular reference to the *aboutness* of fanfiction, i.e. contents through its lexicogrammar, 2) multimodal resources used by fans, and 3) how verbal and multimodal resources interact in the digital environment where they are placed. Section 2 will further introduce the context that has been briefly sketched in this subsection and outline the main components that will be taken into account in the analysis. In particular, Subsection 2.1 will tackle corpus construction by discussing the rationale of analysis, in particular explaining the linguistic features that a positive and negative keyness analysis can illuminate (cf. Bondi, Scott 2010). Subsections 2.3 and 2.4 will discuss the main findings, using, respectively, FLOB and COCA as reference corpora. The second part of the paper, i.e. Section 3, will present multimodal data, arguing the case for an integrated multimodal approach that can add a further layer of understanding in qualitative terms to a purely quantitative study. After the illustration of a methodological caveat, a tentative taxonomy will be presented to the reader, more with the goal of orienting future lines of research than with the aim of producing definite guidelines of analysis. Subsection 3.2 includes a fine-grained analysis of six sample case studies (i.e. visual entries) from a qualitative standpoint. Section 4 will draw some provisional conclusions, discussing the limitations of this study and possible future lines of research.

2. Fanfiction in blogs: a corpus-based approach for the analysis of language

2.1. Corpus construction

The blog environment selected for this study is a web-based social networking platform, i.e. *LiveJournal* (LJ henceforth), which hosts blogs, diaries and journals. LJ was created in 1999 and includes over 50 million blogs and journals to date, webridising two well-established digital genres, i.e. blogs and social networking websites. Social interaction, creativity, self-expression, and web writing are endorsed in the multilanguage and multicultural LJ. English plays the lion's share, but it is not the only language used in LJ, which is in fact a Russian platform, hosting over 80 of the top 100 Russian blogs. Cultural and linguistic diversity are promoted in LJ, even though the present study has been exclusively focused on blogs written in English. LJ does not systematically differentiate its blogs or journals, hence the sampling of fandom-related blogs has been possible only via a preliminary qualitative evaluation. A previous study on the phenomenon of fandom in LJC has been carried out using a subcorpus, called LJF (Sindoni forthcoming). In this paper,

"I really have no idea what non-fandom people do with their lives". A multimodal and corpus-based analysis of fanfiction

281

the domain of analysis has been further restricted, creating another subcorpus, which has been called LJFic, including only randomly selected fanfiction entries from the original LJF corpus.

The general LJC has been created respecting specific guidelines in order to deal with representativeness (Biber 1993), sampling units selection, and method of data collection.[2] LJC has been constructed following a problem-oriented approach to address a few specific research questions, in particular tackling the question of the interplay between verbal language and other semiotic resources.

LJFic, as mentioned, is a subcorpus that incorporates only data that are relevant for the research purposes addressed in this study. To this end, some preliminary choices were necessary to define the domain of investigation which, as assumed, could produce significant results for the exploration of fanfiction. In particular, it has been shown (Scott, Tribble 2006: 73-88) that if a corpus is taken as a whole, keywords do not include many open-set items that are informative about the *aboutness* of the texts in each section of the corpus, but that the keywords distribution is similar to an average word frequency distribution. Conversely, when the corpus is segmented, following, for example, the criterion of genre, it is then possible, or very likely, that key-keywords (i.e. keywords that share keyness, or that are "co-keys", shortened as KKWs) are informative of aboutness, and, to a lesser extent, of style (Scott, Tribble 2006, p. 83). Therefore, LJFic has been created from five undifferentiated subcorpora, namely LJ1, LJ2, LJ3, LJ4 and LJ5,[3] that were originally used for the creation of LJF (Sindoni forthcoming). As stated, only the entries relating to fanfiction have been included in LJFic, further restricting the scope of analysis. The assumption is that by narrowing the scope of text genres, more revealing data can be produced.

Today fanfiction is typically a web-based practice widespread in fan communities, but is only a part of the wider realm of fandom, as discussed beforehand. This web-based activity is currently spreading rapidly as some studies on the matter testify (cf. Coppa 2006; Jenkins 2007; Sindoni 2013), involving non-traditional outlets for publication, as these works are commonly non authorised by the original authors. One of these outlets is LJ, where a huge amount of fandom-related contents is available, including fanfiction. LJFic forms a database to explore keywords, using a larger corpus as a reference.

In Table 1, preliminary statistics from a wordlist generated from LJFic are reported.

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[2] Representativeness has been computed by lexical saturation, which means that the linguistic features chosen for analysis show little variation. To measure corpus variation, the corpus has been divided into several segments of equal size (i.e. LJ1, LJ2 … LJ10), based on its tokens, and the corpus is saturated because each addition yielded approximately the same number of new lexical items. Sampling units are made up of blog entries and the overall LJ corpus includes ca. 1 million words.

[3] The overall LJC has been segmented in 10 subcorpora including 150 entries each for a total of 1500 entries for a total of 1,603,160 running words (cf. Sindoni 2013).

File size	1,144,234
Tokens (running words) in text	193,723
Tokens used for word list	191,172
Types (distinct words)	12,299
Type/token ratio (TTR)	6.43
Standardised TTR	43.96
Standardised TTR std. dev.	54.95
Standardised TTR basis	1,000
Mean word length (in characters)	4.34
Word length std. dev.	2.28
Sentences	13,647
Mean (in words)	14.01
Std. deviation	14.47

Table 1
LJFic basic statistics.

In previous studies (Sindoni 2013), some validation tests, useful for LJC and its related ten subcorpora (LJ1, LJ2, LJ3… LJ10) were successfully carried out. In particular, to check whether corpus size affected the results, five different wordlists were used to create five different keyword lists with five different reference corpora, namely British National Corpus (cf. 2000, 2001), FLOB, International Corpus of English – Great Britain component (ICE), and its two subcomponents, i.e. the spoken and written sections (ICE_spoken and ICE_written). In Sindoni 2013, other research questions were addressed, in particular to investigate variation across speech and writing in some other digital texts (i.e. videochats, blogs, YouTube videos).

This study is concerned specifically with research questions mainly dealing with diatypic variation (Halliday 1991) in fanfiction, with reference to *genre variation* in digital environments, which, as other studies testify, can be assumed as being highly rich in semiotic resources such as videos, images, layout; in short, resources *other* than verbal language. In the following subsection, methodological steps will be further illustrated, shedding light on the choice of the reference corpora and related keyness analysis.

2.2. A keyness analysis with FLOB as reference corpus

As anticipated in the previous subsection, LJFic has been used in this study to explore diatypic variation (Halliday 1991) in fanfiction. LJFic includes only verbal data, so the sampling units are made up of blog entries that have been copied into a .txt file without including other resources (metadata have been included in separate files). As a reference corpus, one of the most useful corpora to this end is FLOB, the Freiburg LOB corpus of British English, including 500 texts of ca. 2000 words each, and distributed across 15 categories divided into three macro-categories, respectively, news, general prose and fiction (see Mair 1997).[4] The category of interest here is the macro-category of fiction,

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[4] The Freiburg-LOB corpus is part of the "Brown family" corpora. F-LOB and its counterpart, the Freiburg-Brown corpus of American English (Frown), began in 1991 and both corpora were created to match the Brown and LOB corpora as closely as possible in size and composition. They represent the language of the early 1990s and this represents a limitation to the present investigation.

"I really have no idea what non-fandom people do with their lives". A multimodal and corpus-based analysis of fanfiction

283

incorporating General, Mystery and Detective, Science, Adventure and Western, Romance and Love, Humor, for a total of 126 texts of approximately 2000 words each, i.e., ca. 252,000 words.[5] A limitation of this study is that the reference corpus is only slightly larger than the corpus taken for analysis, even though some studies claim that the size of the reference corpus is not always significant (Tribble 1999).

The keyword list has been generated by adjusting the pre-set limit of words to 500 and using a wordlist generated with Wordsmith 6 (Scott 2012). Table 2 displays a positive keyness list for LJFic with FLOB (fiction) acting as RC, displaying the top 20 items that have been identified. Proper nouns have been removed from the list, as they are poor indicators of diatypic variation.

Keyword	Freq.	%	RC freq.	RC %	Positive keyness
1. it's	357	0.18	0		358.60
2. I'm	327	0.17	0		337.61
3. are	760	0.39	188	0.14	182.00
4. didn't	181	0.09	1		176.23
5. is	1,367	0.71	482	0.37	165.55
6. you're	132	0.07	0		136.23
7. dean	119	0.06		0	122.81
8. I've	118	0.06	0		121.78
9. that's	104	0.05	0		107.33
10. this	1,059	0.55	416	0.32	94.28
11. abortion	90	0.05	0		92.87
12. can't	80	0.04	0		82.55
13. he's	77	0.04	0		79.46
14. will	446	0.23	132	0.10	79.08
15. papa	70	0.04	0		72.23
16. she's	69	0.03	0		71.20
17. UK	89	0.05	886	3	70.85
18. doesn't	68	0.03	0		70.16
19. wasn't	66	0.03	0		68.10
20. we're	63	0.03	0		65.00

Table 2
LJFic positive keyness list with FLOB (fiction) acting as RC. Top 20 items.

In Table 2, grammatical words in contracted forms display a significant positive keyness. The lexical words are only: *dean*, *abortion*, *papa*, *UK*. The high use of contracted forms may hint at a colloquial usage of language that is generally avoided in professional writing (English 2011). Furthermore, contractions display positive loading in Biber's Factor 1, that is "informational vs. involved production" (1988). The features with positive loadings on Factor 1, which are "characterized as verbal, interactive, affective, fragmented, *reduced in form*, and generalized in content" "can be associated in one way or another with an involved, non-informational focus" (Biber 1988, p. 105, emphasis mine). However, when

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[5] In more detail: 29 texts each in General fiction, Adventure and Western fiction, Romance and Love fiction, 24 texts in Mystery and Detective Fiction, 6 texts in Science fiction, and 9 texts in Humor fiction.

assessing the prominence of contracted forms, it is worth noting that LJFic is not tagged, as it has been archived as a linear text and hence this is different from the fully tagged FLOB reference corpus. Inconsistent transcription is a limitation of this approach (McEnery, Xiao, Tono 2006).

Among the most striking grammatical items, *are* ranks 3, *is* ranks 5, and *will* ranks 10. Their positive keyness is remarkably higher than expected. Furthermore, a range of auxiliaries and modal verbs are featured as the most prominent items, also in the negative and contracted forms. Another interesting occurrence of function words is *this*, which displays a remarkable prominence as well.

However, as function words have poor lexical content and referential meaning, a further list, ranked for positive keyness, has been created by removing all function words. The resulting words are shown in Table 3.

Keyword	Freq.	%	RC frequency	RC%	Positive keyness
1. dean	119	0.06		0	122.81
2. abortion	90	0.05	0		92.87
3. papa	70	0.04	0		72.23
4. UK	89	0.05	886	3	70.85
5. article	61	0.03	0		62.94
6. episode	61	0.03	0		61.91
7. gif	57	0.03	0		58.82
8. tv	89	0.05	6		57.99
9. characters	63	0.03	2		50.78
10. photos	49	0.03	0		50.56
11. caps	46	0.02	0		47.47
12. fan	69	0.04	4		47.46
13. male	53	0.03	1		46.55
14. video	45	0.02			46.43
15. source	66	0.03	4		44.71
16. boy	160	0.08	37	0.03	42.03
17. fiction	57	0.03	3		40.45
18. program	38	0.02	0		39.21
19. fic	37	0.02	0		38.18
20. makes	70	0.04	7		38.04

Table 3
LJFic positive keyness list with FLOB (fiction) acting as RC. Top 20 lexical items.

In Table 3, several interesting findings can be observed. To start with, only one verb is present (n. 20). All other keywords are nouns. With regard to the aboutness of entries, some considerations can be made. Fanfiction entries refer to:

(1)   a masculine world that is far more represented than the female world (i.e. *male* and *boy*);
(2)   a self-reflective world: a web-based genre that openly refers to itself (i.e. *article*, *episode*, *characters*, *fan*, *source*, *fiction*, *program*, *fic*);

"I really have no idea what non-fandom people do with their lives". A multimodal and corpus-based analysis of fanfiction

285

(3)   a media world that refers back to other non web-based media (i.e. *TV*) and technical affordances typical of digital platforms (i.e. *gif*, *photos*, [*screen*]*caps*, *video*, *source*, *program*).

Additional concordancing searches have been carried out to find out the main collocates and help clarify the context of occurrence, as it has been shown that isolated words "leave much unanswered and we need to look at how they frequently combine meaningfully with other words to have a fuller picture of the text's aboutness" (Milizia 2014, p. 163). For example, *fiction* has been included in the category 2), after a close inspection of L1 collocates, that turned out to be *fan-*. The complete node was thus *fan-fiction* in 23 occurrences out of 57. However, a manual analysis of the 57 occurrences has clarified that *fiction* was mainly considered as an abbreviation of *fan-fiction* in most of the 23 occurrences.[6] *Episode* is also related to fan-fiction in ca. 1/3 of the occurrences in LJFic.

With regard to category 1), our assumption that the world described in LJFic is a masculine one is confirmed by the negative keyness analysis, where *she* appears in the top negative keyword list (with a striking negative keyness of -658,52!), followed in third position by *her*, negative keyness -302,10).

To have a clearer map, a new keyword list has been created, resorting items by raw frequency. Results are shown in Table 4 below.

Keyword	Freq.	%	RC frequency	RC%	Positive keyness
1. the	8,491	4.38	7,001	5.35	*- 159.87*
2. a	4,249	2.19	3,277	2.47	*- 25.88*
3. of	3,623	1.87	3,121	2.39	*- 100.89*
4. you	2,319	1.20	1,250	0.92	56.32
5. his	2,288	1.18	1,210	0.93	48.80
6. it	2,055	1.06	1,762	1.35	*- 54.40*
7. was	1,512	0.78	2,131	1.63	*- 494.26*
8. is	1,367	0.71	482	0.37	165.55
9. her	1,085	0.56	1,459	1.12	*- 302.10*
10. this	1,059	0.55	416	0.32	94.28
11. she	891	0.46	1,707	1.31	*- 686.52*
12. are	760	0.39	188	0.14	182.00
13. 's	661	0.34	1,137	0.87	*- 385.67*
14. had	590	0.30	1,135	1.02	*- 666.53*
15. your	466	0.24	166	0.13	54.77
16. will	446	0.23	132	0.10	79.08
17. can	431	0.22	146	0.11	57.39
18. there	407	0.21	447	0.34	*- 50.47*
19. other	387	0.20	161	0.12	28.31
20. would	378	0.20	439	0.34	*- 60.01*

Table 4
LJFic top 20 items with FLOB (fiction) acting as RC and sorted by raw frequency.

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[6] Other L1 collocates include: non-fiction, romantic fiction, science fiction, literary fiction, and short fiction.

The items highlighted in italics are those that display negative keyness. What is striking in this list is that among the 20 top frequent items, 11 display negative keyness, with particular reference to the top 3 items. With regard to genre variation, these keywords are revealing as they allow considerations about the variation across spoken and written discourse in the corpus, in particular with reference to spoken-like and written-like linguistic features that are relevant to this digital genre (Pugh 2005).

Of as a preposition adds a negative weight to Biber's Factor 1, that is "informational vs. involved production", identified by Biber's MF/MD analysis of the spoken/written variation in genre analysis (1988). Tribble (1999) claims that *of* and *the* are usually associated with nouns, also observing that in academic prose *of* is used as a postmodifier in the N1 + *of* + N2 structure. The definite article *the* is also associated with nouns and in Biber's MF/MD analysis, nouns of the nominalization type are a feature with a positive loading in Factor 3 (i.e. explicit vs. situation-dependent reference), while nouns of other types are a feature with a negative loading for Factor 1 (informational vs. involved production). Considering that these items have negative prominence in LJFic, evidence suggests that the items usually associated with written prose are less prominent than could be expected in a corpus exclusively made up of written data. However, contractions such as *'s* can be considered as positive indicators in Factor 1, even though, as said, the issue of inconsistent transcription needs to be taken into careful account and may cause incorrect interpretations with regard to enclitics, as mentioned beforehand. A further confirmation of gender preference in fanfiction comes from such findings: *his* is positively prominent, whereas *her* and *she* are negatively prominent.

In the following subsection, another reference corpus will be used to repeat and test the findings discussed so far, but limiting the analysis only to lexical items.

2.3. A keyness analysis with COCA as reference corpus

Changing reference corpus is a step to check the validity of the findings preliminarily discussed in Subsection 2.2. The possible limitations implicit in the choice of the FLOB corpus as a reference, subsection fiction, are: 1) FLOB is a first-generation corpus, including fiction of the early 1990s and 2) it includes only British printed output. It is thus obvious that some lexical items are completely not (or under) represented in FLOB, as they were not current in the early 1990s. However, as a first methodological step, the comparison to FLOB has been carried out to provide a *distant* benchmark for assessment of change and differences, provided that it is made clear that it comes as no surprise that some genre-related items in LJFic are positively prominent.

As a second step, a further analysis has been undertaken with a completely different reference corpus. The Corpus of Contemporary American English (COCA) is a monitor corpus as well as FLOB, but it does cover a larger time span, from 1990 to 2012 (Davies 2008), and 2012 is the year in which most LJFic texts were collected and archived. Furthermore, the fiction represented in LJFic is *mostly* written by American bloggers, at least by self-definition, as it has not been possible to verify the authors' nationality and mother language with absolute certainty. In addition, COCA is much larger than FLOB, at least in the subsections used as a reference in this study. The general COCA includes 440 million words and 190,000 texts. However, for the present analysis a smaller dataset has been used: from 1,7 million words, only one text per year, from 1990 to 2012, has been incorporated in the wordlist, for a total of 356,700 tokens. This operation has been done with the aim of creating two reference corpora including approximately the same genre and roughly the same number of running words.

"I really have no idea what non-fandom people do with their lives". A multimodal and corpus-based analysis of fanfiction

287

Table 5 reports on the top 20 lexical items ranked for positive keyness.

Keyword	Freq.	%	RC Freq.	RC %	Positive keyness
1. tags	170	0.09	2		335.08
2. dean	119	0.06	7		200.58
3. UK	89	0.05	0		185.90
4. abortion	90	0.05	1		177.85
5. papa	70	0.04	2		129.67
6. gif	57	0.03	0		119.06
7. fan	69	0.04	8		99.69
8. *model*	62	0.05	5		98.27
9. source	66	0.03	8		94.10
10. episode	60	0.03	6		90.32
11. caps	46	0.02	1		87.27
12. fic	37	0.02	0		75.19
13. *fucking*	46	0.02	0		71.01
14. *guys*	72	0.04	21		69.25
15. *secrets*	49	0.03	7		66.22
16. *show*	126	0.07	75	0.02	62.68
17. *type*	53	0.03	11		61.51
18. fiction	57	0.03	14		60.70
19. photos	49	0.03	9		60.09
20. film	55	0.03	13		59.80

Table 5
LJFic positive keyness list with COCA acting as RC. Top 20 lexical items.

The items emphasised in italics are those which are absent from the list in Table 3 and are 6 out of 20. In particular, the first 7 items are common to the two lists. Table 5 features the same first 7 items, which are nonetheless present in the reference corpus. Their presence is negligible in statistical terms, but they nonetheless indicate a clear movement towards change in longitudinal terms and in a diachronic perspective. Furthermore, drawing parameters for analysis from Biber's MF/MD approach, this list confirms the low presence of nouns of the nominalization type, which, as said beforehand, are a feature with a positive loading in Factor 3 (i.e. explicit vs. situation-dependent reference) and a higher presence of nouns of other types, which are a feature with a negative loading for Factor 1 (informational vs. involved production)[7].

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[7] Factor (or Dimension) 1 is labelled "informational versus involved production" in Biber 1988 and described more comprehensively as follows (p. 115): "The poles of this dimension represent discourse with interactional, affective, involved purposes, associated with strict real-time production and comprehension constraints, versus discourse with highly informational purposes, which is carefully crafted and highly edited. This dimension is very strong and represents a fundamental parameter of variation among texts in English."

3. A multimodal analysis of *Fandom!Secrets*

3.1. A methodological caveat

The notion of *resource-switching* has been invoked to explain the alternation of semiotic resources in blogs and other digital platforms. Participants can deploy these resources, such as speech, writing, visuals, etc. in a number of ways and for different communicative purposes (Kress 2010). The combination of these resources is still rather unmapped, despite the fact that the idea of a high integration of resources is very widespread in both lay and academic discourse. With the aim of exploring this phenomenon more systematically, I have devised the notion of *resource switching* to deal with questions such as alternation, relative status and preferential use of all the semiotic resources involved in communicative exchanges and in the construction, distribution and consumption of meaning-making digital events (Sindoni 2013). Research I have previously conducted has shown that resources tend to aggregate more frequently with similar resources. In other words, *images tend to cluster with other images and words tend to coalesce with other words*, challenging the idea of the high integration of semiotic resources in web-based texts.

Some entries have been extracted from LJF to further illustrate this point, with the caveat that comparing verbal language in computational terms and visual resources in multimodal terms is, by definition, a procedure that 1) implicitly recognizes the epistemological differences between them and 2) separates methods and kinds of findings in a clear-cut way. The recognition of these epistemological and unavoidable differences is another potential limitation of this study, but has nonetheless allowed us to present some reflections which broaden the scope of previous research based only on one method of analysis.

3.2. "I have been in fandom for so long…" A cautious taxonomy

The entries extracted from the corpus are all taken from fandom-related blogs and have been selected randomly from a blog called *Fandom!Secrets*, which publishes, on a weekly basis, entries from fan bloggers who anonymously confess a "secret" to the community. The blog is regulated by some rules, for example with regard to technical affordances (i.e. "one secret per link") or topic (i.e. "all secrets must be fandom-related").

In this blog, fandom in general and fanfiction in particular are made up of visual and verbal entries that discuss a wide range of issues involved in the practice of experiencing fandom and reading and/or writing fanfiction.

A manual and fine-grained analysis of more than 2000 "fan secrets" has allowed a tentative categorization in terms of textual purpose, that can be summarised as follows:

- *statement*: a visual entry where a general comment and/or opinion with reference to one's own evaluation with regard to fandom and/or fanfiction is presented to readers;
- *reaction*: a visual entry where a comment and/or an opinion with reference to one's own reaction with regard to fandom and/or fanfiction is presented to readers. It is generally prompted (e.g. replies to another fan's comments);
- *consequence*: a visual entry where a comment and/or an opinion with reference to one's own consequence to a previous posted entry is presented to readers;
- *denunciation*: a visual entry that exposes negative behaviour suffered by others;
- *comment*: an expansion of statement with a direct addressee or topic;

"I really have no idea what non-fandom people do with their lives". A multimodal and corpus-based analysis of fanfiction

289

- *detachment*: a visual entry that marks a separation and/or distance from fandom and/or fanfiction.

The taxonomy presented has been designed for heuristic purposes and cannot be considered as absolute: categories are blurred and overlap (e.g. *statement*, *comment*, *reaction* or *comment* and *denunciation*, because the latter may also be interpreted as a negative comment) and, more importantly, visual entries cannot be analysed separately, but they must be considered in context, reconstructing threads of discussions. Furthermore, such categories clearly suggest the idea that language is the essential resource used to convey meanings. In the following subsection, an example for each category will be illustrated.

3.2.1 A qualitative multimodal analysis of visual entries
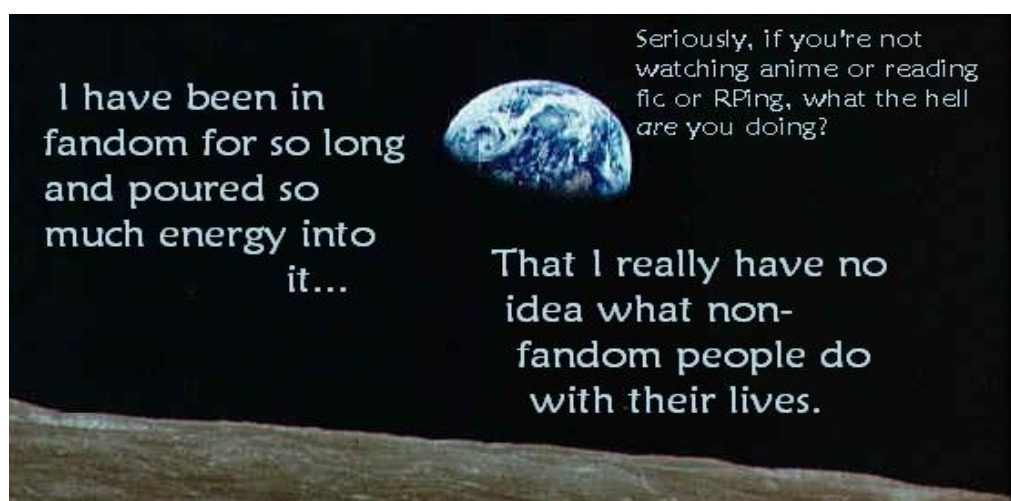
Figure 1
Fandom!Secrets entry, sample n. 1, *statement*.

Figure 1 shows an entry that is helpful in approaching and understanding fandom, seen as a social practice that involves participants to such an extent that the very idea of "non-belonging" seems absurd and unthinkable. As a matter of fact, this kind of blog entry cannot be analysed following conventional computational methods that usually take into account only verbal data. Verbal language is completely *ingrained* within the visual unit that frames the "secret" that is told through the meaning compression principle (Baldry, Thibault 2006). Furthermore, it is language that conveys the meaning of this entry. From an experiential point of view, the image features a naturalistic picture. No human participant is displayed, hence no vectors can be emanated. A conceptual process is featured instead, representing participants in terms of their structure, thus hinting at their generalised essence. In a conceptual process, picture captions are akin to identifying clauses in functional terms (Halliday, Matthiessen 2004; Kress,Van Leeuwen 2006), with a reference to the picture as Token and the meaning of the picture as Value. However, this is not the case, as language is ingrained in the picture instead. A "science-fiction" context can be imagined.

With regard to naturalism, reality is defined on the basis of how much correspondence there is between the visual representation of an object and what we, as viewers, can see of that object with the naked eye (cf. Kress, van Leeuwen 2006, see also 2001). From this standpoint, Figure 1 displays the highest modality. Furthermore, the

abstract coding orientation represents general qualities, i.e. the earth seen from another planet that conveys the feeling of taking the stance of an external, "alien" observer.

Finally, the compositional meaning of the image is also revealing. The prevailing mode is of *spatial* composition, realised through word juxtaposition, whereas the picture functions as a background. The structuring of Given and New is respected in this picture as the blogger decides to place the Given in the sentences positioned on the left and the New in the sentences positioned on the right part of the picture. Furthermore, the right part can be divided into two: the bottom one gives meaning to the second, top one: in other words, the ideational meaning is realised fully through a visual compositional path that the reader needs to follow to understand. Figure 2 below shows the reading path direction that readers/viewers must follow, even though other alternative reading pathways can be imagined (Baldry, Thibault 2006).
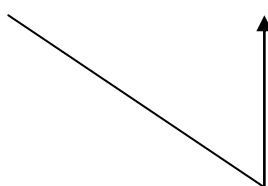
Figure 2
Reading path for Figure 1.

In the same macrocategory, other issues can be observed, for example with regard to *reactions* and *consequences* of reading and writing fanfiction. Reactions can be instantiated by both verbal and visual strategies that function as reciprocal reinforcements, whereas consequences are typically realised by verbal resources and then reinforced by images that, in this case, play a subservient role. However, this is a rough approximation and the interplay of resources can be multi-layered and completely subvert this typical state of affairs.
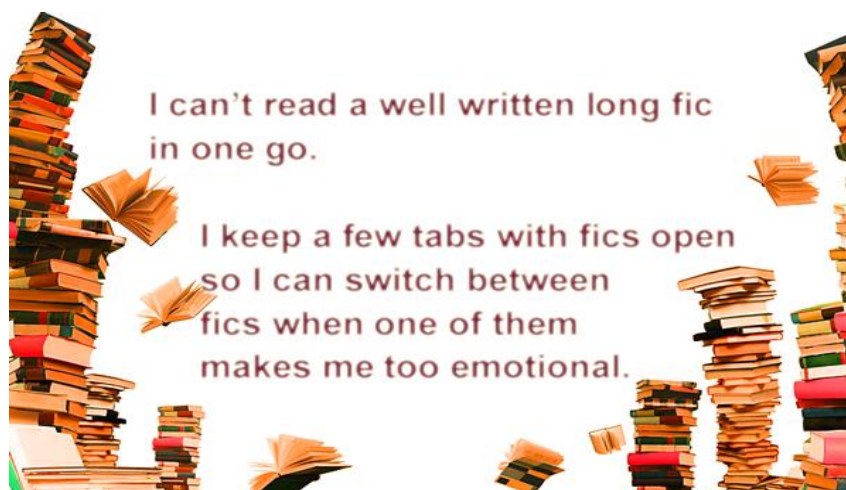
Figure 3
Fandom!Secrets entry, sample n. 2[8]: *reaction*.

[8] Secret post num. 2929, January 10, 2015, http://fandomsecrets.livejournal.com/.

"I really have no idea what non-fandom people do with their lives". A multimodal and corpus-based analysis of fanfiction

291

By way of examples of *reaction* and *consequence*, Figures 3 and 4 provide two relevant exemplifications.

In Figure 3, verbal resources are again clearly more important for the interpretation of meaning rather than the visual units that are dispersed in the overall text. In other words, the books that are not placed in the centre are only reinforcing what is "confessed" verbally. The fan blogger, however, is here using the image of books quite ironically, as s/he contends that her experience of reading is firmly based on digital platforms. Books thus stand for the traditional and Western-centred notion of reading in syntagmatic terms (i.e. *reading books*), because reading pre-digital materials means reading linear printed materials. However, as a matter of fact, what is really predicated is instantiated in the idea of reading as a computer-mediated activity. In effect, keeping different tabs open to switch from reading one fiction to another with the aim of controlling emotional states of mind adds a further perspective about how digital texts have changed reading and writing experiences (Sindoni 2012). Coding orientation is in this case naturalistic, even though books are placed in a neutral background. Some vectors are emanated by the imaginary movements that is mimicked by the "flying" books that are scattered across the neutral background. Furthermore, the book piles are skewed, as if caught in the moment before falling down. These strategic representations add to a sense of imaginary movement but are taken from "real life".

From a compositional point of view, the placement of elements (participants and syntagma that relate them to each other and to the viewer) gives them specific informational values that are linked to the areas of the picture where elements are arranged (Kress, van Leeuwen 2006; Kress 2010). In this case, the visual component stands at the margin, in a centre-margin dynamics composition that, according to Kress and van Leeuwen (2006), is less common than left-right or top-bottom in Western-centred visual communication. However, in this case, different semiotic systems contribute to such compositional arrangements: centre (i.e. verbal resources), margins (i.e. visual resources). Margins are ancillary elements in traditional multimodal approaches, and this is consistent with our interpretation. Furthermore, in accordance with what has been discussed in Section 2, the verbal component is little modalised in favour of yes/no polarization. Finally, in Figure 3 the prevailing mode is that of spatial composition.

Figure 4 below provides an example of *consequence,* as discussed previously. Verbal resources are again more important than the visuals that play a subservient role in accompanying the verbal text. It is quite striking that when discussing their relationship with fanfiction, both in terms of reading and writing it, bloggers select books as visual accompaniment to, or "decoration" of, their entries. This semiotic choice is significant, because it seems to suggest the presence of a visual generic preference in these web-based environments. However, further research is needed to validate this preliminary assumption. Many of the considerations made for Figure 3 can be also applied to Figure 4, for example with regard to coding orientation (naturalistic), which is nonetheless animated by the circular movement that is mirrored by the book pages.
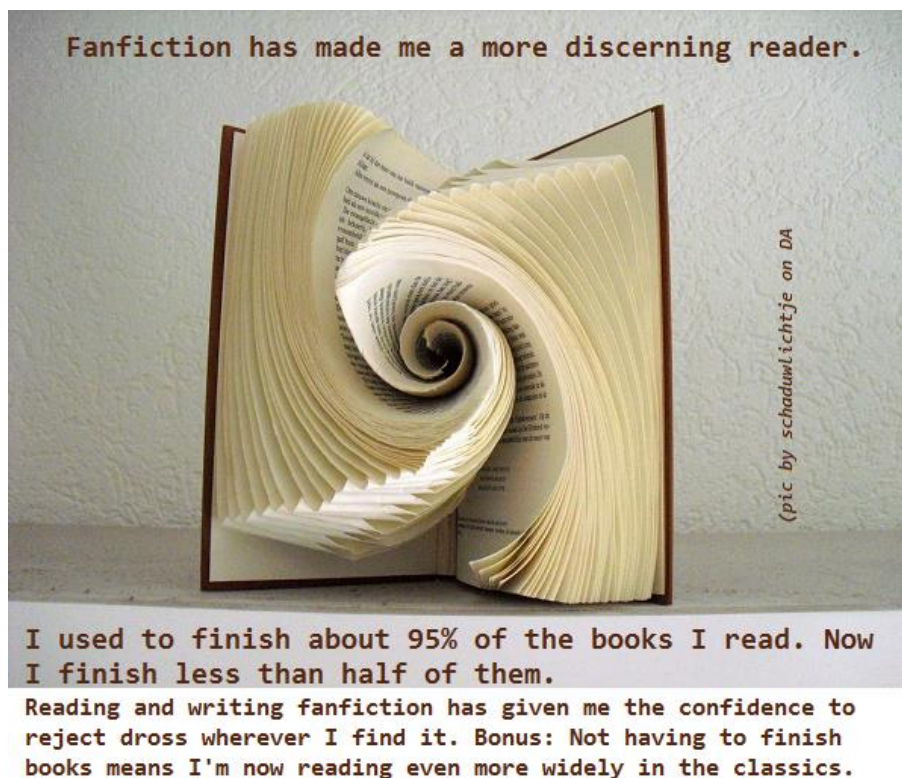
Figure 4
Fandom!Secrets entry, sample n. 3[9]: *consequence*.

Although the compositional arrangement of this entry is top/bottom, hinting at an ideal/real compositional rationale, (i.e. factual information is placed bottom page, whereas the ideal is visualised in the book), the final effect is quite similar to that discussed for Figure 3. From a linguistic point of view, this sample confirms data discussed in Section 2, with particular reference to a highly personalised stance, epitomised by a significant use of first person singular personal pronoun and an overall low use of modals. In other words, secrets are presented as *factual information*, in a direct and straightforward fashion. Strategically, the fan blogger creates a stark contrast between the past (i.e. what used to be before fanfiction experiences) and the present (i.e. what it is after the experience of fanfiction). Fanfiction is thus presented as a transformative practice that has an impact on previous well-established practices/ways of life.

Additionally, it is represented as a *binary practice*, where reading and writing go hand in hand, hence adding a more active and performative touch to the traditional and solitary activity of reading fiction published in conventional outlets (i.e. printed media).

Even though visual elements, at a closer inspection, appear as less significant for the general appreciation of these posts, other features need to be taken into account. For example, the use of customizable modal features, such as colour palette, layout, font type, animation and interactivity (Adami 2015, p. 2) contribute to the meanings that these texts produce also in terms of their desired effects on viewers. All entries present different uses of font type and size, colour, capitalization and use of bolds. Following Adami's framework of multimodal analysis, we can assume that our system of appraisal of visual resources, that is taken as naturalised, is the result of complex and culture-bound

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[9] Secret post num. 2923, January 4, 2015, http://fandomsecrets.livejournal.com/?skip=10.

sociosemiotic actions, choices, and events. For example, the font used for entries featured in Figures 3 and 4 is very readable, serif,[10] with bolding effects (presumably to highlight the verbal text that is placed against a visual background). In Figure 4, moreover, size is also reduced as to reflect a hierarchical organization of the text, whereas a bigger font size is used for the most important/highlighted statements and smaller font size is used for less important portions of the text.

Figure 5
Fandom!Secrets entry, sample n. 4[11]: *denunciation*.

Figure 5 is slightly different in scope and purpose and is not directly connected to fanfiction, but it has nonetheless been inserted as it is useful to add a further category within fandom-related writing: *denunciation*. What is striking about this image is again a stark contrast between what is written and what is shown. The fan blogger is talking about her experience of being stalked and this is contrasted with the background that features a fluffy bunny hiding in a pink and "aunty-style" cup of tea. The explanation is provided bottom left: "boring secret so here is a bunny". The blogger is trying to soften her message through the visual component. The bunny is thus used as a minimizing strategy on the part of a well-experienced fan, who is probably certain that her message will be either well-received earning her sympathy, or, conversely, bluntly rejected.

From an experiential standpoint, the image presents no human participant, and the coding orientation is naturalistic. The bunny is placed in salient position, even though the

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[10] Sans-serif, conversely, conveys minimalism-essentiality and functionality-effectiveness, according to Adami forthcoming.
[11] Secret post num. 2886, November 27, 2014, http://fandomsecrets.livejournal.com/?skip=50.

image presents no relationship whatsoever to the verbal component that is, as said, of different nature.

Figure 6
Fandom!Secrets entry, sample n. 5[12]: *comment*.

Figure 6 presents another example of typical entries that are found in *Fandom!Secrets*, that is, *comment*. The latter category exemplifies a human participant that is represented as trying to avoid excessive noise, or, more probably, isolate herself from an annoying and disturbing surrounding environment. The non-transactional action that is represented in the picture could be described as an action process, because representation of actions which include only a Goal (the woman putting her hands over her ears) are Events, i.e. something that is happening to someone, but viewers cannot see who or what makes it happen (Kress and van Leeuwen 2006). It could also be described as a reactional process of a particular kind, where the action that causes the reaction (the woman putting her hands over her ears) is outside the frame.

With regard to the interpersonal metafunction, the close shot reproduces a reduced social distance, creating a sense of intimacy with the represented participant: this is also reflected in the verbal contents and in the perspective, i.e. a horizontal angle encoding involvement. Furthermore, in this case, the image is a photo, thus further increasing the "reality factor": however, the black and white used in the picture reduce modality. In other words, if on the one hand, the picture presents the represented participant in a realistic fashion with high degrees of details and a horizontal angle, on the other hand, it reduces modality by using scarce colour differentiation, and a neutral background (i.e. black and white, cf. Kress, van Leeuwen 2002).

Finally, the verbal component under investigation is worth some consideration, as it reports on a significant relationship that is instantiated in fandom-related communities. In particular, the possibility of interaction between the fanfiction writer and the fanfiction reader is represented here, summarising the main key components involved: a) *comment*; b) *evaluation*; c) *reaction*. The fan blogger is here commenting her favourite fanfiction

[12] Secret post num. 2883, November 24, 2014, http://fandomsecrets.livejournal.com/?skip=50.

"I really have no idea what non-fandom people do with their lives". A multimodal and corpus-based analysis of fanfiction

295

writer, evaluating her in both positive terms (*excellent*) with regard to the quality of her narratives, and in negative terms as for her responses to her followers (NAILS.ON.A.CHALKBOARD). Significantly, the fan comment and evaluation is grounded on her perception of the rules of "good writing" (Sindoni 2012; Baron 2013), and in fact she rejects the practice, typical of web-based, informal platforms - of using emoticons and similar devices, on the part of the fanfiction writer. Her reaction is explained both in verbal and visual terms: verbally, it is positioned bottom page (in real compositional terms) and visually, in a synesthetic fashion, with the woman who does not want to *hear*, whereas the blogger does not want to *see*.
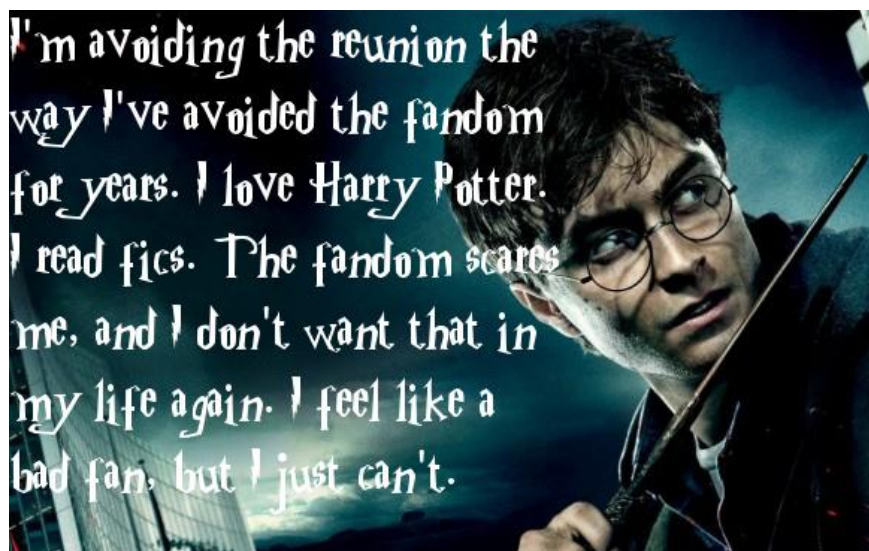

Figure 7
Fandom!Secrets entry, sample n. 5[13]: *detachment*.

Figure 7 features an example of the last category identified in this study: *detachment*, implying, as is clarified in the verbal explanation, an estrangement from the world of fandom (but not of fanfiction in this case). As the title of this paper suggests, fandom can be an extreme experience, having consequences that have also been illustrated in Figure 5. Moreover, participation in fandom takes on extreme forms, with the possibility of becoming an obsession (or a "fixation", as described by Thomas 2010). This fan blogger is here claiming her decision to detach herself from fandom and this is clearly accompanied by her feeling guilty (i.e. *I feel like a bad fan*). In this example, the visual component is once again completely subservient to the verbal component, as Harry Potter is the protagonist of the fan blogger's obsessions. He is looking outside the frame, probably trying to react to some evil and threatening force that becomes more powerful the more invisible it is from the viewers' eyes. Coding orientation is partially naturalistic as the image is a picture, but it clearly moves towards a sensory coding orientation, yielding affective meanings, such as reference to the world of witchery. Furthermore, modality markers, such as contextualization, representation, depth, illumination and brightness are fully exploited to convey the desired message: we are in another world, but Harry (a recognizable, reassuring human figure) is here to protect us.

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[13] Secret post num. 2870, November 11, 2014, http://fandomsecrets.livejournal.com/?skip=70.

The image is placed on the right with respect to the verbal component that is put in Given position. The font used for writing reflects the content, as it directly refers to Harry Potter fandom in a "witchlike" style. Detachment is the final, but not mandatory, stage of a fan's life. Extreme forms of participation may lead to the big decision of not having fandom in one's life again, for unspecified reasons in this case.

From a linguistic standpoint, this entry shows features consistent with the others, i.e. bare factuality, referential meanings, preference for oppositions and polarization (i.e. *I do* vs. *I don't*) and consequent low use of modalisation and modality markers, and a distinctive preference for first person narration.

It is not surprising that what can be provisionally defined as a particular micro-genre, i.e. a *secret* in fanfiction, displays a preference for first person micro-narratives, where personal feelings are not smoothed down as they would have been in another, more public and "neutral" context.

4. Conclusions: "nothing has broken my heart more than unfinished fic"

A complementary analysis and a cross-disciplinary approach has been adopted in this study to tackle the complex nature of fanfiction. Narratives that are published online and that develop trasmedially an original storyline are very common today.

They display certain similar characteristics that have been investigated using a keyness analysis to shed light on the aboutness of these texts. The comparison with two differently composed reference corpora has shown that overall these texts are highly metacommunicative, as many keywords directly refer to genres, platforms, technical affordance, and specific lexical items dealing with fanfiction. An initial analysis of grammatical items has additionally revealed the prominence of a male-oriented world in terms of pronouns, a low degree of modal verbs, and an overall negative keyness of items more usually associated to written genres, at least according to classic corpus-based research literature (Biber 1988). Overgeneralising, the verbal datasets have displayed an informal, metacommunicative, and metareflective style, even though inconsistent transcriptions in the corpora used in this study might have altered the final results. To minimise this problem, different wordlists have been created from different corpora used as reference, despite the fact that it has not been possible to obtain fully reliable results with different corpora, as expected. However, acceptable approximations have been achieved.

A corpus-based keyness analysis has been useful, in the first stage of this study, to come to grips with fanfiction contents and related questions, for example with regard to variation across speech and writing, ultimately very valuable to explore diatypic variation. As mentioned, data show that the language used in fanfiction entries is generally low in modality and first person narrative is more used than what is found in traditional fiction, i.e. fiction published in traditional outlets. Furthermore, the prominence and positive keyness of personal and possessive pronouns and adjectives referred to male subjects indicate a marked preference for male-oriented narratives, whereas the corpora taken as a reference (FLOB and COCA) show a more balanced representation of gender, especially in terms of pronoun use. An analysis of the aboutness of LJFic has also shown preferred semantic areas in fanfiction.

The experience of fandom and fanfiction is firmly and ultimately grounded on *interactivity* that is made possible by digital platforms. Being a fan, reading and writing

"I really have no idea what non-fandom people do with their lives". A multimodal and corpus-based analysis of fanfiction

297

fanfiction also means being involved in the use, manipulation and interpretation of semiotic and meaning-making resources *other than* verbal language.

This study has thus tackled the second research question dealing with the use of other semiotic resources, with particular reference to visuals, invoking the notion of resource-switching. Resource-switching is the interplay of resources in a multimodal communicative event and refers either 1) to the way in which users can *arrange* the resources they have at their disposal (for example language, images, music, etc.) to communicate or 2) to the way in which users are able to *interpret* the resources they encounter in communication.

It has been argued that a purely quantitative approach says nothing about other meaningful patterns of multimodal resources in fanfiction entries or, more broadly, in fandom-related communities. Furthermore, communication is not exclusively based on verbal language and meanings are also produced outside the system of language.

With the aim of exploring these additional meanings, a sample of six entries from a popular fandom blog, *Fandom!Secrets*, has been extracted, selecting only entries linked to fanfiction. These entries are in the form of ''secrets'' that are published anonymously on a regular basis, and we have chosen to monitor how the main resources involved, language and visuals, interact. Despite the huge diversity and variety that has been detected in such visual entries, a tentative taxonomy has been designed with the aim of describing basic communicative purposes expressed in fanfiction communities.

Far from attempting to provide a far-reaching but unrealistic picture, this study has shown that a multimodal and qualitative analysis of a small number of entries is not inconsistent with what has been found in the corpus-based analysis, grounded on larger and exclusively verbal datasets. A heuristic taxonomy has been created with the sole scope of indicating possible future lines of research for the assessment of visual communication in fandom-related blogs and digital narratives. The identified categories describing how visual resources are organised are blurred and somewhat vague, but they may signal some communicative trends that involve the practice of commenting, participating, critiquing and, finally, opting out.

Quite strikingly, but consistently with previous studies (Thomas 2010; Sindoni 2013, forthcoming), language still plays the lion's share in multimodal communication. All entries reveal that the core message is entrusted with words. Images can ornate, provide a secondary meaning, accompany, soften, or strengthen the verbal message. But it is within language that a secret can be communicated unambiguously. Probably, when it comes to opening their hearts and speaking frankly, no resource is more functional than language, at least in the fan bloggers' minds.

Despite the much heralded idea that a wide range of resources are widely used and aggregated in the web, such integration and ample use still needs to be checked and validated empirically in a wide range of digital genres, micro-genres, and texts (Thomas 2010). Judging from the observations based on this study and despite the epistemological limitations implied in the combined use of different theoretical and methodological frameworks of analysis, language still plays a predominant role in CMC. Further research is needed to corroborate the claim that language is the most widely used resource in CMC with further empirical data. The hypothesis that language is predominant over the visual is rather unpopular and apparently against the current research trend within mainstream multimodal frameworks of analysis, but is, in my opinion, the most promising channel for future research.

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