

**O desenvolvimento dos conceitos dos alunos da graduação
sobre o gênero sistêmico fanfictional**

**The development of undergraduate students' concepts
about the fanfictional genre system**

**El desarrollo de los conceptos de los estudiantes de graduación
sobre el género sistémico fanfictional**

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Resumo

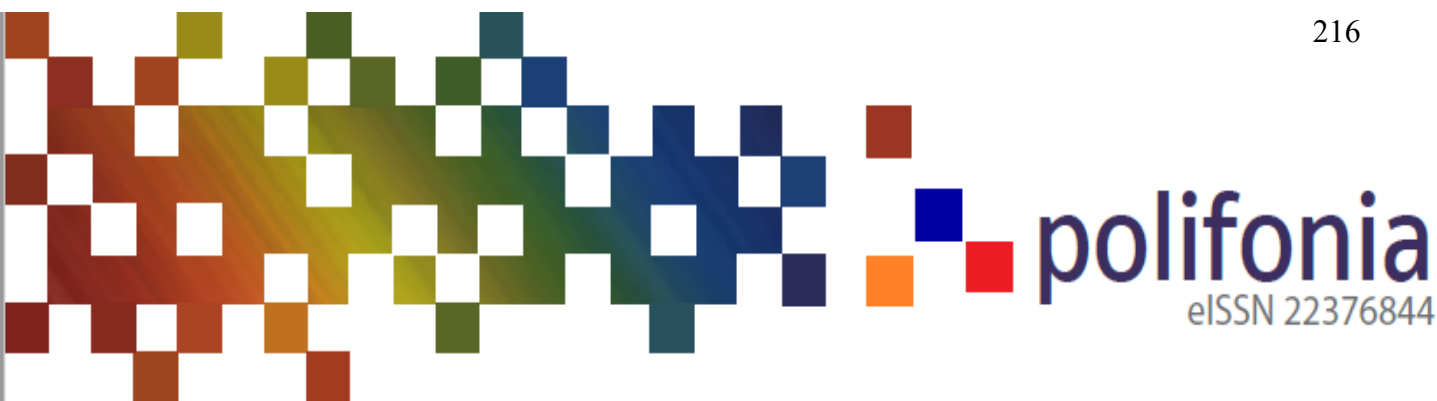
O gênero fanfictional não tem sido extensamente investigado no Brasil. Na realidade, há pouquíssimos trabalhos sobre esse gênero nas universidades (MYERS, 2006, MORLEY, 2007, BLYTHE & SWEET, 2008, HEALEY, 2009; OBERHOLZER, 2014). Devido a isto, um curso de Escrita Criativa Fanfictional em inglês (ECFI) foi desenvolvido e ministrado no final de 2016. Este curso contou com 5 alunos da graduação em Letras. Dois dos objetivos desse curso eram o de 1) identificar e 2) desenvolver os conceitos sobre fanfictions. Para este artigo, utilizou-se apenas a estudante A como exemplificadora. A metodologia aplicada foi o estudo de caso (DUFF, 2008, 2012; DYSON, 2005; STAKE, 2006). O curso ECFI teve como base a teoria sociocultural vygotskiana (VYGOTSKY, 2004; 2007). Como resultados, a estudante A demonstrou sinais de desenvolvimento referentes aos fatos sociais, atos de fala, conjunto de gêneros e sistema de gêneros (BAZERMAN, 2012; CURRY & LILLIS, 2016).

Palavras-chave: Escrita Criativa Fanfictional; Teoria sociocultural; Estudo de Caso.

Abstract

The fanfictional genre has not been extensively investigated in Brazil. In fact, there is very little academic work on this genre in Universities (MYERS, 2006, MORLEY, 2007, BLYTHE & SWEET, 2008, HEALEY, 2009 and OBERHOLZER, 2014). Therefore, a Fanfictional Creative Writing in English course (FCWE) was developed and taught at the end of 2016. This course was attended by 5 undergraduate students in Languages and Literatures. Two of the objectives of this course were to 1) identify and 2) develop concepts about fanfictions. For this article, only student A was taken as an example. The methodology applied was the Case Study (DUFF, 2008, 2012; DYSON, 2005; STAKE, 2006). The FCWE course was based on the Vygotskian sociocultural theory (VYGOTSKY, 2004; 2007). As a result, student A demonstrated signs of development regarding social facts, speech acts, genre sets, and genre systems (BAZERMAN, 2012; CURRY & LILLIS, 2016).

Keywords: Fanfictional Creative Writing, sociocultural theory, case study.



Resumen

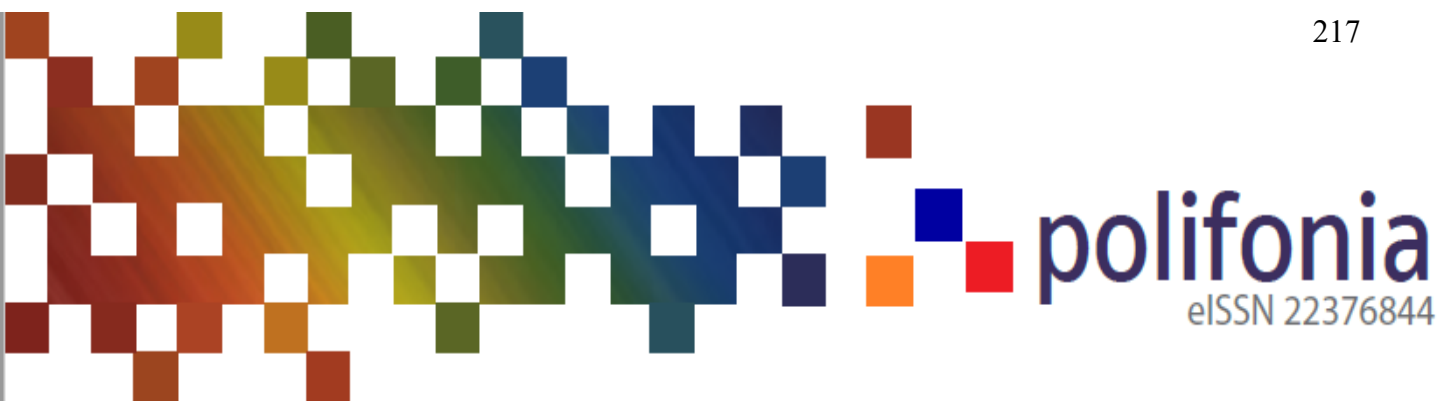
El género fanfictional no ha sido ampliamente investigado en Brasil. En realidad, hay muy pocos trabajos sobre este género en las universidades (MYERS, 2006, MORLEY, 2007, BLYTHE & SWEET, 2008, HEALEY, 2009; OBERHOLZER, 2014). Debido a esto, un curso de Escritura Creativa Fanfictional en inglés (ECFE) fue desarrollado y ministrado a finales de 2016. Este curso contó con 5 alumnos de la graduación en Letras. Dos de los objetivos de este curso eran: 1) identificar y 2) desarrollar los conceptos sobre fanfictions. Para este artículo, se utilizó sólo la estudiante A como ejemplificadora. La metodología aplicada fue el Estudio de Caso (DUFF, 2008, 2012, DYSON, 2005, STAKE, 2006). El curso ECFE tuvo como base la teoría sociocultural vygotskiana (VYGOTSKY, 2004; 2007). Como resultado, la estudiante A demostró señales de desarrollo referentes a los hechos sociales, actos de habla, conjunto de géneros y sistema de géneros (BAZERMAN, 2012; CURRY & LILLIS, 2016).

Palabras clave: Escritura Creativa Fanfictional; Teoría Sociocultural; Estudio de caso

1. Introduction

Creative Fanfictional Writing (ECF) has not been widely investigated in Brazil. In fact, there are very few papers on ECF in Brazilian universities and much less publications in this area (MYERS, 2006, MORLEY, 2007, BLYTHE & SWEET, 2008, HEALEY, 2009 and OBERHOLZER, 2014). However, the genre *fanfictions* have been one of the largest genres produced in the world (JENKINS, 2007). According to Jenkins (2007, p. 45), fanfictions may be a constitutive part of the participatory culture. Still for him, the participatory culture is a phenomenon in which creation and sharing are intrinsically ordered.

Based on one of the most famous websites for fanwriting publications, *Wattpad*, people from different countries prefer to publish their fanfictions in English. This may happen because ficwriters can establish a broader readership in the English language. Furthermore, the Wattpad moderators claim that their website is a quite attractive publishing platform. Statistically speaking, they publish around 1.000 new fanfictions daily. In addition, the Wattpad moderators highlight that they have more than 70.000 ficreaders subscribed and 50 writing resources available to help their ficwriters compose



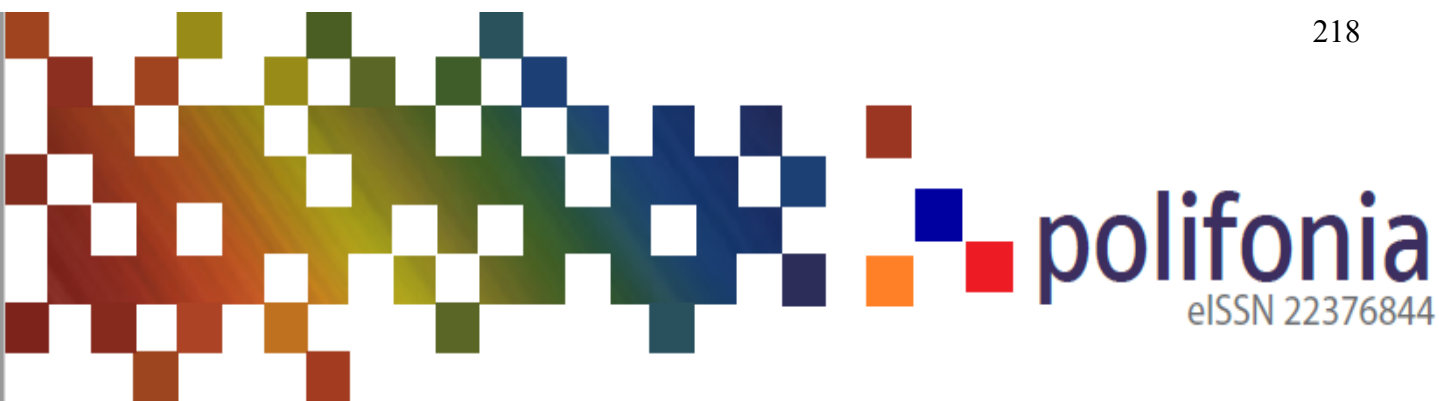
their fanfictions, acquire new ficreaders and even attract big publishers to purchase their texts.

2. The literary genre *fanfictions*

Fanfictions are texts written by fans (JENKINS, 2007). In fact, this is one of the most recurrent characteristics related to the fanwriting. However, fanzines are also texts written by fans. Therefore, what is the difference? This is the case of *Old Friends and New Fancies: An imaginary Sequel to the novels of Jane Austen*, published in 1914 by Sybil Briton. In this fanzine/fanfiction, Briton (1914) displayed postmodern features such as intertextuality (KRISTEVA, 1980) and literary collage (JAMESON, 1992).

Enthrillingly to notice, Briton (1914) masterfully combined 6 Austen's major characters to create a friendship networking. This friendship networking was composed by Elinor and Ferrars (*Sense and Sensibility*, 1811), Elizabeth and Darcy (*Pride and Prejudice*, 1813) and Anne and Wentworth (*Persuasion*, 1818). Furthermore, Briton (1914) created this whole imaginative world without the internet. Based on Briton (1914)'s *Old Friends and New Fancies: An imaginary Sequel to the novels of Jane Austen* fanzine, Dew (2014, p.18), pinpointed that Briton wrote a fanfiction, which was a text written by fans. Once more, this core characteristic was easily identified within fanzines (JENKINS, 2007).

To complexify the concept of fanfictions, Vargas (2005, p. 127) claimed that fanfictions were fanwriting created within the fanzine realm. She inferred that *fanfictions* became a genre due to the Star Trek program cancel in 1967. For this reason, its fans became orphans of this program and started writing fanfictions. Vargas (2005, p. 127) even dabbled in proposing some fanfictional characteristics. However, all her proposed



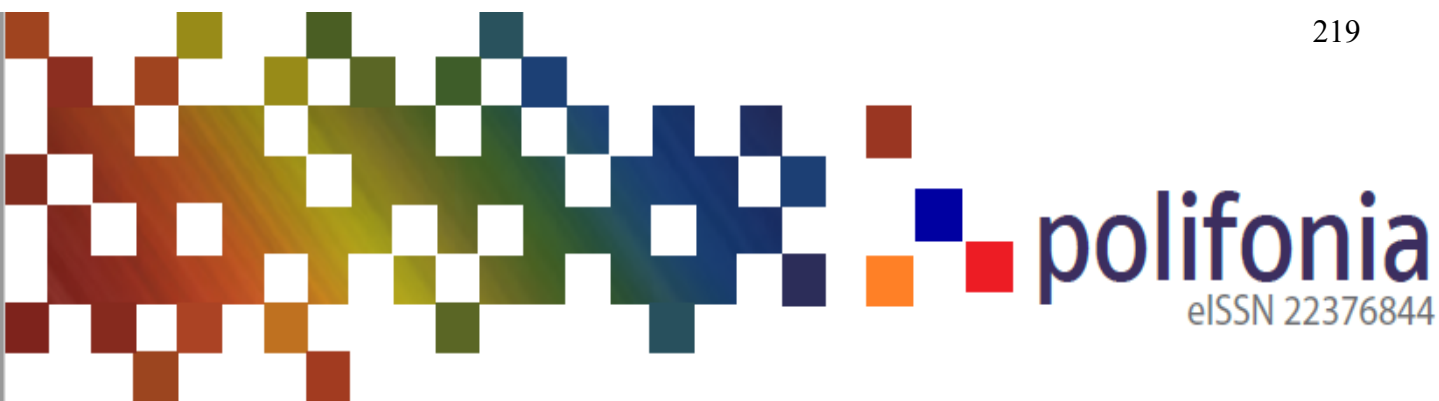
characteristics could be easily applied to fanzines. Therefore, what the Star Trek orphans wrote were fanzines, not fanfictions.

According to Marcus and Sollor (2009, p. 11), the various attempts to define any literary work have never been a very easy task. In fact, they proposed to define literature as “(...) *not only what is written but what is voiced, what is expressed, what is invented, in whatever form*”. Their definition is simultaneously ample and complex. Although Marcus and Sollor (2009, p. 12) recognized that the definition of literature had never been a very easy task, they believed it has always been paramount to literary critics to attempt to do it. If you comprehend fanfictions as literary works, then you should accept that the attempts to define fanfictions are as difficult as it is to define any other literary work.

Based on Jenkins (2007)’s fanfictional core characteristics, fanfictions are synonyms of fanzines, i.e., they are texts written by fans in a participatory cultural environment. To my mind, fanfictions are different from fanzines. Therefore, they cannot be comprehended similarly, but analogously. In other words, fanfictions are different from fanzines not because they have similar characteristics, but because they have distinctive characteristics which distant themselves from fanzines.

What are then these distinctive characteristics? In my opinion, fanfictions entail cyberliterary characteristics. This means that they encompass critical digitality (SERRANO, 2017), which provides its ficwriters, ficreaders and moderators with an expanding variety of paratextuality (GENETTE, 2005). In turn, to be considered a fanfiction, these digital and paratextual characteristics must be construed and concretized organically (TRIFONAS, 2018), i.e., they should emerge cohesively and coherently. As a result, all these characteristics (digitality, paratextuality and organicity) should be performed within a circuitous, outspreading and intricate genre system (BAZERMAN, 2012).

3. Methodology



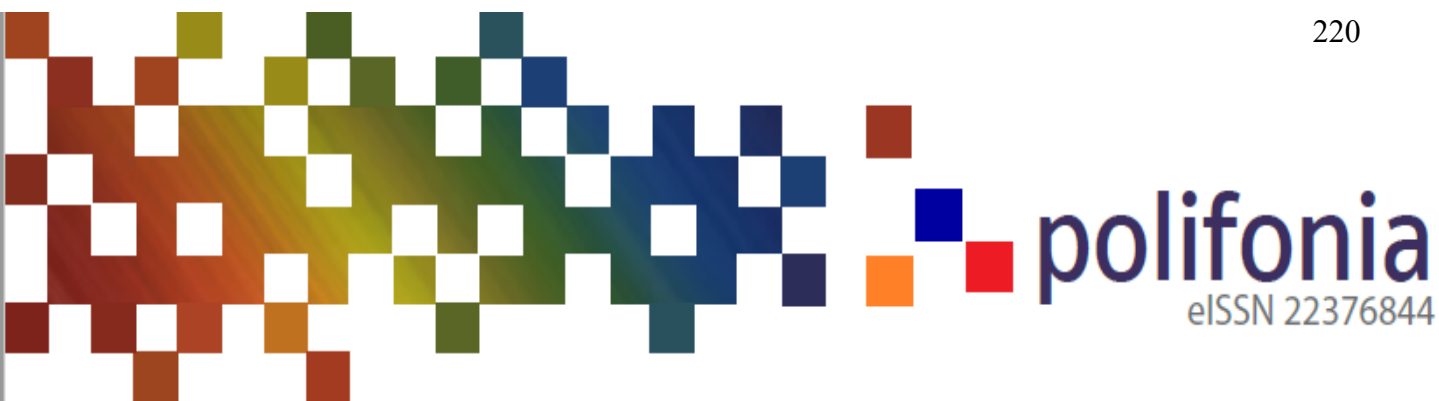
This research was organized based merely on the case study methodology (DUFF, 2012; DYSON, 2005; STAKE, 2006). According to Duff (2012, p. 95), “(...) *case study research is a potentially powerful yet quite practical form of inquiry and theory building that has led to important insights since the inception of the field of second language acquisition.*” In addition, she recognized that this type of research was not fixed and restrictive. On the contrary, Duff (2012, p. 96) furthered her case study concepts and attested that they could be adaptable to the research in progress.

In the same vein, Dyson (2005, p. 17) claimed that case studies encompass a quite penetrating and commonsensical examination of a specific object (also known as the case). This may happen because the researcher (even the teacher-researcher) could draw and spend more attention to the object (the case) being investigated. Therefore, the investigators would be able to concentrate on improving their analytical minds, creative thinking, coping strategies and communicative skills.

The Fanfictional Creative Writing (FCW, henceforth) in English course was designed and taught by the teacher-researcher. Even though 11 students enrolled in it, as it was a case study research, this article was elaborated on 1 student (namely student A). I chose her, because she could exemplify the FCW class development about the concepts of fanfictions (VYGOTSKY, 2004; 2007).

The FCW in English course was pedagogically based on the Vygotskian sociocultural theory (VYGOTSKY, 2007). Although Vygotsky (2007) was interested in comprehending people’s consciousnesses holistically, he became notorious for his coinage of the concept of Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD, henceforth). The ZPD was an abstract concept which entailed substantially the possible differences between what a learner could achieve by themselves, and what they could achieve without more experienced people’s various assistances.

The FCW in English course had 8 classes and was taught in 2016. To investigate the data collected adequately, the teacher-researcher recorded and transcribed all the eight



classes in a properly fashion. Furthermore, he carried designed and applied 2 types of feedback sessions. The first feedback session, namely 1, occurred by the end of the fourth class. The second feedback session, namely 2, occurred by the end of the eighth class. For Stuart (2004, p. 06), in Second Language (SL, henceforth) teaching, feedback sessions should be understood as pedagogical tools. For instance, SL teachers could use these tools to analyze their students' actual development (VYGOTSKY, 2007) and even assess their own teaching.

Furthermore, Stuart (2004, p. 08) highlighted that the feedback sessions could be beneficial to any professional since they could contribute to 1) the implementation of continuous improvement and business-excellence programs, 2) higher energy inside teams and therefore improved team output, 3) qualitatively higher levels of decision making, 4) improved relationships and interactions with clients and suppliers, 5) more effective presentations and 6) higher levels of negotiation skills. To my mind, feedback sessions may be quite effective pedagogical tools to help both teachers and students' educational development.

4. The development of undergraduate students' concepts about the fanfictional genre

The FCW in English course students displayed signs of developing their concepts about the fanfictional genre. To exemplify their development, student A was culled. Student A's concepts about fanfictions seemed quite restrictive in the beginning of the FCW course. Based on her initial fanfictional creative writing (see appendix 01), student A indicated that her comprehension of fanfictions was mainly related to its textual scripts. However, her definitions of the fanfictional genre seemed to be even more restrictive, relying more mainly on its etymological composition.

Student A's conceptual development of fanfictions could be identified in four distinctive aspects: 1) social facts, 2) speech acts, 3) genre set and 4) genre system (BAZERMAN, 2012). For Bazerman (2012, p. 312), social facts were what people

considered to be true. Speech acts were any utterance that had a performative function. Still for Bazerman (2012, p. 316), genres were speech acts with standardized and recognizable linguistic forms, structured in a genre set. In turn, one genre set was interconnected with other genre sets, which resulted in a genre system. Student A's four generic developmental stages could be summarized as follows:

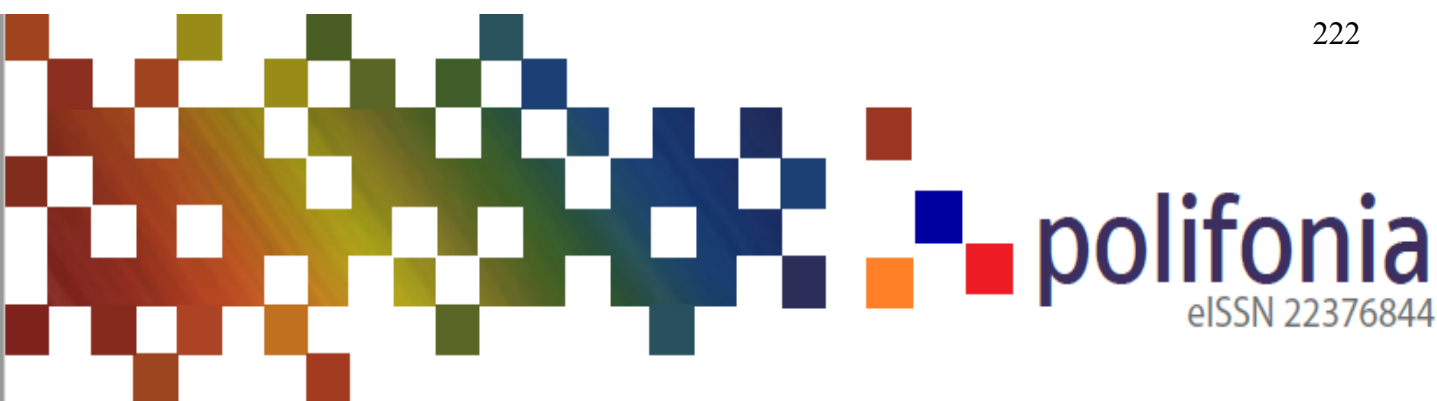


Fig. 01 – The FCW students' fanfictional generic developmental aspect

The first generic developmental stage, called here *social facts*, was largely identified in the FCW course. It was also worth highlighting that for Vygotsky (2004; 2007), development should not happen as an ever-ascending and linear process. The Vygotskian concepts of development were multi-faceted and dialectical. In fact, he did not present us with clear-cut and/or unambiguous definitions of development, due to his apparent intentions of understanding the human consciousness more holistically.

In relation to the social facts (BAZERMAN, 2012) stage, student A indicated that she only had one perspective upon fanfictions in the beginning of the FCW course (see table 01). According to Bazerman (2012, p. 312), the way people perceived a certain text might display the way these people comprehended their surrounding world as well as created their realities. The analysis of student A's initial fanfictional creative writing displayed that she did not consider apparently the digital scripts (HODGES & KRESS, 1998) in her first fanwriting process (see appendix 01).

According to Hodges and Kress (1998, p. 07), "(...) *no single code can be successfully studied or fully understood in isolation*". When student A did not ponder much her digital scripts uses, she showed that her knowledge about fanfictions was merely based on its communicative characteristics. However, for Hodges and Kress



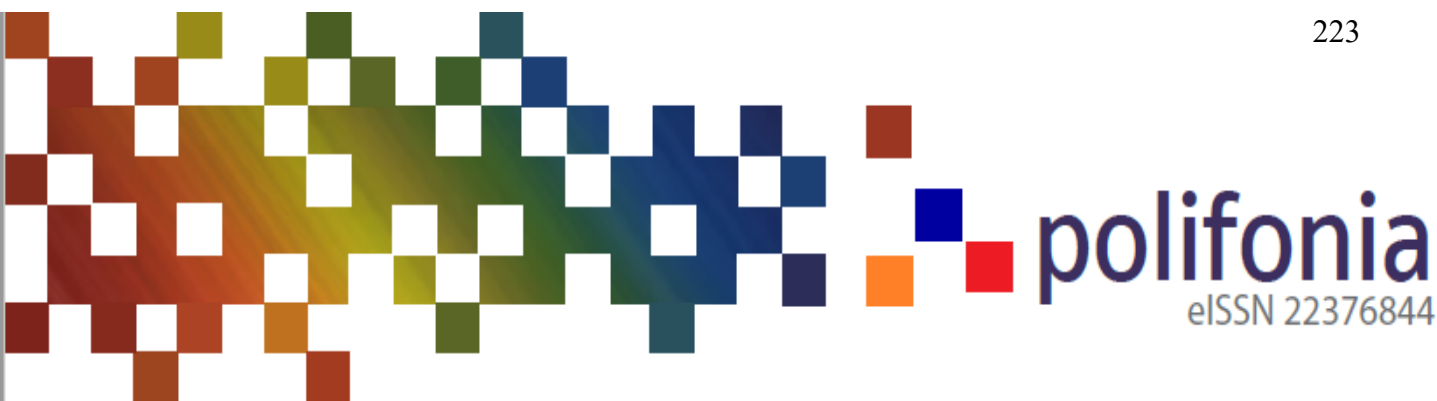
(1998, p. 11), the constant blending of (technological) affordances, constraints, and socio-cultural norms have determined more and more how people's current texts have been composed. Therefore, student A may also have showed digital illiteracy (SERRANO, 2017):

Q. 01 – Why or why not did you choose images for your fanfictions?	
Student A	This is the first time I think better about images and fanfictions but I believe it's important to attract people's attention because there are so many fanfictions out there if you don't do that people don't read your story but I have no idea how to use in the correct way maybe because I never learned how to use.

Table 01 – Student A's excerpt taken from the feedback session 1

The second generic developmental stage, called here *speech acts*, was also identified in the FCW course. For instance, based on student A's feedback session 1, she confessed that she did not know how to use digital scripts (JENKINS, 2007). Hence, student A disregarded other fanfictional aspects such as images and hypertexts, which also indicated her limited comprehension of the target language. For Hodges and Kress (1998, p. 08), this was what they considered to be the traditional concept of language: "(...) *the limitation to verbal language is a major inconvenience. Meaning resides so strongly and pervasively in other systems of meaning, in a multiplicity of visual, aural, behavioral and other codes, that a concentration on words alone is not enough.* Therefore, student A's feedback session 1 indicated that her views upon language were merely about its textual scripts.

According to Bazerman (2012, p. 321), the way people comprehended the language may help them attempt to comprehend more profoundly their surrounding



environments. In the FCW students' spontaneous speeches (VYGOTSKY, 2007), they claimed that fanfictions were just texts written by fans. As fans, they believed they had no constraints, which was not true. This was verified on the last class of the FCW students' classroom transcripts:

Excerpt 1 (class 8)

T: What else do you perceive differently now?

SA: Although I write fanfictions they are not mine (2s) I cannot do whatever I want (2s) as you said there are constraints.

SB, SC, SD and SE: (they all nodded agreeing with student A).

T: So do you see fanfictions differently?

SD: I understand what you say about the new concepts of fanfictions but I still think what I write is fanfictions.

SE: I liked what you taught but I think I have the same idea about fanfiction. I tried to publish our fanfiction in my fandom and didn't get it (2s) they did not allow it.

SD: I also had problems with my fandom to publish and I now feel a little trapped.

Most of the FCW students seemed to have struggled to broaden their comprehension of fanfictions. For example, students D and E had many observations about the teacher's proposed concepts of fanfictions. For Bazerman (2012, p. 309), even statements that may be scientifically accepted by one community may not be by the other. This may generate conflicts which, based on Vygotsky (2007), could be considered a sign of development. Based on student A's last class answers, she started considering her fanwriting constraints with her teacher's more experienced guidance (*Although I write fanfictions they are not mine (2s) I cannot do whatever I want (2s) as you said there are constraints*).

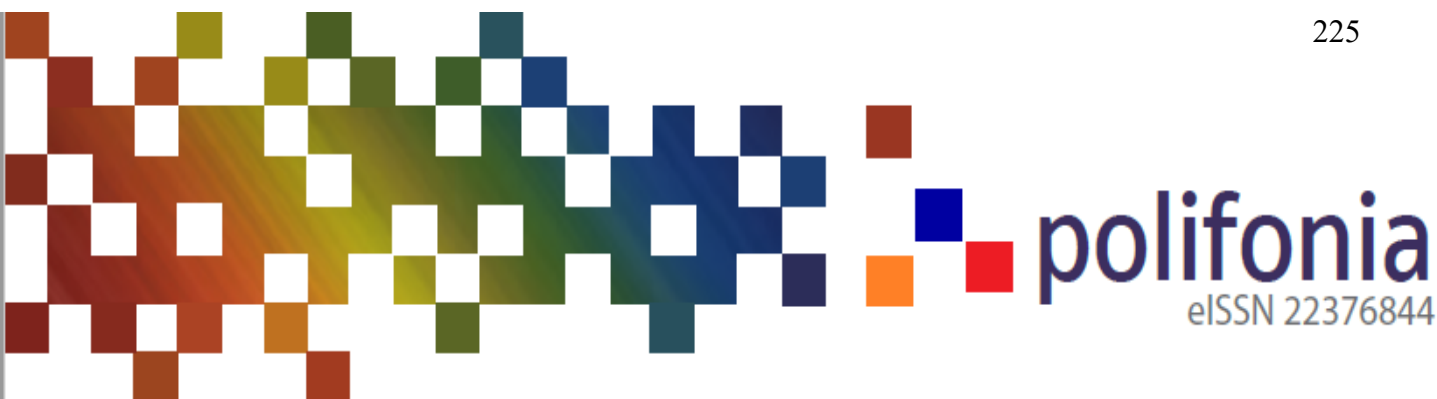
In relation to the third generic developmental stage, called here *genre set*, the fandom seemed to display more authority than their teacher. Based on the student A's feedback session 1 answers, she attested that she did not read her fandom guidelines to

write her initial fanfictional creative writing. According to Jenkins (2006, p. 79), it was crucial for the ficwriters to read their fandom guidelines, because as they were published on the internet, they might change constantly. Interestingly to notice, student A confessed that she did not do it as indicated as follows:

Q. 02 – Have you read your fandom guidelines? Why? Why not?	
Student A	To be honest, I never read.

Table 02 - Students' excerpts taken from the feedback session 1

In addition, student A may have not read the fandom guidelines, due to her main perspectives upon creativity: the I-paradigm approach (GLĂVEANU, 2011). For Glăveanu, the I-paradigm approach followers believed that creativity was a free-range and innate process. Student A's fandom guidelines reading may have created a set of conflictive feelings. One of them seemed to be the fandom's publishing requirements. As a result, student A stated on the last FCW class that she felt compelled to post the fandom policies on her Facebook. She did that, so all her ficreaders could be aware of them. The fandom's publishing requirements which student A posted are indicated below:



Fanfiction ENTRE CADASTRE-SE

[Categorias](#)
[Português](#)
[Liga dos Betas](#)
[Recentes](#)
[Pesquisar](#)
[Ajuda](#)

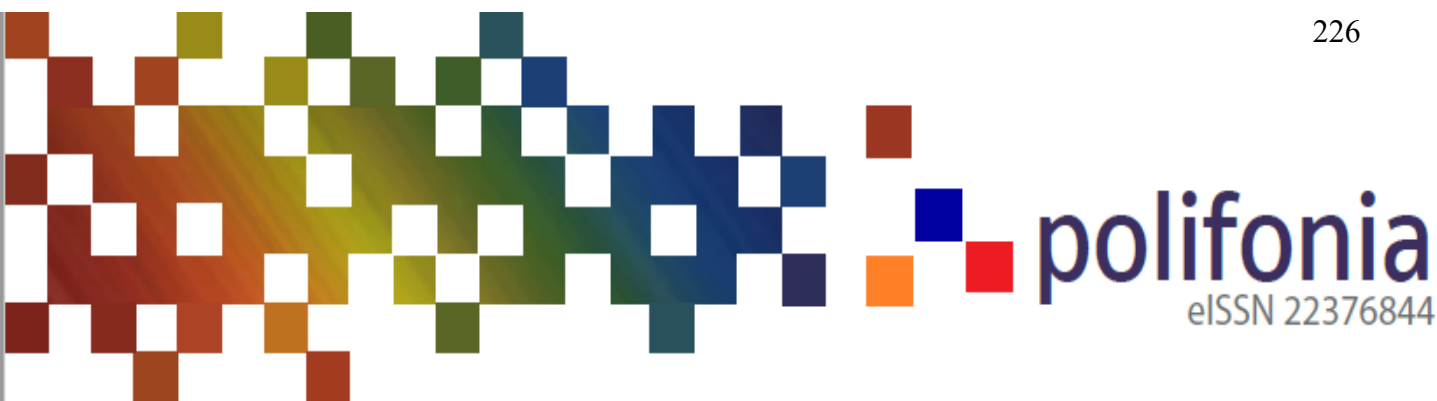
O que é proibido postar?

1. Textos que não sejam de sua autoria, mesmo que tenha autorização para tal.
2. Traduções, mesmo que tenha autorização para tal.
3. Adaptações que utilizem o material original na íntegra ou parte dele.
4. Textos em outros idiomas (pode conter trechos em outros idiomas, mas eles não podem compor a maior parte do texto postado).
5. Conteúdo que incentive ou dissemine discriminações, sejam por cor, sexo, religião, etc.
6. Textos abaixo de 100 palavras.
7. Títulos, sinopses e nomes de usuário (nome de exibição) que não sejam adequados a todas as idades, isto é, que sejam sexualmente sugestivos ou que façam apologia de drogas (lícitas ou ilícitas) ou de violência.
8. Avatares, capas de histórias ou quaisquer imagens que:
 - Conttenham violência explícita ou insinuação de violência (tortura, intenção de agressão, por exemplo);
 - Incentivem qualquer tipo de discriminação (racial, ideológica, etc.);
 - Incentivem o uso de drogas (lícitas ou ilícitas);
 - Conttenham nudez parcial e/ou total;
 - Conttenham imagens eróticas;
 - Sugiram a intenção sexual (beijo excessivamente provocante, pose que sugira relação sexual, entre outras);
 - Ofendam a moral de alguma forma.

Fig. 02 – Student A’s fandom’s publishing requirements

In relation to the fourth generic developmental stage, called here *genre system*, the FCW students’ consideration of the audience, fandom and genre sets build up the fanwriting genre system (BAZERMAN, 2012). As stated by Bazerman (2012, p. 311), intertextuality helped the writers to compose social facts that they desired to convey, conceal and/or criticize. In addition, for him, these writers could apply these social facts to propose new perspectives to reanalyze their own realities. However, this was not so simple to be accomplished, especially if they were inserted in an environment which hindered or even censored their potentiality. This was the case of student A’s fandom.

Although student A felt hindered by her usual fandom, she could notice that it had constraints. Consequently, she could be aware of her fandom choices. Nevertheless, by the end of the FCW course, student A seemed to have broadened her concepts about the fanfictional genre. She may have achieved that, not only because she started reading her fandom guidelines, but also because she was more aware of other fanfictional generic elements such as the digital scripts, the paratextual scripts and the audience. More importantly, student A noticed that these social facts and speech acts were structured in a



fanfictional genre set, which belonged to more a complex and intricate fanwriting genre system (BAZERMAN, 2012).

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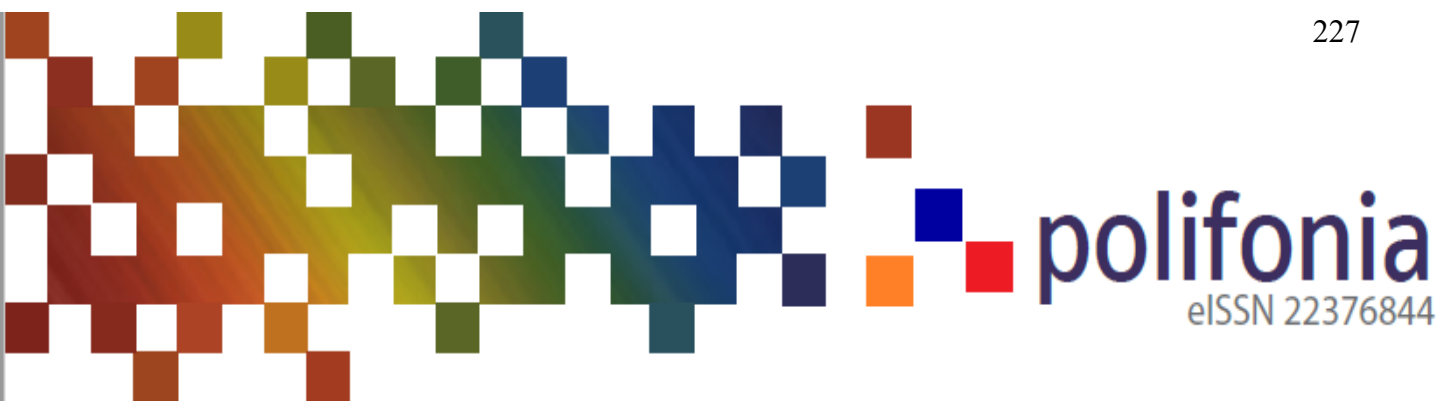
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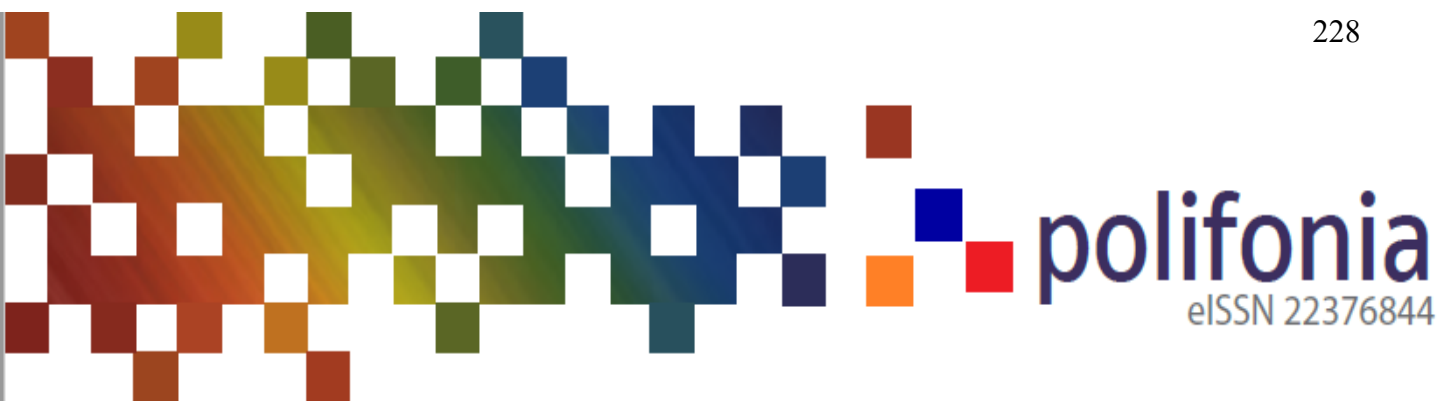
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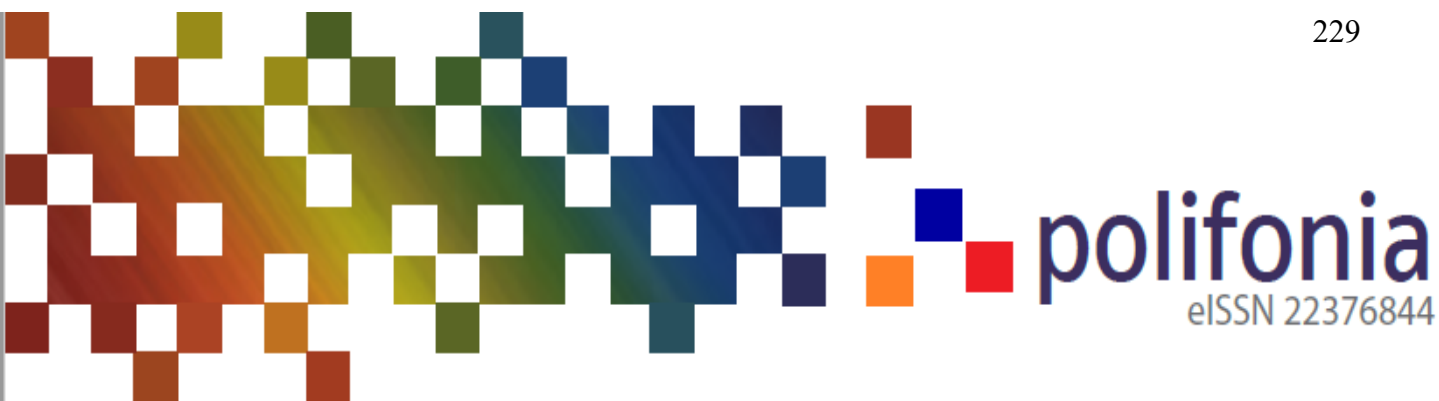
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6. Appendices

Appendix 01: Student A's initial fanfictional creative writing

She'd moved to L.A. at the age of 19, with the dream of pursuing a career in music so that she could make enough money to help her Cuban family move back to the U.S.. She'd been separated from her parents at the age of 15 - when she came back from school one day and found out her mom and dad had been deported back to their home country just a little over a year after they'd moved to Miami. Ever since, she'd promised herself she would do the impossible to help her family.

Lauren and her brother, Chris, had lived at their neighbor's house until Lauren graduated from high school. During her senior year, she'd met Camila, who would soon become her first serious girlfriend. They'd really fallen for each other - the kind of love that one may find once, maybe twice in their lifetime, if they're lucky enough. They started to build their future together when they moved to L.A., where Camila would start college and Lauren her musical career.

When Lauren got a record deal and started putting out singles, she soon became fairly famous and started touring all over the country. Camila, on the other hand, stayed in L.A. and focused on her studies and her internship at a recording studio. The distance - and the multiple fights that came with it - made them break up and live their separate lives.

Now, Camila has a boyfriend and a steady job as a songwriter and Lauren's just back in the city from recording her debut album. Just when they think they'd gotten over each other, destiny comes into play and makes them question everything.



Appendix 02: Student A's final fanfictional creative writing

An Encounter

A.N.: So I created a playlist for every song that is played out in this chapter. (<https://open.spotify.com/user/tinazardo95/playlist/3fTMqPcawYyvccRtvyTbE5>) Every time you see a number like these (1),(2) and so on, you can play the corresponding song of the playlist to match the scenario. All of the songs I chose were released prior to or during the year 2013, which is when this flashback takes place. Enjoy!

It was close to 8 PM when the sun started to set and Camila found herself wandering around the hallways of Keana Marie's house. Everything felt as if she was entering a new dimension. A heavy bass line was all she could make out of the overplayed hip-hop song that was making people go crazy downstairs (1). Their shouts and conversations and the splashes of water in the backyard pool were also faint.

Camila's head felt lighter, but it was also running a hundred miles per hour. She couldn't explain it if she tried – it was like everything around her was suddenly more interesting. The bright orange reflection shining on the surface of the picture frames on the walls; the smell of smoke that followed her up the stairs; the soaked tips of her wavy brown locks caressing the small of her back; the beige-colored carpet sliding under her bare feet as she dragged herself slowly to the end of the hallway. Every image, every sensation and every feeling that would normally go unnoticed in that simple scene seemed enhanced.

Drawn by her curiosity, the 18-year-old reached the handle of the last door of the hallway – a light pink one, unlike the other plain white doors she'd followed down until that point. Her mouth fell the instant she set foot in the room. It looked just like the type of bedroom she'd always wanted and had seen countless of times on tumblr, but none in real life. It was big. Bright. Colorful. Vibrant. Peaceful. The adjectives came to her mind as she studied the details.



The wall tapestry adorned with those tiny lights people put on Christmas trees. The towers of books and magazines organized in a circle on the floor by the opposite corner of the room. An old guitar missing 3 strings leaning on the wall. A huge stereo system sitting next to a wooden desk that had a closed laptop on top of it. Camila could've never afford to have a room like that. Back at home in Mexico her room was half that size and she had to share it with her little sister. Here in Miami, she was stuck with makeshift bed in her cousin's room – which wasn't half bad, actually, but it still didn't even come close to this one. In awe, she moved her attention from one detail of the room to another, wanting to take everything in at once and imagine what it would be like to sleep in there everyday, you know? Have that kind of life. "One day", she thought. Then, as if she had made the biggest discovery of the century, Camila took a few steps to the end of the room and oohed to herself as leaned forward to peep out of the window – "check out if the view was as dope as her surroundings", the little voice in her brain told her. And yeah, it was pretty dope. She could see everyone in the backyard in their bathing suits or less, taking shots or drinking beer from red solo cups, dancing, making out, smoking, playing games, all without noticing her wandering gaze. But someone else did.

“Camila, what on earth are you doing here?” Lauren giggled when the younger girl jumped at her spot by the window as she was surprised by her voice. Then, realizing who it was, her expression turned into a bubbly, relieved grin.

“I felt like exploring” she answered simply, shrugging. Lauren shook her head in amusement, taking a step towards the girl. She moved one loose strand of hair out of Camila’s face, studying her eyes for a few seconds. The younger girl shuddered slightly at the sudden contact of Lauren’s fingertips against the back of her ear, but was quickly brought back to reality when she heard the girl laugh again.

“Are you stoned right now?” the green-eyed girl half-whispered, although nobody could hear them if they tried, and Camila gave her a slight nod.

“Guess there’s a first time for everything” she chuckled. Lauren was a bit in disbelief, but the tiny smile that formed on her lips this time showed a little pride in the girl in front of her – for letting go and allowing herself to be a teenager.

“So,” the older girl started, deciding she could have a little fun with this scenario “how does it feel?”

Camila sighed and looked up at the ceiling, altering her balance to each one of her feet and trying to find a good way to describe how she felt in that moment.

“It feels... wait, what? Where’d the music go?” she turned to look at Lauren, who had closed the door behind her, and started to make her way to the stereo system, quickly turning it on and reaching for the aux cord to plug it in her phone.

“Keana’s room is soundproof” she explained without diverting her gaze from her phone screen as she went through the playlists in her library. “I want to play the songs I promised to introduce you to”.

“Oh yeaahh!!” the younger Latina exclaimed in realization. Lauren and her had connected through music since day one – when she met the girl, she was humming to a John Meyer song in her cousin’s friend’s basement and that was it. An instant bond. But Camila soon found out that the girl’s music taste went way beyond that. Sure, she appreciated singer-songwriters just like herself, but she new a larger variety of underground artists that sounded amazing and Camila hadn’t ever heard of them before. All of their conversations that followed that day had a part in which they would just talk about music. Lauren would show her a new sound and always promised to make a full playlist for them to listen together. Their friends called her “whipped” when they overheard that promise.

Camila didn’t know if she could classify what they had as “flirting”. They had built a pretty strong connection as friends in the last two months. She could even dare to say Lauren was a very special friend. But, although she felt it, she wasn’t ready to admit that she was starting to get butterflies in her stomach every time she was near the girl. It was scary to say something like that out loud when she wasn’t sure she’d be reciprocated. So they just naturally let them be drawn to each other. Well, yeah, maybe “whipped” was a good adjective after all.

Lauren turned up the volume as the first song of the playlist came on (2). Camila laughed softly when the 19-year-old started to move to the rhythm of the song, humming the melody to herself. She took the girl’s hands and started to mimic her movements; bouncing her head lazily and closing her eyes, letting herself *feel* the music as they did their little dance throughout the first half of the song.

“But you’re sure that I’d learn, I’m pushing through bodies, avoiding me and walking around you. But you’re cold and I burn, I guess I’ll never learn cause I stay another hour or two” Lauren sang, making the younger girl’s eyes open again.

“Their lyrics are like *aaaargh*” she clutched her fist shut at her own chest and grunted for effect. Lauren grinned and nodded strongly, squeezing the girl’s other hand that was still in her own.

“Yeah, Matty’s a genius, nothing less” she praised the lead singer of the band. Then, as the bridge of the song started, both girls decided to lie on Keana’s bed and just enjoy the sounds ringing in their ears a little bit.

They stared at the ceiling in silence; watching the room get dark as the night came in and the only thing that allowed them to see their surroundings were the tiny Christmas lights hanging beside the bed. Camila was still in her bikini top and tiny jean shorts – and the combination of her partially wet hair and clothing was leaving little stains all over the bed covers. Lauren’s dark hair was also sorta damp and the fact that it was beautifully spread over one of the colorful cushions wasn’t helping the situation – neither did the fact that her choice of outfit matched Camila’s almost perfectly, except she was wearing a loose tank top over her wet bikini top. None of them seemed to care.

They turned their heads to the side to stare at each other in amusement for a moment as the song faded out. Camila was about to thank her for being so amazing, for introducing her to this new musical world – but the very first seconds of the next song (3) made her stop in her tracks.

“I LOVE THIS SONG” she almost shouted, making Lauren laugh out loud, kicking the mattress underneath them slightly with her heels as she did so, entertained at how excited the younger girl could get, especially when she wasn’t sober.

“ME TOOOO” she mused in the same tone. Next thing they know, their voices were ringing smoothly in harmony to the song. As the chorus came closer, Lauren intertwined their fingers and started hammering their hands together against the bed to mark the pauses between the lyrics.

A moment.

A Love.

A Dream.

A Laugh.

A Kiss.

A Cry.

Our rights.

Our wrongs.

The two girls made the most of that song, getting up and running around the room, using a table lamp and a hairbrush for microphones, dancing, spinning around – forgetting there was a whole other world outside of that room. This was their reality, the here and the now. It was theirs.

By the end of this song, they lay down together once again, giggling and trying to catch their breaths as an instrumental tune started to play out (4).

Feeling a little dizzy than she already was after spinning around for so long, Camila found herself staring at Lauren and studying the details of the girl's makeup-less face. Her plumped lips, always chapped. Her thick, black eyebrows perfectly trimmed. Her lumpy cheeks covered in freckles by her nose. Her green eyes like two vast galaxies, one complementing the other.



The girl's collarbones peeking out of her tank top. The smooth ivory skin of her neck and chest. Her breasts. Her arms. Her left hand holding Camila's right one so delicately.

"But tell me – you didn't get to tell me," Lauren's voice was low when she interrupted Camila's wandering thoughts, noticing the way she was looking at her and reciprocating by staring intently at the girl's wide brown orbs



"How does being high for the first time feel?"

Camila had her lips slightly parted. She found herself in awe, practically hypnotized by the girl in front of her after realizing she now studied her figure in the same way. The doe-eyed girl inhaled deeply, lost in thought as the sensations that Lauren's image and the gentle caressing in the palm of her hand took over any sense she thought she still had in her blurry little mind.

"It feels..." she started once again, trying to form the right words "It feels like everything is just..." she rambled, diverting her gaze from the girl for a second, so she could focus. "My perceptions make everything seem bigger and better and more important and it's overwhelming in a way..." she turned to look at Lauren once again. The playful look that was plastered across the girl's face when they were singing and dancing had vanished completely, and her features now seemed calm and almost... lustful? Her eyes half-shut and trained on her own, her mouth slightly open, her chest rising and falling slowly with every deep breath and her fingers lightly tracing patterns all around the extension of Camila's right arm made the girl shiver. There was that overwhelming feeling again. But she also felt *bold*.

"But, at the same time," the younger girl continued, "It feels... so... natural" Lauren's face was now a mere inch from hers. Her head was spinning, the butterflies making a wild fuss in her stomach. Camila gulped, reaching her left hand to the green-eyed girl's face "it feels *ethereal*".

(5)

Lauren finally closed the distance between them. Both green and brown orbs fell shut as their lips connected for the first time ever. Camila felt like that was her first real kiss. She'd made out with a few boys in her hometown – rushed, awkward kisses during games of spin the bottle or at a secret corner of the school during recess. She never felt completely comfortable, never really into those guys – kissing them was just something girls her age were doing and, because of that, she thought she was supposed to do too. This was a completely different thing.

Lauren's lips were soft and gentle, moving with hers slowly in perfect sync, almost as if they danced to the music playing on the background. The girl's left hand now cupped the back of her head, playing with the baby hairs that adorned the nape of Camila's neck.

Baby, we both know that the nights were mainly made for saying things that you can't say tomorrow day

Crawling back to you

Ever thought of calling when you've had a few?

'Cause I always do

As the first chorus of the song begun, she felt Lauren's tongue run across her bottom lip asking for entrance and almost immediately granted it. The younger girl let out a small moan as they deepened the kiss slowly, making Lauren's mouth vibrate slightly and igniting in her an even stronger need for Camila. Everything was *magnified*. Their breaths became erratic as their actions got more intense. Lauren's hand quickly traveled down Camila's side to reach the girl's thigh, grabbing at it so she would place it around her waist. Camila's left hand still cupped the side of Lauren's face, but, as the tension built up, she brought her right one underneath the other girl's shirt, feeling the smooth skin of her stomach shudder beneath her at the contact. Everything was *unique*. Their hearts beating against each other, the occasional nips on each other's lips, the rubbing of the bare skin of their legs as they moved in sync. It felt like nothing they'd ever experienced. It was all too much and, at the same time, not enough.

As the song faded out and another series instrumental sounds started to fill the room (6), they slowed down their actions and separated their lips, resting their foreheads against each other with their eyes still closed as they caught their breaths once again. After a few moments, Camila opened her eyes to find Lauren's already staring at her accompanied by a shy smile on her lips and a light blush on her cheeks. The younger girl chuckled lightly, her face gradually turning as red as Lauren's as she started to laugh too.

They spent a few moments like that, with Camila caressing the small of the older girl's back and paying attention to the series of chills that Lauren's caresses provoked with her hand back on the girl's neck. Their hooded-eyed looks told each other something they both understood perfectly but couldn't put into words. As if all the time they'd spend together, every conversation, every laugh, every secret shared and kind words exchanged made complete sense now. They didn't know they'd been waiting for each other for so long until that very final encounter – but now it was impossible not to see it. It had to be them.

Camila pecked the girl's lips quickly, breaking their streams of thought for a second and making Lauren grin at the action. The older girl had never been in love, and Camila knew that. But the sparkle in her eyes in that very moment told Camila she might be starting to get to know that feeling very well.

"Guess this should be a day for first-times, then".

