

Worlds of many languages. Transformations in fictional text universes

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Abstract

This article presents a study of how meaning is created when participating in a fictional text universe, and thereby provides insight into literacy aspects of recreational use of fictional stories. The analysed material consists of transcriptions of pen-and-paper role-playing sessions. The results show that the role-players transform fragments of information from different languages, modalities and semiotic systems into the situated practice of role-playing. In the conclusion, the competence to transform in relation to the role-playing, and in a wider context to participate in text universes, is discussed as a multiliteracies competence needed in the situated activity. The way in which language and communication is used requires, among other things, the ability to integrate different languages, modalities and semiotic systems, which in turn opens up new perspectives on what literacy in a recreational use of text universes can be.

Keywords: *Fictional text; multiliteracies; recreational text use*

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Most young people in their late teens in Sweden, and probably also in many other parts of the world, devote several hours each day to fictional stories in a recreational context (Lundström & Svensson, 2017). Narrative forms of expression are, however, currently in transition. Novels become games, games become movies, movies become TV-series and so on, and the majority of the narratives are mediated digitally and globally. In his book *Convergence Culture: Where Old and New Media Collide* (2006), Jenkins highlights two prominent aspects of the media landscape of today; media convergence, where many different mediations are used to distribute a certain content, for example the *Star Wars* phenomenon, and a cultural convergence, where the traditional roles of producer and consumer are challenged. In the convergence

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culture, participants combine and mix content from various media forms and from various modalities (Jenkins, 2006; Lundström & Olin-Scheller, 2010). These transitions place great demands on people's literacy skills. The research interest of this article is to understand how literacies apply in this context. In the article, the concept of *transformation* (Brummet, 1991) is used as a way of analysing literacy in recreational media use within the convergence culture. Brummet uses transformation to denominate the process when fragments of information get their fixed meaning when combined with other fragments into patterns according to certain logics. In his view, this process refers to making meaning in life, but the concept is also relevant for understanding a specific activity. The latter is how the concept is used in the article and it is further explained in the theoretical framework below.

The aim of the article is to contribute with knowledge concerning literacies in the part of the convergence culture called text universes. We understand the concept of text universe as a broad repertoire of texts from various media that relate to the same content (cf. Lundström & Olin-Scheller, 2010, 2014; Svensson, 2013). More specifically, the article analyses empirical examples from a role-playing game belonging to the *Warhammer* text universe, focusing on *how* the players transform meaning and contribute to the storytelling by using different semiotic systems and languages. Thus, the research question is:

- *How do the participants in a role-playing game use transformations to create a story within a text universe?*

In this article, the five participants are men in their early twenties, who are all experienced role-players, and have been playing at least once a week for five years or more. They are presented in more detail in the *Method and material* section below.

Since text universes are broad and include many different mediations, they undermine the concept of common culture. Instead, they promote divergence among the participants (cf. Jenkins, 2006). Based on this, we have analysed the transformations from a multiliteracies perspective (New London Group, 2000). In order to categorise the different kinds of transformations, we have used Jakobson's (2004) view of the translation process as a process of transfer of meaning, where transfer can be either intralingual, interlingual or intersemiotic (see theoretical framework below). The transformations are discussed as a requirement in order to participate in a fictional text universe, thereby shedding light on literacy aspects of an important part of recreational media use of today.

Background

The media-related development that has taken place over the last decade has led to an increased possibility of constructing text universes by expanding the boundaries of an original fictional text, and thereby continuing the narrative in different communities of practice (e.g. Manderstedt & Palo, 2011; Olin-Scheller & Wikström, 2011;

Svensson, 2018; Svensson & Lundström, 2019). Many text universes therefore provide comprehensive material for analysis and the universe that is the subject of analysis in this article, Warhammer Fantasy, is no exception. The Warhammer Fantasy text universe represents a classic struggle between good and evil in, for example, video games, novels, role-playing games, comic books, miniature games, visual arts, card games, and miniature art. The participants in this text universe, as well as in others, rarely use one single mediation of the content. Rather, the parts are combined in various ways. Text universes of the convergence culture are thus often multimodal, and can be considered as an informal learning environment (e.g. Jenkins, 2006; Lundström & Olin-Scheller, 2014). The participants in a text universe also often transform content between various media forms when they produce and consume, or prosume (Tapscott, 1996), texts. For example, a reader/fan of *Anne of Green Gables* can produce a film variant of the story and then post that film on the Internet, thereby expanding the universe further (e.g. Lundström & Svensson, 2019).

The transformations between texts in a text universe often remain invisible. For example, it is difficult to see how participants use other texts when creating meaning from reading novels or playing certain video games. The chosen material in this article, an adventure from a pen-and-paper role-playing game belonging to the Warhammer Fantasy text universe, makes it possible to study these transformations, as well as show some aspects of how the text universe is constructed by the participants.

In this kind of role-playing game, a group of players, usually four to six people, meet to build a coherent story together. At the game sessions, one person is usually the game master, meaning he or she is responsible for creating the narrative. The other players act out one fictional character each and interact in the fictive world. It is up to the game masters to describe what happens when the players interact in the world, as well as to play all non-player characters that the players meet. The result of this 'acting' is a story made up of utterances and descriptions of the environment that the players encounter. Although not necessary, the game master often has a rough written script with some environments, characters, creatures, and certain events described in advance. This prepared material is usually referred to as an adventure, which functions as a basis for the construction of the storyworld and as guidance to the players for what they should do.

This creative process is also governed by a large number of rules, loosely designed, for what is allowed in the fictive world. The pen-and-paper concept is largely misleading since only small parts of the activity use pen and paper. Instead, oral communication is the dominant resource. However, in some situations dice are rolled to determine what happens in the story. In certain games, such as *Dungeons & Dragons*, the famous precursor to Warhammer, dice rolls are used frequently, and in others not at all. The Warhammer Fantasy game should be placed in the middle of this range. Other materials the participants use to create the world are books and maps. It is also not a game in the traditional sense, as there is no outright winner. Instead,

the players work together with a common goal.¹ Similar to *Dungeons & Dragons*, the setting of the Warhammer game is a medieval-like fantasy-world, and the common goal is often to fight evil plots and monsters, explore unknown territories, and win fame and fortune, even though the game enables many other kinds of adventures. If a player character dies, or if the players fail a quest, it is sometimes considered “losing” (even though this word is never used). Nevertheless, the story continues with new characters and quests. Hence, the playing of a single storyline can go on for years.

The game studies research field is extensive, and much research has been conducted on role-playing games. However, most of this research concerns digital games and has ontological claims. Research concerning literacies in relation to pen-and-paper role-playing gaming is limited. In one study that relates to the present article, Gary Alan Fine (1983) shows that participation takes place at several framed levels simultaneously, where different rules of behavior apply at every level. Lundström & Olin-Scheller (2014) uses a similar perspective when studying how the role-players create meaning through remediating statements of different modalities and contextual configurations, and also how playing fiction is a vital aspect of the processes of creating identity. These aspects are intertwined in semiotic remediation practices in the way the participants expand the narratives in participatory storytelling.

Method and material

The analysis of this study is based on an extract of 3 hours out of 50 hours of audio recordings from gaming sessions performed as a recreational activity. All five players in the group are present during all of these 50 hours. The article presents some sections that have been transcribed into typographic text (Kvale, 2007) to show the different forms of transformations that occur. All empirical examples are translated from Swedish. Other material belonging to the Warhammer text universe is not subject to empirical analysis for this study, but is, as the analysis will show, an inseparable part of the universe when playing, even though it is not possible to determine exactly which other material the players use.

The gathering of empirical material and the published results follow the ethical guidelines established by the Swedish Research Council (2017). This means that the players have approved of the recordings and that they are aware of the research context. All of them have participated voluntarily and have been informed that they could cancel their participation at any time. However, all participants have chosen to participate throughout all of the gaming sessions. To anonymise the participants, their real names have been changed. In the article, the players will be called Andreas, Daniel, Erik, and Gunnar. These four players knew each other from previous experiences of role-playing games when the adventure started. The fifth participant is only

¹ For a more detailed introduction to role-playing games, see https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=U_v3vTAEML0.

referred to as The game master, and did not know the others from before. In pen-and-paper role-playing, as well as in digital gaming, men are considerably overrepresented (Lundström & Svensson, 2017). Thus, it is not in any way a strategic choice to include only men.

Theoretical framework

In this study, the overarching perspective is multiliteracies. As far back as the year 2000, the New London Group argued that the modern multi-channel system undermines the concept of a common culture and instead promotes subcultures and divergence. This means that individuals participating in the same situated practice (Gee, 2000, 2004) can be expected to possess different cognitive patterns and abilities, thereby providing access to many different sorts of knowledge without erasing various subjectivities. However, in the analysed examples, the linguistic, technological, cognitive, and social accoutrements also form and frame the participants' understanding of the story created. For example, in role-playing, it is critical to understand knowledge in relation to the rules and goals expressed in the overall game situation, but also in relation to the ongoing storytelling (Lundström & Olin-Scheller, 2014). Attending this practice includes knowledge of many social conventions, but also knowledge of how to break and change them, for example adapting genres to fit their own purposes. Thus, the creation of meaning in a situated practice requires a development of systems for interpretation and transformation, according to Gee (2000).

The variety of knowledge is the foundation of multiliteracies, which, in the New London Group's use of the concept, is mainly discussed in relation to classroom teaching. Rather than seeing culture as something stable to be transferred to the student, he or she is considered a transformer of meaning and a constructor of cultures. However, their arguments are also applicable to understanding literacy in text universes as a recreational, social, and participatory activity, because here, as well as in the classroom, the events are characterised by "multiple languages and dialects, multiple community histories and life experiences, multiple intelligences, in sum, multiple ways of being human" (Cope & Kalantzis, 2000, p. 143).

In the field of multiliteracies, critical literacy is an important part. Luke (2000) distinguishes between three aspects of critical literacy from a multiliteracies perspective. First, a meta-knowledge of different meaning systems and the environments in which they are embedded is needed. Second, the participant must master the technical and analytical skills to use the systems in different contexts. Third, an understanding of how these systems and skills relate to power interests, where differences in literacies and knowledge occur, is needed.

A more specific use of the concept of transformation can be found in the theory that Brummet (1991) has developed to demonstrate how people create meaning in life through a process of perceiving, where they transform *bits* to *texts* according to certain logics. Brummet uses the notion of bits to denominate the experiences that

people perceive as units, for example, an event, a person, a thing or a word, because they have learned to do so. The bits have potential meaning in a logic system, such as a symbolic system, and receive their fixed meaning when combined with other bits into patterns, hence the concept of transformation. The bits become the building blocks of constructed texts. The texts should not be considered artefacts in a traditional way, but a manifestation of how people through agency organise their experiences in socially shared and sanctioned contexts. In the present study, for example, the manifestation is the story that the players develop during the gaming sessions.

The texts are combined with contexts and the construction of subject positions to form *mosaics*. Brummet states that "texts and subjects are created as continuous with one another, with each having an integral and reciprocal place in an ordering of meaning, and with each created simultaneously" (p. 81). The texts and the subject are thus not to be considered as dialogical, but rather as an entity and a continuity in the situated practice.

The construction of a mosaic, that is to find meaning in an experience, is, according to Brummet, an act of linking texts, contexts, and the subjects together – an act that requires *glue*. Brummet calls this glue *homology*. For example, what constitutes a certain text universe cannot be defined outside the situation that a person participates in. Only that person can find the meaning in the experience by interpreting how bits fit together. If he or she cannot see any connection to the mosaic, that is does not experience any homology, bits are not included in the text universe, and do not therefore contribute to the experience. Although Brummet's argument is applied to a much broader context than text universes, he uses examples from popular culture to illustrate his perspective. Hence, his view of how mosaics are constructed is relevant for how text universes are constructed. The examples of role-playing that are used in this article illustrate how a text, in this case a role-playing adventure, is created continuously during the gaming session. The narrative structure of the adventure depends on the homology that allows transformations of bits to the construction of the text. The homology is in turn a result of the agency at the time. If the participants do not accept a bit as part of the mosaic, that is the text universe they participate in, it will not become part of the text, in this example the adventure they play, and thus not part of the social practice that the text universe represents. Although the present analysis is based on the text that is created during the role-playing session, the text, the context, and the subjects should be considered as a structural unit in a mosaic. The homology of the mosaic is a representation of the meaning-making process taking place during the gaming session. Since the text, in Brummet's sense, is different for each participant, the meaning of the text's *what* becomes subordinate to *how* and *why*. When we are analysing transformations in this study, the question of *how* the text is constructed is the focal point, not what it is.

The concept of transformation implies change. To categorise this change, we use Jakobson's (2004) view of the translation process as a process of transfer. According to Jakobson, language, on a cognitive level, always requires recoding interpretations

and there is no complete equivalence between different code-units. The meaning of a sign is its translation to some further, alternative sign. He refers to three categories of the translation process. The first of Jakobson's categories is "[i]ntralingual translation or *rewording* [which] is an interpretation of verbal signs by means of other signs of the same language" (p. 139, original italics). He differentiates this category from "[i]nterlingual translation or *translation proper* [which] is an interpretation of verbal signs by means of some other language" (p. 139, original italics). As a complement to these two categories, Jakobson adds a third: "Intersemiotic translation or *transmutation* [which] is an interpretation of verbal signs by means of signs of nonverbal sign systems" (p. 139, original italics). While the first two categories, intralingual and interlingual translation, have a verbal focus, the third category, intersemiotic translation, focuses on the transfer of meaning between verbal and non-verbal systems. Since the present study has an even broader understanding of language, we use Brummet's concept of transformation, rather than translation, to describe literacy in a text universe, but we use Jakobson's categories as a limitation for coding the empirical material and as a way to categorise the various processes of transformation. Jakobson and Brummet share a common view that the meaning of a sign, or a bit, cannot be defined outside the context in which it occurs in and the subjects using it. We therefore find that their perspectives complement each other in the conceptual apparatus used in the article, despite the fact that their scientific background and perspective on language differ.

Transformations in the text universe of Warhammer Fantasy

In this section, we will show how the role-players use different kinds of transformations in the situated practice of the Warhammer Fantasy text universe. The examples occur frequently throughout the material and should therefore be regarded as symptomatic. They can be categorised based on the transformations that occur; intralingual, interlingual or intersemiotic transformations in order to illustrate one aspect of participation in text universes. At the same time, they offer different perspectives of the same phenomenon. Hence, one form of transformation does not exclude other forms.

In the transcriptions, italics are used to distinguish utterances made by the character in the narrative of the game, as opposed to utterances made by the player outside the character. Thus, italics show utterances made within the fictive world (see also Drachen & Heide Smith, 2008; Lundström & Olin-Scheller, 2014). Sections in bold font indicate comments of particular interest for the analysis of the empirical material.

Intralingual transformations

The first kind of transformation concerns construction of the content of the text universe. Focus is on verbal language in Swedish. The transformations do not include

other languages or semiotic systems. Instead, knowledge from other verbal sources in oral or written form within the Warhammer Fantasy text universe is incorporated into the role-playing adventure, thus being considered intralingual in this section. For example, in Excerpt 1 the players decide to visit a temple dedicated to the fictive world's largest deity, Sigmar, to ask for help. The player Daniel, who plays the character of Johannes, meets a cleric, who is portrayed by the game master. The following conversation takes place:

Excerpt 1

- The game master (as a cleric)** *Well ... I don't know. What would that be? Do you have any suggestions what one could do?*
- Daniel (as Johannes)** *Maybe send for **Sigmar's most sacred order of knights templars.***
- The game master (cleric)** *Yes...It sounds serious what you are saying, but we of course need something to draw conclusions from. We cannot start chasing shadows in this town. I am sure you understand.*

The adventure has so far not contained any information about the knights templars of Sigmar, but in the Warhammer Fantasy universe, such a brotherhood of knights is found in numerous sources. Daniel thus transforms a bit he has received from another part of the text universe, which we do not now, to construct the text. A similar example is shown in Excerpt 2, where Daniel asks for a Shallya-priestess never mentioned before, which causes the game master to, through a random citizen, introduce several deities:

Excerpt 2

- Daniel (Johannes)** *Excuse me, my friend has hurt himself. I wonder if you have someone ... some, how to put it, priest who can perform small healing miracles. Perhaps a Sigmar- or a **Shallya-priest**, or priestesses in the latter case.*
- The game master (random person on the street)** *Yes, inside the city, there are temples dedicated to all major deities. **There is an Utric-temple, a Sigmar-temple, a Herena-temple, a Shallya-temple ...***

The other players do not react to Daniel's (Johannes') statement, suggesting that either they are also familiar with the *bit* or they quietly sanction the use anyway. In any case, the result is that the story is constructed in relation to a wider context. The participants create and maintain the text universe as a mosaic by transforming bits that carry meaning in this way. As Brummet (1991) claims, the exact meaning of a bit, for example "knights templars of Sigmar", is constructed within the practice and is dependent on the participants. Hence this example illustrates a transformation of information rather than a transfer of an already defined utterance. The content and the borders of the text universe are not fully possible to define, because the

construction is a representation of the knowledge that the participants, in this case at least Daniel, possess. Even though all the players transform bits of information in this way, Daniel does so more frequently than the others, giving him a certain status within the situated practice. Although never explicitly stated, Daniel seems to be an authority accepted by the other players.

However, it is reasonable to assume that the other players in the example above would not accept just any transformation from Daniel. By accepting the transformation, they become co-creators of the manifested text. The homology that is reflected when Daniel transforms these bits of information to the adventure therefore is, or becomes, the other participants' homology too.

The kind of transformation of bits seen in Excerpt 1 and Excerpt 2 is very frequent in the empirical material and thus an important part of creating meaning in and through the text universe. As mentioned earlier, there is an outline script for the adventure, but the players are free to interpret what fits in the fictive world, as is illustrated by Daniel's transformation of bits that were not anticipated by the authors of the script. Thereby, the final version of the story is a result of a negotiation among the players.

Sometimes the negotiation seems to be too complex to handle within the fictive world. The players then have to "leave" their characters and discuss the framing of the narrative at a meta-level. In Excerpt 3, it becomes visible how the players try to decide what a reasonable knowledge for the characters could be.

Excerpt 3

Gunnar (Bethir)	You know about ... three cities. Altdorf, Nuln, Marienburg. Everything else is a bonus.
Daniel (Johannes)	And Middenheim.
Gunnar (Bethir)	And Middenheim. Four then.
The game master	You have been to Carroburg now.
Gunnar (Bethir)	Yes. Yes, but I mean, everyone knows about these four cities.
The game master	Mm.
Andreas (Esme)	Bigger cities, he means.
The game master	Mm.
Gunnar (Bethir)	The really big ones.
Daniel (Johannes)	Then we have, what is it called, the one in a crater ...
Gunnar (Bethir)	Well, well, but as I said, we hope to get glasses for the wine, so we don't have to drink from the bottle.

In this example, all the players are engaged in a discussion about which bits that are reasonable to transform to the text they are creating. They all seem to agree upon four city-names that their characters know about, but when Daniel tries to introduce a fifth city, Gunnar ignores the question and returns to the narrative. The city Daniel refers to exists in the text universe, but in this case the framing of the practice, that

is to role-play an adventure, is challenged, since the discussion moves away from the story. Gunnar has been part of this discussion, but clearly interrupts it and moves the conversation in another direction, that is back to the story. From now on the city in the crater is excluded from the adventure and is never mentioned again. In line with Brummet's (1991) concepts, the homology is not strong enough to incorporate this potential bit of information into the manifested text. This can only be decided by the players in the situated practice.

There are also social accoutrements based on a rule system in the role-playing practice that frame what is accepted and not accepted in the creation of the narrative. In Excerpt 4, Gunnar and Daniel's understandings of the situation do not match the framing, which in this case concerns how much help they are allowed to give to the active player. In the scene that takes place, Andreas' character Esme is alone on watch, while the other characters are asleep. As they are attacked by a bunch of villains, Andreas is trying to find out what to do. The other players try to help by giving some suggestions, but after a while the game master puts an end to the discussion by stating that Andreas has to figure this out by himself, since the other characters are supposed to be asleep and thereby not allowed to speak according to the critical framing of the role-playing situation. The rules of the game do not state that this kind of conversation is not allowed, but imply that a player should act as his or her character. The participants have to interpret what this means, thereby transforming a bit of information to the text. This is what the game master does when he with an authoritarian voice declares that Andreas has to figure out for himself what to do.

Excerpt 4

Andreas (Esme)
The game master
Andreas (Esme)
Gunnar (Bethir)
Andreas (Esme)
Gunnar (Bethir)
Daniel (Johannes)
Gunnar (Bethir)
The game master

There must be a rope somewhere on the deck.
Yes, there is one under the tarpaulin.
Then I take ... or I take a strap. That's right.
A grappling hook. No.
That's a damn hook you throw at things.
Yes, but ... yes.
I thought you would hook ...
I mean a boathook. What is that called?
Let him figure this out by himself where he stands.

Together Excerpts 1–4 demonstrate variations of a practice where the boundaries of what is accepted in the manifested text are continuously negotiated (cf. Gee, 2000). The definite meaning of bits of information depends on *how* the participants introduce and use them. These transformations do not follow clear rules, but must be developed in relation to the on-going practice. Hence, the role-playing story is created by transformations of content, bits, from a wider context, the text universe. These four examples should be considered typical in the material and indicate that both the knowledge about bits and the power to introduce them differ

among the players, and that their impacts on the story therefore differ, but also that a mutual experience of homology is needed for bits to be accepted into the narrative.

Interlingual transformations

In the Warhammer Fantasy universe, basically all the material, including the role-playing game, is produced in English. When playing, the language of communication is Swedish, but a number of English utterances, often with a specific meaning, are integrated in the conversation in the manner illustrated in the excerpts below. Even though not proper translations, these bits are, in line with Jakobson (2004), considered interlingual transformations, since they get their manifested meaning in the Swedish language context. This of course requires knowledge of the English language among the players. Similar to the previous category, the transformations concern verbal signs, but according to Jakobson, translations from another language require a different recoding interpretation than intralingual translation. Therefore, the use of bits in this section should be considered a co-variation of the use presented in the previous section.

The utterances in a bold font in Excerpts 5 and 6 are used in English even in the original Swedish dialogue.

Excerpt 5

The game master

Okay, roll a **charm test** then. You don't have the **skill** or?

Andreas (Esme)

[rolls dice] Yes, I have, but I roll too high of course, so I use a **fate point**. [rolls dice] But what the heck is this. I brutally fail. Why can't I ever roll low on **skills**. It's impossible.

The game master (Inn keeper) *I really have to go and take care of the dishes now.*

Erik (Sigismund)

[aggressive] *I would really like you to tell us. I roll an **intimidate** instead.*

The English utterances used in this example have an established meaning in the printed system of rules that exists for the role-playing game. Thereby, the homology for these bits is not subject to negotiation in the same way as the intralingual examples above. In the gaming sequences, there are no explicit agreements between the players *when* or *how* the English utterances may be used. Even so, the other players, without further ado, accept the bits that in another context would have been out of place.

Although there are references to certain meanings of the English utterances in the game rules, they receive their specific meaning when they are transformed to the text that is constructed at the time of playing. For example, it is stated what it means to roll a charm or intimidate test and how you should do it, but it is not stated when to do it or how it affects the narrative. This type of transformation shows how a socially established and accepted homology holds together the various bits, in this case utterances in different languages. The players could have used Swedish translations, but

the specific meanings that they construct by transforming bits from the rules, and which the players position themselves in relation to, in these examples by accepting them as rules of how to play the game, might then have been lost, since translation between languages involves more complex interpretations.

Another example of the use of the English language in the ongoing Swedish conversation is the existence of pre-prepared gaming aids printed in English. When introduced, these handouts are never translated. Instead, they create a bilingual gaming sequence, as shown in Excerpt 6. Here, the discussion concerns the difficulty to read the handwriting of a letter the players have found, not that it is written in English. Just like in this example, the players never comment on the parts of the storytelling that are in English. Instead, they use the two languages mixed, seemingly without any trouble at all:

Excerpt 6

Daniel (Johannes)
Andreas (Esme)
Daniel (Johannes)
The game master
Andreas (Esme)

Can we agree that this wasn't easy to read.
Yes, it was very messy.
Do you have a fair copy of this?
That is the copy that exists.
*It says: **You may recall certain communication we had last Brauzzeit.***

It is neither new nor remarkable to regard the use of concepts in this constructivist way, but what characterises the article's empirical material, and presumably many other text universes, is the apparent bi- and multilingual practice. The material shows how meaning is created by integrating the two languages in a way that, at least in this context, makes it difficult to separate the use of mother tongue from the use of English. In a survey concerning the use of fictional texts conducted among 500 people aged 17–18 years old in Sweden, we found that a significant part of all the use of fictional texts, regardless of media form, is in English without any translation (Lundström & Svensson, 2017; Svensson, 2014). Thus, it is not surprising that there are no signs that English causes any difficulties for the players, nor are there any visible restrictions when using English in the role-playing practice. Rather it seems like interlingual transformation is a prerequisite when playing Warhammer.

Intersemiotic transformation

As noted earlier, participation in a text universe is characterised by the use of many different media, which indicates that the prosumer also has to know different semiotic systems and modalities as well as how to integrate them through transformations. In the present section, we will show how transformations between modalities, and thereby also between semiotic systems, are used to construct the manifested text. Jakobson's (2004) use of the concept of intersemiotic translation refers to interpretation of verbal signs by non-verbal sign systems. As presented in the theory section, we apply a broader view on language, but we agree with Jakobson that the translation

from one sign system to another involves interpretations that transform meaning. These interpretations are situated in many different practices and therefore require many different literacies. Excerpts 7–10 are examples of what intersemiotic transformations can look like in a role-playing practice. Utterances in bold font are in this section of special interest for the results.

Transformations that concern modalities are relatively common in the empirical material. At one point, the players decide to locate the Sigmar temple, where they wish to receive help in their quest. At this role-playing session there is a large full-colour map of the fictive town, where the story takes place, placed on the table in front of the players. On the city map, several buildings are marked with numbers. The following dialogue takes place at the time:

Excerpt 7

**The game master
Gunnar (Bethir)
Daniel (Johannes)
The game master**

Yes, should we start at the temple?

Do so.

Yes, we can do that.

It's number 13 here [points at the map], the largest that is, which is Sigmar's temple, and since it's in the middle of the day it's open, so you just need to pop in.

The map is considered a tool for playing the game and does not exist inside the fictive world, but the bit that the map contributes in this example must be transformed to the text by the players. This happens when they look at it and decide to go to the temple. To construct texts with bits of different modalities in this way is necessary in order to participate in the text universe. Hypothetically, a participant could create a mono-modal mosaic, but it is hard to imagine that it ever occurs. Many foundational parts for participating in text universes today are already produced and launched in so many modalities that it appears almost absurd to limit participation to one modality. In the strategies to create mosaics with a certain homology, that is to form the understanding of a content in a situated practice, the prosumers must therefore be prepared to transform modalities. However, since the texts and subjects, according to Brummet (1991), are created as continuous with one another in a specific mosaic, in this case the Warhammer Fantasy text universe, it is not possible to distinguish a “fixed” set of skills needed to perform these transformations. Instead, literacy is also characterised as continuous and always related to a specific practice.

Another example, Excerpt 8, shows a situation where the players have unequal access to bits due to the rules of the situated practice of role-playing. Again, the players are trying to find a specific house in the fictive world and ask an inn keeper played by the game master for directions. In the audio recorded material, the game master points out that he has access to a map, but since the characters in the story do not, the players are not given access either, and the game master transforms the signs on the map to a verbal instruction, performed as the inn keeper, hence an intersemiotic transformation. As opposed to the previous example (Excerpt 7), showing the map

does not seem to be an option this time, as it would break the immersion of the story in the same way as handing out the transcribed letter in Excerpt 6 would have. Even though the players know about the game master's map, they seem to agree that the framing of the activity this time prevents them from asking for the map:

Excerpt 8

The game master (Inn keeper) *You go through the door and then turn left when outside, to the next big wharf. From there you turn left again, straight to the large building. You can't miss it. It's only 50 metres from the big wharf.*

Daniel (Johannes)

Yes, okay.

The game master

It's the largest house in the village.

In yet another example, Excerpt 9, the game master sketches a picture of a boat to visualise a scene where the characters are about to be attacked by robbers. The main modality is still oral verbal language, but the picture is a semiotic resource that adds important information to the situation, and thereby affects the narrative. As can be seen in the excerpt the players make fun of the quality of the drawing, but still accept the usefulness of it, as they clarify the meaning by using transformations of bits to the verbal semiotic system. The game master does not seem to mind the criticism he receives for his poor drawing skills. Instead, the group starts a negotiation on how to understand the scene by using *both* modalities and semiotic systems:

Excerpt 9

The game master

Several people come running along the wharf towards the boat.

[Silence for 30 seconds. The game master draws on a sheet of paper.]

The game master

[ironic] That was a straight line.

Andreas (Esme)

That is very ... beautiful.

The game master

It's a boat.

Daniel (Johannes)

It's streamlined.

Andreas (Esme)

It's boatshaped.

The game master

This is a small elevation on the boat, a cabin that you can crawl down into. Here is the actual loading area. Here is a tarpaulin. Here is a mast, and you can walk along the wharf here. You are sitting on guard here. Then several people come running towards you.

Andreas (Esme)

How high is this thing here?

The game master

About one metre.

Andreas (Esme)

[screaming] ROBBERS.

Like in many other games, luck, in the form of a dice roll, has great importance for what happens in role-playing games. However, role-playing games differ from other games in that the consequence of the dice throw is not predetermined. Instead, the meaning of the number rolled has to be transformed to the verbal narrative by the participants. In Excerpt 10, which is the same as for interlingual transformation

above (Excerpt 5), Andreas, as the character Esme, attempts to obtain information by lying to an inn keeper in the fictive world. To achieve this, he must use a dice roll:

Excerpt 10

- The game master** Okay, roll a charm test then. You don't have the skill or?
- Andreas (Esme)** [rolls the dice] Yes, I have, but I roll too high of course, so I use a fate point. [rolls the dice] But what the heck is this. **I brutally fail.** Why can't I ever roll low on skills? It's impossible.
- The game master (inn keeper)** ***I really have to go and take care of the dishes now.***

To roll a test against a skill is the same thing as to roll the dice against a numerical value that represents the character's skill level according to the game rules. The dice roll can be more or less successful in relation to this value, and depending on the numerical results, the narrative will somehow be affected through semiotic transformation. In the excerpt, this is seen when Andreas rolls a charm test. The numerical value is not stated in the audio recording, but Andreas, in an upset voice, establishes that he "brutally fails". The consequence of the failed dice roll is that the inn keeper is not fooled by Andreas' character Esme. Instead of revealing the information Esme tried to obtain, the game master, with a troubled voice, decides from the failed dice roll that the inn keeper should "take care of the dishes". The transformation of the numerical value to a reaction and an utterance from a character has no set rules and needs to be improvised in the situation.

This kind of transformation has previously been analysed using Erving Goffman's (1974) theory of framing (Lundström & Olin-Scheller, 2014). The dice roll in one configuration, the rule system outside the narrative, is transformed to a character's actions in a different configuration, inside the ongoing narrative. Bits are used in various configurations that are controlled by different socially established rules, but the bits are also transmitted and transformed between the configurations. Knowing *how* the bit that the numerical value of the dice forms in Excerpt 10 should be transformed in order to become part of the narrative requires knowledge of the context in which the story takes place, the text universe, as well as an understanding of the rule-based system that controls what is possible in the fictive world. The charm test, for example, is specific for the Warhammer Fantasy role-playing game, and inns have to follow a certain standard to be credible in the Warhammer setting. Thus, knowing how to transform in the way the game master does is highly related to this situated practice and only partly transferrable to other practices, even so to other role-playing games. The dice roll contributes to *one* realisation of the text, but the game master must be prepared for other realisations before the dice are rolled. It is the homology of the text universe that determines the possible realisations. The realised answer of the inn keeper is then of course the subject of further possible realisations of the ongoing narrative.

Multiliteracies in text universes

We have so far given examples of intralingual, interlingual and intersemiotic transformations of bits in a role-playing game as a recreational activity. These categories show co-variations of the phenomenon of transformation and they do not exclude each other. Similar examples are frequent in the empirical material we refer to, and we believe that the literacy competencies they imply are symptomatic for participation in other text universes as well.

In the excerpts, it becomes clear how transformations at a micro level are necessary for constructing the text, and, on a macro level, the mosaics in the text universe. This construction occurs within an idioculture, where the social interaction is characterised by a shared knowledge of the text universe and shared values and habits in relation to participation in the text universe. Thus, the players are enculturated while developing the text in a way similar to what Brown, Collins and Duguid, in their study of situated cognition, describe as “learners do not receive or even construct abstract, ‘objective’, individual knowledge; rather they learn to function in a community [...]. They acquire that particular community’s subjective viewpoints and learn to speak its language” (1989, p. 48). Even though the knowledge may differ among the players, they develop a mutual homology by accepting certain bits and rejecting others, as in Excerpt 3. Thus, by attending the situated practice of role-playing in the Warhammer Fantasy text universe, they transform and produce knowledge, which is an important part of multiliteracies (Gee, 2000, 2004).

The results show that bits of information are transformed to the practice to construct meaning (Excerpts 1–4), that English is clearly integrated with the mother tongue instead of being distinguished as a foreign language (Excerpts 5–6), and that different semiotic systems are present almost all of the time (Excerpts 7–10). These transformations are parts of the literacy practice of being a prosumer in the Warhammer Fantasy text universe. To claim that the players *master* the analytical skills to use different semiotic systems, which is an important aspect of critical literacy (Luke, 2000), may be an exaggeration, but they display enough knowledge to make the concept of multiliteracies relevant. The results indicate that the players do not depend on specific mediations in an obvious way. On the contrary, they *integrate* mediations, languages, modalities, and semiotic systems through various transformations, which is also an important aspect of critical literacy in a multiliteracies perspective (cf. Cope & Kalantzis, 2000; Luke, 2000). For the players, these acts of transformation do not seem to pose any difficulties. Since the acts of transformation are not possible to define outside the practice, the result implies that the players possess the needed meta-knowledge of when to use different systems to construct meaning in the narrative (cf. Luke, 2000), even though they do not always agree initially, as is shown in Excerpts 3, 4, and 6. Throughout the material, only brief negotiations similar to the ones shown are required before bits are either embedded in, or silently rejected from, the manifested text.

The results also imply power relations among the players, but without causing any conflict. As illustrated by Daniel in Excerpts 1 and 2, some players can introduce bits of knowledge, and thereby challenge the framing of the narrative, without being questioned, probably because they are considered experts of this specific text universe. The expert controls the framing of the activity to some extent, but as seen in Excerpt 3, where Gunnar changes the direction of the conversation, there are limits even to Daniel's impact on the practice. Hence, the community is stronger than even the expert in the creation of the story. An exception to this is the function of the game master. As can be seen in Excerpt 4, the situated practice of role-playing gives the game master the final word when interpreting rules and situations (see also Montola, 2009). The players seem to be well aware of this and comply with his instructions. Understanding the power relations within the practice in this way is also a part of multiliteracies, according to Luke (2000).

To conclude, the participants must understand the narrative in the role-playing game in the context of the Warhammer Fantasy text universe, which, in line with Gee (2004), can be considered a semiotic social space. The transformations in the role-playing always occur in relation to the other participants and the narrative emerges as a social event and thus has more dimensions than, for example, the act of reading typographic fictional texts. Hence, this practice requires different literacies, as has been demonstrated in the article. A consequence of considering role-playing a semiotic social space is that the narrative should be seen as a dynamic process rather than as an aesthetic representation, thereby challenging traditional views on aesthetic means of expression. However, this challenge goes beyond the scope of this article and ought to be the subject of further research.

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