# World of Speechcraft:

## Accent Use and Stereotyping in Computer Games

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**Summary in Norwegian**

Denne studien omhandler dialektbruk ('accent') i dataspill. Nærmere bestemt, etterforsker den om det er en sammenheng mellom egenskapene til spillkarakterer og den dialekten de snakker. Studien er inspirert av Rosina Lippi-Green sin 1997 studie om dialektbruk i Disneyfilmer og resultatene blir dermed også sammenlignet med hennes resultater, samt resultater fra andre lignende studier.

Årsaken til at nettopp dataspill ble valgt som materiale er at til tross for dataspillenes stadig voksende popularitet, er det blitt utført veldig lite forskning på dette mediet, og med denne studien ønsker jeg dermed både å belyse et mørklagt felt, men også å inspirere til videre forskning innenfor området.

Datamaterialet var 1230 karakterer fra ti forskjellige spill utgitt i perioden 1997 til 2009. Disse ble kodet for en rekke sosiale variabler, og dialekten deres analysert manuelt. En rekke hypoteser var knyttet til disse variablene, men den overliggende tanken var å se om det kunne påvises en form for korrelasjon mellom karaktertrekk og uttale. Alle karakterer som snakket en eller annen form for engelsk, enten det var med utenlandske uttaletrekk, en eller annen form for amerikansk, eller britisk, var inkludert så fremt de snakket lenge nok til at dialekten lot seg klassifisere.

Resultatene viste at det var hevet over enhver tvil at karaktertrekkene hadde noe å si for dialekten til en gitt karakter, og for alle de sosiale variablene var det tendenser til at noen typer dialekter ble funnet oftere blant karakter med en viss type karaktertrekk og sjeldnere blant karakterer med andre typer karaktertrekk. Sammenligningen med Lippi-Green (1997) viste at selv om det fantes visse tendenser til likheter, var det også flere områder hvor våre respektive funn var forskjellige. Et slikt område gjaldt karakterer med utenlandsk uttale. Hvor Lippi-Green fant at slike karakterer var overrepresentert blant negative karaktertyper, viste mine resultater et mer nyansert bilde, og det var mer sannsynlig at en karakter med utenlandsk uttale i de analyserte dataspillene hadde en positiv enn en negativ holdning. Et annet hovedfunn var at mens General American ('standard' Amerikansk) i filmene analysert av Lippi-Green hovedsaklig ble brukt av hovedkarakterer og positive karakterer, ble den i dataspillene brukt av alle typer roller.

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Anders Bratteli, Bergen November 2011

Dedicated to my dearest grandmother Alette Olsen (1914-2011).
You are sorely missed.

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**List of abbreviations**


AIAS: Academy of Interactive Arts and Sciences
BA: British coloured American
ESRB: Entertainment Software Rating Board
FA: Foreign accented
GA: General American
ISFE: Interactive Software Federation of Europe
KotOR: Knights of the Old Republic
MaPC: Main player character
NPC: Non-player character
NwN: Neverwinter Nights
PC: Personal computer, may also mean player character
PEGI: Pan European Game Information
RP: Received Pronunciation
RPG: Roleplaying game
SA/RA: Socially and regionally marked American
SB/RB: Socially and regionally marked British
SuPC: Supporting player character

## CHAPTER 1 | INTRODUCTION

### 1.1 Aim & scope

This thesis aims to investigate how different accents of English are used in the portrayal of characters in computer games. The sample consists of 10 games released between 1997 and 2009. All characters have been coded for the following variables, which were considered to potentially have an effect on the variety used: *Orientation* (physical/intellectual), *Gender* (male/female)*, Social Status* (high/non-high), *Species* (human/non-human)*, Prominence* (major/minor), and *Alignment* (positive/negative/neutral/mixed) (see 4.1 for a full description of these variables). In addition, the games were divided into *newer* and *older* based on their year of release, and also according to setting (science fiction and fantasy) (see 3.2.3). The varieties spoken by the characters were categorised into the following accent categories: General American (GA), Received Pronunciation (RP), British coloured American[1] (BA), foreign accented (FA), socially and regionally marked American (SA/RA), and socially and regionally marked British (SB/RB) (see 4.2 for a full description of these categories).

The study was inspired by Lippi-Green (1997), who studied accent use and stereotyping in Disney films as part of a greater work on language ideology and discrimination in the US, and my method and variables are inspired by hers, although I have made several adjustments and included new variables and categories in order to accomodate the somewhat different type of material I am investigating. In addition, Dobrow and Gidney (1998) examined dialect use in children's animated television from the nineties, and Sønnesyn (2011) investigated a sample of Disney films released after 1994. These studies have also served as inspiration and as a point of comparison.

The reason why accent use is bound with stereotyping is connected with attitudes to language. As we shall see in chapter two, several studies have shown that people associate different language varieties with different traits, to the extent that they may imbue a speaker of a given variety with the attributes they associate with the variety in question. For instance, speakers of RP may be labelled as intelligent and well educated, while speakers of Scottish English may be seen as friendly (see 2.4.1), based simply on the fact that they speak their respective varieties. The concept of attitudes towards language and language variety, then, is central to my study.

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1 A variety using a mix of GA and RP features

## 1.2    Computer games and films

The modern computer game can in many ways be likened to the movie, but there are great differences. The interactivity of the games versus the passiveness of the movies probably being the greatest of these. This interactivity takes many forms, such as the player being able to choose from which 'camera' angle he wishes to view the scene, where he wants to go, who he wants to talk to and what he wants to say (of course all within the confines of the game world which has been preprogrammed). As Steven Poole puts it in *Trigger Happy: the inner life of videogames* (2000), '[f]ilm manipulates the viewer, but a game depends on being manipulable' (2000:95), and '[i]n the cinema, the world is projected *at* you; in a videogame, you are projected *into* the world' (2000:98) (his emphasis). One thing they both have in common is that they tell a story. This is especially true for *roleplaying* and *adventure*[2] games, in which story and plot progression is essential for the functionality, and it is through this storytelling that the vast character galleries come to life.

The computer game industry has had to endure a lot of criticism and scepticism. From being ridiculed as a waste of time, or something for immature kids, to being accused of being detrimental to morality and promoting violence. But it is by no means the first industry to face such problems. The movie industry, from which the game industry has drawn a lot of inspiration (a flow of inspiration which has recently begun to shift the other way as well), was also faced with its fair share of problems. J. Edgar Hoover was very sceptical towards this 'new' media, and according to Ross in *Movies and American Society,* during the Second World War, 'Hoover's agents sent him a report declaring the motion picture industry "as one of the greatest, if not the very greatest, influence upon the minds and cultures, not only of the people of the United States, but the entire world"' (Ross 2002:8, quoting a report from 1943), which did nothing to alleviate this sceptisism.

The computer game industry has grown enormously the last two decades, To illustrate this, by September 2009 it had overtaken both cinema and films on dvd in terms of grossed money in Britain, as £1.73 billion had been spent on computer games the preceding 12 months, as opposed to £1 billion at the cinema and £198 million on DVD's and blu-ray (The Telegraph, accessed 18 November 2011). Despite this, it has received very little attention, both among researchers and in mass media. This untapped reservoir of ever more relevant data is the reason I decided to investigate computer games.

## 1.3.    Hypotheses

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2   Roleplaying and adventure are the two game genres from which the games in my study are chosen (see 3.2.2)

In this section I present all the hypotheses tied to the variables in my study. For a full discussion on the variables themselves, see chapter 4. On a general basis, I expect there to be evidence of correlation between traits exhibited by a given character, and the variety they speak. This I believe to be the case both as previous studies on accent use in film and TV have indicated such a connection (see 2.5), and because attitude studies have shown that people tend to associate various traits, such as intelligence, friendliness and social status, with certain varieties of spoken language (see 2.4), and it is expected that such associations are reflected in the games. The following are my hypotheses:

- Older games will show more accent variation than newer.

There are two reasons for this, although they are somewhat linked. Firstly, I believe that the newer games are more subject to political correctness, and therefore greater care will be taken to avoid stereotyped accent use, and standard varieties will be more prevalent (see 2.3.1). It could be argued that the timespan between the oldest and the newest game in the survey is too small for such an effect to be evident, but here my second reason comes into the picture. The history of computer games is a short one, and the technological development has been phenomenal, so the size and shape of the industry has changed enormously only over a few years. One result is that while the voice acting pioneers of the 90s were probably given more leeway with their characters to do as they pleased, the last decade has seen an increased focus on leaving nothing up to chance, with every part of the game development process overseen by trained professionals. This, I believe, has led to a conscious effort from the game developers to avoid stereotyped accent use, and also to try for more believable use, so that for instance four different characters from the same village will no longer speak four widely different varieties, as was often the case in the early voice acted games.

- Fantasy games will show greater use of British varieties than science fiction games. Conversely, science fiction games will show greater use of American varieties than fantasy games.

This is due to the fact that fantasy games are often inspired by medieval or renaissance Europe, when America was not yet colonised, or possibly in its infant stages. Furthermore, as we shall see in 2.4.2, British varieties sometimes evoke connotations such as 'traditional' and old days with 'king and queen' in Americans. Note that this does not necessarily entail that speakers of

British varieties will outnumber those of American varieties in fantasy games. In fact, because the game developers are American and America is the primary target audience, I still expect there to be a high number of American speaking characters in fantasy games. I expect it to be lower than for science fiction games, though. Where Britain is associated with the past, America is associated with the present and the future, due to its status as a modern superpower, and its history of space exploration.

- *Intellectual* characters will be more prone to speak RP and BA than *physical* characters. Conversely, *intellectuals* are less likely than *physicals* to speak socially or regionally marked Englishes.

This hypothesis is based on results from attitude studies, showing that RP speakers are typically seen as intelligent and well educated. (see 2.4)

- *Females* are more likely to speak GA, BA and RP than *males*, while *males* are more likely to speak socially or regionally marked Englishes than *females*.

This is based on results both from sociolinguistic studies, most of which show that females tend to speak more standardised than males, and also on attitude studies which reveal that this belief (or a belief that males speak more non-standard than females) is prevalent among lay people (see 2.6.4). It is also based on results from previous studies on accent use in televised cartoons and animated films (see 2.5).

- Characters of *high* Social Status will speak more BA and RP than *non-highs*, while *non-highs* will see more common use of foreign accents and socially or regionally marked Englishes than *high*s.

This is based on attitude studies which show respondents to associate RP with the upper classes and prestigous jobs, while socially and regionally marked Englishes, as well as foreign accents, are often associated with working class and semi-skilled labour (see 2.4) In the case of RP, it is a fact that this variety is preferred among the British upper middle class, and therefore, if there is a correspondence between real world accent use and accent use in the games, it would be more logical for *high* than *non-high* characters to speak RP. The reason I have no distinct ideas about how GA is used, is that it does not hold the same status in America as an upper crust

variety, as RP holds in Britain. Neither is it particularily associated with the lower classes in any way.

- Non-GA varieties are more likely found among *major* characters than *minor* characters[3].

This hypothesis may appear odd from the point of view that these are American games with Americans as the main target audience, and one therefore would believe GA (or at least American varieties in general) to be more dominant among *major* characters. However, first it is important to emphasise that I do believe GA will be very much in use among *major* characters, only not as much as it is used among *minor* characters. The reason for this is that in a game with up to several hundred different voice acted characters, I suspect many of them will speak GA simply for the sake of ease. This will apply mainly to minor characters, as the game developers will be loath to 'waste' the extra effort of a non-GA variety on a peripheral role.

- GA is more likely to be found among *positive* and *neutral* characters than *negative* and *mixed* characters. For RP, this will be reversed.

The reason I believe GA to be overrepresented among *positive* characters is based on the evidence from previous studies on accent use in films and televised cartoons (see 2.5). I also believe GA to be overrepreresented among *neutrals,* which is tied to the hypothesis on *major* and *minor* characters above. Many characters are coded as *neutral* simply because they feature so briefly in the game that not enough is known about their motivation or personality to label them otherwise, so if it holds true that GA is overrepresented among characters with peripheral roles, then this should also extend to *neutral* characters. My reason for suspecting RP to be overrepresented among *negative* and *mixed* characters is, like GA, based on previous studies (see 2.5), but also due to the possible increasing influence of political correctness, and what seems to be a growing consensus that British is becoming the only non-American variety which it is 'safe' to use for villains without stepping on someone's toes (see 2.6.1). I have not postulated any hypotheses regarding the other varieties in the study, simply because I do not

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3   I must confess that notes from the very early stages of the thesis show that I originally hypothesised it to be the other way around. That is, non-GA varieties were more likely to be found among *minor* characters than *major.* As I began to immerse myself in the source material, this expectation changed, however, and I forgot all about my original hypothesis. As the main body of work was executed with the revised hypothesis in mind, I chose to let it stand.

know what to expect. It is difficult to predict anything regarding BA since it falls somewhere between GA and RP. Depending on how computer game developers have adhered to political correctness, we may find that foreign accents are overrepresented among negative characters, as was the case in Lippi-Green (1997), that they show a more even distribution, or even that the game developers 'overcompensate' and have them overrepresented among positive characters. The same could apply to speakers of socially or regionally marked Englishes.

During the course of the study, it became apparent that where foreign varieties are concerned, there seems to be what Garrett calls 'attitudinal hierarchies' (2010:74). That is, people with a strong degree of accentedness (see 2.4.1) are often evaluated more negatively than those with a mild degree. Therefore, although not originally intended as part of the study, I perform a brief examination of the foreign accented characters with regards to their degree of accentedness and how they are otherwise portrayed.

## 1.4    The structure of the thesis

In chapter one I have introduced the topic of the present study, and why I have chosen this particular avenue of research. I have situated it in relation to previous studies on similar topics, and described what I expect to find. Chapter two outlines the theoretical background upon which I base the study. In chapter three I present my methodology and the data which formed the basis of my analysis. Here, I also take a critical stance towards my method, and attempt to discern whether another form of approach would have been more fruitful. Chapter four is devoted to a description of the variables relevant to the study. Both the social variables for which the characters were coded, and the accent categories are described in detail. In chapter five I present and discuss the results of my findings, before I attempt to gather the threads in a summarising discussion in chapter six.

## CHAPTER 2 | BACKGROUND AND THEORY

In this chapter I first look briefly at language variation and attitudes in sections 2.1 and 2.2. In 2.3, I explore Standard language ideology and outline its relevance to my thesis, thereafter situating it against the increasing influence of political correctness. In 2.4, I illuminate different ways in which the connection between language variation and attitude has been studied in the past, and outline the results from several such studies. 2.5 is devoted to discussing stereotyping in the media, and previous studies on the connection between type of character and the variety spoken are detailed here, while 2.6 discusses some of the character types which have been especially prone to stereotyping. In 2.7 I give a brief account of the history and cultural impact of the computer game industry, while 2.8 investigates the position and importance of voice acting in computer games.

### 2.1    Language and variation

Linguistic variation is often described with the aid of terms such as *accent, dialect* and *language.* But the difference between them is often unclear, at least for accents and dialects. Wells elects to avoid the term *dialect* altogether, replacing it with the term *variety*, where different varieties may potentially be distinguished by syntax, morphology, lexicon, and pronunciation. Varieties which are only distinguished by differences in pronunciation, are referred to as accents (1982:3). However, I feel that this causes a certain mix of terms, as 'variety' then is used both about varieties in general, and about accents in particular. Therefore, I will use another common distinction, where different *accents* of the same language are varieties which are only seperated by differences in phonology, while different *dialects* are varieties where lexicon, grammar and semantics may differ as well (Lippi-Green, 1997:43; Nilsen, 2002:15), and I use *variety* as an umbrella-term for both. For my study, I have limited myself to differentiating between accents only, and then mainly with the help of segmental features. The workload an indepth analysis of grammar and intonation would add, would not be defensible for such a small study.

It is important to realise the distinction between authentic and non-authentic language. That is, traditional sociolinguistic studies typically investigate language as it occurs naturally, while my data involves artificial situations where actors produce language according to a script and direction from the game developers.

## 2.2    Language variation and attitude

Attitudes towards language variation and varieties are abundant, and without them it would be fair to say that there would be no need for a study such as this, but what exactly is 'attitude'? Different working definitions are abundant; Sarnoff defines an attitude as 'a disposition to react favorably or unfavorably to a class of objects' (1970:279; in Bradac et al 2001:147). Some researchers have limited the term to an evaluative or affective response, while others have included belief (the cognitive basis for the evaluation), and behaviour (the observable reflection of the evaluation) (Ryan et al 1982:6f). In this study I will embrace the following definition by Edwards: '"language attitude" will be taken in a broad, flexible sense as any affective, cognitive or behavioural index of evaluative reactions toward different language varieties or their speakers' (1982:20).

It is important to clarify that language attitudes are based on personal experiences associated with the language forms in question, rather than some innate attribute linked with the language forms themselves (Niedzielski & Preston 2000:27f). People form attitudes towards language and language varieties based on the influences they have been and are being exposed to throughout their lives, and '[s]tatus and ingroup solidarity are (...) the two primary evaluative dimensions of language attitudes' (Ryan et al 1982:3). Thus, a subject's own variety is usually highly valued for no other reason than it being their own and associated with 'their people'. Such a high esteem might be found even among speakers who are aware that their variety is not viewed positively by outsiders. For these, this often results in a covert prestige being attached to the variety, as opposed to the overt prestige of the standard. Such covert prestige is exemplified by members of the American South, who, unable to proclaim their speech as standard, rather connect their variety (and identity) with pleasant labels such as 'Southern hospitality', and 'true gentleman'. (see 2.4 for a further discussion). Ryan et al sum it up as follows:

> The language or dialect of one's family life, intimate friendships and informal interactions acquires vital social meanings and comes to represent the social group with which one identifies. One's native language typically elicits feelings of attraction, appreciation and belongingness. In situations where a group's identity is threatened, the variety with which it is associated can become a key symbol of the group's culture and identity (1982:9).

## 2.3    Standard Language Ideology

The notion of a standard language is ancient, and 'is bound up with the aim of functional

efficiency of the language' (Milroy & Milroy 1999:19). It could also be said to be fueled by a fear that if all forms of pronunciation, spelling, and such were equally accepted, the result would ultimately be that the language would break up into a huge number of 'sublanguages', where the different speakers would be unable to comprehend each other. Although it is possible to establish a fixed standard where written language is concerned, the same is not possible for spoken language, due to the fact that there is always some variation, however small. Hence, it is fitting to refer to the notion of standard spoken language as an ideology, as 'an idea in the mind rather than a reality - a set of abstract norms to which actual usage may conform to a greater or lesser extent' (Milroy & Milroy 1999:19). It must also be noted that since standardisation implicitly seeks to prevent linguistic change, it is ultimately a doomed effort, as all evidence shows that language is constantly in change (Milroy & Milroy 1999:45). That being said, the essence of standard language ideology represents the belief that there is a 'correct' way of using a language (Milroy & Milroy 1999:25), which in turn makes all deviant uses not only non-standard, but sub-standard, and the users of such forms are seen as less worthy, or even stupid and incompetent. (Milroy & Milroy 1999:33).

Although standard language is usually seen as prestigious, Wolfram and Schilling-Estes make the case that it is not so much defined by its inclusion of prestigious features, as it is by being free of stigmatised ones (1998:12). The status of standard language is evident in many sociolinguistic studies where the respondents are asked to report on their use of standard forms versus the local ones, as respondents tend to show a strong overreporting of standard form usage (Milroy & Milroy 1999:16). Note that this is not always the case, however, and especially males have been seen to sometimes do the opposite. Both Trudgill and Labov have illuminated the apparent connection 'between lower-class speech patterns and masculinity' (Edwards 1982:27), and it appears that some form of covert prestige may be attached to the use of localised forms even to the degree that middle-class speakers sometimes overreport their use of nonstandard forms (Edwards 1982:27).

The notion of standard language is heavily reinforced by authorative institutions such as government, mass media and schools, and even dictionaries reflect this. Lippi-Green found that the 1989 version of the Oxford English Dictionary (OED) had the following definition of accent:

> The mode of utterance peculiar to an individual, locality, or nation, as 'he has a slight accent, a strong provincial accent, an indisputably Irish, Scotch, American, French, or German accent.' ... This utterance consists mainly in a prevailing quality of tone, or in a peculiar alteration of pitch, but may include *mispronunciation* of vowels or consonants, *misplacing* of stress, and *misinflection* of a sentence. The locality of a speaker is

generally clearly marked by this kind of accent.' (Lippi-Green 1997:58, her emphasis)

A search on OED online, revealed that by 1 June 2011, this definition had remained unchanged. What is questionable about this definition, is the use of 'mis', implying that there is some standard which stands above the other varieties, and that anything deviating from this is seen as wrong.

Standard language ideology is embraced by various groups in society, for slightly different reasons. One of the more questionable advocators are rascist groups and movements, such as America for Americans, which use the non-standard language of foreigners and other groups they disagree with as an excuse for discrimination against them. A seemingly more innocent (and for my purposes more interesting) group is the nerd culture. Bucholtz, whose ideas are backed by her one year of fieldwork at Bay City High School, claims: 'Central to nerdy practice is a particular emphasis on language as a resource for the production of an intelligent and nonconformist identity' (Bucholtz 2001:87). This was expressed through persistently avoiding non-standard language use, such as slang (when asked to comment on specific pieces of slang, several of the interviewed nerds even claimed to have no knowledge of it) (Bucholtz 2001:90). It was also evident in the phonology of the respondents, who even during spontaneous speech seemed to keep a style closer to reading style. For instance, one respondent pronounced *going to have to* as [goɪŋ tu hæv tu] (Bucholtz 2001:91f). These differences in pronunciation were also remarked upon by the respondents themselves, one of whom seemed exasperated by other peoples' tendencies to 'cut off half the words' (exemplified by not using the velar nasal at the end of words such as 'tripping') (Bucholtz 2001:92).

That nerds seem to have strong connections with standard, or even superstandard language is very interesting when bearing in mind that computer games and roleplaying games are phenomena which are often linked with the nerd culture. Provided that the game developers are aware of this, it might affect the way they use standard and non-standard varieties in the games.

### 2.3.1   Language ideology and political correctness

Although the phrase *political correctness* may be an invention of the 20th century (Hughes 2010:60), and perhaps especially the seventies (Hughes 2010:63), the phenomenon has been around for centuries. Even so, the last few decades have seen an increasing focus on its importance. As Geoffrey Hughes points out in his 2010 work on political correctness, it is quite unique in that it does not stem from some religious or political authority, but rather from a

variety of different sources. Its main 'goal' can be seen to protect the disadvantaged and minority groups, weeding out prejudical attitudes and the demeaning ways in which they are expressed (Hughes 2010:7). Perhaps the area where we are most accustomed to encountering political correctness is the lexical. Words used to describe concepts are changed, or in some cases, the concepts themselves are shunned. Feminism is one of the domains firmly linked with political correctness (Hughes 2010:64), and a salient example of its influence is language used about gender. For instance, historically, the male personal pronoun 'he' has been used in sentences where the gender is unspecified, but with the feminist movements of the seventies, new variants such as 's/he' or 'they' were introduced instead. Lexicals such as 'chairman' and 'spokesman' were also the subject of attempted change, to the neutral 'chairperson' and 'spokesperson' (Hughes 2010:6). Some of these changes have been more successful than others, but the heart of the matter is a general change towards neutrality and avoidance of loaded terms.

Even with the rise of political correctness, with terms such as racism and sexism following in its wake, discrimination regarding language use still seems somewhat accepted in some contexts, and as Burridge puts it 'conscious and unconscious discrimination against speakers of non-standard dialects and low-status accents is rampant' (2010:4). Historically, ideas such as some languages or accents being more logical or beautiful than others have been quite prevalent, both among linguists and lay people, and they persist today among the latter (Milroy & Milroy 1999:10). Recently, such notions are in decline, and most linguists would deny any such claims. The book *Language Myths*, edited by Bauer and Trudgill, is one such attempt at trying to inform non-linguists about the fallacy of many of these historical claims, as it tries to disarm popular notions such as 'Italian is Beautiful, German is Ugly' (Giles & Niedzielski 1998:85), and 'They Speak Really Bad English Down South and in New York City' (Preston 1998:139). This book certainly is in keeping with Hughes' idea that, 'A great deal of political correctness is concerned with changing ingrained attitudes and language based on offensive stereotypes deriving from collective prejudices, folklore and ignorance' (2010:40).

The advent of political correctness could potentially manifest itself in two ways in the computer games. The first is that language variation will be abundantly featured, but where before certain types of varieties might be used for certain roles, and other types of varieties for others[4], the varieties would now be more evenly distributed over the various character types, thus avoiding stereotyping. The second possibility is that standard varieties, which for an American audience would mean GA, will feature much more prominently. The reason for this,

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4   Such as GA being preferred for 'heroes' or positive characters, as seen in the studies covered in 2.5 below

is that by choosing the 'neutral' majority variety for characters of all types, one avoids the possibility of stepping on someone's toes, as it were, such as could be the case when having a minority variety being portrayed in a certain way. Of course, such a solution could also be interpreted as a way of reinforcing standard language ideology, as having fewer characters speak non-standard varieties overall, also limits the exposure of these varieties. Still, with the nerd culture sentiments on standard language ideology outlined in 2.3 above in mind, I suspect the latter solution to be more evident in the results.

## 2.4    Studies on language attitudes

Studies on language attitudes are still relatively rare, although they have become somewhat more common the last few decades. Several different approaches to extract the needed information are used, both indirect means such as the *matched-guise* and *verbal-guise* technique, and direct means such as interviews and questionnaires with direct questions about language attitudes (Carranza 1982:81). The advantage with the indirect methods is thought to be that instead of having the respondents directly report on their attitudes (which may lead them to report a false image, in order to project themselves as saintly as possible), inferring their attitudes indirectly from the responses skips this problem (Niedzielski & Preston 2000:9). The *matched-guise* technique was first introduced in 1960, and involves the same speaker having recorded the same text in two or more varieties, whereupon listeners are to evaluate the speaker's personality based on the recording, without having been told that they are in fact listening to the same speaker (Edwards 1982:22). The idea is that by having the same speaker record all the varieties, the evaluation should be influenced by differences in the varieties only, rather than being influenced by voice quality, or factors such as age and gender. This technique has met with some critique however, among others for the fact that it assumes the speaker is perceived as equally skilled in all varieties by the respondents. Violation of this assumption could mean that the respondents label the varieties differently not because of the variety itself, but rather due to the speaker's performance (Bradac et al 2001:139; Said 2006:39). Also, the reading of prepared passages creates an artificial environment which inhibits casual and spontaneous speech, and may severely influence the evaluations of the respondents, as was revealed in Ryan and Carranza (1977), where topic, context and domain all affected the listener reactions (Carranza 1982:82). Therefore other types of studies are employed as substitutes or backup, one simply being questionnaires, where people are asked to rate varieties on a scale, or asked about their attitudes towards varieties, or speakers of certain varieties (Edwards 1982:22). The trouble with questionnaires, however, is that they create a high awareness in the

respondents about them being measured (Bradac et al 2001:140). Therefore, a growing consensus seems to support combining indirect and direct techniques for maximum reliability of observations. With all this in mind, I feel compelled to point out that several studies have been carried out with the intent of investigating whether or not other variables than the variety of the speaker have an impact on the attitudes expressed by the respondents. As outlined by Garrett, a whole range of variables have been investigated, including speech rate, lexical provenance (whether the speaker used mainly Germanic or Latinate vocabulary) and lexical diversity, as well as the physical appearance, social class, gender and age of the speaker. While some of these variables did excert a limited influence on the outcome, the variety of the speaker was predominantely the main factor of consequence (2010:88-94). This is exemplified by a 1980 study by Ryan and Sebastian, which revealed that when respondents were informed whether or not the speaker was lower or middle-class before the evaluation, they still rated lower-class Spanish-accented speakers much lower for factors such as status and solidarity, than they did lower-class speakers of standard English (Carranza 1982:79).

The results of some of these traditional studies will be presented in 2.4.1. However, recently a new trend has also been to simply investigate directly what lay people have to say about language. This branch is called folklinguistics, and the results of some such studies will be presented in 2.4.2. Finally, in 2.4.3 I look at results from the BBC voices project from 2005, where over 5000 participants responded to a direct questionnaire online, ranking 35 different UK and foreign accents (Garrett 2010:172). These are compared with Giles' 1970 study, where secondary school students evaluated 13 different accents in a similar fashion (Garrett 2010:40).

Although the games are developed mainly by Americans, and first and foremost for an American audience, the rest of the world can not be dismissed as a target group either, so although language attitudes in America will be focused on, attitude studies with non-American respondents will be referred to as well.


## 2.4.1 Traditional studies

Most traditional studies have compared attitudes towards a standard variety, usually RP, GA or both, with attitudes towards one or several non-standard varieties. Certain patterns have tended to repeat themselves, such as RP speakers being seen as educated, intelligent, high class, but scoring lower on friendliness and trustworthiness. The opposite is often true for the non-standard varieties. Attitudes towards foreign accents are often very mixed, although some tendencies exist here as well, for instance a tendency for American native speakers to have low opinions about Spanish-accented English. Such patterns and their exceptions are detailed

through different studies outlined below.

In a study by Giles from 1970, British secondary school children judged RP highest for both status, aesthetic quality and communcative content, while the urban Cockney and Birmingham varieties ranked the lowest. Regional rural accents (South Welsh and Somerset) were placed between RP and the urban ones (Edwards 1982:23). This study did not attempt to elicit attitudes regarding *integrity* (helpfulness and trustworthiness) or *social attractiveness* (friendliness and sense of humour), but a study by Giles the following year did precisely that. Here, respondents rated RP highest for competence, but Somerset and South Welsh highest for integrity and attractiveness (Edwards 1982:23f). The respondents in this study were Somerset or South Welsh natives, and their ranking their own varieties highest for integrity and attractiveness could be interpreted as an example of the ingroup solidarity and covert prestige concepts outlined in section 2.2. It is perhaps unfortunate that there were no 'outsider' respondents as a control group. However, as we shall see, RP tends to score low for such attributes even when the respondents have no specific attachment to the other varieties.

Attitude studies towards RP by non-British respondents reveal much the same patterns as in Britain. In 1983, Ball found that Australians ranked RP high for competence, while low for sociability. Scouse, on the other hand, was perceived with warmth, but also symbolised incompetence (Garrett 2010:60). Huygens and Vaughan studied New Zealand in 1983, and again British English (presumably RP) received high scores for social status, but lacked warmth (Garrett 2010:62). In 1985, Stuart, Ryan and Giles compared RP and standard American English as perceived by US respondents. RP was awarded significantly more status than American, but scored lower for social attractiveness (Garrett 2010:63). Ladegaard used Danish respondents in 1998, and discovered that RP was associated with status, competence and linguistic superiority, but here too marked by low social attractiveness. Interestingly, the other varieties in the study were all evaluated especially favourably for one category each; the Scottish were seen as friendly, Australians as reliable, and Americans as humorous (Garrett 2010:64). Interestingly, this idea of the Scottish as friendly was also found in Cheyne's 1970 study, where both English and Scottish raters gave Scottish accents lower status than regional English, but male Scottish speakers were rated as more 'friendly' (Edwards 1982:23).

A more recent study from 2001 seems to suggest that a shift in the status of RP is in progress, at least outside Britain. Gayard, Weatherall, Gallois and Pittam had respondents from Australia, New Zealand and the US rate the three varieties, as well as RP, on power, competence, solidarity and status (Garrett 2010:65f). Although the US respondents did rate the male RP speaker on a shared first place with the US female for Status (the US female was on

top in all categories), the female RP speaker was, together with the New Zealand male at the bottom in all categories, and the male RP speaker only scored in the middle range for power and competence, and poorly for solidarity. The scores were somewhat higher from the Australian and NZ respondents, but not as high as expected based on previous studies (Garrett 2010:67).

The studies we have looked at so far have mainly involved RP and non-standard British, so I will now focus on GA and non-standard American. In 1990, Alford and Strother studied the attitudes of both native and non-native speakers of English towards Southern American, Midwestern and New York accents. The native speakers gave Midwestern speech high marks for status, while Southern was awarded high marks for solidarity. New York was given low scores for both categories. Interestingly, non-natives did not seperate between Midwestern and Southern, but they too awarded New York low marks in both categories (Said 2006:27f).

Bouchard-Ryan used white middle-class children aged 10 to 11 in her 1969 study on GA, 'low-class white English', and AAVE. They rated six speakers on 15 traits, such as 'wise', 'tall', 'religious' and 'trustworthy', and also assigned them one of the following occupations: janitor, gas station attendant, fireman, teacher and doctor. GA speakers were significantly favoured above the other two. Of the two, lower class white English ranked much more positively than AAVE (Day 1982:121). The same year, Tucker and Lambert used northern white, southern white and southern black college students to rate various non-standard American varieties, as well as GA. The latter was clearly favoured (Edwards 1982:26).

As stated at the beginning of this section, foreign accents see a mixed reception. The reception of the accents depends both upon the hearer and upon the origin of the speaker. Giles' 1970 study on RP, regional and urban varieties also included foreign accents, and some of these were actually ranked as high as RP, at least for some traits (Edwards 1982:23). Results along the same lines were also found by Podberesky, Deluty and Feldstein, who in 1990 investigated the attitudes of 134 American college students of mixed ethnicity, towards Spanish-accented and oriental accented English, as well as 'unaccented [sic] English' (Said 2006:13). Contrary to much of the earlier research, some of which I have outlined in 2.2, the speakers of the non-native varieties did not suffer significantly lower scores than those of native varieties (Said 2006:13). Results like those above are uncommon, however, and according to Milroy and Milroy '[i]n the United States, "foreign accents" seem (...) to be more subject to negative evaluation than in Britain, unless associated with prestigious social groups. Spanish is viewed with particular disfavour, as are Asian-accented Englishes' (1999:14). In Johnson and Jenks

(1994), 124 college freshmen rated German, Arabic and Spanish, as well as a GA speaking control group (1994:4). GA was rated the highest, with Arabic the lowest and German and Spanish in the middle (Johnson & Jenks 1994:23). The authors were somewhat surprised that Spanish was rated higher than Arabic, but launched the recent political developments as one possible reason (Johnson & Jenks 1994:26). This is by no means a far-fetched hypothesis, and ties in neatly with the long tradition in media to portray negative characters as affiliated with the currently alienated group, such as the Nazis around and immediately after the Second World War, the Soviets during the Cold War, and now most recently, the Arabs. In 1998, Cargile and Giles by help of a matched-guise test, compared attitudes towards GA, moderate Japanese, strong Japanese and strong/disfluent Japanese. Moderate Japanese and standard American actually scored equal for status, but for attractiveness, the former scored more negatively. The strong Japanese varieties were rated negatively in all respects (Said 2006:16-18). Although moderate Japanese managed to attain the same status as standard American, the general trend towards downgrading foreign accents still seems clear. These results also suggest that people not only differentiate between different varieties, but also that there is some sort of hierarchy within the varieties, an idea which will be explored further towards the end of the section.

In 2006, Said compared the attitudes of both native and non-native speakers of English, towards foreign accented English. The respondents rated each accent, Arab, Latino, East European and South East Asian, on a Likert Scale for a number of different factors, such as ease of comprehension, pleasantness and refinement (Said 2006:50). The respondents also rated how they perceived the speakers of each accent, according to status factors such as class and level of education, and attractiveness factors such as friendliness. Gender was also an issue, so each accent was spoken by both a female and a male elicitor, and there were respondents of both genders (Said 2006:51). Non-natives generally gave higher scores for all accents, but across accents, the groups largely followed the same pattern. The Arab and South East Asian males were awarded the lowest scores, with values well into the negative part of the scale. The Latinos and East Europeans were given the highest scores, although for the native respondents, this still meant that the Latinos were slightly on the negative side of the scale (Said 2006:58f). One of the factors was whether or not the accent sounded romantic or not. Here, all of the accents were rated on the negative side of the scale by the native respondents. When the speakers themselves were rated, the two South East Asians were consistently placed the lowest with regards to level of education and class, by both native and non-native respondents. For pleasantness and friendliness, Latinos and Arabs were the lowest rated (Said

2006:63f). These results show that the subject of attitudes is complex, and that care must be taken when generalising.

One interesting finding from language attitude studies, is that not only may various accents rank differently with regards to prestige, but also that there are differences between speakers which have been broadly labelled under the same variety. A study from 2004 on attitudes towards AAVE by Rodriguez and associates, revealed that the speakers with a high degree of accentedness[5] were evaluated on the lowest (most negative) part of the scale, while the less distinctive varieties ranked higher (Garrett 2010:74f). Similarily, a 1977 study by Ryan, Carranza and Moffie, in which 'Anglo students' evaluated Spanish-English bilinguals with varying degrees of accentedness, showed the degree to affect the evaluations, with the respondents giving less favourable feedback as the degree increased (Edwards 1982:26; Carranza 1982:78). In 1981, a study by Brennan and Brennan on Anglo-American and Mexican American attitudes towards English with a Mexican accent, showed much the same results, with higher status being accorded to those with a low degree of accentedness, in comparison with those with a higher degree. The ratings for solidarity, however, were not affected by the level of accentedness in any significant way (Said 2006:11-13). A study by Niestas in 2005 confirmed these findings (Said 2006:21f). Finally, Rey (1977) reported that employers, who listened to tapes of Cuban-Americans with varying degrees of accentedness and were asked to comment on whether or not they sounded like someone they wanted to employ, labelled white Americans the highest, then Black Americans together with Cubans with a minimal degree, followed by Cubans with a medium degree, and finally Cubans with a strong degree (Carranza 1982:70f).

There seems, then, to be a strong case for arguing for the existence of what Garrett calls 'attitudinal hierarchies' (Garrett 2010:74). Not all studies show such a strong correlation between degree of accent and positive or negative evaluation, however. In a 2003 attitude study on Spanish-American by Young, the respondents were all learning Spanish as a second language. Here, it was revealed that the female respondents all rated the least proficient English speaker the most favourably. (Said 2006:20f) Still, the overwhelming amount of research seems to indicate that people in general react less favourably the stronger the degree of accentedness they encounter.

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5   When I discuss the 'degree of accentedness' of foreign speakers of English, I mean to which extent they include pronunciations which are not native to English. A speaker with a low degree of accentedness, then, would only sporadically use non-native pronunciations, and perhaps only for one or two phonemes, while a speaker with a high degree of accentedness would use them frequently, and possibly for a greater range of phonemes.

### 2.4.2 Folklinguistics

Garrett defines folklinguistics as studies which 'refer to the views and perceptions of those who are not formally trained experts in the area being investigated' (2010:179). For a linguistic study this would mean that lay people are asked about their opinions on linguistic subjects, such as the use of the velar nasal [ŋ] as opposed to the alveolar nasal [n] for -ing endings in words such as *going* and *hunting*. The idea is that it is not only interesting what goes on in language, but also what ordinary people make of what goes on (Garrett 2010:179).

Although the tradition of folklinguistics is arguably an old one, Niedzielski and Preston date the onset of it as a defined field to the 1964 UCLA Sociolinguistics Conference, where Hoenigswald presented 'A proposal for the study of folk-linguistics' (2000:2). It met with early critique, however, among others from Labov, who argued that the data were impoverished, largely due to the inadequacy of non-linguists vocabulary when making overt remarks about language (Niedzielski & Preston 2000:3, originally from Labovs discussion in Hoenigswald 1966:23). Niedzielski and Preston point out that such logic seems flawed, as it hints that the language of these speakers must then be inadequate for the task of expressing their thoughts and opinions, a notion many linguists today would discard (2000:3). Even so, Labov himself did collect much information that may appear to be under the domain of folklinguistics, such as New Yorkers' attitudes towards New York speech, their attitudes towards southern speech, and how they believe New York City speech is perceived by outsiders (Niedzielski & Preston 2000:31). One of his discoveries was that two thirds of the interviewed New Yorkers believed outsiders to disapprove of New York speech (Labov 1982:341).

The difference between folklinguistics and traditional language attitude studies, may seem hard to grasp, but one important distinction lies in the aim: While traditional studies have given a great deal of attention to attempting to avoid the observers paradox, and draw the attitudes from the respondents without alerting them to the true goal of the study (the idea being that this will contaminate the data), in folklinguistics, the overt attitudes of the respondents are sought after (Niedzielski & Preston 2000:44).

In a study by Preston in 1986, respondents were given a blank map of the US and asked to show the main speech regions. The results were strongly attitudinal. That is, the regions were not simply seperated by boundaries, but terms such as 'hillbilly' and 'hicks' were used to describe the accents/accent users (Garrett 2010:180). Both northern and southern respondents largely seemed to share an idea that the 'midwestern' speech was 'accent free' (Garrett 2010:183).

In a similar study, a group of respondents from Michigan, one from Alabama and one

from South Carolina were all asked to rate the different states of America with regards to language correctness on a ten-point scale. Michigan gave the lowest scores to The South and New York, and the highest to themselves, closely followed by their neighbours. Alabama and South Carolina also gave the lowest score to New York, but gave the South scores roughly on par with the rest of the nation. The scores they gave to the Michigan area were also markedly lower than those given by the Michigan respondents (Garrett 2010:183-185). This clearly demonstrates the effect of 'ingroup solidarity' as discussed in 2.2. Interestingly, parts of the New England area was given high marks, which might be due to its association with British speech. If this is the case, then it follows Langacker's claim that 'British English enjoys a special favor in the eyes of many Americans' (Niedzielski & Preston 2000:43, originally from Langacker 1973:55). Ingroup solidarity was even more evident as the pleasantness of the varieties were judged, as here respondents generally valued their own speech as the most 'pleasant'. This was especially true for the Southern respondents. New York was given overall low scores for pleasantness as well (no New Yorkers were respondents in this survey), and Northerners gave the South low scores for pleasantness, while the Southerners largely did the same for the North (Niedzielski & Preston 2000:70). These results also reflect the phenomenon of covert prestige.

Along the same lines, Preston conducted a study in 1989, where college students from Indiana acted as respondents. Michigan, Minnesota and Wisconsin were rated as very correct, while speakers from the South were generally rated as the least correct. In this study, New York rated somewhat better, but there was a very high standard deviation for its scores, possibly owing to its unique cultural position (Lippi-Green, 1997:57). Preston also used his map-drawing routine in 1982. Here, Hawaiian respondents drew maps of what they perceived to be the different variety-regions, and assigned labels to show what they associated with the variety of these regions. It might not come as a great surprise that the Midwest and inland North were often given labels such as 'standard', 'regular', and 'normal', but it is worth noticing that the South was the only area which did not receive such a label by even a single respondent (Niedzielski & Preston 2000:56f).

Niedzielski and Preston's *Folk Linguistics* (2000) gives valuable insight into American attitudes towards American varieties. Among other things, they had fieldworkers doing interviews, and these revealed several instances of people linking Southern speech with a lack of education, even when faced with the reality that well-educated Southerners employed the same speech. Similarily, one respondent seemed to blame the Appalachians' 'poorer language skills', on them being generally unwealthy, and thus not being able to go too school as much

(Niedzielski & Preston 2000:99f). A recurring theme seemed to be the belief that those who are perceived to speak 'incorrectly' (mainly Southerners, speakers of AAVE and New Yorkers), do so out of laziness or a lack of interest in attempting to shape up (Niedzielski & Preston 2000:131). The fieldworkers also asked their respondents to rate the different varieties. Although New York was almost rated as low as Southern, it was far less frequently discussed in the conversations (Niedzielski & Preston 2000:125). Based on their findings and the historical context, they sum up that the caricature of the South has been predominantely negative, presenting the picture of the backward Southerner (Niedzielski & Preston 2000:123).

A recent folklinguistic study by Garrett, Williams and Evans included 187 native speakers from the US, UK, Australia and New Zealand who were 'asked to name the countries around the world (...) where they knew that English was spoken as a native language, and to jot down some words to say "how the English spoken there strikes you when you hear it spoken"' (Garrett 2010:187). They did not listen to any recorded speech. As American attitudes are most relevant I focus on theirs here. The Australians were given a positive affective value, but they were also seen as less cultured, with remarks such as 'sloppier' and 'less educated...' (Garrett 2010:190). Additionally, Crocodile Dundee was mentioned by 15 of the respondents, in addition to words such as 'rugged', 'rough' and 'macho' (UK respondents barely made such comments and NZ not at all). Garrett claims '[o]ne interpretation of this "tough" grouping is that the US respondents may have been relying on more limited media representations for their stereotype than the other respondents' (2010:190-191). This shows the potential impact media has on their audience, and how easy it is to build stereotypes.

When respondents from all the countries were considered, comments on English English were very much in keeping with findings on RP from earlier studies, with positive cultural comments being numerous. Keywords such as 'correct', 'standard', 'proper', 'wealthy', 'rich', 'high society' and also 'original' and 'traditional' were all mentioned. Negative affective comments were common among the US respondents however, with keywords such as 'stuffy' and 'they feel they are better than you'. Keywords such as 'Royal family' and 'Ancient times with a king and queen' were also present (Garrett 2010:193). These remarks should be kept in mind when comparing accent use in science fiction and fantasy games later in the thesis.

It is important to be aware of the fact that in many studies, the respondents are never explicitly told which sort of accent they are listening to, presumably so that the respondent will react only to the accent itself, rather than any underlying associations it might have with the area in question. However, this means that one can never be sure of whether or not the respondent has actually identified the accent 'correctly' (Niedzielski and Preston 2000:45). The

inconsistency and differing views of lay people was clearly illustrated through Preston's 1986 study, when respondents were asked to draw a map of the different linguistic areas of the US, and there were some whose ideas of the South were not even remotely similar (Niedzielski & Preston 2000:52).

## 2.5     Stereotypes and media

In *Movies and American Society,* Ross states that 'Movies do more than simply show us how to dress, how to look, or what to buy. They teach us how to think about race, gender, class, ethnicity and politics' (2002:1). He goes on to claim that 'The constant repetition of similar images in dozens of films until they become embedded in our minds as "reality" can affect the way we think about the world' (Ross 2002:9), especially if we have very few real life experiences connected with the images projected at us, so that 'People who had little daily contact with unionists, radicals, feminists, gays and lesbians, African Americans, Latinos, Asians and various minority groups, were most likely to be influenced by what they saw on the screen' (Ross 2002:2).

Movies, then (and more recently, computer games), build and perpetuate stereotypes. While some of these may appear innocent, others are far more sinister, such as the portrayal of Native Americans as half-clothed savages, uncaring and brutal, in early Hollywood movies (Redface, accessed 25 October 2011). This negative stereotyping has often led to protests by the offended parties, such as Italian Americans regarding *The Godfather* (1972), 'Asian Americans against *Year of the Dragon* (1988), and gays and lesbians against *Basic Instinct* (1992)' (Ross 2002:7), although usually with little consequences for the movie makers.

This stereotyping is often accomplished through a combination of different factors, such as appearance, demeanor, and accent. Accent is not only an important tool to signal a certain character's membership with a group, but also to imbue the character with attributes that are linked with the accent, attributes such as those outlined in the studies reviewed in 2.4. That the acting industry is aware of the power of the accent and the associations they inspire, seems fairly obvious when taking a look at some dialect coaching handbooks. Most of these are not only content with describing the diagnostic features and attempting to teach the student how to emulate the variety successfully. Rather, they include descriptions of what sort of people typical speakers of the varieties are, and even go so far as to imply that there is a link between the way they pronounce certain words, and their nature. Here is an example:

'The lilting melody that characterizes the Irish speech is reflective of the greenery of

Ireland's rural past. Legends of leprechauns and elves, and tales of love and adventure, mystery and wonder, have been passed down generation to generation. The Irish people's romantic land is lush with rolling green hills and fields of wildflowers. The lilt of their accent could also come from the warmth and friendliness of the people' (Walshe 2010:252, originally from Kopf 2003:41).

Not only are elves and leprechauns brought into the equation, but Kopf also seems to claim a connection between the 'greenery of Ireland' and the 'melody' of their speech. Jerry Blunt, in *Stage Dialects,* seems aware of the dangers of such comparisons, as he in the chapter on American Southern tries to disarm the myth of Southerners speaking slowly. One of the 'explanations' he attacks is the 'assumption that climatic conditions cause a slowdown of speech activity' (1967:40). He too, falls into the same trap, however, such as when describing a variety of Scottish: 'A native of Glasgow is called a Glaswegian. He lives in a highly industrial environment. As might be expected, much of the speech in this area sounds tight and twangy, not altogether pleasant to hear, and consequently not always desirable to reproduce' (Blunt 1967:92).

We have seen earlier that different attitudes towards language varieties is commonplace. In fact, no ordinary person is probably totally attitude free, as even if they believe that all varieties and languages are equally beautiful, understandable and worthy, will always have some unique experiences associated with each variety, which at some level, however small, will affect the attitude towards that variety. We have also seen that accents are useful tools for easily imbuing characters with attributes through the stereotypes they represent. Now we will look at some studies which have performed a closer examination of the connection between accent and character in cartoons and films.

### 2.5.1   Rosina Lippi-Green's Disney Study

Rosina Lippi-Green's study on Disney films analysed 371 characters from 'all of the available Disney full-length animated films' (Lippi-Green 1997:85), for 'a variety of language and characterization variables' (1997:86). The study was included in her book *English with an Accent* (1997), as part of an investigation into language ideologies and discrimination in the United States. The aim was to investigate the connection between character and accent, and her hypothesis was as follows: 'animated films entertain, but they are also a way to teach children to associate specific characteristics and life styles with specific social groups, by means of language variation' (1997:85).

Of the 371 characters, 56% spoke some form of American, 43% of which spoke GA.

British was spoken by 33% (22% RP), and foreign accents and other Englishes by 9% and 2%, respectively (Lippi-Green 1997:88). The gender distribution was 69.8% males and 30.2% females (1997:87). Her findings on gender is further discussed in 2.5.4.

The study also revealed that in the films where the story was set at a location which could have prompted the use of foreign accented characters, just over a third of the cases actually did so (Lippi-Green 1997:87). Moreover, while only 19.9% of the US English speakers were negatively motivated (as opposed to positive or mixed), 40.7% of the foreign accented were the same. The number for British and other Englishes was 30.4% (1997:92). This not only indicates a reluctance to include foreign accents, but worse, they are stigmatised when included. Lippi-Green also makes a point of there being no foreign accented male leads, and while the female leads in two of the films are actually foreign accented, they are both voiced by Eva Gabor, a famous member of the US culture at the time, who, it is argued, was cast mainly on reputation and the associations her reputation would bring (1997:96). Along the same lines, only two characters in a 'mother' or 'father' role are foreign accented, although eleven in such roles should have been foreign accented according to the setting (1997:97).

Apart from the case of AAVE, social and regional accents of British and US are not commented upon to any large degree by Lippi-Green, although some findings are mentioned. One is that no mother characters speak any form of non-standard US accent, while some leniency is shown towards non-standard British (1997:98). Her explanation is that an American audience would not typically distinguish between such varieties of British in the way they would between American ones, a point which is supported by Niedzielski and Preston's findings, where interviews revealed notions such as: 'there are two kinds of English in England – "upper class Oxford English" and "Liverpool Beatle's English"' (2000:150). This particular respondent even went on by identifying 'Monty Python' speech as 'proper, upper-crust British English' (ibid), apparently blissfully unaware of the range of varieties employed by the group.

Finally, Lippi-Green, in order to make the point that even well meant stereotyping can be negative, turns to the portrayal of the French. This, she says, is a group which is viewed mostly positively, or at least neutrally (1997:98). Jerry Blunt, in the dialect coaching handbook *Stage Dialects*, echoes this sentiment accentwise: 'To the ears of the English-speaking actors and audiences the incorrectnesses which make up a French dialect both attract and please' (1967:105). Even so, only five of 38 characters who are in a setting which should indicate a French accent actually make use of it. Only one of these is female, and she seems put there mainly to act as a coquette for one of the male characters (Lippi-Green 1997:100). In other words, the only impression of female French the audience are given, is that of flirtatious

romance.

### 2.5.2   Other previous studies

Lippi-Green refers to Goldstein's 1995 study on accent use in *Schindler's List* (1993). The film is credited for consistency in accent use, but a closer examination still reveals some notable patterns. In general it seems that 'the more sexually available and attractive a female character was, the less distinctive her accent' (Lippi-Green 1997:102). For the males 'conservative Jews had stronger Yiddish accents; the worst of the prison guards, brutish Nazis, had the heaviest German accents' (Lippi-Green 1997:103). In other words, characters with which we may wish to identify or sympathise are given a low degree of accentedness, while those we are meant to dislike, are given stronger degrees, increasing the sense of otherness. This ties in with the findings on accent hierarchies outlined in section 2.4.

In 1998, Dobrow and Gidney published a study on accent use in children's animated television, where they analysed a sample of 12 shows from various broadcasters (1998:109). The sample included 323 characters, of which 44% were coded as ethnically American (1998:112f), although about 75% of the characters spoke some form of American accent, which is far higher than the 56% in Lippi-Green (1997) (Dobrow & Gidney 1998:117). Males outnumbered females three to one (ibid), roughly the same as in Lippi-Green's study. They remarked that previous research has consistently shown a disproportionate number of foreign accented villains as opposed to American ones. Moreover, male characters have outnumbered females quite clearly (1998:106). They go on by quoting Barcus, saying: 'children's TV tends to reinforce traditional sex-role behaviors and personality traits extant in society. Thus, females are portrayed as being more passive in behavior . . . while being weaker, more peaceful, more dependent, and more passive than males' (Dobrow & Gidney 1998:113, originally from Barcus 1983:61). The situation, they say, is not much better in the shows analysed for their study (1998:113). British English (RP) was the most commonly used variety by villains, but also 'the type of English accent often employed in pirate movies' (1998:115) (I choose to interpret this as a form of West Country variety). Slavic with a strong degree of accentedness, as well as German were the dominating foreign accents. Several other villains seemed to mix traits from different foreign accents, the main point being that the person was not American. There were some American villains as well, but they all spoke regionally or socially marked American (Dobrow & Gidney 1998:115). Although there were no GA speakers found among the villains, a few of the heroes did speak with a foreign accent or non-standard American accent, but these were exceptions (Dobrow & Gidney 1998:116). Foreign accents were also used for comedic

effect, as were socially and regionally marked American. RP was never used in this manner, however. In fact, RP speakers were portrayed either as 'the epitome of refinement and elegance or as the embodiment of effete evil' (Dobrow & Gidney 1998:117).

In 2011, Janne Sønnesyn did a study on Disney films released after the films included in Lippi-Green's 1997 study. The sample included 18 films released between 1995 and 2009 (2011:49), causing the timeframe to correspond well with that of my own. 372 characters were analysed, with the following accent distribution: GA 61%, RP 14.2%, Regional AmE 11.8%, Regional BrE 3.5%, AAVE 0.5%, and English with other accent[6] 8.8% (2011:51). Compared with the findings from Lippi-Green, this means a decrease for all non-GA varieties and a corresponding increase for GA. Especially for the British varieties the difference is striking, them being spoken by 17.7% in Sønnesyn, as opposed to 33% in Lippi-Green's study (see 2.5.1).

The distribution of characters over gender in Sønnesyn's study is quite similar to that in Lippi-Green (1997) and Dobrow and Gidney (1998), as males outnumber females roughly three to one (Sønnesyn 2011:57). Unlike Lippi-Green, who only examined the accent use of some subgroups (mothers, fathers and lovers), Sønnesyn provides a comparison between accent distribution for all male and female characters. Both GA and RP is in higher representation among females, although the latter only slightly. English with other accent and regional American is more popular among males, while regional British is actually more widespread among females (2011:58f).

Sønnesyn also investigated whether there was a possible connection between the *sophistication* of a character and the accent spoken. A sophisticated character was defined as one 'intelligent and socially apt' (2011:44). Her findings shows that GA or RP is spoken by 84% of the sophisticated characters, compared to 64% of the unsophisticated ones. Conversely, non-standard varieties are largely in higher representation among unsophisticated characters, while the distribution for English with an accent is roughly the same for both (2011:72f). Although this variable does not correspond entirely to my own *orientation*-variable (see 4.2.1) they are similar enough to allow for some comparison between the results.

Rather than opting for dividing characters according to their ethical motivations as Lippi-Green did (and as in the present study), Sønnesyn grouped characters into seven different possible roles, such as 'hero', 'villain', and 'peripheral role' (2011:44). Some of the results should still be comparable, however, as categories such as 'hero' and 'villain' are arguably[7]

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6    Sønnesyn uses this as an umbrella category for foreign accents and accents 'from the English-speaking world outside the U.S or the British Isles' (2011:39)

7    Sønnesyn points out that the heroes and villains were not always 'all-good' or 'all-bad', such as Scrooge from *A Christmas Carol* who changes demeanor during the course of the story, but whom she nevertheless classifies

transferrable to those of 'positive' and 'negative' used in Lippi-Green and the present study. Sønnesyn found that as many as 83.3% of the heroes speak GA, around 10% RP, while the rest are divided between English with other accent and regional American (2011:78). For villains the numbers for GA is somewhat lower, at 70.4%, but this is still higher than the average of 61% for all characters. RP is more common among villains than heroes, with 14.8%, and the same applies to English with other accent (7.4%) (2011:81). Still, these numbers are roughly the same as for the total average. What Sønnesyn calls 'unsympathetic' characters could also possibly be compared with my category of 'negative' characters. For these she finds that around 40% speak GA, RP is spoken by 14.8%, RegAm 19.7%, BrE 8.6%, and English with other accent 17.3% (2011:84). Lastly, the category she calls 'peripheral role' could correspond to my 'neutral' category (see 4.2.6). Here, she finds GA speakers to number roughly 60%, RP 19%, Regional AmE 12%, Regional BrE 2% and English with other accent 7%, numbers which on the whole are not too different from the total average (2011:78).

## 2.6    Classical roles

Here I present types of roles which have often been stereotyped.

### 2.6.1    The Villain

Villains have often been subject to stereotyping, both in Hollywood and by its associates. Traditionally, they were often cast as representatives of a group which the government were or had previously been in disagreement with, such as the Native Americans, the Germans around and after World War II, and the Russians during the Cold War (Empire online, accessed 11 May 2011). Recently, such one-dimensional portrayals have seen a lot of criticism, but as Dobrow and Gidney's (1998) findings show, they still persist to a certain extent. One group has managed to avoid the brunt of this criticism, however: The English.

Peter Trudgill remarked that 'there is a long history in American science-fiction and horror films for sinister, menacing characters to be given RP accents' (The sociolinguistics of modern RP, accessed 15 August 2011). The phenomenon of the English villain does not go unremarked among non-linguist writers, bloggers and forum users on the internet either. One such is Helen O'Hara, who in a short article on villains and the demise of Hollywood, concludes:

'there's only one fallback position, one group that remains eternally reliable when it

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as a hero, owing to his status as protagonist (2011:50).

comes to providing villainy, one nation that can always be called upon for evil: the English. (...) there's something about the accent that can be depended upon to terrify us all' (Empire online, accessed 11 May 2011).

A parallel to these observations can be found on discussion boards. For instance, the official discussion board for the Star Wars: The Old Republic series, which one of the games in this study is part of, sees the question 'Why Are The Sith British?' (the Sith being bad guys) commonly raised. The user 'Minty', answers: 'because we brits are about the only nation that you can put in the stereotypical "evil" role and no one will be offended in the slightest'. Another user, 'Syrria', remarks:

> 'The west [sic] think of Britain when they think of imperialism, and the iconic "evil genius" (as depicted in Bond books / movies) is your classic intelligent, middle aged, upper class english man with detachable cat. We're the obvious choice therefore for an evil imperial regime. Also, American cinema has some demand for villains who aren't American, but share the language and much of the culture so both the heroes and viewers can associate' (Star Wars: The Old Republic forums, accessed 25 March 2011)

Note the reference to cinema despite the topic originally concerning the games, which shows how closely the two have become related.

### 2.6.2   The Hero

Whereas the villain is often marked as non-American, the opposite has typically been true for the hero. The hero is perhaps best described as unremarkable. That is, he has no exaggerated traits to set him apart, and this usually extends to the accent as well, resulting in an abundance of GA-speaking heroes, as we have seen documented in Lippi-Green (1997), Dobrow & Gidney (1998) and Sønnesyn (2011) in 2.5.

### 2.6.3   The 'Other'

Using accents to mark otherness has been a viable tool in the past, to the point where some accents have been associated with certain types of people, or where fantasy and science fiction is concerned, certain races. The main vampire villain in Bram Stoker's Dracula (1897) is clearly marked by his accent as a Transylvanian, which is made clear through descriptions such as '[t]he old man motioned me in with his right hand with a courtly gesture, saying in excellent English, but with a strange intonation...' (1897:13), and Dracula's own admission that he knows 'the grammar and the words, but yet I know not how to speak them' (1897:17). This has been reflected in film versions of the novel, and in films using the Dracula name, to a varying

degree. Bela Lugosi, one of the most famous Dracula actors, was a native Hungarian and consequently made regular use of such an accent. Conversely Christopher Lee used no discernable Eastern European accent in his many representations of Dracula, but Gary Oldman spoke with a clear Eastern European accent in *Bram Stoker's Dracula* from 1992. All in all, Dracula has in many ways become synonymous with vampires, which has lead to a connection between Eastern Europe and vampires. This means that even vampires which would not logically speak with such an accent still do so from time to time, although the recent influx of teen vampire drama series in America may now be erasing this old stereotype.

Another species which has become subject to some accent stereotyping is the dwarves. There is some discussion as to exactly how this stereotype has come to be. The film versions of Tolkien's *Lord of the Rings* has Welsh actor John Rhys-Davies contriving a Scottish accent for the dwarven character Gimli, but nowhere in the books is such a link mentioned. In fact dwarves themselves are creatures from Germanic/Norse mythology, and their names are of Norse/Germanic design, while their language seems inspired by Hebrew and Arabic, so there is nothing to indicate this Scottish link. Some claim Three Hearts and Three Lions by Poul Anderson in 1961 to be the first to introduce Scottish dwarves. What is certain is that the fantasy franchise Warhammer has made some use of Scottish dwarves in the 80s and 90s, and that the immensely popular World of Warcraft features Scottish dwarves. The Scottish, then, seem bound against dwarves, who are usually a mountainfolk, fond of beer, often temperamental, and fond of mining and especially gold.

### 2.6.4 Gender

Although early sociolinguistic studies were concerned primarily with social class, other variables such as gender and age have later seen more focus. For gender, many studies have shown that females can often be associated with prestige forms to a larger degree than males (Coates 2004:52). Kramer (1977, 1978) had white midwestern teenagers rate 51 speech traits on the basis of how they related to typical women's or men's speech, where 'good' grammar and pronunciation was associated with females, showing that the observations from Trudgill's study are also reflected in the stereotype (Kramarae 1982:91). These observations correlate with ideas presented by dialectologists and grammarians in earlier decades. However, it is prudent to bear in mind that their notions must be held in question, owing to their tradition of focusing on non-mobile, older rural men, thus failing to properly document any actual differences (Coates 2004:42f). Even so it must be noted that the reason many dialectologists tended to avoid women as respondents, was that their aim was to document the 'pure' dialect, and that women,

in their experience, tended to speak more standard language, thus failing to qualify as proper testaments of their local dialect. That being said, Coates, in *Women, Men and Language* (2004), illustrates that several recent studies have shown this not to be necessarily true, and that the idea that women are guardians of standard language, while men favour the vernacular, is somewhat of an oversimplification (2004:187). However, for the purposes of this study, I do not believe this to be an issue, as any stereotypical use of language related to gender in the games, will likely be based on the old beliefs.

Interestingly, Niedzielski and Preston (2000) found that their interviewees, rather than commenting on female speech as standard, focused on male speech as nonstandard, possibly indicating that female speech is seen as unremarkable (2000:191). The interviews also hinted that the concepts of masculinity, swearing and working-class are bound together (Niedzielski & Preston 2000:192).

As mentioned in 2.5.1, Lippi-Green's Disney study revealed that almost 70% of the characters were male, with just over 30% female, and while they were equally distributed among major and minor characters, females tended to be restricted to roles within the home, or as princesses, mothers, waitresses, housekeepers and the like. Men, on the other hand, figured in roles such as doctors, detectives and pilots, but also as waiters and servants. Even so, an idea that women have less life style choices than men, and that they are first and foremost wives and mothers, seems to be underscored (Lippi-Green 1997:87). In addition, female characters seem more static in terms of character development (Lippi-Green 1997:90). Lastly, Lippi-Green concludes that the mother role many of these characters are drawn into seems associated with middle-class norms, and 'without a hint of ethnicity, regional affiliation, color, or economics' (Lippi-Green 1997:98).

## 2.7    Computer games

This section is both devoted to explaining how I will use some technical terms throughout the rest of the thesis, and to an attempt at imparting some understanding of the brief but spectacular history of the evolution of computer games, and how this evolution has led to the point where a study such as this is not only feasible, but arguably long overdue.

### 2.7.1    Computer game terminology

The terms *computer games, video games* and several others, have been used by different parties to mean slightly different things over the years. In essence, computer games is sometimes taken to mean only games which are playable on a personal computer system (i.e a PC), while others

take it to include games for other platforms as well. *Platform* is a general term for the various electronic systems used to play computer games, so when I refer to different gaming platforms, I refer to systems such as Sony PlayStation, Microsoft Xbox, and the personal computer (PC). The term 'video games' has often been used about games played on handheld platforms and games which are played on platforms plugged to the TV (these are generally referred to as *consoles*), although this term, too, is sometimes used about games for the PC as well. As it has recently become more and more normal to release the same game for several different gaming platforms, the lines have been blurred even more. In order to avoid any confusion, I will make use of the term *computer games* in this study, and its meaning encompasses both games for the PC and console games. Should the need to differentiate between the two arise, they will be called *PC games* and *console games* respectively.

### 2.7.2 A brief history of computer games

According to Steven Poole in *Trigger Happy: the inner life of videogames* (2000), the first game ever created was a simple two-player tennis game. Designed in 1958 by Higinbotham, an employee at a nuclear research facility, its purpose was to entertain visitors from the public. The game never left the research facility, however, and soon passed into oblivion (2000:29f). In 1962, a group of students designed Spacewar, where the object was to fire torpedoes at the opposing player's rocket ship, while avoiding the graviational pull of a star in the middle of the screen. Reasoning that there was no market for selling the game, the students gave away the source code freely to anyone who wanted it (Poole 2000:30f). This source code would enable anyone to replicate the game, as well as expand on it, and this led to the first commercially available computer game: Computer Space from 1971. It met with little success, ostensibly for being too complex (in comparison with its rival pinball machines) (Poole 2000:33). That such a game, the gameplay being quite similar to that of Spacewar described above, could be considered too complicated seems quite ludicrous when comparing with the games of our generation. Nevertheless, the first true commercial success was accomplished a year later by taking a step back towards the simple tennis idea of Higinbotham. This success took the form of the game Pong, which had one simple line of instruction on the cabinet: 'Avoid missing ball for high score' (Poole 2000:33). The success of Pong eventually threatened to choke the budding industry in its infancy, however, as the 70s saw the market flooded with almost identical variations on the theme, and the sheer number of rivaling systems eventually led to a collapse in the market, causing a widespread crisis among manufacturers (Poole 2000:34). In the end, salvation appeared to arive from Japan, whose influx of new ideas helped spawn the

first games resembling those of our generation. Of these, Mario Bros. (1983) is undoubtably the most famous (Poole 2000:42). In fact, sequels and spin-offs are still being made today, and the entire Mario franchise is by far the most successful in the entire gaming industry, with over 262 million games having been sold as of March 2011 (Businesswire, accessed 16 November 2011). Of particular interest is the release of Final Fantasy in 1987. According to Poole, this game is the source of many of the paradigms shared by modern roleplaying games (2000:54), and has in other words been influential in shaping the games in the study. One of its sequels, Final Fantasy XII, is also included in my game selection. Games like Final Fantasy told long and complex stories, but technological restrictions still prevented anything akin to cinematic experiences with high definition video sequences and actual spoken dialogue. Not until the 90s were such attempts feasable, and even then the results were hardly comparable to ordinary film (Poole 2000:78). Consequently, most games released during this period would limit themselves to written dialogue, sometimes with short stretches of voiced dialogue used by the more important characters. Even so, with the enormous amount of money poured into the industry, and the constant improvement in hardware and programming, change was inevitable. Outcast (1999), signalled the beginning of this oncoming change. With a three-million-dollar budget, it sported a two-hour musical score recorded by the Moscow Radio Symphony Orchestra, as well as twenty hours of voiced dialogue (Poole 2000:113f). The game failed on the market, though, and not until Knights of the Old Republic (2003) was there a full length, commercially successful RPG which included a cast where every character was voice acted[8].

Although voice acting seems to be the new trend, some game developers still choose to have much of their dialogue in written text only. This is the case in Final Fantasy XII in this study, where spoken dialogue is restricted to cinematic 'cutscenes' in which the player is unable to control the events of the game, and most of the advancements in the plot are revealed. Even so, the general trend of present day gaming is that voice acting is becoming more and more central. This is evidenced by well-known Hollywood actors recently being found among the voice acting cast in games such as Fallout 3 (Liam Neeson), Call of Duty: World at War (Kiefer Sutherland and Gary Oldman), Elder Scrolls: Oblivion (Patrick Stewart and Sean Bean), and Jade Empire (John Cleese).

### 2.7.3   The cultural impact of computer games

The stereotypical 'gamer' has often been portrayed as a young male, and games are often relegated as something 'for kids', something which 'normal' adults would not spend their time

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on. Surveys show that if this was ever the truth, it is certainly the case no longer. According to Poole, already by the turn of the millennia, the average age of computer game players, was 21, with 29 per cent being 36 years old or older (2000:20).

In 2010, the Interactive Software Federation of Europe (ISFE) conducted an extensive consumer survey, where it was estimated that more than 95 million European adults played computer games regularily (Eastern Europe not included). This constituted 25.4% of the adult population in the 18 countries surveyed, with the percentage reaching as high as 38% in France (Little 2010:2f). The survey admittedly shows that the distribution over age is strongly stratified, with the highest percentage of gamers found in the youngest age group (68% of all 16-19 year olds), but interestingly even the 35-44 year olds show a higher percentage (30%) than the total for all groups (Little 2010:16). Moreover, the distribution showed that about 31% of males were gamers, and around 20% of the females, showing that males are by far not as dominant a user group as popular belief would have it (Little 2010:3). This being said, it must be noted that the survey also showed that males and younger gamers in general tended to spend more time and money on gaming than the other groups (Little 2010:8).

That computer games are widely distributed among the population is also reflected in sales numbers. According to Poole, by the turn of the millennium the British game market grossed 60 per cent and 80 per cent more than the total cinema box-office receipts and video rentals, respectively (2000:20). A concrete example from the US would be the game Legend of Zelda: Ocarina of Time, which grossed $160 million over the six-week Christmas period in 1998, far ahead of the most popular film at the cinema, *A Bug's Life* by Disney (Poole 2000:23). More recently, Call of Duty: Modern Warfare 3 sold over 6.5 million copies within 24 hours of its release in the UK and the US alone, at a value of over $400 million. This means total sales for the entire Call of Duty series now surpass the box office takings for the hugely popular Lord of the Rings and Star Wars trilogies (The Telegraph, accessed 16 november 2011). According to the ISFE consumer survey, a total of 253 million games with a value of over 8 billion Euros were sold at retail[9] in 2009 in Western Europe only (Little 2010:2). All of these numbers indicate that the impact and importance of computer games in modern society is not to be underestimated.

## 2.8    Voice acting

Voice acting in computer games is not a subject which has received much attention, even among gamers (although game reviewers are quick to point out if they feel the voice acting of a

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9   This does not include digital, online and second-hand sales, nor online game subscription fees

particular game is dissatisfactory). This is perhaps due to its relatively recent history (as we have seen, extensive use of voiced dialogue has only become the norm the last decade). Only over the past year, however, I have registered what seems to be a tendency towards a greater awareness and interest in the subject. Interviews with voice actors are becoming more common, and the voice actors themselves are expressing views that they deserve a greater amount of attention. In 2.8.1 I will take a brief look at how the work of voice actors differ from that of ordinary actors, while in 2.8.2 I will use interviews with some voice actors to shed light on how they are selected for the different characters, and to what extent accent is important for character building.

### 2.8.1   The demands of voice acting

The major difference between voice actors and stage actors is that the former are completely dependent on their voice to relay their message, while the latter is able to use body language, props, etc. This arguably makes the accent of the character even more central. Granted, in a finished game, the player usually watches some sort of graphic representing the character while they speak, but this graphic is not at the disposal of the voice actor (sometimes the graphic has not even been made yet). Furthermore, only very recently have computer systems become powerful enough for the graphic to replicate body language and facial expressions in anything resembling a believable manner. Before this, it was entirely up to the voice actor to adequately express a multitude of feelings and intentions through the voice only.

Jennifer Hale is a veteran voice actor who has done both voice acting for film/TV and games, among others Knights of the Old Republic and Mass Effect from this study. She reveals that not only is voice acting different from stage acting, but voice acting in games is different (and more difficult) than other types of voice acting, as in a typical animated series, the entire cast is together and they work in a rotation, being able to 'work off each other's energy', while in a game 'it's basically like doing a one-woman show for four hours' (Rock, Paper, Shotgun, accessed 4 August 2011). The sheer number of lines and the number of characters involved in a game simply makes it too impractical to hold a shared recording session for most games. Moreover, Hale points out that as game plot is strictly confidential, actors usually only get their own lines, and only a very short time before they are supposed to record them (Gamasutra, accessed 26 October 2011). When asked how she copes with this, she replies: 'I'll ask [the voice director] physically where am I, what's going on, how much ambient noise, how much battle (...), you've also got to know your history with the other person you're talking to and what you want from them' (Rock, Paper, Shotgun, accessed 4 August 2011). She admits that it

would have been helpful to have had a more direct contact with the surroundings, as this comment exemplifies 'It drove me a little bit crazy, because when I was in the game I could see the tweaks and adjustments I'd love to do' (on having played the Mass Effect game afterwards) (ibid).

Michael Gough, who voices the wise old sage in Diablo II (also in my study), echoes Hale's sentiments that most of the time you are completely on your own in the booth (apart from the voice director), and that you don't see the material "till you get there', and that in most cases he really does not know much of what is going on outside of the lines he is speaking. With scripts several inches thick it is really just too much. But he assures that they are given enough information about their own character and situation to act on it (Youtube, Michael Gough interview 1/2, accessed 26 october 2011).

An interview with the voice director for Mass Effect, Ginny Mcswain, reveals that, at least for the voice director, having the voice actor alone in the booth when producing the lines is not necessarily a bad thing: 'working one on one with an actor can be thrilling. I can be really indulgent and dig deep into the character, versus having an ensemble cast to wrangle!' (The Gaming Liberty (1), accessed 27 October 2011). Interestingly, even she admits 'it was impossible to know everything that was going down' (ibid). Regarding the, 'interactive actors' as she calls them, she says they are 'a special breed (...) It requires exceptional acting in a limited amount of time, people who can think on their feet, often with limited character definition' (ibid).

### 2.8.2  Voice acting and accent use

A study investigating the connection between character and accent presupposes that there is a conscious choice from the game developer to have certain characters speak certain varieties, and that it is not simply up to the individual actor to produce whatever sort of variety they feel like (although it could be argued that this too could produce some interesting patterns as the individual actor would consciously or subconsiously pick an accent to fit the stereotype). Films that certainly left the speech of no character to coincidence was the Lord of the Rings trilogy. Director Peter Jackson employed dialect coach Andrew Jack, who worked on the basis of an accent rationale, detailing the accent of every major character, as well as accents for different regions and races. The following excerpt provides an example:

> '[w]e began with the Hobbits; (...) we were looking for something timeless and rustic, [so] we chose the speech of Gloucestershire. (...) Samwise Gamgee (Sam) can be considered a working-class Hobbit: he is the son of a gardener. Sam's accent is as strong

as the other Shire Hobbits. Bilbo and Frodo Baggins are educated Hobbits. (...) Their accent reflects the patterns of accents within the UK where the more educated the speaker, the less localisable and the closer to RP [they are]' (Andrew Jack's homepage, accessed 4 November 2011)

Another case is the humans from the nation of Gondor, who were to speak RP 'with undertones of the speech of the counties of northern England', because '[t]his style of speech conjures up a degree of formality as well as a *warrior-like demeanour...*' (Andrew Jack's homepage, accessed 4 November 2011, my emphasis). This illustrates that at least in some movies, the tie between accent and character is strong, and that the movie makers clearly believe that accents flesh out the characters and give them attributes, such as the 'warrior-like demeanour' in the example above.

Can the same be said to hold true for computer games, though? Voice actor Georgia van Cuylenburg, on being asked how she got the job as Vanille in Final Fantasy XIII, replied 'I remember the character description: Aussie accent, young, bubbly, sunshine and rainbows, etc...' (The PAL Gaming Network, accessed 26 October 2011). Note how 'Aussie accent' is listed first. Michael Gough, in the same interview as in 2.8.1, is asked how he came up with the voice for his character in the Diablo series (the first game was released in 1996), to which he replies that the game creators 'had a vague idea that he was kind of an old, wise character, and that he might sorta' have like a Sean Connery thing about him'. He goes on by saying 'this was back before anybody... You know, it was all new, so nobody knew... Knew anything', which I take to mean that the instructions and demands upon the voice of the character have become stricter since then. When asked how he prepares for jobs in general, he says that he reads the description of the character and plays around with different voices, which seems to indicate that they are given some leeway, but he goes on to say 'if it requires, you know, some kind of an accent or something, you play around with that' (Youtube, Michael Gough interview 1/2, accessed 26 October 2011). Finally, voice actor D.C. Douglas reveals that '[m]ost audition [sic] come with a spec (vocal specifications)', and shares what he was given for the game Mass Effect 2: '[s]peech pattern: As part of a collectively intelligent race, it always refers to self as a plural – "we" or "us". Uses smooth, complete sentences with very subtle emotions, *no accent[10]*' (The Gaming Liberty (2), accessed 27 October 2011, my emphasis). In other words, the evidence all seems to point towards game developers being conscious of the potential role an accent can play in fleshing out a character.

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10 An inspection of the character revealed that 'no accent' meant GA.

# CHAPTER 3 | DATA AND METHODOLOGY

This chapter describes the processes involved in obtaining the data which forms the basis of my study. Section 3.1 details the reasoning regarding where I would find the data, which criteria I followed when choosing sources for the data, and why. 3.2 shows how the Award Association I chose as the basis for the game selection process, was helpful in finding games belonging to the desired genres and settings, and these are further defined. In 3.3, all of the games are introduced and situated according to genre and setting. 3.4 explains how the data was extracted from the games, gives a brief description of different character types and how they relate to my study, as well as the criteria by which they were chosen, as not all characters in every game were suitable. In 3.5, the character coding and accent analysis process are explained. Also, how the data was quantified using SPSS is described. Lastly, 3.6 takes a critical view on the methodology and examines whether different approaches might have been more helpful.

## 3.1    Data selection

### 3.1.1   Computer game selection

With the vast number of games available, it was clear that several guidelines would have to be in place in order to achieve as objective and representative a sample of games as possible. Firstly, restrictions were placed as to which game genres (sports, arcade, adventure, action, etc) were used, and secondly measures were taken to ensure that the games included were games which were among the most important and popular titles in the time around their release. In order to ensure variation it was decided that no more than one game should be included per year of release. This chronological spread also made it possible to compare the older games with the newer games, to see if accent use patterns had changed.

The restrictions placed on which game types were chosen, were intended to ensure that the games included had as high a chance as possible to offer the raw material that I needed (i.e. several different characters with enough voiced dialogue to allow me to classify their accents). *Adventure-* and *roleplaying* games in *fantasy* and *science fiction* settings seemed most likely to offer this. These categories will be explained in more detail in sections 3.2.2 and 3.2.3.

In order to choose the most important or popular games, several options were considered. Number of actual sold copies was one possibility, and another was using the games with the highest scores on the critics rankings. However, sales numbers are not always reliable

or easy to obtain, and there are so many different forms of rankings that it would be very hard to justify using one rather than the other. It was therefore decided to look towards the various ssociations which give awards to the different game developers and their games. Of course, the argument against using rankings because there are so many different to choose between could be applied to Award Associations as well, but a closer inspection of the major Associations showed that they tend to operate with different categories. Since my aim was to investigate adventure- and roleplaying games, those which did not operate with individual categories for these games were of no interest, and could therefore be ignored, thus narrowing the scope.

An Award Association which operates with categories for the different game genres, is The Academy of Interactive Arts and Sciences (AIAS). It appears to be one of the largest and most important actors on the scene, something which Snorre Bryne, game reviewer in Dagbladet confirmed (personal correspondence). I then selected the winner of either the roleplaying game or the adventure game category for each year. If neither of the two winners met with the other criteria, one of the nominees was chosen.

In order to avoid a possible mixture of culture and language attitudes, American games were preferred, but non-American games were considered if no suitable American games were available. This ultimately led to the inclusion of Final Fantasy XII, which was originally developed in Japan. The English version was produced by an American company, however.

 Lastly, only PC games were originally considered for the study. This was both to avoid having to choose between too many games, and to avoid having to acquire all of the different gaming systems. However, as it proved harder than I had first thought to find suitable games within the winners or nominees each year, console games were accepted as an alternative if no PC games were suitable. This is the case for the Playstation exclusive Final Fantasy XII, and several of the other games, which were originally released for Xbox and only later for PC.


## 3.2   AIAS and game genres

In this section I elaborate on the mechanics of the AIAS award system, and how it relates to the game genres I settled on. In addition, I give a brief description of what is meant by an adventure and a roleplaying game, and how I have defined the science fiction and fantasy genres. Roleplaying games will from now on be abbreviated RPG, while science fiction may be shortened to sci-fi.


### 3.2.1   AIAS

The first AIAS Awards were held in 1998, prizing games released in 1997, and my study

includes games from this and up till the 2010 Awards (The Academy of Interactive Arts and Sciences homepage, accessed 11 August 2011). As mentioned in 3.1.1, AIAS was not only chosen because of its status, but also because the awards were conveniently categorised, among other things, by game genre. This made it possible to ensure that a game of the wanted genre was indeed nominated or a winner each year. The categories have undergone some changes over the years, however. From 1998 to 2004, PC and console games were separate categories, so there was for instance both a PC RPG of the year and a console RPG of the year. After 2004, however, these two categories were collapsed. This meant that from 2005 and onwards, all of the nominees and the winner could potentially be console games. This is partly the reason why some games which were originally released for console were also included in the study, as there simply were no suitable PC games. In addition, the category for adventure games underwent several changes. While the 1998 and 1999 awards saw adventure and RPG as two separate categories, in 2000 they were collapsed. Between 2001 and 2007, RPG was a separate category again, but adventure was collapsed with action. From 2008 adventure was again a separate category, while RPG was collapsed with Massively Multiplayer games from 2010.

### 3.2.2 Adventure and roleplaying games

AIAS defines an RPG as one where:

> 'an individual assumes the role of one or more characters and develops those characters in terms of abilities, statistics, and/or traits as the game progresses. Gameplay involves exploring, acquiring resources, solving puzzles, and *interacting with player or non-player characters* in a persistent world' (The Academy of Interactive Arts and Sciences homepage, accessed 11 August 2011, my emphasis).

The importance of interaction with characters in these games is what makes them so suitable for my purposes. Further, AIAS defines adventure games as:

> 'titles in which players are challenged with real-time action activities where timing, skill and accuracy are necessary to succeed. Puzzle-solving, resource management and exploration often drive the quest oriented narrative rather than primarily combat mechanics' (The Academy of Interactive Arts and Sciences homepage, accessed 11 August 2011, my emphasis).

As we can see, RPGs and adventure games share many similar traits, and this is why I considered it acceptable to include both in the survey. The main difference between the two is that adventure games tend to be more fast paced, and the storyline more linear. Also, there are typically fewer characters and less dialogue in an adventure game than an RPG.

RPGs were preferred in the study because of my own experience that these games typically include a vast gallery of characters and possible dialogue, a stance which is backed by AIAS' definition that interaction with characters is one of the key distinctive features of such a game. It might be wondered why adventure games were included at all, but this was deemed a neccessary backup to ensure that as many of the years as possible would receive representation by a game, as the roleplaying category did not always include any suitable games. This is especially true for older games, where in my experience there is a tendency to rely more on written text in RPGs while adventure games to a larger degree utilise voiced dialogue.

Many computer RPGs are heavily influenced by the original pen and paper RPGs, of which Dungeons and Dragons is the most famous. This influence sometimes extends to stories being set in the same worlds as the games which inspired them, and the use of the same rule system. A traditional pen and paper RPG can be likened to a book, where a story is told by the author, about one or several protagonists and their antagonists. In an RPG, one player assumes the role of the 'author', or *gamemaster* (GM) as they are often called. Their job is to control the antagonists and minor characters, as well as maintaining the plot, while the other players each control one of the protagonists. The main difference between a book and an RPG lies in the free will of the players to allow their characters to attempt anything they wish, effectively creating a story as they go along, guided, of course, by the efforts of the GM. The computer RPGs function in much the same way, only the role of the GM is filled by the computer, and due to the limitations in programming, less freedom is allowed for the players. That is, in a pen and paper RPG, if the players refuse to speak to a character who is supposed to give them a vital clue, the GM will find some way to work around it so that the plot will still be advanced. In a computer RPG, refusing to speak to such a character might mean that the plot is brought to a halt, and the game can not be completed until the player relents. Still, some illusion of freedom is typically implemented by letting the player choose between several different ways of acting towards said character, such as being rude, kind, threatening, seductive etc, and through having large worlds they may explore and places to visit which are not strictly neccessary to complete the game.

### 3.2.3   Science fiction and fantasy

According to Abrams (2005:288), the terms *science fiction* and *fantasy* encompass all stories which are set in fictional worlds that are radically different from our own reality. The stories may be set on other worlds, parallell universes, or in futuristic versions of our own world. Although the two terms are somewhat intertwined, there are some traits which are very typical

for fantasy, while others are typicel for sci-fi.

Fantasy settings are usually influenced by medieval or biblical sources (Abrams 2005:288), the general level of technology is lower than in our contemporary world, and phenomena which we today have scientific explanations for are often given mythical explanations. Sci-fi settings typically feature sophisticated technology, very often more complex than in our world, and the inspiration is drawn from scientific marvels and hopes or fears of what progress might bring. In such settings, any fantastic elements are usually attempted explained by means of scientific principles, known or imagined (Abrams 2005:288). For example, both fantasy and sci-fi may include characters who possess strange powers, such as being able to move objects with their mind, heal people with their touch, or control the elements. However, the explanation for them being able to do so is usually quite different; In fantasy settings it would typically be explained by priests receiving power from their gods, or sorcerers wrestling power from demons, and so forth, while in science fiction, typical explanations could be that the person in question had been exposed to some form of radiation, or been the victim of biochemical experimentation.

The reason for limiting the selection of games to sci-fi and fantasy is quite simple. In section 3.1.1, I mentioned that sci-fi and fantasy settings were more likely to give me the data I required. The reasoning behind this, is that realistic games should in theory aim for realism in all aspects, including voice and accent use. Thus, if the game is set in the 2$^{nd}$ world war, it is only natural that the Russians speak with a Russian accent, the Germans with a German accent, and so on, regardless of factors such as status, gender, and demeanor of the character. In sci-fi and fantasy games, accent is presumably much more likely to be linked with character traits, since there is no direct correspondence to our world. Also, the plot in sci-fi and fantasy settings often gives a quite clear delimitation between good and evil, which is helpful when coding characters.

## 3.3    The games

In this section each game included in the present survey is given a presentation where they are classified according to the categories outlined in 3.2. Unless otherwise indicated, the information about the games, was found on either AIAS' homepage (http://www.interactive.org/), or on GameSpot (http://www.gamespot.com/), a website which provides news, reviews and information about games for a range of different gaming platforms. Although reliable sales numbers were not obtainable for all the games, it is fairly safe to say that they typically sell in the millions.

RPGs are naturally quite diverse in storyline and execution, but some basic elements tied to story and plotline are usually shared. As mentioned in 2.6.2, the first Final Fantasy game from 1987 set the standard which most RPGs follow to a greater or lesser extent even today. Therefore it is not surprising that its basic storyline, with an ancient evil having reawakened and threatening to ravage the lands unless the player characters find some way of preventing it, is more or less replicated in all but one of the RPGs in my study. The basis of most RPGs then, is that of heroes (though not always brave or entirely willing) having to combat evil, usually against seemingly insurmountable odds, in order to save their world from utter ruin. Interestingly, there has gradually been a tendency to move away from the black-and-white representation of gameworlds and plotlines, so that it is no longer fruitful to speak of a good vs evil dichotomy. That is, it is often perfectly possible to play halfway through a game and still not be completely certain who your true friends and foes are. Add that some games open up for multiple endings depending upon the choices the player makes during the game, which potentially can lead to the player character himself 'turning evil', and it is suddenly not all that simple anymore.

An adventure game often (although by no means exclusively) follows the same rough good vs evil plot as the RPG, but as they are more puzzle-oriented and less character-driven, the setting is often limited to a smaller area, and the action typically takes place over a briefer period of time. Investigation is a keyword for adventure games, and typical plotlines include investigating the mysterious events at a haunted mansion, the strange string of deaths in a town or city, or exploring an ancient tomb. As opposed to RPGs, where the world, or at the very least the nation is usually at stake, the ramifications of failure in adventure games are usually more local, sometimes even affecting only the player character.

### 3.3.1 Blade Runner (1997)

Blade Runner was developed by Westwood Studios and released the on 31 October 1997. It won the Computer Adventure Game of the Year award in 1998. The game is set in a futuristic America, and is as such considered a sci-fi adventure game. It is also a good example of a game which does not have a clear good vs evil base plot, as this quote from AIAS illustrates: 'You play the role of police officer McCoy, a Blade Runner, whose special job is to hunt down replicant rebels. But during your investigations, you also get to see their side, and your vision of the world and society begins to change' (Academy of Interactive Arts and Sciences, accessed 11 October 2011).

### 3.3.2 Return to Krondor (1998)

Return to Krondor was developed by Pyrotechnix and released on 30 November 1998. It was nominated for Computer Role Playing Game of the Year in 1999. The game is based on the author Raymond Feist's fictional fantasy setting of Midkemia, making it a fantasy roleplaying game.

### 3.3.3 Diablo II (2000) and Diablo II: Lord of Destruction (2001)

Diablo II was developed by Blizzard Entertainment and released on 29 June 2000. It not only won the 2001 award for PC Role Playing Game of the Year, but also PC Game of the Year and Game of the Year regardless of gaming platform. Moreover, the expansion pack released on the 29th of June 2001, Diablo II: Lord of Destruction, was nominated for PC Role Playing Game of the Year in 2002. As the expansion pack only added a new area (the original had four different areas), and the original is needed to play it, I consider the two as one game. It is set in a fictional fantasy world where magic and monsters are commonplace. With a relatively small world to explore, few characters and a simple plotline, in addition to being very action oriented, it is rather untypical for RPGs, but it is nevertheless considered a fantasy roleplaying game.

### 3.3.4 Neverwinter Nights (2002)

Neverwinter Nights, abbreviated NwN, was developed by BioWare and released on 16 June 2002. It won the 2003 Computer Role-Playing Game of the Year award in addition to a nomination in Computer Game of the Year and two other categories. It is a typical example of the RPGs which are heavily influenced by their pen and paper counterparts, and as AIAS states it is 'Based on the Dungeons and Dragon [sic] 3rd edition rules', as well as being set in a world described in the Dungeons and Dragons source material (see 3.2.2 for more on the relationship between computer RPGs an pen and paper RPGs). It is considered a fantasy roleplaying game.

### 3.3.5 Knights of the Old Republic (2003)

Knights of the Old Republic, abbreviated KotOR, was developed by BioWare. It was released both for Xbox and PC and won both Computer and Console Role-playing Game of the Year awards in 2004. Its PC release was 18 November 2003. In addition it won an Outstanding Achievement award and was nominated in five other categories. As NwN, KotOR uses the Dungeons and Dragons 3rd edition rule system. Though BioWare was the game developer,

LucasArts, a company founded by George Lucas in 1982 (The Gaming Vault, accessed 4 August 2011), was in charge of sound and voice. Although it may not be the first RPG to include a full voice cast, it is still considered to have revolutionised the industry through its size and the sheer amount of voiced dialogue, mixed with the enormous popularity it enjoyed (TORWars, accessed 4 August 2011). As such it serves as a natural boundary between what I in the study refer to as older and newer games, KotOR spearheading the newer games. During a GameSpot interview in 2003, with voice department manager Darragh O'Farrel, it was revealed that the game consisted of around 15 000 lines and 300 characters and that a complete copy of the script fills up 10 5-inch binders. The 300 or so characters were voiced by around 100 different voice actors, meaning that most voice actors were used for more than one character. However, due to the size of the game this was considered unproblematic, as most people would not notice that they heard the same actor more than once when so many hours of gametime would be between the occurrences.

The game is set in George Lucas' Star Wars universe, which was introduced by the film Star Wars in 1977. After the release of this first film, the universe has been expanded and detailed over and over through another five films, books, comics, animated series and more. KotOR is an example of one of these additions to the expanded universe. As such it is considered a sci-fi roleplaying game.

### 3.3.6 Jade Empire (2005)

Jade Empire, developed by BioWare, was originally released for Xbox on 12 April 2005 and not released for PC until 26 February 2007. However, by 2006, AIAS had stopped operating with separate categories for console and computer games, and Jade Empire received the 2006 Role-Playing Game of the Year award, in addition to three nominations, and was the winner of Outstanding Character Performance – Female. Set in a fictional world reminescent of ancient China, it is considered a fantasy roleplaying game.

### 3.3.7 Final Fantasy XII (2006)

Final Fantasy XII, developed by Square Enix, was released for Playstation 2 on 31 October 2006. It was nominated for the 2007 Role-Playing Game of the Year award in addition to being nominated for Outstanding Achievement in Art Direction. Set in a fictional world filled with swords and sorcery, and strange non-human races, it is considered a fantasy roleplaying game.

### 3.3.8 Mass Effect (2007)

Mass effect, developed by BioWare, was released for Xbox on 20 November 2007 and PC on 28 May 2008. It won the 2008 Role-Playing Game of the Year award in addition to being nominated in three categories. As it is set in a future version of our own universe, where humans have achieved interstellar travel and met other races, it is considered a sci-fi roleplaying game.

### 3.3.9 Fallout 3 (2008)

Fallout 3, developed by Bethesda Softworks, was released for PC on 28 October 2008. It won the 2009 Role-Playing Game of the Year award, as well as the award for Outstanding Achievement in Original Story. Also, it was nominated in six other categories, Overall Game of the Year being one of them. The game is set in a post-apocalyptic America, in and around a ruined Washington D.C., making it a sci-fi roleplaying game.

### 3.3.10 Dragon Age: Origins (2009)

Dragon Age, developed by BioWare and published by Electronic Arts, was released for PC on 3 November 2009. In addition to winning the 2010 Role-Playing/Massively Multiplayer Game of the Year award, it was nominated for Game of the Year. Set in a fictional world reminescent of feudal Europe, with the addition of non-human races, magic and monsters, it is considered a fantasy roleplaying game.

## 3.4 Data collection and characters

This section details the process of obtaining the speech needed to identify an accent from the characters. In total, 10 games and a total of 1220 characters were analysed. The number of characters drawn from each game differs, as some games include far more characters than others, and especially the older games tend to have fewer characters with voiced dialogue. Although most of the games were completed and all suitable characters analysed, for some of the longer games it was neccessary to end the collection process at a certain stage when it was felt that enough characters had been aquired, in order to attempt to shorten an already lengthy process, at least slightly.

### 3.4.1 Finding the data

In order to obtain the data, it was for the most part necessary to manually play the games themselves. This was a long process, as many RPGs are designed to take 50 hours or more to

complete, with some lasting over 100 hours if all sidequests and optional exploration is included. There are several reasons why it had to be done in this manner. First of all, the soundfiles themselves are typically encrypted by the developer, so that it is virtually impossible for novice computer users to find all the dialogue tracks and play them manually in a media player. Secondly, seeing the characters in action and understanding the plot of the games was essential for my classification of the characters for the social variables.

The process for the most part consisted of playing the games, interacting with all the characters I found and writing down all relevant information. There was one exception, however: For Final Fantasy XII, I was able to obtain a fanmade version of the script (Final Fantasy Worlds Apart, accessed 5 August 2011). Additionally, a person had uploaded on youtube an entire walkthrough of him playing the game (Youtube, KaddyGamer's channel, accessed 5 August 2011). This amounted to 121 clips between 10 and 15 minutes each, in other words somewhere between 20 and 30 hours, despite him having edited out much of the repetitive actions, such as combat. By using the script, I was able to skip rather quickly through the clips till I found the parts with dialogue, and was thus able to finish this game rather quicker than the others. Youtube was also used to some extent for other games, but for the most part it was hard to find anything more than short scenes, so manual playing was ultimately the best strategy.

### 3.4.2   Types of characters

In the pen and paper RPGs, it has been conventional to discriminate between characters controlled by the players, and characters controlled by the GM, with the former being called *player characters* (PCs) and the latter *non-player characters* (NPCs). This convention was adopted for their computer counterparts as well, where PCs are the characters controlled by the player, while NPCs are the computer controlled characters. Most games feature somewhere between one and ten PCs, while the NPCs may number into the hundreds. In this study, both kinds are included, with one exception; The *main player character* (MaPC). Just as in novels and in films, there is typically one character around whom the main plot revolves. Although they may have friends and helpers who are also tied to the plot, it is ultimately up to the main character to save the day.

The reason why the main character in the games must be treated as a separate phenomenon is that in many of the games, the appearance of the MaPC is definable by the player. Hair, weight, height, the colour of the skin, even species, age and gender may be modified. Moreover, and even more importantly, the MaPC is not always voice acted, but

rather their intentions are expressed either through body language, or more normally through written text. Also, in those cases where the MaPC is given a voice, the player is often given a range of different voices and accents to choose between, much in the same way as they may modify the appearance. For these reasons the MaPC was not included in the overall analysis, but will rather be discussed separately in 5.6.

### 3.4.3   Selecting the characters

The process of selecting which characters to include was subject to some deliberation. At first I thought to possibly include twenty characters from each game. Selecting the first twenty characters encountered in each game would put less strain on the time schedule, as less time would be needed per game. However, due to the complexity of these games, such a solution would prove problematic. First of all, the main antagonists are ususally not introduced very early in the game, so such a selection could easily lead to missing them entirely. Secondly, characters often change and evolve over the course of a game, so categorising a character according to all the social variables based on only the first few hours of the game might be problematic. An alternative could have been to not take the first twenty characters regardless, but rather take, for instance, the first ten male and the first ten female characters. However, with all the different social variables I am operating with, this could easily have given a skewness elsewhere. Besides, it was realised that during such a process, potentially a great deal of characters would end up excluded, not because they were not interesting, but because the quota for, for example male, had already been filled. I felt that this would be a waste, and realised that it would be just as well to play as long as I felt was necessary on each game (if possible through the whole game), and record all the characters which had enough voiced dialogue to be classified in an accent category.

Due to the generally low number of characters with voiced dialogue in the older games, all characters with enough voiced dialogue to be classified were included, with one exception. In some games, several of the less prominent characters are given one or two lines they speak when you greet them. These lines are usually shared by many different characters, and it would be senseless to include them all, even if the accent was recognisable. In other words, the dialogue would have to be unique for a character in order to include him. The relatively broad accent categories I operated with meant that in many cases only a single spoken line was enough to be included, although most characters contributed more than this.

Due to the very large number of characters with voiced dialogue in some of the newer games, I placed an additional restriction on which characters would be included. The characters

would have to be interactable. By this I mean that it had to be possible for the player to engage in a conversation with the character and be presented with at least one dialogue option (such as being able to ask a question, or make a statement). In other words, characters which simply uttered a sentence or two when they were clicked, were excluded, even if their voice was unique. The exception to this rule is characters whom the player is never actually able to meet or talk to, but who are nonetheless very prominent through movie clips showing events happening elsewhere (often of the antagonists), and similar means.

## 3.5     Analysis and quantification

When a character was encountered, it was coded for the variables Orientation, Gender, Social Status, Species, Prominence, and Alignment. Each character was given a unique code, so that when the data was later entered into Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS), it would be easy to trace the entries back to their source, ensuring that no character was entered twice. This also allowed me at a later date to check that no mistakes had been made while entering the data. A few months after the initial coding, a random selection of characters were recoded, and the results compared with the original, in order to check for consistency. This was partly due to a fear that I might subconsciously have changed my criteria for categorisation over time, making the first games analysed different from the last. However, there was over 95% consistency between the originally coded and the recoded characters.

Computer games allow the player to save and load their progress, just like with a word document, so care was taken to save the game regularily, and on different files, so that if a certain character from earlier in the game needed to be re-examined, I merely had to load to the state of progress just before encountering the character. The opportunity to save the game often, was also used when the accent of the character was to be determined. Saving the game immediately before initialising dialogue, meant that relistening was generally unproblematic, and a few of the games even gave the added benefit of saving recent dialogue in a log, so that simply a push of the button would replay it for me. Some scenes were problematic however, in that large stretches of non-pauseable interaction between several characters took place, making accent classification difficult. To solve this, I aquired a Zoom Q3 recording device, so that it would be possible to record the dialogue and relisten at my leisure.

The analysis of the accents was auditory, and each character was listened to for as long as was neccessary for me to make a positive classification. A few months after the initial analysis had been performed, a random selection of characters were analysed again, in order to check for consistency. As for the coding described above, the degree of consistency was above

95%. In addition, all characters whose accent I had been unable to classify during the first analysis, were re-examined. If there was still uncertainty, they were excluded from the study. Lastly, my supervisor listened to a selection of characters and compared her analysis with mine, and with the exception of one borderline case, there was complete agreement.

The data was all manually copied from the documents into SPSS 18 for windows, where I proceeded to use the statistical tools to quantify the data. Most of the tables were created by using SPSS' functions for descriptive statistics. Although the total number of characters is included in the basic tables, I will mostly discuss the numbers in percent. This is due to a myriad of different reasons, the most important being that the numbers are much easier to comprehend when converted to percent. The figures were made by exporting the needed numbers to the 'spreadsheet' function in OpenOffice 3.3. The excact mechanics behind the different tables and figures will be explained as they are introduced in chapter 5

### 3.6     Limitations and concerns with my method

In hindsight there are always things which could have been done differently, if only one had possessed the knowledge and experience one does now, at the time. Likewise there are flaws which one was aware of from the very start, but which there simply seemed no way to work around. This section is an attempt to address some of these concerns, and explain which steps I took to limit their impact on the results.

### 3.6.1   Limited game representation

The extreme length of many of the games caused the data collection phase to last much longer than anticipated, and was partially the reason for limiting the study to ten games. Considering the number of games being released each year, 1638 having been assigned a rating by ESRB[11] only in 2010 (ESRB. Frequently Asked Questions, accessed 9 August 2011), the amount is but a pittance, although it must be pointed out that only a small percentage of these games would fall under the RPG or adventure game categories. In order to avoid long games, the RPG genre would have to have been avoided altogether, however, and then it is likely that I would have been in trouble with regards to finding games with enough characters using voiced dialogue.

In addition to there being relatively few games in the study, several are from the same developer (five of the ten are developed by BioWare, although LucasArts was responsible for sound design on one of these games). This could potentially lead to skewed results, if the

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11 The Entertainment Software Rating Board (ESRB) rates games with regards to which age group they are suitable for. '[m]ost major {American} chains, have policies to only stock or sell games that carry an ESRB rating' (ESRB. Frequently Asked Questions, accessed 9 August 2011),

developer has deviced a certain formula for accent use in its games. This was not felt to be a problem though, as the most important factor in choosing the games was their popularity (and consequently how many people they reached).

### 3.6.2  Limited foundation for comparison with previous studies

To the best of my knowledge, no previous studies have been conducted on accent use in computer games, and therefore there are no studies whose findings are directly comparable with mine. I soon realised that most relevant previous studies had been conducted on cartoons or Disney films. The common denominator for these studies was that their primary target audience were children. The games in my study are mainly targeted towards teenagers and older, one game (Dragon Age) even receiving a PEGI-rating of 18+ (Pan European Gaming Information, accessed 11 August 2011). This makes it somewhat problematic to directly compare and contrast my results with those from the previous studies. A solution would have been to limit myself to games with PEGI-ratings 3+ and 7+. The problem with such an approach, too, is that RPGs would most likely have to be excluded, and that it would in all likeliness be hard to find many games with enough voiced characters. It must be added that these reservations are based solely on my own limited experience with games for children, so they may prove unfounded. As such, it is definitely an avenue which deserves further exploration.

### 3.6.3  Amount of dialogue and broadness of categories

Some characters produced very few spoken lines, which could be said to be problematic when classifiying the variety spoken. However, due to the relatively broad categories I operated with, this was largely unproblematic. Admittedly, it does mean that some characters were labelled as, for instance, SB/RB not because they spoke with a clear Northern or Scottish accent, but rather because it was clear that they spoke some form of British, and that it was not RP. This was seen as sufficient for the purposes of the study, however. Characters whose speech was not sufficient for me to positively identify their accent, were left out of the study.

The decision to leave the categories as broad as they are could be questioned as well, not only for the accent categories, but also those for the social variables. It may potentially lead to some overgeneralising; for instance, dividing characters between high and non-high social status is an extreme simplification when compared to social class in the real world, but I deemed it necessary in order for the data to be manageable. Also, a reason for not using more detailed categorisations would be that the more finegrained the categories are, the harder it is to

distribute the characters between them; characters which we often know very little about.

**CHAPTER 4 | VARIABLES**

In this chapter, the social and linguistic variables related to my thesis are presented. Section 4.1 outlines the different character attributes which I hypothesise may affect the variety spoken by the character: Orientation, Gender, Social status, Species, Prominence and Alignment. Section 4.2 describes the different accent categories: General American (GA), Received Pronunciation (RP), British coloured American (BA), foreign accented (FA), and socially and regionally marked American and British (SA/RA and SB/RB).

## 4.1    Social variables

The social variables are the different factors which may potentially have an effect on the accent produced by a given character. To simplify the process of statistical representation, the variables were, if it was judged to be possible without compromising the results, divided into binary categories. Naturally, this potentially leads to a large number of quite different characters being lumped together in the same category, which in turn could be said to take away the uniqueness of the different characters. However, it could be argued that the more categories there are, the harder it is to place something in the 'correct' category and that fuzzy cases would still be present. Also, a closer examination of some specific cases will be executed if relevant.

It holds true for all the variables that if it was deemed impossible to label the character one way or the other, they would be disregarded from the statistics for the variable in question, but still included for other variables where it was possible to categorise them.

All characters apart from the main player characters (MaPCs) are categorised according to social variables. Due to the special conditions applying to the the MaPCs (see 3.4.2), they are treated in a separate section in the results chapter, and are not included in the main analysis in any way.

To avoid confusion throughout the thesis, the variables are written with the first letter in capitals when the specific variable with its categories is referred to.

### 4.1.1   Orientation

The Orientation variable consists of the categories *intellectual* and *physical*, and is used to separate between those characters who are perceived to be in a role mainly demanding intelligence and wit, and those mainly demanding strength and constitution. The profession/function of the character is the most important factor for deciding its Orientation,

but also hobbies and visual representation play a part. Typical *physical* professions are soldiers, peasants and common labourers, while *intellectual* professions are, among others, merchants, wizards, scholars and clerics. Hobbies such as a fondness for books, appreciation of art, or an aptitude for chess indicate an *intellectual,* while hunting and sports are examples of *physical* hobbies. Lastly, visual cues such as bulging muscles and a healthy appearance indicate a *physical*, while *intellectuals* may be typified by wearing glasses, having a long beard, being skinny, or being in a poor physical form. If a character belongs to a profession seen as *physical* and does not display any *intellectual* hobbies or visual cues, then he is seen as *physical* and vice versa. If the visual cues and hobbies are at odds with the profession, however, then the character is labelled according to the former. For instance, a soldier who is skinny, cowardly and prefers to sit in front of the fire with a good book is considered an intellectual.

### 4.1.2   Gender

The apparent Gender of a character is categorised as either *female* or *male,* with *female* as the marked category. Even for non-human characters, tools such as visuals cues, voice quality, given information and dialogue content usually make it quite clear whether a character possesses the marked Gender. Visual cues indicating a female may include markedly feminine facial features, breasts, and style of clothing. By given information, I refer to what we learn about the character from other sources, while dialogue content is what is revealed through discussions with the character. If, for instance, a character talks about their husband, it is a quite strong indicator that they are female. If none of this was sufficient to positively label a character, they were left out of the analysis for this variable.

### 4.1.3   Social status

Social status concerns the socio-economic position a given character is perceived to hold in the game world. It is based solely on socio-economic factors such as wealth, occupation, rank and caste. The characters are divided into *high* and *non-high*. High serves as the marked category, and typical examples of such characters are nobles, the leader of a successful trade cartel, a general or the head of a prestigious university. Since high is the marked category, this means that characters who are not explicitly portrayed as being wealthy, influencial, etc, are considered non-high. For instance a merchant would not be considered high unless a point is being made about their wealth or influence, even though merchants in general are typically considered quite well off. Lastly, the immediate surroundings of the character in question are taken into account when judging their status, so that the leader of a poor village would be

considered high even if they in terms of wealth may be poorer than an average merchant from a prosperous city. The reasoning behind this decision, is that I suspect accents are more likely to be used as a tool to indicate the socio-economic differences between characters from within a certain area, rather than across the entire game world.

### 4.1.4   Species

Since the games I am collecting my data from either belong in the science fiction or the fantasy framework, a sizeable number of the characters are not human. This is covered by the Species variable. One category for each race represented would have been preferable, but the overwhelming amount of different species would have made any form of statistical presentation almost impossible, so I have limited myself to the following categories: *human* and *non-human. Human* characters are characters which, as far as I can determine, are meant to correspond to humans as seen in the real world. *Non-humans,* then, include everything from robots and dragons to humanoid species such as elves, vampires and dwarves. I am aware that using such broad categories makes it hard to observe race-specific accent use tendencies, such as the cases of Eastern European vampires and Scottish dwarves (see 2.6.3). However, while collecting the data, I took care to note down the exact species of each character as well, so the possibility to comment in detail about certain species exists if needed.

### 4.1.5   Prominence

The prominence variable concerns how central the character is to the plot and how much they are potentially featured in the game. The categories are *major* and *minor.* A typical RPG consists of a main storyline with a certain amount of places and people which absolutely have to be interacted with in order to advance the plot, in addition to a number of optional locations and characters. Characters who are considered central to the main story, and recurring characters, are labelled as major, while characters with whom it is not strictly necessary to interact, or whose presence is very brief, are labelled as minor. The reason for seperating between major and minor characters is tied to the hypothesis that I am more likely to find non-standard accents among less prominent characters. (See also 2.3 on standard language in nerd culture)

### 4.1.6   Alignment

Alignment is arguably the most interesting of all the variables, as it concerns the ethical

motivation of the character. For this variable I did not find it advisable to make use of binary categories, as too many of the characters are too complex to be divided into 'good' or 'evil'. Additionally the terms 'good' and 'evil' were deemed too loaded to adequately serve as category titles. Instead, I divided the characters into four categories, namely *positive, negative, mixed* and *neutral. Positive* is the label given to characters who display virtues such as selflessness, generosity and kindheartedness. Although such characters often happen to aid the main character, this is by no means a requirement to fall under the category. *Negative* characters are judged by traits such as visciousness, disregard for others, greed and lust. *Mixed* is used for characters who shift between seeming positive and negative throughout the game, or who do 'bad' deeds for 'good' reasons (such as a person who steals bread to feed his starving family). Additionally, since computer games are interactive and the plot often takes very different turns depending on how the player allows the main character to act, several characters have the potential to exhibit both negative and positive traits depending on how he interacts with them. These are also considered *mixed* for the purposes of this study. Finally *neutral* is used for characters who exhibit no real tendency towards either extreme.

## 4.2    Accent categories

In this study, I operate with six different accent categories. The categories are General American (GA), Received Pronunciation (RP), British coloured American (BA), foreign accented (FA), socially and regionally marked American (SA/RA), and socially and regionally marked British (SB/RB). Wells' *Accents of English 1-3* (1982) is the main source I have used for accent descriptions.

Throughout the thesis, the terms *standard accents* and *non-standard accents* will be used. The first of these include GA, RP and BA, while the second includes FA, SA/RA and SB/RB. GA and RP are seen as standard due to the position they hold in their respective countries (see 4.2.1 below). BA could naturally be seen as a non-standard accent since it does not hold such a position, is not described in dictionaries, and could be construed as a mix of two different varieties from two different countries. My reasoning, however, is that while it does not actually function as a standard anywhere on its own, all of its traits are from the varieties which enjoy the status of standard/enjoys high prestige in their country. Moreover, considering the esteem British accents have historically held in America, and the sentiments proposed by Bucholtz (see 2.3), it could even be suggested that BA can be thought of as some form of super-standard. Thus, for my purposes it seems fitting to label it as a standard accent. The terms *British accents* and *American accents* are also used in the thesis. As BA is somewhat

ambiguous, in that it could be argued that it is at the same time both and none of these, it is not included under either of these terms. Hence, the former refers to RP and SB/RB, while the latter refers to GA and SA/RA.

Since the games are developed in America, it is reasonable to assume that most voice actors are American as well, and that in many cases accents will be performed by people for whom said accent is not native (for further discussion on voice acting in computer games see 2.8). With this in mind, some deviation from the descriptions was tolerated when analysing the characters.

Finally, a comment must be made on the link between accents and stereotypes. It is well known that the varieties I am outlining below show great diversity, both within and between different groups. Furthermore, since language is constantly changing, certain traits (such as rhoticity) which have traditionally been connected with certain varieties, in reality no longer deserve that close association. Even so, I will restrict myself to the most traditional and characteristic features associated with the different accent areas. This is due to the fact that although in-depth case studies may show that a certain trait is in recession, this is not necessarily something the layman is aware of. Most would probably still think of the South as non-rhotic (although perhaps not in quite those terms), and envision the New Yorker as saying 'toity toid', and as such it is arguably these traditional stereotypical traits which are likely to be found as a voice actor attempts an accent in a computer game.

## 4.2.1 General American (GA) and Received Pronunciation (RP)

It must be clarified that it is not really possible to speak of standard spoken language in the way one speaks of standard written language. That is, where written language may be standardised through rules and regulations for spelling and grammar, this is not possible for spoken language. There may be guidelines to pronunciation encouraged by institutions such as media and the educational system, and certain varieties may be associated with high overt prestige, but they are not standard per se. When I still speak of standard and non-standard varieties in this thesis, it is mostly because the concepts are so established that they are easy to relate to. When I label GA and RP as standard varieties, then, it is due to factors such as the high overt prestige associated with these varieties, but also that they are often the preferred variety in broadcasting services (spawning the terms 'Network English' and 'BBC English'), they are codified, meaning that dictionaries and handbooks exist which describe them, and they are normally the variety taught to foreign learners of English. Both GA and RP also have in common that they are supra-regional, meaning that use of the varieties does not link the

speaker with a specific region, although GA is sometimes associated with the Midwest and RP with the southeast of England. With regards to social stratification, however, there are some dissimilarities, as GA is generally found among speakers from all walks of life, while RP is usually an indicator of the upper middle class. Another striking difference is the actual number of people speaking the two varieties. An often used estimate for RP is three percent of the population (The sociolinguistics of modern RP, accessed 6 October 2011), a number which is far higher for GA. Below follows the main diagnostic traits for GA and RP.

- RP is non-rhotic, while GA is rhotic, meaning that in RP, /r/ only occurs prevocalically. In GA /r/ is retained in all environments where it has occured historically
- In GA, /t/ is intervocalically often realised as [ɾ]. This phenomenon is called T-voicing
- For the LOT vowel, GA uses the long open back /ɑ:/, while RP uses the short open back rounded /ɒ/
- The low back vowel /ɑ:/ is used in RP BATH vowels, as opposed to the fronted /æ/ in GA
- The GA GOAT vowel has a rounded back starting point [oʊ], while the starting point of the the RP variant is more unrounded and central [əʊ]. The establishment of this realisation in RP is fairly recent, and it is also in use by some American speakers, so it is somewhat less of a salient feature than the monophthongs.

Considering the fact that most of the voice actors employed are American, some leniency is shown with regards to accuracy and consistency of the performance. Thus a character will be considered an RP speaker even if some features are not fully present, such as if they are not fully non-rhotic, or switch between the RP and GA BATH vowel. Also, characters which sound largely RP, but with a few mildly socially or regionally marked British traits are considered RP for the purposes of this study. Salient non-RP features can not be ignored in this fashion, however. Use of the Northern STRUT vowel is an example of a trait which is so markedly non-RP as to discard a character from that category.

### 4.2.2 British coloured American (BA)

This accent category is my own creation, and was deemed necessary due to the substantial number of characters who exhibit both GA and RP traits. It is quite broad, as it includes both characters who are close to GA and those who are close to RP. To be labelled a BA speaker, the character needed to feature traits from both varieties without also featuring traits from any

other varieties. This could happen either by using the GA variant exclusively for some of the features, while using the RP variant for others, or by making extensive use of both variants within a single feature. The features listed in 4.2.1 were used when checking for BA speakers. Moreover, as I consider BA to be a form of super-standard, traits such as an absence of consonant cluster reduction, extensive use of strong forms, and a tendency to avoid retractions, were considered as indicators of BA. This is typified by characters saying 'did not' and 'going', rather than 'didn't' and 'goin''. Of course, such formulations are not directly uncommon in GA and RP either, so they are not diagnostic in their own right[12].

### 4.2.3   Foreign accented (FA)

All accents which are perceived as non-native English belong to the foreign accented category. Examples are French, German and Russian. Because the degree of foreign 'accentedness' is very individual for speakers, it is not possible to list diagnostic features in the same way as with native varieties. Still, there are some stereotypical features associated with most foreign accents. These features typically arise because learners of a new language often experience that the new language contains some vowel and consonant sounds with which they are unfamiliar. As such, they substitute the unknown sounds with sounds which are close from their own language. Thus, Norwegian learners of English might for instance pronounce /θ/ with an /f/, /s/, or even a /t/, as no varieties of Norwegian include /θ/. That such relatively different phonemes might all be used to substitute /θ/ may appear odd, but they all have in common that they share two out of three distinctive features with it (Nilsen 2002:58).

As I mentioned above, it would be senseless to attempt to describe in detail the various foreign accents, but I wish to provide an example from *Stage Dialects* by Jerry Blunt (1967), to show what sort of information may be provided for actors trying to learn to imitate such accents. A typical feature in an Italian accent, is the interjection of [ə]

'as the terminal sound of a single word that ends in a consonant: *wind* [wində] (...) as an interjection between two consonants in a multisyllable word: *midnight* ['midənaɪtə] (...) as an interjection between words of a sentence when one ends and the next begins with a  consonant: *what* [ə] *you want?*' (Blunt 1967:118).

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12  BA and the Eastern New England variety may appear to share many traits, but there is one very important difference; namely the open front [aː], which in Eastern New England is used in START, PALM, and in many instances in BATH words. A character speaking BA would use either the GA or RP variants for these sets, none of which include [aː]. Note that Eastern New England will not be detailed as a separate variety below, simply because no characters speaking this variety were found.

Blunt reasons that this is partly due to the fact that all Italian nouns have vowel endings, and 'an overwhelming majority of all other words also end in vowels' (Blunt 1967:117). Far more fanciful ideas are often presented by authors of coach dialect books, though, as illustrated by the following quote from Kopf (2003:42) on the Irish, as quoted by Walshe (2010:252) : 'the unpredictable rhythms of their speech, the wide, emotional inflection, and the manner in which they "sit on" or stretch out stressed syllables can be linked to their fiery temperament' ( The book also mentions several common syntax errors, and details common consonant and vowel mistakes, such as substituting [iː] for [ɪ], and [d] for [ð] (Blunt 1967:118f).

I must add that although countries such as India and Nigeria may employ English as an official language, they are considered foreign for the purposes of this study. Australia and New Zealand, however, are not. This is done in accordance with the concentric circle concept introduced by Braj Kachru, where the so called 'inner circle' countries are mainly USA, UK, Ireland, Canada, Australia and New Zealand, while countries such as India are part of the 'outer circle', where 'the language has become part of a country's chief institutions, and plays an important "second language" role in a multilingual setting' (Crystal 2003:60).

Finally, accents which it is not possible to associate with any particular nationality, but which are clearly not from any English L1 countries, are considered foreign.

### 4.2.4  Socially/regionally marked American (SA/RA) and British (SB/RB)

SA/RA includes all non-GA American varieties, both regionally marked, such as Southern, and socially marked, such as AAVE. Similarily, SB/RB includes all non-RP varieties found on the British Isles as well as Australian. I had initially intended to keep socially and regionally marked varieties separate, but due to the scarcity of characters with socially or regionally marked accents. The most relevant varieties of SA/RA and SB/RB are detailed below. For SA/RA, these are New York, Southern and AAVE. For SB/RB, London (Cockney), West Country, Northern, Scottish, and Australian are included. Others, such as Irish and Eastern New England, are not described as no characters speaking these varieties were found.

When considering the varieties outlined below, it is important to be mindful of the fact that there is variation among the speakers within each group, as well as across. In other words, all the features listed are not necessarily used by every speaker of the described variety. Rather they are considered markers which, if present, help associate a speaker with a certain variety, but which do not necessarily exclude the speaker from the variety if not present. Lastly it must be mentioned that there are more diagnostic features than those listed below, but these were chosen as some of the more salient and commonly used.

### 4.2.4.1 New York City

When the term 'New York accent' is used in everyday speech, it is usually a very specific type of speech which is kept in mind. Often (perhaps a bit unjustly) associated with Brooklyn, it is a variety which seems lacking of both overt and covert prestige (Wells 1982:502) (for futher discussion see 2.4), and identified by a range of, often, ridiculed features which I shall describe below.  For the sake of ease, I will continue to refer to it as the New York variety.

- It is traditionally non-rhotic, although studies reveal rhoticity to be socially stratified, with younger speakers and those belonging to the upper class tending towards more rhotic pronunciations
- TH-stopping is prevalent. That is, /θ/ and /ð/ are pronounced [t̪] and [d̪]
- Extensive use of centring diphthongs in the lexical sets NEAR [ɪə], SQUARE [eə], CURE [ʊə], PALM [ɑə], START [ɑə], THOUGHT [ɔə], CLOTH [ɔə], NORTH [ɔə], and FORCE [ɔə], and often in BATH [ɛə] and TRAP [ɛə]
- The typical New Yorker is often caricatured as pronouncing NURSE words with [ɜɪ], resulting in spellings like 'toity-toid' for *thirty-third*  (note that the prominence and distribution of this feature is greatly exaggerated, though)

### 4.2.4.2 Southern American

When speaking of the linguistic South of the US, it is important to keep in mind the vast areas it comprises, and that features which are common in one part of the South are not necessarily very much present in a different part. Even so, this area is often roughly treated as one, both by linguists and lay people (see 2.4.2), presumably because it is easier to isolate differences between GA and this constructed South, than differences within the South itself.

- The south has historically been mostly non-rhotic, although there has been a recent development towards variable and full rhoticity. This means that although non- or variable rhoticity may contribute towards categorising a character as southern, full rhoticity does not necessarily entail that the character is not southern
- The PRICE vowel is usually monophthongised into the front open [a:], unless followed by a fortis consonant
- The BATH and TRAP vowels are typically diphthongised [æɪ] before /g, n, v, f, s, θ, ʃ/,

and often before /d/ or /ŋ/

- The KIT, DRESS and TRAP vowels receive an [ə]-offglide in some environment. This phenomenon is usually referred to as Southern Breaking

- The DRESS vowel is typically raised to [ɪ] before nasals, causing homophones such as *pin* and *pen* = [pɪn]

- STRUT is raised to [ɜ]


### 4.2.4.3 African American Vernacular English (AAVE)

Wells comments on the fact that there has historically been some argument over whether or not it makes sense to treat Black English as a distinct variety, as studies have shown how easily it may be confused with the speech of southern whites (1982:554). However, he goes on to show that a lot of research indicates that there are important differences (Wells 1982:555-556). These are well illuminated in a recent article by Erik R. Thomas (2007), which outlines the main phonological and phonetic characteristics of African American Vernacular English (AAVE). Thomas makes a point of distinguishing between African American English (AAE) and African American Vernacular English (AAVE). The latter is a specific category for the the form spoken mainly by working-class African Americans, while the former is a more general category which is meant to include 'the speech of all African Americans' (2007:451). I will focus on AAVE below, but the principle of ingroup variation can not be stressed often enough, and this is by no means a guide to how all working-class African Americans speak.


- It is non-rhotic, even to the point where /r/ may be dropped intervocalically word-internally. R-sandhi is uncommon

- /l/ is typically vocalised or omitted non-prevocalically. For instance *feel* would be /fiʊ/ or /fiə/

- Extensive consonant cluster reduction. This is typified in words such as *pas'* for *past* and *ac'* for *act*

- Fronting, stopping, glottaling or even deletion are all possible for /θ/ and /ð/. This can result in pronunciations such as /brʌvə/ for *brother*, /nʌtn/ or [nʌʔn] for *nothing*, and /wɪmi/ for *with me*

- AAVE shares many vowel features with Southern American


### 4.2.4.4 London (Cockney)

Within London, there is a great spectrum om varieties spoken, ranging from RP, to the often caricatured broad London variety called Cockney. Between these are found varieties such as 'popular London' and 'London Regional Standard', which use a mix of the features associated with RP and Cockney, or features which lie somewhere in between the two. Salient Cockney features are outlined below.

- TH-fronting is a typical feature for Cockney speakers, meaning that /θ/ and /ð/ are replaced by [f] and [v] respectively, although the latter only occurs non-initially.
- T-glottaling is perhaps the most typified Cockney feature, even though it is by no means exclusive to this group. /t/ is normally realised as [ʔ].
  - /p/ and /k/ may also be glottalised.
- H-dropping is yet another salient feature. It involves /h/ being omitted, usually word-initially, but also medially.
- L-vocalisation is used variably with non-prevocalic /l/, giving the vowel [ʊ], and pronunciations such as [mɪʊk] for *milk.*
- There is an extensive diphthong shift, giving FLEECE, FACE, PRICE and CHOICE possible realisations of [əi], [aɪ], [ɒɪ] and [oɪ], respectively. GOOSE, GOAT and MOUTH may be realised as [ʉ:], [aʊ] and [æʊ, æ]

**4.2.4.5 The West Country**

The counties Devon, Cornwall, Dorset, Somerset, Glouchestershire and Wiltshire in the south-west of England are often referred to as the West Country (the boundaries are not exact). The pronunciation patterns in this area have traditionally included quite a few features which differ sharply from those of the popular south-east, although some are have recently been disappearing. Below are listed the main features of the West Country variety.

- It has historically been fully rhotic. The realisation of /r/ is retroflex [ɻ]
- Word-initial voiceless fricatives are often replaced by voiced variants
- Vowel length is not as strictly regulated as in other English varieties. More precisely, many environments lengthen the short vowels, causing potential homophones.
- Much of the West Country area features an [a] realisation of the TRAP vowel as well as the BATH vowel, and, for some areas, the START vowel. In combination with the variable lengthening of short vowels mentioned above, this means that for these speakers of West Country, there really is no distinction corresponding to the /æ/ - /ɑ:/

constrast in RP

- The starting point of PRICE vowels is typically more back, giving realisations such as [ɒɪ]

### 4.2.4.6 Northern English

The linguistic north is a large area, which Wells separates into the midlands, the middle north and the far north, but for the purposes of this study, such a distinction is redundant, and I will describe the entire north under one heading, as the ultimate aim is to show how northern varieties in general differ from RP.

- The FOOT vowel /ʊ/ is typically used for STRUT words as well, resulting in a merger of these sets
- BATH words are usually pronounced with the short open front /a/
- The FACE and GOAT vowels are typically monophthongised to /e:/ and /o:/, respectively

### 4.2.4.7 Scottish

For Scottish, I will mainly present Standard Scottish English, which can be thought of as Standard English with a Scottish accent. It is very important to not confuse this with Scots, which is a traditional dialect descended from a Northumbrian dialect of Old English, and quite different both in vocabulary and vowel-system (Wells 1982:394f).

- SSE is strongly rhotic, although the realisation of /r/ varies. In addition to the post-alveolar approximant [ɹ] of RP, a retroflex approximant [ɻ], a roll [r] and a tap [ɾ] are all possible, and although the stereotypical Scotsman is supposed to 'roll his r's' (Wells 1982:410f), [r] is actually the one with the most restricted use of the four
- The velar fricative /x/ is used in some proper names, but is also quite frequently seen in words of Greek or Hebrew origin spelt with *ch*, such as *epoch* and *patriarch*
- Words spelt with *wh* are commonly pronounced /hw/. For instance *what* would be [hwɔt] as opposed to RP [wɒt]
- There is no systematic distinction between short and long vowels
- FOOT and GOOSE words share the same vowel /u/, typically realised [ʉ], as opposed to the /ʊ/ - /u:/ disinction in RP

- As in the north of England, FACE and GOAT vowels are usually monophthongised to /e/ and /o/, respectively
- The MOUTH vowel is usually realised [ʌu], although other realisations are possible
- Speakers of SSE typically use /ʌ/ for *FIRST* and *HURT* words, while /ɛ/ is used in *PERCH* (all subsets of the NURSE set).

**4.2.4.8 Australian**

According to Wells, Mitchell & Delbridge (1965) separated Australian English into three rough categories, namely Cultivated, General and Broad (Wells 1982:594). The former lies closer to RP, which has traditionally held a high status in Australia, and I will concentrate on General Australian features below.

- Australian English is non-rhotic
- /t/ is often voiced intervocallicaly
- /l/ is dark in all contexts
- BATH, PALM and START words tend towards an open front /a:/ vowel, although some BATH words are pronounced with the /æ/ of the TRAP words by some speakers.
- DRESS and TRAP vowels are raised to [e] and [ɛ]
- In General Australian there is a diphthong-shift for closing diphthongs, where FLEECE = [ɪi], GOOSE [əʉ]  FACE [æɪ], PRICE [ɑɪ], GOAT [ʌʉ], MOUTH [æʊ]

**CHAPTER 5 | RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

This chapter includes a representation of all the findings from my study, as well as a discussion of the relevance and significance of these results. In 5.1, I give a brief outline of the accent distribution for all the games and characters. In 5.2, a detailed report on how accents are distributed among the different social variables is given, and in 5.3, I present a comparison between sci-fi and fantasy games, while 5.4 compares older and newer games. In 5.5 I will examine more closely the special case of the main player character. Finally, the use of foreign accents will receive some extra attention in 5.6.

**5.1      Accent distribution**

The overall accent distribution for all the characters in the study is shown in table 5.1 below. As the number of characters present in each game varies quite a lot, Diablo II having the lowest with 34, and Dragon Age the highest with 324, such a presentation might easily skew the numbers in favour of the more character heavy games. Due to this consideration, a second table (5.2) is included. Here, the percentage was first calculated for each game individually, causing the actual count to become irrelevant, thus giving each game equal influence on the results; all games are weighted equally.

Table 5.1: Accent distribution for all games and characters

| Accent category | Count | Percentage |
|---|---|---|
| GA | 682 | 55.9% |
| RP | 255 | 20.9% |
| BA | 104 | 8.5% |
| FA | 59 | 4.8% |
| SA/RA | 36 | 3.0% |
| SB/RB | 84 | 6.9% |
| Total | 1220 | 100% |

Table 5.1 Shows the accent distribution for all the games and characters included in the study. *Count* shows the actual number of characters speaking a given accent, while *percentage* shows how many percent of the total this amounts to. Note that although the total number of characters here is 1203, this number may be lower in some of the tables in section 5.2, where the distribution of accents for the different social variables is given. This is due to the fact that a few of the characters simply did not fit into any of the categories for some of the variables,

and were therefore excluded from the statistics for those variables.

As seen in the table, GA is relatively dominant, being spoken by well over half of the characters, and RP comes in second with 20.9% representation. BA is represented by 8.5%. In contrast, all the non-standard varieties combined constitute less than 15%. In comparison, Lippi-Green's (1997) and Sønnesyn's (2011) Disney studies showed non-standard speakers to constitute roughly 35% and 25%, respectively (Sønnesyn 2011:53). The percentage of purely American accents is less than 60%, which is close to Lippi-Green's 56%, and quite lower than Sønnesyn's 72% (ibid). Interestingly, table 5.2 below shows that when the average for each game is considered, rather than the total number, the numbers for American accents drop even further.

Table 5.2: Accent distribution for all games equally weighted

| Accent category | Percentage |
|---|---|
| GA | 52.3% |
| RP | 16.2% |
| BA | 11% |
| FA | 8.8% |
| SA/RA | 3.2% |
| SB/RB | 8.4% |
| Total | 100% |

Table 5.2 shows that with equal weighting, both GA and RP representation is lowered, while all other varieties show an increase. This is especially true for FA, which almost doubles from 4.8% to 8.8%. This indicates that games with fewer characters show greater diverstity in accent use. One possible explanation for this is that in general the older games are those with fewer speaking characters, while the newer games have more, and as I have hypothesised, older games will show greater diversity (see 1.3 & 2.3.1). This matter will be pursued further in 5.4. There is another possibility which can not be discarded, however, simply that when dealing with hundreds of characters, game developers do not take the time to flesh them all out, and assign standard varieties to most of them purely for the sake of ease.

## 5.2    Results for Social Variables

In this section, the results for each of the social variables are handled individually. Each variable is first presented by a table which outlines the main findings both in actual count and

in percent. The findings for each variable is also represented in a figure designed to better illustrate how the distributions for the different varieties compare to each other. The numbers are commented on, and the findings are discussed.

### 5.2.1 Orientation

The Orientation variable concerns whether or not a character is perceived mainly as *physical* or *intellectual* (see 4.1.1).

Table 5.3 Orientation: Accent distribution

**Accent spoken * Orientation Crosstabulation**

| | | | Orientation | | Total |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | | | physical | intellectual | |
| Accent spoken | GA | Count | 448 | 234 | 682 |
| | | % within Orientation | 64.0% | 45.2% | 56.0% |
| | | % of Total | 36.8% | 19.2% | 56.0% |
| | RP | Count | 115 | 140 | 255 |
| | | % within Orientation | 16.4% | 27.0% | 20.9% |
| | | % of Total | 9.4% | 11.5% | 20.9% |
| | BA | Count | 27 | 77 | 104 |
| | | % within Orientation | 3.9% | 14.9% | 8.5% |
| | | % of Total | 2.2% | 6.3% | 8.5% |
| | FA | Count | 23 | 34 | 57 |
| | | % within Orientation | 3.3% | 6.6% | 4.7% |
| | | % of Total | 1.9% | 2.8% | 4.7% |
| | SA/RA | Count | 26 | 10 | 36 |
| | | % within Orientation | 3.7% | 1.9% | 3.0% |
| | | % of Total | 2.1% | .8% | 3.0% |
| | SB/RB | Count | 61 | 23 | 84 |
| | | % within Orientation | 8.7% | 4.4% | 6.9% |
| | | % of Total | 5.0% | 1.9% | 6.9% |
| Total | | Count | 700 | 518 | 1218 |
| | | % within Orientation | 100.0% | 100.0% | 100.0% |
| | | % of Total | 57.5% | 42.5% | 100.0% |

Table 5.3 shows the distribution of accents for the Orientation variable. *Count* shows the actual number of characters who fall under the category in question, while *% within Orientation* shows the distribution in percentages within each category. The cases observed for all the varieties total 100% for each category regardless of the actual number of cases, which makes it

easier to compare the two categories when the number of cases differ, as is the case here with 700 physically oriented characters as opposed to 518 intellectuals. The *total* column shows for each accent the actual number of speakers, and the percentage of the total number of characters this constitutes. For example, GA has a total of 682 speakers, which is 56% of the characters. The total amount of characters, 1218 in this case, is given in the lower right area. Similarily, the *physical* and *intellectual* columns show the accent distribution for each category, with the total number of cases at the bottom.

If there is no correlation between the Orientation of the character and the accent they speak, then the percentages given in the *physical* and *intellectual* columns should ideally be the same as the percentages in the *total* column. A lower percentage indicates that speakers of a given accent are underrepresented in the category in question, while a higher percentage indicates overrepresentation.

From the table we can see that GA speakers constitute 56% of the total number of characters. However, with the intellectual characters they only make up 45.2%, as opposed to 64% for physical characters. On the other hand, RP speakers, who constitute 20.9% of the total, show 27% representation among intellectual characters, with only 16,4% among physicals. BA is even more extreme in this respect. Being spoken in total by 8.5% of the characters, it is nonetheless only present in 3.9% of the physical characters, with a staggering 14.9% among the intellectuals. Furthermore, looking at the *count* we see that the BA speakers are comprised of 27 physically orientated characters as opposed to 77 intellectual ones, despite physical characters in general outnumbering intellectuals by almost seven to five. With 6.6% of the intellectual characters speaking FA, this variety is also overrepresented here, as only 3.3% of the physical characters use FA. In contrast, both regionally/socially marked British and American show overrepresentation among the physical characters, 12.4% speaking either SA/RA or SB/RB, as opposed to 6.3% among the intellectuals. Figure 5.1 below shows the accent distribution in a slightly different manner. Using the data collected, a projected distribution of intellectuals and physicals per 100 characters has been calculated for each individual accent category, making contrasting and comparison between the different varieties easier.
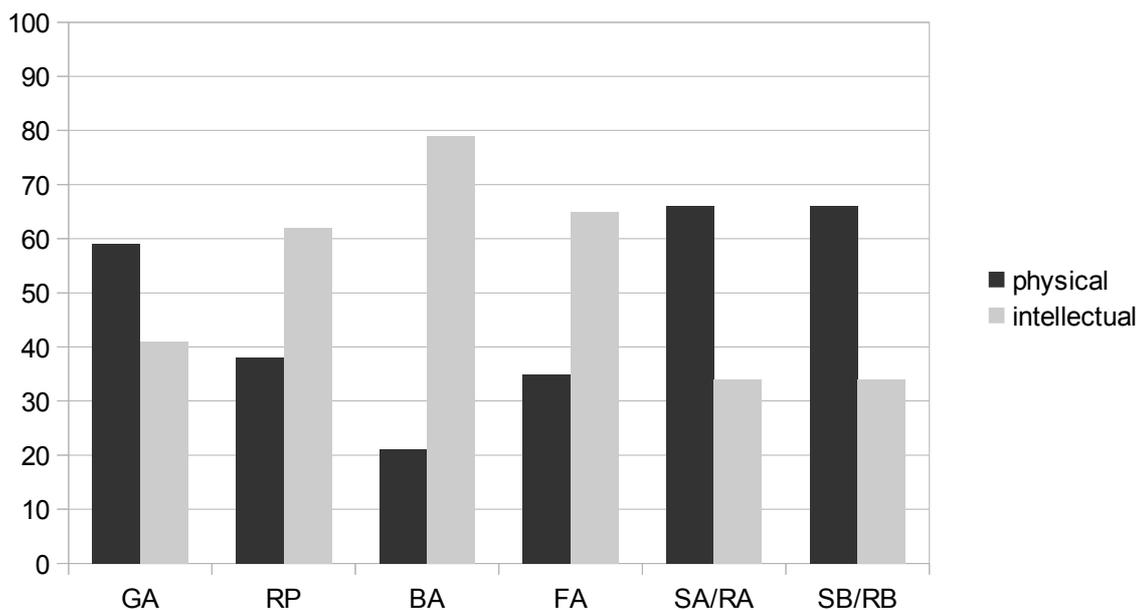
Fig 5.1 Orientation: projected distribution per 100 characters speaking each variety

The advantage of this perspective is that by not focusing on the total number of cases, one avoids variation within the less represented varieties being dwarfed by GA and RP. For instance, observing that 3.7% of the physical characters are SA/RA speakers, as opposed to only 1.9% of the intellectuals, may not necessarily appear very convincing, as the scores are so low. Being presented with the fact that about 66 of every 100 SA/RA speakers are physicals, while only 34 are intellectuals, draws a rather clearer picture. It may seem strange to disregard the actual character *count* in such a manner, but I hold that sheer numbers are not necessarily the most important thing. For instance, supposing four out of five FA speaking characters were negatively portrayed, it would send a stronger signal than if 300 out of 500 were portrayed the same way, even if the actual number is higher in the latter example. That being said, it is important to remember that the numbers from this figure, although based on the actual observed cases, ultimately only show an imagined distribution. This means the numbers must be taken with a grain of salt, especially for the accents where there is a low number of cases upon which to calculate the projection. Another weakness is that by ignoring the actual count, results which could be potentially significant through sheer weight of numbers might be ignored because the figure only illustrates the ratio between the two categories. For instance, in the figure above, the difference between physicals and intellectuals appears to be the least significant for GA, but the actual number of cases upon which the ratio for GA was calculated is far higher than for the other varieties, thus increasing its significance.

If comparisons to studies on real life language use and attitudes are drawn, the findings are in general not very surprising. RP's overrepresentation with intellectuals is very much in keeping with the overwhelming number of studies which show such speakers to be perceived as educated and intelligent (see 2.4). BA's enormous overrepresentation among intellectuals fits in as well, if my idea of BA as standard language taken to the extreme is correct (see 4.2). The results for both of these varieties seem to support my hypothesis.

It would be prudent to ask why a 'bastardised' British-American variety is more prominent among intellectuals than the pure standard British variety. My explanation is that BA is perhaps first and foremost implemented as a tool to reflect intelligence and social status, while RP has a larger variety of uses, and since many of the characters which speak RP for other reasons are physicals, the representation among intellectuals is somewhat lower. For example, one of the games (Dragon Age) has set aside RP as the main variety spoken by humans, in opposition to GA which is spoken by the two main non-human species, the elves and the dwarves. This means that in this game, RP is potentially found among all walks of life because the main function of RP here is not to signal intelligence or education, but rather membership with human society.

As we can see in fig 5.1, intellectual FA speakers outnumber physicals almost two to one. This comes as somewhat of a surprise to me, as the attitude studies covered in 2.4.1 largely reveal no tendency towards marking foreign accented speakers as particularily intelligent or educated. Granted, neither do the studies directly reveal an idea of FA speakers as physicals, although as we have seen, some studies, on Spanish-American in particular, revealed that employers envisioned Spanish-American speakers more suitable as semi-skilled workers. Granted, the situation for Spanish-Americans in America is a special one, with the high immigration from Mexico, so it can not really be projected onto foreign accents in general. Even so, there seems to be no attitudinal background for this high number of foreign accented intellectuals. In their studies on Disney films and televised cartoons, Lippi-Green, and Dobrow and Gidney did not explicitly focus on the intelligence or physicality of the characters, so it is hard to draw any comparisons. Dobrow and Gidney's study did reveal foreign accents to be used largely for comical effect (or by villains), however (1998:116), and comical characters are not ordinarily noted for their intelligence. Sønnesyn found that characters speaking English with other accent[13] was slightly less common among sophisticated characters than among unsophisticated ones (2011:72f). It may appear then, that computer games are somewhat unique in their portrayal of foreign accented characters as largely intellectual, and that foreign

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13 Note that Sønnesyn's category 'English with other accent' (see 2.5.2) includes varieties such as Australian, which in the present study is included under SB/RB, making the results not entirely comparable.

accents are not to any large degree used to portray 'simple' characters. However, this does not mean they are not possibly portrayed as evil or lowly. The history of Hollywood is after all filled with foreign accented evil masterminds. This matter is explored more fully in the discussion of the other social variables.

Non-standard English accents are severely underrepresented among the intellectuals. Granted, this holds true for GA as well, although to a lesser degree. Of course, being labelled a physical character is not necessarily synonymous with stupidity, but the fact remains that among the intellectuals, there is a considerable underrepresentation of non-standard English speakers, so if the conclusion that these speakers are portrayed to be simple and lacking of wits can not be made, then at least we can claim that they are mostly kept away from roles which are associated with intelligence and sophistication. This is entirely in keeping with findings from the attitude studies covered in 2.4, where the regionally and socially marked varieties tended to score low for attributes such as intelligence, education and status. In conclusion it seems that with regards to accent use and Orientation, computer game developers largely follow existing stereotypes, although foreign accented speakers provide a possible exception.

### 5.2.2 Gender

The Gender variable concerns the perceived gender of the character. Its categories are *male* and *female*, with *female* as the marked gender (see 4.1.2).

Table 5.4 Gender: Accent distribution

**Accent spoken * Gender Crosstabulation**

| | | | Gender | | Total |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | | | male | female | |
| Accent spoken | GA | Count | 484 | 198 | 682 |
| | | % within Gender | 53.8% | 61.9% | 55.9% |
| | | % of Total | 39.7% | 16.2% | 55.9% |
| | RP | Count | 187 | 68 | 255 |
| | | % within Gender | 20.8% | 21.3% | 20.9% |
| | | % of Total | 15.3% | 5.6% | 20.9% |
| | BA | Count | 84 | 20 | 104 |
| | | % within Gender | 9.3% | 6.3% | 8.5% |
| | | % of Total | 6.9% | 1.6% | 8.5% |
| | FA | Count | 38 | 21 | 59 |
| | | % within Gender | 4.2% | 6.6% | 4.8% |
| | | % of Total | 3.1% | 1.7% | 4.8% |
| | SA/RA | Count | 33 | 3 | 36 |
| | | % within Gender | 3.7% | .9% | 3.0% |
| | | % of Total | 2.7% | .2% | 3.0% |
| | SB/RB | Count | 74 | 10 | 84 |
| | | % within Gender | 8.2% | 3.1% | 6.9% |
| | | % of Total | 6.1% | .8% | 6.9% |
| Total | | Count | 900 | 320 | 1220 |
| | | % within Gender | 100.0% | 100.0% | 100.0% |
| | | % of Total | 73.8% | 26.2% | 100.0% |

Table 5.4 shows the accent distribution for the Gender variable. As we can see, the marked category is in a clear minority. Of the 1220 characters, 900 are male and 320 are female. This means around 26.2% of the characters are female and 73.8% male, or put differently, males outnumber females almost three to one. These numbers are roughly on par with those found in Lippi-Green (1997), Dobrow and Gidney (1998) and Sønnesyn (2011) (see 2.5). It could be argued that six of the ten games are set in medieval fantasy settings, thereby reflecting medieval gender roles. As females in those times were usually not given access to roles of authority and work outside the house, it follows that a player would mainly encounter male characters. Some of the fantasy games make a point of claiming that gender is not an issue in their world, however. For instance, when the player is supposed to select the gender of his main character, one of the games states '[m]en and women (...) are generally regarded as equals. Both genders are evenly represented in most organizations, noble houses, and military forces' (Dragon Age:Origins. 2009. BioWare). The character distribution in the game clearly

demonstrates that this is not the case; 74.3% are male, 25.7% are female, which is almost identical with the average for all games. Not only are the females outnumbered, but the females that are there, are not as powerful as the game developers would have you believe. For instance, among the dwarven nobles, there is a male king with two sons, and his must trusted advisor is male as well. Granted there are some female nobles, but they mostly appear to act on behalf of their husbands or sons. The story seems to repeat itself for the other communities and species in the game as well, and as for representation in military forces; quite early in the game, the MaPC is present in a war camp preparing for a siege, and of all the soldiers it is possible to engage in dialogue with, not a single one is female. There is a female priest, however, ready to give comfort and prayer before the battle. Though there are exceptions, this largely seems to be the trend for the games in the study. Female characters are partially restricted from roles of authority, and also from combat oriented roles, while caregiver roles seem more availible to them. A look at the main antagonist, insofar as I was able to determine one for each game, shows that with but one exception they are male. In the four games where the player has no influence upon the gender of the MaPC, they are all male.

A comparison of Gender distribution in sci-fi and fantasy games does reveal that sci-fi's include more females, but not by far; 29.2% of the characters are female in sci-fi's, compared with 24.1% in fantasy games. The distribution of females and males, then, even when claimed to do so by the game developers, does not imply equality or reflect modern society, nor does it reflect the gender distribution among gamers (see 2.7.3).

55.9% of the characters are GA speakers, and as the table shows, this makes GA overrepresented among females, as 61.9% of them speak this accent. The numbers for RP are quite undramatic, with 21.3% representation among female characters as opposed to 20.8% for males, showing that the use of RP seems unaffected by gender. The same does not apply to BA, which is spoken by 9.3% of the male characters while only 6.3% of the females speak it. 6.6% of the females are foreign accented, quite higher than the 4.2% for males. However, the most important numbers in this table are the numbers for the socially and regionally marked Englishes. In total 9.9% of the characters speak one of these, but their representation is only 4% among the females. SA/RA is spoken by as few as three out of the 320 female characters.

Similarly to fig 5.1, figure 5.2 below shows a projected distribution of males and females per 100 characters within each accent category.
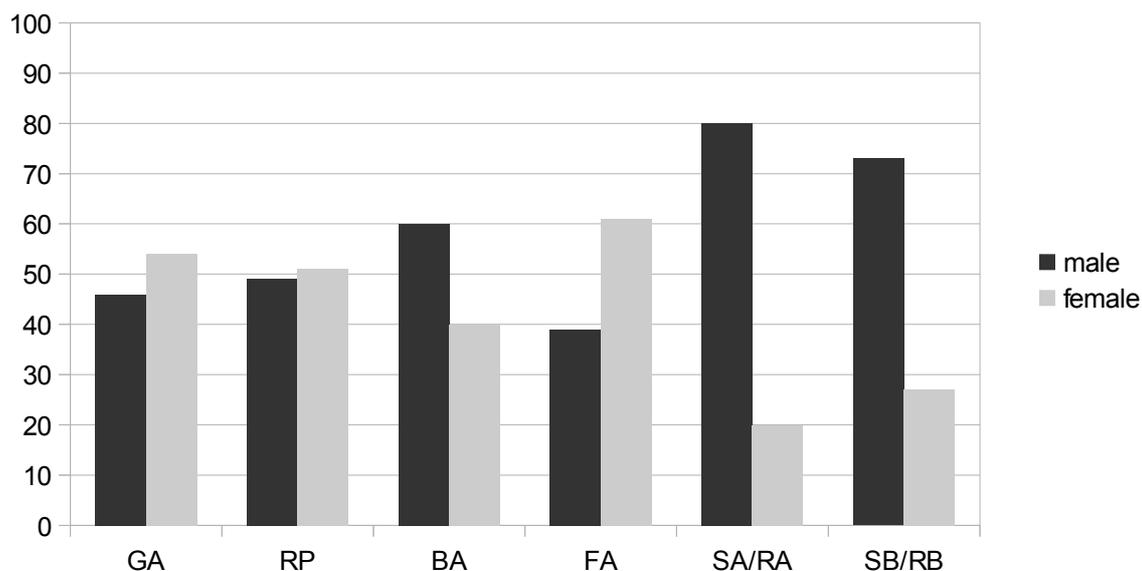
Figure 5.2 Gender: Projected distribution per 100 characters speaking each variety

Figure 5.2 illustrates that the differences between the genders is not very large for GA and RP, although there is a slight overweight of female characters speaking both varieties. Thus, the distribution seems to follow the impression given by most sociolinguistic studies on gender and standard vs non-standard language use (see 2.6.4). If BA is to be thought of as a standard variety, its distribution contradicts these studies, however. A look at female representation among intellectuals and those of high status, who have shown themselves to be overrepresented among BA speakers (see 5.2.1 and 5.2.3), was thought to possibly shed light on the issue. The results showed that while females are underrepresented among high characters, they are equally overrepresented among intellectuals, and so this seemingly provides no explanation. Thus, my hypothesis that females would be more likely to speak GA, RP and BA than males is, at least partially, disconfirmed.

The major findings for Gender would be the huge underrepresentation of female speakers of SA/RA and SB/RB. As we can see, only one in five SA/RA speakers would be female, and just over one in four, speakers of SB/RB. Again, this ties in very well with the findings from the sociolinguistic studies covered in 2.6.4. It also appears to lend credence to the notions of female speech being seen as unremarkable, hinted at by Niedzielski and Preston (see 2.6.4). This is, of course, following the assumption that speech deviating from the standard is to be thought of as 'remarkable', while the standard is not. For these varieties, my hypothesis seems strengthened.

A comparison with Lippi-Green's study is not very easy, as she does not list numbers for all the female and male characters, but rather treats the subgroups 'lovers' 'fathers' and 'mothers' in detail. Her numbers show that just as in the present study, SA/RA and SB/RB is used far less by females than by males; in fact there is not a single mother or female lover speaking SA/RA. A difference from my findings is that RP, too is spoken more by males than by females, while GA is spoken by an even higher proportion of females than in my study (Lippi-Green 1997:95-97). The numbers I have found for GA and RP correspond well with those in Sønnesyn's recent Disney study, but where I found that both SA/RA and SB/RB are underrepresented among female speakers, Sønnesyn only found this to be true for the former, with the latter actually overrepresented among females (see 2.5.2).

Interestingly, my results show FA to be found more often in female than in male characters. Admittedly, this is also the case in Lippi-Green's study, where among lovers, fathers and mothers, three female characters are foreign accented, as opposed to only one male (Lippi-Green 1997:95-97). But again, this is based on only a small subselection of her data, and considering that the entire study included 34 foreign accented characters, such a comparison really does not bear fruit, as there is no way of knowing how the rest of the characters were distributed. On the other hand, Sønnesyn (2011) revealed that males were far more likely to speak English with other accent than females. She argues that this is in line with studies and the general view that 'women speak more standardised, whereas men have a more regionally marked language' (2011:59). I hold that some caution must be held when using such material as basis, though. Granted, I have myself said that FA falls under a heading of non-standard accents in 4.2, but in the case of sociolinguistic studies evidencing that women speak more standardised than men, they have after all focused on native speakers, rather than foreign accented speakers, and thus the results are not really projectable to the situation of foreign accents. That being said, I have no good explanation for the higher number of female speakers of FA in my study. Said's 2006 study on American native and non-native speakers' attitudes towards foreign accented English did show that native speakers gave quite higher evaluations to females than males for two of the four accents (the other two were given roughly equal evaluation for both male and female) (Said 2006:58), but this is only a single study, and not enough to establish a trend of Americans preferring female foreign accented speakers over male.

### 5.2.3   Social status

Social status covers the socio-economic position of a given character, with the categories *high*

and *non-high* (see 4.1.3)*,* and *high* as the marked category.


Table 5.5 Social status: Accent distribution

**Accent spoken \* Social status Crosstabulation**

| | | | Social status | | Total |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | | | non-high | high | |
| Accent spoken | GA | Count | 581 | 101 | 682 |
| | | % within Social status | 61.4% | 37.0% | 55.9% |
| | | % of Total | 47.6% | 8.3% | 55.9% |
| | RP | Count | 163 | 92 | 255 |
| | | % within Social status | 17.2% | 33.7% | 20.9% |
| | | % of Total | 13.4% | 7.5% | 20.9% |
| | BA | Count | 53 | 51 | 104 |
| | | % within Social status | 5.6% | 18.7% | 8.5% |
| | | % of Total | 4.3% | 4.2% | 8.5% |
| | FA | Count | 44 | 15 | 59 |
| | | % within Social status | 4.6% | 5.5% | 4.8% |
| | | % of Total | 3.6% | 1.2% | 4.8% |
| | SA/RA | Count | 30 | 6 | 36 |
| | | % within Social status | 3.2% | 2.2% | 3.0% |
| | | % of Total | 2.5% | .5% | 3.0% |
| | SB/RB | Count | 76 | 8 | 84 |
| | | % within Social status | 8.0% | 2.9% | 6.9% |
| | | % of Total | 6.2% | .7% | 6.9% |
| Total | | Count | 947 | 273 | 1220 |
| | | % within Social status | 100.0% | 100.0% | 100.0% |
| | | % of Total | 77.6% | 22.4% | 100.0% |

Table 5.5 shows how accent is distributed over the Social status of the characters. As with
gender, the marked category is in a clear minority, constituting 273 (22.4%) of the characters,
while non-highs constitute 947 (77.6%). While 61.4% of the non-high characters speak GA,
only 37% of the high do so. Conversely, RP seems favoured by high speakers, as 33.7% speak
it, while only 17.2% speak GA. The gap between high and non-high is even larger for BA,
where the former is spoken by 18.7%, while the latter is only spoken by 5.6%. This means BA
is spoken well over three times as often by high characters as non-high.(although note that in
actual count, non-high characters slightly outnumber high due to their much larger numbers in
total). FA too is overrepresented among the high characters, if only slightly, with 5.5%
compared with 4.6% for non-high. Lastly, both SA/RA and SB/RB are underrepresented
among highs, the latter severly so, being spoken by only 2.9% of the highs and 8% of the non-

highs (in count, the difference is as high as 8 vs 76).

Figure 5.3 below shows a projected distribution of non-highs and highs per 100 characters within each accent category.
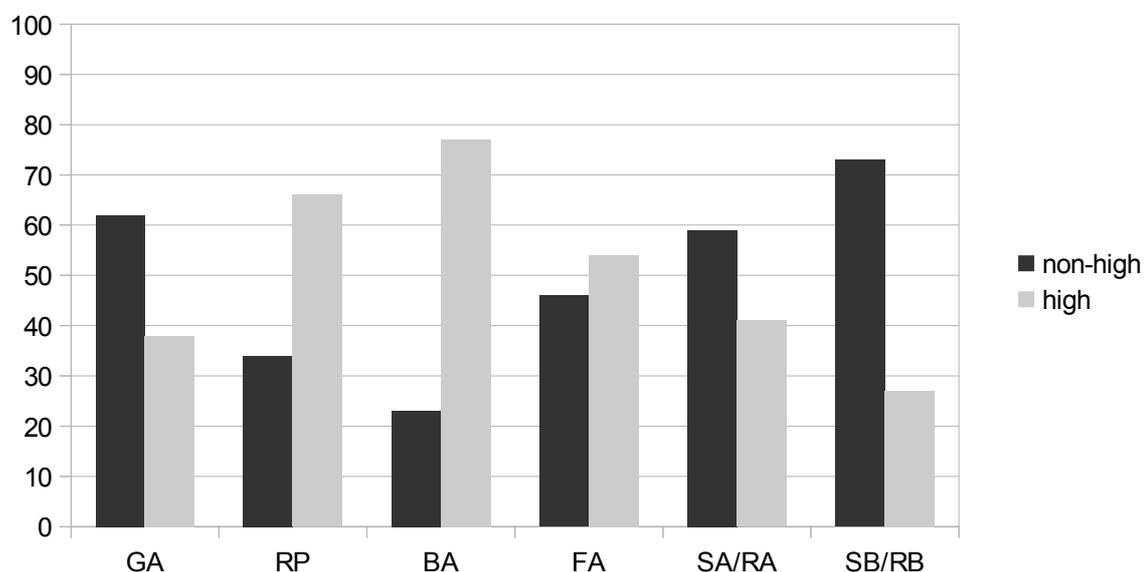


Fig 5.3: Social status: Projected distribution per 100 characters speaking each variety

Figure 5.3 illustrates that as expected, the standard varieties RP and BA are severely overrepresented among people of high social status, while SA/RA and SB/RB is underrepresented. This is in accord with my hypothesis (see 1.3), and correlates both with findings from sociolinguistic studies on the social stratification of accents, and with language attitude studies (see 2.4). GA seemingly represents an exception, however. GA is quite underrepresented among highs, and a comparison between the standard and the non-standard American varieties shows them to be almost equally distributed, with SA/RA in fact being slightly more common among highs than GA. One possible explanation for the differences between RP and GA is the status these varieties hold within their respective countries. RP has arguably always been very closely tied with social class, while for GA this applies to a much lesser extent (see 4.2.1). This does not explain the relationship between GA and SA/RA, but here too there is a possible contributing factor: My inclusion of BA as a separate variety. An alternative would have been to label the BA cases closest to RP as RP, and those closest to GA as GA[14], and with BA's strong representation among highs, such a partitioning would most

14 A similar solution was opted for in Sønnesyn (2011), where several characters were placed 'more or less in-between the categories of GA and RP', but the author decided the number of characters was so low that they were put under GA for the sake of simplicity (Sønnesyn 2011:49).

likely have bolstered GA numbers. We can only analyse the numbers as they stand, however, and thus it would appear that the game developers find both GA and SA/RA roughly equally adequate, or inadequate as it were, for representing high characters. One possible explanation is one which I touched upon when discussing my hypotheses for Prominence and Alignment in 1.3, namely that in a game with up to several hundred characters, the developers might have a fair share of them speak GA to simplify a time-consuming production process. Also, because GA is both supra-regional and not very closed tied to social class, the game developers might easily find it a 'safe' and 'neutral' choice for a character, and may therefore see use in a myriad of different roles. Of course, there is nothing to say that these different roles should not include high characters, but here again my inclusion of BA as a separate variety could be the explanation.

Just as FA speakers are overrepresented among intellectuals, they are overrepresented among characters of high social status, although for the latter only slightly. There is nothing among the studies forming the theoretical background of this thesis to indicate why this should be so. If anything, studies like those of Ryan and Sebastian, and Carranza (see 2.4) should indicate that FA speakers would be more common among non-high characters. Granted, Giles' 1970 study showed that some foreign accents held a rather high prestige (French in particular), but this was among English respondents, not American, and the more recent BBC Voices study (2005) has also shown the foreign accents to be losing this prestige (see 2.4.3).

### 5.2.4 Species

The Species variable indicates whether or not the character is *human* or *non-human* (see 4.1.4). *Non-human* is the marked category.

Table 5.6 Species: Accent distribution

**Accent spoken * Species Crosstabulation**

| | | | Species | | Total |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | | | human | non-human | |
| Accent spoken | GA | Count | 453 | 229 | 682 |
| | | % within Species | 50.7% | 70.0% | 55.9% |
| | | % of Total | 37.1% | 18.8% | 55.9% |
| | RP | Count | 222 | 33 | 255 |
| | | % within Species | 24.9% | 10.1% | 20.9% |
| | | % of Total | 18.2% | 2.7% | 20.9% |
| | BA | Count | 65 | 39 | 104 |
| | | % within Species | 7.3% | 11.9% | 8.5% |
| | | % of Total | 5.3% | 3.2% | 8.5% |
| | FA | Count | 47 | 12 | 59 |
| | | % within Species | 5.3% | 3.7% | 4.8% |
| | | % of Total | 3.9% | 1.0% | 4.8% |
| | SA/RA | Count | 33 | 3 | 36 |
| | | % within Species | 3.7% | .9% | 3.0% |
| | | % of Total | 2.7% | .2% | 3.0% |
| | SB/RB | Count | 73 | 11 | 84 |
| | | % within Species | 8.2% | 3.4% | 6.9% |
| | | % of Total | 6.0% | .9% | 6.9% |
| Total | | Count | 893 | 327 | 1220 |
| | | % within Species | 100.0% | 100.0% | 100.0% |
| | | % of Total | 73.2% | 26.8% | 100.0% |

Table 5.6 shows the accent distribution for Species. Again, it must be noted that members of the marked category are outnumbered almost three to one (893, or 73.2% vs 327, or 26.8%). A first glance reveals that non-humans are underrepresented among speakers of all varieties apart from GA and BA. While roughly every other human speaks GA, as many as 70% of the non-humans do so. For BA, the numbers are 7.3% for humans, and 11.9% for non-humans. In the other extreme, RP is spoken by 24.9% of the human characters, while only by 10.1% of the non-humans (in character count, this constitutes a massive 222 vs 33), and the socially and regionally marked Englishes by 11.9% of the humans and 4.3% of the non-humans. FA is also more common among humans than non-humans, with 5.3% and 3.7% representation, respectively.

Figure 5.4 below shows a projected distribution of humans and non-humans per 100 characters within each accent category.
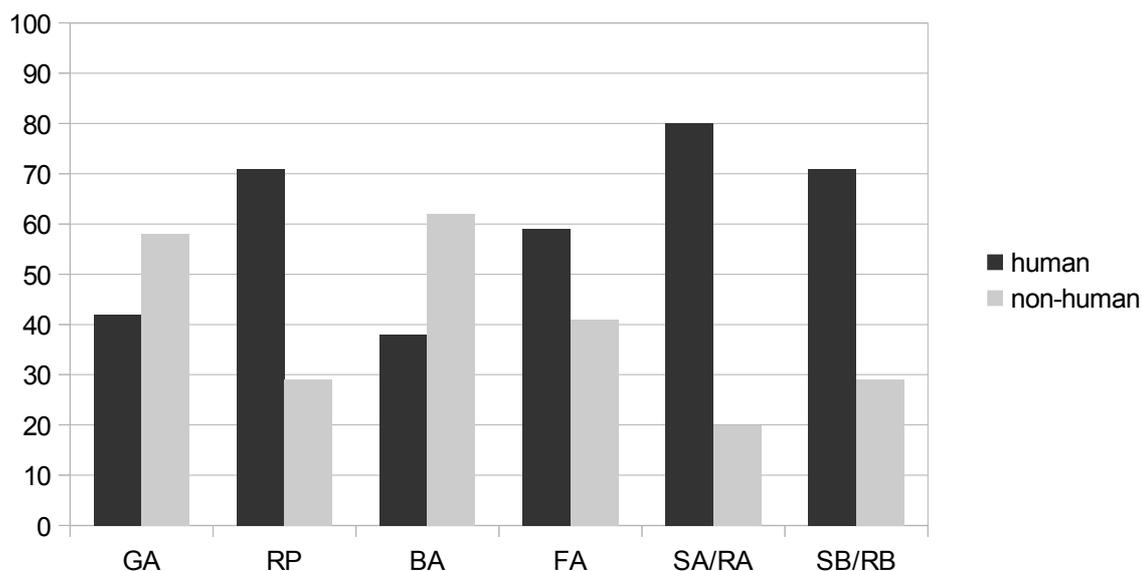
Fig 5.4 Species: Projected distribution per 100 characters speaking each variety

Fig 5.4 illustrates the clear dominance of RP and non-standard varieties among human characters, and how GA and BA are the preferred choices for non-humans. The general trend in most games seems to be that in situations where a non-human species lives relatively isolated from other species in a community/city/country/planet, and would therefore have reason to share a common variety, indeed tend to do so. But while this could potentially be any variety, the trend is that they speak GA, with the occasional BA speaker thrown in the mix. In situations where non-human characters are integrated with human society, they still largely stick to GA and BA, regardless of the varieties spoken around them. There are some exceptions, of course, most notably in Final Fantasy XII[15]. In this game, GA seems largely reserved for human characters from the nation of the MaPC, and the non-human species all speak a distinct non-GA variety each, regardless of whether they appear to be from the same area or not. One species speaks something which is possibly supposed to imitate Scandinavian, another something which is vaguely West Country (from the context, I believe it is an attempt to evoke the feeling of pirates), while a third speaks Indian English.

Species was not a variable for Lippi-Green, but she did illuminate accent use by animal characters versus that of humanoid ones. Here she noted that every AAVE speaker was in animal rather than human form; the same applied to speakers of Southern American (1997:93). Since animals would fall under the heading 'non-human', this means that our studies have

15 It should be noted that this game is the only game in the study originally developed outside of America, and that this could have an impact on the results. That being said, an American company was responsible for the creation of the American version.

uncovered widely different trends, as where in the Disney films non-human characters are prone to speak non-standard varieties, the computer games reveal varieties with high overt prestige (GA and BA) to be preferred for non-humans.

I can think of two possible explanations for why GA and BA is preferred for non-humans. One is that the visual appearance of the non-humans, as well as voice quality[16], is in itself considered a viable tool for marking otherness, thus alleviating the need for marked language variety use. The second is related to the advent of political correctness. Game developers might be reluctant towards assigning a specific variety to a certain species because of the possible stereotyping it might contribute to. Having a non-human species speak GA or BA when the humans around them speak different varieties is a seemingly neutral and harmless way of marking otherness while avoiding this possible stereotyping. This is exemplified by Dragon Age, where the dwarves and elves largely speak GA, while humans mainly speak RP (of the 182 humans, not a single one speaks GA).

### 5.2.5    Prominence

Some characters are very prominent in the game plot, while others are only encountered briefly. The Prominence variable separates between these, with the categories *major* and *minor* character (see 4.1.5).

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16 A recurring theme, especially in sci-fi games, was for the voice of non-human characters to be electronically altered in some way

Table 5.7 Prominence: Accent distribution

**Accent spoken * Prominence Crosstabulation**

| | | | Prominence | | Total |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | | | major | minor | |
| Accent spoken | GA | Count | 69 | 612 | 681 |
| | | % within Prominence | 40.6% | 58.5% | 56.0% |
| | | % of Total | 5.7% | 50.3% | 56.0% |
| | RP | Count | 39 | 215 | 254 |
| | | % within Prominence | 22.9% | 20.5% | 20.9% |
| | | % of Total | 3.2% | 17.7% | 20.9% |
| | BA | Count | 29 | 74 | 103 |
| | | % within Prominence | 17.1% | 7.1% | 8.5% |
| | | % of Total | 2.4% | 6.1% | 8.5% |
| | FA | Count | 16 | 43 | 59 |
| | | % within Prominence | 9.4% | 4.1% | 4.8% |
| | | % of Total | 1.3% | 3.5% | 4.8% |
| | SA/RA | Count | 8 | 28 | 36 |
| | | % within Prominence | 4.7% | 2.7% | 3.0% |
| | | % of Total | .7% | 2.3% | 3.0% |
| | SB/RB | Count | 9 | 75 | 84 |
| | | % within Prominence | 5.3% | 7.2% | 6.9% |
| | | % of Total | .7% | 6.2% | 6.9% |
| Total | | Count | 170 | 1047 | 1217 |
| | | % within Prominence | 100.0% | 100.0% | 100.0% |
| | | % of Total | 14.0% | 86.0% | 100.0% |

Table 5.7 shows the accent distribution for Prominence. The fact that most characters in computer games only play minor parts and are encountered only briefly is reflected in the numbers, as major characters only constitute 14% of the total and are outnumbered 170 to 1047. GA is quite underrepresented among major characters, as it is spoken by 40.6% of these, as opposed to 58.5% of the minor characters. RP, on the other hand, is quite evenly distributed, with 22.9% of the major and 20.5% of the minor characters. Both BA and FA are clearly favoured by major characters, with 17.1% and 9.4% representation versus 7.1% and 4.1% among minors. Interestingly, SA/RA and SB/RB, which have roughly followed the same patterns for all other social variables, diverge here, with SA/RA being more common among major characters and SB/RB more common among minor characters.

Figure 5.5 below shows a projected distribution of major and minor characters per 100 within each accent category.
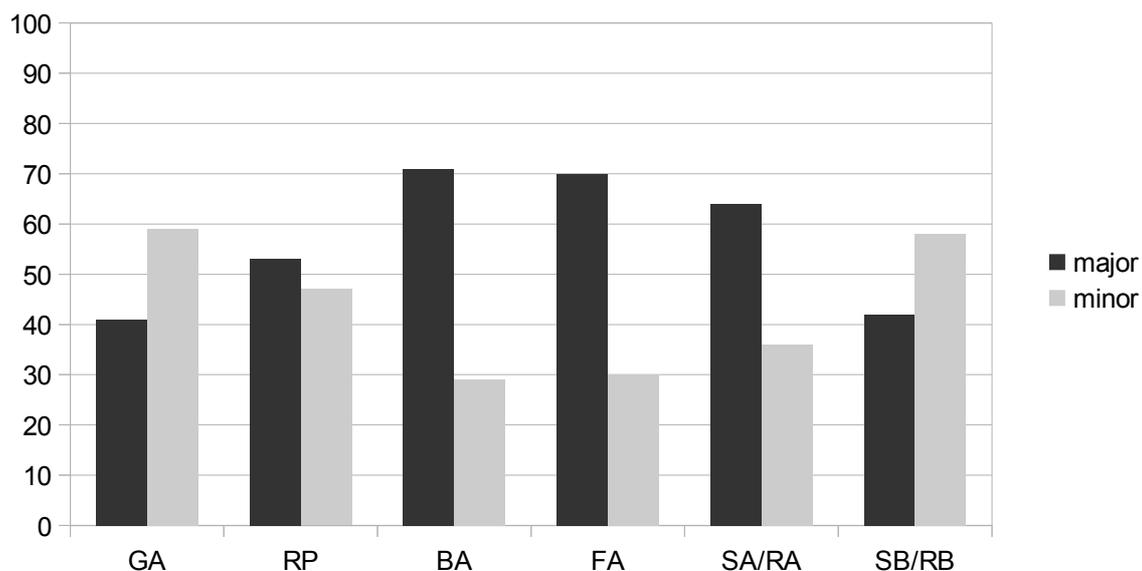
Fig 5.5 Prominence: Projected distribution per 100 characters speaking each variety

As the figure shows, my hypothesis that non-GA varieties is more likely to be found among major than minor characters (see 1.3), seems strengthened, as of the non-GA varieties, only SB/RB is more common among minor than major characters. I suspect the reason for the relatively low number of GA majors to be that for characters serving in roles which are brief or unimportant to the plot, such as street vendors[17], the developers most likely see no point in fleshing them out overly much, and as argued earlier, GA is likely the easiest variety to go with. It would appear, then, that there is a certain correlation between the complexity of the characters and the variety they speak, with 'marked' (non-GA) varieties being more in favour among complex characters.

Interestingly, while GA is comparatively the least favoured variety among major characters, BA is the most favoured. This, I interpret as an expression of the impact of nerd culture and their preferance for superstandard language, as discussed in 2.3.1.

The only non-GA variety more likely to be found among minor than major characters, is SB/RB. It is a bit puzzling that this accent category does not follow the same trend as the other non-standard varieties, and I am hesitant to speculate too heavily into the matter, but a possible explanation could be that for an American audience it is not very appealing to listen to regional British varieties for an extended period of time.

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17 A rather important part of most RPGs is the aquiring of helpful goods, such as better armour or weaponry, so games typically feature several different vendors where old and no longer serviceable goods may be sold, and newer equipment aquired. These characters usually have little to do with the plot.

### 5.2.6 Alignment

The Alignment of a given character reflects their ethical motivation. The categories are *positive, negative, neutral, and mixed* (see 4.1.6).

Table 5.8 Alignment: Accent distribution

**Accent spoken * Alignment Crosstabulation**

| | | | Alignment | | | | Total |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | | | positive | negative | neutral | mixed | |
| Accent spoken | GA | Count | 116 | 151 | 351 | 64 | 682 |
| | | % within Alignment | 54.2% | 49.0% | 61.8% | 49.2% | 55.9% |
| | | % of Total | 9.5% | 12.4% | 28.8% | 5.2% | 55.9% |
| | RP | Count | 46 | 72 | 107 | 30 | 255 |
| | | % within Alignment | 21.5% | 23.4% | 18.8% | 23.1% | 20.9% |
| | | % of Total | 3.8% | 5.9% | 8.8% | 2.5% | 20.9% |
| | BA | Count | 21 | 28 | 40 | 15 | 104 |
| | | % within Alignment | 9.8% | 9.1% | 7.0% | 11.5% | 8.5% |
| | | % of Total | 1.7% | 2.3% | 3.3% | 1.2% | 8.5% |
| | FA | Count | 14 | 13 | 17 | 15 | 59 |
| | | % within Alignment | 6.5% | 4.2% | 3.0% | 11.5% | 4.8% |
| | | % of Total | 1.1% | 1.1% | 1.4% | 1.2% | 4.8% |
| | SA/RA | Count | 5 | 14 | 15 | 2 | 36 |
| | | % within Alignment | 2.3% | 4.5% | 2.6% | 1.5% | 3.0% |
| | | % of Total | .4% | 1.1% | 1.2% | .2% | 3.0% |
| | SB/RB | Count | 12 | 30 | 38 | 4 | 84 |
| | | % within Alignment | 5.6% | 9.7% | 6.7% | 3.1% | 6.9% |
| | | % of Total | 1.0% | 2.5% | 3.1% | .3% | 6.9% |
| Total | | Count | 214 | 308 | 568 | 130 | 1220 |
| | | % within Alignment | 100.0% | 100.0% | 100.0% | 100.0% | 100.0% |
| | | % of Total | 17.5% | 25.2% | 46.6% | 10.7% | 100.0% |

Table 5.8 shows the accent distribution for Alignment. As we can see, neutral characters are in a clear majority, being almost as numerous as all the other three put together. The main reason for this large number of neutral characters is that a lot of characters only feature very briefly in the games and are involved in such a limited number of events that it is impossible to deduce their alignment; for instance, a messenger presenting you with a message before disappearing, never to be seen again. Neutral characters are also unique in that they do not really provoke any emotional response in the player. That is, is where you may sympathise with a positive character, be angry with a negative one, or be frustrated over a mixed character who appers to go astray, neutral characters are usually just there to perform a practical purpose.

This is naturally linked with the Prominence variable covered above, and a crosstabulation of Prominence and Alignment shows that only 3.5% of the neutral characters are major, and only 11.8% of the major characters are neutral.

GA is given 61.8% representation among the neutral characters, which is probably linked to the high number of neutral minor characters, since we saw above that GA is also very prominent among minor characters. Among the positive characters, 54.2% speak GA, while negative and mixed characters have the lowest percentage, both around 49%. RP shows a reversion of this pattern, as negative and mixed characters both are over 23%, positive characters are in the middle with 21.5% and neutral characters the lowest with 18.8%. The lowest percentage of BA speakers, too, is found among neutrals with 7%, with the highest percentage found among mixed with 11.5.%. Positives and negatives place in the middle with 9.8% and 9.1%, respectively. The non-standard varieties are perhaps the most interesting for this variable. SA/RA and SB/RB mirror each other in being clearly in highest representation among negatives and lowest among mixed. Added together their numbers are 7.9% for positives, 14.2% for negatives, 9.3% for neutrals, and 4.6% for mixed. FA is interesting in two ways. Firstly, it shows a greater representation among positives than among negatives and neutrals. Secondly, with 11.5%, FA speakers constitute a much higher percentage of mixed speakers than they do any other group.

Figure 5.6 below shows a projected distribution of positive, negative, neutral and mixed characters per 100 within each accent category.
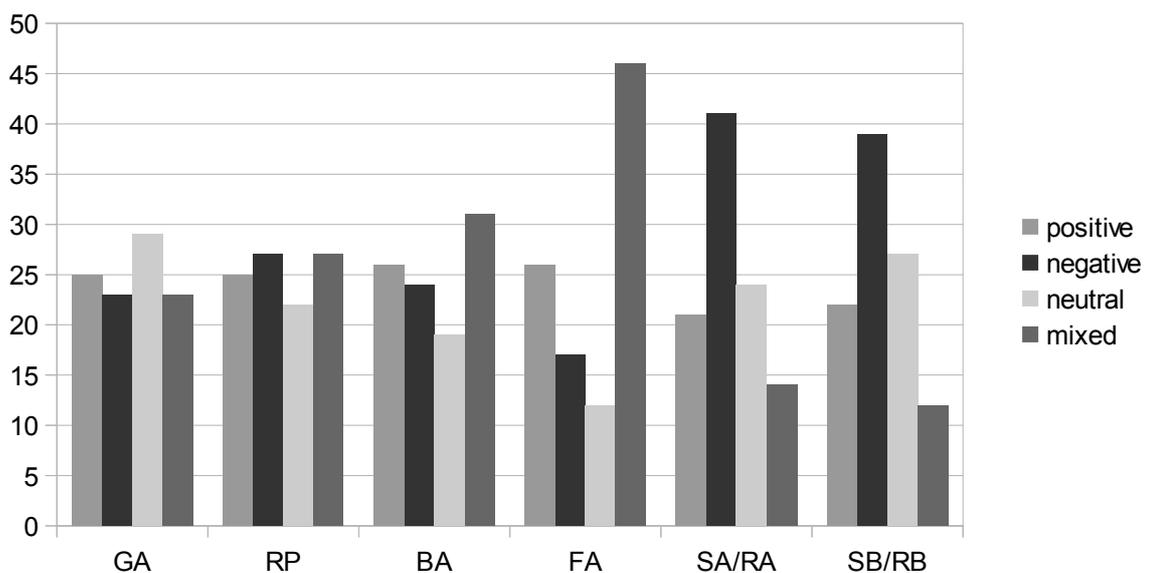


Fig 5.6 Alignment: Projected distribution per 100 characters speaking each variety.

As Figure 5.6 helps illustrate, with regards to Alignment, GA seems to be a jack of all trades. This stands in stark contrast with the findings in both Lippi-Green (1997), Dobrow and Gidney (1998), and Sønnesyn (2011), all of which showed GA to be clearly preferred for heroes and positive characters (see 2.5). Some of GA's even distribution may be accounted for by the tendency for some games to have nearly all non-human characters speak GA, as covered in 5.2.4, since it is reasonable to expect that all four Alignments are represented among these characters. A crosstabulation of Alignment and Species shows that non-humans are somewhat overrepresented among mixed, and to a lesser degree neutral characters, so a slight impact might be registered, but human characters outnumber non-humans almost four to one, so the importance of this should not be overestimated.

That GA is not more uniformly spoken by positive characters is admittedly surprising, and leaves my hypothesis (see 1.3) only partially confirmed. The same can be said for RP. According to my hypothesis, RP should have been overrepresented among negative and mixed characters. Granted, this is the case, but the numbers are nowhere near as clear as expected. It is difficult to compare my results with those of Lippi-Green (1997), as she did not differentiate between standard and non-standard Englishes for this variety. Dobrow and Gidney (1998), however, reported that RP was the clearly preferred variety for villains (see 2.5.2). Sønnesyn's numbers for RP are perhaps those which most closely approximate mine. She did find RP to be more common among villains than heroes, but the difference was not very big. A clear difference, however, is that the largest RP speaking group in her study was the 'peripheral roles' (2011:78), which could be said to correspond to 'neutral', the smallest RP speaking group in the present study. There is a possible contributing factor to the even distribution, namely that in Dragon Age, RP is spoken by the majority of the human characters to signal their nationality in the game. A crosstabulation of Alignment and variety spoken for Dragon Age reveals that the numbers for neutrals are well over the average for all games (which could owe to the fact that in this game, RP substitutes for GA as the variety spoken by very minor characters such as vendors). In other words, without Dragon Age, the group of neutral RP speaking characters would be even lower. Still, this is only one game, so the impact must be considered limited. That being said, the fact remains that RP seems slightly favoured for roles which possibly inspire an emotional response in the player.

The socially and regionally marked Englishes are almost surprisingly identical in their distribution over Alignment. The main point of interest is that they are clearly overrepresented among negative characters. This came as somewhat of a surprise to me, as I had suspected the advent of political correctness to influence the game developers into preferring non-marked

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varieties for such characters. A comparison between Alignment in older and newer games reveals that there is really no tendency for change either. Dobrow and Gidney (1998) did find that the only villains speaking with an American variety, spoke regionally or socially marked (see 2.5.2), so some similarities are evident. Sønnesyn (2011) did find her equivalents of SA/RA and SB/RB to be most heavily distributed among the 'unsympathetic' characters, but 'aide to hero/-ine' was not far behind (2011:78), so her findings do not seem to be as unequivocal as those in the present study.

From figure 5.6 we see that foreign accented is the group least likely to be posited as a neutral character. Also we see that they are quite more likely to be portrayed as positive than negative. This means that not only does the majority of FA speakers appear in roles of intelligence and wit, and in roles of high social status, but they are also apparently 'the good guys'. The combination of these findings are quite astounding, and does not quite match up to the indications from attitude studies (see 2.4), nor those from the previous studies on accent use in TV and film (see 2.5). There is one fly in the ointment, however: The highest proportion of characters likely to speak FA are mixed ones. I have earlier said that positive, negative and mixed characters are those which can possibly evoke an emotional response in the player. Here, I further  that the mixed characters are the only truly dynamic characters in the games. While the others start out as good or bad and stay that way throughout the game, the mixed characters are those who actually change throughout the plotline. They may start out as good and turn bad, or vice versa, or their demeanor may be dependent on how the player interacts with them, but ultimately they are the characters who show change[18]. At first glance this might seem like a good thing, that foreign accents are well represented among the most complex and dynamic characters, but the truth of the matter is that where mixed characters are concerned,  on some level the term 'bad' comes into the picture. Whether the characters start out bad but end up good, or they appear good and turn out bad. Not to put too fine a point on it, characters who start out bad and later change may be thought of as having a 'handicap' they need to overcome, while characters who start out good and turn bad are, in Corneliussen and Mortensen's words, 'traitor[s]' (2005:134).

Summing up, contrary to my hypothesis, both RP and GA are quite evenly distributed across Alignment. For both of the varieties the explanation seems tied with other variables. For RP it appears that other character traits, such as Orientation, Social Status, and even Species

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18  The perfect example of such a mixed character would be Aribeth, a non-player character (NPC) from NwN (2002), who '[t]hrough the game (...) develops from a bland paladin into a bitter, unhappy opponent and traitor (...), after much painful soul-searching and nightmares' (Corneliussen & Mortensen 2005:134). This character is ultimately redeemable in the final part of the game (if the player so chooses), and has evoked so much attention among fans of the game as to spawn fan-created stories, and even games surrounding her fall from grace (Corneliussen & Mortensen 2005:135).

are more relevant than Alignment in deciding whether a character should speak it or not. For GA, it might be a product of GA in general being used as a handy variety for roles of all kinds. The socially and regionally marked Englishes, however, mainly seem to signal negativity, and thus it appears that the game developers have not conformed to the demands of political correctness where they are concerned.

## 5.3    Comparison of science fiction and fantasy games

As the data was collected, it quickly became apparent that there were certain accent use patterns which seemed to follow the genre of the games. To investigate this more fully, I constructed tables showing the average accent use for all the sci-fi games and fantasy games seperately. The numbers were first converted into individual percentage scores for each game, meaning that a game with 40 characters has the same impact on the results as a game with 300. The results are shown in tables 5.9 and 5.10 below. The numbers for all games from table 5.2 are included for comparison.

Table 5.9 Fantasy games: Accent distribution

| Variety | Percentage, equal weighting | Percentage, all games with equal weighting |
|---------|-----------------------------|-------------------------------------------|
| GA | 42.4% | 52.3% |
| RP | 20.5% | 16.2% |
| BA | 15.6% | 11% |
| FA | 8.1% | 8.8% |
| SA/RA | 0.3% | 3.2% |
| SB/RB | 13.2% | 8.4% |
| Total | 100% | 100% |

As table 5.9 shows, American varieties are less common in fantasy games than for all games in total. In fact, SA/RA is spoken by only 0.3% of the fantasy game characters, roughly one tenth of the number in all games. On the other hand, speakers of the British varieties, together with BA, constitute almost half of the total, whereas they make out just over a third for all games. FA is slightly underrepresented in fantasy games, but not by much. The biggest difference is clearly between SA/RA and SB/RB, however, as only 0.3% of the characters speak the former, while13.2% speak the latter.

    The general trend seems to tie in well with my hypothesis that British varieties will be more widely used in fantasy games than in science fiction games (see 1.3). Interestingly, the

numbers correspond quite well to those found by Lippi-Green (1997), where her equivalent of GA was spoken by 43%, RP by 22%, SB/RB by 13%, and FA by 9%. Lippi-Green found 13% to be SA/RA speakers (1997:88), however, while fantasy games include 15.6% BA speakers. The virtual non-existence of SA/RA is quite striking. Only two of the games included such characters (Jade Empire and Dragon Age), and none of the cases were regionally marked. Rather they exhibited overly exagerrated use of features such as consonant cluster reduction and copula deletion[19], which mostly seemed intended to mark the characters as simple or stupid. The lack of SA/RA varieties again seems tied to a desire to strive for 'authenticity' in the games. It is easy to imagine that the game developer would feel that a barmaid speaking like a 'Southern belle' would crush the illusion of being at a traveller's inn in a medieval fantasy setting, or that a dueling knight speaking AAVE just would not be 'quite right'. Still this striving for authenticity does not seem to affect the use of GA, at least not to the same extent[20]. This I attribute to the fact that the games ultimately are by Americans, with Americans as a very important target audience, and that there may be a general consensus that gamers would not approve of having to listen to non-American varieties for an entire game. GA with its position as supra-regional and standard, is a safe choice, as it is less likely to evoke as strong and stereotyped associations as socially or regionally marked varieties would.

One fantasy game, Jade Empire, broke with the general trend in that its number of GA speakers was nearly twice that of the average, at 83.9%. In fact, this game held the second highest number of GA speakers regardless of genre. A possible explanation could be that while the other fantasy games are to a certain extent influenced by medieval or renaissance Europe, this particular game is set in a fictional ancient China, thereby lacking the 'ancient times with a King and Queen' connotations we saw some respondents associate with RP in 2.4.2. That some thought has gone into the accent process seems obvious as there is only a single RP speaker in the entire game: A comical knight, voiced by John Cleese, who is shipwrecked and originally hails from a western country which would correspond to Britain in the real world.

While fantasy games are typically inspired by historical times, such as the Dark Ages, sci-fi games can be thought of as a reflection of the future. Table 5.10 below shows the accent distribution for sci-fi games compared with the total for all games.

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19  Although this is strictly a grammatical feature and therefore falls outside how I have defined accent, the use was so prevalent that it simply could not be ignored.
20  The widespread use of British varieties in fantasy settings does not appear to pass unnoticed on the net, and I have seen several discussion boards where the matter is discussed, where answers like '[British English] does suit it better (...). Standard american [sic] accents are alright too, but I can't really imagine a fantasy movie or game where the characters speak with a southern american accent...' (GameSpot. English accents in fantasy, accessed 19 November 2011) is common.

Table 5.10 Sci-fi games: Accent distribution

| Variety | Percentage, equal weighting | Percentage, all games with equal weighting |
|---------|------------------------------|---------------------------------------------|
| GA | 67.2% | 52.3% |
| RP | 9.7% | 16.2% |
| BA | 4.2% | 11% |
| FA | 9.9% | 8.8% |
| SA/RA | 7.6% | 3.2% |
| SB/RB | 1.3% | 8.4% |
| Total | 100% | 100% |

A quick glance at table 5.10 reveals that the numbers are radically different than for fantasy games. Where British varieties plus BA constituted almost half of the spoken varieties in the fantasy games, they only total 15.2% here. American varieties are spoken by roughly 75%, but in spite of this high number, SA/RA speakers are relatively seldom, constituting only 7.6% of the total, or making up just over one tenth of the speakers of American varieties. Foreign accented speakers are slightly overrepresented with 9.9% compared with the total average of 8.8%. The hypothesis that sci-fi games will show greater use of American varieties than fantasy games, then, seems strengthened by these numbers.

The numbers for SA/RA would actually have been even lower were it not for Blade Runner (1997), which had 15.9% of its characters speak this variety. Blade Runner is incidently the cause of the slight overrepresentation of FA characters as well, as 31.8% of the characters in this game are FA speakers. Because this is the oldest game in the survey, it seems connected with my hypothesis that older games show more accent variation, and the matter is discussed more fully in 5.4 below. One explanation for the low number of SA/RA speakers is a possible idea that the future involves standardisation and uniformity, that as humanity unites and expands to the stars, tokens of irregularity, such as different varieties of speech, melt away. This uniformity is evidenced in several ways. A substantial number of characters are visually marked as Hispanic/Asian/African, yet they almost always speak GA. With some characters, their birthplace is known, but not reflected in their speech, such as for Captain Anderson in Mass Effect (2007), who speaks GA despite being from London (and despite other characters in the game speaking British varieties). I mentioned above that Blade Runner's high number of non-GA speakers could be tied to its year of release. Another contributing factor could be that Blade Runner is unique among the four sci-fi games in that its setting is much closer to our own reality. The location is Los Angeles only a few decades into the future, and instead of

portraying a united starfaring human race, the game portrays an urban sprawl of a multicultural society.

Another contributing factor to the high number of GA speakers is the presence of alien characters. Well over one fifth of the sci-fi characters are non-humans, yet there are no alien SB/RB speakers, only one alien SA/RA speaker, and two alien FA speakers. The low variety among aliens could stem from a well of different reasons. I already mentioned voice quality as a way of marking the otherness of non-humans in 5.2.4. In addition, there is another strategy sometimes employed: to have non-human characters speak a fictional language which is then texted in English so that the player can comprehend what is being said. This was in fact the case for over a hundred characters encountered during the data collection phase, but they were eventually cut from the data material, as my aim was to investigate accents of English.

Just like SA/RA is spoken by very few fantasy game characters, SB/RB is spoken by very few sci-fi game characters. This too seems connected with the expectations the audience has for the different settings, and that just like a medieval knight speaking AAVE feels somehow 'off', so does a futuristic bioengineer speaking West Country. Of course, in reality both the idea that American varieties are not suitable for fantasy settings because '[t]hey weren't developed till WAY after the medieval periods' (GameSpot. English accents in fantasy, accessed 19 November 2011), and the idea that British varieties are incompatible with sci-fi settings because they are archaic is rather silly, seeing as how both fantasy and sci-fi settings are, when all is said and done, imaginary. And as the GameSpot forum user Siddiqui points out, it is not like the varieties spoken in Britan during the middle ages are in any way comparable to those which exist today (ibid).

## 5.4    Comparison of older and newer games

To test my hypothesis that older games will show more accent variation, a comparison was executed between the older and the newer games in the study. As discussed earlier (See 2.7.2 & 3.3.5), Knights of the Old Republic (2003) was the first commercially successful RPG to provide fully voiced dialogue for all characters, a practise which has since become the norm rather than a peculiarity. As such it makes sense to mark this game as the first game representing the newer games, while all games released prior to this are considered older. As only four of the games in the study fall under this heading while six are newer, and because the more recent games tend to have more characters included, the statistics shows a calculated average in percent, for easy comparison. As for tables 5.9 and 5.10 above, the percentages were first calculated for each game individually, giving each game equal weight on the results.

Table 5.11 Older games: Accent distribution

| Variety | Percentage, equal weighting | Percentage, all games with equal weighting |
|---------|------------------------------|---------------------------------------------|
| GA | 39% | 52.3% |
| RP | 12.3% | 16.2% |
| BA | 17.5% | 11% |
| FA | 14.3% | 8.8% |
| SA/RA | 4.0% | 3.2% |
| SB/RB | 12.9% | 8.4% |
| Total | 100% | 100% |

From table 5.11 we see that both RP and GA show less representation in older games than in games in general, while all of the non-standard varieties show greater representation. BA is also well represented in the older games, with 17.5% of the characters speaking this variety, as opposed to 11% for all games, but this is mainly due to Diablo 2, where 47,1% of the characters speak this variety. My hypothesis that older games will show more language variation (see 1.3) seems clearly strengthened by these findings, though it should be noted that the older games are comprised of three fantasy games and one sci-fi, while the newer games include three of each, which might be a contributing factor to the low amount of GA. Still, the percentage of GA speakers in the older sci-fi game (Blade Runner, 1997) is actually no higher than 47.7%, about the same as one of the fantasy games (Diablo 2, 2000), and not much higher than the average of 39% for all older games, so the trend seems to extend beyond this.

The numbers for the newer games are given in table 5.12 below.

Table 5.12 Newer games: Accent distribution

| Variety | Percentage, equal weighting | Percentage, all games with equal weighting |
|---------|------------------------------|---------------------------------------------|
| GA | 61.3% | 52.3% |
| RP | 18.8% | 16.2% |
| BA | 6.7% | 11% |
| FA | 5.2% | 8.8% |
| SA/RA | 2.7% | 3.2% |
| SB/RB | 5.4% | 8.4% |
| Total | 100% | 100% |

As table 5.12 shows, GA or RP is spoken by over 80% of the characters in the newer games.

This is even higher than the percentage (75.2%) in Sønnesyn's study (2011:51), and this is leaving BA out of the picture. Compared with the numbers for the older games, where GA and RP together constitute just over 50%, the difference is astounding. With the percentage of non-standard speakers together adding up to less than 15% in the newer games, there is a clearly visible trend for non-standard varieties to be replaced by standard ones.

That BA is spoken by only 6.7% percent of the characters in the newer games, as opposed to 17.5% in the older is a bit surprising when keeping in mind the ideas of nerd culture and standard language ideology presented in 2.3.1. This might be a sign that the game developers are trying to embrace a wider audience (and as we have seen, the demographics of gamers is becoming varied indeed), but also as the general trend seems to be an increase in GA and RP at the cost of all other varieties, one could argue that standard language ideology is being reinforced.

## 5.5    The curious case of the Main Player Character

As indicated earlier, the MaPCs are not part of the main analysis (see 3.4.2). This does not mean that there is nothing to gain by looking at these characters, and especially in the games where the player can customise their character, there are some very interesting findings. I have seperated the games into those where the MaPC has been given a fixed voice along the same lines as other characters, and those where the player may choose between a range of different voices and accents. Additionally, KotOR, Jade Empire and Fallout 3 all have MaPCs without any voiced dialogue, and are therefore left out.

### 5.5.1   Fixed voice

The games with a fixed voice include Blade Runner, Diablo 2, Return to Krondor, Final Fantasy XII and Mass Effect. Three of the games have a fixed main character, two of which speak GA and one  which speaks RP. Mass Effect lets you choose between a male and a female character, but otherwise the voice is fixed. They both speak GA. Diablo 2 lets you choose between seven different character classes, such as sorceress, paladin and amazon. I still consider it a fixed voice game, however, as each class is inexorably bound to a preset voice, gender (for instance there is no sorcerer, only a sorceress), and appearance. Here too, all characters speak GA, from the barbarian from the northern steppes, to the amazon from the south. Standard varieties, then, are chosen for all of the MaPCs, despite several of them featuring in games showing a rich variation in accent use among other characters.

### 5.5.2   Player-chosen voice

If the fixed voice games showed evidence of standard language ideology in motion, then the player-chosen voice games may be prime examples of possible accent stereotyping. The games where the player can choose the voice themselves are Neverwinter Nights (NwN) and Dragon Age.

The fact that the player may choose between a range of voices is not only interesting from the perspective of seeing what sort of varieties the player may choose between; it is also interesting because the game developers for these games have given each variety a description. That is, in the menu where the accents are represented, they are not simply listed as 'voice 1, voice 2, voice 3' etc. Rather they each have an individual label, such as 'sultry', 'wise', or even 'brooding dark hero'. In other words, the game developers project the idea that there is a correspondence between the voice and the attributes of a character.

The voices available in NwN mostly speak GA, RP or BA. One of the voices speaks regionally marked British, however, the one labelled '[b]oisterous goodnatured' (Neverwinter Nights. 2002, BioWare). This ties in quite nicely with the attitude studies on regional British which we explored in 2.4, where we among other things saw Somerset, Scouse, Scottish and South Welsh accents being associated with friendliness. RP seems to be reserved for intelligent, thoughtful characters, possibly of high status, with adjectives such as 'scholar', 'mature' and 'noble' being used to describe the voices (Neverwinter Nights. 2002, BioWare). This also corresponds well with the attitude studies covered in 2.4. Somewhat to my surprise, the GA voices are mostly given negative labels such as 'violent fighter' and 'manic psychotic' (Neverwinter Nights. 2002, BioWare). There is a possible explanation for this, however. We have earlier seen that GA appers to be used for a wide variety of purposes, and that it somehow serves as the fallback variety for the game developers. This arguably extends here as well. While attitude studies have investigated matters such as whether or not a given variety is associated with intelligence, friendliness, or high social class (see 2.4), the question 'do you believe this speaker to be a manic psychotic' has likely never been included. Therefore, it might be easiest and safest for game developers to ascribe GA to the character types of such descriptions.

Dragon Age differs somewhat from NwN as the species of the character, rather than the describing adjective (wise, sultry, mysterious, etc) seems to decide the accent (Dragon Age: Origins. 2009. BioWare). This means all elven and dwarven voices are GA, and all human voices are RP, regardless of whether the character, for instance, is 'smart' or not. That some innate character trait no longer influences what sort of variety a character speaks seems a step

in the right direction, but there are still some oddities. Among the NPCs the player encounters during the course of the game, several dwarves speak the non-standard English varieties, some elves BA and even RP, and a sizeable number of humans SB/RB, but still a player is only allowed to choose RP for human a MaPC and GA for a dwarven or elven one.

NwN, although including a slightly wider range of varieties from which to choose, still limits the player to American or British varieties, and then almost exclusively to standard ones. All in all then, whether the voice is fixed, or whether the player is allowed some choice, the voice of the MaPC is largely limited to standard varieties, which might be interpreted as a reinforcement of standard language ideology.

## 5.6     Foreign accented revisited

As we saw in our exploration of the social variables, FA was actually preferred among intellectuals, people of high social status, and to a certain degree, positive characters (mixed was by far the most likely Alignment category in which to find an FA speaker). This seems to stand in stark contrast with the findings from the previous studies on accent use in media outlined in 2.5, and largely with the findings from the attitude studies described in 2.4. However, a closer look at the FA speakers when taking into account the notions of attitudinal hierarchies presented in 2.4.1, shows that the portrayal of foreign accented characters is more complex than what is perceived at first glance.

Interestingly, crosstabulations of Orientation and Accentedness, and Social Status and Accentedness show that both characters with a mild degree, and a strong degree of accentedness are roughly evenly distributed over the different categories. When crosstabulating Alignment with Accentedness, however, it becomes evident that the main bulk of the positive FA speakers have a mild degree, while the majority of the mixed FA speakers have a strong degree. Only three of the 30 FA speakers with a strong degree of accentedness are positive, as opposed to seven of the 21 with a mild degree.

I wish to illustrate how differently foreign accents may be perceived through an example from Dragon Age. In Dragon Age, one of the SuPC's (Leliana) is a female with which it is possible for the MaPC to become romantically involved. During the course of the game, through dialogue, the player learns more and more about her past, and it is eventually revealed that she used to be a spy until her former mentor (Marjolaine) betrayed her, and that she is now trying to make amends for her sordid past. At a certain stage in the story,  the player needs to face down Marjolaine, who in all respects comes off as a very negative character with seemingly no redeeming features at all. Both characters are from a country in the game from

which characters speak with a French accent, but where Leliana's degree of accentedness is very mild, Marjolaine's is very strong. To sum it up then, the character with which the player is supposed to sympathise (Leliana) speaks with a mild degree of accentedness, while the character which the player would typically feel hostile towards speaks with a strong degree of accentedness. To underscore how this is perceived by the players, I include some quotes from discussion boards where Leliana and Marjolaine are discussed. Users TyroneTasty and Sericenthe on Leliana: 'I want to eat Leliana's accent. It's delicious', and 'I don't care what her accent is, it's sexy' (BioWare social network. Leliana's accent?, accessed 7 November 2011). Users Giggles_Manically and The Water God on Marjolaine: 'I cant [sic] stand her accent. Unhaha hunh! Listen to my silly French accent unhahahee!', and 'her accent is way too thick sounding and annoying (...) she just sounds like a crazy paranoid Frenchie' (BioWare social network. Did you kill Marjolaine?, accessed 7 November 2011).

## CHAPTER 6 | CONCLUSION

In this chapter I first summarise the main goals and findings from this study in 6.1, before I in 6.2 discuss the relevance of this study, and briefly explore avenues for further research.

### 6.1    Summarising the study

In this study I examined a total of 1230 characters distributed over ten different computer games released between 1997 and 2009 for accent and a selection of social variables. The games selected were a sampling of the most popular and successful adventure and roleplaying games from the period. The thesis was directly inspired by Lippi-Green's 1997 Disney study, and as such the overarching goal was simply to observe whether there appeared to be a correlation between the accent spoken and the traits exhibited by a given character, a correlation which the findings from the study clearly show to exist. To this end, the characters were coded for six different variables (Orientation, Gender, Social Status, Species, Prominence, and Alignment), and the accent spoken by the character analysed and grouped into the different accent categories of GA, RP, BA, FA, SA/RA, and SB/RB. Specific hypotheses were formulated for most of the variables. Chronology was also considered important, so the characters were grouped into *older* and *newer* game based on whether they game they featured in was released in 2002 and earlier, or after. Lastly, the characters were coded for being either a part of a fantasy or a sci-fi game.

It was also natural that the findings would be compared to those from similar studies. Unfortunately, the field of 'computer game linguistics' is rather young, and no previous studies on accent use in computer games were found. However, as Lippi-Green's Disney study was the source of inspiration for the thesis, it seemed natural to compare and contrast the findings with those of hers. Two other studies, one on televised cartoons by Dobrow and Gidney (1998), and one on more recent Disney films (Sønnesyn (2011) were also included as a source of comparison.

For the Orientation variable, my hypothesis was strengthened. Physical characters were prone to speak SB/RB and SA/RA, while RP and BA were clearly favoured by intellectual characters, findings which are in correlation both with sociolinguistic studies and language attitude studies.

For Gender, parts of the hypothesis were disconfirmed, as males were far more likely to speak BA than females. Females were more likely to speak GA and RP though, although not by

far. The part of the hypothesis which was unquestionably confirmed concerned the use of SA/RA and SB/RB. These varieties were much more likely to be used by male speakers, and the results are therefore in line with the majority of studies conducted on the subject.

With regards to Social Status, my hypothesis was largely supported, as BA and RP were more often found among high than non-high characters, and the socially and regionally marked Englishes were more often employed by non-highs. The findings for FA contradicted the hypothesis, however, as high characters were marginally more likely to speak with a foreign accent than non-high, whereas my hypothesis predicted non-highs to be in the majority.

I had no specific hypotheses tied to Species, but a clear trend for GA and BA to be preferred by non-humans, while the other varieties were overrepresented among humans was clearly discernable. This stands in contrast with the findings from Lippi-Green (1997), where all of the speakers of AAVE and Southern American were non-human (see 5.2.4).

My hypothesis regarding Prominence was to a great extent confirmed, as GA was most commonly found among minor characters, while all the other varieties, SB/RB excepted, were overrepresented among major characters. 'Marked' (i.e. non-GA) varieties seemed largely reserved for major characters, which I believe is owed to the fact that with the extra time and effort production of a non-GA variety often entails, it is more likely to be spent on a major than a minor character.

Finally, my hypothesis for Alignment was that GA would be more common among positive and neutral characters than among negative and mixed ones, with the reverse true for RP. Although this hypothesis was in no way contradicted, the numbers were nowhere near convincing enough for me to claim the hypothesis as confirmed. The interesting findings for this variable were found among the varieties not covered by the hypothesis, however, namely FA, SA/RA, and SB/RB. Speakers of the former variety were by far most likely to be mixed, which I shall return to in a separate paragraph on FA below. Speakers of SA/RA and SB/RB were most likely to be negative. In fact, the prediction showed that for every positive SA/RA or SB/RB speaker, there would be nearly two negative ones. Speakers of these varieties were also the least likely to be mixed, which could be interpreted as SA/RA and SB/RB speakers being the least dynamic or complex characters (see 5.2.6).

For the most part, RP, BA, and the socially and regionally marked Englishes behaved as anticipated, or at least they did not stand in clear contradiction with the hypotheses. The two varieties which gave some unexpected results were FA and GA.

The overall impression I am left with after examining GA for all of the variables is that its main function is simply, as I have also argued for during the discussion for the different

variables, that of a jack of all trades. The distribution for GA is therefore not easily predictable, as it appears to be used for a wide array of different purposes and in a wide variety of roles. The main function seems to be to mark neutrality though. It is preferred among neutral characters; it is preferred among minor characters (who are often featured so briefly in the plot as to leave no lasting impression on the player); and it is preferred among non-human species, for these seemingly as a neutral way of marking otherness (by having the non-human species collectively speak GA, while the humans around them show more diverse variety use). GA then, rather than being first and foremost associated with positiveness, as was the case in Lippi-Green (1997) and Dobrow and Gidney (1998), rather functions as the variety upon which the game developers can rely when they have no 'better' alternatives.

## 6.3 Avenues for further research

Despite the prominent position of computer games today, it still does not appear to receive its due share of attention, neither from the mass media, nor from researchers. With this pilot study, I hope to spark a larger interest among both linguists and lay people for the mechanics of voice acting and accent use in computer games, and the exciting and largely uncharted world this represents.

In this study I argued that sci-fi and fantasy games were most likely to provide me with the material I required to answer my hypotheses, and that realistic games would not be adequate as source material, as it would not be very interesting to see that a German soldier speaks with a German accent and a Russian with a Russian accent during a WWII game. However, the notion of attitudinal hierarchies (see 2.4.1) could definitely be brought to bear here, and Goldstein's 1995 study[21] on the realistic film *Schindler's List* (1993), may serve as an inspiration for a study to examine whether similar patterns may be found in realistic computer games.

In 3.6.2 I discussed how there was a limited basis for comparing my findings with those of the other studies, because the main target audience in these were children. The possibility of choosing children's games was discarded, as I was too uncertain about whether or not there was enough voiced dialogue in such games for me to gather enough data upon which to perform an analysis. This uncertainty is based merely on my own very limited experience with games for children, however, and if this proves false, such a study brings several benefits. Firstly, the

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21 The study uncovered that although a great deal of attention had been put towards having the various characters in the film speak 'authentically', characters with whom we would want to sympathise were generally given a low degree of accentedness, while characters whom we were supposed to distance ourselves from were given a stronger degree of accentedness.

findings are much more readily comparable with those on animated film and televised cartoons which I have detailed in my thesis. Secondly, children are arguably more susceptible to stereotyping, and as such, finding that a certain variety is being associated with a certain character trait in a game for children is arguably more aggravating than if the same variety is associated with the same character trait in, for instance, Dragon Age from the present study.

A third possible avenue further research is to focus on BioWare games, or non-BioWare games, or to do a more detailed comparison of the two. Just like Disney is the leading company within animated films in America, BioWare seems to be the leading game developer within the RPG genre. When criticising my own method under 3.6, I mentioned the possible weakness of having four out of ten games in the study from the same developer (BioWare). Three of the six newer games are developed by BioWare, and I feel compelled to point out that a comparison of accent distribution between newer BioWare games and other games did reveal some differences. The differences were not found with regards to the use of standard vs non-standard accents as much as they were found with regards to the use of British vs non-British accents, however. BioWare games showed a clear preference for British varieties, especially RP, in comparison with  the other games. On the other hand foreign accents and SA/RA were hardly present in the newer BioWare games (2.1% and 0.5% respectively). The games upon which these numbers are based are too few to positively establish any trends, however, so a more directed study is in order to investigate whether this is simply a coincidence due to the low number of games involved, or whether there is an actual trend where BioWare favours British varieties, while other developers use a greater range of non-standard American varieties and foreign accents.

Clearly, there are many possible ways in which to investigate accent use in computer games, and the suggestions I have presented here surely represent only a fraction of the potential buried in this massive unearthed treasury of linguistic material, and I can only hope that this thesis kindles a spark of inspiration in some other adventurous soul.

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