

Beyond Philology No. 16/4, 2019
ISSN 1732-1220, eISSN 2451-1498

<https://doi.org/10.26881/bp.2019.4.05>

Game localization pitfalls: Translating variables and gender

EWA B. NAWROCKA

*Received 12.10.2018,
received in revised form 14.05.2019,
accepted 30.05.2019.*

Abstract

Variables and gender constitute game localization pitfalls due to the fact that games are interactive entertainment software and contain dynamically generated content. Variables pose a problem in languages (such as Polish) which use inflection (conjugation and declination). Gender is an issue as the player, the characters the player creates, and the characters the player encounters in the game world can be male or female. Gender neutrality is a requirement not only in all messages directed to the player but also in plot related texts such as dialogs and journals. The present article seeks to investigate the subject of variables and gender in order to determine some strategies for dealing with these pitfalls.

Keywords

games localization, variables, placeholders, gender, strategies

Pułapki lokalizacji gier. Tłumaczenie zmiennych i płci

Abstrakt

Zmienne i płeć stanowią pułapki lokalizacji gier wideo z powodu faktu, iż gry stanowią interaktywne oprogramowanie rozrywkowe i zawierają dynamicznie generowaną treść. Zmienne są źródłem problemów w językach takich jak polski, który używa fleksji (koniugacji i deklinacji). Rodzaj gramatyczny odzwierciedlający płeć jest wyzwaniem, ponieważ gracz, postacie tworzone przez gracza oraz spotykane przez niego w świecie gry mogą być rodzaju męskiego lub żeńskiego. Neutralność płciowa stanowi wymóg we wszystkich komunikatach kierowanych do gracza, lecz także w tekstach związanych z fabułą, takich jak dialogi i dzienniki. W niniejszym artykule podjęto próbę zbadania tematu zmiennych i płci w celu określenia pewnych strategii ukierunkowanych na radzenie sobie z tymi pułapkami.

Słowa kluczowe

lokalizacja gier, zmienne, symbole zastępcze, płeć, rodzaj gramatyczny, strategie

1. Introduction

Video games constitute interactive entertainment software which, more often than not, generates dynamic content for the player. The interactivity and dynamic character of games is the source of two major pitfalls in the area of game localization, namely variables and gender. This is especially true for languages such as Polish, which have a rich morphological system with gender, number and declensions (Chandler and Deming 2012, Sajna 2013). Variables and gender, especially when combined, prove to be a Pandora's box (Kischewski 2016).

Variable issues arise directly from the fact that the game contains placeholders, which will later be dynamically replaced with appropriate content. According to Bernal-Merino, "linguistic

variables allow the game engine to create correct phrasing ‘on-the-fly’, avoiding retranslation which saves time and money in localisation projects” (2018: 128). Moreover, “variables can be used in many complex ways to enhance players’ immersion by addressing them, their chosen profile and their performance directly” (Bernal-Merino 2007: 6). “When text is displayed in-game, strings often change based on variables such as location, player’s name, number of items and so on. Developers have many conventions for notating these variables, and translators must be familiar with these in order to provide accurate translations for these strings” (Chandler 2008: 36).

By the same token, variables are potentially error-prone since their removal or alteration may result in a game crashing (Chandler and Deming 2012, Tutka 2017, Kuipers 2010). According to a MoGi Localization Agent (2019) variables can be tricky because their replacements are not always known. The solution is to account for all possibilities in the most natural way. In Kischewski’s opinion (2016), there are many cases where variables could be eliminated altogether by the developer, even if it means having much more text to translate. Still, variables are a part of most localization projects and although they constitute a predicament they are here to stay, not only for the previously mentioned economic reasons, but also due to their vital function in providing the player with customised content. Nonetheless, “while the use of variables for in-game parameters such as speed, endurance or armour won’t cause much of a problem, using variables to create sentences invariably does” (Kishewski 2016: 47).

Subsequently, gender issues stem from the fact that the player has a gender. The character the player creates and plays with can often be male or female as well (Bernal-Merino 2007), (Bernal-Merino 2013). Furthermore, the non-player characters also have a gender, one that oftentimes their invented names do not hint at. As one might imagine, staying gender-neutral is usually a challenge in the translation from English into languages with a grammatical gender of verbs such as Polish (MoGi Localization Agent 2019). Using variables for nouns with

a grammatical gender is equally problematic. What is required is a grammatical agreement between the noun functioning as the subject and the verb as well as between the verb and the noun functioning as an object, which has an impact on the whole sentence (Bernal-Merino 2007c).

A frequent mistake that can often be observed in localized games is using the masculine form to refer to the player. Indeed the Polish noun for player, *gracz*, is masculine, however, referring to all players in the masculine form is sexist and risks being ungrammatical and incorrect whenever the player or character name is female¹ (Kischewski 2016). According to O'Hagan and Mangiron, “[g]iven the broadening appeal of games to a diverse player population and the increasing number of female gamers, gender related questions in games will continue to pose significant challenges” (2013: 207). Hence special care must be taken in order to maintain gender neutrality and gender-inclusiveness in localized games (Pérez and Sáenz 2019), which can be achieved by employing a variety of linguistic strategies.

In order to account for the obstacles posed by variables and gender the present article will seek to explain how these problems arise as well as aim at identifying certain possible solutions that can be employed by the translator as part of the game localization endeavour.

2. Variables

The indisputable role of variables is to display customised content to the player throughout the entire play (Sajna 2013). “Variables are used in many complex ways in order to trigger players’ suspension of disbelief” (Bernal-Merino 2013: 205) and thus play an important part in enabling player immersion (O'Hagan and Mangiron 2013). Variables are “replaced by different values when certain conditions are met”, including a player’s action (O'Hagan and Mangiron 2013: 11) and choices (Bernal-Merino

¹ A simple example is: ‘<NAME> zaprosił cię do gry’, which can result in: ‘Anna zaprosił cię do gry’ (Anna invited (masculine gender) you to the game).

2007b). They constitute “replaceable parameters normally preceded by a “%” sign” (O’Hagan and Mangiron 2013: 96). They are replaced “on-the-fly” by the game engine (Bernal-Merino 2015) and are typically part of the software products (Sajna 2013) to which games naturally belong. As such they may be a source of grammatical errors (Chandler and O’Hagan 2016, Bernal-Merino 2013, Kischewski 2016). As Heimburg comments: “people don’t even notice when the grammar is good, but they certainly notice when the grammar is bad” (Heimburg 2006: 136).

Variables can generally be strings of text or numbers. Strings of text are usually nouns or proper names. Languages such as Polish normally require inflection of nouns which is impossible in localization since all nouns and proper names are dynamically inserted in the nominative case with some rare exceptions. Variables can also be numbers “whose precise value is determined as the *game* is played” (Heimburg 2006: 148). Both kinds of variables pose specific problems when translated into languages such as Polish. The only viable solution is to take into account all the possibilities (MoGi Localization Agent 2019) and ensure that the resulting text which the player sees will be grammatical, even if not stylistically pleasing.

In classic applications, strings are represented by the placeholder %s (s for string), whereas numbers by %d (d meaning decimal).² If we take for example the noun ‘house’ in Polish we will have three different forms of the noun according to the number: 0 *domów*, 1 *dom*, 2, 3, 4 *domy* and 5 or more *domów*. In such cases, the most basic strategy regarding number variables is to move the number in the workfile to the end of the sentence after a colon or a hyphen (Table 1).

² There is no unified way of representing placeholders among various developers. They can hint at the content (<NAME>) or not at all (%1, %2). Moreover, the % character does not represent the percent but aims to show that the expression is a variable.

Table 1

	Workfile	Example result
English	% houses	3 houses
Polish	Domy: %d Domy – %d	Domy: 3 Domy – 3
Backtranslation	Houses: %d Houses – %d	Houses: 3 Houses – 3

In another example the English version contains an optional plural form in brackets. Such a solution would be incorrect in Polish and is not generally used. Similarly to the previous example, the standard strategy is to move the number variable to the end after a colon or a hyphen (Table 2).

Table 2

	Workfile	Example result
English	%d day(s) left	4 days left
Polish	Pozostało dni: %d Pozostało dni – %d	Pozostało dni: 4 Pozostało dni – 4
Backtranslation	Days left: %d Days left – %d	Days left: 4 Days left – 4

Variables which are nouns or proper names are often the objects of verbs and, as such, also normally would require inflection. Hence various strategies are employed to make the sentence grammatical. The most basic strategy is to use a colon or a hyphen before the variable (Table 3).

Another example combines a number variable with a string variable. Since it is not advisable to use two colons or hyphens in one sentence a possible strategy is to put the number in brackets after the string variable as shown in Table 4.

Table 3

	Workfile	Example result
English	Kill %s	Kill Silver Drake
Polish	Zabij: %s Zabij – %s	Zabij: Srebrny Smok Zabij – Srebrny Smok
Backtranslation	Kill: %s Kill – %s	Kill: Silver Drake Kill – Silver Drake

Table 4

	Workfile	Example result
English	Kill %d %s	Kill 10 wolves
Polish	Zabij: %s (%d)	Zabij: wilki (10)
Backtranslation	Kill: %s (%d)	Kill: wolves (10)

The example below (Table 5) adds a place, where the player is to kill the given creatures as “sentences may contain multiple noun variables” (Heimburg 2006: 146). This is where another strategy, specification, can be introduced. In the translation a specifying noun ‘place’ is used which can be inflected and linked with a string variable that would be rendered in the nominative case.

Table 5

	Workfile	Example result
English	Kill %d %s in %s	Kill 10 wolves in Wild Forest
Polish	Zabij: %s (%d) w miejscu %s	Zabij: wilk (10) w miejscu Dziki Las
Backtranslation	Kill: %s (%d) in place %s	Kill: wolf (10) in place Wild Forest

The following example contains two string variables and is a case where the translator cannot change the order of the variables since the placeholders are identical. The example is a typical tip given to the player in real time strategy games so it is apparent that the first variable refers to a unit (jednostka) while the second refers to a building (budynek). The advisable strategy here is to use two specifying nouns, which can be inflected so that the end result would be grammatical.

Table 6

	Workfile	Example result
English	You can recruit %s in %s	You can recruit archer in archery range
Polish	Możesz zwerbować jednostkę %s w budynku %s	Możesz zwerbować jednostkę łucznik w budynku strzelnica
Backtranslation	You can recruit unit %s in building %d	You can recruit unit archer in building archery range

The next example is the same with the exception of placeholders. Whenever the placeholders for strings has a different form, the translator can move them around the sentence and possibly achieve a more natural sounding result, as shown in Table 7.

Table 7

	Workfile	Example result
English	You can recruit %1 in %2	You can recruit archer in archery range
Polish	W budynku %2 możesz zwerbować jednostkę %1	W budynku strzelnica możesz zwerbować jednostkę łucznik
Backtranslation	In building %2 you	In building archery

	can recruit unit %1	range you can re- cruit unit archer
--	---------------------	--

In general the examples above³ may not sound perfectly natural but they constitute a necessary compromise between completely non-grammatical and natural sounding sentences. The most commonly used strategies are applying colons and hyphens as well as moving the variable to the end of the sentence. Brackets can also be useful. Still, whenever the translator knows what the string will refer to, like in the last example, a specifying noun can be used to make the sentence sound more natural in the target language. There is also usually the possibility to consult the game developer and ask what the variable will be replaced by in order to choose the best strategy for a given instance.

3. Variables and gender

Another type of string variable which may pose gender issues is the one referring to the names of players and in-game characters (cf. Diaz-Monton 2007). The problems with these variables arise whenever a language, like Polish, displays gender inflection. The most commonly encountered situation concerns the past tense in Polish which is gender specific. One possible solution to the problem is to turn the past tense into the present tense, which is gender-neutral in Polish (Table 8).

This strategy is appropriate to all of the cases where the action was recent, being reminiscent of the English present perfect tense. Of course, the present perfect tense would also be usually rendered in the present tense in Polish (Table 9).

³ The examples above are invented by the author and they do not come from any particular game title.

Table 8

	Workfile	Example result
English	%s left the game	Anna left the game
Polish	%s opuszcza grę ⁴	Anna opuszcza grę
Backtranslation	%s leaves the game	Anna leaves the game

Table 9

	Workfile	Example result
English	%s has won	Unger has won
Polish	%s wygrywa	Unger wygrywa
Backtranslation	%s wins	Unger wins

Still, the problem concerns not only the past tense. Another example is the verb “should”, which is gender specific in Polish. In such cases it is advisable to use a synonym such as “must”, which would work for both genders. Moreover, it is important to note that “their” here is a gender-neutral form sometimes used in games by developers (Pérez and Sáenz 2019).

Table 10

	Workfile	Example result
English	%s should heal their wounds	Yaris should heal their wounds
Polish	%s musi uleczyć swoje rany	Yaris musi uleczyć swoje rany
Backtranslation	%s must heal their ⁵ wounds	Yaris must heal their wounds

⁴ A literal translation using a masculine form would result in: ‘Anna opuścił grę’, which is a glaring mistake. ‘Gracz Anna opuścił grę’ would also not be the best solution.

⁵ In Polish the word “swoje” is gender-neutral.

4. Gender

Similar to variables, gender issues are caused by the interactive and dynamic nature of games. First there is the player, who has a gender. Second, there are player-created characters who can be male or female⁶ since “in some games players can choose their character’s gender, race or profession, and this information ties seamlessly into the virtual world in meaningful ways” (Bernal-Merino 2015: 39). “In those games where players are free to choose their avatar, race, gender, personality, and so forth, linguistic variables have to be built into the dialogue so that the game addresses players in specific terms, enhancing their experience (Bernal-Merino 2007b). And third, there are the NPCs⁷ residing in the game world. We have already seen a few examples of the first two gender issues while discussing variables.

As regards the third case, the problems that occur most often are: (a) when the name of the NPC does not unequivocally hint at a gender (e.g. Yaris) and (b) when the workfile the translator receives to work on does not contain the name of the character who is speaking a given line. In the first instance it is necessary to consult all available reference materials to establish the gender of the character or ask the game developer. When however, as in the latter case, there is no information whatsoever on the speaker, the translator can either translate gender-neutrally (which will add to the difficulty and may have a negative effect on naturalness) or direct a whole series of queries to the developer asking about the speaker characters and their gender. It is important to stress here that the last case constitutes a severe problem and should not occur when working with a professional developer who applies best practices in their localization projects. Hence it is vital that the developer provide

⁶ In some games there is a single protagonist who has a specific gender. In such cases gender neutrality is not an issue and the translator needs to adjust the text to fit the protagonist’s gender.

⁷ NPC is a non-player character controlled by the artificial intelligence (AI) of the game.

“the name and gender of the character who is speaking in dialogs as well as the addressee” (O’Hagan and Mangiron 2013: 144).

Even if games feature gender-inclusive language such as ‘they’ instead of ‘he’ or ‘she’ or ‘police officer’ instead of ‘policeman’ (Pérez and Sáenz 2019), they may still pose problems in translation. Likewise, even when cooperating with well-prepared developers, gender is an issue in games localization. Apart from the short lines with variables, discussed previously, gender issues are typically found in dialogs and journals. The examples below come from the game *Baldur’s Gate: Siege of Dragonspear*, which has not been localized into Polish. Hence the translations are my own suggestions. The first example is a dialog fragment spoken by the main NPC antagonist to the player character.

When Caelar says ‘you’ve come’, an obvious mistake would be to translate it with ‘przyszędłes’ (masculine form of “you have come”). In such dialogs that are spoken to the player character who can be male or female, it is necessary to maintain gender neutrality by working around gender. Here is another case when the present perfect (or past) tense is rendered in Polish by the present: ‘przychodzisz’ (“you come”). Although this strategy may seem obvious, translators sometimes forget about it and it is not uncommon to encounter mistakes in this area even in well-localized games, such as the previous instalments of *Baldur’s Gate*.

Table 11

English	Polish	Backtranslation
Caelar Argent	Caelar Argent	Caelar Argent
Change is upon us. Great and righteous change. You’ve come to face me, so do so! Now is your time.	Nadchodzą zmiany. Wielkie i szlachetne zmiany. Przychodzisz , by stawić mi czoła, więc do dzieła! Nastał twój czas.	Change is upon us. Great and righteous change. You come to face me, so do so! Now is your time.

The second example concerns a conditional clause which can also be rendered in the present tense. Here the literal translation is avoided (gdybyś tylko wiedział/wiedziała) and the phrase ‘you are not aware’ is used (Nie zdajesz sobie sprawy).

Table 12

English	Polish	Backtranslation
Caelar Argent	Caelar Argent	Caelar Argent
And so we reach the end of a long, long journey. If you only knew the sacrifices I made to bring us to this point. All of them worthwhile.	A więc dotarliśmy do końca prawdziwie długiej drogi. Nie zdajesz sobie sprawy , jak wielką zapłaciłam cenę, by doprowadzić nas do tej chwili. A jednak było warto.	And so we reach the end of a long, long journey. You are not aware of the sacrifices I made to bring us to this point. All of them worthwhile.

The problem in the next example is the adjective ‘ready’. Adjectives are gender-specific in Polish and the word ‘ready’ has been known to cause problems in many games. In the example below, ‘ready’ (gotowy/gotowa) has been replaced by a similar expression: ‘do you want to...?’. Moreover, ‘ready’ is repeated in the answer options of the player. The player can answer with 1, 2 or 3. Instead in 2 the verb ‘want’ (chcę) is repeated and in 3 there is an expression ‘when I get ready’ (jak się przygotowuje).

Table 13

English	Polish	Backtranslation
<p>Caelar Argent What do you say then, <NAME>? Are you ready for this final battle?</p> <p>1: I'll be the one leading the battle, Corporal. 2: Ready? No. But it needs to happen, regardless. 3: I need more time to prepare. I'll return when I'm ready.</p>	<p>Caelar Argent Więc, co powiesz, <NAME>? Chcesz się zmierzyć w ostatecznej bitwie?</p> <p>1: To ja poprowadzę bitwę, dowódco. 2: Chcę? Nie. Ale i tak nas to nie ominie. 3: Potrzebuję więcej czasu. Wróć, jak się przygotuje.</p>	<p>Caelar Argent What do you say then, <NAME>? Do you want to challenge me in a final battle? 1: I'll be the one leading the battle, Corporal. 2: Want? No. But it needs to happen, regardless. 3: I need more time to prepare. I'll return when I get ready.</p>

The fragment below is a dialog between a female blacksmith, Jegg,⁸ and the player. In order to avoid gender specificity the Polish version displays a change of subject. Instead of 'you saved us' the Polish text says 'thanks to you we avoided' (dzięki tobie uniknęliśmy). Another example of a change of subject is a change from 'I acquired' to 'they fell into my hands' (wpadły mi w ręce). The next strategy for gender-neutrality to be found in the fragment below is the omission of 'I was wondering' altogether in order to avoid a literal translation (zastanawiałem się / zastanawiałam się), which would be gender specific. The last example in turn is rendering 'I'd like to' as simply 'I want to' (Chcę), in which the auxiliary verb is omitted and a synonymous Polish expression is used instead.

⁸ Jegg is female, which apart from the game can be checked in a wiki: <http://baldursgate.wikia.com/wiki/Jegg>

Table 14

English	Polish	Backtranslation
<p>Jegg Hey there, I heard you saved us all from certain death. S'pose I'm obliged to you for that. Is there anything I can do for you? Weapons you need? Armor?</p> <p>1: Would you be able to make M'Khin a set of armor? I'm having trouble finding a suit that fits her.</p> <p>2: Actually, there is something you might be able to help me with. I acquired these stone shards not too long ago. They clearly have magical qualities – I was wondering if you might be able to incorporate them into a weapon of some sort?</p> <p>3: I'd like to see your wares.</p>	<p>Jegg Witaj. Słyszałam, że to dzięki tobie uniknęliśmy pewnej śmierci. Chyba jestem ci za to wdzięczna. Czy mogę coś dla ciebie zrobić? Potrzebujesz broni? Zbroi?</p> <p>1: Czy możesz zrobić zbroję dla M'Khin? Mam problem ze znalezieniem dla niej czegoś odpowiedniego.</p> <p>2: Jest coś, w czym możesz mi pomóc. Niedawno wpadły mi w ręce te odłamki kamienia. Najwyraźniej są magiczne. Czy możesz umieścić je w jakiejś broni?</p> <p>3: Chcę zobaczyć twoje towary.</p>	<p>Jegg Hey there, I heard it is thanks to you that we avoided certain death. S'pose I'm obliged to you for that. Is there anything I can do for you? Weapons you need? Armor?</p> <p>1: Would you be able to make M'Khin a set of armor? I'm having trouble finding a suit that fits her.</p> <p>2: Actually, there is something you might be able to help me with. These stone shards fell into my hands not too long ago. They clearly have magical qualities. Can you incorporate them into a weapon of some sort?</p> <p>3: I want to see your wares.</p>

In another fragment below we can see a change of subject: ‘if I hadn’t killed him’ is rendered as ‘if he wouldn’t die by my hand’ (gdyby nie zginął z mojej ręki). The other instance of gender avoidance is ‘you would have me retreat’ translated as ‘am I supposed to’ (Mam uciekać) since a literal translation would be gender specific (chciałbyś, żebym uciekł/uciekła).

Table 15

English	Polish	Backtranslation
<p>Porios Back away, <NAME>. Back away and you might sur- vive this. 1: Lay down your arms. I’ve no wish to hurt you. 2: That’s what the last fellow said–well, he WOULD have said it if I hadn’t killed him first. 3: Attack me and you’ll die, as surely as the sun will rise in the morn. 4: You would have me retreat from you? You jest, su- rely.</p>	<p>Porios Wycofaj się, <NAME>. Wycofaj się, a może to przeżyjesz. 1: Odłóż broń. Nie chcę cię skrzywdzić. 2: To samo powiedział poprzedni. To znaczy POWIEDZIAŁBY, gdyby nie zginął z mojej ręki. 3: Zaatakuj mnie, a zgi- niesz. To pewne jak to, że wszędzie słońce. 4: Mam uciekać przed tobą? To jakiś żart.</p>	<p>Porios Back away, <NAME>. Back away and you might survive this. 1: Lay down your arms. I’ve no wish to hurt you. 2: That’s what the last fellow said–well, he WOULD have said it if he hadn’t died by my hand first. 3: Attack me and you’ll die, as surely as the sun will rise in the morn. 4: Am I sup- posed to retreat from you? You jest, surely.</p>

In the following dialog the past tense is rendered as past tense, but the form is plural: ‘I searched’ becomes ‘we searched’ (szukaliśmy cię) thereby avoiding the gender of the protagonist. This is possible since it is obvious that the game is generally played with a party of heroes rather than a single hero.⁹

Table 16

English	Polish	Backtranslation
Viconia Well met, <NAME>. It’s been a while. 1: After Sarevok’s fall, I searched for you . What happened? 2: What are you doing here? 3: Well met indeed. I must go now. Perhaps we will speak again later.	Viconia Miło cię widzieć, <NAME>. Minęło sporo czasu. 1: Po upadku Sarevoka szukaliśmy cię . Co się stało? 2: Co tu robisz? 3: Ciebie również. Muszę już iść. Może porozmawiamy później.	Viconia Well met, <NAME>. It’s been a while. 1: After Sarevok’s fall, we searched for you . What happened? 2: What are you doing here? 3: Well met indeed. I must go now. Perhaps we will speak again later.

The next dialog fragment takes place with a major antagonist in the game, named Sarevok. Here we see again that the past tense is rendered by the present tense without losing the sense. ‘You did not think me truly dead’ becomes ‘you do not think I can be truly killed’ and hence gender is avoided although the translation includes a slight shift in meaning that is still contextually acceptable.

⁹ It is possible to play with just one hero, but the default gameplay assumes a party of heroes.

Table 17

English	Polish	Backtranslation
Sarevok	Sarevok	Sarevok
You did not think me truly dead, did you?	Nie sądzisz chyba, że da się mnie za- bić?	You do not think I can be truly killed?

The last dialog fragment displays a change in voice: from active to passive. 'I felled you' becomes 'you have been felled by me' (zostałeś przeze mnie pokonany). In other words, the unknown gender of the player is substituted for the known gender of the NPC, Sarevok. The other example is rendering the present perfect by the present tense in Polish: 'I've had my fill' becomes 'I've enough of' (Mam już dość).

Table 18

English	Polish	Backtranslation
Sarevok We will never end, you and I. Even in death. 1: Prove it, if you can. I felled you once. I will do so again. 2: The end has come and gone already, brother. I've had my fill of vengeance. 3: You are naught but ashes. Return from whence you came, and bother me no more.	Sarevok Nigdy nie będziemy kwita. Nawet po śmierci. 1: Udowodnij to, je- śli zdołasz. Już raz zostałeś przeze mnie pokonany. Czeka cię to po raz kolejny. 2: Koniec nadszedł i minął, bracie. Mam już dość zemsty. 3: Jesteś tylko pro- chem. Wracaj, skąd przybyłeś, i nie za- wracaj mi głowy.	Sarevok We will never end, you and I. Even in death. 1: Prove it, if you can. You have been felled by me once. I will do so again. 2: The end has come and gone al- ready, brother. I've enough of venge- ance. 3: You are naught but ashes. Return from whence you came, and bother me no more.

The following examples come from the same game, *Baldur's Gate: Siege of Dragonspear*. These are sentences taken out of the journal. Journals in games provide a summary of the plot and quests for the player. The journal in the English version of *Siege of Dragonspear* is written in the past tense from the perspective of the protagonist. Using past tense in Polish is often impossible, so in such cases present tense is used. This changes the character of the text but the change is inevitable since the story must be gender-neutral. Still the present tense in stories is not objectionable as it is sometimes used in presenting plots in literature. Thus despite changing the tense it is possible to maintain the epic character of the story.

In the first and second example, the past tense and the present perfect are rendered in the present. 'I freed' becomes 'I free' (Uwalniam). Likewise, 'I have helped' becomes 'I help' (Pomagam).

Table 19

English	Polish	Backtranslation
I freed the trolls to wreak vengeance on the crusaders.	Uwalniam trolle, aby zemściły się na członkach krucjaty.	I free the trolls to wreak vengeance on the crusaders.

Table 20

English	Polish	Backtranslation
I have helped Elandro deal with his anxieties.	Pomagam Elandro poradzić sobie z lękami.	I help Elandro deal with his anxieties.

In the following example gender is avoided by rendering the auxiliary verb “should” as “must”, which is gender-neutral in Polish.

Table 21

English	Polish	Backtranslation
I should keep watch for another appearance of the hooded man.	Muszę wypatrywać kolejnego pojawienia się zakapturzonego człowieka.	I must keep watch for another appearance of the hooded man.

In the next example there is again “should” rendered as “must”. Also the past tense is rendered as the expression ‘I managed to’ (udało mi się) in order to maintain the past meaning in a gender-neutral form. However, this relatively easy solution should not be overused as it may result in an unnatural style on a textual level. If the translator were to use it all over the journal the result would certainly not be very good. This expression ‘udało mi się’ should be reserved for situations where the past meaning is not rendered well by the present and when it fits contextually as an achievement of the player character.

Table 22

English	Polish	Backtranslation
I should tell de Lancie that I poisoned the supplies.	Muszę powiedzieć de Lancie, że udało mi się zatruć zasoby.	I must tell de Lancie that I managed to poison the supplies.

In the example below, a literal translation is avoided (De Lancie chce, abym zatruł/zatrula) and a gender-neutral form is used: ‘expects that I poison’ (oczekuje ode mnie, ze zatruje).

Table 23

English	Polish	Backtranslation
De Lancie wants me to poison the crusaders' food and water in Dragonspear Castle.	De Lancie oczekuje ode mnie, że za-truję żywność i wodę członkom kruscjaty w Zamku Smoczej Włóczni.	De Lancie expects that I poison the crusaders' food and water in Dragonspear Castle.

The last two examples display a change of subject as the strategy to avoid gender. In the first sentence vision becomes the subject, while in the second, it is Edwin.

Table 24

English	Polish	Backtranslation
I've had a vision of Bhaal's death.	Nawiedziła mnie wizja śmierci Bhaala.	A vision of Bhaal's death came to me.

Table 25

English	Polish	Backtranslation
I've welcomed Edwin into my party.	Edwin dołączył do mojej drużyny.	Edwin joined my party.

5. Summary of gender-neutral strategies

Table 26 presents a summary of various gender-neutrality strategies presented in this paper. It should not be seen as a definitive list since such a thing does not seem possible. It serves, however, to show that the same problems may have different solutions depending on the context. Using a variety of strategies and not overusing one of them (for example the expression 'I managed to') is the key to the translator's success. Although this table presents some possible strategies, creative solutions

need to be generated by the translator on a case-by-case basis. One thing is certain: gender requires special attention from the translator. Maintaining gender neutrality when required is a key to immersive play for the gamer, which is the ultimate goal of all video games.

Table 26

Pitfall	Strategy	Example EN	Example PL	Back-translation
Past tense, present perfect tense	Using present tense	You've come to face me, so do so!	Przycho- dzisz , by stawić mi czoła, więc do dzieła	You come to face me, so do so!
	Changing the subject	I've welcomed Edwin into my party.	Edwin dołą- czył do mo- jej drużyny.	Edwin jo- ined my party.
	Using pas- sive voice	I felled you once.	Już raz zo- stałeś przeze mnie poko- nany .	You were felled by me once.
	Using the expression 'I managed to'	I should tell de Lancie that I poisoned the supplies.	Muszę po- wiedzieć de Lancie, że udało mi się zatruć zasoby.	I must tell de Lancie that I managed to poison the supplies.
	Omission	They clearly have magical qualities – I was wondering if you might be	Najwyraźniej są magiczne. Czy możesz umieścić je w jakiejś broni?	They clearly have magical qualities. Can you incorporate them into a weapon of

		able to incorporate them into a weapon of some sort?		some sort?
	Using plural form if appropriate	After Sarevok's fall, I searched for you.	Po upadku Sarevoka szukaliśmy cię.	After Sarevok's fall, we searched for you.
Adjective	Using a context – dependent synonymous expression	Are you ready for this final battle?	Chcesz się zmierzyć w ostatecznej bitwie?	Do you want to challenge me in a final battle?
Auxiliary verb should	Using 'must'	I should keep watch for another appearance of the hooded man.	Muszę wy-patrywać kolejnego pojawienia się zakapturzonego człowieka.	I must keep watch for another appearance of the hooded man.
Want sb to do sth Would have sb do sth	Using a synonymous expression	De Lancie wants me to poison the crusaders' food and water in Dragonspear Castle.	De Lancie oczekuje ode mnie, że zatruję żywność i wodę członkom kucjaty w Zamku Smocznej Włóczni.	De Lancie expects that I poison the crusaders' food and water in Dragonspear Castle.
		You would have me retreat from you?	Mam uciekać przed tobą?	Am I supposed to retreat from you?

6. Conclusions

All things considered, variables and gender constitute palpable pitfalls of game localization into Polish. Variables pose problems due to the fact that they are an unknown factor introducing gaps in texts. Additionally, the Polish language has grammatical features such as inflection. These two issues combined will always lead to problems, solutions to which are merely compromises. Texts with variables are rarely perfect, nonetheless, for now it is impossible to dispense with them. They are an inevitable element inherited by games from software and thus responsible for dynamically-generated content.

Translators in game localization are expected to handle such items successfully and working with variables has been defined as one of the translators' competences (O'Hagan and Mangiron 2013, Chandler 2008). When dealing with variables all possible cases must be considered and "the best possible solution needs to be applied to avoid grammatical errors and inconsistencies that may disrupt the pace of the game by attracting the player's attention for the wrong reasons" (O'Hagan and Mangiron 2013: 133). "To create immersive and varied game-play experiences, developers might want to consider limiting the use of variables to in-game parameters and use proper sentences whenever a game's narrative is concerned" (Kischewski 2016: 47). This would surely result in a better quality of texts and would be a preferable solution. Still, in reality variables are expected to stay especially since they are key to customised player content.

As indicated previously, variables may combine with gender issues and become the reason for a sort of double jeopardy. "The safest option is to use translations that will work in all contexts, regardless of the gender and number of the noun they modify, even if this translation may not be preferred one stylistically" (O'Hagan and Mangiron 2013: 132). Gender issues found in dialogs and journals are another story. In this domain, the naturalness of language cannot be compromised. The player should perceive the text as if it was written originally in their

language.¹⁰ Good style is a priority which outweighs fidelity to the original text.¹¹ The general sense must be maintained but can be rendered with synonyms which are not especially close. Hence ‘should’ can be rendered as ‘must’ even though the latter is stronger. The past tense can be rendered by the present, the active voice by the passive and the singular by the plural. It all depends on the particular situation but such modifications aiming at gender-neutrality are acceptable, even necessary, to maintain the natural flow of plot text in games – a quality games share with literature.

References

- Baldur’s Gate: Siege of Dragonspear. Game (2016). Beamdog.
- Bernal-Merino, Miguel Á. (2007). “Challenges in the translation of video games”. *Tradumática* 5. Available at <<http://www.fti.uab.es/tradumatica/revista/num5/articles/02/02art.htm>>. Accessed 12.10.2018.
- Bernal-Merino, Miguel Á. (2007b). “Localization and the cultural concept of play in games”. Available at <<http://www.localizationworld.com/wseattle2007/downloads/LocalisationAndGames.pdf>>. Accessed 25.04.2019.
- Bernal-Merino, Miguel Á. (2007c). “What’s in a ‘Game?’”. Available at <https://www.localisation.ie/oldwebsite/resources/lfresearch/Vo16_1Bernal.pdf>. Accessed: 25.04.2019.
- Bernal-Merino, Miguel Á. (2013). *The Localization of Video Games*. PhD thesis. Available at <<https://pdfs.semanticscholar.org/01b5/3b858c0ae8e224862b5c2d05613a3796f61d.pdf>>. Accessed: 26.04.2019.
- Bernal-Merino, Miguel Á. (2015). *Translation and Localisation in Video Games*. London – New York: Routledge.
- Chandler, Heather (2008). “Practical skills for video game translators”. *Multilingual*, October/November 2008.
- Chandler, Heather, Stephanie O’Malley Deming (2012). *The Game Localization Handbook*. Sudbury: Jones and Bartlett Learning.

¹⁰ This is a general requirement for games localization (O’ Hagan and Mangiron 2006).

¹¹ Localization, and games localization in particular, is target oriented (Es-selink 2000, O’Hagan and Mangiron 2013).

- Díaz Montón, Diana (2007). "It's a funny game". Available at <http://www.wordlabtranslations.com/download/its_a_funny_game_EN.pdf>. Accessed 25.04.2019.
- Esselink, Bert (2000). *A Practical Guide to Localization*. Amsterdam, Philadelphia: John Benjamins.
- Gambier, Yves, Luc van Doorslaer (eds.) (2016). *Border Crossings: Translation Studies and Other Disciplines*. Amsterdam: John Benjamins Publishing Company.
- Heimburg, Eric 2006. "Localizing MMORPGs". In: K. Dunne (ed.). *Perspectives on Localization*. Amsterdam: John Benjamins Publishing Company, 135-151.
- Kischewski, Rolf (2016). "The price of infinite choice: The impact of variables on game localization". *Multilingual*, June 2016: 42-47.
- Kuipers, Erik Jan (2010). "Lokalizacja gier komputerowych – czyżby dzieciennie proste? Nowe perspektywy w szkoleniu tłumaczy pisemnych". *Homo Ludens* 2/1: 77-86. Available at <<http://ptbg.org.pl/dl/42/Erik-Jan%20KUIPERS%20-%20Lokalizacja%20gier%20komputerowych%20-%20czy%C5%BCby%20dziecinnie%20proste%20-%20Nowe%20perspektywy%20w%20szkoleniu%20t%C5%82umaczy%20pisemnych.pdf>>. Accessed: 24.04.2019
- MoGi Localization Agent (2019). Interview. Available at <<https://mogi-group.com/interview-with-a-mogi-localization-agent/>>. Accessed 25.04.2019.
- O'Hagan Minako, Heather Chandler (2016). "Game localization research and translation studies: Loss and gain under an interdisciplinary lens." In: Y. Gambier, L. Doorslaer (eds). *Border Crossings: Translation Studies and Other Disciplines*. Amsterdam: John Benjamins Publishing Company, 309-330.
- O'Hagan, Minako, Carmen Mangiron (2006). "Game localization: Unleashing imagination with 'restricted' translation". *The Journal of Specialised Translation* 6: 10-21. Available at <http://www.jostrans.org/issue06/art_ohagan.php>. Accessed 12.10.2018.
- O'Hagan, Minako, Carmen Mangiron (2013). *Game Localization*. Amsterdam: John Benjamins Publishing Company.
- Pérez, Cristina, Leticia Sáenz (2019). "Gender-inclusive language in games and its localization challenges". *Multilingual*, May/June 2019, 32-35.
- Sajna, Mateusz (2013). "Translation of video games and films – a comparative analysis of selected technical problems". *Homo Ludens* 1/5. Available at <<http://ptbg.org.pl/dl/146/Mateusz%20SAJNA%20-%20Translation%20of%20video%20games%20and%20>

Ofilms%20-%20a%20comparative%20analysis%20of%20selected%20technical%20problems.pdf>. Accessed 25.04.2019.

Tutka, Paweł (2017). "The role of translation studies in video games localization." In: Karolina Drabikowska, Marietta Izdebska, Anna Prazmowska (eds.). *Form, Meaning and Function in Theoretical and Applied Linguistics*. Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 193-216.

Ewa B. Nawrocka
ORCID iD: 0000-0002-4365-0797
University of Gdańsk
Institute of English and American Studies
Wita Stwosza 51
80-308 Gdańsk
Poland
e.b.nawrocka@ug.edu.pl