Slavic local color in The Witcher III: Wild Hunt localization

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Abstract

Games localization presents itself as a primarily target-oriented activity, wherein the game developers anticipate a fluent translation that will cater for the needs and expectations of the target players. And yet, when we are dealing with games with a prominent local colour such as *The Witcher III: Wild Hunt* it seems that the translation can follow one of two possible paths: domestication or foreignization. The present article investigates the Slavic local colour found in *The Witcher III: Wild Hunt* to determine which of those paths were chosen by its translator and whether this has any ramifications for game localization practice. To this end the concept of game localization and its goals is confronted with well-known concepts of translation studies; *The Witcher III: Wild Hunt* game and its protagonist are described and the elements of the Slavic local colour present in the title are outlined. Finally, analyses of the characters' idiolect and the Slavic rite of Forefather's Eve are provided and followed by conclusions.

Keywords: game localization, Slavic culture, Slavic local color, Slavic rites, idiolect

Introduction

The Witcher III: Wild Hunt is a Polish action role-playing game produced by CD Projekt Red, which has won unprecedented popularity on a global scale. The game is based on fantasy short stories and novels by Andrzej Sapkowski, and most notably their protagonist – the Witcher Geralt of Rivia, a mutated monster slayer. Apart from satisfying gameplay and an immersive plot, the game features a depiction of Slavic local colour which contributes to its appeal. Slavic country landscapes, Slavic monsters and Slavic atmospheric soundtrack performed by Polish folk bands make *The Witcher III: Wild Hunt* a truly unique title. The world of the game, similarly to Sapkowski's books, is rich in cultural overtones, including allusions to Slavic beliefs, folk tales and classical Polish literature. The local quality is also depicted in the speech of the characters, which features stylization characteristic of Sapkowski's pen. The present article focuses on two facets of local colour – the characters' idiolect and Slavic rituals – with an aim to

explore whether they have been domesticated or rather foreignized and what implications this bears for localization practices.

1 The goals of games localization versus domestication and foreignization

The goals of games localization stem from localization in broad terms viewed as a process which "involves taking a product and making it linguistically and culturally appropriate to the target locale (country/region and language) where it will be used and sold" (LISA, 2003: 13). Moreover, localization is intertwined with other processes referred to collectively as GILT. The acronym GILT stands for globalization, internationalization, localization and translation. The first of the processes, globalization is „the transformation of business and processes to support customers around the world, in whatever language, country, or culture they require (LISA, 2007:1). The next process is internationalization, which "primarily consists of abstracting the functionality of a product away from any particular language so that language support can be added back in simply, without worry that language-specific features will pose a problem when the product is localized (LISA, 2004: 14). Within the GILT model the localization stage covers preparing, managing, engineering and quality testing the localized product (Jiménez-Crespo, 2013). Translation in turn is a separate step in the localization process, which consists in "the actual transfer of textual material" (Jiménez-Crespo, 2013) into another language.

It is in this context, sketched by the industry, that game localization enters the stage, introducing its own goals and idiosyncrasies: "The brief of the localiser is to produce a version that will allow the players to experience the game as if it were originally developed in their own language and to provide enjoyment equivalent to that felt by the players of the original version" (Mangiron and O'Hagan, 2006: 14). This definition features two aspects that can be seen as coinciding with certain concepts well known to Translation Studies.

The first of these is the goal of game localization to create the illusion of a new original: "to produce a target version that keeps the 'look and feel' of the original, yet passing itself off as the original" (Mangiron and O'Hagan, 2006: 20). This direction is known in Translation Studies as covert translation (House, 1997) or instrumental translation (Nord, 2005). Covert translation "is a translation which enjoys the status of an original source text in the target culture" (House, 1997: 69). Instrumental translation "serves as an independent message transmitting instrument in a new communicative action in the target culture" (Nord 2005: 81), which means that the receivers of the target text read it as if it were a source text written in their language (Munday, 2016). The second aspect – the goal to provide the target players with equivalent entertainment – mirrors the age-old TS concept of dynamic equivalence focused on the principle of inducing an

"equivalent effect" (Nida, 1964). In dynamic equivalence, the message is tailored to the linguistic needs and cultural expectations of receivers and aims at complete naturalness, while the principle of "equivalent effect" boils down to producing a similar response in the target audience (Munday, 2016). Respectively, game localization presents itself as a primarily target-oriented activity at its very onset since it favours fluency over accuracy to pass on as a new original and produce a comparable entertainment effect.

Be that as it may, there are also two other concepts which originated in translation studies that are of great relevance to game localization and especially its cultural dimension: domestication and foreignization (Venuti, 1995). According to Venuti domestication is "an ethnocentric reduction of the foreign text to receiving cultural values" (1995: 20). This philosophy boils down to translating in a transparent, fluent and invisible style to minimize the foreignness of the text (Munday 2016). The reverse approach, foreignization, means "developing a translation method along lines which are excluded by dominant cultural values in the target language" (Venuti 1995: 242). The goal of foreignization is "making the receiving culture aware of the linguistic and cultural difference inherent in the foreign text" (Munday 2016: 226).

Even though domestication seems to be the dominant and preferred approach in game localization, an opposite strategy, namely foreignization, is not excluded and is tightly linked to the cultural impact of localization. According to Sajna when faced with cultural items the translator can "either domesticate the game or incline towards foreignization" (2018: 179). In this light, the considerations of whether *The Witcher III: Wild Hunt* has undergone domestication or foreignization are especially material since we are dealing with a translation from a minor language, which is Polish, into a global one, which is English. That being so, it is worth exploring if the English version overshadows the Polish one completely or makes an effort to represent its quality in the translation.

2 The Witcher III: Wild Hunt game and its protagonist

The saga of Geralt of Rivia also known as The Witcher dates back to 1986 with the first short story by Andrzej Sapkowski, "The Witcher", which won a competition in a Polish literary magazine *Fantastyka* (Sapkowski, 1986). The Witcher's main adventures commence with two short story collections: *Sword of Destiny* (1992/2015)[1] and *The Last Wish* (1993/2008). Subsequently, they are continued on the pages of the so-called Witcher saga: *Blood of Elves* (1994/2008), *Time of Contempt* (1995/2013), *Baptism of Fire* (1996/2014), *The Tower of the Swallow* (1997/2016), *The Lady of The Lake* (1999/2017) and *Season of Storms* (2013/2018).

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[1] The first date is the date of the publication of the Polish version and the second date of the English translation.

The Witcher III: Wild Hunt game, developed by a Polish studio CD Projekt Red, was released worldwide on 19 May 2015. The game was preceded by two other games in The Witcher series: *The Witcher* (2007) and *The Witcher II: Assassins of Kings* (2011). In March 2016, after achieving the 250th game of the year title *The Witcher III: Wild Hunt* became the most rewarded game in history (Gładkowski, 2016). The average review rating of the game did not fall below 90%. As of April 2022, the game has sold over 40 million copies. According to Eurogamer *The Witcher III: Wild Hunt* is one of the best games ever created as it "captivates with its artistic vision, mesmerises with its vast world and absorbs with its story" (Jankowski, 2015). Arkadikuss from IGN Polska, who gave the game a 10/10 rating, wrote: "The Witcher is a game thought through from A to Z. Everything is on the highest level – the gameplay, the plot, graphics and sound" (Arkadikuss, 2015).

As opposed to the two previous instalments the game features an open world, which means that it is a huge area which is explored freely by the player who can decide on what activity or quest they undertake at a particular moment. The player controls the witcher Geralt and occasionally Ciri, the princess of the conquered Cintra whom he initially seeks. Geralt uses two swords to fight his opponents – one of them silver to kill monsters and one made of steel to fight human opponents. He also boosts his abilities with alchemical potions and uses magical signs. The game consists of the main plot, which leads to several different endings, as well as side quests. Apart from questing the player is free to explore various monster lairs and treasure sites marked on the world map. To explore the immense world, Geralt rides his inseparable mare, Roach, which is itself a treat for players.

The most important character in Geralt's story is Cirilla, the granddaughter of Queen Calanthe of Cintra and the daughter of the Emperor of Nilfgaard bent on world domination. Ciri possesses an immense magical power and is the legendary Surprise Child, who is strongly connected to Geralt's destiny and whom he treats as a daughter. Other prominent characters are the witcher Vesemir, the bard Jaskier, the dwarf Zoltan Chivay, the sorceress Yennefer (with whom Geralt has a complicated relationship) and the sorceress Triss Merigold. The action takes place shortly after the events of the second instalment. Nilfgaard has conquered Temeria and is about to attack the remaining lands of the North. Geralt and Vesemir scour the field of a recent battle, coming across traces of the sorceress Yennefer. The witchers head to the nearby village of White Orchard to find out more. Geralt learns that Ciri has appeared in the nearby Velen. Geralt must find her, but the young woman is also followed by ghostly horsemen called the Wild Hunt. The axis of the main plot is the search for Ciri and her tracks lead from Velen, through Novigrad, to frigid Skellige islands (Jankowski, 2015). It is the player's decisions throughout the main plot that determine the final ending of the whole story with Ciri's destiny following different paths.

Before the games were created the adventures of the Witcher were already popular in Poland and abroad thanks to translations of Sapkowski's prose into English and other European languages. The comic books by Parowski and Polch released originally in 1993–1995 (Parowski, Polch, Sapkowski, 2015) preceded the games and gained a certain amount of popularity in Poland despite a slightly controversial depiction of the Witcher. However, the Polish feature film of 2001 (Brodzki, 2001a), heavily criticized not only for the most horrible dragon in cinematography, placed third in the poll for the worst Polish film of all time. The Polish TV series containing 13 episodes (Brodzki, 2001b) shot simultaneously was received somewhat better. Despite such publicity of the production the actors Michał Żebrowski (Geralt) and Zbigniew Zamachowski (Jaskier) evoked much warmer feelings.

Nonetheless, it can be surmised that it was CD Projekt RED's games that forged the Witcher into a genuine world-famous pop-culture icon, whose full-size image adorned shops with games. If that weren't enough, the recent TV series by Netflix with Henry Cavill, comprising so far three seasons released in 2019, 2020 and 2023, gained him even more renown as the most popular TV show in the history of the streaming platform (Flamma, 2020). As a result, Geralt of Rivia can be placed next to such prominent fictional figures as Darth Vader, Han Solo or Indiana Jones (Flamma, 2020). Today he is a transmedial hero found in books, comic books, video games (PC, console, mobile, card), tabletop role playing-game, fan-fiction, TV shows, radio drama, a musical and even a rock opera (Smuggler, 2023a) (Smuggler, 2023b) (Flamma, 2020). The Witcher's popularity is also the subject of academic study, for example: *Polski fenomen popkultury* (Dudziński and Płoszaj, 2016) or "Monstrum albo Wiedźmina opisanie. Geralt z Rivii, bohater czy antybohater?" (Nakonieczna, 2017). There was also a conference entitled "The Witcher – hero of mass imagination" (Smuggler, 2023a). On the cover of the book *Wiedźmin. Historia fenomenu* (Flamma, 2020), the author describes the Witcher as "the hero from Poland who conquered the world".

Consequently, the Witcher can be seen in terms of a franchise in itself and his popularity as "the Witcher effect" (Flamma, 2020). The success of Netflix's TV show boosted further the sales of the games and of Sapkowski's prose, whose worldwide renown can only be compared to that of Stanisław Lem's (Bartosik, 2007). Moreover, the success of CD Projekt's titles commenced a boom for Polish-made video games. Nowadays, Geralt of Rivia is one of the most recognizable figures of Polish origin.

The Witcher is so immensely popular in Poland because despite being a fantastic highly skilled mutated monster slayer, he is also familiar and local (Bartosik, 2007). On the other hand, to the worldwide public, he seems unique, fresh and exotic (Flamma, 2019b). Moreover, just like Sapkowski's prose, he is not black and white (Bartosik, 2007). He does not shy away from killing but at the same time, he is deeply aware of the moral repercussions of various tough choices he must make. He notices wickedness and tries to openly oppose it, however, at times he seems hopelessly entangled in it. As a

witcher, he is supposed to have no feelings and is often treated as such, but the opposite is true. He deeply cares for Ciri, who is a daughter figure to him. He has profound feelings for the sorceress Yennefer and the game allows the two to finally reunite depending on the player's choices. Nakonieczna (2017) calls him a "heroic antihero" and points to the fact that in Sapkowski's puckish universe, it is the excluded (monsters, witchers, elves, dwarfs) as opposed to ordinary humans that become the defenders and embodiment of humanitarianism.

3 Slavic local colour in The Witcher III: Wild Hunt

Sapkowski's prose is rich in cultural and literary references of various origins as well as evident intertextuality (Kuster, 2015). His books contain a whole mixture of allusions, which is one of the features that define them. Mottos of particular parts of the saga contain excerpts from world literature next to quotes from fictional works. Even more so, he plays with known motifs and conventions, achieving a new literary quality for which he is so appreciated by his readers.

> "Sapkowski is not only a master of dialogues and descriptions of battles, but [...] also a postmodern play with literary conventions. He bends them and transforms them to his own needs, playing with the reader. He chops them up, twists them, revamps them, call it what you will – the important thing is that the effect is truly electrifying[2]" (Bartosik 2007: 61).

The first source of his inspiration is classic tales by Andersen and the Grimm brothers or for example the French tale *The Beauty and The Beast*. The other sources are Celtic (elves), Germanic (dwarfs), Scandinavian (Skellige) and even Arabic (the djinns) (Bartosik, 2018). Sapkowski himself openly admits that he is greatly impressed by the Arthurian myth (Sapkowski, 2001). Interestingly, "Sapkowski's remixed tales are much deeper than their original versions" (Bartosik 2007: 57) since they are imbued with additional undertones and a characteristic puckishness.

Despite these rich international cultural overtones, the books also contain a depiction of Slavic culture and folk tales. The Witcher as a protagonist can be viewed in terms of the Slavic spirit – he possesses a sense of inner justice and performs his duties though not without grumbling (Flamma, 2019a). The very name of his profession is also a reference to Slavic beliefs, and more pertinently, to the Ruthenian tales of "wiedźmak", who is a male witch, knowledgeable in sorcery, the powers of nature and the supernatural and who also often fights wraiths and monsters (Muszyński, 2017). The Witcher's universe is itself folksy and Sapkowski's language is sui generis since he consistently applies archaization (Dziwisz, 2015). Especially characteristic is the speech of the simple folk but also the use of swearwords.

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[2] The translation of quotes from Polish sources has been conducted by the Author of the present article.

Slavic folk tales and legends are an important source of inspiration for Sapkowski both in terms of the plot (the dragon of the Wawel castle) and bestiary (Leshy, rusalka, striga). The books also contain references to Slavic mythology (Zaborowski, 2015). First of all, there is the cult of nature with dryads and druids worshipping sacred groves and trees. Ergo, the religion depicted by Sapkowski can be considered in terms of pantheism (Ibid.). There is no specific personified god worshipped except for Żywia, the mother nature (Ibid.). Another important aspect related to Slavic mythology in Sapkowski's universe is the realm of the dead (Ibid.). It is inhabited by souls of the dead and all kinds of spirits and undead creatures, some harmless but most vicious. In Sapkowski's vision, it is a realm that permeates the ordinary world and plays a crucial role, especially from the perspective of the simple folk.

It is this local colour that has been emphasized and enhanced by CD Projekt Red in the games. The reason behind this approach must have been the desire to stand out in the global gaming market (Bartosik, 2018) and create a title which will be fresh, unique and even exotic to an international player (Flamma, 2019b). Such a strategy is visible in the first game of the series, *The Witcher* (2007), and most prominently in *The Witcher III: Wild Hunt* (2015). Consequently, the games, and especially the last instalment, are intrinsically more Slavic than the books. This phenomenon is an example of what happens when a certain fictional figure starts to live their own life – one that might not have been predicted by its original creator. This is also the reason why the Polish public (at least those who haven't read the books and just played the game) sometimes adheres to the misconception that the Witcher's world is inherently and decisively Slavic in nature (Bartosik, 2018). This may be true but only concerning the aforementioned games and also not entirely since other inspirations of Sapkowski (such as medieval European knighthood) are well present in the games.

Be that as it may, CD Projekt Red reinforced the Slavic spirit – which was nonetheless present in the books – in a very conscious manner. *The Witcher III: Wild Hunt*, which is the focus of the present article, contains Slavic overtones on several different levels. First of all, there is the Slavic setting of White Orchard and Velen: vast green glades, lush forests, dark marshes, deep caverns and, of course, idyllic villages (see Screenshot 1) and sometimes desolate, ruined hamlets infested with monsters.

Screenshot 1 – ***The Witcher III: Wild Hunt. CD Projekt RED***

The decorated thatched huts are based on a real-world village Zalipie in Poland[3]. Apart from paintings on hut walls, there are also traditional colourful hanging decorations called "pajączki" (Widomska, 2021) (see Screenshot 2).

Screenshot 2 – ***The Witcher III: Wild Hunt. CD Projekt RED***

Besides the Slavic countryside, there is the city of Novigrad, taking its inspiration from Gdańsk with its iconic crane and characteristic architecture (Ibid) (see Screenshot 3).

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[3] https://compassrose.pl/zalipie/

Screenshot 3 – ***The Witcher III: Wild Hunt. CD Projekt RED***

There is also a depiction of the legendary Mice Tower related to the legend of Popiel who was eaten alive by rats, which is the cursed tower of Fyke Island. In the game, it is the daughter of a selfish nobleman who is eaten alive (Ibid.). Another renowned Polish landmark that found its way to the game is the Bald Mountain. It was a famous place of pagan cult in Poland, where rites such as Dziady (Forefather's Eve) and Kupala Night (summer solstice) were celebrated. Secondly, there is the mesmerizing music composed and performed by Percival Schuttenbach[4], a Polish folk-metal band utilizing rare historical instruments and unforgettable female voices.

Another Slavic element of the game's universe is the simple folk and, interestingly, elderly people, rarely if ever featured in games. Their speech is consistent with Sapkowski's unique style of dialogue. The next prominent Slavic element is the belief in the supernatural, including the worship of nature, as well as herbalism and witchcraft. Some of those supernatural beings, such as Rusalka, Striga or Leshy, found their way to the game's bestiary, which is exceptionally rich and significant since fighting monsters is a core feature of gameplay and a vital aspect of the game's universe.

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[4] The name of the band is a reference in itself as Percival Schuttenbach is the character of a gnome appearing in Sapkowski's books.

The Slavic spirit is also present in folk rituals such as Dziady, a celebration dedicated to the dead, coinciding with Halloween, as well as country weddings, such as the one attended to by The Witcher in the Bronovitz[5] village in *The Hearts of Stone* expansion to the game. These rites are at the same time allusions to classical Polish literature, which was the first to depict them: Dziady by Adam Mickiewicz (1822) and *The Wedding* by Stanisław Wyspiański (1901).

The Hearts of Stone expansion contains even more allusions to Polish literature: Olgierd von Everec can be associated with Kmicic, the protagonist of *The Deluge* by Henryk Sienkiewicz (1886). His duel with Geralt is inspired by the cinematic adaptation of the classic trilogy (Hoffman, 1974). Moreover, the plot of the expansion alludes to *Pani Twardowska* by Adam Mickiewicz (1822). In the *Blood and Wine* expansion, in turn, we can undertake a quest to withdraw money from the Bank of Vivaldi. This scene is a hilarious allusion to the reality of The Polish People's Republic (PRL) as the Witcher is redirected from one bank post to another and neglected by the box ladies to the point of annoyance.

4 Slavic local colour in the localization of The Witcher III: Wild Hunt

When contemplating the localization of Slavic local colour in *The Witcher III: Wild Hunt* one cannot overlook the translation of Sapkowski's unique language into English. The reason is that it is a mixture of contemporary Polish literary language and colloquial expressions (including vulgarisms) with dialect and archaisms. "The effect of such a combination is a contemporary text containing stylization elements in the form of archaisms, vulgarisms and dialectisms" (Dziwisz, 2015: 197). The developers of *The Witcher III: Wild Hunt* took great care to recreate Sapkowski's linguistic idiosyncrasy in their game. Another characteristic element of Slavic local colour in the game is Slavic rites such as The Forefather's Eve, which is simultaneously a direct reference to the classical Polish poetic drama *Dziady Part II* by Adam Mickiewicz (1822).

The English translation of the game that is subject to analysis has been carried out by Travis Currit (*The Witcher III: Wild Hunt*, 2015). The texts for the qualitative analysis have been extracted from screenshots made in the game. In the analysis, Baker's types of meaning (1992) have been considered as well as types of archaisms (Piela, 2016). Various dictionaries have been utilised in the study of particular archaisms, dialectisms, colloquialisms and vulgarisms. The chosen fragments are to serve as examples of wider phenomena such as the general strategy – domestication or foreignization – and the quality of the translation.

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[5] *Bronovitz is a clear reference to the real world Bronowice village, where Wyspiański attended a real wedding that turned out to be an inspiration for his drama.*

4.1 Characters' idiolect

The speech of the characters in the game features archaisms, dialect, colloquial expressions and vulgarisms just like was the case with Sapkowski's language in the book series. These traits play an important role in creating a characteristic old-timey and often folksy local colour and constitute a vital feature of the author's idiolect (Dziwisz, 2015) that has been recreated in the game. Stylization efforts are particularly visible in the speech of the simple folk. At the beginning of the game the witcher Geralt and his mentor, Vesemir, visit the inn in a village called White Orchard and talk to the innkeeper, Elsa. The dialogue fragments below have been chosen since they represent one of the first encounters with simple folk by the protagonist of the game.

*Elza: **Mości** wiedźmini… **Jadło i napitek** na mój rachunek. Co podać? / Your majesties witchers… Food and drink on my bill. What to serve?*

Elsa: Master witchers… food and drink on the house. What can I get you?

This utterance is the first example of archaism usage applied in the simple folk's idiolect. "Mości" is a polite expression, a lexical archaism (Piela, 2016), used in combination with a title such as prince or in this case – witchers. It was used when addressing a person directly and constitutes a short form of archaic "wasza miłość" similarly to the English expression "your majesty" (Doroszewski 1958-1969). It has been translated using the expression "Master" as there seems to be no literal equivalent for it in the English language, which constitutes a change in propositional meaning[6]. The other lexical archaisms are "jadło i napitek" ("food and drink"). They have been neutralized in the translation, which uses contemporary unmarked expressions. Consequently, the translation features a loss in evoked meaning[7] since neither "Master", nor "food and drink" evoke the same archaic register.

*Elza: Czego **wam** jeszcze trzeba? / What else would you like?[8]*

*Geralt: **Macie** coś ciekawego pod **szynkwasem**? / Do you have anything under the counter?*

*Elza: A zależy, czego **szukacie. Rzućcie** okiem. / It depends on what you are looking for. Have a look.*

*Elsa: **Somethin'** else you'll be **needin'**?*

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[6] Propositional meaning is related to the literal sense of the expression and can be judged as true or false (Baker, 1992).

[7] Evoked meaning stems from the usage of dialects and registers, and more broadly, culture.

[8] The Polish version is supplemented with backtranslations after the slash in order to illustrate the differences between the Polish and English texts.

Geralt: Got anything interesting under the counter?

Elsa: Depends what you're after. Have a look.

The next example contains a phenomenon called *pluralis maiestaticus* (Wiśniakowska, 2020). It was originally used to emphasize the dignity of the ruler speaking about himself or herself or by other people in addressing the ruler. In the analysed example, it is used as a form of polite address by the innkeeper Elsa toward Geralt ("wam", "szukacie", "rzućcie") and by Geralt to Elsa ("macie"). This feature has been completely lost in translation.

The example also contains a lexical archaism: "szynkwas" (Doroszewski, 1958-1969) translated literally as "the counter". Here once again a marked form has been neutralized through the application of a contemporary, standard term, which constitutes a discrepancy in evoked meaning despite retaining propositional meaning. The English version, however, marks the simple folk speech by using shortened forms: "*Somethin'*" and "*needin'*". Such contractions are characteristic of some dialects and are called "g-dropping", where the word-final "g" is dropped both in speech and writing and replaced with an apostrophe (Karve, 2023). This translation strategy can be seen in terms of compensation for the loss of markedness elsewhere.

*Elza: Cały naród w drodze. Ten krewnych **szuka**, inny z dala od frontu **bieży**... A **każden** zjeść **musi**, wypić, noc w cieple **spędzić**. / The whole nation on the road. This one is looking for relatives, another is running away from the front... And everyone has to eat, drink, spend the night in warmth.*

*Elsa: **Nation's** on the move. Some search for kin, others just want to get out of the way of the armies. They all need food, drink, and a night's rest in warmth.*

The next example contains more archaisms. The verb "bieżeć" means "run" or "hurry" (Doroszewski 1958-1969). It was translated as "get out of the way". Another marked expression is the archaic "każden", which means "everyone" (Doroszewski, 1958-1969). The translation uses the form "They all". Another marked feature of the simple folk's idiolect is the placement of verbs at the end of the clause: "szuka", "bieży", "musi", "spędzić". This syntactic archaism (Piela, 2016) has not been transferred into English since it is a language with a static word order as opposed to Polish. The English version again marks the simple folk speech by using a shortened form: "Nation's", which is a contraction with a noun characteristic for speech (Karve, 2023). Still, most of the translation is unmarked which creates a disparity in the evoked meaning.

*Elza: **Ludzie tu nerwowe**. Nie dość, że dopiero co wojska **przeszły**, to jeszcze gryf nam się **zaląCl**. / People here are nervous. Not only have the troops just passed through, but we've had a griffin nest itself.*

*Elsa: **Folk're** jumpy **'round** here. Armies just passed through, now a **griffin's prowlin'** about...*

The next fragment contains dialect: "Ludzie tu nerwowe" ("Folk're jumpy"). The source form is marked since it is an example of the simple folk's unsophisticated, ungrammatical speech. Once again, there is also a marked word order with two verbs placed at the end of the clauses: "przeszły" ("passed through") and "zaląg" ("prowlin' about"). As far as the translation is concerned, it again uses contractions to mark the character's speech. "Folk're" and "griffin's" are contractions of the verb "be" with nouns. The contracted "prowlin'" is another example of g-dropping. The contraction "'round" in turn is an example of aphaeresis, which consists in dropping the first unstressed syllable and replacing it with an apostrophe (Karve, 2023) This time the loss of evoked meaning in some places is successfully compensated in others, while the propositional meaning remains relatively close.

*Chłop: **Ostaw** nas. **Gadać** z tobą nie **będziem**! / Leave us. We won't talk to you!*

*Chłop: Ja... Ja dość już chyba wypiłem. We **łbie** mi szumi... / I... I've probably drunk enough. My head is humming.*

*Chłop: To nie od **siwuchy**, tylko od **guseł**! / It's not from the guzzle, but from the witchcraft!*

*Peasant: **Begone.** We'll not talk to you.*

*Peasant: I, uh... Oh, I've drunk enough. **Me head's spinnin'**!*

*Peasant: **Tain't the hooch! 'Tis wizardry!***

The next fragment constitutes the speech of peasants addressing the Witcher in the White Orchard Inn. There are some archaisms and some colloquial expressions to be found here. The first archaism is the verb "Ostaw" meaning "leave" (Wielki słownik języka polskiego, n.d.). It has been translated as "Begone", which is an interjection that activates an archaic and literary register (The Britannica Dictionary, n.d.). Another marked form is the peripheral inflectional archaism "będziem" ("will be") (Dubisz, 2008). The English translation uses standard language at this point. The verb "gadać" ("talk") in turn is a colloquial expression (Słownik języka polskiego PWN, n.d.) just like "łeb" ("head") (Słownik języka polskiego sjp, n.d.) and "siwucha" ("vodka") (Doroszewski, 1958-1969). Unlike the last expression translated as "hooch", which comes from US slang (The Britannica Dictionary, n.d.), the other translations display standard language: "talk" and "head". The term "gusła" is quite rare in contemporary Polish and even if not explicitly archaic, it features a literary register (Wielki słownik

języka polskiego, n.d.). On the other hand, the English equivalent of "wizardry" belongs to the standard language.

The expression "Me head's spinnin'!" is marked. "Me" used instead of "my" constitutes non-standard language/dialect (Oxford Languages, n.d.), while "head's" and "spinnin'" contain contractions characteristic of the speech of the simple folk in the English translation. Non-standard contractions can also be found in the last line: "Tain't the hooch! 'Tis wizardry!". "Tain't" is the non-standard short form of "it ain't" (The Free Dictionary), while "'Tis" is the archaic contraction of "it is" (Cambridge Dictionaries, n.d.) often used in poetic contexts (Karve, 2023). Once more the technique employed in the translation is the compensation of the lost evoked meaning elsewhere. The propositional meaning remains otherwise close.

Another character, whose speech is interesting from a linguistic point of view – since he uses a lot of vulgarisms – is the Bloody Baron of Velen. When a peasant brings Ciri and Małgosia to him, he is furious that none of them is his lost daughter.

Baron: No i kogoście tu przyprowadzili? Przecież to nie jest moja córka! / Well, and who did you bring here? After all, this is not my daughter!

Chłop: A ta druga? / And the other one?

*Baron: Żadna, **kurwa**! Chyba potrafię rozpoznać własną córkę! / None, fuck! I think I can recognize my own daughter!*

*Baron: Just who do you think you've brought me, man? That's not **me** daughter!*

Peasant: And the little one?

*Baron: Neither, **dammit**! I think I'd know my own child.*

In this exchange, Baron uses the swearword "kurwa" ("bitch"), which is one of the strongest vulgarisms in Polish. The English version, however, uses "dammit", which, in comparison, is of lesser strength. The result is not only a change in propositional meaning but also a change in expressive meaning[9]. There is also once more a non-standard form "me" instead of regular "my".

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[9] Expressive meaning is the meaning associated with the emotional load of an expression or an attitude of the speaker (Baker, 1992).

Chłop: Ale... ta starsza może i nie wasza, ale całkiem podobna... nie? To jak? Panie, nagroda będzie? / But... the older one may not be yours, but quite similar... no? Then how? Master, will there be a reward?

*Baron: Ja ci, **kurwa**, dam nagrodę! **Wypierdalaj** mi stąd, zanim psem poszczuję! / I'll fucking give you a reward! Get the fuck out of here before I sic the dog on you!*

*Peasant: Well, er... mi-might not be yours, the older one, you've **gotsta** admit the likeness. It's downright **strikin'**! So any chance for that reward?*

*Baron: You'll not see one **fucking** copper! **Get out** before I set my hounds on you.*

In the following exchange, Baron again uses the swearword "kurwa" ("bitch"). This time the English version employs a swearword of similar strength: "fucking". Hence despite a change in propositional meaning the swearword carries a similar expressive meaning. The next swearword, though, has been completely neutralized: "Wypierdalaj" has been translated as simply "Get out". Other than that, the peasant's speech displays stylization in the form of a slang contraction "gotsta" meaning "got to" (The Online Slang Dictionary, n.d.) and g-dropped "strikin'".

In another conversation with the Witcher, Baron talks about the simple folk believing in all kinds of magic and monsters.

*Baron: Wieśniacy wszędzie widzą czary, wiedźmy, diaboły i **chuj** wie co tam jeszcze. / Villagers everywhere see sorcery, witches, devils and dick knows what else.*

*Baron: Common folk see witches, wizardry, devils and who knows what the **fuck** else every which way they turn.*

This time the Baron uses the swearword "chuj" ("dick"), which belongs to the strongest Polish swearwords. Here the translator uses a similarly strong vulgarism, which is "fuck". Even though the propositional meaning is different, the expressive meaning has been maintained.

To sum up, the speech of the simple folk is often neutralized in places, where it was marked in the source text. As a result, many of the archaisms and dialectisms of the Polish version get lost in translation. *Pluralis maiestaticus*, which has been observed in the Polish version, also does not apply to the English translation since the latter uses the pronoun "you" in both formal and informal address. Similarly, the syntactic stylization, which consisted of placing verbs at the end of the clause, could not have been transferred into the English text since it is a language with a mostly fixed word

order. These forms of stylization in the source text are sometimes compensated elsewhere in the translation, mainly in the form of contractions and some non-standard expressions. Subsequently, the evoked meaning of the analysed utterances has been partially lost and partially retained even if the propositional meaning was relatively close.

As far as vulgarisms are concerned, we have observed three different strategies: using a swearword of similar strength, using a swearword of lesser strength or complete neutralization. Some swear words differed in propositional meaning but managed to carry similar expressive meanings related to their emotional load. Nonetheless, from what we have seen vulgarisms in the game are sometimes softened in the translation into English and this is not prompted by the PEGI[10] rating of the game, which is 18, i.e. highest possible (which means vulgar language and violence are allowed). The reason for this may be the fact that Polish vulgarisms are richer and more varied than the ones found in English. The English translator may have aimed at achieving a similar degree of diversity by softening some of the swear words.

4.2 Folk rituals

The Witcher III: Wild Hunt features an important Slavic rite of the Forefather's Eve, which is a direct reference to *Dziady Part II* by Adam Mickiewicz (1822), one of the most influential poets of Polish Romanticism. This is also the reason why this rite has been chosen for the analysis. The folk rite pictured in the drama by Mickiewicz consists in summoning the dead on the eve of All Soul's Day to help them get to heaven by offering them food and listening to their sorrows. The dead in turn tell their stories, which take on the form of cautionary tales explaining why they experience problems getting to heaven.

The poetic drama by Mickiewicz is referred to in the game on many levels. The first is the very name of the rite, Dziady, translated into Forefather's Eve. Secondly, the rite itself resembles the classic drama: it similarly features rhymes and is divided into lines spoken by the Pellar and by the Mob. The latter is the counterpart of the chorus in Mickiewicz's piece.

Guślarz: Czym jest życie? Sami wiecie. / What is life? You know yourselves.

Tłum: Krótką męką na tym świecie. / Short ordeal in this world.

Guślarz: To, co po nim następuje, / What comes next,

Tłum: Każdy z nas sam decyduje. / Every one of us decides for themselves.

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[10] PEGI stands for Pan-European Game Information and is a rating of the content of video games. There are 5 general ratings related to age appropriateness (3, 7, 12, 16, 18).

*Pellar: What is this life? Well **ye** know…*

*Mob: Fleeting torment **ere** we go.*

Pellar: What comes next, once life subsides…

Mob: Man his own fate decides.

The first part of The Forefather's Eve has been translated quite closely in terms of propositional meaning while maintaining the rhymes and similar rhythm. This time the Polish version features standard language while the English counterpart contains stylization, which points to a change in evoked meaning. The first such linguistic element is the pronoun "ye", which is the plural form of "thou" (you) and constitutes an archaism sometimes used in poetic and religious contexts (Collins English Dictionary, n.d.). Another archaism which is also used in literary context is visible in the form "ere" meaning "before" (Collins English Dictionary, n.d.).

Guślarz: Zaraz zjawią się przodkowie, / Soon the ancestors will appear.

Tłum: Co ich dręczy, każdy powie. / What ails them, everyone will say.

*Guślarz: **Czy gotowiście na swady**?/ Are you ready for conversations?*

Tłum: Przybywajcie! Już czekamy! / Come! We are already waiting!

*Guślarz: Zaczynamy **tedy** Dziady! / Let us start Forefather's Eve!*

*Pellar: Soon will rise **thy** dead, **thy** buried…*

Mob: Each will say what they're harried.

*Pellar: Will **ye** grant these souls reprieve?*

Mob: We're prepared to end their grief!

Pellar: Let's begin Forefather's Eve!

The next fragment features a looser translation: "Czy gotowiście na swady?" (Are you ready for talks?) has been rendered as "Will ye grant these souls reprieve?" and *"Przybywajcie! Już czekamy!" (Come! We are already waiting!)* as *"We're prepared to end their grief!"*. As far as stylization is concerned, "Gotowiście" is a word-formative archaism (Piela, 2016) meaning "Are you ready". "Swada" in turn is a lexical archaism

meaning fluent speech or eagerness (Doroszewski, 1958-1959). "Swady" (plural) could then be understood as conversations with the dead. There is also the conjunction "tedy" meaning "hence" or "then" (Doroszewski, 1958-1959), which is another lexical archaism. Stylization efforts can also be observed in the translation in the form of archaic "thy" meaning "your" and "ye" meaning "you", both of which can be found in poetic and religious contexts (Collins English Dictionary, n.d.). Despite a divergence in propositional meaning, the evoked meaning in this fragment seems to have been maintained.

Guślarz: **Kto z was wietrznym błądzi szlakiem,** / *Who among you wanders down the windy trail,*

Guślarz: *Nie opuścił tego świata,* / *Has not left this world,*

Guślarz: **Tego lekkim, jasnym znakiem,** / *The one with a light, bright sign,*

Guślarz: **Przyzywamy, zaklinamy.** / *We summon, we enchant.*

Tłum: **Przyzywamy! Zaklinamy!** / *We summon! We enchant!*

Guślarz: *Czy się mylę? Dobrze słyszę?* / *Am I wrong? Do I hear well?*

Tłum: *Duch przerywa nocy ciszę!* / *A ghost breaks the night's silence!*

Pellar: **Ye** *who wonder on the gale,*

Pellar: *Ever caught in this world's thrall,*

Pellar: *See this sign, gentle, pale,*

Pellar: **Ye** *we summon!* **Ye** *we call!*

Mob: **Ye** *we summon!* **Ye** *we call!*

Pellar: **Hark**! *A sound I hear!* **'Tis** *right?*

Mob: *A spirit breaks the still of night!*

The next fragment of the rite contains direct quotations from the Polish drama: *"Kto z was wietrznym błądzi szlakiem" ("Ye who wonder on the gale"); "Tego lekkim, jasnym znakiem", ("See this sign, gentle, pale"); "Przyzywamy, zaklinamy" ("Ye we summon! Ye we call!").* Since there is no existing English translation of *Dziady Part II*, the one contained in the game is original. The translation can be deemed quite faithful in terms of

propositional meaning. From the point of view of stylization and evoked meaning this time again the source text uses standard language while the translation features archaization in the form of "ye" repeated as much as five times in the quoted fragment. Lastly, there is the archaic "'Tis" meaning "it is" and "Hark!" meaning "listen" (Collins English Dictionary, n.d.).

With the lines above the introduction to the Dziady rite is concluded and the game presents the main part of the rite.

Niechaj kądziel płonie w żarze. Niechaj duch się nam ukaże! / Let the distaff burn in the embers. Let the spirit appear to us!

Niechaj duch zabierze głos. Wnet poznamy ducha los! / Let the spirit speak. Soon we will know the spirit's fate!

Przyzywamy, zaklinamy. *Duszę każdą przebadamy. / We summon, we enchant. We'll examine every soul.*

Ciemno wszędzie, głucho wszędzie. Co to będzie, co to będzie? */ Darkness everywhere, deafness everywhere. What will it be, what will it be?*

Cosik szemrze, cosik piska. Ktoś się zbliża do ogniska. / Something murmurs, something squeaks. Someone approaches the campfire.

Ciemno wszędzie, głucho wszędzie. Co to będzie, co to będzie? *// Darkness everywhere, deafness everywhere. What will it be, what will it be?*

*Burn the incense ever higher! Spirit, join us **'round** the fire!*

Spirit – speak! This time is yours! Tell us of your ghostly woes!

Ye *we summon,* ***ye*** *we call. Enter, souls, we'll judge* ***ye*** *all.*

All is quiet, all is gloom. What beings in the darkness loom?

Something whispers, something peeps. Someone near our fire creeps.

All is quiet, all is gloom. What beings in the darkness loom?

In the main fragment of the ritual, there is no information on the speaker, but some parts are similarly spoken by the Pellar and some by the mob. Moreover, the lines are twice as long and hence feature internal rhymes. This part also contains direct quotes from Mickiewicz: *"Przyzywamy, zaklinamy" ("Ye we summon, ye we call"); "Ciemno wszędzie, głucho wszędzie. Co to będzie, co to będzie?" ("All is quiet, all is gloom. What beings*

in the darkness loom?"). Especially the latter one is very famous and recognizable by the Poles. As there was no preexisting translation of *Dziady Part II*, this reference will not generally be noticed by the players of the English version, except for perceptive Poles who might play the game in English.

From the standpoint of propositional meaning, the translation of the main part of the rite is fairly close to the Polish source text. In the first line of the Polish version, the incense is burned in the cinder while in the English version, it is burned "ever higher". Similarly, the plea to the spirit to show itself becomes a plea to the spirit to join the mob "'round the fire". There are two further examples of added information that was non-existent in the source: "This time is yours!" and "Enter, souls". As far as stylization and evoked meaning are concerned, the Polish version contains a nonstandard noun "cosik" (meaning "something"), which is an example of archaism/dialect (Glosbe, n.d.). The English version again uses the archaic "ye" (three times) and a contracted nonstandard form: "'round" (aphaeresis).

What follows in the game is the appearance of a ghost, which is characteristic of this medium, and the Witcher Geralt is forced to fight evil spirits and protect the pellar and the mob.

All in all, what is characteristic of the rite of the Forefather's Eve in *The Witcher III: Wild Hunt* is the dramatic form with its intrinsic features such as rhyme and rhythm modelled on the original poetic drama by Mickiewicz. The result is occasionally loose translation and the addition of some elements probably motivated by the fact that English has shorter words, especially ones of Germanic origin. The Polish rite even features direct quotes from the famous work of the national bard, which have been translated quite adequately together with the remaining lines written specifically for the game. What is more, there is also stylization in both the Polish and the English rites but, interestingly, it is even more pronounced in the latter. The reason may be that the rite of Dziady in Polish portrays not as much Sapkowski's language (as was the case with the characters' idiolect) as the literary language of Mickiewicz. Last but not least, even though the translation seems to do justice to the original from the point of view of the dramatic form as well as propositional and evoked meaning, it will most probably fail in eliciting the same recognition and allusion to classical Polish literature of the Romantic age in its receivers.

Conclusion

Video game localization aims to provide the target players with a new original and comparable entertainment and usually does this through a target-oriented, fluent translation. In the case of *The Witcher III Wild Hunt*, however, what we have observed are efforts directed at foreignization rather than domestication. This is evident in the very effort to render the game's local colour in the translation. The striving to recreate

Sapkowski's idiolect, which is visible in the localized version of the speech of the game's characters, is just one such area. Another is the domain of Slavic rites exemplified by the Forefather's Eve, where the translator not only took great care to render its dramatic quality and propositional meaning but also provided a translation of the quotes from Mickiewicz's *Dziady Part II*, presenting the target players with a direct reference to classical Polish literature instead of replacing it for example with quotes from Shakespeare.

The Slavic local colour portrayed in the speech of the characters seems to have been transferred relatively well though partially into the localized version. The English version strives to do justice to the original through the usage of stylization – more pertinently archaisms, dialectisms and vulgarisms, which constitute characteristic features of Sapkowski's language that have been recreated in the game, though at times neutralization has been observed. Still, in both the Polish and the English versions of the game the characters generally speak in idiolect which adds to their credibility and enhances the local impression.

As far as Slavic rites are concerned, the ritual of the Forefather's Eve has been depicted adequately in the English translation. The English text is relatively close in terms of propositional meaning to the Polish rite, except for a few lines translated rather loosely. Still, more important than propositional meaning was the dramatic form of the ritual. In this respect, the translation is undoubtedly on par with the source text through the employment of rhyme and similar rhythm. Furthermore, the translator also provided a translation of the direct quotes from Mickiewicz's drama. Even though the English-speaking players may not recognize the reference, they are given a chance to get acquainted with fragments of classical Polish literature and are not treated as naïve receivers who will only respond to references well-known to them. Some players even excel at finding various allusions called "easter eggs" in games and are fully capable of appreciating them. In this light, it would be interesting to explore other references to classical Polish literature present in the game, such as *The Wedding* or the *Deluge* trilogy, both of which are available in English translations.

That being said, the very fact of translating the game from a local language to a global lingua franca stresses the globalization aspect that localization is tied to by making the game accessible to a global audience. At the same time, this creates a danger of diluting the locality, which was visible in a certain amount of neutralization that has been observed. On the other hand, some degree of neutralization does not have to be viewed in negative terms since it aims to increase the accessibility of the text. And yet it is the local quality of the game – the Slavic local colour – that makes it fresh and exotic in the eyes of the global player, which is partially due to the localization. All this leads to the conclusion that moderate foreignization seems to be a viable alternative to domestication whenever we are dealing with a prominent local colour in a particular title. Moreover, foreignization which is not pushed to the extreme does not necessarily

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have to compromise fluency. Subsequently, in the case of *The Witcher III: Wild Hunt* and games with similarly pronounced local quality, depicting the local culture becomes part of the obligations imposed on localization. Moderate foreignization makes sure that this culture is depicted as fully as it is feasible without making it feel obscure.

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