The FanTALES project:
how fans can make interactive multilingual stories in the language classroom

Frederik Cornillie – KU Leuven
Shannon Sauro – Malmö University
Once Upon a Time
53. Zomn: :) .. dont u mind if i add u to friend list?
54. Zomn: yeah :)
55. Meme: go ahead, i'll add you too and we can group again sometime
56. Zomn: sure :))
57. Zomn: nice too meet u //
58. Meme: you too, I forget how to spell goodbye in russian, dasvidania?
59. Meme: Is that sort of close?
60. Zomn: it is right ... or ... just 'poka'
61. Meme: alright, thanks
62. Meme: see ya

When fans become prosumers

“Storytellers now think about storytelling in terms of creating openings for consumer participation.

At the same time, consumers are using new media technologies to engage with old media content, seeing the Internet as a vehicle for collective problem solving, public deliberation, and grassroots creativity.”
Forms of participatory storytelling

FAN FICTION

INTERACTIVE FICTION
Maker spaces for participatory (digital) storytelling

FAN FICTION

INTERACTIVE FICTION

@fanTALES_EU
When these two spaces collide

The last thing you see before the hat drops over your eyes is the Hall full of people craning to get a good look at you. Next second you are looking at the black inside of the hat. You wait.

‘Hmhn,‘ says a small voice in your ear. ‘Difficult. Very difficult. Plenty of courage, I see. Not a bad mind, either. There’s talent, oh my goodness, yes – and a nice thirst to prove yourself, now that’s interesting… So where shall I put you?‘

You grip the edges of the stool and think,

‘Not Slytherin, not Slytherin.’

‘Any house will do.’
The FanTALES approach
FanTALES process

catalog of source texts
learning through doing modules
modular framework of tasks and rubrics

classroom experimentation

1. English+
2. Dutch+ German+ Swedish+
Catalog of source texts (English)

- Based on learner survey ($N = 351$)
- Books, games, films, etc. related to the target language & of interest to target group
- Includes relevant information for teachers, e.g. summaries, text samples, potentially problematic content, etc.
- To serve as a guide for teachers interested in developing language learning tasks based on media that secondary school pupils may already be familiar with (in the target language).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Media (ranked by frequency)</th>
<th>BEL</th>
<th>GER</th>
<th>SWE</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Harry Potter</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>Y</td>
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<tr>
<td>Game of Thrones</td>
<td>Y</td>
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<td>Y</td>
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<tr>
<td>Gossip Girl</td>
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<td>Y</td>
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<tr>
<td>Pretty Little Liars</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>Y</td>
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<tr>
<td>Riverdale</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>Y</td>
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<td>Call of Duty</td>
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<td>FIFA</td>
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<td>Y</td>
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<td>Stranger Things</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>Y</td>
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<td>Grand Theft Auto</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td></td>
<td>Y</td>
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<td>Orange is the New Black</td>
<td>Y</td>
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<td>Y</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
The searchable catalog of source texts will provide teachers with information about texts, movies, digital games, tv shows and other media that lend themselves to fanfiction-based projects.
Learning through Doing Modules

- For teacher and student training
- Hands-on activities
- Provide future teachers with the experience and knowledge needed to implement IF, fan fiction, multilingual storytelling in their classrooms.
Modular Tasks

- **Modules** for the major components of these complex tasks.
- General task instructions + more specific instructions tied to a particular text (e.g. Sherlock Holmes)
- Instructors can combine and build an assignment that meets their students’ needs and abilities.

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**Fanfiction 6A. Fix-it Fic (General Instructions)**

Fix-it fic is fanfiction which fixes something in the source material that a fan did not like. For instance, it is common for fix-it fic to bring a beloved character back to life, to fix or explain an inconsistency in a character’s behavior or to fix a hole in the plot. For this option, you will identify something in the source text you do not like and write a story where you fix-it and explore what happens as a result.

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**Category 4: A language problem**

Language itself is at the heart of the plot: A language has to be learned, a letter from a distant place has to be translated, a character has to mediate for two other characters who don’t share a language, E.g. a misunderstanding happens because of a difference in languages.

Example: Write a Sherlock Holmes story that is based on a misunderstanding of a word that means very different things in different languages (e.g. “Gift” a present in English, poison in French) (If you want an extra, you could make the story harder by giving a character e.g. “gift”.

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**IF 4. Ethical choice, combined with cause and effect choices**

In stories, a character (typically the hero) often has to make tough choices that involve some kind of moral dilemma and that have a big impact on the world around them, on the other characters they relate with, or on their individual lives. In a famous story of yours, think about such an ethical choice and the series of events that lead up to it. Also make a character sheet that lists the major values of your character and his or her backstory. Now imagine that your character makes a different choice. What events would inform that choice? What motivations does your character have for making that choice? Write an outline for an interactive fiction story in which the different events and motivations would result in your character making a different ethical choice.

(Note: this is advanced stuff to implement, and would require knowledge of variables and delayed branching.)
Rubric Framework

- Comprised of different components for evaluating the fanfiction, multilingualism and IF elements of each task.
- Includes separate peer-evaluation scales.
Classroom experimentation: preliminary results

- Upper secondary school learners in Belgium (N = 20)
  - Age: 17-18

- Approach
  - Creative writing project
  - End goal: write an interactive fanfiction story with multilingual elements
  - 5 groups
  - High degree of freedom
Process

- Preparation
  - Class pick a common universe
    - Assassin’s Creed
  - Groups pick a main character, location and time
  - Basic training in Twine
- Guided group work in class
  - Brainstorm – write – revise
- Presentation for peers and for FanTALES team
- ~ 25 hours of classroom time
You wake up in a prison cell with a pounding headache, wondering where you are. The space feels very cold and dark. It seems that you're somewhere underground. After looking around and taking in your surroundings, you notice the guard standing by your cell block.

Where am I?
Let me out!
Who are you?
The guard doesn't appreciate you being this freaking annoying and loud, so he leaves. Great, now you're on your own. You need to figure out where you are and what you're here for...

COME BACK
WIG, the guard understood and came back, this time someone's with him.

Shut up and listen
I WANT AN EXPLANATION
WHO IS THIS NOW??
Teacher intervention ...

Nothing like this man had ever been seen in Privet Drive. He was tall, thin and very old, judging by the silver of his hair and beard, which were both long enough to tuck into his belt. He was wearing long robes, a purple cloak which swept the ground and high-heeled, buckled boots. His blue eyes were light, bright and sparkling behind half-moon spectacles and his nose was very long and crooked, as though it had been broken at least twice. This man’s name was Albus Dumbledore.

Albus Dumbledore didn’t seem to realise that he had just arrived in a street where everything from his name to his boots was unwelcome. He was busy rummaging in his cloak, looking for something. But he did seem to realise he was being watched, because he looked up suddenly at the cat, which was still staring at him from the other end of the street. For some reason, the sight of the cat seemed to amuse him. He chuckled and muttered, ‘I should have known.’

He pointed a shaking wand, looking for in his inside pocket. It
The Russian connection

Oliver wakes up in a dark prison cell with a pounding headache, wondering where he is. His limbs are feeling numb, like he's been sleeping for a while. The space feels very cold and dark. When he tries to remember what he's been doing or even where he was during the last 24 hours, he can't remember a thing. Maybe he was sent on a mission? It seems that he is somewhere underground. So far for guessing in what country he even is.

After looking around and taking in his surroundings, just the bed he's sitting on and something that looks like a plate with bread crumbs on, he finally notices someone standing by the door.

- Hey man, where am I and what am I doing here?

- Hey you, can you let me out of here!

- Who are you, man? Oliver asked.
Focus group sessions

- Focus group interviews held with small groups (6 to 9 students) on each of the three major task elements: Fanfiction, Multilingualism, IF

- To gather input on the students’ perspective regarding such complex tasks
Key Observations: IF

When you had a choice, a choice you had to find another story for that choice and then **go on and go on and go on**.

It was also **difficult to say OK this is the end**, I’m not going to go further.

I think too much choices, too much [sic] ideas. And then **choosing what is the best idea**. The idea that I can do the most with. That was difficult for me.
Key Observations: IF

authoring interface interferes with creative writing process

I think it was good that you could see the different choices – it was like a mindmap actually, and then you could write in these different choices.

But what was not so good is that you had to write [...] two signs and then the title of your choice and then you stop that, and that slows down the writing process, because you could be writing, like very fast, you have a good idea, you write a lot. And then you’re like, wait, now I need to make another choice. And you have to write the code. You have to also make these boxes every time, you have to make sure they’re linked.
Key Observations: Multilingual Storytelling

- Tension between multilingual task and school policy on language use
  - Other languages at school not allowed (e.g. on playground)
- Difficult to implement other languages in meaningful ways that added to the story
  - But also interesting and fun
Key Observations: Multilingualism Storytelling

- Awareness of varied approaches to multilingual storytelling:
  - Languages should create an authentic atmosphere
  - Russian was used for side characters but did not play a role in the plot.
  - Think about languages first and then create a story around that.
Benefits of Writing Fanfiction

- Being free to write your own story.
- Improved English skills
  - Vocabulary
  - Being able to describe and use detail for people, landscape, structures and places.
  - Learning to use longer and better sentences with varied sentence structure.
  - No starting every sentence with “He did this” or “He did that”.
- Incorporating things they knew or were interested in:
  - 13 Reasons Why
  - Historical women pirates
  - Growing tensions between US and Russia
Challenges of Writing Fanfiction

- Being **creative**.
- Using extensive **vocabulary**.
- Not knowing what to expect and what level writing like this would look like.
- **Too much freedom** and not enough responsibility.
- Finding a way to end the story.
- Writing about something most students didn’t really know much about: the Assassin’s Creed game
  - Wrote a story about a non-existing Assassin’s Creed, the future, and lost track of the Assassin’s Creed aspect, which is about murdering people.
  - It was difficult to combine the movie (Blue Lagoon) and TV series (13 Reasons Why) with Assassin’s Creed together because they were totally different stories.
Next Steps

- Identifying Source Texts for Dutch, German and Swedish.
- Developing sample tasks for Dutch, German, and Swedish.
- Making English materials available in Dutch, German and Swedish.
- Integrating the above into an Online Gamified Writing Assignment Platform.
- Developing a teaching handbook.