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A lack of flæ:r

A comparative study of English accent stereotypes in fantasy role-playing games

Abstract

This study analyzes the use of linguistic stereotypes in two fantasy role-playing games, *Witcher 3: The Wild Hunt* and *Dragon Age: Origins* with a focus on phonology. It investigates how accent stereotypes are used and why they are important for characters in video games, for example regarding prestige and attractiveness. It analyzes each character from a character type perspective: hero, villain, comic-relief, mentor and lover. The results show that there are accent stereotypes in fantasy role-playing games and that they are, most likely, deliberately placed as such. It also shows that standard variations of English are mainly used for characters that serves a purpose to the story while non-standard variations are used for characters that serves no purpose to the game other than working as tools to enrich the world with a sense of life.

Keywords: Fantasy role-playing games, phonology, stereotypes, and English accents.

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1 INTRODUCTION

How things are communicated is often as important as what is being communicated. People use the way they sound to create their own identity. Growing up in Skåne, I never gave this much thought, because the people in my surroundings more or less spoke the same way. However, this all changed when I moved to Jönköping. It did not take more than three days until I was characterized as "the Skåning" because of how I spoke. We live in a world where we categorize our surroundings to more easily understand them. We assign fictional characteristics to people based on how they sound. We are, in a way, separated from each other as a result of our different use of language. One of the reasons for this separation is the spread of media, which, according to Lippi-Green (1997), is the reason why language norms are created, and stereotypes are spread. Media such as television, video games and reality shows provide a venue for interaction, where stereotypes are created to present a person or character in a certain way. Movies, video games and reality shows all make use of language to highlight stereotypes of the region or country they want the character to represent. A person or character speaking English with a standard or non-standard accent will more times than not be a representative of the region or country that the accent stems from. This study focuses on linguistic stereotypes and how they are represented through language in two modern fantasy video games.

2 Background

The background chapter in this study is divided into four parts, the first part being a description of role-playing games in general and a short summary of the two video games, as they are a central part of this study. The second part introduces English accents and the concept of prestige and attractiveness in relation to different accents of English. Part three and four of the background contains descriptions of character stereotypes and finally, phonetic attributes in different accents of English.

2.1 Fantasy Role-playing games

Role-playing games, more commonly known as RPGs (or FRPGs, which is short for fantasy role-playing games), are defined as "any game which allows a number of players to assume the roles of imaginary characters and operate with some degree of freedom in an imaginary environment" (Fine, 1983, p. 6). Today, most games belonging to this genre take place in settings which either originate in medieval fantasy or science fiction, where the player can navigate through a story filled with different choices that affects the game world. The concept of RPGs originally comes from the board game Dungeons and Dragons (D&D), which had its first release in 1974. D&D took gamers by storm. Bartle (2016) summarizes it as:

> It was all about imagination – about sharing a world, about consensus, about living the adventure. People came together to play and could define the boundaries of that play for themselves. They could create their own worlds, their own personalities; they could be the masters of their own destinies; they could make their intelligence count (Bartle, 2016, p. 10).

The core features of what makes RPGs great, according to Bartle (2016), are still the same as they were in 1974, where the player can personalize their character to connect better with the gameplay. Furthermore, another aspect of an RPG is the world. There needs to be a multi-faceted world in which gameplay choices directly impact the development, feel and pace of the game.

2.1.1 Witcher 3: The Wild Hunt

The Witcher is a game series made by CD Project RED in 2015. It is based on the Polish author Andrzej Sapkowski's numerous stories about the witcher Geralt of Rivia. In Sapkowski's books, witchers are monster hunters who, through mutation, possess superhuman abilities in speed, cunning and strength. They earn their livelihood through killing monsters and never do anything for free. They are also neutral in politics and war. In *Witcher 3: The Wild Hunt* the player plays as Geralt of Rivia, who embarks on an epic and dangerous journey to find the child of prophecy Ciri, an ashen-haired girl who is a living weapon that everyone wants to control (CD Project RED). She can exist in multiple different alternative realities which makes her a target of the Wild Hunt, a cavalcade of ghostly riders in the sky. Witchers strive to remain neutral in most situations, but in Witcher 3, the player often finds themselves deciding the fate of others through tough choices that can determine the scales of life and death. Furthermore, *Witcher 3: Wild Hunt* features multiple endings, both political and how the story ends for the character, depending on the choices the player makes throughout the game (CD Project RED).

2.1.2 Dragon Age: Origins

Dragon Age: Origins is a role-playing game made by Bioware in 2009. The game starts with the player creating their Grey Warden character and customizing gender, appearance, race and occupation (Haynes, 2009). The possible combinations of race and occupation are: Dalish Elf, Dwarf Commoner, City Elf, Mage, Human Noble and Dwarf Noble (IGN, 2009). These combinations also determine how other characters in the game perceives the player character. For example, a city elf would be discriminated by other elves because of where they live.

   Dragon Age: Origins takes place in Ferelden, a country in the fictional world Thedas. Deep beneath the earth there are monsters (Darkspawn) hiding in a highway system called the Deep Roads. Once every few hundred years the Darkspawn emerge from the earth to swarm the surface in a catastrophe called the Blight. Ever since the first Blight the world has relied on a group of warriors known as the Grey Wardens to confront and fend off the Blight from Thedas.

Thedas is a world where race and occupation determine social class. Elves are viewed as second-rate citizens. Humans are viewed as the pinnacle of society and treated with the utmost respect. The dwarves[1] are plagued by tradition and a rigid caste system.

Much like *Witcher 3: The Wild Hunt*, *Dragon Age: Origins* lets the player have an impact on the story by having their gameplay decisions determine the outcome of the story.

2.2 English Accents and Dialects

The Oxford English Dictionary's (2019) definition of accent is "a distinctive way of pronouncing a language, especially one associated with a particular country, area, or social class". According to Lippi-Green (2012), the definition is also related to phonology and pronunciation of words and sentences. Thus, English accents can be identified to broad geographical regions from which they inherit their characteristics. For example, some regions of the British Isles have unique phonetic attributes that define the accent of that region. Southern English varieties make use of /æ/ compared to /a:/ as in Received Pronunciation (RP): man - /mæn/, bag - /bæg/ and jam - /jæm/ (Arcy, Russell, Browning, Tomlinson, 2004). This attribute is not solely a characteristic of "southern English", but rather a wide variety of dialects spoken in the southern parts of Britain. There are some accents that are not only defined by region but also fully or partially by class. The most notable accent belonging to the British Isles that is defined by social class is Received Pronunciation (RP) (Hughes, Trudgill, Watt, 2012, p. 10). RP also has a history of being called "BBC English", which comes from the demand announcers had to speak with the accent (Wells and Colson, 1971). One of the defining features of RP is its use of the long [a:] in words such as *bath* or *start*. Another example of RP are words such as *news* and *stupid,* which are pronounced with a /j/ sound: /nju:z/ and /'stju:pɪd/. In comparison to accents, dialects are, according to Wolfram & Schilling-Estes (2006), used by linguists as a way to determine a variety within a language. An example of this could be African American English and General American which both are part of American English.

2.2.1 Prestige and Attractiveness

Prestige and attractiveness are two measurements used when examining how social beliefs are structured (Coupland and Bishop, 2007, p. 75-76). Prestige represents the social status and class the speaker appears to belong to, and attractiveness represents how appealing the

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[1] A dwarf being a fictional race in fantasy and not a person of smaller stature.

accent is to the hearer. The article *Ideologised values for British accents* (Coupland and Bishop, 2007) ranks accents from different regions by categorizing the accents on a prestige and attractiveness scale. The study is based on surveys using interviewees from different age-groups and different English-speaking regions. The survey shows that overt accents without regional dependence speech, such as RP, are ranked high on both the prestige scale and the attractiveness scale, and covert accents that are exclusively or partially exclusively spoken within one region are placed much lower on the scale. The table below showcase different accents in relation to their perceived prestige and attractiveness, with 1 being the highest score in both categories and 34 the lowest score. (Coupland and Bishop, 2007, p. 79).

Prestige	Attractiveness
1. Queen's English	Standard English
2. Standard English	Accent identical to own
3. Accent identical to own	Southern Irish
4. Edinburgh	Scottish
5. Scottish	Edinburgh
6. London	New Zealand
7. New Zealand	Queen's English
8. North American	Cornish
9. French	West Country
10. Southern Irish	Newcastle
11. Australian	French
12. Nottingham	Northern Irish
13. Norwich	Australian
14. Cornish	Welsh
15. West Country	North American
16. South African	Lancashire
17. Northern Irish	Spanish-influenced English
18. Welsh	Norwich
19. Spanish-influenced English	Nottingham
20. Lancashire	Leeds
21. Manchester	Afro-Caribbean
22. Bristol	London
23. German	Belfast
24. Newcastle	Cardiff
25. Cardiff	Swansea
26. Leeds	Bristol
27. Belfast	Manchester
28. Swansea	South African
29. Glasgow	Glasgow
30. Afro-Caribbean	Liverpool
31. Liverpool	Asian
32. Black Country	German
33. Asian	Black Country
34. Birmingham	Birmingham

Table 1. Ranking of accents in terms of prestige and attractiveness. Adapted from: Coupland and Bishop, 2007.

2.2.2. Character stereotypes and language varieties

When creating characters for role-playing games, video games, theatre and movies, people often have an idea of what that character is going to be and sound like. These ideas are often reflected in standardized perceptions of certain social groups and their respective language variety. According to Garret, Coupland & Williams (2003), language varieties are often associated with deep-rooted emotional responses, such as stereotypes and prejudices about people (Hernandez-Campoy, 2005, p. 467). McKenzie (2008) states that according to studies on attitudes towards standard and non-standard varieties of English, standard varieties are often associated with status, containing traits such as ambition and intelligence while non-standard varieties are often associated with solidarity (p. 64-65). According to Ladegaard & Sachev (2006) RP is perceived as the highest status variety of English amongst both native and non-native speakers. They also state that RP is evaluated to be the accent that most signals intelligence, education, leadership and self-confidence (p. 100). Ball (1983, p.163) agrees and further suggest that RP elicits stereotypes of unsociability, which in contrast to the other traits make it difficult to place RP in one category of characters. For example, a character that is supposed to be portrayed as a sophisticated evil genius, would most of the time be associated with accents of high prestige and status, thus leaning towards an accent like RP. The same could be said for a character portrayed as a generous queen/king, meaning that RP does not necessarily belong to one category of characters. However, according to Trudgill (2011), "there is a long history in American science-fiction and horror films for sinister and menacing characters to be given RP accents". The present study does not examine science-fiction and horror films, but in the broader spectrum of fiction, tendencies may be recurring between films and fantasy role-playing.

Compared to the villain, the hero is portrayed as ordinary or unremarkable, meaning that there are no specific traits that sets him apart from the rest of the characters which often is reflected in the accent as well (Bratteli, 2011). In Dragojevic (2016) study, characters from nine cable networks in the US were analyzed and it was concluded that most of the main characters spoke with a standard American accent. The characters portrayed with an American accent were also depicted more positively than other groups and appeared to have more attractive traits. Additionally, in Lippi-Green's (1997) study on Disney films and the connection between characters and accents it was found that there is a plethora of GenAm-speaking heroes.

Cockney is, on the other hand, associated with the working class and according to Levey & Harris (2002), Cockney elicits hard, dishonest, uneducated and comic connotations (p. 18). In contrast to varieties of British English, Americans do not assign prestige value to any particular accent. In Wolfram & Schilling-Estes (2006) it is stated that the basic contrast instead lies between accents of negative value and those without negative value.

A language stereotype for dwarves in fantasy fiction is the use of the Scottish accent. It is stated in Bratteli's (2011, p. 36) master thesis *World of Speechcraft* that it is unclear as to where the stereotype originates from. Bratteli mention that the film version of Tolkien's *Lord of the Rings* makes use of the accent but that there is no such link mentioned in the books. Furthermore, Bratelli discuss other sources like the fantasy franchise Warhammer as well as the computer game World of Warcraft who both use the Scottish accent in their portrayal of dwarves. In the thesis he suggests that "The Scottish, then, seem bound to dwarves, who usually are mountainfolk, fond of beer, often temperamental, and fond of mining and especially gold" (Bratteli, 2011, p. 36). While this does not create a direct connection between the accent and the dwarves it may suggest a stereotype in which people connect Scottish people with this type of behavior.

2.4 Phonetic attributes in different English accents

In this section the common phonetical attributes of Received Pronunciation, Northern English, Southern English, Cockney, Welsh, Scottish, General American and Spanish-Influenced English will be introduced, as well as a brief description of the term Idiolect.

2.4.1 Idiolect

The term idiolect describes the dialect of an individual person's own way of speaking (Mesthrie, 2000, p.42). Thus, meaning that two people speaking with the same language and dialect will never have the exact same pronunciation in every word because of personal deviations from language norms (Crystal &, 2014). Furthermore, the term also describes the constant change in one's dialect by the introduction of, e.g., new words.

2.4.2 Received Pronunciation

Received Pronunciation (RP) is often characterized by its rounded vowels [ɒ] as in: *o'clock* and *stopped* (Wells, 2013)[2]. Furthermore, there are 12 monophthongs and 8 diphthongs in RP. Three of the diphthongs are *centering*, which is when the diphthong begins with a peripheral vowel and ends with a central one, as in: /ɪə/ in *beer* and /ɛə/ in *bear*. The other five are *closing*, which means that the second element is more open than the second, as in: /eɪ/ in *bay* and /aɪ/ in *buy*. (Hughes et.al, 2012). There are 19 vowels in the vowel system of RP. Six of these are *checked* vowels and 13 are *free* vowels. *Checked vowels* are those who subject to the phonotactic constraint which do not occur in a stressed monosyllable with no final consonant, e.g. fit, rent, cat. Free vowels are those vowels that occur free of any checking consonant e.g. *key, play, fear*. Additionally, RP is a non-rhotic accent which means that /r/ is only pronounced in words where the /r/ is followed by a vowel. Thus, in words like *farther*, the /r/ is not pronounced, making it sound as /ˈfɑːðə/. Another characteristic of RP is the use of the vowel sound /ɑː/ in words such as: *bath*, *vast* and *past* making them sound as /bɑːθ/, /vɑːst/ and /pɑːst/.

2.4.3 Northern England

There is a great variety of accents in larger regions and Northern England is no exception. However, the broader accents of the region, that are farthest from RP, according to Wells (2013), share two characteristics:

- "No distinction between the vowels STRUT and FOOT where there is an /ʊ/-like vowel in both".
- "The absence of "BATH broadening", where bath has the same vowel as TRAP: /a/ instead of /æ/".

Speakers of Northern English accents tend to use /ʊ/ as in: *just* - /dʒʊst/; also /a/ instead of /ɑː/ as in: *dancing* - /ˈdansɪŋ/. Wells mentions that speakers of broad[3] accents, not exclusively northern accents, sometimes a drop the /h/ in words: *I've had* – /aɪv æd/ and shortening the pronunciation of -ing as either /ɪn/ or /ən, n̩/.

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[2] Referring to Wells, J. (2013).

https://www.phon.ucl.ac.uk/home/wells/accentsanddialects/

[3] An accent associated with traditional speech or the working class of a region.

2.4.4 Southern England

Southern English can be divided in two accents, Estuary English (southeast British) and West Country (southwest British) (Wells, 1982, vol. 1). Some markers of Estuary English are, glottal stop /ʔ/ instead of t-sound in certain positions, and l-vocalization which replaces the l-sound as /w/, so that *milk bottle* becomes 'miwk bottoo' (ibid, 1982).

West Country, on the other hand, is a rhotic accent, which according to the *English Oxford living dictionaries* (2019) means: "Relating to or denoting a dialect or variety of English in which /r/ is pronounced before a consonant […] and at the ends of words […]". For example, /r/ being pronounced in: *war, water* (ibid, 1982). Furthermore, speakers of West Country accents use a hypercorrect /h/, as in: *h'ancient, h'aristocrats*. The accent also features an /a/ realization of the TRAP and BATH vowel which means that there is no distinction corresponding to the /æ/ - /ɑ:/ contrast in RP (Wells, 2013).

2.4.5 Cockney

Cockney is a non-standard variety of English and is often recognized as a working-class accent that shares a lot of similarities with Estuary English (Hughes, Trudgill & Watt, 2012, p. 75). Some characteristics of Cockney, according to Hughes are:

- The use of high back rounded vowel /ʊ/, as in: *about* - /əbæʊʔ/.
- The voiceless glottal fricative /h/ is most of the time only present in stressed syllables.
- /a/ and /a:/ are commonly used as in RP: pat – /pat/, path - /pɑ:θ/.
- The glottal stop /ʔ/ is frequently used with the back of the throat in between vowels, as in: button - /bʌʔn̩/.
- th-fronting where the contrast between /θ/ and /f/ is lost. The *th* is pronounced with a forward consonant sound, as in: thin - /fɪn/.

2.4.6 Welsh

According to Wells (1982), Welsh tends to be defined by its monophthongs /e:/ and /o:/ and the use of round and fronted vowels /œ:/. The distribution of /a/ is much like that of northern England where the contrast between vowels are often one length only: cat – [kʰat] and cart [kʰa;t] (Hughes, Trudgill, Watt & 2012). Welsh is also a non-rhotic accent where, for example, *start* becomes /sta:t/ (Wells, 1982 vol 2, p. 378).

2.4.7 Scottish

Scottish is distinguished as a rhotic accent by its use of post-vocalic /r/ in words like: *car, father*. Vowels in Scottish accents are often short: *bead* would be pronounced as /bid/ and *bed* as /bɛd/. However, an exception to the rule is when the vowel is followed by a voiced fricative or /r/, in which the vowel sound is long (Wells, 1982 vol. 2, p. 400). Furthermore, the Scottish accent is also characterized by seldomly using the phoneme /ʊ/ which instead is replaced with the phoneme /u/ (Wells, 2013).

2.4.8 General American

General American English (GenAm) is not a single accent but rather a blend of all the accents in America, with the exception of Eastern and Southern American accents. It is a rhotic accent. Further, there are no centering diphthongs as phonemes in GenAm, as in: experience - /pɪr/. There is, however, a tendency to pronounce the phoneme /t/ as /ɾ/ before vowels, as in: *matter* sounding like /ˈmæd əɹ/. GenAm is, according to Wells (2013), also characterized by not pronouncing /j/ after the consonants /t/, /d/ and /n/, as in: Tune, /tuːn/. The example presented below shows some of the phonetic characteristics of GenAm, such as not pronouncing /j/ after /n/ in *news* making it sound as /nuːzː/: "Do you want me to watch the news today?" which is pronounced as /djuː wɑnt mi tə wɑtʃ ðə nuːz təˈdeɪ/

2.4.9 Spanish-Influenced English

When learning a second language there is a tendency for each language to influence the other. Goldstein (2001) states that the English accent spoken in Spanish communities is influencing Spanish learners of English in both their Spanish and English accent. According to Goldstein (2001, p. 57) some of these influencers are the amount of contact with English speakers, the motivation of the speaker, whether the speaker is learning the languages simultaneously or sequentially, oral and perceptual abilities and the prestige associated with accents that the speaker comes in contact with. The greatest difference between the phonologies of English and Spanish is that Spanish only has five vowel sounds, /i/, /e/, /u/, /o/ and /a/ whereas English has 14. Other characteristics of Spanish-influenced English, according to Goldstein (2001) is the lack of phonemes and allophones such as: /pʰ/, /tʰ/ and /kʰ/ as in /pʰen/, /tʰen/ and /kʰen/ which are completely absent in Spanish and /ʃ/, /v/, /dʒ/ which are absent in most Spanish accents (p. 57-58). This produces pronunciations of words like *show* and *shut* as: /tʃo/ and /tʃʌt/ where /ʃ/ is replaced with

/tʃ/. Furthermore, in certain Spanish accents there is an absent of /s/ which is also translated into English words such as *bus* - /bʌs/ which would be pronounced as /bʌ/.

3 Aim and Research Questions

The aim of this study is to investigate how English accent stereotypes are represented in two fantasy video games, namely *Witcher 3: The Wild Hunt* and *Dragon Age: Origins*. The study will start off by gathering results from studies on English accents and their phonology, involving matters such as prestige and attractiveness. Additionally, it will identify phonetic attributes in different English accents in order to transcribe conversations between a set of characters in the two video games. It will also discuss whether developers of video games are aware of different values and attitudes in accents and if they purposely assign certain accents to characters to give additional depth to them. The study will be conducted with the following research questions:

- How are English accent stereotypes used in fantasy roleplaying video games?
- How are the stereotypes important for the characters in that set world?

4 Method and Material

Information was first gathered from previous studies on English accents and their associated attitudes with a focus on attractiveness and prestige and reported in the background. Two video games part of the same genre were then specifically selected, namely *Witcher 3: The Wild Hunt* and *Dragon Age: Origins*, because of the English accents used in the games, as a study of this subject would not ideally be set in a place where it is probable for only one accent to be spoken. The two games were chosen because of their variety in both setting and environments, functioning as representations of different parts of the world where English is spoken. Each video game was then played through and analyzed separately, with a focus on its characters and accents. The accents that were the most recurring in the play-through were then investigated, more specifically on their respective phonetic attributes and tendencies. To make the phonetic transcriptions of sounds consistent throughout the study, the International Phonetic Alphabet (IPA) was used. Additionally, examples given in slanted brackets represent broad transcriptions or in situations when describing multiple dialects. Examples given in square brackets represent narrow transcriptions of words close to how the speaker said it. It was also decided to include a brief description of what an Idiolect was because some characters showed tendencies with having an idiolect.

Because video games of this type give the player freedom to dictate what and when things are going to happen and which Non-Player Character (NPC) they talk to, the risk of collecting unnecessary and overly time-consuming data from non-significant characters was deemed high. Thus, in accordance with Vladimir Propp's (1928) theory that every story is constructed from seven recurring character roles: the hero, the villain, the prince/princess, the sender, the helper, the father and the giver; a number of characters from each video game were selected on the basis of their role as: mentor, lover, comic relief, hero and villain. The choice to use these specific roles was inspired by Vladimir Propp's (1928) theory but modified to fit the characters of the two video games. There was also a limit set to the number of characters analyzed in *Dragon Age: Origins*, resulting in only four analyzed characters compared to the six of *Witcher: The Wild Hunt* (See Limitations, 6.2). Additionally, because of the high amount of play time each game consisted of, only one conversation by each character was selected to be analyzed and transcribed. Each conversation included a minimum of eight minutes speech time which was deemed sufficient for this study. However, this also resulted in long transcriptions, which led to the exclusion of the full passages to save space in the study. To be able to give examples from the different accents each character used, examples from each conversation were selected and transcribed in IPA, highlighting the phonetic attributes each respective accent possessed. Furthermore, to be able to determine the accent used by the characters in question, several phonetic requirements for each accent were selected. The characters had to use some of these requirements in their speech in order to be placed under a certain accent.

Phonetical requirements:

Received Pronunciation – Not pronouncing /r/ unless it is followed by a vowel, as in: *bird* - /bɜːd/ and *cart* - /kɑːt/; Long rounded vowel sounds (e.g. /ɑː/), as in: *father* - /ˈfɑːðə/; The use of *centering* diphthongs (e.g. /ɛə/ in bear); The use of *closing* diphthongs (e.g. /aɪ/ in buy).

Northern England – H-dropping, as in: *I've had* – /aɪv æd/; The use of /ʊ/, as in: *just* - /dʒʊst/; -ing pronunciation as /ɪn/.

Southern England – Glottal stop /ʔ/, as in: button - /bʌʔn̩/; L-vocalization where /l/ is replaced with /w/, as in: *milk bottle - 'miwk bottoo'*; Pronouncing the phoneme /r/ before a consonant, as in: *work* - /wɜrk/.

Cockney – Glottal stop /ʔ/, as in: button - /bʌʔn̩/; Th-fronting, as in: thin - /fɪn/.; The use of the high back rounded vowel /ʊ/, as in: *about* - /əbæʊʔ/.

Welsh – The use of rounded and fronted vowel sounds (e.g. /ə/), as in: *Even* - /ˈiːvən*; Only pronouncing /r/ before a vowel; The use of the monophthongs /e:/ and /o:/, as in: *Wales* - /weːlz/ and *going* - /ˈɡoːɪŋ/.

Scottish – The use of the phoneme /r/ before a consonant; Short vowel sounds; The use of /u/ as a replacement for /ʊ/.

General American – Rhotic distribution of /r/; Not pronouncing /j/ after the constants /t/, /d/ and /n/, as in: /nuːz:/; Pronouncing /t/ as /ɾ/ before vowel sounds, as in: *matter* - /ˈmæd əɹ/.

Spanish-influenced English – The lack of /s/ in pronunciation of certain words, as in: *bus* - /bʌ/; Substituting certain phonemes and allophones (e.g. /ʃ/ is replaced with /tʃ/).

5 RESULTS

This part of the study will present the results gathered from the two video games. In the first part named characters, actors and accent, each voice actor and the respective character will be presented in terms of their origin and character accent. Continuing, the second part will show evidence of the characters accents in phonetic transcriptions. Sounds in context tend to be different from sounds in isolation, thus also affecting the phonetic transcriptions of words uttered in a certain way. Because this study aims to analyze accents, I deemed it necessary to take this into account if most of the uttered words show evidence towards a certain accent.

5.1 The Witcher 3: The Wild Hunt characters, actors and accents

The main protagonist, Geralt, voiced by actor Doug Cockle, speaks with a very prominent general American accent and according to the *Internet Movie Database* (IMDB), Doug Cockle is of American origin. Furthermore, like Geralt, other witchers such as Vezemir, Eskel and Lambert all speak with an American accent and are voiced by American actors. The dwarf character Zoltan Chivay, voiced by Scottish actor Alexander Morton, speaks with a Scottish accent. The human witch and lover of Geralt, Triss, speaks with a general American English accent, the character is by American actor Jaimi Barbakoff. Yennefer, Geralts true love and mother of Ciri, speaks with an RP accent and is voiced by Irish actor Denise Gough. Furthermore, the end-game villain Eredin has an RP accent with auditory distortion and is voiced by British (West Yorkshire) actor Steven Hartley.

5.2 Phonology

This part contains of transcribed examples from conversation between several characters in *Witcher 3: The Wild Hunt.*

5.2.1 Geralt of Rivia

Geralt is from Rivia, a part of the northern Kingdoms in the world of *Witcher 3: The Wild Hunt*. Like the real world, the fictional world of *Witcher 3: The Wild Hunt* is divided in regions where characters speak with different varieties of English depending on the region they originate from. Most of the regions residing in the Northern Kingdoms speak with varieties of British English like RP, Cockney, Welsh and Scottish.

Geralt puts emphasis on his pronunciation of /r/ before a consonant and when the /r/ is placed at the end of words in *dark, her* and *hunter* as [dɑːrk], [hɜːr] and [ˈhʌntər], indicating that he is speaking with a rhotic accent; As seen in the pronunciation of *dark power?* which is pronounced by Geralt as [dɑːrk ˈpaʊər]. He also pronounces the word *during* as [ˈdʊrɪŋ] without pronouncing /j/ after /d/ which is one of the characteristics of GenAm according to Wells (2013).

5.2.2 Vezemir

Vezemir's pronunciation of words points towards the use of a GenAm accent. Vesemir pronounce the /r/ in *her* as /hɜːr/ at the end of the word in "how many times do I have to tell her? Don't train alone, it only embeds your errors", compared to RP where the /r/ is only pronounced if followed by a vowel: /hɜː/; *your* is pronounced [jʊr] rather than /jə/; error is pronounced as [ˈerər], compared to the British /ˈerə/. Vezemir also pronounces the word *flair* as [fler] with some minor deviations from general American English, which could be because of an idiolect. The length of the vowel sound /e/ in Vezemir's pronunciation is a bit longer than it is in general American Accents when comparing it to the oxford living dictionary version of *flair*, making it sound as /æː/ as in /flæːr/. These are common characteristics of GenAm according to Wells, with the exception of Vezemirs pronunciation of *flair.*

5.2.3 Zoltan Chivay

Zoltan Chivay, friend and mentor of Geralt speaks with a Scottish accent. Zoltan pronounces the word *our* with the vowel sound of /ɜ/, compared to RP and GenAm where

it is pronounced as /ˈaʊə/and /aʊr/. Zoltan's accent is also distinguished through his use of post-vocalic /ɹ/ which according to Wells (1998) is one of the characteristics of the Scottish accent and is notable in the phrases *"I wonder if I'd recognize her"* and *"Right y'are"*. Additionally, according to the William Labov (1966), the view upon the use of post-vocalic 'r' is vastly different in American English and British English. It was found in his study that people of higher status and social class in America use post-vocalic 'r' while it is the opposite in Britain. Because Zoltan is not portrayed as someone of higher class, it is evident that Zoltan, together with the other traits of his dialect, is speaking with a British variety.

5.2.4 Eredin

Eredin is the leader of the Wild Hunt and the main villain in *Witcher 3: The Wild Hunt*. Eredin's accent is mainly distinguished by his use of rounded /aː/ in the words *last* and *afterwards* in "Any last words" - [ˈeni lɑːst wɜːdz]*;* The use of non-rhotic distribution of /r/, as seen in: *words* [wɜːdz], *afterwards* [ˈɑːftəwədʒ] and *other* [ˈʌðə]. These traits points towards Eredin speaking with an RP accent.

5.2.5 Triss

Triss is a sorceress and lover of Geralt. She pronounces /r/ before consonants and at the end of words, as seen in words like *forget* and *answer* as [fərˈget] and [ˈænsər] in "Answer me! Sometimes you have to escape just to forget." Triss also pronounces the word *attitude* as [ætəˌtuːd] not pronouncing /j/ after /t/, which according to Wells (2013) is a common characteristic of GenAm.

5.2.6 Yennefer

Geralt's other lover, Yennefer, is the most prominent speaker of RP in *Witcher 3: The Wild Hunt* in terms of accent. Yennefer pronounces *our* as [ˈaʊə], not pronouncing the /r/ after the vowel /u/ which is one of the characteristics of RP according to Wells. Furthermore, she centers the diphthongs in *fear* as [fɪə] and again not pronouncing the /r/ after the vowel /a/ in "[…] I fear you don't trust me. […]" as "[…] [aɪ fɪə jʊ dəʊnt trʌst miː] […]".

5.2.7 Dandelion

Dandelion, bard and friend of Geralt, pronounces /r/ at the end of words and before consonants in *everything* and *hunter* as [evriːˌθɪŋ] and [ˈhʌntər]. Further, he pronounces

attitude as [ætəˌtuːd], as seen in the example of Triss, where /j/ is not pronounced after /t/. These traits points towards the use of a GenAm accent.

Table 2.

Character accents in *Witcher 3: The Wild Hunt*.

Role	Character	Accent
Hero	Geralt	GenAm
Villain	Eredin	RP
Mentor	Vezemir	GenAm
Lover	Triss, Yennefer	GenAm, RP
Comic Relief	Zoltan	Scottish

5.3 Dragon Age: Origins character, actors and accents

Dragon Age: Origins main protagonist, the Grey Warden, is voiceless throughout the game. The voice of this character is represented through dialogue choices that are silent. Because the aim of this study is to analyze accents in video games, the character slot of "Hero" will be filled by another character, namely Alistair. The character the player is controlling will instead be referred to as "the protagonist".

Alistair, voiced by actor Steve Valentine, speaks with a British accent which has characteristics of both RP and southern English. According to IMDB, Steve Valentine is from Scotland. The dwarf character Oghren, voiced by American actor Steve Blum, speaks with an American accent. Morrigan, voiced by Australian actor Claudia Black, speaks with a British accent that reflects RP characteristics. Lastly, the villain character analyzed in *Dragon Age: Origins*, Flemeth, is voiced by American actor Kate Mulgrew and speaks with a GenAm accent.

5.4 Phonology

This part contains of examples from transcribed conversation between several characters in *Dragon Age: Origins*.

5.4.1 Alistair

Alistair takes on the role of hero in *Dragon Age: Origins*. Throughout the game you get to know him as your companion, Templar, Grey Warden and king. Alistair's accent is most likely related to an RP accent with some characteristics of southern English. Alistair makes use of the same characteristics of RP as the other users analyzed in this study. In every word where a vowel is followed by the consonant /r/, the /r/ in the pronunciation is not pronounced, leading Alistair to instead emphasize the vowel sound in the word in *army* as [ɑːmi] and Templars as [ˈtɛmpləz], as well as using the broad vowel sound /ɑː/ in *Chantry* as [ˈtʃɑːntri], meaning that he is speaking with a non-rhotic accent.

5.4.2 Oghren

Unlike Zoltan Chivay from the *Witcher 3: The Wild Hunt*, Oghren's pronunciation of words points towards the use of a GenAm accent. Oghren's accent is best distinguished by his pronunciation of /r/ after the vowel sounds in care, partake, of course and beggar as [ker], [pɑːrˈteɪk], [əv kɔːrs] and [ˈbegər]. Additionally, he does not pronounce /j/ after /n/ in newly, making it sound as [ˈnuːli].

5.4.3 Morrigan

Morrigan's pronunciation of words points towards the RP accent with minuscule deviations in certain pronunciations of words. Morrigan has a non-rhotic accent where she does not pronounce when a vowel is followed by /r/, as in: *born, over, years, forms, creatures* and *there* as [bɔːn], [ˈəʊvə], [jɪəz], [fɔːmz], [ˈkriːtʃəz] and [ðeə], thus lengthening the sound of the vowel to compensate for the /r/. Morrigan also uses the vowel sound /ɑː/ in *ask* as /ɑːsk/. Morrigan centers the diphthong in *years* as /ɜː/. Furthermore, her use of *'tis* and *we* in: "[…] 'Tis a skill of Flemeth's […]" and "[…] tales of we witches […]" are deviations from RP and is pronounced as: *it is* and *us.* She uses *we* as a *royal we* which gives the player insight to how her social status is supposed to be perceived. Additionally, Morrigan is consistent with the use of *'tis* and *we* throughout the conversation, which is more likely to point towards her social status, rather than evidence against her RP accent.

5.4.4 Flemeth

Flemeth is one of the main villains in *Dragon Age: Origins.* She is also the first one to be introduced to the player. She speaks with a rhotic accent, which can be seen by her consistently pronouncing the phoneme /r/ at the end of words and before consonants, as

in *girl*, *are* and *your* as [gɜːrl], [ɑːr] and [jʊr]. She also pronounces *new* as [nuː]. As Flemeth is not pronouncing /j/ after /n/ and her use of post-vocalic /r/, as well as being portrayed as someone of high social stature, her accent points towards a prestigious GenAm accent.

Table 3.

Character accents in *Dragon Age: Origins*.

Role	Character	Accent
Hero	Alistair	RP
Villain	Flemeth	GenAm
Mentor	Oghren, Morrigan	GenAm, RP
Lover	Morrigan	RP
Comic Relief	Oghren	GenAm

6. DISCUSSION

This part of the study will discuss the gathered results presented in section 5. It will also consider the information presented through previous studies on stereotypes and prestige/attractiveness discussed the background. Further, it will examine the significance of the character accents in relation to how the characters are meant to be portrayed.

6.1 Roles, standard and non-standard variations

From the gathered results it is evident that accent stereotypes are used as tools to build different character personalities. Most of the examined characters speak with standard varieties of English, more specifically GenAm and RP. It was also noted when playing through the games that non-standard varieties of English appear to be reserved to random non-player characters (NPCs) that only function as tools to create life and diversity. There is, however, no conclusive evidence to support this claim and therefore it was not included in the results. Nevertheless, it is something to keep in mind when discussing the subject.

It could be argued that RP is used to portray intelligence, wisdom and class as well as, in some cases, portraying evil characteristics in characters. To further support this claim, it is stated in Ladegaard & Sachev (2006) that RP elicits these traits. Additionally, RP is also placed amongst the highest rated accents in prestige by Coupland and Bishop (2006) and it has a history of being known as BBC English which comes from the demand

announcers had to speak with the accent (Wells and Colson, 1971). Continuing, it is also stated in Trudgill (2011) that there is a long history of applying RP to characters who display menacing characteristics. In correlation with this, all of the analyzed RP using characters of *Dragon Age: Origins* and *Witcher: The Wild Hunt* all possess either wisdom, class or intelligence and, in the case of Eredin, an evil and menacing personality. It is important to note, however, that even if this generalization can be made, there might still be exceptions to the rule as this study cannot prove that every RP speaking character in the two games have similar traits to Eredin, Yennefer and Alistair. Futhermore, other characters of standard variations such as Vezemir have also been found to have traits such as wisdom.

The correlation between some accents and the portrayal of characters is especially evident when you compare the two analyzed villains of the games, namely Eredin and Flemeth. Eredin, who speaks with an RP accent, is portrayed as a cold and intelligent conqueror and his accent is used accordingly. The way he speaks is used as a tool to emphasize the feeling of respect and fear towards him. As seen in section 2.2.1., RP is the highest rated accent when it comes to prestige, which directly relates the accent to the traits shown by Eredin, as seen in McKenzie (2008). Flemeth, on the other hand, is not a status craving character and is portrayed with a sense of neutrality with her GenAm accent. In Bratteli (2011) it is stated that speakers of GenAm, typically the role of hero, often are portrayed as "unremarkable". It is then possible that through Flemeth's GenAm accent, the developers are able to achieve this sense of neutrality. It is also possible that the "unremarkable" characteristics of the accent is used as a façade of sort to trick the player into thinking that Flemeth is not a villain at all, as seen in Bratteli (2011) where he mentions that the accent often is used to highlight the lack of certain traits that help set the character apart from the rest of the characters.

The role of mentor is shown to be the most diverse role when it comes to portrayal of different character stereotypes due to *Dragon Age: Origins* method of using every companion as a potential mentor, compared to *Witcher 3* where only Vezemir is used as the mentor role. The distribution of accents among the mentor role between RP and GenAm in the two games are 50/50, with two speakers of each. The most prominent mentor, Vezemir, is however a speaker of GenAm which most likely is because of the relation he holds to the main character, Geralt. More specifically, showcasing the importance that they are from the same place, maybe not geographically but rather in life. As previously discussed, GenAm often display unremarkable traits in characters. Vezemir

is portrayed as an old teacher, not a teacher with answers to everything but rather someone who provides the protagonist with words of wisdom. Vezemir is not supposed to be seen as a character of high status and intelligence and thus his accent reflects his neutrality throughout the story. Vezemir's characteristics showcase wisdom and intelligence, which is often relatable to a standard variety of English (McKenzie, 2008).

The role of the hero in the two games are shown to include two accents, RP and GenAm. The hero of *Dragon Age: Origins*, Alistair, is a speaker of RP. The accent is likely utilized to illustrate his social status that is hinted at throughout the game. Alistair is, at the end of the game, revealed to be the lost king, thus having an accent that corresponds with nobility helps build the stereotype surrounding the character. It could, however, be argued that Alistair breaks the stereotype of RP by not displaying traits of unsociability (Ball, 1983, p. 163). Geralt, the hero of *Witcher 3: The Wild Hunt*, speaks with a GenAm accent, like all other witchers in the game. Geralt is portrayed as a reliable character to the player audience by the way he acts in social interactions. He is confident, but not afraid of asking for help in situations where he struggles. He is not portrayed as overly intelligent or dumb, but rather as quite mundane. By not using an accent that is ranked high or low in prestige and social attractiveness, Geralt is portrayed as a reliable hero, someone the player audience is able to relate to. The accent is most likely used to portray a sense of neutrality in the character, which corresponds with his character traits of neutrality in terms of social status. This corresponds with Bratteli's (2011) claim that heroes often are portrayed as unremarkable and Lippi-Green's (1997) findings that heroes often are portrayed with a neutral accent, such as GenAm. Furthermore, he is also a character that a lot of people playing the game are supposed to be able to relate to, which also could be one of the reasons behind his accent. It could also be possible that the accent is used because of the history in popular culture of using GenAm accents on main characters to display positive traits (Dragojevic, 2016). It is possible that the developers of Witcher 3: The Wild Hunt used GenAm as a way to tap into an existing stereotype that people are unconsciously aware of.

Comic relief characters in *Witcher 3: The Wild Hunt* has been shown to speak with a mixture of GenAm and Scottish accents while *Dragon Age: Origins* only makes use of the GenAm accent. It could, however, be argued that *Dragon Age: Origins* use a wider range of accents due to the fact that all companion characters could be seen as comic relief in certain situations. In order to not draw too many parallels between characters, only Oghren from *Dragon Age: Origins* has been put in this category. Additionally, there seems to be a pattern with the use of GenAm and characters who are portrayed as ordinary in how they

think and act, which correlates the parallels between GenAm and neutrality as discussed above. Furthermore, the Comic Relief category is the only category amongst the five analyzed where some of the characters speak with a standard variety but are illustrated as stereotypes of non-standard varieties, which according to Lewis and Harry elicits comic connotations (2002, p. 18). Zoltan Chivay speaks with a Scottish accent which is probably used to illustrate him as a dwarf, as the accent stereotype for dwarves has been Scottish since the release of Lord of The Rings and other fantasy fiction works (Bratteli, 2011). Oghren, on the other hand, breaks this stereotype by talking with a standard variety of GenAm. It should, however, be added that Zoltan's portrayal as a comic relief character would probably not be altered if he were to speak with a GenAm and the same goes for Oghren if he were to speak with a Scottish accent. The last character in this category, Dandelion, is a joker, womanizer and a poet. He is not a serious character and his stature needs a valid representation of sociability and neutrality which is reflected in his GenAm accent.

Three different characters holds the role of lover with two different accents among them, two being RP and one GenAm. The two characters, Yennefer and Morrigan, who use RP are portrayed very similarly, with the major difference being that the accent does not reflect Morrigan's background as much as it does her character. It is possible that the developers ignored this in order to portray her as someone of status and education, as the accent is used, in both characters, to emphasize their social stature. Continuing, Triss speaks with a GenAm accent which is used to portray her as an ordinary girl even if she is far from ordinary, as she is one of the main side characters of the story and a perceived as a highly educated person. She is not a character of status and does not hold any particular prestige, which also could be one of the reasons why she is portrayed with a GenAm accent, also correlating with Bratteli's (2011) claim.

6.2 Limitations

I was only able to find one previous study on accents and stereotypes in video games. However, this study did not solely focus on character stereotypes meaning that there are no studies who are directly comparable with mine. Furthermore, the other previous studies examined are primarily targeted on children movies, while the analyzed RPGs of this study are targeted on adults. A way to get around this could have been to only analyze video games directed to younger age groups. This could, however, prove problematic as most role-playing games are directed to adults or teenagers. It should be added that this is based on my own experience with video games and could be proven differently.

When playing through Dragon Age: Origins I quickly realized that I had to put a limit of four characters to be analyzed. This was because there was a limit to how many characters you could have as companions throughout the game. Therefor it was deemed too time-consuming to analyze more than four characters.

7. Conclusion

To summarize, this study has shown direct relations between the RP accent and characters of wealth, status, education, wisdom or intellect. It has, however, also shown that these characteristics are not exclusively used on characters using RP but are rather, in relation to standard variations of English, used on characters that serves a purpose to the story. None-standard variations, on the other hand, such as Cockney and Spanish influenced English, has been shown to be used on characters that do not serve any real purpose to the story other than bringing the world to life. It should then be fair to assume that standard variations are used to distinguish certain characters from others to the player. By taking this into consideration, one could argue that accent stereotypes are not important for the role each character represents, but rather used as a way to illustrate how their characteristics serves a purpose to the story. Thus, meaning that certain accents are not restricted to one type of role or character.

My concluding thoughts are that there are very specific stereotypes in fantasy role-playing games, and that they are deliberately placed by the developers as a way to distinguish certain characteristics in characters. Game developers are aware of the importance of authentic accents in voiced characters, which can be seen by the choice of casting actors who, most of the time, are native speakers of the accent they portray. These stereotypes are, however, not restricted to roles and should not be treated as such, meaning that any character of any role could speak with any accent. It depends on how the character is supposed to be perceived. It should also be added that if this study had analyzed a wider range of games the results might have been different. Lastly, it would, for the purpose of continues work in accent stereotypes, be interesting to investigate how accent stereotypes are reflected in real life and if there is any truth to it.

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9. Appendix

9.1 Standard lexical set for RP and GenAm

Lexical Set	GA	RP
KIT	ɪ	ɪ
DRESS	ɛ	e
TRAP	æ	æ
LOT	ɑ	ɒ
STRUT	ʌ	ʌ
FOOT	ʊ	ʊ
BATH	æ	ɑː
CLOTH	ɔ	ɒ
NURSE	ɜr	ɜː
FLEECE	i	iː
FACE	eɪ	eɪ
PALM	ɑ	ɑː
THOUGHT	ɔ	ɔː
GOAT	o	əʊ
GOOSE	u	uː
PRICE	aɪ	aɪ
CHOICE	ɔɪ	ɔɪ
MOUTH	aʊ	aʊ
NEAR	ɪr	ɪə
SQUARE	er	eə
START	ɑr	ɑː
NORTH	ɔr	ɔː
FORCE	or	ɔː
CURE	ʊr	ʊə

(Melchers & Shaw, 2003, p. 18)