Dialect representation: Language varieties in The Witcher 3: The Wild Hunt

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Abstract

This study examines the dialect representation in CD PROJEKT RED's video game *The Witcher: Wild Hunt.* The study intends to contribute to an already narrow sociolinguistic field of research of how dialects are represented in video games, more precisely role-playing games. The purpose of this study is to find out: 1) What are the pronunciation, word choice and grammar features of the farmer Bruno and the Witcher Geralt in the game, The Witcher 3: Wild Hunt, and 2) What social status, class, traits are the two characters' pronunciation, word choice and grammar features associated with?.

The study looked into language varieties, regional dialects and stereotyping with support from sociolinguistic variables to help analysing the dialects. Character 1 was assumed to use West Country English. Character 2 was assumed to have a General American dialect. Each dialect was compared to dialects with similar linguistic features, and the case for each dialect was argued and proved through analysing the grammar, vocabulary and pronunciation.

The study had two assumptions, 1) that the dialects used in *The Witcher: Wild Hunt* were used because of the real-life associations they have. There was no clear answer to this. However, it could be suggested that there indeed was a deliberate choice to assign the characters with their dialects, since many linguistic features correlated to real-life dialects and so did the associations we make with the dialect. The first character of low socioeconomic background and low social status had a dialect often associated with these traits. The second character had a linguistically neutral language, and had a dialect associated with similar traits. The second hypothesis was 2) the dialects in *The Witcher: Wild Hunt* run a risk of enforcing stereotypes. This was vaguely proven to be true, as it depends on how aware the players are when they play the game, as they might otherwise subconsciously enforce them. Disregarding the stereotypes as humorous representations was argued to be equally dangerous as a simple dismissal might do harm as well.

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Chapter 1 | Introduction

You've been on the Triboar Trail for about half a day. As you come around a bend, you spot two dead horses sprawled about fifty feet ahead of you, blocking the path. Each has several black-feathered arrows sticking out of it. The woods press close to the trail here, with a steep embankment and dense thickets on either side. What do you do?

- *- A Dungeons and Dragons campaign.*

When we read the text above, the silent voice within our heads narrates it for us and we generate an image of the described scene in front of us. We envision the trees, their colour and size, the horses blocking the path ahead of us. This prompt also asks something of us. What will we do? How do we react to the images drawn before us? Voice acting in video games shares a similar purpose to the writing prompt as described above, to create an aesthetic flavour in a video game world. This thesis explores the linguistic toolset used by game developers when they create a game world, and what it could potentially lead to.

I have chosen the game *The Witcher 3: Wild Hunt* because it has a broad cast of characters with different dialects and this creates a linguistically diverse game world which gives us a lot of influences. In this study I will analyse and characterize the characters in relation to sociolinguistic variables that are considered to affect the speaker's dialect (See, 2.1). I will also look at grammar, vocabulary and pronunciation. The reason behind this avenue of research is because it is a quite unresearched field of linguistics, and its possible use in furthering our insight into spoken language in video games. This is done because I believe there is a correlation between dialect representation and stereotyping.

The topic of this study was inspired by Bratelli (2011), who studied accent use in video games and how the character's characteristics might relate to their accent. The variables I used were inspired by Lien (2016) who researched accent representation in HBO's television series *Game of Thrones*. However, the appropriate adjustments have been made to adapt the variables to the material I chose. Furthermore, the studies of Carlson (2007) who researched communication in tabletop role-playing games, and the role language has in creating reality, and Paner's (2018) study of the impact of marginalization of Asians in the film industry, and its damaging effects on our perception of Asians in society. Both these studies have been inspirational to the thesis and to formulate my research questions.

The discussion of stereotypes came as a natural part of this thesis, as accents and language attitudes are closely tied to stereotyping. As elaborated on in chapter two there are certain theories that confirm that we associate accents with more or less desirable features. This means, attitude towards language is essential to this study. Assuming motivation for accent representation is that it is considered a tool for characterization and character portrayal, I need to have not one, but two research questions to aid with answering my aim:

1.1 Aim & Scope

The aim of this thesis is to analyse how English dialects are used in the portrayal of video game characters, and whether they run the risk of enforcing stereotypes.

1. What are the pronunciation, word choice and grammar features of the farmer Bruno and the Witcher Geralt in the game, The Witcher 3: Wild Hunt?

2. What social status, class, traits are the two characters' pronunciation, word choice and grammar features associated with?

The analysis is expected to show a representation of several accents associated with certain given traits, as will be explained in section 2. The aim is to be achieved through analyzing linguistic features, grammar, vocabulary and pronunciation of the dialects assigned to each of the two characters. After describing the linguistic features, I look at the characters' language to see which accents the in-game one corresponds to with the most, and this is done by investigating and illustrating potential patterns in the characters' vocabulary, grammar and pronunciation. Then, once the accents with similar linguistic features have been narrowed down, the accent representation in the game will be looked at regarding the relevant variables to this study. The results of the analysis will then be brought into a discussion, framed by the point of research question 3.

In relation to these research questions I have formulated two assumptions. In general, I expect there to be a correlation between the dialects used in the game and corresponding real-life ones, however such might not be the case and hence it warrants an investigation into what dialects the selected characters use. I also expect there to be fixed associations to the dialects used and that might be incremental to their use in the game. My assumptions are:

- Dialects in *The Witcher* are in fact used in relation to the traits associated with them
- The dialects in *The Witcher* run a risk of enforcing stereotypes.

There are two reasons for this. Firstly, I believe there are certain associations we make with different dialects, an example of this is the belief that a formal Standard British English dialect is more associated with education or a higher level of prestige. Secondly, when the game developer uses the dialect, they do so purposefully to assign it as a linguistic and characteristic feature to a character to make it feel relatable, and to make the players more immersed in the game world, as explored in 2.1 about immersion.

The second hypothesis is related to the first, as the only way the dialects can enforce stereotypes is if they are associated with certain traits, behavior or norms. Because if they run a risk of enforcing stereotypes, there might have been an intention to use stereotypes when they assigned dialects to the characters in the game. We as players might then subconsciously restrict the dialect to certain traits, as mentioned before, the Standard British English to be associated with a higher education, while it might not be.

1.2 The structure of the thesis

Chapter two is dedicated to the previous research and theories that have inspired and influenced the present study, and it also describes the sociolinguistic variables serving a key role in my analysis. Chapter three divulges the information and reasoning regarding the material, why and how I selected it, as well as the method of how the analysis has been carried through. Next, Chapter four is dedicated to the analysis, where each character is worked through in detail separately, where I look at examples from the appendixes of the characters' grammar, vocabulary and pronunciation. Finally, Chapter five is devoted to concluding the analysis and discussing the results in relation to my research questions as well as the correlation between dialect representation and the act of stereotyping, and further research.

Chapter 2 | Previous Research & Theory

In this section I present previous research related to the subject as well as theories that help me build the analysis.

2.1 'Enthrallment of characters' – Language features in computer games

Carlson (2007) has highlighted how individuals playing *Dungeons and Dragons* create the fantasy world through communication with one another, as well as receiving detailed descriptions of the world around them by a Dungeon master (DM). The one who acts the role of the Dungeon Master is the one who creates the world for the players. What Carlson (2007)

found was that there were linguistic connections with enthrallment and speech codes specific to the role-playing. Her results showed:

> *Players constructed reality through multiple linguistic means. One way to look at it is players became enthralled in the game, and they demonstrated and thrived off of theatrical communication patterns. Another way to look at participant's construction of reality is they used a specialized language which defined their reality. Thirdly, communication regarding space made the imaginary-entertainment environment a real environment. (Carlson, 2007, p. 16-17).*

Furthermore, Carlson (2007) states that in non-computer mediated role-playing games "one relies heavily on verbal language such as storytelling to do anything, and thereby establishes a collective reality." (Carlson, 2007, p.7), and the same can be applied to computer mediated RPGs as the game companies nowadays hire voice actors to create dialogues in their games.

Carlson (2007) introduces a new aspect to consider in the analysis of the present study; the power of enthrallment. The concept of enthrallment originates from an article written by Stromberg (1997). In his article Stromberg suggests: "the term enthrallment to refer to the contemporary phenomenon of intense involvement in the fantasies of advertising and entertainment." (Stromberg, 1997, p.490). The idea of RPGs offering an arena where the players may immerse and invest themselves is only enforced by his argument, and enthrallment could be key for the game developers to attract and maintain the crowd of their role-playing game. Stromberg (1997)'s definition RPGs:

> *"Fantasy role-playing games, which have been popular since roughly the early mid-seventies, consists of groups of persons who assume fictive identities in imaginary worlds specified by the rules of the game and the stipulations of a player-referee." (p.496)*

RPGs have evolved since the nineties when this article was written, and when we look at RPGs today the "groups of persons who assume fictive identities" have been replaced by computer-generated characters, often referred to as NPCs (Non-playable characters) that you encounter in the game. Both Stromberg (1997) and Carlsson (2007) view language an essential part to what Stromberg (1997) referred to as *enthrallment*, to be able to create a realistic setting with language that feels authentic and that the players can not only relate to but recognize.

Wardhaugh (2015) writes about ideologies regarding firm hierarchies that we adhere to in speech, and how our perception associate speech and dialects with certain traits. He writes regarding these ideologies: "there certain hegemonic ideologies about different ways of

speaking that dominate in a society and are widely accepted, even by speakers of the varieties which are judged as deficient.

A grammatical feature that is worth mentioning for this study is the contracted use of *'em.* This can be used as a narrative technique to put emphasis on someone's way of speech even in literature. Mark Twain (1992) does this in the novel *Tom Sawyer & Huckleberry Finn*: "She! She never licks anybody – whacks 'em over the head with her thimble, and who cares for that, I'd like to know?" (1992, p. 10)

2.2 English Dialects

In this thesis I use Finegan's (2015) explanation of dialects and accents in this study, where he defines dialect as: "a language variety in its totality —including vocabulary, grammar, pronunciation, pragmatics, and any other aspect of the linguistic system." (p.374). In contrast, Finegan (2015) writes that the word; "accent refers to pronunciation only. When we discuss a "Southern accent" or a "Boston accent", we mean the *pronunciation* characteristic of the Southern dialect or the Boston dialect." (p.374). In the thesis I will use dialect as a reference point, as I will be looking at more than pronunciation. Concluding, this thesis explores a rather uncharted territory of the video games world and that further enforced by the difficulty I encountered in finding previous research that remotely touched upon my subject, hence I believe my research here might have something worth looking into.

The main dialects used in this study is Standard English, General American (GA), Standard Scottish English (SSE), Northern Irish and West Country. Standard English defined by Trudgill & Hannah (2008) is:

"This type of English is called 'standard' because it has undergone standardization, which means that it has been subjected to a process through which it has been selected, codified and stabilized, in a way that other varieties have not." (Trudgill &Hannah, 2008, p.1).

2.2.1 The Rhotic /r/

A feature present in the dialects of both characters is the /r/ and Wells (1982) writes that: "the rhotic accents include those typical of Scotland, Ireland, Canada, Barbados, certain western parts of England, and most of the United States, including GenAm." (p.76). Here, it is mentioned that rhotic accents are present in the western parts of England, but as well as in Irish and Scottish, which makes the latter two relevant as well to have in mind.

2.2.2 General American

General American, defined by Trudgill & Hanna (2008) is: "a term which is quite widely used by American linguists to describe those American accents – the majority – which do not have marked regional north-eastern or southern characteristics." (p. 48) There is, however, one thing to consider when approaching GA is the potential regional differences in the dialect. The Central Eastern area and the Western area are ones that share the same vowel phonology and they are practically identical if not for two exceptions (Trudgill & Hannah, 2008). One of the exceptions is the vowel /ɔ/ of *caught*, which is disappearing and instead becoming merged with the vowel /ɑ/ in *cot*. This makes words such as *taught, tot, sought,* and *sot* to be pronounced the same (Trudgill & Hannah, 2008).

Grammatically, one thing that is frequent in GA is that the language can use the past simple tense as illustrated in the following examples:

GA: "**Did you buy** your car yet?"
GA: "**I misplaced** my pen, can you help me find it?"

Compared to, e.g. SBE, it would be incorrect to use the past tense in this example (Dirgeyasa 2016). GA also stands out in how the rules apply in verb agreement, in GA the collective nouns are always followed by a singular verb:

"My team **is** winning".
"The class **starts** at 9 am."
"The family **needs** clarification."

However, as Dirgeyasa (2016) writes, "staff" and "police" are nouns that normally take on the plural agreement in GA;

"The police **catch** the bank robber"
"The staff **need** clarification."

Another thing that stands out in GA is the use of the word *'would'* and can be used to describe a hypothetical state that can be used in informal speech, as in the example; "*I wish I would have done it.*" This can, however, not be done in e.g. SBE if the state is; "… already signaled by the verb or by a conditional clause." (Trudgill & Hannah, p.63, 2008). Furthermore, there are lexical differences that makes GA stand out, and that are the ending of "-or" as in; *color, favor, honor,* as well as the start of "in- "constructions, such as *Incase, insure, inquire* (Trudgill & Hannah, 2008). The vocabulary of GA differs as well, an example made by displays the lexical differences when we talk about cars. In America cars have hoods, trunks,

stick shifts and tires, while in e.g. SBE cars have bonnets, boots, gear levers and tyres. (Kirkpatrick, 2007)

2.2.3 West Country

the west country dialect is equally similar to Northern Irish and SSE that it is rhotic, The British Library (n.d) describes two speakers with a West Country accent; "Above all, they are both rhotic speakers' they pronounce the <r> sound after a vowel, at one time a feature of speech throughout the UK and until relatively recently still widely heard across much of southern England." According to Bratelli (2011), the West Country accent tends to not regulate the vowel length compared to other accents, and many environments causes potential homophones because they lengthen the short vowel, which is seen in SSE as well. West Country, being a regionally-marked variety of Standard English, does not have a lot of deviations in regards of grammar and vocabulary. However, there are a few that is worth mentioning. In West Country English, the present and past participles are often preceded by "a-", as in *a-going* or *a-done.* Then, the past present tense of the verb *be* has been adjusted to a single form that is used all over the West Country; *I be, you be, he be, they be, we be.* (Encyclopedia, n.d). In terms of vocabulary many of the West Country words have been narrowed down and restricted to part of only one county, although there are a few words that have been formerly known to stand out; *fardel, lew* and *truss* meaning respectively *a burden, dry* and *a bale* (of hay). Those that remain are words such as *anywhen* any time, *backalong* homeward, *chammer* to chew loudly. An example of a sentence could be *I'll be doddlin backalong*, meaning to go back home (Encyclopedia, n.d).

2.2.4 Scottish Standard English (SSE)

Standard Scottish English (SSE) is strongly rhotic, even more so than the West County accent and in addition to the rhotic /r/ there is a total lack of any distinction between short and long vowels. While the Standard Scottish English shares the rhotic /r/ with the West Country accent it is significantly stronger than that of the West Country accent, and as mentioned it has a tapped or rolling /r/ (Bratelli, 2011). According to Trudgill & Hannah (2008), SSE is a form of Standard English which; "is grammatically and lexically not very different from that used elsewhere, although they speak it with a very obviously Scottish accent." (p.95) However, perhaps the most obvious grammar differences stand out in its level of informal speech. The main verb *have* does not require *do*-support, as seen in;

"Had you a good time?"

"I've coffee with breakfast.

"We hadn't a good time."

As illustrated in the examples above, and stated by Trudgill & Hannah (2008), the main verb and auxiliary *have* behave alike, and stative *have* also behaves like dynamic *have*, and is also seen in many forms in Irish English. The Vocabulary of SSE does not differ significantly from other varieties, although there are differences still. Words such as *Aye, dram, folk* and *wee* correspond to the Standard English of *Yes, drink, people* and *small* (Trudgill & Hannah, 2008).

2.2.5 Northern Irish

The Northern Irish accent, like SSE is rhotic in its nature but the pronunciation of the /r/ is more like the West Country pronunciation of it rather than the tapped or rolling /r/ of SSE. The vowel system of Northern Irish has more in common with SSE as where words such as Pull, and Pool are often homophones, and on top of this the Northern Irish accent has a very distinct intonation that often ends words with an upwards pitch, as if the speaker would ask a question (The British Library, n.d). Northern Irish English shares grammatical and lexical features with SSE, as mentioned before that the verb have does not require *do*-support. However, a distinctive feature of the northern Irish is the use of *whenever* to refer to a single occasion, e.g. <u>*Whenever* my baby was born, I became depressed</u>. Examples of words that cannot be found in Standard English are words such as; *to boke, to gunder, to skite* which means the equivalent of *to vomit, to shout, to slap* (Trudgill & Hannah, 2008). Two examples of how the words *bring* and *take* are used in northern Irish are; <u>You bring</u> the children to school, and **<u>I'll take</u>** them home. In contrast to Standard English where it is written like; **<u>You take</u>** the children to school, and **<u>I'll bring</u>** them home (Trudgill & Hannah, 2008).

2.3 Sociolinguistic Variables

Structuring this analysis requires a set of variables that can help determine linguistic patterns found in the characters of this analysis.

Lien (2016) analysed the accents in her study in relation to a set number of variables *Age, Gender, Geographical area, Social Status* and *level of sophistication*. She explains that each of these variables can have an impact on why the person speaks the way they do, and that the dialect used might be indicative of certain traits such as a high level of sophistication makes

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the person talk more proper or with an RP accent (Lien, 2016).

In her thesis, Lien (2016) writes that children can strive for a more prestigious accent, which is also tied to the stereotyping of gender in films, one being how women speak with a prestigious accent no matter what their socioeconomic status. Geographical relevancy in relation to cities can be of importance when exploring accents, i.e the further away from the city you get, the more branched the accent becomes. Status and power are loosely tied to their level of sophistication. If they have a higher education and social status, the chances that they display a higher level of sophistication might be increased (Wardhaugh, 2015). Stereotyping was also considered in the analysis as the accents used in the RPG might unintentionally enforce certain stereotypes associated with an accent (Panel, 2018).

Gender is an important aspect to consider when studying linguistics. According to Bratelli (2011), studies have shown that women might sometimes be associated with a higher prestige than males, and in this case that could affect the language they speak – in comparison to men where the concepts of masculinity, swearing and working-class goes together. One example from Bratelli (2011) is:

> *Kramer (1977, 1978) had white midwestern teenagers rate 51 speech traits*
> *on the basis of how they related to typical women's or men's speech, where*
> *'good' grammar and pronunciation was associated with females, showing*
> *that the observations from Trudgill's study are also reflected in the*
> *stereotype (Kramarae 1982:91).*

The gender of the characters also plays a part in dividing the roles in the game, which might affect the language. If a character is the wife of a working-class man, she might be portrayed in a certain way in regards of her language (Bratelli, 2011).

The next variable to consider is age, whether it is an adult, an elder or a child we are analysing. The age of a character can be determined by looking at the amount of responsibility they have or if they are playful and irresponsible, the former suggesting that responsibilities can be tied to maturity, while the latter might suggest the character is of a younger age (Lien, 2016).

Furthermore, the geographical area is also of interest when it comes to pinning down an accent, as it indicates where the characters in question were born, what part of an area they live in, in relation to the different characters being analysed. Not only does the geographical region matter, but when socioeconomic statuses are applied to a speaker we can get a clearer picture of their background as well. An example is the RP accent which is often either

associated with a villain or a people of prestige, i.e. the church or kings and queens (Lien, 2016).

2.4 Stereotyping

The act of stereotyping is of vital importance to the dialects that we encounter in the game, as they are replications of certain expectations. These expectations herald from the associations we make with dialects, I.E if we hear someone with a posh dialect we might create an image of who and what that person is. "Movies do more than simply show us how to dress, how to look, or what to buy. They teach us how to think about race, gender, class, ethnicity and politics" (Ross, 2002, as cited in Bratelli, 2011, p. 29). In movies we can see a strong case of stereotyping that cements ideas regarding gender and race often enforced by humour as certain features of a culture are exaggerated and/or ridiculed through it. As an example, in the movie Rush Hour 2, there are several characters who endure the stereotyping of Asian culture. In her article, Paner (2018) writes: "Even more nuanced and more current performances fall victim to the opposing stereotypes of a "dragon lady" and a "china doll" (also known as a "lotus blossom") (p. 14). She refers to a character in the movie who mantles the "dragon lady" stereotype, a powerful and dangerous woman yet at the same time there are other women in the movie who plays the role of masseuses in massage parlours, being portrayed as weaker and submissive in both a social and cultural hierarchy (Paner, 2018). In her article, Paner (2018) argues that despite most Asians shrugging off the humorous portrayal, there lies a danger in the dismissal of these stereotypes saying that:

> *"However, harm lies in the dismissal of these stereotypes. When portrayed as humorous, stereotypes can normalize a misinterpretation of people of colour, caging them in singular roles when the reality shows them to be well-rounded people with lives and stories of their own. Without critical discourse, stereotypes run the risk of perpetuating ignorance." (Panel, 2018, p. 20).*

2.5 Role-Playing Games

The foundation of modern-day RPGs ought to credit to Gary Gygax and Dave Arneson who in 1974 created the table-top role-playing game *Dungeons and Dragons (D&D).* Over the years *Dungeons and Dragons* came to branch out across the world, a 'mother game' that soon had delivered hundreds of off-springs, each game inspired in one way or another by the phenomena that was D&D (Wizards of The Coast, n.d). For this thesis I find it relevant to explain the concept and definition of what a role-playing game (RPG) is. Role-playing is "to act out the role of. To represent in action." (Merriam-Webster, n.d). A rather simple

explanation but it reveals enough to establish that it is something that might be bound by rules. You do not act as yourself, but instead you act as someone else. It could be a heroic warrior in a medieval setting, a Jedi from the Star Wars franchise or you can role-play as your friends.

Chapter 3 | Material & Method

In this section I explain the methods that have been applied to gather and analyse the data. I also explain how the material was specified, what was included and what I chose to exclude.

3.1 Material

The RPG I selected was The Witcher 3: The Wild Hunt (The Witcher) and it is what is known as an "open world" game, meaning you have a lot of freedom to travel around and explore the in-game world to quite extensive lengths, encounter countless NPCs (Non-playable characters) inhabiting the world that awaits you. The game is an RPG, meaning the game is driven by a deep narrative with intricate plots and twists, much like that of a novel — only that here we can interact with the story as it goes on. In the world of The Witcher there are numerous kingdoms, each ruled by a different king and queen, yet their cultural representation appears quite homogeneous as most of the characters encountered in the game are white humans. The lack of diversity in this regard is something that caused the game itself to receive a fair bit of critique when it was released. However, a redeeming angle of diversity is the dialects used by the humans, which still create slight diversity amongst a rather homogeneous group, and these human dialects are the focus on the present study. I said most are humans, because there are also other races within the game such as elves, dwarves, gnomes and they all sound different from one another. I have focused on humans as I find it interesting that they differ the most between one another, using different dialects, while the other races sound the same.

For the present study, I have chosen to analyse two characters with different socioeconomic status, as the game itself presents a view of the characters' socioeconomic status as well, creating a contrast between the lower- and upper-class. The first character I have chosen is Geralt of Rivia, the main protagonist, an adult white male. He is a Witcher, as the game refers to. A Witcher, according to the official wiki is: "… someone who has undergone extensive training, ruthless mental and physical conditioning, and mysterious rituals (which take place at "witcher schools" such as Kaer Morhen) in preparation for becoming an itinerant monsterslayer for hire." (The Official Witcher Wiki, n.d). This is important to later understand the representation of Geralt in the game regarding the variables

in 2.1. The second character I have chosen is Bruno, a farmer who has little to no socioeconomic status let alone social status and was chosen because of the possible correlation to stereotypical working-class dialects.

3.2 Method

The method of acquiring the data needed for the analysis was done by an excessive amount of field work, in the quite literal meaning. As there were no quick reference points to find outside of the game, I sought out notable characters with distinguishable accents in the game, recorded the dialogue using the software Open Broadcaster Service (O.B.S for short) and then transcribed the dialogue to an appendix. When I transcribed the dialogues, I copied the subtitles in the game, meaning I did not add anything else such as visual aspects that might have an effect.

As mentioned above, I selected two characters with different social backgrounds and different dialects. First, I characterized the two characters' language in terms of vocabulary, grammar and pronunciation. I did this by looking at the linguistic patterns in the dialects I encountered and then compared them to corresponding accents in the real world. Then, I analysed what traits are associated with the specific dialect, and I explored a correlation between the in-game dialect and real-life ones. This potential correlation is an assumption that a dialect associated with farming in real-life would be given to a character in-game with a similar or the same profession. Due to the limited time scope of this study, I investigated patterns in the characters' vocabulary, grammar and pronunciation.

The analysis was inspired by the framework established by (Lien, 2016) where the personal characteristics of age, gender, geographical relevancy, social status and power and level of sophistication were considered as each of these could affect the accent.

An estimate of things that could go awry needed to be established before the analysis could be done, and one problem considered was the eventual difficulty to identify and correlate an accent from the game to one in the real world. Another downside with the analysis was the limited source, there are only a certain amount of dialogues and voices in the game, compared to if I were to analyse the speech of a resident in England with a cockney accent where I could tell the person to say an unlimited number of things

Chapter 4 | Analysis

In this section, I will analyse the language of the two characters Geralt and Bruno in section 4.1 and 4.2. For each character, I will start by presenting the socioeconomic background of the character and the context of the situation. Then, I will describe the characteristic features

in the characters' vocabulary, grammar and pronunciation. Finally, I will look at what traits the two characters' pronunciation, word choice and grammar features associated with.

I will answer the questions by investigating the grammar, vocabulary and pronunciation. By answering these questions, I try to correspond the accents to real-life ones, this is done by investigating real accents and the linguistic concepts that are attached to them.

4.1 Character 1

In this section I will analyse the second character, Geralt from appendix (B)

4.1.1 Background and context

The dialogue takes place at a grave, where the characters of Geralt the Witcher and Regis the Vampire discusses what it is like being a Witcher, and whether Geralt likes it and if he would change anything regarding his life if he ever had the chance. Geralt is a white male, and while it is hard to specify or tie him to a social class, we can instead determine his social status based on how his profession is viewed by other characters. Witchers are frowned upon by most people, as they are called monsters because they undergo mutations to excel in their line of work. The commoners are either afraid of Geralt or they keep him in high regard, while the aristocracy views the Witcher as a necessary ill but treats him like a commoner, nonetheless. Geralt's age is never specified, but he is close to a hundred years old even though his physical appearance does not age as fast. Geralt cannot be tied to down to a geographical area as he is a traveller. His socioeconomic status is unreliable as he is itinerant, although since he has no larger worldly possessions such as a house, we can suggest his socioeconomic status is not high. Due to his age and way of speaking, as will be analysed below, his level of sophistication can be interpreted as higher than the commoners although not higher than the aristocracy.

4.1.2 Linguistic Features and Language Characterization

In this section, Geralt's language will be characterized by looking at its grammar, vocabulary and pronunciation. The characterization will be supported by examples from the dialogue that illustrate the main points.

Firstly, the tone of the conversation is quite casual conversation where the characters are familiar, so the language used could be expected to be informal, although it is still quite neutral between formal and informal. However, there is one exception to this where the dialogue shows signs of an informal tone as illustrated in example (1):

(1):" All, right, *give you one question.* What do you want to know?"

As seen in the example, the sentence has been simplified from "**I will** *give you one question"* The subject and the verb are ellipted which could suggest a simplified language only as they are only implied in the clause. An 'Ellipsis' is "the omission of one or more words that are obviously understood but that must be supplied to make a construction grammatically complete" (Merriam-Webster, n.d). Geralt's usage of this word can signify a trail of thought, as the dialogue is based around reflecting upon their own personalities. This is further shown in examples (3), (4) and (5) down below.

Next, Geralt's grammar and it shows a Standard English grammar with no evident deviations, as illustrated in example (2) and (3):

(2) "I like the tension right before a fight. And nothing gets my adrenaline flowing like battling a beast."

(3) "Even gotten used to people treating me like a freak, an outcast."

The analysis of the vocabulary of Geralt also shows characteristics of standard, quite neutral language, although he frequently favours the verb 'like' up to a total of 7 times in his monologue, and 5 of them are appreciative and are used to support something he enjoys as illustrated in (4) and (5). He also uses the verb 'like' 2 times in a comparative way as shown in example (6)

(4) "I *like* being on **the Path**. *Like* picking up a lead, a trail…"

(5) "See you're determined to get an answer. To find out if I *like* being a **Witcher**,"

(6) "And nothing gets my adrenaline flowing *like* battling a beast."

As illustrated in the examples above, Geralt also uses simple grammatical sentences for the most part, having the basic elements needed to form a sentence. Although using ellipsis, the subject something becomes implied, as seen in (4) where the second sentence starts without "I". However, he ends the dialogue with a compound sentence as illustrated in example (7):

(7): "Not something I think about much, but I like being a Witcher"

Why Geralt's language might be difficult to pin down in terms of formality could be because Standard English makes no connection between formal and informal, instead the words applied in Geralt's dialogue are stylistically neutral and maintains a view of relative formality (Trudgill & Hannah, 2008).

The words *Witcher* and *the Path* refer to something within the game world and cannot be found in any corresponding language variety in the real world, it is a word choice that is dependent on the context of the conversation, which in this case revolves around Geralt's profession.

Looking at the phonetics of his language, Geralt's accent contain certain characteristic features typically found in General American., which will be highlighted below. The phonetic transcription in the following example illustrates how Geralt uses the vowel sound /æ/ in words such as Answer [ˈænsər] in example (9), and Outcast [ˈaʊtˌkæst] in (8):

(8) Even gotten used to people treating me like a freak, an outcast.

(8) [ˈiːvɪn ˈɡɑːtən juːzd tu ˈpiːpəl ˈtriːtɪŋ miː laɪk ə friːk ən ˈaʊtˌkæst.]

The character's language is also rhotic and adds the /r/, as is illustrated by the pronunciation of the word *Witcher* [ˈwɪtʃər].

(9): See you're determined to get an *answer.* To find out if I like being a *witcher*.

(9): [Siː jʊr dɪˈtɜːrmənd tuː ɡɛt ən ˈænsər tu faɪnd aʊt ɪf aɪ laɪk ˈbiːɪŋ ə ˈwɪtʃər.]

The words "Witcher" and "Answer" are selected because they possess key linguistic features such as /r/, monophthongs /aː/ and /æ/ found in GA. In GA it becomes [ˈwɪtʃər]. The key feature here being the addition of the rhotic /r/ at the end. Geralt's dialect also contain the vowel /ə/ with a less open mouth, which alters the sound. In the word "Answer" we can see this in the vowel sound [ˈænsər] above in (9). The difference feature of /æ/ is also illustrated, and from this the association, it can be established that Geralt's dialect matches with GA.

4.1.3 What social status, class, traits are the two characters' pronunciation, word choice and grammar features associated with?

Geralt's accent, as shown in 4.1.2 shares more linguistic aspects with GA and to investigate how it is represented in the game, the associations one connects to the dialect needs to be illustrated. In the magazine Babbel, a quote from Brendan Houdek who is a speech coach establishes an image of how GA can be perceived;

"To put it simply, this term is typically utilized when referring to a dialect that is clearly American but has none of the distinctive features that categorize a particular region, ethnic group, or socioeconomic status. Upon

hearing someone speak with this particular dialect, it would be difficult to
determine where he or she is from, other than being from the United States
of America." (Babbel, 2017).

The GA dialect as presented here does not appear to have any necessary association to the variables presented (see 2.1), such as degree of prestige, social class, sophistication or socioeconomic background. It is in its simplest form an accent representative of a general population, yet without any linguistic features that can pin it down to a certain geographical region. Considering the nature of the dialogue in appendix (B), where Geralt and Regis are familiar with one another, a less formal conversation could be expected to take place, although that does not appear to be the case. Instead, we have a quite casual conversation with a neutral language that can neither be cemented as informal nor formal. It begs a question as to why Geralt has this language, as in the game he is the only one with it. One reason for this might be to have the Geralt stand out amongst the vast mixture of dialects encountered in the game and thus makes him linguistically unique.

The GA dialect, with the lack of any regional linguistic features, appears more neutral than most because of it, and making Geralt use this dialect could put emphasis on him as a neutral character as well in terms of the socioeconomic variable, coming neither from a rich nor poor background. The dialect appears unique in this sense, as there are no other characters who have the same accent as Geralt. However, according to The Linguist List (n.d), the GA accent is claimed to be associated with high prestige but also people of high social class which does not necessarily correspond with Geralt's social class in the game. The prestigious association with the accent can possibly be related to Geralt's age, as he is close to a hundred years old, which could imply that there is a link between prestige and Geralt's life experience.

4.2 Character 2

In this section I analyse the first character, Bruno from appendix (A).

4.2.1 Background and context

The first dialogue occurs when Geralt seeks out a man by the name of Bruno who is looking for help to find his lost brother. Bruno can be pinned down to a certain geographical area as he is a rural farmer of a small village on the countryside, away from the larger cities. He is an adult white male and comes from a weak socioeconomic background. The things that support this claim is the state of his appearance, rags and tattered clothing, and the fact he pays Geralt

very little, despite saying he will not hold back on his pay. In this study, Bruno is a representation of the working-class in the game as his traits are quite like others of the same social class, even for those who exist in the cities. Peasants are looked down on and often disregarded by the aristocracy, and often calls them pests and unwanted rodents.

4.2.2 Linguistic Features and Language Characterization

In this section, Bruno's language will be characterized by looking at its grammar, vocabulary and pronunciation. The characterization will be supported by examples from the dialogue that illustrate the main points. Bruno's language shows characteristics of informal and non-standard language, as we can see from the following example (10):

> (10): "Bellows *were* a rich village… *till* the war passed through. Huts were burned down, larders cleared out, all the *men folk* conscripted."

Firstly, *were* has been used instead of *was*, *was* being the simple past tense of the third person singular *it* and the typical verb choice according to Standard English. The use of 'were', being the simple past tense of the third person singular it, is however found in dialects in the northern parts of England as written In the previous research section when describing varieties: "The construction she were wearing a mask might sound unusual to some ears, but in some dialects in northern England and the Midlands, many speakers indicate the past tense of 'to be' by saying I were, you were, he, she and it were, we were and they were." (2.X). However, this is something that is difficult to establish as a pattern to one specific dialect, as it is spread out all over the British Isles. Additionally, as illustrated in example the word *till*, an informal choice of the word *until* adds to the informal tone. Furthermore, the elliptical structure supports the idea of being grammatically informal, illustrated in (11), (12) and (13):

> (11): "Been a week now since he took the women of Bellows into the hills."
> (12): "They got lost, is all."
>
> (13): And I've not had word from him since.

In (11) the words "*It has*" have been omitted from the sentence, in (12) *"That"* has been excluded and in (13) the ellipsis of the indefinite article (a).

Furthermore, Bruno uses a consistent simplified language as illustrated in example (14):

(14) *"No one wanted **'em**. Redanians wouldn't let **'em** into Novigrad, so Mikkel took them to the old mines, get **'em** out of the rain, at least.".*

The abbreviations of *them* to *'em* suggest further an informal language, and the use of slang as illustrated in the following example puts emphasis on the informal tone as seen in (15):

(15) "All right… **Me** brother's life's at stake, so I can't **skimp**. It's a deal!."

Lastly the word *men folk* which has its origin in the late 1740s, and is a term often used to refer to the group of men of a family or community – or village (Merriam-Webster, n.d). This example suggests that this is not a formal conversation due to certain words such as 'till' used in the dialogue, and the word *menfolk* is simplified language. In (15), the word *Skimp* has been used, meaning to hold back or to save. It is a slang often found in Scotland or Northern England.

Bruno's dialect has been characterized as West Country, and this is supported by the phonetic transcription of (15);

(15): All right… Me brother's life's at stake, so I can't skimp. It's a deal!

(15): [ɔːl ˈraɪt miː ˈbrʌðəz laɪfs æt steɪk səʊ aɪ kɑːnt skɪmp. ɪts ə diː]

A phonetic transcription and comparison of the word *me [miː]* and the formal *my [maɪ]* shows how his language, when referring to himself it quite different and stands out, as well as the way he says the word *me [miː]* with a long monophthong instead of the formal *my [maɪ]* with a diphthong. This illustrates his dialect both in writing as well as in speech.

The most typical characteristic of Bruno's accent is his usage of the rhotic /r/, which is clearly heard in example (16):

(16) "Women were left to fend for themselves, without food nor **shelter.**".

(16) [ˈwɪmɪn wɜː lɛft tuː fɛnd fɔːr ðəmˈsɛlvz wɪˈðaʊt fuːd nɔːr ˈʃɛltər]

Bruno's dialect is indeed a strong rhotic one, and shares features with the West Country English and I argue that this is the dialect that he uses, because it matches with West Country English the most compared to SSE. In SSE we can find three examples of sounds that sets it apart from the dialect Bruno has. Firstly, there is a difference in SSE's vocabulary and Bruno's own, and that

is the word *'Shouldn't' [ʃʊdnt]* which, in SSE, appears sounded as *'Shouldnae' [ʃʊdnæ]* and is a common pronunciation in SSE. Secondly, the pronunciation of the word '*Take*' [teɪk] differs, as the /eɪ/ is cut short and simply sounds like 'teek' [tek], and the same pattern applies to the word '*Away*' [əˈweɪ] and it sounds like 'awee' [əˈwe] instead (Anna English, 2017c). Lastly, the use of /uː/ in words such as *'Too'* or *'Group'* differentiates from Bruno's dialect as well, as they are also cut short to /u/ yielding the sound of '*Tu*' [tu] and *'Grup'* [grup] (Teacher Colin, 2014).

Bruno pronounces the word *shelter* [ˈʃɛltr] with the rhotic /r/ in his accent that is emphasised at the end. Another linguistic characteristic regarding Bruno's language is the dropping of the voiceless glottal fricative /h/. This is a feature that can be tracked geographically and one that can be found in West Country English. The dropping of the /h/ is illustrated in (17) in the word *'Hills',* which sounds the word as [ɪlz] instead:

(17) "Been a week now since he took the women of Bellows into the hills."
(17) [biːn ə wiːk naʊ sɪns hiː tʊk ðə ˈwɪmɪn ɒv ˈbɛləʊz ˈɪntuː ðə ɪlz.]

Looking at the three accents, SSE, Northern Irish and West Country, most linguistic connections can be drawn to the West Country rather than the other two. They are excluded because they consist of linguistic elements which Bruno simply does not have.

4.2.3 What social status, class, traits are the two characters' pronunciation, word choice and grammar features associated with?

We can establish a linguistic link between the West Country accent to Bruno's accent, although it does not answer the question as to how the accent is represented in the game. To gain a perspective of how it is represented, it can help to establish an image of how the West Country accent is perceived, as it appears to have influenced Bruno's accent. The West Country is a remote and rather isolated area. Here, the linguistic influence has been quite small and thus the accent has remained as it is, and still today is associated with farming and sailing (Babbel Magazine, 2016). We have an accent associated with farming and sailing, as well as linguistic aspects (such as the dropping of /h/) that are associated with the working class, and we have a game setting where Bruno's dialect is used to portray the working-class citizens of that world, which supports the assumption that the dialect was chosen because of the traits associated with it (Wells, 1982). In the game, the accent is represented by the downtrodden, peasants, farmers – people of low level of sophistication and socioeconomic

background. Bruno's language, as illustrated in example (9) shows a clear level of informality with the use of contracted words and slang. Considering Geralt and Bruno have not met before, one could expect a formal dialogue to take place, although that is not the case. Hence, this might suggest Bruno's lack of sophistication in this regard as he either favours a simplified language or that is simply all he knows.

Additionally, according to a study made by Bishop & Coupland (2007), the West Country accent falls at place 15 out of 34 accents in terms of how prestigious it appears, and at place 9 in "Social Attractiveness". If we maintain the association between Bruno's accent and the West Country one, we have an accent that supposedly is not the most social attractive one, based loosely on the study mentioned above. The accent represented by Bruno is one that is geographically distant from any cities, it is represented by a low socioeconomic status and social hierarchy. The accent is also represented as a rural one, as the group of people who shares the accents all live on the countryside and are of an equally low social status to Bruno.

Chapter 5 | Conclusion

In this section I present the results from the analysis and discuss the research questions presented in (1.2).

Concluding, the aim of this thesis was to analyse how English dialects are used in the portrayal of video game characters and to discuss whether or not they run a risk of enforcing stereotypes. I had two research questions: (1) What are the pronunciation, word choice and grammar features of the farmer Bruno and the Witcher Geralt in the game, The Witcher 3: Wild Hunt. (2) What social status, class, traits are the two characters' pronunciation, word choice and grammar features associated with?

In the analysis, both characters, were found to have linguistic aspects in common with the dialects of SBE, GA, SSE, Northern Irish and West Country. For Character 2 it was established that the West Country accent was the most similar, where the most defining factor was the level of rhoticism in the /r/. For Character 2 there was a similar process distinguishing between SBE and GA, where Character 1 was more prone towards GA. The associations made with West Country and GA connects with the characterization of both Character 2 and 1 respectively.

I formulated two assumptions that I will discuss, the first being that dialects in The Witcher are used in relation to the traits associated with them, and secondly that the dialects in The Witcher run a risk of enforcing stereotypes. It can be discussed whether there was an intentional choice to use the dialects in relation to the traits associated with them or not.

However, the associations of the real-life accents correspond to the characteristics of both character 1 and 2, suggesting this was a motivator from the beginning, e.g. assigning an accent associated with farmers and the working class to a peasant in the game.

Character 2's accent in the game and the West Country are both associated with farmers, and as mentioned in Bishop and Coupland (2007) it was not an accent associated with a high prestige. This could be argued to be another reason as to why Bruno's accent might have been influenced by the West Country accent, to make him appear less prestigious. The associations with the represented accents established in the analysis of both character 1 and 2, could run a risk to normalize a misinterpretation of the accent and the people that speak it. Similarly, to the argument Paner (2018) raises, the portrayal of Asian characters in film in one way cements that idea in society and cages them to but one role. I would argue the situation with films is the same in video games, but instead of colour or race it revolves around language or accents, in the case of this study at least. The focus then falls on making a linguistic prestigious difference to establish an image of a social divide, meaning the language is used to cement one dialect to be associated with a certain socioeconomic background or social status. The accent of e.g. Somerset and Cornwall then becomes typecast for the working-class way of speaking and restrict those dialects to a certain thematic role (Paner, 2018).

The link between regional accents and the portrayal of characters has also been highlighted by Lien (2016), suggesting that:

> *"It is not coincidental which characters are portrayed with prestige accents and which are portrayed with regional accents, particularly with regard to gender, social position and level of sophistication." (Lien, 2016, p.47)*

This supports the claim that there is a deliberate choice in assigning a certain accent to a character with a specific characteristic, e.g. giving a character with a high socioeconomic background an RP accent, because that is what we will come to associate the accent with. But she does raise the aspect of authenticity, meaning that an accent is authentic if it corresponds well with its real-life counter-part, as was the case with Character 1 and GA. She suggests that the fantasy genre can emancipate fictional accents from our real-world perception of them. If we only regard the accents as a part of the world we play in, how can our real-world attitudes affect them? This leads us to the question of stereotyping, which is further discussed by Lien (2016):

Moreover, how can the use of accents create or maintain stereotypes, as studies claim they do, if the audience is aware of the fictional aspect of the representation? What is of significant importance here is what Coupland describes as "recontextualization". This means that the representation of accents on screen may not have the same authentic value as real-world accents, which means that the audience experience it as real within the discourse in which it is represented (Lien, 2016, p.47)

In this quote she raises the question of how accents can maintain stereotypes, if the audience is aware of representation and the fictional world it takes place in, and I wish to retaliate with a question – is the idea of gamers having a wider perspective where they acknowledge and understand stereotypes as something fictional rather than real, a bit naïve? It might be a bit provocative to brush aside video gamers with such a broad stroke, but if we consider this: we are still all equally consumers of advertisement and when we play a game, we tend to invest ourselves in it. If we are immersed, recalling Stromberg's (1999) idea of *enthrallment*, it is hard to pay enough attention to acknowledge the stereotypes and disregard them as a product of the fictional world we are in, and we might neglect the stereotypes we encounter. Paner (2018) emphasises that the issue lies in the disregarding of stereotypes instead of questioning them.

However, harm lies in the dismissal of these stereotypes. When portrayed as humorous, stereotypes can normalize a misinterpretation of people of color, caging them in singular roles when the reality shows them to be well-rounded people with lives and stories of their own. Without critical discourse, stereotypes run the risk of perpetuating ignorance. (Paner, 2018, p.20)

I would say it becomes vital to be aware of the stereotypes we encounter, whether it be in video games, because I would argue they are harder to identify and process because of the linguistic nature they come from. In films we have both visual and auditory means to portray characters, while in video games we often rely more on auditory means whenever it is available. We must be aware of dialect representation in video games as they indeed run the risk of enforcing stereotypes between dialects and certain characteristics, and we should be aware that dialect representation has an impact on us whenever we venture into a video game.

While this is a pilot study into this subject, further studies could be the involvement of

more dialects to create a broader image of dialect representation in video games. An angle could be to see how the accents affect the game itself, and what it does to a player when they encounter 'authentic'', meaning accents that correspond to real-life ones, accents in a video game.

Appendix A

Geralt: All right, give you one question. What do you want to know?

Regis: One question to ask one as fascinating as you, Geralt? Cruel parsimony, I'd say. But I shall do my best to make it count. If you were to die and be reborn as I was… in your new life, would you choose to be a witcher?

Geralt: See, Regis… Doubt I'd know how to be anything else.

Regis: Ever tried?

Geralt: See you're determined to get an answer. To find out if I like being a witcher. Just refuse to ask directly, as always. I like being on the Path. Like picking up a lead, a trail… I like the tension right before a fight. And nothing gets my adrenaline flowing like battling a beast. Even gotten used to people treating me like a freak, an outcast. Yeah. Not something I think about much, but I like being a witcher.

Regis: Thank you for being honest. Honesty's an attribute of the truly brave – and thus a privilege of the very few.

(7 min mark)

https://youtu.be/uOqZ1omlM0g?t=418

Appendix B

Bruno: A witcher? And not a second too soon!

Geralt: Understand you have a contract for me?

Bruno: Aye. It's me brother, Mikkel. Been a week now since he took the women of Bellows into the hills.

Geralt: The women of Bellows?

Bruno: Bellows were a rich village… till the war passed through. Huts were burned down, larders cleared out, all the men folk conscripted. Women were left to fend for themselves, without food nor shelter. No one wanted 'em. Redanians wouldn't let 'em into Novigrad, so Mikkel took them to the old mines, get 'em out of the rain, at least. And I've not had word from him since.

Geralt: Could look into it… If you paid me more.

(An option to demand more money for the task is optional, I made him pay Geralt more for this task.)

Bruno: All right… Me brother's life's at stake, so I can't skimp. It's a deal!

Geralt: All right, I'll look for your brother. How will I recognize him?

Bruno: Shouldn't be hard. He were the only lad in a group o' women.

Geralt: Corpses aren't always in a condition where I can determine the sex.

Bruno: Corpses?! Take it back! They got lost, is all. But if worst comes to worst… well, he had calfskin ankle boots, work of Master Clogs. Told him not to wear 'em into the hills, he'd only ruin them. But he was so proud of 'em…

Geralt: Think I know enough… Thanks.

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