

Sorceresses and Witches: The representation of gender in The Witcher videogame Series

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Outline of the talk

- Outline gender and videogame research
- Contextualising 'The Witcher'
- Methods (collecting the corpora) and data
- Analysing representations of a sub-set of characters
- Conclusions and implications

Outline of gender and videogame research

- Content analyses suggesting that women are underrepresented and when they are they are overly visually sexualised (Dietz 1998, Beasley and Collins-Stanley 2002; Burgess et al., 2007; Miller and Summers 2007)
- There is a solid body of work on the visual representation of gender in videogames as a text (for example, Fox and Bailenson, 2009; Downs and Smith, 2010; Sloan, 2015)
- There tends to be a focus on the visually gendered body, and linguistic analyses tend to be rarer by comparison

Outline of language, gender, and videogame research

- 2 camps: videogame paratext and videogames themselves.
- Paratext linguistic analyses are much more common (see Ensslin, 2012; Ensslin and Balterio, 2018; Potts, 2015)
- Although some scholars have looked at aspects of videogames and applications to areas such as language teaching (for example, Gee, 2003), they have not yet looked at lexico-grammatical patterns around gendered terms / characters.

Contrasting visuals



- Highly sexualised
- Little to no spoke language



- Not sexualised
- A lot of spoken language

Summary of arguments

- Previous linguistic research tends to focus on paratext but not of videogames as a text
- Although the gender-based visual analyses of videogames are useful, they do not provide the full picture.
- We need to look at the linguistic features of videogames as a text in order to see how gendered characters both speak and are spoken about.

Background to 'The Witcher'

- Originally a best-selling Polish book series by Andrzej Sapkowski
- Follows the story of Geralt, a professional monster hunter



The Witcher videogames

- 2007- *the Witcher* (received an 81/100 on Metacritic and IGN's Game of the year award).
 - 2011- *the Witcher 2: Assassination of Kings* (received 88/100 on Metacritic and won European Games Awards' *best European Game of the Year*)
 - 2015- *the Witcher 3: Wild Hunt* (93/100 on Metacritic and IGN's best role playing game)
 - Over 33 Million copies sold worldwide (roughly 11 Million per game)
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- Draws heavily on the books by Sapkowski, but are not the exact same
 - The stories in the Witcher take place after the events of Sapkowski's final book
 - Draws quite heavily on medieval literature and tropes



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[illegible]

Cleaned and decrypted file

ief! Please! I'll pay you! I know important people... Where did that one come from? Unbelievable. Leave it. Hello there. Get him! He stole it. The rogue! Don't hit me!!! Gods! Welte to the King! You'll regret this day! Property of the Crown. Put it back. Greetings, witcher. Get out of my inn, mutant! Flea-ridden, arse-ploughed race. Good for nothing but y away from that tentadrake, or whatever it is. Courage can be a mask for stupidity, and stupidity can be dangerous. Will you? Wait... if you're a witcher, we could join forces. Bays work alone. I thought as much. I can draw him out of water. You merely need to ask... I don't even know if he has a neck. I don't know that I would have managed? It's no easy e? Any idea how to draw the Old Man out of the water, get him to stick his head out for a witcher's sword? [PL] W porządku [PL] Podobny do tego? [pokazuje swój] I do. Where the owić. Everything in due time, Gwynbleidd. Captured. My men have taken him to Flotsam. The kingslayer may attempt to spring him from prison. Fled. Iorveth? [PL] Oddam pod sąd. I' ukał, Geralt. Mówił, że to sprawa najwyższej wagi. Powinieneś z nim porozmawiać. [PL] Geralt! Co Ty robisz do cholery?! [PL] Nie wezmę w tym udziału, atak na miasto to szaleństwo. [PL] On sobie radzi! Iorveth ci zaufał, a tyś go w końską pytę zrobił! [PL] A łajno śmierdzi fajno! Iorveth jest twardy, ale honorowy! Nie puszcza w trąbę tych, co mu pomogli a hired thug now? Congratulations! You were one of us, Geralt. You saved us. [PL] Czego nie pamiętam? Try it. But I'm no king. Such a pity we're on opposite sides. He's escaped. ges. Explore the world of The Witcher: Versus on adventurous journeys and rise to meet great challenges. Form a guild and measure up your opponents in epic RvR battles.</html> I h najlepiej zna Riszona. [PL] Riszon porwał moją przyjaciółkę, Triss. Szukam informacji. [PL] Mamy zamiar wcielić ten plan w życie, uwolnić Iorwetha i wydostać się z tego bagna. ejscu wie, gdzie jest Twoja przyjaciółka, jest to Iorveth. [PL] A co ja mam z tym wspólnego? Help! [PL] Pomóż nam, a Iorveth z pewnością zapomni o Twojej zdradzie i pomoże Ci zn za nią. [PL] [ph] Ruda wiedźma nazywała ją Filipką. [PL] [ph] Po kolei... [PL] [ph] Triss? Ta kobieta, tak? Dużo tego było... Coś o smoku... O tym, że jakiś bohater pokonał smok opuścić barkę! Bez jeńców! [PL] W takim razie zapraszam na elfice z rusztu. Wolicie średnio wypieczone, czy krwiste...? [PL] Nasze kobiety są gotowe na śmierć. [PL] Idę tam. [do mojej. Ja jestem żołnierzem. I szukam dobrych żołnierzy. Pomóż mi. [PL] Nie wiedziałem, że w twoich żyłach płynie błękitna krew. S-so what month is it? [PL] Dobrze. Ale jeśli prostytutki/, pomóż nam, proszę. Przez wzgląd na naszą... znajomość. Did someone tip them off? What's with all the soldiers? [PL] Scoia'taeEEEEEEEEEE! [PL] Trzeba zawiadomić Ior h] Tak... Chyba... Chyba masz rację... Dziwne... [PL] [ph] Tak na prawdę chcesz nam to powiedzieć, tylko o tym zapomniałaś [PL] Zamieniam się w słuch. [PL] Słyszałeś o mnie wiel k kawał dobrego mięsa, na którą łaszcza się psy. [PL] A co? [PL] Bo to ich ziemia. Z dziada pradziada. Nie jestem anarchistą, wiedźminie. Moim celem nie jest bezmyślne nękanie l że pracujesz dla Iorwetha. [PL] Więcej nie mogę dla ciebie zrobić. [PL] Mamy różne cele, więc nasze drogi musiały się kiedyś rozejść. Co byś zrobił, gdybyś uznał, że nie jestem jmocniej. [PL] Państwo elfów. [PL] A co? [PL] Nie zamierzam, dopóki ty nie staniesz na mojej. [PL] W takim razie nie wchodź mi więcej w drogę. [PL] To prawda. [PL] Masz tupet. [l] Mnie zależy na czymś innym. [PL] A Roche? Nie wynajął cię? [PL] Doprawdy? Where's Ves? Bastard pervert! I'm not staying here. Great, thanks. So that's her name. I knew she wa Przejdź przez mur i uciekaj. Gdyby zaczęli cię wysoki mężczyzna ubrany na niebiesko, wszystko mu opowiedz i przekaż, że jego plan faktycznie był genialny w swej prostocie. In t że mamy inne zadanie. [PL] Nie chcesz się zmierzyć z Rochem. [PL] My? [PL] Ja nie będę czekał. [PL] Jak chcesz to sprawdzić? [PL] Bedziesz miał okazję spotkać się z Riszonym. A ne tried to kill me. Thought it might've been you. [PL] Bardziej mi się przydasz w mieście. [PL] Przyszedłem tu z tobą i wróce z tobą. [PL] Jesteś bardzo przewidujący. [PL] Wied eś, że nie cofasz się przed niczym. [PL] Nie wezmę odpowiedzialności za pogrom niełudzi. [PL] Ja tylko chcę wiedzieć kim jesteś. Na podstawie twoich czynów. Nadchodzi czas próby dą śledzić każdy twój ruch. Idziemy. [PL] Czas pokaże. Celebrate, my lords! Today's my treat - no innkeeper or wench will take a penny from you! Open barrels of the best [PL] Musimy porozmawiać, chodź. [PL] ...I to nie byle co. Zdradę. Prostą, jasną jak słońce. Piękną. [PL] Mamy jakąś okazję? [PL] Idziemy świętować! [PL] ...A później zastanowimy się azie konfliktu... [PL] Domyślałem się, że wyrok już zapadł. Jest tylko jeden problem, nie sądzę by Loredo zgodził się na własną egzekucję. [PL] Nie rozumiesz. Tylko w przypadku zdra wa. To tutaj Loredo trzyma zagrabione kosztowności, śpi, sra i brandzluje się wpatrzony w elfi posądek. [PL] Nie wiem czy mam jeszcze tę kieckę... [PL] Mają do niej wstęp tylko na ia'tael? How...? I can hear them breathing. One's sick or on fisstech. He's wheezing. We just want to talk to Iorveth. What? You elven cocks gone soft? Wait here... [PL] Niech będ oking for Cedric. [PL] Jest ranny. Loredo więzi go na barce, na której przetrzymuje wielu jeńców scoia'tael. [PL] Ciaran nie żyje. Dopadły go psy Loreda. [PL] Nie Loredo go dopa with the Scoia'tael? That's why he wanted to hang you - for making deals with the Squirrels? What a prick. What about their leader? What?! I met a few, yes, but made no fucking

Methods and data

- The data from the first game was manually coded out using string files which had very little encryption
- Other 2 games were heavily encrypted and different software was used to get that (Gibbed Red Tools for TW2; Lunis for TW3)

Video game	Token Count (using Wordsmith)
The Witcher 1	149, 716
The Witcher 2	255, 763
The Witcher 3	294, 258
Total	699, 764

Choosing gendered social actors

- Keyword lists for 3 corpora combined were generated (as measured by LL, LR, BIC)
- 150 top key words were taken from each corpora
- If a gendered character occurred, their frequency of occurrence was noted.
- 23 male social actors, 11 female social actors
- For this presentation, I will just be reporting on the 5 most frequently key female and male social actors
- Collocational analysis was conducted (for all gendered social actors), but there were few shared collocates. Shared discourse prosodies were present, though.

Gendered social actors who are keywords

Male Character Name	Number of Occurrences	Female Character Name	Number of Occurrences
Foltest	470	Ciri	397
Henselt	502	Philippa	280
Iorveth	410	Saskia	343
Radovid	335	Triss	637
Roche	333	Yenfer	254

Table 11- Most Frequent Male and Female Characters Who are Key Words and Their Frequencies of Occurrence Across All Three Games.

Male characters are leaders

The concordance lines for these men suggest they are in positions of leadership:

“I can spend the rest of my life serving King Foltest as a diplomat.”
(The Witcher 1)

“it’s revenge for those soldiers who died following Roche.” (The Witcher 2)

“They say chess is the game of kings, and Radovid proved this point twice over during his meeting” (The Witcher 3)

(3 kings, 2 leaders of armies)

Male characters are also cunning, merciful, and loyal

These 5 male social actors were also described as having positive attributes:

“Geralt led his group to the wharf, while Iorveth prepared the others to attack from another direction.” (The Witcher 2)

“They’re waiting for you. Defeating Henselt won't be easy. Henselt's experienced at waging war” (The Witcher 2)

“reports have confirmed earlier reports stating King Radovid has important plans for Novigrad” (The Witcher 3)

- Overall, we see a generally well-rounded representation of male characters

Differences in leadership

- There were some negative discourses around the male characters, though this also related to their abilities as leaders:
 - “There’s word he's colluding with Kaedwen. Greed. King Henselt would gladly annex more land and grant Loredo privileges” (The Witcher 2)
 - “Loredo couldn't protect the port from a drunk lumberjack, let alone Iorveth” (The Witcher 2)
 - “Irritated by Geralt's typical cheek, Radovid brayed for the witcher's blood and Geralt only dodge the executioner's axe thanks to the intervention of his co-conspirators” (The Witcher 3)
 - “Mhm. In that time, Roche ventured deep into Kaedwen on some secret mission” (The Witcher 2)

Men are

- Overall, men are represented as a non-homogenous group with different qualities. The discourses around them are quite mixed, with a fair few concordance lines suggesting they are viewed in well-rounded ways.

Women need to be saved

- Storyline about the 5 selected female characters position them as needing to be found, saved, or rescued:

“The city's underworld still held much of it in their sleazy grasp. Finding Ciri here would be like searching for a needle in a burning haystack” (The Witcher 3)

“Everyone loves her. Everyone wants to save Saskia” (The Witcher 2)

“I'm looking for Triss. Letho forced her to teleport near Vergen ” (The Witcher 2)

Female Character

Name

Ciri

Philippa

Saskia

Triss

Yennefer

Women need to be saved

- This idea that women need to be saved is supported by a transitivity analysis of agents and patients in verbs

The term 'woman' occurred as an agent in (a random sample of 100) verbs 27% of the time, and as patients 66% of the time (6% of verbs sampled were not transitive).

The term 'man' occurred as an agent in (a random sample of 100) verbs 55% of the time, and as patients 39% of the time (6% of verbs sampled were not transitive).

- This in addition to the concordance lines suggests that women in the videogame are portrayed as victims who need saving by (male) characters.

Women are sorceresses

- 4/5 of the female characters were sorceresses:
 - “Triss Merigold, redheaded sorceress - she was in the next room...” (The Witcher 2)
 - “Philippa Eilhart was, beyond all doubt, a crafty sorceress.” (The Witcher 2)
 - “This decision had consequences, however: Eredin could sense whenever Ciri used her powers” (The Witcher 3)
 - “Be forewarned that a sorceress has arrived on Ard Skellig. Her name is Yennefer and she hails from Vengerberg.” (The Witcher 3)
- But sorceresses are limited in their power (i.e. they are political advisors at most)
 - The only ‘sorcerer’ is a gay man -> other male magic users are referred to as ‘mage(s)’ (see Cunningham, 2016)

Except from Saskia

- The one female character who is seen as a physical fighter, rather than a sorceress is Saskia:

“turned into heated cross words, and then into a duel between Henselt and Saskia.” (The Witcher 2)

“Is what they say true? Did Saskia kill a dragon?” (The Witcher 2)

Discourses of leadership

Looking at the visuals



Triss
Merigold



Philippa Eilhart



Ciri



Yennefer



Saskia- full body
image

Male character visuals



Foltest



Vernon Roche



Henslet



Ioriveth



Radovid

Conclusions

- Qualitative analysis as informed by quantitative analysis (and indeed, combined with quantitative analysis) has been triangulated with visual analysis, which provides a more comprehensive analysis than simply looking at the visual representation of the gendered body.
- Male characters were represented as leaders with a variety of positive traits; female characters were represented as sorceresses (advisors) who often required saving or finding.
- When one female does show leadership qualities, her physical appearance is vastly different to other women and indeed male characters in the same role.

Implications & future research

- This presentation has demonstrated that corpus approaches to lexico-grammatical representations of gendered characters can be employed to videogames as a text
- But more research needed on more games to see if it is a trend within videogames in general or just The Witcher.
- Although I have not been able to cover it in this presentation, I have also examined how gender neutral professions and items can show a gender bias (for example *mag*es and *tro*phies).

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