

# The cultural and linguistic aspects of naming in fantasy video games

---

**Topolovec, Stjepan**

**Undergraduate thesis / Završni rad**

**2012**

*Degree Grantor / Ustanova koja je dodijelila akademski / stručni stupanj:* **Josip Juraj Strossmayer University of Osijek, Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences / Sveučilište Josipa Jurja Strossmayera u Osijeku, Filozofski fakultet**

*Permanent link / Trajna poveznica:* <https://urn.nsk.hr/urn:nbn:hr:142:637379>

*Rights / Prava:* [In copyright](#)

*Download date / Datum preuzimanja:* **2021-11-27**



*Repository / Repozitorij:*

[FFOS-repository - Repository of the Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences Osijek](#)



Sveučilište Josipa Jurja Strossmayera u Osijeku

Filozofski fakultet

Preddiplomski studij Engleskog jezika i književnosti i

Njemačkog jezika i književnosti

Stjepan Topolovec

**The Cultural and Linguistic Aspects of Naming in Fantasy Video Games**

Završni rad

Mentor: doc.dr.sc. Gabrijela Buljan

Osijek, 2012.

## **Abstract**

This paper is an exploration of names and name giving processes within fantasy video game worlds. Starting with some basic theory of onomastics and word formation, the paper will also take the sociolinguistic aspect of name giving into consideration by exploring the relationship between names and the society that perceives them. Taking a few notable fantasy video games into consideration, this paper will explain the origin, structure, and meaning behind several fantastic names within these fictional worlds. The paper will also concentrate on the most prolific word formation process within this context – compounding. Lastly, the concept of sound symbolism will be studied, and its effects on the protagonist-antagonist relations in the storytelling process. Thus will this study, through sound symbolism, be able to explain the effect of subtle connotations, associations, preconceived concepts and even stereotypes that affect the perception of names and even name giving processes themselves.

Keywords: Onomastics, Compounding, Fantasy Video Game, Sound Symbolism

1 Introduction.....	2
1.2 Structure of the Paper.....	3
2 Theoretical Background.....	3
2.1 On Onomastics and Slavic Mythology.....	3
2.2 On Word Formation.....	4
2.3 On the Sociolinguistics of Naming.....	5
3 Onomastics in <i>The Witcher</i> .....	6
4 Compounding in Fantasy Games.....	9
5 Sound Symbolism as a Tool of Manipulation.....	13
6 Conclusion.....	15
7 References.....	16

# 1. Introduction

The domain of video games, including fantasy games, has enriched the world in many ways with its complexity and depth throughout the last few decades. As all (great) media, fantasy video games have been carefully thought-out and developed on all levels, language included. The goal of this paper is to investigate a few notable fantasy video games and how names are created in such games. This is done from the perspectives of onomastics and word formation techniques. The paper will also take the socio-cultural aspect of the process of naming into account, as the process enables observation of somewhat concealed cultural backgrounds within this intricate system. The study of onomastic techniques and word-formation processes involved in the fantasy video game genre will also reveal certain intriguing aspects such as semantic transparency, and the influence of connotation and association whilst dealing with the processes of giving and perceiving names in a fantasy world. One of the games that will be studied in depth is the renowned fantasy game *The Witcher* (2007), which is based on the novels of the Polish writer Andrzej Sapkowski, whose works are deeply engrained in Slavic mythology. From an onomastic point of view, this paper will not only investigate the source of name giving within the game, but also the meaning and purpose of certain techniques that are “hidden” within this system of nomenclature. For this purpose, the paper will use the available information on Slavic mythology from certain on-line sources, along with some basic onomastic theory. Besides *The Witcher*, the paper will also explore more known video games such as the widely popular game *World of Warcraft* (2005). In this case, the investigation will focus on word formational techniques such as sound symbolism, compounding, and character/role name giving. Using basic knowledge of compounding and other kinds of word formation, the paper will explain the purpose and meaning behind such terms such as *dragonkin*, *hellhound*, *archespore* and *necrophage*, and it will also study the effects of sound symbolism. Thus, an explanation will be given why “good” or “lawful” characters, cities or states receive names such as *Redania* or *Temeria*, and the “evil” or “chaotic” ones are named *Zerrikania* or *Nilfgaard*. Altogether these case studies will allow reaching a few conclusions on what makes the linguistic fantasy video game formula so complex and permeating.

## ***1.2. Structure of the paper***

In order to explain the approach taken in analysis, this paper will mention the basics of word formation and onomastics as disciplines. This will serve to explain why certain types of word formation and/or naming techniques are relevant or vital for this study. Aside from the basic theory, the paper will shortly explain the sociolinguistic aspect of this study, explaining why various connotations, associations, and mythological references all make the process of name giving in fantasy video games interesting and permeating. This will be followed by explaining the onomastic processes in a few notable fantasy video games. The onomastics will be followed by a few selected word-formation processes, most notably compounding, which proves to be a very productive technique in this sense. Lastly, the paper will concentrate on sound symbolism, as this also proves to be a prolific naming technique in the fantasy video game genre.

## **2. Theoretical Background**

### ***2.1. On Onomastics and Slavic Mythology***

Onomastics or onomatology is the study of proper names of all kinds and the origins of names. Aside from toponymy (or toponomastics), one of the principal branches is Anthroponomastics, the study of personal names. The subdivision of this branch also includes study of Given names, Surnames, Clan names, Matronyms, Patronyms, Teknonyms, Nicknames, Ethnonyms, Autonyms/Endonyms, and Exonyms. An area of special interest for this study would be Slavic mythology, i.e. onomastics and nomenclature in Slavic mythology. Most of Slavic mythology was kept in folklore, customs, religious songs, and word-of-mouth storytelling. Many deities such as *Perun*, *Veles*, and *Svarog* are mentioned, and the prevailing mythological elements are magical beasts such as dragons and talking ravens, and concepts such as the World Tree (a Slavic equivalent to Olympus), the fertile or barren earth, the hearth, and harsh life of simple rural peoples. There are many instances where Slavic mythological names remained to this day in the form of toponyms

such as village and hill names. Examples of this would be the Croatian village *Trišćani* after the lightning god *Perun* (the old regional word for lightning is *trisk*), the three hills *Perun*, *Perunić*, and *Perunsko* in Bosnia, and even the creek named *Trišćeni potok*<sup>1</sup>. Also an important factor is the extensive symbolism Slavic mythology uses with various animals and beasts. Dragons mostly represent the devil; sheep represent sacrifice, ravens death or wisdom. This is an important factor in fantasy name giving, as the developers and writers take advantage of this element of symbolism and incorporate it into their fantasy worlds, as will be explained in depth in the next chapters. This paper will concentrate not only on the historical and linguistical aspect of names and name giving but also on the social aspect – the social perception of onomastics and names.

## 2.2. *On Word Formation*

In linguistics, word formation is the creation of a new word. Word formation is sometimes contrasted with semantic change, which is a change in a single word's meaning, and with the formation of idiomatic expressions, although words can be formed from multi-word phrases (such as compounds)<sup>2</sup>. Some main types of word formation would be agglutination, back-formation, blending, conversion, clipping, and compounding<sup>3</sup>. Compounding will be studied and explained in depth for the purpose of this study. Compounding refers to the faculty and device of language to form new words by combining or putting together old words. In other words, compound, compounding or word-compounding occurs when a person attaches two or more words together to make them one word. The meanings of the words interrelate in such a way that a new meaning comes out which is very different from the meanings of the words in isolation. According to semantics one can classify compounds into four groups: Endocentric (consist of a head + modifiers restricting the head's meaning), Exocentric (hyponyms of some unexpressed

---

<sup>1</sup> Šimunović, Petar. *Uvod u Hrvatsko Imenoslovlje*. Golden Marketing, Zagreb:2009.

<sup>2</sup> Widdowson. H.G. *Linguistics*. Oxford University Press; Oxford:1996. P. 45-47

<sup>3</sup> <http://grammar.about.com/od/tz/g/Word-Formation.htm> 7 October 2012

semantic head), Copulative (two semantic heads), and Appositional compounds (refer to lexemes that have two (contrary) attributes which classify the compound). According to formal classification, one can differentiate between noun-noun, verb-noun, verb-verb compounds, and compound adpositions. This paper will concentrate on compounding as a productive type of word formation most often used in situations where a large number of newly constructed beings, objects, and concepts require original names. Aside from compounding, the paper will also mention sound symbolism as a tool of manipulating the perception of names within a fictional universe, taking advantage of both phonetics at a basic level and the preconceived notions and opinions we carry over from the “real world”.

### ***2.3. On the Sociolinguistics of Naming***

Aside from the basic theory, this paper will also explore the bond between names and their perception by society in the context of fictional fantasy worlds. As will be mentioned in the chapter concerning sound symbolism, studies of the “sound shape” of language state that our “lingual feeling” etymologises without any regard to historical linguistics. However, a sociolinguistic study of the process of naming by Stanley Lieberon suggests that there may be more factors influencing not just our perception of names, but also of the very process of name giving:

In some societies and subcultures, the choice of name is controlled by a highly restrictive set of rules and conventions. Although rules and conventions probably exist everywhere, in many settings there is an enormous range of possible choices since the customs are less restrictive and/or ... freer to ignore.<sup>4</sup>

As for the purely phonetic aspect of sound symbolism when discussing the perception of names, there is little or no difference when talking about regular and old or newly coined and fantasy names. First names generally evoke certain stereotypical pictures:” There was

---

<sup>4</sup> Lieberon, Stanley. *What's in a name? ... Some Sociolinguistic Possibilities*. University of California: Berkeley. P. 77



considerable agreement ... that a Mary would be “quiet”, an Edward “friendly”, a Richard “good-looking”, a Joan “young and good-looking”, a Barbara “charming” and an Adrian “artistic”<sup>5</sup>.

Another interesting aspect that will be explored in this paper is the racial/ethnic connotations regarding names which serve a higher function in storytelling and in the determination of the antagonist/protagonist relationships within fictional worlds. Fantasy name giving often takes advantage of preconceived notions and opinions (even stereotypes) that society possesses while coming into contact with fictional worlds whose population, cultures, and relations were, after all, designed and created by the very same opinionated and biased society. This way, fantasy world developers and creators can take advantage of racial and ethnic connotations, and express them through names. This, as will be explained later, allows the developers to create more exotic or threatening antagonists by giving them exotic and (to the general media and society) foreign names:”Racial and ethnic factors are perhaps among the more obvious social forces that affect the choice of first names. But they do serve rather nicely to illustrate some of the societal issues that should be considered in this area.”<sup>6</sup>

### **3. Onomastics in *The Witcher***

The award-winning fantasy video game *The Witcher* (2007) was based on novels by the Polish writer Andrzej Sapkowski, whose works are deeply engrained in Slavic mythology. Aside from the primarily eastern setting and atmosphere, the game also takes advantage of Sapkowski’s fiddling with Slavic onomastics and mythology to cover a wide range of deities, creatures, and race names. It is not only important to discover the origins of the names, but also to analyse the meaning behind the name-giving process, i.e. to determine why a certain person, place, and object has received its name.

---

<sup>5</sup> Ibid. P. 78

<sup>6</sup> Ibid. P.

It is important to know that *The Witcher* is a swordfight-heavy game, and a lot of emphasis is put on the power, vigour, and violence that occur within the story. First of all, rune stones should be mentioned. These magic stones bolster the player's swords, making them more powerful, and each rune stone has a different effect. The names of the stones are Svarog, Perun, and Vodon. The name of Svarog is only found in East Slavic manuscripts, where it is usually equated with the Greek smith god Hephaestus. However, the name is very old, indicating that Svarog was a deity of the Proto-Slavic pantheon<sup>7</sup>. The root *svar* means bright, clear, and the suffix *-og* denotes a place. A comparison with Vedic Svarga indicates that Svarog simply meant (daylight) sky. The effect of the rune stone on swords matches the god's supposed 'intensity' – this is one of the weaker rune stones to be found, symbolising more peaceful solutions to combat and bloodshed. Perun is a heavenly god of thunder and lightning, fiery and dry, who rules the living world from his citadel high above, located on the top of the highest branch of the World Tree, a Slavic equivalent to the Greek Olympus. In Ukrainian *perun* and in Polish *piorun* means "thunderbolt". This is the most powerful rune that can be found within the game, symbolizing the god's might and fury. The last rune stone gets its name from the fantastic underwater creature/ race of creatures called Vodyanoi. In Slavic and Norse mythology, the Vodyanoi are the spirits of all forms of water-like lakes, pools, rivers and little streams<sup>8</sup>. 'Voda' means 'water' in most Slavic languages, and 'vodyanoy' means literally 'watery' in Russian. The corresponding rune stone can be only found near lakes or seas, and has a non-offensive, beneficiary effect on swords, rather than that of the previous two rune stones. This way the game manages to transfer the essence of the Slavic gods' mythos into minute details such as the effect on the gameplay.

Aside from items, the creatures in *The Witcher*<sup>9</sup> receive names from both Slavic and other mythologies, staying more or less true to the basic mythos, and enhancing the gaming experience with realistic visual portrayals of these ancient beasts. One such beast is the

---

<sup>7</sup> <http://www.winterscapes.com/slavic.htm#gods> 3 June 2012

<sup>8</sup> <http://www.winterscapes.com/slavic.htm#creatures> 3 June 2012

<sup>9</sup> <http://mikesrpgcenter.com/witcher/monsters.html> 3 June 2012

Basilisk, from the Greek *basiliskos*, or ‘little king’, a legendary serpent whose poison and death-gaze are present in every mythology (and highly feared). Another example would be the Cockatrice, from Medieval Latin *calcatrix*, meaning ‘tracker’, a two-legged dragon with a rooster’s head, or the Wyvern, from Latin *vipera*, meaning ‘viper’ or ‘adder’, a heraldic two-legged dragon with a barbed tail. The game does not employ only western mythology, however, as there are certain elements from other mythologies and religions, such as the Ifrit (sometimes spelled as efreet), a powerful supernatural creature from Arabic and Islamic cultures, often seen as a powerful winged creature of fire. Ifrit corresponds to Middle Persian *afritan*, which means ‘to create’<sup>10</sup>, as the creature is often seen as the giver of death in fire and of new life.

Not all of the creatures are direct adaptations from mythologies, as some of them are adaptations and re-imaginings of mostly Slavic stories and characters. The Striga, a furious female beast was adapted from *Strigoi*, troubled souls of the dead in Romanian mythology, which have the ability to turn into terrifying animals and drain blood. The game captures this notion of bestiality, and creates a truly horrible, wild beast from the legend. Another good example would be the Koshchey, an enormous crab-like creature created from magic. The Koshchey’s example is unique, as it stems from the Koschei, an archetypal male antagonist in Slavic folklore, described mainly as abducting the hero's wife. The game takes this negative connotation and makes the Koshchey a boss enemy, a true force to be reckoned with. *The Witcher* uses subtleties to reinforce the Slavic and mythological background of its story, using these old legends and myths to reinforce the basic mechanics of the video game. Even minute symbols in the game can be related to this, such as the armor that the protagonist wears, called *Raven’s Armor*. Considering that the raven is an often used symbol in many mythologies, the game makes a simple statement with this kind of name-giving process, strengthening the overall design of the story, and the game itself.

It is important to note, however, that all of these name giving techniques serve the purpose of assigning meaning to people, items, or beasts within a fantasy universe, most

---

<sup>10</sup> <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ifrit> 3 June 2012

often meaning that can be perceived and noticed when playing the game. This is why it could be argued that these kinds of names correspond to the onomastic claim that names are not just unlikely to be a subclass of nouns, but also a completely different functional unit of language<sup>11</sup>. Having exemplified the role name giving plays in the medium of the video game, it is clear that onomastics has a larger and more important role in fantasy video games than just the random assignment of words to objects.

## 4. Compounding in Fantasy Games

Compounding is an exceptionally productive word formation process in fantasy games. The sheer abundance of fictional creatures, items, places, and abstract phenomena requires not only an extensive name giving system, but also a functional approach (as already discussed in the previous chapter) that would form a strong link between linguistic meaning and function in the game. This means that the game has to subjugate its contents to the ability of the given language to adequately describe completely new concepts, the likes of which we find in a fantasy universe.

According to a basic classification of nominal compounds by Adams, most of the compounds discussed here would fall under the group no. X - 'Name compounds'<sup>12</sup>, since most of the newly coined terms within a fantasy universe are used to name creatures and objects. There are other types of compounds present, but these occur in isolated instances that are often repeated throughout several fantasy video games. The most often found combination is that of NOUN + NOUN (as in *hellhound*), or ADJECTIVE + NOUN (as in *felsteed*, where the premodifying adjective *fel* is a newly coined word, though it could also be considered prefixation with a pseudo-affix). The compounds are rarely hyphenated, and many constituents within the compounds are newly coined words that are connected to the game world itself.

---

<sup>11</sup> Anderson, John M. *The Grammar of Names*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007. P. 15

<sup>12</sup> Adams, Valerie. *An Introduction to Modern English Word Formation*. London; Longman, 1994. P. 61

Starting with one of the most common compounds, *Hellhound*, a pattern that is frequent in fantasy name giving (and in general English) becomes apparent – a combination of NOUN + NOUN where the first constituent defines the second one, symbolising a spectral dog empowered with hellish powers, and/or originating from Hell. The term *Hellhound* is frequently used, and most compounds vary from game to game, some of them not being as evident or self-explanatory. Examples would include *Bloodpetal*, a vicious bloodthirsty plant. Aside from describing the creature itself, this kind of compound also serves as a ‘class’ of creatures, as we have *Bloodpetal Lashers*, *Bloodpetal Threshers*, and *Bloodpetal Flayers*. The possibilities are limitless, as we have examples of ‘class’ compounds like *Dragonkin* (creatures that are related to dragons, but are not dragons themselves, not to be confused with *Dragonspawn*) lengthening into *Dragonkin Wyrmspawn*, or *Dragonkin Scalebane*. It is evident from these examples that compounds of this type serve to emphasise subtleties within the fantasy story, subtleties such as class, rank and/or “race”. Even more interesting, however, are compounds whose constituents may not be existing words, but rather coinages that only make sense in the fantasy game world. In *World of Warcraft* (2005), there are certain magic forces which were given the names *Fel* and *Hel* (*Fel* being corruptive magic, and *Hel* being infernal magic). Creatures affected by any of these forces are almost always named according to the formula *Fel-/Hel- + creature/object/person/phenomena* (sometimes divided, mostly together, without a hyphen). In this way, a lot of compounds are created, such as *Felguard*, *Felhound*, *Fel Stalker*, *Fel Hunter*, *Helboar*, and *Helcat*. Another prevalent word formation process is compounding where one or both elements are shortened, and we have the process of blending. Examples of this would be *Cemetaur* (a ghoulish creature haunting graveyards, comes from *Cemetery* + *Minotaur*), *Devilsaur* (a huge Tyrannosaurus, comes from *Devil* + *Dinosaur*) and *Threshadon* (a bestial marine dinosaur, comes from the verb *to thresh* + *adon*, the suffix for all plesiosaur species). The combination ADJECTIVE + NOUN is common in fantasy names, though the first constituent is often either uncommon or used by the developers for their own purposes within the fantasy world. A good example of this would be the term *Orinthosaur*, whose constituents are *Orintho-*, coming from Greek *orinthos*, which means ‘bird’, and the clipping of *dinosaur* down to *-saur*. In most fantasy games, *Orinthosaurs* are *Basilisks*, *Cockatrices*, and *Wyverns* (discussed in the previous

chapter), because of their bird-like appearance, and their savagery. Another example would be the *Archespore*, an ancient bloodthirsty plant, whose age is represented by the premodifying adjective *arche-*, which means ‘first, original’. Another ‘class’ compound of this type would be *Necrophage*, a term used to describe *Ghouls*, *Alghouls*, *Graveirs*, *Cemetaurs*, *Zombies*, *Ghasts*, *Rotfiends*, and all kinds of undead, flesh-eating creatures with the combination of *necro* (dead, corpse, dead tissue) + *phage* (eater).

Not all of the compounds in fantasy games are straightforward combinations of ADJ+N or N+N. As mentioned by Adams, many compounds have the appearance of a free phrase, yet their individual elements are tightly connected in both meaning and syntax<sup>13</sup> (as it is generally the case in English that compounds need not be written as one orthographical word). A simple example of this would be the term *blood pact*, a magical bond between two creatures born in blood. More interesting examples would use elements from everyday compounds and combine them with terms from the fantasy world, such as substituting *bee sting* with *harpy sting*, and similar examples such as *vampire bite* or *ghoul scratch* (which is important, as a vampire’s bite has dire consequences, and as such has to be specifically stressed, as opposed to a *dog bite*, which is more common/ less dire, at least in most fantasy worlds). There are other common expressions that receive stronger emphasis and meaning in fantasy worlds, such as *monster hunter* (a more meaningful term within a fantasy world populated with monsters), *rune stone* (discussed in the previous chapter), and *cloud kill* (a common spell in fantasy worlds, a magical phenomenon).

Other unique examples include instances where we have the combination NOUN + VERB + -ing, which corresponds to the second main class of compounds – NOUN + OBJECT<sup>14</sup>. It is notable that these terms have the ability to follow grammatical rules of conjugation even after the compounding. These would be terms like *spellcasting*, which represents an act of using magic, a common phenomenon in fantasy games, but these examples go even further with terms like *spellbind*, an act of magically binding an item or person to something else, which directly leads to *spellbound*. This can also be seen with

---

<sup>13</sup> Ibid. P. 57

<sup>14</sup> Ibid. P. 68

terms such as *mana*, which is present in almost every fantasy game, where *mana* refers to one's own spiritual force of magic origin. Combining *mana* with other terms compounds are created, such as *mana stone* and *manaborn*; *mana stones* are frequent items in fantasy games, and *manaborn* would be an adjective used to describe people or creatures born from magic. A lot of compounds in fantasy games are associative compounds<sup>15</sup>, with the formula 'B is a part of A'; these are most notably alchemical ingredients and monster salvagings<sup>16</sup> like *abomination lymph*, *alghoul marrow*, *archespore juice*, *beggartick blossoms*, *devourer teeth*, *Koshchey heart*, and *Vodyanoi bladder*. A number of compounds also serve an instrumental function with the formula 'B prevents A'<sup>17</sup>, and these are mostly potions and oils used to combat beasts, such as *insectoid oil*, *necrophage coating*, *orinthosaur poison*, *spectre repellent*, and *vampire dust*<sup>18</sup>.

All of these examples point to the fact that the creation of both new names and name giving systems in fantasy games is imperative for the conveying of the right message, as well as for the assignment of meaning to completely new and foreign creatures, items, and phenomena. This is also enhanced by the fact that the developers and name givers are working with a unique medium that is the video game, where immersion and design depend on all underlying elements working together, including language.

---

<sup>15</sup> Adams, Valerie. *An Introduction to Modern English Word Formation*. London; Longman, 1994. P. 70

<sup>16</sup> <http://mikesrpgcenter.com/witcher/items/ingredients.html> 3 June 2012

<sup>17</sup> Adams, Valerie. *An Introduction to Modern English Word Formation*. London; Longman, 1994. P. 73

<sup>18</sup> <http://mikesrpgcenter.com/witcher/items/oils.html> 3 June 2012

## 5. Sound Symbolism as a Tool of Manipulation

Sound symbolism is a very important aspect in the onomastic processes within fantasy stories, as it allows both meaningful and permeating name giving and manipulation of characterisation and story. This means that the developers may give phonetically uncommon names (from their native language, or even other languages) to creatures in order to control how their names ‘sound’, i.e. to control connotation, emotion, and/or characterisation.

According to Jakobson, the task of speech sounds, which have no autonomous meaning themselves, is to differentiate word meanings<sup>19</sup>. This is also seen in the relationship between shapes and sounds according to the Bouba/Kiki Effect<sup>20</sup>, a psychological experiment carried out in 1929 that shows just how much sound affects our perception of physical, palpable objects. This fact is of paramount importance to the video game, since the story and immersion rely not only on the story, but also on the visual aesthetics to provide a permeating experience. A good example of this would be the *Bloedzuiger*<sup>21</sup>, a monster in *The Witcher* resembling a large humanoid leech. The Dutch term for the leech is used for a reason, as the terms in other languages (*pijawka* in Polish, *Blutegel* in German) lack the auditory impact, more so as the term is pronounced in English in the game; the graphemic appearance (i.e. the letter strings) also plays a role. This multilayered tactic ultimately pays off, as we often have scenes of combat with these hellish creatures in swamps, with the word *bloedzuiger* hanging above every one of the atrocious beasts, causing unease at best.

Even more interesting is the element of sound symbolism in story and character manipulation in fantasy worlds. As Jakobson puts it: “As we gradually acquire our mother tongue, our feeling etymologizes, so to speak, without any regard to historical

---

<sup>19</sup> Jakobson, Roman. *The Sound Shape of Language*. London: Indiana University Press, 1979. P. 177

<sup>20</sup> <http://www.blackcoffee.com/blog/2010/06/11/sound-symbolism/> 3 June 2012

<sup>21</sup> <http://mikesrpgcenter.com/witcher/monsters.html> 3 June 2012



linguistics”<sup>22</sup>; this is nowhere more evident than in the choices fantasy developers make when dealing with faction-based storytelling. This means that “good” or “lawful” states or cities receive names that sound gentler and more familiar. A good example would be four city-states from *The Witcher*: the protagonist’s homelands *Temeria* and *Redania* on the one hand, and *Zerrikania* and *Nilfgaard* on the other hand. It should be noted that the last two city-states boast Eastern and Northern-style cultures, with the antagonist being an exotic dark-skinned sorcerer from *Zerrikania* by the name of *Azar Javed*. Already in the naming process, the developers utilise this aspect of the sublime, foreign, and mysterious by incorporating familiar elements from our world into the fantasy world’s cultures. Another interesting aspect of this manipulation is the name giving process of the character role. Certain primary characters in the *Witcher*’s story not only have names that more or less describe their profession, but they also help the player to remember them (this is an important feature of the names, since *The Witcher* boasts over 50 different characters throughout the epic story). Good examples would be *Kalkstein* (pronounced in English in the game), an alchemist whose name is a compound formed out of the constituents *Kalk* (lime) + *Stein* (stone), which is tightly connected to the storyline, as Kalkstein works with many strange elements, mostly stone-based. Other examples would be *Ramsmeat*, a bandit leader notorious for his thick skin that can withstand tremendous injuries, *Thaler*, a low-life running a pawn shop, also notorious for being corrupt and greedy, and *Dandelion*, a wandering bard and romantic, who spends most of his time composing ballads and courting women.

All in all, sound symbolism completes the connection between a game’s visuals, storytelling, onomastics, and the player’s perception of the three. One of the goals of a fantasy game developer is to successfully simulate certain aspects of our world by any means necessary. Sound symbolism is just one in the plethora of minute tactics used to truly encompass the player in a world that is completely foreign at first.

---

<sup>22</sup> Jakobson, Roman. *The Sound Shape of Language*. London: Indiana University Press, 1979. P. 180

## **6. Conclusion**

All in all, fantasy games owe their complexity and multi-layered structure to dozens of subtle, but effective techniques, some of them being carefully constructed systems of name giving and sound symbolism. By utilising language in this way, developers ensure that the world(s) they create are reasonably realistic, while still allowing the player to lose themselves in the game's permeating immersion. Aside from the purely theoretical approach, it is also evident that there is a strong and important bond between not only the perception of names by society, but also between society and the very process of name giving – the result of which is sound symbolism. Onomastics, word formation, and sound symbolism are important parts of language, and they, as such, have to be carefully studied and utilised in order to accomplish what (good) fantasy video games have already been doing for almost three decades.

## 7. References

Adams, Valerie. *An Introduction to Modern English Word Formation*. London; Longman, 1994.

Anderson, John M. *The Grammar of Names*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007.

Grammar & Composition

grammar.about.com 7 October 2012-09-07

<<http://grammar.about.com/od/tz/g/Word-Formation.htm>>

Jakobson, Roman. *The Sound Shape of Language*. London: Indiana University Press, 1979.

Lieber, Rochelle. *Introducing Morphology*. Cambridge; Cambridge Press, 2009.

Lieberman, Stanley. *What's in a name? ... Some Sociolinguistic Possibilities*. University of California: Berkeley.

Mike's RPG center, The Witcher

Mikesrpgcenter.com 29 May 2012

<<http://mikesrpgcenter.com/witcher/index.html>>

Slavic Mythology Myths & Legends

Library.thinkquest.org 22 May 2012

<[http://library.thinkquest.org/C008326/Slavonic/Welcome\\_SlavicMythology.htm](http://library.thinkquest.org/C008326/Slavonic/Welcome_SlavicMythology.htm)>

Sound Symbolism

Blackcoffee.com 22 May 2012

<<http://www.blackcoffee.com/blog/2010/06/11/sound-symbolism/>>

Šimunović, Petar. *Uvod u Hrvatsko Imenoslovlje*. Golden Marketing, Zagreb:2009.

The International Council of Onomastic Sciences.

Icosweb.net 22 May 2012

<<http://www.icosweb.net/index.php/whatis-onomastics.html>>

Widdowson, H.G. *Linguistics*. Oxford University Press; Oxford:1996.