

# Adaptation and Artistic Translation: Localization of *The Witcher 3: Wild Hunt* in the Context of National Cultures

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## ABSTRACT

The main focus of this presentation will be to identify and analyse obstacles in the processes of artistic adaptation and translation in the game *The Witcher 3: Wild Hunt* (TW3; CD Project Red 2015) from the game production studies perspective. In games studies, terms translation and adaptation are often connected with the idea of localization (Bernal-Merino 2008; Chandler 2005; Flanagan 2017) understood as a process of adapting particular product to the needs of a local market, including not only translation of the text, but also more complex issues of cultural differences, aesthetical preferences, religion, and law (Gacek 2019). Scholars underline that during that process technical elements and playability of the game cannot be forgotten (Flanagan 2017), translators' creativity and knowledge about the culture is crucial (Hevia 2006) and a high level of customisation and "transcreation" may occur for the proper localization (O'Hagan and Mangiron 2013). Different "levels of localization" have also been distinguished, including categories from "no localization" and selling the game in their original language, to "full localization" that provides players with a game fully tailored to their language (Gacek 2019). In case of a game production studies, analysis of the game localization process from the independent developers' perspective had been conducted (Toftedahl et al. 2018).

In described research project, Kevin Flanagan's (2017, 441) proposition of exploring "four moments of encounter in video game adaptation" will be applied as a guideline for throughout analysis. First encounter focuses on adapting the text created in other medium into a playable medium of a game. Second encounter looks at the act of adapting the game from one operating system to another (called here "porting"). The linguistic and cultural translation of a game – including localization – creates third encounter. The fourth encounter deals with modifications and adaptations of a game made by players. Proposed categories will be used as guidelines for the analysis of the artistic adaptation and translation processes in TW3.

First, the game will be analysed as an adaptation of *The Witcher* (orig. *Wiedźmin*) book series, written by Andrzej Sapkowski. A vast number of stories, characters and places had been taken from novels and short stories, and adapted into a playable quests, avatars, and areas. But Sapkowski's books are also representants of fantasy genre, with

particular narrative traits, stylistic means, and intertextual connections to various fairy tales or legends. The processes of their implementation into the game will be important here. Secondly, problem of translation and cultural specificity will be analysed. *TW3* was created by CD Project Red, located in Poland, as an adaptation of books written originally in Polish by the Polish author. At the same time, it attracted global attention and now is available to play in sixteen languages. The obstacles of localization will be taken into consideration here, not only in the context of cultural differences or legal and religious issues (Noclip 2017), but also in the context of the advertised “Polishness” of the game. Great number of references to Polish culture may be found in *TW3*, including architecture and landscapes, but also direct quotes from canonical Polish works of art, like Adam Mickiewicz’s *Dziady* (*Forefathers’ Eve*) or the legend about Popiel – legendary Slavic prince (Schreiber 2017). The strategies of artistic translation will be important here. Also, the problem of preserving national content without sacrificing playability, and non-Polish players’ immersion will be taken into consideration (Kuśnierek 2021; Maziarz and Onik 2019). Thirdly, activism of players will be analysed, including comments explaining cultural references or initiatives to localize the game into different languages (what happened in a case of a Turkish version of the second game in the series, CD Project Red News 2012).

The main aim here will be to describe some of the obstacles encountered during translation and localization processes (in the context of digital game derived from literary sources and with visible national references), and to show examples, how adaptation and localization teams of *TW3* resolved them. The four encounters proposed by Flanagan will help to show on given examples (including translations of original names, quotes from literary sources or various “easter eggs”) how advertised “Polishness” or “Slavicness” of the game was preserved through balancing between “full game localization” and specific “foreignization” for a game being something new and original, but at the same time, playable for a non-Polish player.

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