"Gender Wars" in English to Polish Videogame Translations

Janusz Mrzigod

video game translator since 1993

jbm2014@live.com

Abstract

The paper discusses numerous problems with grammatical genders encountered in-game translations and resulting from the rich and complex structure of gender forms in Polish and most other Slavic languages. The main issues are described precisely and some translator tricks which allow for circumventing them are proposed. Also, some solutions for game developers, enabling the implementation of some gender-dependent functions into localized game versions are recalled from the Author's practice or suggested anew.

Keywords: videogames, translation, localization, grammatical gender, gender neutrality

Introduction

Differences between languages have a fundamental impact on the process of software localization, especially in the case of video games. While translating a game, translators know much less context than during translation of, for instance, film dialogues. Functioning as modern Latin, English has its complexities, but it is simple when it comes to grammatical genders. The only part of speech where gender is important in English is pronouns (Leech 2001). The problem of choosing a pronoun when the gender of the person in question is for some reason unknown or undefined was solved in English long ago by introducing the singular **they** form. For example, there is a well-known song by Sting from 1985, *If You Love Somebody Set Them Free*, where this form was already used in the title (it also appears in the chorus).

However, in this regard, English is rather an exception among European languages, which are much more complicated in terms of grammatical gender. For example, most of them contain gendered articles, a type of article absent in English. In such languages, the form of a gendered article is matched with the grammatical gender of the noun to which the article refers. Gendered articles are used in European languages such as French, Spanish, Catalan, German, Portuguese, Romanian, Italian, and Scandinavian

languages. However, they do not occur in Balto-Slavic languages (e.g. Polish, Czech, Russian, Slovenian) and Finno-Ugric languages (e.g. Estonian, Finnish, Hungarian). The exceptions among the Slavic languages are Bulgarian and Macedonian (a modern language used primarily in North Macedonia). Apart from them, however, the Balto-Slavic languages do not have articles at all, but they have many elements of gender inflection and many structures in which grammatical gender is important (Bednarczuk 1986).

The Polish language is "genderized" very strongly. In this regard, it is very similar to other Slavic languages (constituting a subfamily of Balto-Slavic languages), particularly to the languages used in Central and Eastern European countries. Therefore, the considerations presented here regarding problems with grammatical gender in translation into Polish can also be applied to other Slavic languages, and the proposed solutions for the Polish language can be transposed to other Slavic languages with a slight effort.

The specificity of Slavic languages includes, among others, the fact that they assign grammatical gender not only to persons and animals but also to inanimate objects. Therefore, on the one hand, nouns and some pronouns have a grammatical gender, and on the other hand – adjectives and verbs (in the past tense and in the conditional) are inflected by gender. It always happens, regardless of whether they designate a personal or impersonal noun denoting an animate object or an inanimate object. The situation of numerals is even more complicated: some of their types (e.g. cardinal and fractional numerals) function like nouns and have genders, and others (e.g. ordinal and multiplicative numerals) function like adjectives and are inflected by gender (Grzegorczykowa *et al.* 1998).

The parts of speech inflected by gender in Slavic languages also include pronouns, of which demonstrative pronouns can play the same role in these languages as articles do in German, Romance, and Scandinavian languages.

In the simplest terms, there are five grammatical genders in Polish: three for the singular and two for the plural (see Table 1.; also, please note the Polish pronouns in cursive).

Table 1: *Grammatical genders of nouns and pronouns in Polish*

Gender name	(animate) personal nouns	(animate) impersonal nouns	inanimate nouns
męski (l. poj.) masculine (singular)	*ten* chłopiec this boy	*ten* kot this tomcat	*ten* stół this table
żeński (l. poj.) feminine (singular)	*ta* dziewczyna this girl	*ta* kotka this (she-)cat	*ta* szafa this wardrobe
nijaki (l. poj.) neutral (singular)	*to* dziecko this child	*to* kocię this kitten	*to* krzesło this chair

męskoosobowy (l. mn.) masculine personal (plural)	*ci* chłopcy these boys	–	–
niemęskoosobowy (l. mn.) non-masculine personal (plural)	*te* dziewczyny these girls	*te* koty, *te* kotki, *te* kocięta these tomcats, cats, kittens	*te* stoły, *te* szafy, *te* krzesła these tables, wardrobes, chairs

As may be seen in Table 1., the demonstrative pronoun is inflected also by gender in Polish, not only by number as in English.

Table 2: *Gender forms of adjectives in Polish*

Gender name	Gender form of example adjective
męski (l. poj.) masculine (singular)	zielony green
żeński (l. poj.) feminine (singular)	zielona green
nijaki (l. poj.) neutral (singular)	zielone green
męskoosobowy (l. mn.) masculine personal (plural)	zieloni green
niemęskoosobowy (l. mn.) non-masculine personal (plural)	zielone green

All these facts cause problems while translating game texts, particularly for titles in which the character's gender is not known or when it is not fixed (when the player may select their character's gender), as well as when the text contains names of items or features defined by variables. Unfortunately, gender neutrality is very difficult to achieve in Slavic languages, if possible at all.

In a game where the player may configure their character, including gender, the biggest problems include frequently occurring greetings. Such dialogues as:

Greetings, stranger.

It's your loss, dear pilgrim...

cannot be translated neutrally into Polish, as 'stranger' and 'pilgrim' (as well as many nouns of similar function) have both masculine and feminine forms. On the other hand, many Polish nouns referring to jobs have only one gender form, because mostly persons of one gender perform the given job. Such terms include, for instance, *przedszkolanka*

(kindergarten teacher, only feminine term in Polish) or *szpieg* (spy, only masculine term in Polish, which may seem a bit strange).

When the game does not support the variability of grammatical genders for non-English languages, the translators must resort to tricks, which sometimes worsen the quality of the translation. For instance, the grammatical voice needs to be changed from active to passive while translating the second sentence of the following dialogue. If the gender of the player's character is not fixed, this character cannot be the subject of the sentence using past tenses, because verbs in past tense are gender-sensitive in Polish.

Please, accept this. I cooked it with the meat of the boar I hunted today.

Forced translation: ***Weź to, proszę. Ugotowane na mięsie dzika upolowanego dzisiaj przeze mnie.***

The Polish version has the subject of the second sentence changed, as well as the voice (from active to passive). Generally, the sentence sounds unnatural, unlike the gendered versions:

Masculine: ***Weź to, proszę. Ugotowałem to na mięsie dzika, którego dzisiaj upolowałem.***

Feminine: ***Weź to, proszę. Ugotowałam to na mięsie dzika, którego dzisiaj upolowałam.***

Another example, where the player's character is the subject in the original text:

This is a promise I gave to them when I left.

Forced translation: ***Taką obietnicę otrzymali ode mnie na odchodnym.***

This sentence in passive voice has a complicated structure, which is necessary to transfer the role of the subject from the player character ("I") to "them". Even this version is not completely safe, because *otrzymali* is a verb in masculine personal gender, so a tacit assumption is made that there is at least one male in this set of people. The gendered versions, possible when the gender of the player character is fixed or when the game supports gender variability of the texts, are much more coherent and more correct:

Masculine: ***To im obiecałem, odchodząc.***

Feminine: ***To im obiecałam, odchodząc.***

This issue is particularly severe when the context is lacking, for instance in the following sentence:

I made it some time ago.

It is necessary to know what "it" pertains to (in the game, it is some item which may be crafted by the character). The speaker's gender may be known (let us assume male here), but the Polish translation will depend also on the grammatical gender of the item referred to in the sentence because Polish pronouns have various forms depending on the gender of the noun they substitute for. However, this information may be unavailable (for instance, this dialogue may be a generic message used in many situations, referring to various items).

Masculine:
*Wykonałem **go** dawno temu.* [when the item is, for instance, *pancerz* (armor) or *miecz* (sword)]

Feminine:
*Wykonałem **ją** dawno temu.* [when the item is, for instance, *zbroja* (armor) or *Szabla* (saber)]

Neuter:
*Wykonałem **je** dawno temu.* [when the item is, for instance, *wiadro* (bucket) or *widły* (pitchfork)]

Of course, there is also a possibility to translate the word "it" literally:

*Wykonałem **to** dawno temu.*

Unfortunately, it is not natural in Polish and would look awkward when the whole dialogue is displayed/spoken in-game.

More tricks for circumventing gender problems while translating into Polish will follow.

1 Possible grammatical gender issues

The problem with grammatical gender has several aspects (Mrzigod 2021):

1. Player's gender (that of the person playing, not of their avatar)
2. The player character's gender
3. Genders of other characters in the game
4. Grammatical gender of objects
5. Other problems with variables

1.1 Player's gender (that of the person playing, not of their avatar)

This is not known, and it cannot be assumed. The most common tendency is to use male grammatical gender in the translation. It should be avoided at all costs. The texts addressed directly to the player should be translated always in such a way as not to determine their gender, i.e. avoid using forms with a specific grammatical gender. Such texts include, *e.g.*, interface messages and meta-game messages, such as newsletters texts or other marketing texts.

For instance:

	Not:	But:
Are you sure?	Jesteś pewny?	Na pewno?
Did you buy/have you bought the game?	Czy kupiłeś już grę?	Masz już grę?

1.2 Player character's gender

Variant I – the player has a fixed character, they do not choose anything (e.g. *God of War* [Santa Monica Studio 2018], *Horizon Zero Dawn* [Guerrilla Games 2017]). This is a very comfortable situation; the translator just needs to determine when this character is mentioned to adjust the translation accordingly.

Variant II – the player can choose at least the gender of the character (*AC Odyssey* [Ubisoft Quebec 2018], *AC Valhalla* [Ubisoft Montreal 2020], *Far Cry 6* [Ubisoft Toronto 2021], *Saints Row* series [various developers, 2006–2022], MMORPGs). A more advantageous situation is when the game includes a system allowing for the substitution of gender forms or the game script contains separate alternative lines for the individual genders. However, a problem may arise in the case of texts of other characters' dialogues or when the substitution system does not include other characters speaking about the player's character, only the dialogues spoken by this character. In such cases, the translations need to be kept "gender neutral".

1.3 Genders of other characters in the game

Information about the gender of individual characters in the game should be included in the loc-kit (also for non-player characters or NPCs). However, it is missing sometimes, and even if it is present, it usually concerns only the important characters who have their own personalities and backgrounds. Meanwhile, groups of generic characters, playing supporting roles, often include both women and men (and, increasingly, also non-binary persons). English-language terms such as: soldier, driver, guard, merchant, colonist, scientist, resident, inhabitant, technician are "gender

neutral". But this is not the case in Slavic languages, as well as, for instance, in French or German.

Thus, translations had to be made "gender neutral" also here – but it is not always possible, and in Polish, it is practically impossible. The only possible solution is to assume that a male form will encompass persons of all genders. However, this is contrary to the strong social pressure currently prevailing in Poland on the use of feminatives, even when they were not used for a long time or did not exist (Hołojda-Mikulska 2016; Wysokie Obcasy 2018; Językowe espresso 2019; Florencka 2023; Kirska-Okuniewska 2023; Zachorska 2023). In the latter case, they are created in accordance with the principles of Polish word formation. The same situation applies to forms describing non-binary persons.

This problem is particularly acute when, for some reason, the game creators decide not to differentiate generic characters by their gender. As a result, the game does not contain any information about the gender of the character visible on the screen, and the displayed terms are the same regardless of this gender. An example here is the excellent game *Ghost of Tsushima* [Sucker Punch Productions 2021] where in the Polish version, every inhabitant of the villages on the island is referred to as *wieśniak* (peasant), regardless of the fact that the character's appearance and voice may indicate a woman – *wieśniaczka*.

This issue is escalated by the tendency to use masculine forms also for persons of other genders in the USA. Despite the fact there are, for instance, 'actor' and 'actress' in English, new feminine forms are not created and the use of existing feminine forms is sometimes discouraged. While such words as 'driveress' or 'doctoress' exist in English, they are qualified as archaic by dictionaries. In racing games, drivers of any gender are referred to simply as 'driver' in English – and when the game script uses only one form, the translations are limited to one form too. In Polish, *kierowca* (a male form) is customarily used for drivers of any gender, and it not only looks unnatural in some contexts but may be also perceived as sexist. That is why the implementation of gender-sensitive systems, enabling the use of various gender forms, is so important.

1.4 Grammatical gender of objects

The problem of matching proper forms of verbs, adjectives and other parts of speech, depending on the grammatical gender of a noun arises in games having a random generation system for item names, composing these names from list-words.

For example, in a game set in a fantasy environment, equipment names may be constructed from variables in the format: [material] – [item type] – [fancy embellishment]. The game script will therefore contain lists of words, from which the game will randomly select terms to put together into a name. The list of values for the [material] variable may include words such as 'bronze', 'iron', 'steel', 'silver', 'mithril'.

The list of values for the [item type] variable may include, for example, various weapon names: 'dagger', 'sword', 'saber', 'spear', 'axe', 'halberd'.

And this is the source of the problem because *sztylet* (dagger), *miecz* (sword) and *topór* (axe) have masculine grammatical gender in Polish, *szabla* (saber), *włócznia* (spear) and *halabarda* (halberd) — feminine, *koromysło* (shoulder pole) — neutral, and *widły* (pitchfork) — non-masculine personal. Thus, if the material names are to be translated simply as adjectives — *żelazny* (iron), *stalowy* (steel), *srebrny* (silver) — it is very likely that items like *żelazny włócznia przeznaczenia* will appear in the game (Iron Spear of Destiny, where *żelazny* in a masculine form does not match to the feminine gender of *włócznia*). Or, if a randomly selected part of the adjectives is given the feminine gender, *srebrna sztylet podrzynania* (Silver Dagger of Throatcutting with *sztylet* being of masculine gender) may be received.

The translator will be saved, at least partially, when the order of variables may be changed. If the name format may be changed to [item type] – [fancy embellishment] – [material], the words in the value list for the [material] variable may be translated not as adjectives, but as nouns (iron – *z żelaza* (literally 'of iron'), steel – *ze stali* ('of steel'), bronze – *z brązu* ('of bronze'), etc.; and the last one is even better than *brązowy* (bronze), easy to confuse with color brown). However, it should be mentioned that *włócznia przeznaczenia z żelaza* sounds slightly worse than *żelazna włócznia przeznaczenia* (but is grammatically correct, as opposite to *żelazny włócznia przeznaczenia*).

1.5 Other problems with variables

There are many games, particularly in the strategy/tactical genre, which use a variable system for message generation, mainly due to vast sets of game factions, unit types, attack types, weapon types, and so on. To avoid the manual creation of every single message variant needed for so many names of various types of things, some system of variables is usually implemented. For instance, when a message informing that an enemy unit has been defeated is needed, the game may use a message template with variables:

[Faction-adj1] [Unit-sin1] defeats [Faction-adj2] [Unit-sin2].

When the unit's name is plural, the example sentence would take the following form:

[Faction-adj1] [Unit-pl1] defeat [Faction-adj2] [Unit-pl2].

Then, the game browses a list of faction adjectives, selecting proper adjectives for [Faction-adj#] variables. It also browses a list of unit names, selecting proper names for [Unit-sin#] and [Unit-pl#] variables. Of course, the numerical amount of the second unit in each message is not important, they are chosen arbitrarily. Therefore, the following three lists could be assumed (Table 3).

Table 3: *Lists of "values" for the discussed variables*

[Faction-adj]	[Unit-sin]	[Unit-pl]
Polish	Cruiser	Musketeers
French	Gunboat	Catapults
Chinese	...	...
Roman		
...		

These terms substitute the variables' codes in the template, so the displayed message reads as follows, for instance (articles omitted for simplicity):

Polish Cruiser defeats French Gunboat.

Or:

Chinese Musketeers defeat Roman Catapults.

Thus, only two versions of the message template are required (one for the singular name of the first unit, and another for the plural name of the first unit). The proper message is composed on-the-fly during play. If the French or Roman forces avenge their comrades, the order of words may be completely different, for instance:

French Cruiser defeats Polish Gunboat.

Or:

Roman Musketeers defeat Chinese Catapults.

Or also:

French Cruiser defeats Chinese Catapults.

Or:

Roman Musketeers defeat Polish Gunboat.

The operation of the system depends on whether the first unit's name is singular or plural. This system works in English and some other languages, but not in gender-sensitive languages. In this case, there are four faction/unit pairs in each message:

Polish Cruiser	French Gunboat	French Cruiser	Polish Gunboat
Chinese Musketeers	Roman Catapults	Roman Musketeers	Chinese Catapults

After translation (the word order is the same in Polish, *i.e.* adjective-noun):

polski krążownik	francuska kanonierka	francuski krążownik	polska kanonierka
chińscy muszkieterowie	rzymskie katapulty	rzymscy muszkieterowie	chińskie katapulty

In other situations, also other combinations are possible, for instance: *rzymski krążownik, chińska kanonierka, polscy pikinierzy, francuskie katapulty, polskie katapulty*. Note that there is only one form of every faction adjective in English, but four forms in Polish: *polski, polska, polscy, polskie*. In fact, there are as many as five forms, because there are five grammatical genders in Polish as shown in Table 1. However, the singular neutral form is *polskie*, identical to the non-masculine personal plural.

Therefore, in order for the variable message system to work in gender-sensitive languages, two things are needed:

1) Not one, but many lists of faction adjectives, one for each gender. There would be four such lists in Polish, but it may vary depending on the language.
2) Some implementation of the gender information for every unit name; on the other hand this part may be realized by classifying the unit names by their grammatical gender and creating four unit lists. Then, the variable system could operate by matching the adjective list to the gender list of units. For instance, when a unit name from singular feminine names would occur in the message, the adjective would be selected from the list of singular feminine adjective forms.

This may look complicated already, but one thing was not even mentioned: Polish inflection. Actually, grammatically correct messages in Polish should not read:

Chińscy muszkieterowie pokonują rzymscy pikinierzy.

Rzymscy muszkieterowie pokonują chińscy pikinierzy.

But:

*Chińscy muszkieterowie pokonują rzym*kich *pikinierów.*

*Rzymscy muszkieterowie pokonują chiń*skich *pikinierów.*

Thus, the case forms of words in the unit's name depend on whether the unit is winning or losing the fight.

The system discussed above is not complete or ready for use – it is just a simplified construct created to illustrate the problem. It would require to be adapted to the needs of various languages.

2 Example methods for circumventing the issues

Methods for circumventing the gender issues in English to Polish game text translations proposed by the Author include, for example:

- verbs in conditional → use passive voice, impersonal verbs, gerunds;
- verbs in past tenses → use the forms mentioned above, sometimes present tense may be used too;
- verbs in Present Perfect → use present tense instead of past tense;

  One should note that Polish has significantly fewer tenses than English. There are verbs corresponding to, for instance, Simple Present and Present Continuous in Polish (I go – *chodzę*, I'm going – *idę* or *chadzam*), but they are mostly not considered separate tenses today: *chodzę* and *idę* are different verbs. *Chadzam* is a proper Present Continuous form of *chodzę*, but such forms are currently used in Polish for humorous purposes or for archaization.

- Adjectives → corresponding forms expressed with nouns, e.g. gerunds; nouns referring to persons, for instance jobs (e.g. friend, colleague, doctor, medic, astronaut) → ?

THERE ARE NO GENDER-NEUTRAL FORMS FOR SUCH TERMS IN SLAVIC LANGUAGES.

Below, a dozen or so examples of gender-neutral translation into Polish may be found. These are authentic texts from game scripts with translations actually used in localized versions. The examples include both proper sentences and instructions for the player or other lines which sometimes are not terminated with a punctuation mark.

Table 4: *Examples of translating into gender-neutral forms*

English	Polish	Remarks
You have defeated the Pit Master![1]	Udało ci się pokonać mistrza areny!	Impersonal form 'udało ci się'
	Pokonujesz mistrza areny!	Present tense
	Mistrz areny został pokonany!	Passive voice
Find the Post That Nakalla Was Tied To[1]	Znajdź słup, do którego przywiązano Nakallę	not 'był przywiązany/a'
Are you absolutely sure you wish to proceed?[1]	Czy masz absolutną pewność, że tego chcesz?	avoiding gender-sensitive adjective 'pewny'
As I feared[1]	Moje obawy się sprawdzają	not 'Jest tak, jak się obawiałem/am'
You've been pranked[2]	Padasz ofiarą psikusa	a different sentence structure
I never planned to pick up the sword again, but I couldn't just ignore the horrible things that were happening in front of me.[2]	Ponowne sięgnięcie po miecz nigdy nie było w moich planach. Trudno było jednak ignorować straszliwe rzeczy, które działy się na moich oczach.	avoiding Past Tense in both cases ('planned', 'couldn't') by using a more elaborate sentence structure
Once this war is over, I'm going to go home and get married.[2]	Gdy ta wojna się skończy, wrócę do domu i założę rodzinę.	'get married' or 'marry' are particularly problematic in Polish, as two completely different verbs are used in exact translation: *ożenić się* for male and *wyjść za mąż* for female.
I see you visited this city.[2]	Widzę, że znasz to miasto.	A different verb in present tense is used, as present form of 'to visit' in Polish would be improper

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[1] Horizon Forbidden West 2022.

[2] Unpublished League of Legends spinoff.

English	Polish	Remarks
You were knocked unconscious during this challenge.[3]	Ogłuszono cię podczas tego wyzwania	Not 'zostałeś/aś ogłuszony/a podczas tego wyzwania'
You didn't make it in time[3]	Nie udało ci się zdążyć na czas	Not 'nie zdążyłeś/aś na czas'
Tell Eli you're ready[3]	Powiedz Eliemu o swojej gotowości	Not 'Powiedz Eliemu, że jesteś gotowy/a'
You failed to meet the challenge goals[3]	Nie udało ci się osiągnąć celów wyzwania	Not 'Nie osiągnąłeś/osiągnęłaś celów wyzwania'
I'm disappointed I'm not on this one.[3]	Nie czuję rozczarowania, że mnie tu nie ma.	The dialogue refers to a wanted poster
You did not reach your goal.[3]	Nie udało się osiągnąć celu.	
Joannie and the crew are planning to rob Harley's bank.\n\nCheck it out and call them in when you're ready.[3]	Joannie i ekipa planują napad na bank Harleya.\n\nZbadaj cel i zadzwoń do nich, gdy się przygotujesz.	Gender-sensitive adjective is avoided
Diamond needs you to make another run.[3]	Diamond potrzebuje cię na następny kurs.	Diamond is a male, but the player's character gender may be any
But you seem troubled.[3]	Ale chyba coś cię trapi.	Gender-sensitive adjective is avoided – a verb in present tense is used instead

In many games, particularly of RPG and strategy genres, status effects are being imposed on characters or units. Most often, these effects are described by adjectives or adjectival participles which are both gender-sensitive in Polish. As they would require using one gender form for all genders, adjectives and adjectival participles should be avoided in the translation.

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[3] Saints Row 2022.

Table 5: *Translation of character status effects*

English	"First-choice" translations using adjectives or *gendered nouns	Gender-neutral translations using gerunds or **gender-insensitive nouns
stunned	ogłuszony	ogłuszenie (stun)
blind	ślepy/oślepiony	Ślepota**/oślepienie (blindness)
ill	chory	choroba** (illness)
drunk	pijany	upojenie (intoxication)
alcoholic	alkoholik*	alkoholizm** (alcoholism)
coward	tchórz*	tchórzliwość** (cowardness)
infected	zainfekowany	infekcja** (infection)

Character traits and attributes are constant features and they are most often described in English using nouns referring to persons. As mentioned above, such nouns are gender-sensitive in Polish, so they should be avoided in the translation. In Table 6 below, related nouns or terms are used.

Table 6: *Translation of character traits and attributes*

Gambler	Zamiłowanie do hazardu
Glutton	Obżarstwo
Hypochondriac	Hipochondria
Idiot	Głupota
Infected	Infekcja
Loner	Zamiłowanie do samotności
Lazy	Lenistwo
Melancholic	Melancholia
Whiner	Marudność
Celebrity	Sława
Composed	Odporność psychiczna
Empath	Empatia

Enthusiast	Entuzjazm
Party Animal	Zamiłowanie do imprez
Fit	Sprawność
Gamer	Zamiłowanie do gier
Genius	Iskra geniuszu
Nerd	Nerd
Religious	Religijność
Rugged	Krzepa
Saint	Świętość
Sexy	Seksowność
Survivor	Bear G.
Workaholic	Pracoholizm

The translation of "Survivor" is a reference to Bear Grylls intended as a pun.

Examples in Tables 5 and 6 are gathered from *Surviving Mars*, a sci-fi city builder developed originally by Haemimont Games and published by Paradox Interactive.

3 Suggestions for game developers

A system for support of gender forms in a game may pertain to their various aspects. Matching the text to the gender of the player character is the most obvious one, but one should remember the issue of the grammatical gender of other characters too. Also, the grammatical genders of objects are important – as mentioned above, they make it difficult or even impossible to properly transfer the system of randomly generated names of items to Slavic languages.

There is no doubt that implementing any system for gender forms support means additional work for programmers. Therefore, the efforts of game developers who include such systems in their games are all the more worthy of appreciation. Unfortunately, in more than thirty years of the history of game localization in Poland such systems appeared in games quite rarely – for instance, in the *Neverwinter Nights* series and *Saints Row* titles of 2013 and 2022. Grammatical gender is also supported by the variable system in *Stellaris*, although to a very small extent limited to pronouns.

Obviously, not all games require such a system. It is not needed, for example, in games which do not contain a loot system with item names generated randomly. A gender

support system is also much less important in games that place great emphasis on the story, where the player's character is not chosen by the player but imposed by the game (such series as *Dishonored*, *Grand Theft Auto*, *Uncharted*, *Final Fantasy*, or *Legend of Zelda*). However, even in such titles, a variable gender support system could be useful, if it concerned NPCs.

There are also games in which the player actually does not have their avatar – this is the case in most strategy, puzzle and sports games. In games without an avatar, the "gender problem" is limited to messages addressed directly to the person playing, whose gender cannot be assumed in any way. The only solution here is, as stated above, translation in a way that avoids gender-dependent forms. However, it should be noted that sports games are increasingly incorporating a career mode involving the choice of a player's character of any gender. Also, a story mode is sometimes introduced, such as "Breaking Point" in *F1 21/23* or "Drive to Glory" in *Grid Legends* (in this mode, the player avatar is usually a character having a specific gender, as in the F1 series).

Implementing a system that supports gender forms is worth the effort. An ideal system related to the gender of a player's character would include not only the pronouns describing it but would be flexible enough to allow translators to introduce all gender forms (because it could encompass non-binary persons), also in the case of nouns and adjectives. Such a possibility would have a great impact on the speed of translation (because it would eliminate the need for special measures and deliberation), and, above all, would increase the final quality of the translation. Most gender-neutral expressions in Polish sound awkward and unnatural because they are not used in everyday language.

On the other hand, implementation of such a system would eliminate the inappropriate gender forms from the translation. Despite the increasing level of QA and testing, there are still incorrect gender references in localized game versions, usually the male gender referring to female characters (although it also happens the other way around, as can be seen in Fig. 1 – there is a feminine form *sama* despite the fact that a male Eivor has been selected by the player). And when there is no other option and it is necessary to choose a specific gender form (e.g. in job descriptions), this also means that in some cases the female character will be described with a male term (as in the above-mentioned *Ghost of Tsushima*). Every time, this causes a dissonance for the player and breaks immersion.

Fig. 1 – *An example screenshot showing an impermissible 'genderization' (Assassin's Creed Valhalla, Ubisoft 2020, screenshot from the Author's collection)*
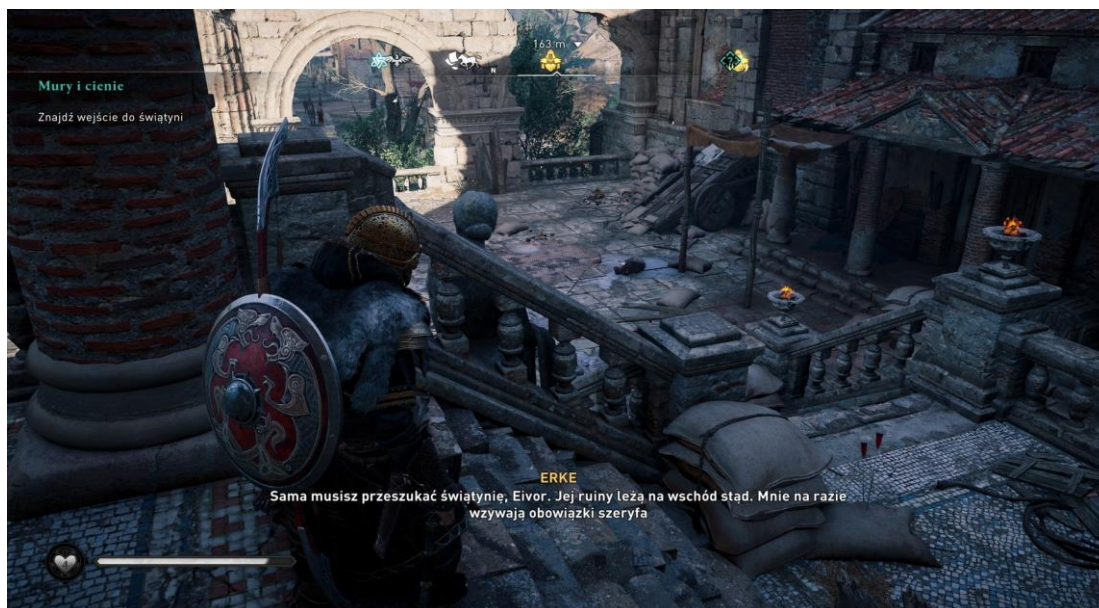
3.1 Separate places for male and female lines

The most immediate solution consists in leaving space in the script for separate strings written in the individual genders. For instance, the script of *Hordes of the Underdark*, one of the expansions for the first part of *Neverwinter Nights* series, had spaces for translations using a male and a female form, with the Female line being entered only if it actually differs from the Male line (Fig. 2). The script was translated as a doc file.

Fig. 2 – *A fragment from the Hordes of the Underdark text script for translation (BioWare 2003)*
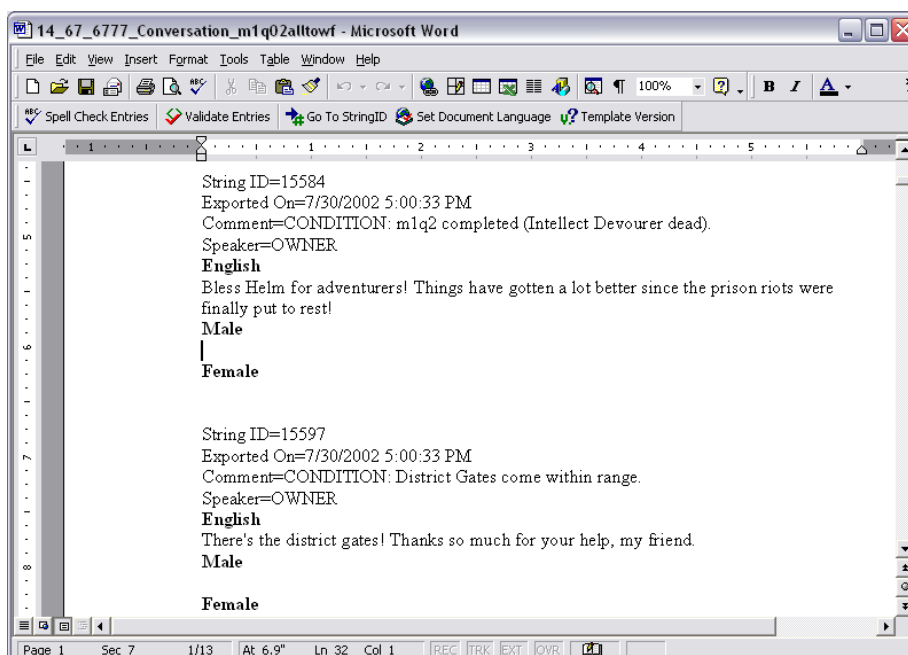
Currently, scripts with game texts are mostly exported for translation and processed in MS Excel format. It happens that the translation for the female gender is entered in an additional column of the sheet in the same line as the translation for the male gender.

3.2 Tags

Another solution consists in using tags marking male and female forms, as in the examples below. The strings encompassed by tags may include one word or several words. The tag symbols themselves are not displayed in-game.

Anthem (2019)

Important: The information below is taken from Dragon Age as a start. Information will be updated accordingly at a later point.	Usually the main character in BW games can be male or female - Gender tags can be used in BW titles for localized strings. For example: EN: The teacher is waiting. IT: {[M]Il maestro}{[F]La maestra} sta aspettando.
Speaker: use[{M}...][{F}...]	True
Listener: use[{M}...][{F}...]	True
Third-party: use[{M}...][{F}...]	False

(BioWare 2018)

Saints Row (2022)

Myślę, że [player-gender|ten Święty jest obiecujący|ta Święta jest obiecująca], ale czeka [player-gender|go|ją] nie lada wyzwanie!

3.3 Tokens

Still another solution, probably the most complicated and sophisticated one, consists in the use of tokens. A token is a defined string of characters which, in its simplest terms, contains two forms, male and female. They are connected by undisplayed code characters that let the game "know" their locations. This allows the game to select and display only that part of the token – that is, the gender form – which is needed in a given situation. However, efficient use of these mechanics requires considerable effort from the translator, who must remember what tokens are available. This is less convenient

than using tags. An example of an internal token system used by the localization department of CD Projekt in the 2000s is shown below.

Problemy z płcią rozwiązujemy używając specjalnych tokenów. Ponieważ wypowiedzi gracza (i o graczu) mogą dotyczyć obu płci można wstawiać specjalne sekwencje które mają to ułatwić. Znajdują się one między znakami < i >. Można ich używać w środku wyrazów. Uwaga, duże małe litery mają znaczenie. Wersja polska będzie miała następujące:

<_/a>	*[nic]/a*	*np. on<_/a>, zrobił<_/a>*
<_/A>	*[nic]/A*	*np. ON<_/A>, ZROBIŁ<_/A>*
<e/a>		*np. zrobił<e/a>ś, był<e/a>ś, wiedział<e/a>m!*
<E/A>		*j.w. tylko duże litery*
<y/a>		*np. któr<y/a>*
<ą/ę>		*np. wzi<ą/ę>ł<e/a>m*
<en/a>		*np. T<en/a> <FullName> (...)*
<ego/ej>		*np. j<ego/ej>, ni<ego/ej>, t<ego/ej>*
<EGO/EJ>		*j.w. (Duże litery, bo czasem niektóre potwory gadają samymi dużymi)*
<emu/ej>		*np. j<emu/ej> albo J<emu/ej>*
<EMU/EJ>		
<mu/jej>		*np. Daj <mu/jej> spokój!*
<MU/JEJ>		
<ego/ą>		*np. j<ego/ą>*
<EGO/ą>		
<go/ją>		
<GO/Ją>		
<im/ią>		*np. z n<im/ią>*
<IM/Ią>		
<ym/ą>		*np. "z t<ym/ą> <mężczyzn/kobiet>ą."*
<YM/ą>		
<im/ej>		*np. o ni<im/ej>*
<IM/EJ>		
<ym/ej>		*np. "O t<ym/ej>."*
<YM/EJ>		
<chł/dziew>		
<Chł/Dziew>		
<bracie/siostro>		
<Bracie/Siostro>		

Mrzigod, Janusz. 2023. "Gender Wars" in English to Polish Videogame Translations. In: L10N Journal 2(1), pp. 67–87.

<panie/pani>

<Panie/Pani>

<mężczyzn/kobiet>   *np. "Zrób to, <mężczyzn/kobiet>o!"*

<Mężczyzn/Kobiet>   *np. "<Mężczyzn/Kobiet>a, któr<y/a> tu był<_/a> przed chwilą!"*

(CD Projekt 2003)

Conclusions

Videogame translators face some specific challenges, including, among others, lack of context, inadequate information on game characters, incorrect sorting of dialogue lines, and last but not least, problems resulting from the grammar of their language. The latter category includes issues resulting from grammatical genders, which affect strongly some languages (for instance, Slavic, and Polish among them) more than English.

This problem occurs particularly in games where players may choose the gender of their character. Although it may be avoided by using special methods of translation (for example, using passing voice instead of active voice, impersonal verb forms or constructions), the results are often unsatisfactory. In such cases, a better quality of translation is achieved when the game supports a system allowing for different versions of the translation to be entered, corresponding to the individual character genders. Implementation of such systems requires more work and resources from the developer, but the text in local languages is then smoother and more natural, promoting the player's immersion and overall impression of the game. Thus, it should be considered a welcome investment that will benefit both players and publishers.

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Janusz Mrzigod PhD (video game translator)

A chemist and professional translator, as well as a teacher working with high-school and academic students for more than thirty years. During this time, he has been active in almost 380 individual or team projects concerning game translations, including such well-known titles as *Horizon Zero Dawn* (and other parts of the series), *F1 23*, *Dishonored*, *The Sims*, *Spore*, or *Civilization II*. Moreover, he translated several hundred scientific texts such as journal articles or patents, and nine popular-scientific books for one of Polish publishers, including *The Weather Makers* by Tim Flannery and *The World Without Us* by Alan Weisman. Since 2012, he has a seminar on "Games and software localization" for the students of the Faculty of Humanities, University of Silesia in Katowice. He is the author of the first-ever Polish game localization handbook, *Meandry lokalizacji gier* (Helion S.A., Gliwice 2021).