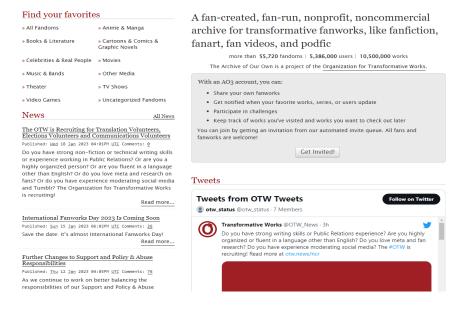Crowdsourcing Archive of our Own

Proposal

This proposal is focused on rallying a crowdsourced translation force for translating the website Archive of our Own (Archiveofourown.org, alternatively Ao3). A non-profit fanfiction website created by the fans, for the fans in 2008. This was after fanfiction.net, another fanfiction website, had a drastic decline in popularity due to its over-regulation of adult-related content – a story that is similar to the more famous case of Tumblr.

What is fanfiction?

Fanfiction is fiction written by a fan of, and featuring characters from, a particular TV series, movie, etc.. A single fanfiction can be as short as a few words and as long as a few million. The longest fic to date is "At the Edge of Lasg'len", which was started in 2016 and is still being updated. It has recently passed 6 million words.

As a comparison, Harry Potter's entire 8 novels combined is 1,084,170 words long.
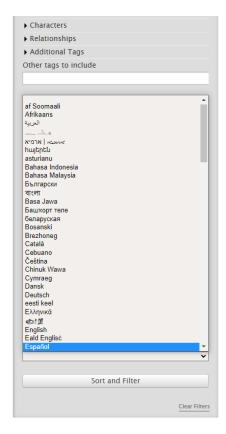

And with over 5 million users on Ao3, the resources to be tapped for crowdsourcing is huge.

Concept

The project would focus on two key areas: the UI and the content.

The UI:

While the fics (fanfiction) are posted in a multitude of languages on the website, and filtering by language is possible, the site itself has no visible option of switching the language of the UI.

A crowdsourced effort to translate the website into the top-used languages would increase user-interaction and make the website more accessible to a larger crowd.

This would, in turn, increase traffic to the website, thus potentially increasing the donations that might come in to help fund the website. Naturally, as this is user-facing content that demands high quality translation, this would require proper workflows and management to assure that the translations are of an acceptable quality. A concept similar to the crowdsourced translations utilized by Facebook or Mozilla would be best.

The Content:

Fanfiction has grown into such a large concept that a work of fanfiction might get as popular as a published novel. There have been multiple instances where readers ask the author if they can translate the work into a different language and repost it, and Ao3 already has some built-in interfacing to help with translations of fanfiction.

AO3 is nice because it's explicitly designed to facilitate translating. You put up your translation on your account and there's a little ticky-box for whether it's a translation or not. If the author has an account on AO3 you enter their name and the original and the translation are automatically connected, and if not there's still a place to add a link to the original.

@andordean pointed out that on AO3 you can have multiple authors, so if you translate it you can add the original author and both get notifications.

But is it enough?

Translated fics are reposted to the site as a whole new fic, which bloats the list of available content and makes scrolling more tedious without filtering languages. Instead, it would be beneficial if the translation is combined to the original author's work rather than being posted as a repost of the fic. Then, a reader would only need to switch to the translated language from the fic page itself, making it easier to find both the original fic and the translated one.

Additionally, a crowdsourced system similar to Crowdin would allow multiple readers to offer translations or edit submitted translations, increasing the already questionable quality of writing on Ao3. Once a translation is completed, a dropdown selection of available languages would allow readers to switch between languages easily.

Costs

As a non-profit website with a massive user base, Ao3 may not have too much of an overhead cost for crowdsourcing the website. The biggest costs would go into developing the systems and technology for managing and maintaining the crowdsourcing project and allowing a Crowdin-style crowdsourced function on the website itself. If that is impossible, then using Crowdin itself would be a potential method as well, with each fic linking to the Crowdin project. On the other side, for project management and expert review of the UI translations, there is aI estimate anywhere from $50,000 to $150,000. This would be done through re-allocation of donated funds to focus on UI translation.

Appendix A: Ensuring the Quality of the Translations

There are three key parts to ensuring the quality of the translations:

1. Providing reputation boosting: A translator often chooses to translate the content of a fanfiction out of love, so there isn't much need to give any sort of compensation to these users. However, acknowledgement can go a long way in getting more translators to participate. Boosting a participant's reputation through giving badges of sorts to those who help the site will allow users to feel more involved with the website itself, boosting their attachment to the website.
2. Employing an Expert for User-Facing translations: While translations of all qualities are acceptable for user-generated content, for the website's UI, a higher level of translations will be necessary for keeping users feeling invested in the website. Having an expert translator review UI translations to ensure top-quality would keep the quality of the website high.
3. Managing the Workflow: One thing that volunteer translators don't want to handle is workflow. Making sure that the workflow is properly managed will allow a more efficient use of the volunteers' time so they will feel like they are able to focus more on content they care about - the actual fics.

Quality Assurance

1		2		3
REPUTATION BOOSTING	→	**EMPLOYING AN EXPERT**	→	**MANAGING THE WORKFLOW**
With fanfiction, people choose to translate out of love. Compensation is unnecessary. Provide contributors a ranking based badge or a title and boost their attachment to the website.		For the website's UI, a higher level of translations will be necessary. Have an expert translator review UI translations to ensure top-quality.		Make sure that the workflow is properly managed will allow a more efficient use of the volunteers' time so they will feel like they are able to focus more on content they care about

Appendix B: Ensuring the Quantity of the Translations

Similarly, there are three key parts to ensuring the quantity of translations:

1. Make it Easy: If it's difficult to donate translations to the website, less people will be inclined to try. It's important to make translating the website and its content as easy and painless as possible.
2. Make it Clear Where a Volunteer's Work is Being Used: There's no better way to make sure volunteers provide more and more translations than to make it very clear where those translations are being used. A volunteer who feels like their work is helping the website will feel like their work was not in vain.
3. Remember that it's Voluntary: Fanfiction authors already use their time to provide fiction to readers for nothing more than clout and recognition. Authors often feel rewarded simply when a person likes or comments on their content. Use a similar concept for readers, but remember that it's voluntary. Don't pressure the volunteers to do more work, simply make doing the work easy so they don't feel pressured.

Quantity Assurance

1		2		3
MAKE IT EASY		**MAKE IT CLEAR**		**REMEMBER IT'S VOLUNTARY**
If it's difficult to donate translations to the website, less people will be inclined to try. It's important to make translating the website and its content as easy and painless as possible.		There's no better way to make sure volunteers provide more and more translations than to make it very clear where those translations are being used. A volunteer who feels like their work is helping the website will feel like their work was not in vain.		Authors often feel rewarded simply when a person likes or comments on their content. Use a similar concept for readers, but remember that it's voluntary. Don't pressure the volunteers to do more work, simply make doing the work easy so they don't feel pressured.