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## Fanfiction in Esperanto – Esperanto in Fanfiction

**Abstract:** Esperanto’s role in fanfiction provides a compelling case study of how constructed languages function within digital participatory culture. This article examines the ways in which Esperanto appears in fan-created narratives, both as a storytelling device and as a medium for linguistic experimentation. It explores Esperanto’s use as a futuristic lingua franca in science fiction, a secret or resistance language in dystopian settings, and a bridging language between cultures and characters. Additionally, it considers the phenomenon of fanfiction written entirely in Esperanto, highlighting the language’s use in both translation projects and original narratives. Through an analysis of examples, including *Ruĝen: rakonto pri intima socialismo* and *Now You’re Thinking With Portals! Wait, That’s Knot Right*, the article discusses the challenges of linguistic authenticity, particularly when Esperanto is incorporated via machine translation. Furthermore, it examines the expansion of Esperanto fan creativity beyond textual storytelling, as illustrated by *La Kanto de Tamar* (by the author of this paper), a fan-created song blending science fiction with historical legend. This study ultimately demonstrates that Esperanto’s presence in fanfiction extends beyond mere linguistic play; it functions as a dynamic tool for world-building, identity exploration, and alternative storytelling within contemporary fandom culture.

**Keywords:** Constructed languages; Esperanto; Fanfiction; Linguistic experimentation; Participatory culture; Science fiction

### 1 Introduction: exploring the role of Esperanto in fanfiction

Fanfiction has long served as a creative space where writers experiment with narrative structures, character development, and, significantly, language (Thomas 2007). As a literary phenomenon, fanfiction allows authors to engage with existing worlds while incorporating their own perspectives, often reshaping canonical material to explore alternative timelines, cultures, and linguistic elements (Farley 2017). One of the most compelling aspects of fanfiction is its multilingual nature (Mussies 2023). Many fanfics incorporate elements of multiple languages, whether through code-switching, (fictional) dialects, or entirely constructed languages: “conlangs” (Peacey

2020). The presence of real-world constructed languages, particularly Esperanto, within fanfiction is an underexplored area of study. While Esperanto remains a prominent example, other constructed languages such as Klingon from *Star Trek*, Dothraki and High Valyrian from *Game of Thrones*, and Quenya and Sindarin from Tolkien's *legendarium* have also been employed by fanfiction writers to enhance world-building and characterisation. Esperanto, designed as a politically neutral and accessible *lingua franca*, has often appeared in speculative fiction as the language of the future (Fians 2021). Science fiction writers, in particular, have utilised Esperanto as a tool to imagine global or even intergalactic communication. Beyond its role within fictional universes, Esperanto has also served as a medium through which fanfiction itself is written, providing a unique linguistic community with fan-created literature in the language.

The relationship between fanfiction and language is particularly significant because fanfiction is, by its very nature, a participatory and boundary-pushing form of literature (Mussies 2024b). Unlike traditional publishing, which often adheres to strict linguistic norms, fanfiction communities thrive on linguistic creativity, allowing writers to experiment with polyglossia, invented terminology, and alternate linguistic histories (Jenkins 1992). This makes Esperanto – an idealistic language created to foster international understanding – an especially fascinating subject within the realm of fanfiction. Furthermore, fanfiction writers often use language to explore identity, cultural hybridity, and linguistic diversity, mirroring the way Esperanto itself emerged as a language meant to bridge cultural divides. Writers may use Esperanto to signal a utopian future, to reflect a specific subculture, or simply as a playful homage to linguistic experimentation. These different usages highlight the versatility of Esperanto within both fictional storytelling and real-world literary communities.

This article explores the relationship between fanfiction and Esperanto from two perspectives. First, it examines how Esperanto has been used within fanfiction, particularly in science fiction and speculative fiction genres. Second, it investigates the presence of fanfiction written in Esperanto, highlighting key works, trends, and the motivations behind writing in the language. Through an analysis of a specific case study, this article seeks to illustrate the ways in which Esperanto functions both as a narrative device and as a living language within the fanfiction community. In doing so, it offers insights into the broader role of constructed languages in participatory literary cultures.

## 2 Definition and origins of fanfiction

Fanfiction, often abbreviated as ‘fanfic’, refers to works of fiction written by fans of existing media properties – such as books, films, television series, or video games – that build upon, expand, or reinterpret elements from the original work. Unlike officially licensed adaptations, fanfiction is typically produced outside traditional publishing and circulates primarily within online communities.

While the phenomenon of fanfiction is particularly associated with the digital age, its roots can be traced back much earlier. Storytelling practices resembling fanfiction have existed for centuries. The Christian Bible, for example, has inspired numerous apocryphal and derivative works that reimagine characters and motivations (de Bruin 2024). Celtic mythological traditions, including tales of shapeshifting women, druids, and the mystical Ogham script, have been continuously reworked, as recently illustrated in fanfiction about King Alfred the Great that blends historical and mythological elements (Mussies 2023). Similar fanfictive impulses appear in Afro-Caribbean narratives, such as reinterpretations of the Mami Wata figure and the zombie mermaid archetype, which blend folklore with modern feminist concerns and speculative futures (Mussies 2022a; 2024a). Thus, long before the internet, storytelling offered fertile ground for transformative engagement with source material – a hallmark of what is now widely recognised as fanfiction.

Modern fanfiction as a recognised genre began to coalesce in the 20th century, particularly within science fiction and fantasy fandoms. The rise of *Star Trek* fanzines in the 1960s is often credited with catalysing contemporary fanfiction culture, providing a model for the collective expansion and reinterpretation of beloved narratives.

The emergence of digital fanfiction platforms such as FanFiction.net, Archive of Our Own (AO3), and Wattpad has further positioned fanfiction within a broader landscape of participatory fan art, where textual, visual, and multimedia creations coexist and interact. Tumblr, in particular, has become a central hub for fannish creativity, offering a space where fanfiction merges with digital art, GIF sets, meta-analyses, and video edits, forming a dynamic and intertextual cultural archive. Unlike traditional literary circles, these platforms enable a fluid and decentralised engagement with texts, encouraging fans to reinterpret, rewrite, and expand upon media narratives.

This participatory culture not only fosters community-building but also enables experimentation with language, identity, and representation. The iterative and interactive nature of fanfiction aligns it with broader fannish ‘hacking/making’ traditions, where fans creatively rework and remix exist-

ting materials to better reflect their own narratives, interests, and socio-political concerns (Mussies 2023b). In fannish contexts, ‘hacking/making’ refers to creative practices that subvert and transform dominant cultural materials, much like feminist craftivism reclaims traditional domestic arts for political purposes. It involves deconstructing and reassembling narratives to challenge hegemonic representations and to empower marginalised voices. Within this tradition, the playful and experimental use of Esperanto in fanfiction – through full narratives, translations, or lyrical inventions such as *La Kanto de Tamar* (Mussies 2024c) – can also be seen as a form of language hacking and making. Fans repurpose Esperanto not only to build new fictional worlds but also to imagine alternative futures, forge transnational identities, and question linguistic hierarchies, thus contributing to a broader participatory reimagining of cultural and linguistic norms.

A crucial dimension of fannish rewriting lies in its role in feminist and emancipatory storytelling. Fanfiction has historically provided a space for marginalised voices – particularly women, LGBTQ+ individuals, dis/abled people and people of colour – to challenge dominant media narratives and reclaim agency. Feminist fan rewritings, often referred to as ‘fix-it fics’ or ‘meta critiques’, address gendered disparities by reimagining female characters in leadership roles, introducing queer perspectives, and subverting traditional tropes of heroism. An example developed to explore the intersection of science fiction, mythology, and feminist utopianism is the Esperanto fanfiction *La Rekompenco de Tamar* (Mussies 2024d). In this work, the cyborg mermaid Tamar is portrayed as an active agent who rewrites history, with the narrative intentionally using the medium of a constructed international language to engage with themes of identity, neurodiversity, and empowerment. Such projects illustrate how fanfiction can function not merely as entertainment but as a site of resistance, fostering digital activism and empowering new generations of media creators.

In light of these transformative practices, it becomes evident that fanfiction is not merely a derivative form but a vibrant space for creative and linguistic experimentation, where fans actively reshape language, narrative, and identity on their own terms.

### **3 Fanfiction as a space for creativity and linguistic experimentation**

One of the most distinctive aspects of fanfiction is its ability to serve as a creative and experimental literary space. Unlike conventional publishing, which is often constrained by market demands and editorial oversight,

fanfiction operates within a more fluid and democratic ecosystem. Writers have the freedom to push the boundaries of storytelling, both structurally and linguistically. Fanfiction writers frequently engage in linguistic experimentation, making creative use of different languages, dialects, and linguistic structures. This can range from code-switching – where characters or narrators alternate between two or more languages within a text – to the invention of entirely new languages (conlangs). Such experimentation allows fanfiction authors to explore themes of identity, culture, and communication in ways that might not be possible within mainstream literature.

Many fanfictions incorporate multilingual elements, reflecting the linguistic diversity of their authors and audiences. Writers often use code-switching to add authenticity to characters from multilingual backgrounds or to create a sense of realism in cross-cultural interactions. In some cases, characters switch between languages based on their emotional state, social context, or cultural identity, mirroring real-world bilingual speech patterns. Additionally, fanfiction writers may use foreign words or phrases to signify cultural specificity, adding depth to world-building or emphasising the distinctiveness of particular characters. For instance, a *Harry Potter* fanfic might include dialogues in Latin to enhance the mystical atmosphere of spellcasting, or a cyberpunk-inspired *Star Wars* fic could integrate Mandarin or Japanese to reflect an imagined futuristic linguistic landscape. Fanfiction often explores ‘what-if’ scenarios, and language is no exception. Writers may construct alternative linguistic histories that challenge existing narratives about language development and use. For instance, in a medieval fanfiction setting, an author might depict King Alfred the Great not only learning Old English and Latin but also engaging with Ogham script as part of an alternative historical timeline (Mussies 2023b). Similarly, some fanfictions engage with linguistic anachronisms, reimagining how language might have evolved under different geopolitical or cultural conditions. These narratives can function as both an exercise in historical linguistics and as a commentary on how language shapes identity and communication.

One important dimension of fanfiction’s linguistic experimentation lies in the use of constructed languages within fictional worlds. As Barnes and Van Heerden (2006) argue, fictional languages in science fiction and fantasy literature serve a pluridimensional function: they not only aid in the creation of immersive fictional worlds but also operate within those worlds as sociolinguistic systems, helping to construct group and individual identities. This dual role highlights the significance of language not just as a tool of communication, but as a narrative device that shapes the very fabric of imagined societies.

Many fanfiction writers engage in the development of constructed languages (conlangs), either by inventing new linguistic systems or by incorporating established fictional languages into their narratives. This phenomenon, widely recognised both within and outside the Esperanto-speaking world, has been examined in several studies on linguistic creativity and fan cultures (Peterson 2015). Popular examples include the use of Quenya and Sindarin, the Elvish languages developed by J. R. R. Tolkien, which have become central elements in *The Lord of the Rings* fandom (Mussies 2022b). Other prominent conlangs include Klingon from *Star Trek* (Thibault 2020) and Dothraki from *Game of Thrones* (Meluzzi 2019). Ursula K. Le Guin's Earthsea cycle, though more implicit in its linguistic world-building, also demonstrates a deep engagement with language as power, with its central 'True Speech' functioning as both a narrative and philosophical device (Le Guin 1968). These examples illustrate how conlangs not only contribute to immersive world-building but also serve as tools for exploring identity, power dynamics, and cultural plurality within fan-created and canonical texts alike.

Stanley (2003) proposes that constructed fictional languages (CFLs) often operate along a dual axis: they not only contribute to the immersive quality of a fictional world, but also shape how characters and cultures are perceived by audiences. Particularly for antagonistic or 'othered' groups, fictional languages are deliberately engineered to evoke specific emotional reactions, often through phonological choices perceived as harsh, alien, or unsettling to English-speaking audiences. Stanley's analysis demonstrates that the phonological, grammatical, and lexical features of these languages are carefully selected to reinforce cultural narratives of difference and opposition within the fictional universe. While fictional languages are often crafted to signal cultural difference or emotional resonance, as Stanley suggests, they can also serve deeper mythological and aesthetic functions. Nowhere is this more evident than in the work of J. R. R. Tolkien, whose approach to language creation intertwined linguistic structure with the very foundations of fictional world-building.

Conlangs serve as a tool for world-building, adding depth and authenticity to fictional settings (Mussies 2022). Tolkien's approach to conlangs was deeply rooted in his background as a philologist. He saw language creation not merely as an exercise in linguistic construction but as an integral part of mythology and world-building. Unlike Esperanto, which was designed for practical communication, Tolkien's languages were developed with an aesthetic and historical purpose, interwoven with the cultures and histories of his fictional peoples. He believed that language should be studied for love rather than utility, an approach that continues

to inspire fanfiction writers today. Additionally, conlangs in fanfiction can serve as a means of expressing personal linguistic preferences, much like Tolkien’s concept of a ‘personal proto-language’ – a language that resonates with an individual’s phonetic and aesthetic sensibilities (Smith 2022). Some fanfiction authors engage with Tolkien’s Elvish languages by expanding their grammar and lexicon, much like the real-world evolution of language elsewhere, especially online (Mussies 2022b). Others draw inspiration from his methodology to create their own unique languages, influenced by real-world linguistic systems.

## 4 Esperanto in fanfiction

The incorporation of Esperanto into fanfiction serves multiple narrative and thematic purposes beyond mere linguistic ornamentation. As Okrent (2009) observes, constructed languages in literature often symbolise broader sociopolitical ideals. In Esperanto-based fanfiction, the language frequently acts as a narrative tool to explore themes of universality, cross-cultural understanding, and linguistic utopianism. Characters using Esperanto are often portrayed as intellectually curious and committed to ideals of internationalism, positioning language choice as a marker of both personal and political identity. Moreover, the presence of Esperanto reflects what Stockwell (2006) terms “linguistic worldbuilding”, where language plays a crucial role in establishing the narrative setting and atmosphere. Fanfiction authors employing Esperanto leverage its neutral, constructed nature to transcend traditional geopolitical boundaries, particularly in crossover stories where characters from disparate fictional universes must negotiate communication barriers. In such contexts, Esperanto serves both as a plausible diegetic solution and a metatextual commentary on the aspirational universality embedded in science fiction narratives. Contemporary online fanfiction communities further reinforce this complex engagement. Many works featuring Esperanto incorporate metalinguistic commentary, with characters explicitly debating the potentials and limitations of Esperanto. These self-reflexive practices suggest that Esperanto fanfiction authors are not merely adopting the language for exoticism but are actively engaging with its historical context, ideological foundations, and evolving cultural significance.

In 2025, the distribution of Esperanto fanfiction was facilitated by various digital platforms, each contributing to the accessibility and visibility of this niche literary form. Archive of Our Own (AO3), a major fanfiction platform known for its non-commercial ethos and robust tagging system, hosted approximately 254 works tagged with “Esperanto” as of March 2025. While

many of these works include only brief phrases or dialogue in Esperanto, a notable subset consists of fanfictions written entirely in the language. Wattpad, another popular fanfiction platform geared toward global youth audiences, listed around 23 stories associated with Esperanto, ranging from translated classics to original compositions. FanFiction.net, one of the earliest large-scale fanfiction archives, included 18 such works. Although these numbers may appear modest when compared to the vast scale of content on these platforms, their significance lies elsewhere. The persistent presence of Esperanto in these fanfiction spaces – particularly on platforms favoured by younger, digital-native users – indicates a continuing interest in the language among new generations. Moreover, because these figures only reflect publicly tagged works, they likely represent a fraction of the total production. Esperanto-related fanfiction also circulates in less visible or private venues, such as Facebook groups, Discord servers, Tumblr communities, and one-on-one exchanges. As such, these searchable instances serve not as statistical endpoints, but as indicators of a broader, living culture of Esperanto storytelling embedded within digital participatory practices.

Fanfiction, though often regarded as an informal or derivative genre, shares deep structural and thematic continuities with speculative fiction. Both forms are rooted in imaginative world-building, alternative histories, and explorations of social, technological, and linguistic futures. In particular, fanfiction inherits from science fiction the drive to question the status quo and to envision possibilities beyond the constraints of the real world. Within this speculative tradition, language often functions not merely as a communicative tool but as a central axis of world-making. Among the many constructed languages (conlangs) that have appeared in fanfiction, Esperanto holds a unique position due to its real-world status as an international auxiliary language. Unlike fictional languages created solely for storytelling purposes, Esperanto exists at the intersection of fiction and reality, making it a compelling tool for fanfiction writers exploring themes of global communication, neutrality, and linguistic accessibility.

One of the most prevalent uses of Esperanto in speculative fiction is as the lingua franca of utopian or futuristic societies. For instance, in Harry Harrison's *The Stainless Steel Rat* series, Esperanto is depicted as a common intergalactic tongue, reflecting the author's advocacy for the language (Carter 1980). Similarly, Philip José Farmer's *Riverworld* novels feature Esperanto as the language of the Church of the Second Chance, symbolising unity among diverse resurrected individuals. In Isaac Asimov's short story "Homo Sol", extraterrestrials communicate with humans using Esperanto, highlighting its role as a bridge between civilisations. The character of Herr Heinrich in H. G. Wells' *The War in the Air* demonstrates a "touching

belief in Esperanto as a solution to international conflict” (Sherborne 2014, 5) and the novel also includes advertisements in Esperanto, suggesting its widespread use in a future society. These narratives align with Esperanto’s historical association with idealistic internationalism and its early adoption by science fiction writers. As Barnes (1975) observes,

While many writers ignore the issue of language altogether, a linguist-writer may choose to create an entire language system and build the society around it [...] For this reason, the imaginary languages found in science fiction are more thoroughly explained and are superior because they are created by linguists who are fully aware of the linguistic principles involved. (Barnes 1975)

This insight underscores the deliberate and thoughtful integration of languages like Esperanto into speculative narratives, reflecting broader themes of unity, cooperation, and progress.

In fanfiction, authors take this idea further by integrating Esperanto into existing science fiction universes. For instance, in *Star Trek* fanfiction, Esperanto can be used as the native tongue of a planet or to replace or supplement the Federation’s ‘Standard’ as a common tongue, aligning with the franchise’s utopian vision of a united humanity (OliviaR5Warbler 2019). Similarly, in fanfiction inspired by *Doctor Who*, writers may use Esperanto as a symbol of linguistic evolution, positioning it as a bridge between different species or time periods (Nytewing 2019). By using Esperanto in this way, fanfiction authors are engaging in a form of speculative linguistics, imagining what global or even intergalactic communication might look like in a future where language barriers are minimised. To illustrate the versatility of Esperanto in fanfiction, below is an excerpt from *Universal Understandings* (2024), a crossover between *Doctor Who* and *Star Trek*, published under the pseudonym of Galaxiulo. In this fanfiction, the Doctor visits the USS Enterprise and communicates with the crew in fluent Esperanto, leading to surprising and humorous situations. This excerpt shows how Esperanto functions as a universal language, facilitating cooperation between characters from different universes and emphasising language as a unifying element.

The TARDIS appeared on the deck of the USS Enterprise, surprising the crew. The Doctor emerged, smiling, and said, ‘Saluton! Mi estas la Doktoro. Ĉu vi parolas Esperanton?’ Captain Kirk, a little confused, replied, ‘Jes, ni ĉiuj parolas Esperanton ĉi tie.’ The Doctor grinned. ‘Bonege! Tiam ni povas komenci la aventuron sen lingvaj baroj.’ (Galaxiulo 2024)

In fanfiction, Esperanto is not commonly used, but when it does appear, it often serves as a neutral or secret language, particularly within espionage,

dystopian, and alternative history narratives. Its status as an international auxiliary language untethered to any specific nation renders it an ideal linguistic medium for characters engaged in political intrigue, underground resistance, or covert communication. In alternate history scenarios, Esperanto is often portrayed as a clandestine language of resistance against authoritarian regimes, symbolising transnational solidarity.<sup>1</sup> Similarly, in the speculative scenario discussed in the thread “Esperanto in a victorious CP world”, the language gains prominence in a world dominated by the Central Powers, serving both as a unifying medium and a subject of conspiracy theories, with fictional portrayals of the Esperanto Institute as a shadowy organisation influencing global events.<sup>2</sup> Fanfiction narratives may depict Esperanto as a diplomatic lingua franca, a revolutionary vernacular, or even the official language of entire nations, reflecting the aspirations of real-world advocates who have promoted its potential for fostering international peace and mutual understanding, as will be exemplified below. These representations underscore Esperanto’s unique cultural positioning at the intersection of utopian aspirations, historical contingency, and speculative imagination.

Beyond the domain of science fiction, Esperanto also features prominently in dystopian and alternative history fiction as a marker of secrecy, resistance, or ideological identity. In narratives reminiscent of Orwell’s *1984* or Collins’ *The Hunger Games*, Esperanto is often depicted as the language of dissident movements, functioning as an alternative to state-controlled linguistic hegemony. This literary portrayal aligns with historical attempts to position Esperanto as a politically neutral tool of resistance, particularly in contexts where authoritarian regimes have sought to suppress independent or international modes of communication. Furthermore, the ideological dimension of Esperanto extends into speculative and fantasy settings. Online discourse, such as a Reddit post by user FlamingHail, illustrates this phenomenon by envisioning a fictional society where “the predominant religion happens to use Esperanto how the Catholic Church has traditionally used Latin”.<sup>3</sup> While it remains unclear whether this specific concept has been fully realised in fanfiction, such discussions highlight the broader ways in which Esperanto is woven into fictional societies as a symbol of tradition, authority, and linguistic cohesion. These representations underscore the language’s unique cultural positioning at the intersection of utopian aspirations, historical contingency, and speculative imagination.

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1 Search results (2025).

2 Esperanto in a victorious CP world (2017).

3 Using Esperanto in Fiction (2008).

Esperanto is also utilised in fanfiction as a bridging language between different cultures and characters. Fanfiction is, at its core, a medium of cultural exchange, and writers often use language to highlight connections and divisions between characters. Esperanto's structure as a simplified, highly regular language makes it an appealing choice for authors who wish to explore linguistic diversity without the complexities of real-world multilingualism. Esperanto's role as a bridging language is particularly evident in fanfiction that explores themes of inclusion and accessibility. Because Esperanto was designed to be easy to learn, it is sometimes portrayed as a more equitable alternative to English, French, or Latin, which often serve as default international languages in fiction. By incorporating Esperanto into their stories, fanfiction writers engage in a subtle critique of linguistic hegemony, imagining alternative linguistic landscapes that prioritise fairness and accessibility.

## 5 Fanfiction in Esperanto

Fanfiction written in Esperanto represents a unique intersection of linguistic innovation and fandom culture. Spanning various genres and platforms, these works not only provide entertainment but also serve as tools for language education, community building, and cultural preservation. As digital platforms continue to evolve, the presence and influence of Esperanto fanfiction is likely to expand, further enriching the global tapestry of fan-created content. Modern Esperanto fanfiction spans a variety of fandoms and platforms. Some works highlight the linguistic potential of Esperanto in translation projects, others embed the language within political and historical narratives, while still others explore its use in multimodal fannish expression. One particularly notable example is *La Glaciarium* (Trashlations D4tD 2020), a fanfiction based on *Good Omens* (a comedy SF book and TV show by Neil Gaiman and Terry Pratchett), that has been translated into Esperanto and accompanied by a podfic (an audio recording of the text). This project exemplifies the collaborative and multimedia dimensions of Esperanto storytelling, allowing both readers and listeners to experience a fandom well-known to them through the lens of a constructed international language. While the original text was written in English, the translation process itself reflects the linguistic activism often associated with Esperanto. By making fanfiction available in Esperanto, translators contribute to the ongoing efforts to normalise and expand the language's usage, ensuring that Esperanto remains viable as a spoken and literary language. The addition of a podfic further demonstrates the extent to which Esperanto enthusiasts engage with multiple forms of media, transforming the experience of reading into an auditory one, accessible to different types of audiences.

Beyond translation efforts, some fanfiction writers employ Esperanto as an intrinsic element of the narrative itself. Matenruĝulo's 2021 work *Ruĝen: rakonto pri intima socialismo* 'Red-wards: a story about intimate socialism' is a political Real Person Fiction (RPF) exploring the lives of twentieth-century European leftists – a subject matter that aligns closely with Esperanto's historical associations with socialist and internationalist movements (Matenruĝulo 2021). The Esperanto word *ruĝen*, formed by combining *ruĝa* 'red' with the directional suffix *-en* 'towards', can be interpreted both as a literal movement 'towards the red' and as a symbolic gesture towards socialism. Interestingly, the title may also allude – humorously or subversively – to nautical terminology such as “to port” (left), adding another layer of political orientation to the work's title.<sup>4</sup> Esperanto has long been associated with radical political thought, functioning as a language of solidarity among labour organisers, anarchists, and anti-fascists. In *Ruĝen*, this legacy is embedded within the storytelling, using Esperanto not merely as a linguistic curiosity but as a symbol of ideological commitment. Although specific passages from this fanfiction are not readily available, its very premise suggests that the use of Esperanto serves to reinforce themes of political unity, transnational activism, and resistance to oppression. Fanfiction of this nature extends beyond entertainment, engaging with historical reimaginings and speculative politics, making it a powerful tool for both storytelling and ideological exploration.

The integration of Esperanto into fandom, however, is not limited to textual works alone. In the case of *Tokyo Afterschool Summoners*, a popular mobile phone game featuring a richly developed fantasy world, Esperanto has been incorporated into fan-created visual art. The presence of Esperanto within fan art speaks to the language's symbolic power as a marker of inclusivity and globalism. While it is less common for constructed languages to be visually represented in fan culture, the inclusion of Esperanto within illustrated works suggests an attempt to imbue artistic creations with additional layers of meaning. By embedding Esperanto into visual compositions, artists connect their work to a broader linguistic and cultural movement, transforming language into a visual aesthetic rather than solely a textual medium. Esperanto fan creativity also extends into music. My own work *La Kanto de Tamar* (Mussies 2024c) also exemplifies this expansion of fanfiction beyond the written word. The song, composed for the character Tamar – a cyborg mermaid who meets King Alfred while journeying through time and space – blends science fiction with historical legend, themes that are common in Esperanto fanfiction. The lyrics narrate Tamar's quest for truth across the cosmos, culminating in her encounter with the

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4 The author would like to thank Chris Gledhill for this suggestion.

past, echoing a recurrent motif in fanfiction: the intersection of alternative histories and speculative futures. Much like Esperanto itself, which exists as both a bridge language and an ideological construct, the song functions as both a chronicle and a prophecy, mirroring the way fanfiction engages with existing narratives while also reimagining them. The presence of original music in Esperanto underscores the broader participatory nature of fan culture, where storytelling is not confined to a single medium but evolves through text, performance, and auditory experience.

As such, Esperanto fanfiction exemplifies what Henry Jenkins (2008) terms *convergence culture* – the fluid movement of narratives, languages, and creative practices across different media platforms. Through translation efforts, collaborative multimedia projects, and fan-driven reinterpretations of mainstream texts, Esperanto fanfiction bridges linguistic and cultural communities, reinforcing the participatory nature of both fandom and Esperanto itself. It is not merely a niche linguistic curiosity but a living testament to the adaptability and resilience of constructed languages within digital storytelling ecosystems. By embedding Esperanto within fanfiction, creators engage in a broader dialogue about language, identity, and global communication, ensuring that this constructed language continues to evolve and thrive in the digital age. The examples discussed illustrate the breadth of Esperanto’s role within fanfiction and fan culture. Whether through translation projects that seek to expand the reach of popular stories, politically charged narratives that engage with Esperanto’s radical history, or visual artworks that integrate the language into fannish iconography, Esperanto continues to find a place in participatory storytelling. More than just a linguistic experiment, its use in fanfiction underscores the ongoing vitality of Esperanto as a cultural force – one that bridges disciplines, mediums, and communities. Esperanto fanfiction is a small but vibrant subgenre within the broader world of fan-created literature. Its presence across multiple platforms and fandoms highlights its versatility as both a storytelling tool and a linguistic experiment. Whether used to imagine utopian futures, to craft alternative histories, or to explore the aesthetic possibilities of a neutral and accessible language, Esperanto remains an intriguing medium for fanfiction writers.

## **6 Case study: the use of Esperanto in “Now You’re Thinking With Portals! Wait, That’s Knot Right”**

The following case study exemplifies a unique and increasingly common phenomenon in fanfiction: the use of constructed languages as a characterisation tool, even when the author is not fluent in the language being used. Unlike fully Esperanto-written fanfictions such as *Ruĝen: rakonto pri intima*

*socialismo*, which reflect a deep engagement with the language, this fanfic presents a different but equally valuable case – one where Esperanto is used to highlight a character’s distinctiveness, yet where linguistic accuracy is compromised due to reliance on machine translation. This case study was chosen because it allows us to explore the role of Esperanto in fanfiction not just as a full storytelling medium, but as a decorative or narrative device. It also raises important questions about linguistic authenticity and accessibility in fanfiction. Should writers aim for perfect accuracy when incorporating foreign or constructed languages? Or is the creative function of language in fanfiction – its ability to evoke meaning, even if imperfectly – more important? By examining this fanfiction, we can better understand the ways in which Esperanto functions within fandom, not only as a means of storytelling but as part of a broader cultural and linguistic experiment.

In fanfiction, the use of non-English languages frequently serves a range of narrative and stylistic functions, from adding cultural specificity and deepening characterisation to enhancing world-building – often drawing on the distinct emotional resonance, tonal quality, or associative colour that a word may carry in one language but not in another (Mussies 2009). In the Danny Phantom fanfiction *Now You’re Thinking With Portals! Wait, That’s Knot Right*, the character Wulf – a werewolf-like ghost – is depicted as speaking Esperanto rather than English. This choice aligns with Wulf’s canonical portrayal in the original series, where he communicates in an unidentified language, widely speculated by fans to be Esperanto. By adopting this linguistic distinction, the author both reinforces Wulf’s narrative otherness and engages with an established fan theory about his identity. The Esperanto used in this story was generated using Google Translate, a detail acknowledged by the author in the story’s metadata. While machine translation tools such as Google Translate and DeepL are increasingly valued for their accessibility and utility – especially in initial drafts – they often require revision to address idiomatic expressions, contextual meaning, and syntactic nuance (Garcia and Pena 2011; Toral and Way 2018). These limitations become more evident in literary contexts or when applied to constructed languages like Esperanto, where grammatical precision and idiomatic fluency are key to stylistic credibility. At the same time, it is important to acknowledge that most Esperanto users are non-native speakers, and as such, there is a widespread tolerance for variation and non-standard usage within the community. As both Corsetti (1996) and Fiedler (2012) show, the Esperanto-speaking world includes not only fluent second-language users but also a small number of native speakers – *denaskuloj* – whose linguistic input has shaped the language in diverse ways. This openness to variation

may explain why even imperfect Esperanto, when used creatively in fanfiction, can still resonate with readers as authentic and meaningful.

The use of Esperanto in this fanfiction provides an instructive example of the limitations of machine translation when applied to constructed languages. One of the first instances of Esperanto in the story is the phrase *Eble bildoj estus pli bonaj*, which translates literally as ‘Maybe pictures would be better’. While understandable, this construction is misleading in Esperanto. A better way to express the same idea would be *Eble estus pli bone uzi bildojn* ‘Maybe it would be better to use pictures’, which better reflects the expected word order and phrasing of the language. A more problematic example appears in *Kion vi volas? Mi ne finis vian ilon*, which translates literally as ‘What do you want? I have not finished your tool’. The phrase *Mi ne finis vian ilon* is particularly awkward because *ilo* ‘tool’ does not seem to fit the intended meaning. This may be a mistranslation of a more complex phrase, possibly meant to express something like ‘I have not finished what I was making for you’. A more fluent way to phrase this in Esperanto would be *Mi ne ankoraŭ finis tion, kion vi petis* ‘I have not yet finished what you asked for’, which preserves the likely intent while improving clarity. Another example of translation difficulty appears in *La afero ne estas damaĝi*, which seems to mean ‘The thing is not to damage’. However, the phrase is also grammatically incorrect, as *damaĝi* ‘to damage’ is presented in its infinitive form without proper syntactic integration. A more natural way to phrase this idea would be *La celo ne estas kaŭzi damaĝon* ‘The goal is not to cause damage’, which better reflects Esperanto sentence structure. Interestingly, not all Esperanto phrases in the fanfiction feel completely unnatural to me. One of the more successful examples is *Nu, ĉi tio probable ne plibonigos lin, sed li certe ne faros ion dum kelka tempo* ‘Well, this probably won’t improve him, but he certainly won’t do anything for a while’. While slightly awkward in phrasing, it remains largely grammatically sound. A minor refinement, such as *Nu, ĉi tio verŝajne ne plibonigos lin, sed certe li ne faros ion dum iom da tempo*, would make it feel slightly more idiomatic, but the meaning remains clear.

These linguistic issues reflect broader considerations surrounding machine-translated Esperanto. While it is true that Esperanto lacks the dataset richness of globally dominant natural languages, recent neural machine translation models have nonetheless been trained on high-quality Esperanto corpora – including translations of *Le Monde diplomatique* and *UNESCO Courier* – which have contributed to notable improvements in baseline translation quality. Still, automated tools often struggle with subtler aspects of language, particularly when context and idiomatic nuance are required. In the fanfiction examined here, for example, lexical mismatches such as the

use of *ilo* 'tool') instead of a more semantically appropriate term, and syntactic awkwardness in phrases like *La afero ne estas damaĝi* 'The thing is not to damage', illustrate the limitations of machine-generated Esperanto when not followed by post-editing. These examples are not intended as criticisms of the author per se, but rather as indicators of how language technologies can shape and sometimes distort constructed language usage in creative writing. It is important to note that fanfiction operates within an experimental literary register. As discussed earlier in this article, fanfiction authors often embrace linguistic playfulness and stylistic deviation, unbound by conventional editorial standards. In this context, non-idiomatic or awkward phrasing may be understood not as failure, but as part of a broader ethos of creative linguistic exploration. Especially within the Esperanto community, where most users are non-native and variation is broadly accepted (Fiedler, 2012), such imperfections may contribute to the evolving texture of the language itself.

The presence of Esperanto in this fanfiction, even in a flawed form, is notable because it aligns with broader patterns of multilingualism in fandom. Many fanfiction writers engage with languages other than English, either to enhance world-building or to reflect diverse character backgrounds. The use of Esperanto in this story follows the tradition of multilingual storytelling in fanfiction, where non-English dialogue is often included to establish a character's cultural or linguistic identity. However, the reliance on imperfect translation tools raises questions about authenticity and the responsibilities of writers when using languages they do not speak fluently. In contrast to works like *Ruĝen: rakonto pri intima socialismo*, which is written entirely in Esperanto by a fluent speaker, this fanfiction uses Esperanto more as a decorative element – a way to highlight Wulf's 'otherness' rather than as a primary storytelling medium. This distinction underscores an important divide within Esperanto fanfiction: on one hand, works that are authentically produced by Esperanto-speaking authors, and on the other, stories that incorporate Esperanto as an aesthetic or characterisation device, often with varying degrees of accuracy.

In conclusion, *Now You're Thinking With Portals! Wait, That's Knot Right* illustrates both the creative potential and the linguistic challenges involved in incorporating Esperanto into fanfiction. While the use of Esperanto in this story is limited and occasionally flawed – primarily due to its reliance on machine translation – it nevertheless demonstrates how constructed languages can function as tools for world-building, characterisation, and stylistic experimentation within participatory fan cultures. In this particular case, Esperanto serves less as a communicative medium and more as a narrative

device, reinforcing the character Wulf's identity as an outsider within the Danny Phantom universe.

This case study also invites broader reflection on what it means to describe Esperanto as a 'living language' in fanfiction. Although the Esperanto in this story may not reflect fluent or idiomatic usage, its presence – even in decorative or symbolic form – signals continued engagement with the language and its ideals. The Esperanto-speaking community is shaped by both native speakers and a diverse body of semi-fluent or symbolic users, many of whom participate in the language's maintenance through creative or ideologically motivated expressions. Its use in fanfiction contributes to Esperanto's ongoing cultural relevance, especially when situated within digital and fannish spaces where experimentation, appropriation, and recontextualisation are central practices.

Fanfiction offers a space where these varied forms of engagement can coexist. Some works use Esperanto as a primary linguistic medium, while others incorporate it more subtly – as a gesture towards universality, neutrality, or character distinctiveness. Both approaches sustain the visibility and symbolic function of Esperanto, reflecting its adaptability to new media and its resonance within global cultural production. In this sense, Esperanto in fanfiction performs a dual role: it is both a literary resource and a cultural artefact, shaped by and contributing to the participatory environments in which it appears.

## 7 Reflections

This study has sought to explore how Esperanto operates within the creative and linguistic ecology of fanfiction, particularly as both a narrative device and a symbolic resource. In doing so, it has raised several questions that lie at the intersection of fandom studies, language ideology, and digital cultural production. While the examples discussed – ranging from fully Esperanto-written fanfictions such as *Ruĝen* to fragmentary uses of the language in works like *Now You're Thinking With Portals! Wait, That's Knot Right* – demonstrate a modest but meaningful presence of Esperanto in fan-created content, the nature of that presence requires further qualification.

One of the core tensions that emerged in this inquiry concerns the claim that Esperanto in fanfiction constitutes evidence of its status as a 'living language'. While this may be true in a symbolic sense – reflecting ongoing cultural and ideological engagement – it would be problematic to equate such episodic, often decorative usage with sustained linguistic vitality as defined in sociolinguistic terms. As critics of this view might argue, a language's presence in fanfiction may reflect more about the nature of fanfiction itself –

its predisposition toward linguistic bricolage and semiotic experimentation – than about the health of the language being deployed. Moreover, this project has implicitly operated on the assumption that the use of Esperanto in fanfiction often carries ideological weight – whether utopian, egalitarian, or emancipatory. Yet, such assumptions warrant more empirical scrutiny. Are fan authors truly engaging with the political and historical dimensions of Esperanto, or is the language being used primarily as a world-building shortcut, or even as a form of aesthetic exoticism? Future research might benefit from reader reception studies, interviews with authors, or corpus-based analysis to discern the motivations and receptions of Esperanto use in fan contexts.

The methodology employed here also has its limitations. The analysis has relied predominantly on close reading of selected examples drawn from open-access platforms such as AO3 and Wattpad. These platforms, while influential, represent only a segment of global fanfiction production. More ethnographic or comparative research across different linguistic or regional fan communities – particularly those that operate outside Anglophone digital spaces – would deepen our understanding of how Esperanto functions transnationally and multilingually within fandoms. Finally, this investigation has largely treated Esperanto as a linguistic object, with occasional gestures toward its visual or symbolic properties. Yet there remains significant scope to theorise Esperanto not only as language but as cultural signifier – a form of linguistic cosplay, perhaps – especially in multimodal fanworks where written language operates less as code and more as visual artefact. Such a shift in perspective would open further avenues for examining how conlangs operate as aesthetic rather than communicative resources, aligning more closely with theories of translanguaging, performativity, and language-as-design.

## **8 Expanding the frame: alternative frameworks and comparative cases**

While this article has largely approached Esperanto through the lens of conlangs and constructed linguistic systems, it is worth considering more radically alternative frameworks that could reposition our understanding of how the language functions within fanfiction. One such perspective would treat Esperanto not primarily as a communicative code but as a cultural signifier within what might be termed transmedial performance. Much like cosplay, in which fans wear costumes not to replicate historical accuracy but to embody affective or ideological alignment with a character or world, Esperanto can operate as a kind of linguistic costume. Its deployment in

fanfiction may thus signal thematic associations – utopianism, estrangement, resistance – regardless of grammatical precision or linguistic fluency. Within this framework, concerns about syntactic correctness are arguably beside the point, as Esperanto functions more as a semiotic resource than a strict linguistic system.

Relatedly, the framework of translanguaging (García and Wei 2014) offers a compelling alternative to the binary distinction between natural and constructed languages. Rather than viewing Esperanto as a bounded linguistic entity, one might understand its appearance in fanfiction as part of a dynamic and hybrid linguistic repertoire. In this sense, Esperanto becomes one of many tools – alongside English, fandom-specific jargon, emojis, and visual coding – used by fan authors to create meaning, perform identity, and delineate narrative boundaries. This approach would further support an understanding of Esperanto as a flexible, performative element within a multimodal fan ecology.

These perspectives are reinforced when we consider comparative examples. Klingon, a conlang with intentionally complex and alien syntactic features, appears far more frequently on AO3 than Esperanto, despite its more limited real-world speech community.<sup>5</sup> This suggests that how a language fits into a given narrative world – its symbolic resonance and expressive potential – may be more important than whether it is widely spoken or used fluently. Similarly, Arabic and Russian are often used in espionage fanfiction (such as in *James Bond* universes, e.g. Flea 2007) to evoke secrecy or cultural specificity, whereas Esperanto’s constructed neutrality may lack the ethnolinguistic charge that such genres typically demand. In LGBTQ+ fanfiction, fictional sign languages or minimalist conlangs like Toki Pona are sometimes preferred for their associations with resistance, marginality, or otherness – aligning with queer and neurodivergent identity politics in ways that diverge from Esperanto’s historical mainstream. These counterexamples demonstrate that Esperanto’s presence in fanfiction must be understood not in isolation but in conversation with a wider array of linguistic practices and symbolic languages, each embedded in distinct affective, ideological, and narrative economies.

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5 Unlike Esperanto, which was designed to maximise accessibility and ease of acquisition, Klingon was developed by linguist Marc Okrand to reflect the harsh, martial aesthetics of the fictional Klingon culture. Its syntax deliberately violates common typological patterns (e.g. object-verb-subject word order), which adds to its distinctiveness within fictional contexts.

## 9 Conclusions

This article has demonstrated that Esperanto, while rarely central in mainstream fanfiction, plays a versatile and often ideologically inflected role within certain fannish spaces. Whether used to signal character otherness, evoke utopian futures, or mark alignment with leftist traditions, its presence reveals the ways in which constructed languages continue to animate speculative storytelling. At the same time, the analysis suggests that the boundaries between communication, decoration, and ideology in fan language use are porous and unstable – making Esperanto in fanfiction a particularly rich object of study for those interested in the semiotic politics of language choice.

The key insight to emerge from this research is not that Esperanto is flourishing as a spoken or written vernacular within fanfiction communities, but rather that its symbolic affordances remain alive in participatory culture. Even when mediated through imperfect tools such as Google Translate, Esperanto retains a capacity to signify openness, neutrality, resistance, or estrangement – depending on narrative context. This flexibility is arguably what secures its continued relevance, not as a rival to English or naturalistic conlangs, but as a mutable cultural form shaped by those who choose to appropriate and recontextualise it.

Ultimately, the case of Esperanto in fanfiction invites us to reconsider what it means for a language to live – not merely in terms of fluent usage or demographic breadth, but as a dynamic and evolving presence within digital culture. It challenges us to think not only about linguistic survival, but about symbolic afterlives. As such, it provides fertile ground for interdisciplinary inquiry at the intersection of linguistics, media studies, fandom, and cultural semiotics. The present study is but an initial foray into this terrain, and a call to take up the challenge to map it further.

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## About the author

Martine Mussies is an autistic academic and artistic researcher based in Utrecht, the Netherlands. She recently published her first monograph, *Inside the Outside – a Misfit Manifesto*. Martine is a PhD candidate at Maastricht University, and also a musician, visual artist, avid language learner, and budo practitioner.

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## Pri la aŭtoro

Martine Mussies estas aŭtisma sciencisto kaj arta esploristo loĝanta en Utreĥto, Nederlando. Ŝi lastatempe publikigis sian unuan monografion, *Inside the Outside – a Misfit Manifesto*. Martine estas doktoriĝa kandidato ĉe la Universitato de Maastricht, kaj ankaŭ muzikisto, bildartisto, fervora lingvolernanto kaj budo-praktikanto.

## Over de auteur

Martine Mussies is een autistische academica en artistiek onderzoeker uit Utrecht, Nederland. Onlangs publiceerde ze haar eerste monografie, *Inside the Autside – a Misfit Manifesto*. Martine is promovenda aan de Universiteit Maastricht en daarnaast ook musicus, beeldend kunstenaar, enthousiaste taalleerder en budoka.

### Fikcio de fanoj en Esperanto – Esperanto en fikcio de fanoj

**Resumo:** La rolo de Esperanto en fikcio de fanoj donas konvinkan ekzemplon pri la manieroj, per kiuj konstruitaj lingvoj funkcias ene de la cifereca partoprena kulturo. Ĉi tiu artikolo ekzamenas la rimedojn, per kiuj Esperanto aperas en rakontoj kreitaj de fanoj, kaj kiel rakonta ilo kaj kiel rimedo por lingva eksperimentado. Ĝi ankaŭ esploras kiumaniere Esperanto uziĝas kiel estonteca komuna lingvo en sciencfikcio, kiel sekreta aŭ rezista lingvo en distopiaj scenaroj, kaj kiel ponto inter diversaj kulturoj kaj roluloj. Aldone, ĝi konsideras la fenomenon de fanfikcio tute verkita en Esperanto, elstarigante ĝian uzon en tradukprojektoj kaj originaj rakontoj. Per analizo de ekzemploj, inkluzive de *Ruĝen: rakonto pri intima socialismo* kaj *Now You're Thinking With Portals! Wait, That's Knot Right*, la artikolo esploras la defiojn de lingva aŭtenteco, precipe kiam Esperanto estas uzata pere de maŝintradukado. Plue, ĝi ekzamenas la vastiĝon de esperantista fan-kreado preter teksta rakontado, kiel montras *La Kanto de Tamar*, fankreita kanto (fare de la aŭtoro de ĉi tiu artikolo), kiu kunfandas sciencfikcion kaj historian legendon. Ĉi tiu studo finfine montras, ke la ĉeesto de Esperanto en fanfikcio transpasas simplan lingvan ludon; ĝi funkcias kiel dinamika ilo por mondkonstruado, identeca esplorado kaj alternativa rakontado en la nuntempa fankulturo.

**Ŝlosilvortoj:** Esperanto; Fanfikcio; Konstruitaj lingvoj; Lingva eksperimentado; Partoprena kulturo; Sciencfikcio

### Fanfiction in het Esperanto – Esperanto in fanfiction

**Samenvatting:** De rol van Esperanto in fanfiction biedt een fascinerende casestudy over hoe geconstrueerde talen functioneren in de digitale participatiecultuur. Dit artikel onderzoekt de rol van Esperanto als narratief middel en als taalkundig experiment in door fans geschreven verhalen. Het beschrijft het gebruik van Esperanto als een toekomstige lingua franca in sciencefiction, als geheime of verzetstaal in dystopische settings, en als een brug tussen verschillende culturen en personages. Daarnaast wordt fanfiction die volledig in Esperanto is geschreven geanalyseerd, met aandacht voor zowel vertaalprojecten als originele verhalen. Aan de hand van voorbeelden zoals *Ruĝen: rakonto pri intima socialismo* en *Now You're Thinking With Portals! Wait, That's Knot Right* worden de valkuilen rond taalkundige authenticiteit besproken, vooral wanneer Esperanto wordt geïntegreerd via machinevertaling. Verder wordt de uitbreiding

van Esperanto-creativiteit buiten het tekstuele verkend, zoals in *La Kanto de Tamar*, een fan-gecomponeerd lied (door de auteur van dit artikel), dat sciencefiction met historische legenden verweeft. Dit artikel toont aan dat Esperanto in fanfiction verder gaat dan enkel taalkundig spel; het fungeert als een dynamisch hulpmiddel voor wereldbouw, identiteitsverkenning en alternatieve vormen van storytelling binnen hedendaagse fancultuur.

**Trefwoorden:** Esperanto; Fanfiction; Geconstrueerde talen; Participatiecultuur; Sciencefiction; Taalkundig experiment