

LINGUISTIC REPRESENTATION OF ETHNICITIES IN
ASSASSIN'S CREED: BLACK FLAG

Master's thesis

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<p>Tiivistelmä – Abstract</p> <p>Tässä tutkimuksessa analysoidaan Assassin's Creed: Black Flagia, suosittua historiallista seikkailuvideopelia (Ubisoft, 2013). Peli kertoo monisyisen tarinan, joka antaa pelaajille mahdollisuuden olla vuorovaikutuksessa hyvin kirjoitettujen, kolmiulotteisten hahmojen kanssa. Pelihahmot edustavat lukuisia eri etnisiä ryhmiä ja heidät on sijoitettu huolellisesti rakennettuun historialliseen kontekstiin. Pelin monipuolinen ja monikielinen tapahtumapaikka on myös tärkeässä asemassa ja kieli on siinä erittäin tärkeä immersion, maailmanrakennuksen ja tarinankerronnan väline. Pelidiskursia analysoitiin sosiolingvistikan, proseduraalisen retoriikan, narratologian ja aiemman historiallisia seikkailupelejä koskevan tutkimuksen tarjoamin käsittein. Työn tavoitteena on vastata seuraavaan tutkimuskysymykseen: Miten erilaiset etniset ryhmät ovat kielellisesti ja narratiivisesti kuvattu Assassin's Creed: Black Flag-pelissä? Hahmojen kielenkäyttö ja pelinsisäiset lingvistiset ilmaukset ovat työkaluja immersioisempään pelikokemukseen.</p>	
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1. INTRODUCTION

In the past ten years, the technological development of video games has grown so rapidly, that it allows the developers to create highly detailed worlds in which the players can immerse themselves into. One example for such advancements and creative freedom is *Assassin's Creed: Black Flag* (2013, Ubisoft), featuring a vast explorable space with locations that exist in our world as well, since the game is set in the West Indies. This means, that the game not only presents the geography of the Bahamas, but the exciting, exotic ways of lives of the inhabitants as well. The player meets a meticulously built, fascinating world, which features a deeply diverse representation of settlements, groups of various ethnicities and with that, people with various fates and ambitions.

As a gamer myself, I became immersed in the game and the adventures my character was going through, since with the progressing of the narrative I was required to venture forward and discover new islands, new settlements and meet more people in the game. It was not long before I began to notice how the presence of numerous ethnic minorities created a diverse atmosphere in the game, and their presence also contributed to me feeling welcome in the game's presented world. My attention was piqued when I realized how the various settlements included different languages on the streets as well. Although I have never visited the West Indies myself, with my existing knowledge of history I found myself quickly accepting the game's depiction of a multicultural, linguistically colourful world.

As a student of languages, I was always fascinated by multicultural environments and communities, and the game aims to bring a depiction of those. Since the characters speak with numerous accents and dialects and come from all around the globe, it was the most optimal choice as a subject of analysis for my Master's thesis. In this game, the default, standard language is English, and I quickly realized that the languages of other ethnic groups have their own significance in the gameplay experience and the process of immersion as well. In the end it was a quick decision to make, since upon playing the game with a keen eye for linguistic markers, I found a wide range of topics to discuss.

In this section, I am going to establish why this game is the most suitable for this kind of analysis, the thesis is going to be structured, but first and foremost, let me introduce the game and the franchise.

1.1 In focus: *Assassin's Creed: Black Flag*

The *Assassin's Creed* franchise is a unique series of roleplaying video games developed by the Canadian video-game studio Ubisoft, featuring linear historical storylines in a universe that is a copy of ours with few sci-fi elements included (e.g. simulation of ancestors' memories, ascendant beings watching over humanity through technology). Through the games, players follow the protagonist characters' lives and adventures through a series of missions, while resolving a socio-political conflict in the meantime and working in the shadows with major historical events (conquests, rebellions, revolutions) happening in the background. The appeal of the franchise is that it shows how the protagonists create an impact on the historical course of events, while working in the shadows as a part of an ancient brotherhood whose mission is to fight for the freedom of human society. The hero's - and thus the player's - machinations support society's claim to rule themselves and to be free from dictatorship or from the rule of self-proclaimed leaders who aspire to take advantage of their position or social power. Each game features discourses about human rights, the human society's right to take control of its fate to avoid war or disaster, or to end an era that they are not satisfied with. Later in section "Theoretical Framework", I will elaborate on the game's structure entailing storytelling.



Figure 1: Havana's marketplace with the player character Edward Kenway in the center (screenshot original)

Assassin's Creed: Black Flag is a historical action-adventure role playing video game

which has a fictional-historical narrative pinning two stealthy groups against each other: the Assassins who fight for the free will of society and peace for the people, and the belligerent Templars who desire peace by controlling the masses. This particular game is highly popular within its franchise: it has sold 93 million copies according to Ubisoft Registration Document and Annual Report 2015. Its popularity derives mainly from its innovative playstyle (including exploration with pirate ships and unlimited interaction within the game world) and from its main character, the notorious pirate and opportunist Edward Kenway. Since the game's setting is in the 18th century Caribbean seas, through Edward Kenway's story the player encounters multiple male and female characters from several ethnicities, representing a range of ideologies. Some of the characters and locations have a connection to real-life, and their characterization has been a product of research. One example like this is that the game features Nassau, Kingston and Havana, which are existing cities on the Bahamas in our world as well.

The plot is best summarized by the excerpt I found on Wikipedia (https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Assassin's_Creed_IV:_Black_Flag):

As [Edward] Kenway, the player must unravel a conspiracy between high-ranking Templars within the British and Spanish empires who, under the guise of cleaning up piracy in the Caribbean, have used their positions to locate the Sage (reincarnation of a powerful ancient godlike being)—later identified as Bartholomew Roberts—who is the only man that can lead them to the Observatory, an ancient device (advanced technology created by powerful ascendant godlike beings) which can monitor anyone anywhere in the world [...]. Seeing an opportunity for profit, Kenway [...] meets Woodes Rogers as well as Cuban Governor, and Templar Grandmaster, Laureano Torres. His recklessness endangers the entire Assassins' Order, prompting him to pursue the Sage and the conspirators.

Meanwhile, a band of notorious pirates—including Edward "Blackbeard" Thatch, Benjamin Hornigold, Mary Read (under the alias "James Kidd") and Charles Vane, among others, seize control of Nassau and establish a pirate republic.

Eventually, Kenway and Roberts uncover the location of the Observatory and retrieve the artifact powering it, but Kenway is betrayed by Roberts at the last moment. After a brief stint in prison for the crimes of piracy, Edward escapes with the aid of Ah Tabai, the Assassin Mentor, and elects to join their Order. Chasing down and eliminating Roberts and the Templar conspirators, Kenway retrieves the artifact and returns it to the Observatory, sealing it away for good. He is left facing an uncertain future with his newfound convictions until he receives a letter informing him of the passing of his wife and the imminent arrival of his hitherto unknown daughter, Jennifer Scott. Kenway travels back to England, promising Ah Tabai that he will one day return to continue the fight against the Templars.

It is important to highlight the difference between the Templars and Assassins. The Assassins fight for the free will of society and peace for the people, and the Templars desire peace by controlling the masses from an untouchable position of political power, from above. Later this will be an important part of the analysis since I will also include the interesting power play between the representatives of each group, expressed by language use. Depending on which

characters belong to the freedom-fighter Assassins or the Templars desiring power above all, my methods of linguistic and narrative evaluation will point out forms of stereotypization, narrative importance and characterization through language use.

In the investigation of the linguistic representation of non-English languages in *Assassin's Creed IV: Black Flag*, it is important to bear in mind that the game has been distributed globally and features multiple language packs (French, Spanish, German, Finnish etc.). The English version is considered the default one by the developers' (Ubisoft) standards: this is because the majority of the production has been conducted under the assumption that most players will play with the English language pack. The most apparent proof of this is that while the English language pack is lip-synced with the characters' speech, other language packs are not. The English textual utterances in the game's world do not switch to other languages upon switching between language packs ("Harbormaster" remains "Harbormaster" in every language pack regardless of which language is dominant in the game world's that particular harbour.) More details of these features will be given in the chapter dedicated to linguistic landscape analysis.

The thesis is going to consist of three large sections, and sub-sections dedicated to the particular topics of discussion. The structure is going to follow a rather traditional but highly effective method of organization: After the Introduction, I am going to discuss previous studies regarding video games which fall in the same category like *Assassin's Creed: Black Flag*. During my research, I found only a few studies which included this particular game or the franchise in the particular field I am working with. The Theoretical Framework section will elaborate on how video game studies established the current scientific conventions regarding cinematic, narrative-based roleplaying games as their own mediums, and how such mediums are capable of embedding narratives into procedural patterns and create high immersion and interactivity for the players. After this, I will discuss the importance of the unity of narrative and gaming, and introduce the vital role language plays in that particular unity. In the Methods section, I am going to introduce the theories of Bleichenbacher regarding the analysis of multilingualism in cinematic works, Chapman's theories about video games including history, and Bogost on procedural rhetorics in video games; these studies proved essential to my analysis. These will be followed by the Analysis section and the Discussion.

2. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

In this section, I will give my reader a general overview about how video game studies and narratology became paired, and then narrow it down to my case.

2.1. Video Games as medium – a review of approaches to analysing video games

After the beginning of the 1990's, video games as media investigated in narratology or ludology has been an established fact. To summarize the argument in these two fields, I borrow Emese Róth's words (2014: 2); in her words, "[w]hile narratology argues that computer games can be analyzed by existing methods of humanities, ludology argues that computer games are not conventional texts thus they cannot be analyzed as such." However, as Stephan Günzel also argues, while ludology and narratology both have their respective conventions and methods of analysis when it comes to storytelling, video games reach far beyond those conventions. Therefore, scholars have had to propose a new approach in analysing video games. The very term 'video game' is a generic, collective compound word with several dozens of subcategories, thanks to there being thousands of video games for dozens of platforms. According to this view, one particular method suitable for the analysis of one particular game would not work if one applied it to another. For example, when analysing a mathematics-based strategy card game that has no narrative elements (e.g. *Heartstone*, Blizzard Entertainment), one cannot use the same narratology-based research methods than those that have previously been applied to a roleplaying and story-based video game (e.g. *Assassin's Creed*, Ubisoft co) even though, by definition, both games are "played by electronically manipulating images produced by a computer program on a monitor or other display." (en.oxforddictionaries.com/definition/video_game). Günzel explains,

"[c]omputer games therefore are taken as a transformation or transposition of something old into a new medium; the text becomes an interactive text and play becomes virtual play. [...] Both [narratology and ludology] took for granted – and likewise neglected – the fact that computer games are based on computers. This is exactly what Mark Wolf highlighted: video games are a *specific kind of medium*. One could add that they are a new medium of their own. (Günzel, 2012: 32, italics original)

Ever since, as Günzel further argues in his article, the nature of computer games as medium has been widely accepted. In addition, later with the introduction of the term "immersion" (McMahan 2003), (Ryan, 2001) another dimension of attributes have emerged. Immersion is currently viewed as an essential characteristic of video games in a general sense, as it is explained below:

“[S]he points out that one has to distinguish carefully between immersion in a *diegetic* and immersion in a *non-diegetic* sense. In the diegetic sense, “immersion” designates the aspect of someone being fascinated by the narration of the game or the game play. Apart from this, on the non-diegetic level, “immersion” indicates the aspect of someone having the feeling of what McMahan, with respect to Jonathan Steuer (1992), calls a “being there.” Immersion is thus understood as the illusory impact of the medium. (Günzel 2012: 39)

The importance of immersion is also highlighted by Janet Murray’s *Hamlet on the Holodeck* (1997) in which she argues that video games are “digital artefacts”, building on immersion, spatiality, procedurality, participation and encyclopaedic scope. From the list, prodecurality will be discussed in greater detail later. In this context, spatiality means the player’s opportunity to explore, navigate the game’s world and the ability to move in digital space. Participation means the process through which video games induce change according to the player’s input, in other words, the strong sense of interactivity through procedural methods. The encyclopaedic scope of a game entails how well constructed the game world is, when it comes to all provided information about fictional game lore, information about the game world’s characteristics, history and general gameplay. Immersion is one of the key elements here, too, because, as also suggested by the narratologist Ken McAllister (2004: et al), just like any other transformative work of art, when playing narrative video games we also pay attention to characters and their linguistic features. In this way, video games have a similar effect on player brains as literary or other transformative works have.

According to this view, it is important to highlight the nature of immersion one experiences while playing video games. To get a broader, unbiased point of view about the phenomenon, it is interesting to look at the key elements in today’s most popular video games on the market: their combined unity of narrative and immersion. In the following, I will explain how the nature of video games as media enables, empowers them to reach beyond the boundaries that other media have not been able to do.

When video games are referred to as “digital artifacts” (Murray, 1997: 11) or technical media (Günzel, 2012 et al), what both have in common is that their target group of consumers are humans instead of, for example experimental artificial intelligence or animals. In analyzing narrative based video games, in turn, it is essential to keep in mind that narrative is, as Domsch (2013: 99) puts it, “[...] what happens in the minds of those who experience”. Domsch analyses narrative in video games from the point of view of “how video games can be experienced by

their players as narrative, and how this narrative, through its connection to gameplay [...], can enable the openness that is a precondition for their inclusion into the category of FNs” (FN: future narratives, Bode (2013: et al); (Domsch, 2013, 1). Domsch in the same work also suggests that video games essentially build entire narratives by including conventional media of art. By utilizing several types of media (static media in the form of text, images, and dynamic forms of media in the form of movie clips and music), video games have found the liberty to “combine user agency (the user can transform the perceptible form through input) with activity (the medium changes in the user’s real time but without her influence).” (Domsch 2013: 8) While uniting agency with narrative through the complex platform consisting of combined media, roleplaying games have evolved greatly. They can enhance player immersion while using technical means to offer expansive virtual worlds and interactive, highly engaging, meaningful stories.

Video games also rely a great deal on technology to bring the player the experience of flow, which is best described “[...]as an indicator of total involvement that the player experiences when playing a game” (Toivio, 2016: 16). With the emergence of games which are relying heavily on narrative and agency, the player experience is focused around those elements, while the games build on and utilize the basic aspects of video games (Murray,1997: et al.).

As described above, videogames have the resources and potential to create an experience in which the player has a limited perception of the physical reality, by projecting the agency of himself or herself into the game. However, despite the fact that the purpose of this study is not to analyse player psychology, but to analyse video games as rule-bound, carefully constructed media in which language plays a key element in achieving their function, the presence of a human agent (player) as a participant in the video game’s overall structure is still a crucial aspect if this study.

2.2.The role of narration and game rhetoric in video games

An essential element of narrative-based games is success through immersion and knowledge about the game. To analyse a narrative-based video game, one must familiarize him/herself with the narrative aside from the game’s technical apparatus and programming. Even so, “[...] the computer game complex is dialectical, a complicated and ever-changing system constructed out of innumerable relationships among people, things and symbols, [...]” (MacAllister 2004:16). These symbols and interpersonal relationships are tied to a vast number of systems

which contributed to creating the video game itself: contemporary ideologies, the video game developing industry, consumer society (ibid). Whether intentional or not, some of the previously listed systems and interpersonal relationship affect the game's final form, and those who analyse video games must bear in mind that analytical perspectives may vary about the same video game. This entails the critical reception of the game and the opinion about the game we form from all our accumulated knowledge.

This leads me to an important starting point in the analysis of a narrative video games, which is also suggested by MacAllister (2004: 16):

“As scholar of dialectics Bertell Ollman reminds us, some people enjoy “a privileged position from which to view and make sense out of the developmental character of the [dialectical] system” (14). Such privilege comes both from proximity to the system—in this instance, proximity to some aspect of the computer game complex—and from breadth and depth of knowledge about it.”

The concept of close proximity to the game during the upcoming discussions will be important in my analysis as well. In my study this means that I am going to show how I piece together the puzzle *Assassin's Creed: Black Flag* provides by taking the game apart as narrative, cinematic segments. This means that after playing the game multiple times and consulting the game's included encyclopaedia, I will analyze how character appear in short cinematic clips and how their position in the narrative changes accordingly.

In order to understand the sociocultural dynamics in *Assassin's Creed: Black Flag*, the present study needs a perspective like this. It will ensure an unbiased analytic view, while also making it possible to delve into the game's world and narrative effectively and in detail.

Through its narrative devices and storytelling the game proposes several types of struggles with which the player can identify with or take her/his narrative stance (positive, negative contribution or neutral) in relation to the game world. As such, the game challenges agency in both narrative actions and thinking about our own society in a pseudo-historical setting. It urges us to take sides, take action and see the perspectives from both the Templars' and the Assassins' sides while reflecting on socio-political issues (such as slavery, surveillance, social hierarchy). Nevertheless, agency in gaming is crucial. This is emphasized by for example by Chapman who, relying on a broad view of agency, suggests that it is “a term to refer to the opportunities for the player to take these actions, as structured by the game rules and hardware.” (Chapman, 2016:30). By utilizing the rules, the hardware and the pre-coded narrative in the

game, the player has a whole range of options about interacting with the game. In a game like *Assassin's Creed*, these include watching, reading, listening, engaging and creating and perceiving interpersonal relationships. In this game, the player is just as much invited to deliver a blow against the totalitarian ideologies of the enemies, as to ponder and contemplate on the various troubles and definitions of freedom, truth and the limitations of society. Which leads me to the following theory about the connection between agency and consuming.

The importance of this invitation of agency and thinking lies in the way developers establish a pseudo-historical setting, which involves a science-fiction narrative layer on top of the pseudo-realist depiction, dotted by the remnants of an ancient society predating the humans that has left behind advanced technology. In the meantime in the game's past-tense narration, the protagonist, Edward Kenway, a simple privateer turned pirate, is only aware of the problems on the surface of society (e.g. the distinctions between the wealthy vs. poor, slavery vs. freedom, ideologies vs. reality). Through Edward's struggles and eventual enlightenment, the player is invited to participate in the discourses and philosophical debates as well. The target group of *Assassin's Creed* games are young adults, and the game challenges them to engage in socio-political discourses. Here, it could be argued, the game's balance between rhetorics and basic video game elements come together in what Bogost (2007, 2008) calls procedural rhetoric and what Chapman refers to "*doing* historical discourse" (Chapman, 2016:47).

"Thus, it can be argued that historical writing and historical gameplay are similar in a number of ways. Both involve a relationship between *reading* and *doing*, both are configurative -- they are partly about the arrangement and manipulation of pre-existing parts -- and yet both can also involve creative agency and support the production of varying and multiple narratives. [...] They are simultaneously both historical representations and systems for *historizing*." (Chapman 2016: 50-51)

In this respect, the *Assassin's Creed* franchise takes a unique stance on how video games can challenge representation, critical thinking and introducing sociopolitical issues and philosophy through gaming. The narrative choices and the game's rhetoric only enhance the player's immersion and agency, which is a feature that video games have been aiming to achieve in increasing depth in the last ten years, if the worldwide success and greatly increasing number of roleplaying, narrative based games is any indicator to that.

2.3. Storyplaying and language

“Some things are played as games, and some things are read as narrative, and sometimes, a thing is both. The latter is what is called *storyplaying*.” (Domsch, 2013, 3)

In this section I will bring video games and sociolinguistics together. In particular, I am going to elaborate on how language is an essential part of narrative-based games' structure. Starting with a more general introduction of the main attributes of narrative-based games regarding storytelling and the presentation of narrative, the focus of this part of the thesis is to explore the role of language in video games' rule based, multimodal structure.

In videogames featuring a fictional, visually represented world with spatial, procedural dimensions and an encyclopedic scope (Murray, 1997:71), the technical apparatus (screen, hardware and software) only enhances immersion and participation. In the following, the importance of immersion and participation is going to be elaborated on. As Günzel explains, “[t]o a player of a classical computer game, the visual presentation of that virtual world appears to be a representation of it. One does not steer oneself, but rather steers an agent of the self.” (Günzel 2012, 41)

According to this statement, players are given the possibility to have an immersive experience while playing videogames, and experience the narrative while being immersed into the game world's virtual space and chain of procedures.

Before proceeding to the main part of the argumentation and why language plays such an essential role, it is important to explain the types of procedures players meet and for this purpose I will draw on the definitions by Murray (1997:71), and Bogost (2008:122). Murray (1997: 71) defines procedurality as something that is bound to the computer's algorithm systems, a “defining ability to execute a series of rules”, while Bogost (2008: 122) explains it as follows:

“[p]rocedurality in this sense refers to the core practice of software authorship. Software is composed of algorithms that model the way things behave [in a computer software]. To write procedurally one authors code that enforces rules to generate some kind of representation, rather than authoring the representation itself. Procedural systems generate behaviors based on rule-based models; they are machines capable of producing many outcomes, each conforming to the same overall guidelines.”

Bogost (2008: 122) also emphasizes that “[a]mong computer-based media, video games tend

to emphasize procedurality more than other types of software programs.” Keeping this view in mind, it is clear that video games not only are rule-based constructs but they also “[...] depict real and imagined systems by creating procedural models of those systems, that is, by imposing sets of rules that create particular possibility spaces for play.”

Thus, the perception of the player is manipulated by the heavily coded set of rules which basically construct the entire video game as a tightly woven network. The player is given limited freedom, while the process of immersion happens. This is a general statement which applies to all computer based games. However, in the case of narrative-based, sandbox type of games (i.e. spatially large, explorable games with few limitations), the player is free to decide their course of action by either prioritising the game’s main objective (main quest) or by abandoning it and dedicating their time to every other way of interaction the game offers to them. The player in these types of games (including *Assassin’s Creed: Black Flag*) is only bound to follow the main course of the story in the beginning. After this, the game, a set of algorithm intentionally coded to exist as such, allows the player to act freely in the game’s world. Never previously has there been any type of medium to allow such freedom of agency in convergence culture¹ (Jenkins, 2005). This phenomenon was also discussed by Róth from the perspective of ludology and narratology,

“[a] more recent example could be *The Elder Scrolls V: Skyrim* (Bethesda Game Studio 2011) that is a highly popular fantasy action game with role play elements. The game was critically acclaimed mainly for its sheer dimensions. From the point of view of narratology and ludology the game is interesting because it can be played both as an open, sandbox type of game or as a classic action game. The player can freely decide whether he or she will take on quests or just becomes a simple miner, hunter, mercenary, mage, thief or other, buys a house in one of the game’s cities, gets married, adopts children and does other completely not heroic actions. In this state of the game there is no end because the person who’s supposed to be the hero of the story completely disregards the story creating a unique story and gaming experience.” (Róth, 2014: 8)

The reason why immersion, spaciality, procedurality and agency are important for the purposes of this study is that the four components are essential in order to discuss why language use in

¹“...the flow of content across multiple media platforms, the cooperation between multiple media industries, the search for new structures of media financing which f[a]ll at the interstices between old and new media, and the migratory behavior of media audiences who [...] go almost anywhere in search of the kinds of entertainment experiences they want.” (Jenkins, 2005, 2)

video games is also one of the key component of the giant rule-based structure and interactive gaming experience. As narrative- and agency-based games create immersive, interactive experience for gamers to experience on such a deeply engaging level that they enter the state of flow, it is also necessary to analyse how language becomes part of the flow experience. The player regards the use of language in video games as a default component and takes every form of linguistic communication for granted. While playing through narratives and immersing in virtual worlds, the gamers' perception of reality is consumed by the game's offered reality. (Juul, 2005, 164-183) As such, language becomes part of that reality, an inconspicuous element the player considers taken for granted in whatever form it may be presented in the game's world.

Language in video games has a very similar role to the one that the structure - the narrative – has within which language is embedded, or to the user interface the player engages with: the player takes the presence of language for granted. The forms of language in video games include written, spoken and nonverbal forms, ranging from subtitles for cinematic scenes to spoken lines uttered by voice actors. “Players are listening to statements that are spoken by trained actors, and even the facial animation of the non-player characters in interrogations is modelled on real-life acting through special motion-capture techniques, and so players have to judge these social interactions in ways similar to real-life ones.” (Domsch, 2013, 20) As such, language is an essential part of the game's storytelling, exactly in the same way as it is important in a cinematic piece of art. The way characters are being animated to look like, dressed in specifically designed clothes, act and speak the way they individually partake in the narrative is a deliberately planned move from the developer's part. They are implemented within the final product with the animators' and programmers' tireless work.

Games like *Assassin's Creed: Black Flag* contain a diverse cast of characters and locations. In games like these, the narrative is only enhanced by the characters' colourful use of language. These can include the use of different accents, dialects, and languages other than the default English. All of these are part of the game-world's immersion and of the foundation of the story as well. Characters with various countries and continents of origins are made to speak differently, with the help of different accents and dialects. In this, they are made to resemble real people in real life. In addition, in different locations, various languages exist side by side and characters can also be made to utilize mixed forms of language. More specifically, in *Assassin's Creed: Black Flag*, the game in focus in this study, it is important also to emphasize that it focuses strongly on the narrative, and on the exploration of the game-world and inter-personal relationships among the characters.

More of this is going to be explored in the analysis section, however it is time to introduce why the focus on language in this study also involves an in-depth exploration of video game theory and the functionality of the game's depicted world.

One might object that the rules of a game are highly arbitrary and need no further justification outside of their functionality for gameplay, while, on the other hand, fictional existents in their form, distribution, and connection strive towards probability according to the model of reality to which they refer to. In other words: fiction is realistic, games mean taking a break from reality. But this seems to misrepresent both games and fiction. Fiction is far from being as 'realistic' as it is sometimes made out to be, and the examples of disruptions of resemblance for the sake of functionality (what is routinely called 'literary convention') are legion. (Domsch 2013, 27)

In other words, although video games strive to depict a well-constructed, coded game-world based on our perception of reality, one cannot expect them to represent reality in perfection, nor to be completely consistent in their conventions regarding reality and fiction. In *Assassin's Creed: Black Flag* this manifests in the physical reality of the game being very close to our physical reality and yet supernatural demigods are watching humanity's progress. The depictions of language and characters are also affected by this aforementioned phenomenon: their assigned methods of language use are in some cases loyal to the already existing fictional conventions to depict people from their origin and character trope type and in other cases, they break conventions and stereotypes to provide a fresh perspective. The racial and gender-related diversity of the cast is presented in the next section of this study. In this section, an account will be given of how *Assassin's Creed: Black Flag* (and thus, similar narrative based roleplaying video games with cinematic elements) comes very close to how characters and locations can be also be analysed in cinematic narratives.

2.4. Cinematic narratives, representation and language in *Assassin's Creed: Black Flag*

Language varieties serve as mechanisms to maintain group boundaries. They constitute a cultural practice, as well as a primary tool for successful communication. In both cinema and cinematic scenes in *Assassin's Creed: Black Flag*, there are consciously made choices that determine how the characters appear, act and speak. Character groups are represented as similar in the way they appear, speak and act. The linguistic choices they make also contribute to their

image, contribute to the narrative functions they have. Thus, their linguistic choices constitute an important part of their overall appearance in the story, forming part of the game world as well.

The choice of English as the primary language in internationally distributed video games is not new, since in most cases English has only been considered a tool for communication with an imagined English native speaker as the targeted consumer in mind (Bleichenbacher, 2008: 49). The attitude of the video game developers towards languages seems similar to such film directors and studios who produce mainstream or high-budget films that are targeted at an audience worldwide. The audience, in case their command of the English language is not sufficient, will watch a subtitled or dubbed version (hence, the addition of Spanish, French, German etc. language packs for the video games as well). Now, the relevance of multilingualism in cinema to *Assassin's Creed: Black Flag* lies in the simple fact Williams described in his research (Williams 2009:816):

[v]ideo games have become a widely popular and highly profitable medium, with more than 40 percent of Americans now playing them regularly (Slagle, 2006). A majority of adults age 18 and older (53%) play video games and approximately one in five adults (21%) play every day or almost every day (Lenhart et al., 2008). [...] It follows that if games are a significant portion of the media diet, they need to be understood as important systems of symbols which might have a broad social impact. In the same vein that television has been thought to create cultivation effects (Gerbner et al., 1994) and to have an impact on the cognitive modeling of social identity formation (Mastro et al., 2007), games also may be influencing players' impressions of social groups, including their own (Comstock and Cobbey, 1979).

Williams's research team also argues that "presence, absence or type of portrayal of social groups matter in a diverse society, ranging from social justice and power imbalance to models of effects and stereotype formation." (2009:818-819) Harwood and Anderson (2002) also suggested, that television (mainstream media) is a mirror which reflects the social power imbalances in society through the visibility of groups. Their ethnolinguistic vitality theory claims, that "measuring the imbalances that exist on the screen can tell us what imbalances exist in social identity formation, social power and policy formation in daily life" (Williams, 2009 818-819).

As such, it is evident that by analysing characters in the game we can get a clear idea about the ideologies and the possible stereotypes they might contain. Williams's findings and his

previous analyses of the representation of race, gender and age suggest that indeed, video games are affected by similar trends mainstream media has also been affected by over the decades (Williams 2009: et al). However, he and his team did not look at the representation of linguistic resources and their connotations with respect to characters; this is, in fact the gap that this study aims at bridging. This will be done with the help of Lukas Bleichenbacher's work, in particular the analytic approach he suggests in his book *Multilingualism in the Movies* (2008).

Bleichenbacher's book provides a useful set of tools for the analysis of the presence and functions of language in cinematic works of art. For example, in a recent paper he (2007: 112), argues that:

“[t]he Hollywood industry, as well as other media, have been accused by numerous commentators of underrepresenting or perpetuating stereotypes of, among others, foreigners and members of various ethnic minorities. However, despite frequent reference to the "linguistic turn" in cultural studies, the language-related aspects of these depictions — how movie dialogues contribute to stereotyping in narration and characterisation — have been treated in a disappointingly marginal way.”

Bleichenbacher's argument above underlies and supports the phenomenon Williams's team noted in their research (Williams 2009:et al). In order to investigate such stereotyping in the cinematic dialogues and representations Bleichenbacher builds on the taxonomy suggested by Mareš. In this study, too, the Mareš taxonomy of including non-English languages in cinematic works or fiction will play an important part.

Now we have arrived to the end of the Theoretical Framework section. What I demonstrated in this section was vital to understand how all the previous discoveries of video game studies, the help of narratology and cultural studies contribute to the study's goals. The main point of this section was to highlight the importance of ethnic and linguistic representation in media, ethnolinguistic presence and methods of historical, yet fictional depiction of reality in a video game like *Assassin's Creed: Black Flag*.

3. THE SET-UP OF THE STUDY

3.1 The research questions

In this section I am going to explain why my choice fell on this particular game and what kind of questions my study is going to discuss.

As a devoted student of languages and gaming enthusiast, my interests always aligned with finding out more about the representation of languages in media, particularly in the video games that I play. In connection with this, I have been a long-time fan of the *Assassin's Creed* franchise since the first game came out (2007, Ubisoft). When my studies reached the point when I had to find a topic for my Master's thesis, I turned to my favourite video games for inspiration. *Assassin's Creed: Black Flag* peaked my interest for multiple reasons, including the multicultural cast of characters, the explorable, open-world setting with languages mixing in the settlements and seemingly natural imbalance between the number of characters belonging to ethnic minorities compared to the characters from an Anglo-Saxon origin.

My decision to analyse this particular game was influenced by the fact that in *Assassin's Creed: Black Flag*, the socio-political conflicts and the representation of the ethnolinguistic status quo in the game world are clearly visible through the narrative and the characters. This means, that the appearance and depiction of ethnic minorityies who employ non-English languages are easily detectable and the narrative, and their social status is clearly identifiable in the depicted time period of the game. The dialogues never miss a chance to highlight the use of a non-English language. Early on I recognized that there was a rule-based, purposefully constructed system by which the depiction and appearance of non-English languages were featured in the game either in spoken or written form. For example, I found it interesting that while Edward was sailing on the sea with his crew, the sailors would always sing melodic shanties, and even though the video game features an ethnically mixed crew on the ship, the shanties were always in English. That was how my first question was formed: how is that, that there are no shanties in other languages? The crew had African and Spanish members, and yet they never get sing in their own languages? Another eye-opening experience was when I visited the village of the indigeneous for the first time and their use of Taíno speech was subtitled on the bottom of the screen, I could hear the idle villagers speak in their tongue but when I visited another time (and from then onward, whenever I returned) the village fell silent. No more Taíno was heard from the villagers, they became mute bystanders of the narrative. I found this puzzling.

This turned my attention to the rest of the settlements, and the rest of the characters who appear in the game, and I began to ask questions during playing. How are the rest of the non-Anglo-Saxon people represented in the game? There is only a set number of characters who appear in the narrative, so I took a closer look at them, which led me to the following question, how do

non-English speaking characters appear in the narrative, how are they introduced to us, the audience? Some of the characters have pivotal roles in forwarding the narrative, some are main villains or close allies to the player character (Edward), and their ethnicities and linguistic repertoires are represented in interesting ways. This led me to the following question: how are ethnic groups represented in the game, how are they depicted on the screen? This was not crystallized enough for my purposes, so I went even further. How does the characters' linguistic repertoire and presence in the narrative affect their representation?

That was when I began to search for studies about *Assassin's Creed*. I was trying to find an answer to these questions.

The final form of my research question is, as it follows: how are ethnicities represented in *Assassin's Creed: Black Flag*, linguistically and narratively?

3.2 Data

First, I must say a few words about the technical apparatus that presents the video game to us in its intended form. I have *Assassin's Creed: Black Flag* on PlayStation 4, and that includes owning a moderately good television, controllers, the PlayStation 4 platform and audio-visual system. It is important to keep in mind and state in the very beginning of this section that in other video games like the *Dragon Age* or *Mass Effect* trilogies, the player has choices to determine how their main character will react in certain situations during the cut-scenes but in *Assassin's Creed*, we do not have that option. We the players watch and observe Edward's story as it unfolds as if we were having a cinematic experience, but ultimately we have no control over his actions in the cut-scenes. We still follow him through his adventures and have control over the method of completions of his story, how we choose to approach a seemingly endless series of obstacles both in the storyline and the game's constructed world (sailing, fighting, crafting, maneuvering in dangerous areas etc.). We can choose to have subtitles for the dialogues during these cut-scenes and by default the game offers them as well, we have to manually switch the subtitles off if we do not require them.

The most efficient methods of collecting data about a video game are: playing it several times while taking notes and screenshots and consulting the game's own encyclopaedia. In the case of a narrative roleplaying based game like *Assassin's Creed: Black Flag*, the help of the video archive of YouTube provided great help since some cinematic cutscenes only appear once in a whole playthrough and since my time was limited, I could not begin an entirely new playthrough (more than 65 hours) just for a cutscene that lasts for twenty seconds. In order to

revisit dialogues between characters more than once, to analyse the appearance of characters and the landscape, I also visited the unofficial Assassin's Creed: Black Flag wikia page, where pictures and descriptions were provided about the relevant question I had.

The selection of characters in the game was based on a practical and also greatly technical decision, since in narrative based, open world games like Black Flag, there are a vast numbers of different types of characters in the video game. The types of characters can be divided into two main categories: the playable character and the non-playable characters (NPC in the following). Since Assassin's Creed has only one controllable character and the rest are all non-player characters (NPCs), a distinction will be made between NPCs who have an impact on the narrative and those who are simply present in the game world to fill the towns and plantations, in order to create a more immersive experience for the player. The latter category is going to be called 'idle NPCs', while the former category will be called 'NPCs with impact'. The idle NPCs have no dialogue options, their utterances are repetitive lines which never go beyond greetings or idle talk about their days or affiliations with other people. The player cannot initiate dialogue with idle characters, yet the game is filled with idle NPCs who dwell in cities, settlements or are simple bandits on uninhabited islands. I am confident in a vast, open-world game like *Black Flag*, there are hundreds of idle NPCs. In contrast, in the case of NPCs with an impact on the story, the player can interact with them and the list of NPCs with impact includes only thirty-two characters.

In order to begin my analysis, I catalogued all NPCs with impact with categories such as their race, appearance, age, gender, language repertoire and general impact (positive, negative or neutral) on the narrative. This catalogue is the backbone of this thesis. To create it, I watched all cinematic cutscenes in which the characters appear, took notes about their accents or dialects (or lack of thereof) and consulted the game's Codex (encyclopaedia found inside the game). For the linguistic landscape analysis, I revisited the towns and settlements in the game and took notes, screenshots about them, then created a list of comparisons and differences.

3.3. Methods of analysis

In this section, I am going to introduce and describe the methods of analysis I applied in this study.

In the present study, I will apply Mareš's taxonomy of strategies for including non-standard language in narrative fiction and cinema to investigate how the game *Assassin's*

Creed: Black Flag represents different languages and ethnicities linguistically and narratively in. In addition, in order to gain insight on the game’s manner of historical representation I will be using Chapman’s theory of historical storyplaying and the role of immersion in games, and Bogost’s methods for the investigation of procedural gaming. In the following I will introduce and discuss my analytic tools in more detail, as well as describe the principles according to which I will proceed to conduct the analysis in practice.

3.3.1 Mareš’s taxonomy of strategies for including non-standard language in narrative fiction and cinema

In the section above I already mentioned the taxonomy, however to understand it in greater detail and apply it in practice with *Assassin’s Creed: Black Flag* I am going to include the same table Bleichenbacher did in his book, and in this study we are going to look at the relevant strategy the taxonomy offers.

Mareš’s semiotic taxonomy (Mareš, P. 2000a. "*Fikce, konvence a realita: k vícejazyčnosti v uměleckých textech*" [Fiction, convention and reality: On multilingualism in artistic texts], 47-53) describes strategies that authors of fictional and cinematic narratives can use to include non-standard language use in their works. It is best described by borrowing Bleichenbacher’s own words (Bleichenbacher: 2008:23).

“The taxonomy focuses on characters’ direct speech, since that is the preferred site for other languages to appear. Mareš’s central notion is that whenever another language would be used by a character within the reality of the story [...], the narrator chooses whether to represent the other language faithfully or to replace it, either through complete elimination or one of two intermediate strategies, signalization [...] and evocation [...].”

Table 1: **Mareš’s taxonomy of strategies for including non-standard language in narrative fiction and cinema** (Bleichenbacher, L. 2008:24)

	Most distant from depicted reality			Closest to depicted reality
Strategy	Elimination	Signalization	Evocation	Presence
Treatment of other languages	Neither used or mentioned	Named by the narrator or characters	Evoked by means of L2 interference phenomenon	Used
Audience	Depends on the	Through	Depends on	Full

awareness of other languages	ability to process extralinguistic hints	metalinguistic comments	correct interpretation of interference phenomena	
Audience comprehension of content	Full	Full	Full, unless the audience is unwilling to listen to nonstandard speech	None, unless the other language is somehow translated

The taxonomy of strategies for including non-standard language in narrative fiction and cinema entails four sub-categories, on the basis of the detectable presence of the non-standard language in the fictional world's reality. In his book, Bleichenbacher (2008:24-25) also describes the strategies, from which I will only include his summary of the strategy of Elimination, "when any speech that would have been in another language is completely replaced with an unmarked standard variety of the base language. The audience is offered no linguistic means of realizing that the other language is replaced at all, unless they correctly interpret contextual evidence which shows that in reality, it is unlikely or impossible that the characters would have used the base language." According to this statement, Elimination is, when the audience only receives hints about the non-standard language's existence, but there is no use of that language, nor any mention. The audience is aware of the non-standard language, but never experiences its use. The second strategy is Signalization, in which the non-standard language is mentioned in the narrative at some point, either through names, metalinguistic comments, but the audience is left being aware of the presence of the language. The third strategy is Evocation, which includes non-standard language interaction but its interpretation is left up to the audience. In the Evocation phase, often (Bleichenbacher, 2008:24-25) "a Spanish accent or a number of short code-switches from English into Spanish can evoke an utterance that would have been monolingual in Spanish in reality". The interpretation is simple, since in the Evocation case these kinds of non-standard language interactions include self-explanatory or universal examples in fiction such as Grandmaster Torres's examples of "por favour, sí, gracias" (Spanish: please, yes, thank you) in *Black Flag*. The audience's interpretation is aided by situational context and universal understanding of these phrases, even accents, code-switches. The final strategy in the taxonomy, and the most closest one to the fictional world's depicted reality is Presence. In the Presence strategy, non-standard languages are fully present and used and comprehension from the audience's part becomes an issue if the audience does not command the use of the non-standard language or there is a translation provided.

The reason behind choosing the strategies *Elimination* or *Signalization* can be to avoid misunderstandings between the audience and the author of the text or cinematic piece (Bleichenbacher, 2008:26). However, I argue that authors are free to utilize multiple types of strategies in one product, depending on their intentions for the characters roles in the narrative and thus the taxonomy can also be used as a compass to describe how multiple groups of ethnicities or characters speak or express themselves on the screen.

Since games whose game world are set in multilingual environments (like *Assassin's Creed: Black Flag*) attempt to produce real-life like conversations with spontaneity and time- and space relevant communication, the use of non-standard (and as such) non-English languages in the narrative suggests an attempt to recreate a more realistic multilingual setting. The intention and phenomena would not be entirely new (Blake 1981: 17). Bleichenbacher's statement only underlines that "the use of certain languages is intrinsically meaningful, for instance as an indicator of geographical setting: French or Spanish are spoken because the story is set in France or Mexico." (2008:26) The Mareš taxonomy also helps discovering the functions of code switching in narrative or the presence of other, non-English languages with the according ideologies or stereotypes.

Bleichenbacher (2008: 21-39) also lists a number of aspects one can use the taxonomy as way to reflect upon: social norms, forms of humor, realism and characterization and stereotyping.. The reason why this study lists all these aspects of Mareš's taxonomy is that *Assassin's Creed: Black Flag* uses multiple strategies during the narrative and in specific cinematic scenes, separated from casual gameplay situations. In order to analyse the game in the depth it requires, the in-depth introduction of such aspects have to be introduced.

Bleichenbacher (2008:27) discusses social criticism, and states that whenever there is a deviation from the base language in a narrative, it "can be motivated by a multitude of narrative and ideological reasons." He continues with examples in which the purpose of code-switching and the use of language varieties and dialects is political (to show the difference between social classes). He concludes that, even though some works clearly use language varieties, code switching and mixes to emphasize differences between social backgrounds and origins, some works use these strategies to "invite them to empathize with the characters, but also create atmospheres of foreignness" (2008: 28). In addition, Bleichenbacher emphasizes that the specific atmosphere can "have strongly positive connotations [...] and also the notion of exoticism [...]. Conversely, foreignness can also be associated with alienation, estrangement and hostility. (Mareš 2003: 31,42 as cited in Bleichenbacher 2008:28)

Bleichenbacher also suggests that, at times misunderstandings between multilingual

interlocutors can be a source for humour, as in the case of puns or situational comedy (2008: 29). However, he also makes the multilingual phenomenon of language switching clear as follows:

“The consistent use of a language which is not understood by one’s interlocutor is a problem source in interactions, while its limited use (for instance in code-switched speech tags) is at least odd, and hence potentially funny. Furthermore, it is precisely the pragmatic oddity of these linguistic choices that invite the audience to interpret them as instances of interlanguage and compensatory strategies for a lack of L2 fluency. Likewise, a character’s use of non-standard language can come across as their inability to use the more prestigious standard.” (ibid)

As suggested above, language varieties serve as a mechanisms in narrative fiction to index a character’s connection to social groups or their linguistic capabilities. Bleichenbacher (2008:30) summarizes the contrast between standard language users and characters who “deviate” from the standard as “[t]he main reason for language variation among characters is to create narrative contrasts: specific linguistic varieties mark certain characters as special and different from the other ones.” A similar point has also been made by Blake (1981:12-14) who argues that

“Because literature has until the recent present been written by the educated, it is not unnatural that non-standard language has been widely looked down upon as being the appropriate language for the lowly born, the foolish and the ignorant. Hence non-standard language has been a marker or class and of comedy, [...]. [...] When, in a literary work a character speaks in a non-standard way he will be immediately contrasted with those characters who use the standard.” (12-14)

As an example of Blake’s description above, Grandmaster Torres’s use of Spanish (non-standard language as opposed to the standard English) expresses his Otherness.

Bleichenbacher expands his theory to entail how the representation and utilization of non-standard languages is a method of depiction of characters on screen.

Language ideologies can also be found in cinematic works, and thus, even in video games with cinematic cut scenes such as *Assassin’s Creed: Black Flag*. For example, Bleichenbacher introduces the theory of iconization, which can be identified in cinematic works where beside the standard use of English, and a variety of English is depicted in a certain manner as follows: (2008:35) “[i]conization means that the cinematic depictions of languages

other than English and of L2 varieties of English in movies point, in a strict and iconic manner, to the negative evaluation of the characters who use them, or to an overall lack of prestige, significance, or even just normality of the situations in which they are used.” It is one way to associate a character with negative attributes just by their use of language.

In *Assassin’s Creed: Black Flag*, due to the presence of an economical, international conflict multiple nations and ethnic groups are fighting against each other, and the depictions of characters are influenced by their language use. Bleichenbacher’s theories to unite the taxonomy with language ideologies is a highly important component of the upcoming analysis.

With the help of Mareš’s taxonomy such intentions can be highlighted. Characterization and stereotyping are part of all the taxonomy is capable of detecting. Depending on which strategy one finds in a literary or cinematic work of art, (elimination, signalization, evocation or presence) the way language use becomes a describing feature of a character is a method of characterization nonetheless. By being able to detect a character’s accent, manner of speech and whether or not they employ a form of code-switching during the narrative, this study is going to consider such utterances and occurrences as consciously made narrative choices by the authors (in this case, Ubisoft).

3.3.2. Analysing history in *Assassin’s Creed: Black Flag*, as suggested by Adam Chapman and video games played as History

In this section, I will introduce and discuss Adam Chapman’s theory about analysing video games which contain history as one of their defining attributes. The theory and all it entails also contributes to the study’s perspective about how one can analyse and detect patterns of depictions and representations in historical video games (such as the *Assassin’s Creed* franchise, 2007-2017- by Ubisoft).

To understand Chapman’s theory, I need to remind my reader about the essential components of narrative based video games, as discussed, for example, by Ian Bogost (2007) and Janet Murray (1997). According to them, these components include procedurality, spatiality, interactivity (agency), and encyclopaedic scope while Chapman emphasizes (2016) the gamer’s interaction with the game world, and the role of history in games are key aspects of video games. In addition, following Domsch’s notion of *storyplaying* *Storyplaying* (2013: 4), he (2016:33) argues that narrative video games also involve the dimension of *(hi)story-play-space*. With the development of historical, simulational video games, a channel has

opened to the history-consumers and historians while up until recently (the publishing of *Sid Meier's Civilization*, 1991:Sid Meier, MPS Labs), only historians had the authority to *produce* history through their research while audiences only had the power of *receiving* (Chapman 2016:33-34). Chapman also argues (ibid) that:

“There are of course various theories as to how active this audience should be seen as, but it is generally agreed that there is at least some kind of difference between *production (doing)* and *reception (reading)*. [...] However, in historical games, players also have access to *production* in the story space because players also have access to *doing* and as already discussed, this *doing* can affect the narratives that are created. Digital games [...] open up the story space for shared authorship.” (2016:33-34 italics original)

What does Chapman mean by shared authorship? With video games like *Assassin's Creed*, it becomes evident in the very early stages of gameplay that the history we are playing through is bound by very similar rules of physical and social boundaries like in real life. Yet, active gameplay is strongly affected by the experience of re-living, or re-enacting a particular historical era, while the particular era is also shaped by the player's own playstyle.

“[...] [T]he historical narrative produced in these games is always produced by the actions of both the developer-historian *and* the player. The former determines the nature and components of the story space and the latter determines which narratives are eventually told within it, by configuring them within the limitations established by these components. Through play, historical narratives can be simultaneously emergently produces *and* received by players within a more open digital manifestation of the historian's traditional story space, which therefore becomes [...] *(hi)-story-play-space*.” (Chapman 2016:34).

In other words, when we are playing a game like *Assassin's Creed: Black Flag* we are playing through a previously created re-enactment of history that is carefully pre-arranged and waiting to be told by a developer, who is our historian in this case. Despite this, the narrative will also be affected by the player's choices; they will have an impact on, for example, the frequency of certain encounters, the order of encounters, duration of encounters or missions (if there is a set time limit, this is even more crucial), and several other factors such as moral and ethical decisions made by the player in the relevant situations.

However, historical games offer gamers more than agency over the narrative. Game worlds like *Assassin's Creed: Black Flag* also include a re-interpretation, a re-telling or in any

case, a recreation of humanity's history, and the player is invited to participate and reshape, re-interpret the game's own retelling or representation of history. Following Dening (2007:12) Chapman calls such actions *historying* (2016:23), describing it as follows. "Games differ from many other historical forms because, alongside being capable of sustaining historical representations, they also invite the audience to *actively* take part in history and can therefore offer players access to particular kinds of historical *practice* (that is to say opportunities for *doing* history)". (Chapman 2016:22, italics original). According to Dening (2007:102), *historying* actually involves more than this. In his words, "[h]istory' – the past transformed into words or paint or dance or music or play, -- is our noun. 'Historying' is our verb-noun. Historying is the unclosed action of making histories. History, the noun, is shaped, a product. Historying is a process, never done, dialectical and dialogic."

Games like *Assassin's Creed: Black Flag* offer both a segment of history and the chance to actively participate in the era and the social, political or economic conflicts that particular era had to endure. Chapman (2016:32) acknowledges this in the second chapter of his book as follows.

"Remaining conscious of the fact that players have agency must be at the centre of our understanding of historical games. Whereas again competing definitions of agency also exist, it is sufficient to understand this as "the feeling of empowerment that comes from being able to take actions in the world whose effects relate to the player's intention" (Mateas 2004,21)." (Chapman, 2016:30) This means that players are invited to interact with the game's world, the game's offered reality and the perception of history the players create in their minds: the use of language and methods of representation of ethnic groups also belongs to that perception. Chapman also highlights the importance of historical games being a fusion of rules and fiction (2016:31) and still draws attention to the actions *reading* and *doing*. Reading is closely connected to the perception of the game world and understanding the set of procedural rulemaking, and doing means actively participating and cooperating with the game world's ways to operate and play by the rules. In *Assassin's Creed: Black Flag* the actions of reading and doing affect the games narrative as such, "whereby we have a lot of spatial agency in an open-world and a modest amount of narrative agency, we may decide not to visit a location or choose to avoid particular missions. By making choices in our gameplay we therefore configure a narrative that excludes there particular game spaces or evens in favour of others.

The reason why an in-depth exploration of key aspects of video games was necessary is, that in this study, the aspect of *Assassin's Creed: Black Flag* creating a historical setting with pre-ordained world-building is extremely important. Players of this game have control

over *some* aspects of gameplay, but not all; in fact, they cannot change the ending of the storylines, and can only moderately affect the delivery. The way history is being represented in the game is beyond the player's power: s/he cannot change the dialects, voices, representations of languages or ethnic groups of the game. The way languages and ethnic minorities are represented during the narrative sequences or in other elements of gameplay (character behavior in idle moments or in heated situations) are part of the overall depiction of history the developer-historian created for the player. What the player can try to do is to change and help a character's fate, but overall, even then he/she cannot save a character that is destined to become a villain or destined to perish. (Chapman 2016:51)

“Historical games are unusual because they allow us to both *read* their representations and to manipulate these representations through structured *doing*. They are simultaneously both historical representations and systems for *historying*. As discussed, this relationship between *reading* and *doing* can be complex. However, it does mean that playing historical games can also be understood as a process of *writing* historical narratives in a relationship of shared authorship with developer historians. Importantly, this shared authorship and the discussed tensions it introduces means that games are also a particularly discursive form of history.”

The relevance of this point by Chapman is how historical videogames recreate the particular perception of historical reality for the player. By doing so, players can immerse themselves in a game world that is similar to ours. *Assassin's Creed: Black Flag* is a well-known example of success in such world building. The (hi)storyplaying in such games is done by a simulation of history depicted in an interactive, immersive and yet rule-bound experience.

In *Assassin's Creed: Black Flag*, the simulation becomes apparent to the player when s/he realizes that there is a science-fiction layer embedded into the game's narrative framework. This science-fiction narrative layer “explain[s] the reports on historical objects as coming from the historian in the contemporary team supporting the historical hero. In these moments, tense becomes less clear, shifting from one moment of gameplay to the next, with players dealing with sources about/from the past and yet the representation and gameplay also involving the maintenance of a sense of present tense.” (Chapman 2016:98) As a consequence, in the present tense timeline the player is aware of the game being a simulation, a recreation and enactment of the past, but once the narrative shifts back into the historical, past-tense storylines, the player is allowed to immerse in the game-world's storyplaying experience.

Moreover, *Assassin's Creed: Black Flag's* style of simulating history can be seen as an example of "The Realist" style (Chapman 2016:61). According to Chapman (2016:61-64), realist simulation does not equal with precise re-enactment or production of history in a video game. Rather, it is a style with fantasy element but with a realist approach to represent the historical content and the general structure (contemporary, appropriate social, geographical, economical aspects of the game world) that this involves.

"First, *realist simulations*:

- **Generally work by aiming and/or claiming to *show* the past 'how it was' i.e. as it appeared to historical agents of the time.**
[...]
- **Relatively easy for audiences to interpret.**
- **Can easily engage with existing realist visual discourses and tropes from, for instance, film or television."** (Chapman, 2016: 61-64 bold original)

The fact that *Assassin's Creed: Black Flag* is a realist simulation has more significance than it first seems. One of the key elements of the *Assassin's Creed* franchise is the developer studio's efforts to create realistically presented game worlds for the players with "high degree of visual specificity" (term by Chapman, 2016:61-64). Such a high degree of visual specificity involves "environments, objects, characters and effects are visually detailed and show a degree of fidelity to the physical evidence of the past and the everyday world. Audio-visual elements commonly feature over little overt metaphorisation, and the concern is with producing a representation of the past that imitates direct human experience." (ibid) Such audio-visual elements include observing executions during the French revolutions in *Assassin's Creed: Unity* (Ubisoft, 2010), recreating the accurately presented map of Rome from the 16th century in *Brotherhood* (Ubisoft, 2010).



Figure: 2, Street view and overlook of Rome's Campagna District in *Assassin's Creed: Brotherhood* (Ubisoft, 2010)

Apart from Chapman, Douglas N. Dow describes the immersive simulational approaches of the *Assassin's Creed* games in his article, *Historical Veneers, Anachronism, Simulation and Art History in Assassin's Creed II* (2013). He describes the game world's (*hi*)-*story-play-space* as an ability to control the simulative, visual historical representation (Dow, 2013:215-31). For the purposes of this study, Chapman's notion of games mark it as a realist simulation is a highly useful one, along with Mareš's taxonomy of strategies for including non-standard languages in fiction, and Bleichenbacher's notions of social norms, humor, realism, characterization and stereotypes.

3.3.3 Ian Bogost and procedurality

In the beginning of the study I have touched upon procedurality as one of most essential aspect of video games. However, procedurality is not only essential in video games, but also in other types of media, whose use requires generally accepted rules which have become conventions over the years. Procedurality is defined by Bogost (2007: 3) as

“In common parlance, *procedure* invokes notions of officialdom, even bureaucracy: a procedure is a static course of action [...]. [...] But in fact, procedures in this sense of the word structure behaviour; we tend to “see” a process only when we challenge it. Likewise, procedure and the

law are often closely tied. [...] Thanks to these common senses of the term, we tend to think of procedures as fixed and unquestionable. Procedures are sometimes related to ideology; they can cloud our ability to see other ways of thinking [...].” (Bogost, 2007:3)

According to him, procedures surround us everywhere, in official, medical circumstances, and even in films and video games. Because of our repetitive and solidified procedures and practices, our judgement can be clouded by the casual experience of repetitive practices, in the form of prejudices. Such practices can include stereotypisation, an overall repetitive style of representation of, for example, language varieties and ethnic groups (discussed more in detail in the Analysis section), this is a form of how prejudices against groups of people can form in our minds. Procedures can also become part of our everyday lives in that, through repetitive procedures, we may gradually adopt ideologies (e.g. racism, religion, certain behavioural patterns and ways of thinking). This is exactly the same logic as in situations in which we can follow and accept procedures imposed by officials or people with authority (Bogost, 2007:5). Furthermore, [p]rocedurality in the computer-scientific sense preserves a relationship with the more familiar sense of *procedure* discussed above (cf. Murray, 1997). “Like courts and bureaucracies, computer software establishes rules of execution, tasks and actions that can and cannot be performed.”(Bogost 2007:4) For example, the game allows the player to jump roof-to-roof, climb up on tall buildings and explore wide urban areas like so, yet Edward’s stamina is not endless, nor is he capable of flying. If he falls, he will suffer injuries or in bad cases, he will die. To prevent that, it is programmed by the software to have soft landing surfaces ready (haystack, pile of leaves) below the tall viewpoints, so the player can jump into from a high point, so Edward will not die from falling from such a high point. This is a reliable system which is present in all *Assassin’s Creed* games.



Figure: 3 “Diving off Viewpoints” from “www.gamerguides.com”, with the haystack visible under Edward’s leaping figure

An another important aspect of procedurality discussed by Bogost (2007:10) is *procedural representation*. For the purposes of this study, this notions is also relevant, because also the representation of reality, agents, behavioural patterns, processes, and actions can be patterned and pre-determined in certain types of situations, occurring on cue, repetitively. An example in video game context is, that after finishing a quest (series of tasks), the player character receives rewards for the completion of the quest and instructions to speak with the next quest-giver non-player character, to initialize a new series of tasks. The new series of tasks will introduce new places, new characters and will result in taking the narrative forward and new rewards after completion. Video-game players also have the commonly shared practice of crafting their possessions (weapons, clothing, improving vehicles) across different narrative-based, open world games. This works, since the basic mechanics of crafting are shared across the games, and one practice can be applied across multiple games, such as collecting gold, resources from fallen enemies and combining those resources.

According to Bogost (2007:10), “[p]rocedural representation itself requires inscription in a medium that actually enacts processes rather than merely describe them. Human behavior is one mode of procedural inscription. Human actors can enact processes; we do it all the time.” Nevertheless, most of the time humans do not notice such procedures, not even when we learn how to write and read, or, say, to fill our tax forms. On the one hand, we certainly do not notice

how through procedures depicted on screen (when gaming or watching movies, television series), we are being taught procedurally about certain behavioural patterns or representations of such processes. On the other hand, once one begins to design a pattern for processes to convey a message, or to teach a certain behavioural pattern, one is already employing proceduralism for a different purpose than simply repetitively applying the same rule-based, pre-determined course of action. This is how procedural rhetoric becomes apparent.

Bogost discusses his definition of rhetoric in the sections (2007:15-40) entailing multimodal forms of rhetoric (verbal, nonverbal, visual, digital and procedural). When discussing the topic about how video games can be interpreted, by the perspective of visual or digital rhetoric, Bogost creates a clear distinction between the two. In the section of Digital Rhetoric he highlights that

“[t]o be sure, visual rhetoric is often at work in videogames, a medium that deploys both still and moving images. [...] But in procedural media like videogames, images are frequently constructed, selected, or sequenced in code, making the stock tools of visual rhetoric inadequate.” (2007:24-25)

The study of visual rhetoric in historical video games is necessary to point out the intentionality of selection for specific choices in illustrations of overall street views (population, dirt, daytime activities of inhabitants), advertisements and shop signs on the streets. Another kind of illustration is also methods of clothing according to the time period (dresses, textile patterns and attires). These kinds of illustrations have impact on the player's perception of the game world and affect our evaluation of the game world's representation of reality.

In this study however, using procedural rhetoric as a method of analysis is indeed an attempt to break this trend since in the Analysis section I am going to look at how visual representation of certain characters and uses of language match stereotypes of representation and clarify their relation to the process of characterization. In Bogost's views, one more aspect of proceduralism is rhetorics. By this, he means

“[...] the practice of using processes persuasively, [...]. Procedural rhetoric is a general name for the practice of authoring arguments through processes. [...] Following the contemporary model, procedural rhetoric entails expression—to convey ideas effectively. [...] [i]ts arguments are made not through the construction of words or images, but through the authorship of rules

of behaviour, the construction of dynamic models. In computation, those rules are authored by code, through practice of programming.” (2007:29)

Here I would like to return to the nature of procedures and repetitiveness. A similar phenomenon is detected in mainstream media by the conscious repetition of certain structured practices, behavioural patterns. This brings us back to the beginning of this study where I quoted from William’s (2009: et al) study about how repetitive patterns of stereotypes and representation affect the audience’s perception of certain groups of people. In cinema, the rules are authored by conventions and through the practices of cinematic narratives which have become cinematic stereotypes or tropes. Accordingly, procedurality does not only occur in video games’ deep structure coding and how they construct the world building through algorithms, but in such cases like *Assassin’s Creed: Black Flag* the repetitive cinematic conventions are becoming part of the overall structure as well. Cinematic cutscenes are part of the game’s narrative, whether or not the player intends to view them or not. Cut-scenes are passive, nodal elements in the narrative and the game’s complex series of processes: the player can initiate a cut-scene but can also avoid them, once they learn the consequences of triggering the node in the game’s algorithm. As such, procedurality proposes a dual presence: in the game’s coding to trigger a cut-scene at detectable, procedural patterns or at the same time, teach the player to manipulate the timing and order of the cut-scenes by noticing and structuring the triggers in the order the player wants them to trigger.

The same opportunity to pinpoint focal points of procedurality and procedural rhetoric in *Assassin’s Creed:Black Flag* occurs when, in the same ways as in cinematic narratives and practices, languages and characters are repeatedly shown to have certain features. The contrast between cinematic works and video games is the presence of algorithms and the targeted audience.

3.3.4 Analytic focus, analytic aims

As mentioned in the Data section, my data consists of screen shots from the game and extracts of dialogue uttered in the game. The characters and their connection to the narrative will be analyzed from multiple perspectives: attention will be paid to dialogue, manners, accents and the role the characters take in the story, may that be good, bad or neutral. The number of non-English lines they utter will also be measured, because this also has an impact on their depiction.

In the analysis, I will cover the list of non-playable characters with impact, aside the analysis of the game's narration, the cinematic cutscenes between the periods of quests and missions (which are controllable by the player while the cinematic cutscenes are not). This means that in the analysis as well, I take count all the characters who participate in the narrative and categorize them according to their nationality, race, first language, accent or dialect, and their alignment. By doing so I will get an unbiased, objective image about each character who has an impact on the narrative and will be able to see the broader picture instead of analysing the characters one by one.

Another part of my analysis will focus on the linguistic landscape in which the story takes place, namely the colonies under British or Spanish rule, plantations on the Caribbean islands and uncharted territories owned by the indigenous population. This is also going to be conducted by the use of the Mares's taxonomy and Bleichenbacher's theories of multilingualism in fictional, cinematic environments. While linguistic landscape is another aspect that is often marginalized or forgotten in video game studies (I have yet to find any that includes such an analysis), it is an essential component of the game world and thus, the representation of reality the game offers to the player. Linguistic landscape entails street signs and any other written utterance of language, which appears on screen while the player explores the game-world. In *Assassin's Creed: Black Flag* the game world is a contact zone for English, Spanish and the indigenous Taíno language, and in the chapter dedicated to linguistic landscape analysis, I am going to discuss how these languages are represented as part of the game's re-enactment of historical reality.

The aforementioned goals are also going to serve as an opportunity to systematically show how the non-English speaker characters are being depicted and how the game's surrounding world establishes diversity. It is an immersive process, thus the player identifies with several aspects the game requires them to.

While I will also draw conclusions from the game's rhetoric in storytelling (meaning, how the game's subtle messages are being conveyed and strengthened through the narrative devices), my aim is to describe and draw logical conclusions from the game without looking at the algorithms or the coding. Simply put, I am observing the game and take notes through the lenses of linguistic, sociolinguistic analysis and present my findings in an order that seams the parts together as McAllister suggests in his book *Game Work: Language, Power and Computer Game Culture* (McAllister 2004:29). To have a deeper understanding of the method I am using, I will refer to McAllister's work and, more specifically, to his discussion of the within that, the chapter "G"grammar of gamework". McAllister makes a clear distinction between

analyzing video games through the lense of rhetoric and dialectic approaches however the two can be combined or stay separated depending on the research questions.

“For centuries, scholars have debated over the nature and purview of rhetoric and dialectic, and they have argued for almost as long about the relationship between the two. In the context of computer game studies there is little reason to rehearse these debates, and for our purposes it will suffice to note that dialectics is a way to search for truths, while rhetoric is a way to convey truths. The use of “truths” here is not meant to be absolutist; rather, by linking rhetoric and dialectic to truth I mean only to signify their ideal relationship to praxis, that is, to endless processes of studying the world (dialectical inquiry) and using the fruits of that study to change it (rhetoric). The truths after which dialecticians strive are dynamic, nonlinear, and multivalent, and their assemblage into logical stories that make sense in some way—rationally, emotionally, spiritually, and so on—is achieved through rhetorical means. The interplay between dialectical inquiry and rhetoric, then, is what enables the construction of histories, scientific facts, political exigencies, and a host of other discursive formations. Understanding the dynamics of this relationship is essential for scholars who are working to understand a sociocultural dynamic in which artifacts like computer games are always already embedded.” (2004:29)

Understanding the sociocultural dynamics in *Assassin’s Creed: Black Flag* requires this perspective to maintain an unbiased view while also delving into the game’s world and narrative effectively since in an attempt to conduct an analysis about a video game, one must be thoroughly familiar with the source material.

When referring to characters’ alignment in the narrative, I am going to categorize them according to the easily comprehensible guide found on TvTropes.org, (<http://tvtropes.org/pmwiki/pmwiki.php/Main/CharacterAlignment>) and I will attach the relevant link to the character’s short description in the footnote. However, I will only do so when I discuss a significant character with impact, and the Analysis requires more information about the character’s background and stance on the narrative.

4. ANALYSIS AND FINDINGS

In this chapter, I am going to analyse the strategies used in *Assassin’s Creed: Black Flag* to mobilize multiple languages in the game world. The sections of this chapter are going to go in the following order. With the help of Bleichenbacher’s (2008:24) insights and Mareš’s

taxonomy of strategies of language representation in cinema, I will first identify the strategies with which other languages, besides the base language of the game, are used. After this, I will conduct a more detailed analysis of the kinds of multilingualism there are in the game, as well as discuss whether the use of different languages relates to character stereotypes, and the language policies and detectable ideologies used in their characterization. Thirdly, with the help of Chapman's framework of realistic simulation of history in video games, I will discuss in what kinds of stances the characters representing different ethnicities has assigned, as well as how their stance (positive, negative or neutral affiliation with the main character) affects the way in which they are represented.

4.1 Multilingualism in Assassin's Creed: Black Flag

4.1.1. Linguistic landscape in *Assassin's Creed: Black Flag*

With the help of the upcoming linguistic landscape analysis, I will provide a framework for my reader about the game's depicted world. It is important to see how linguistic landscape contributes to the game's world building, to enhance immersion. By understanding the linguistic landscape, the reader will also receive information about how linguistic landscape constitutes the foundations of linguistic diversity in *Black Flag*.


As I have already mentioned, *Assassin's Creed: Black Flag* is set in a multilingual, exotic environment, in the the West Indies. Over the years from the very first *Assassin's Creed* games, Ubisoft made an effort in re-creating a detailed and realistic simulation of the historical era and place for their games. In this, they were quite successful: they have received and were nominated for multiple awards for the visual effects and graphics of their games (in 2007, 2009, 2010, 2013, 2014, IMDb). *Assassin's Creed: Black Flag* is no exception in Ubisoft's attempts to create a game world fully functional on its own in terms, including fascinating visual animations to represent and depict a simulation of reality that could have been our own back in the same historical era.






Figure 4: “Discovering Havana” (<http://www.gamersheroes.com/game-pages/assassins-creed-iv-black-flag/>)

Once the player and Kenway reach the first settlements it becomes clear that the game represents the West Indies as a heavily populated, international melting pot of cultures and languages. Kenway’s travels take him to Nassau, the town of the pirates, Kingston, a town governed by the British, then and finally to Havana, a town governed by the Spanish. The differences between the three major settlements are striking, and the player encounters these contrasts and differences from the very first moments of the game. Next, I am going to introduce all street signs in the game, divided into three categories depending on which town they were found in.

Table 2: Street signs in Nassau

Street sign	Transcript	Analysis
	<p>“Babins Cabins”</p>	<p>English “cabins” paired with an English name Babins. Although the possessive mark’s punctuation is missing, it is evident</p>


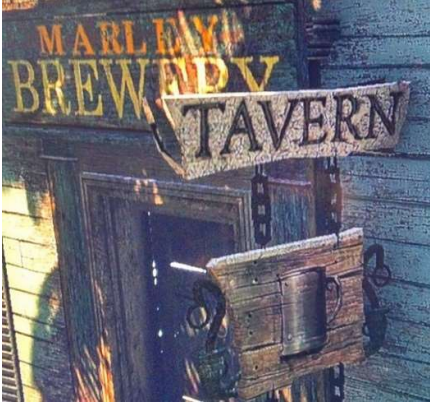

		the establishment is some sort of motel.
	“Fresh Oysters”	Monolingual English sign for a fisher company selling oysters.
	“General Store”	Monolingual English sign for a company selling all sorts of wares (food, equipment for sailing, housebuilding)
	“Tobacco”	Monolingual English sign for a company selling tobacco.

One of the key settings in the game is Nassau. It is full of rundown wooden buildings that no longer have any color left. Tropical palm forests and a sandy beach surround the town. It is a small settlement compared to Havana and Kingston, yet, just like in the other two towns, there are many civilians roaming the streets. Occasionally, the player meets a ragged British flag on a few buildings. Nassau’s street signs are mostly in English, including the “General Store”, “Harbormaster”, “Room for Rent” (on the roof of a building), “Tavern”, “Fresh Oyster” and “Rum for All” poster. Initially it was populated by British soldiers patrolling the streets in red uniforms, but after the invasion of pirates, the soldiers vanished from the streets. The ever-present mercenaries and prostitutes for hire can also be found on Nassau. Mercenaries are all white men in units of four just like the prostitutes however; the group of prostitutes consist of two African, Two Hispanic/Latino per unit. The Harbormaster speaks Spanish, despite the town’s history with the British. To show the town’s mixed allegiance, there are signs which can otherwise be found in the Spanish Havana and the British Kingston, for example the street sign for “Frederico Ancla Canyao” (shown in the upcoming Table X) can be found in both Spanish and British settlements while “Babins Cabins” seems to operate only in Kingston and Nassau, but not on the Spanish Havana.

Up next, I am going to show the street signs found in Kingston.

Table 3: Street signs in Kingston:

Street Sign	Transcript	Analysis
	<p>“Old Bakery” and “Sand&Taylor”</p>	<p>Monolingual English sign for a bakery.</p>
	<p>“Marley Brewery”</p>	<p>Monolingual English sign for a brewery.</p>
	<p>“Paradiso Flower”</p>	<p>“<i>Paradiso</i>”: Spanish word for paradise. “Flowers”: English word. The sign is this a mixture of Spanish and English words.</p>
	<p>“Frederico Ancla Canyao”</p>	<p>Street sign for a sailing company featuring a Spanish word: (“<i>Ancla</i>”: anchor), the rest is a male name with Spanish origin (“<i>Frederico</i>”) and the pseudo-Spanish word “<i>Canyao</i>”.</p>


	<p>“Savi.Co & Sons”, underneath: “Weapons”</p>	<p>The word Savi has meaning in Spanish slang (gorgeous, perfect person), but it is also an Indian name. The rest of the sign is in Monolingual English, yet the “Savi” suggests a more international background.</p>
	<p>“Tavern”</p>	<p>Monolingual English for a local pub.</p>
	<p>“T. Einalem” “Red de Pesca” “Fresh Tobacco”</p>	<p>“T. Einalem” stands for the individual owning a fishing net (“Red de Pesca”) company. The “Fresh Tobacco” sign features the English word “Fresh” paired with the Spanish “Tobaco”. Mixed languages: Spanish and English.</p>





In comparison to Nassau, Kingston is a province owned by only the British. It has colourful wooden buildings, decorated in a modest style. Kingston is surrounded by plantations and rocky areas dotted by thick tropical forests. The civilians roaming the streets speak English and the town has British flags posed around the most populated areas. Kingston features a number of street signs which are also the mixtures of Spanish and English, sometimes the direct mixture of those languages. The player meets the “Frederico Ancla Canyao” sign here too, as well as the “T.Einalem Red De Pesca” sign with blue background and fishnets and including “Fresh Tobacco” right under the image of fishnets. The “Old Bakery” sign bears the names

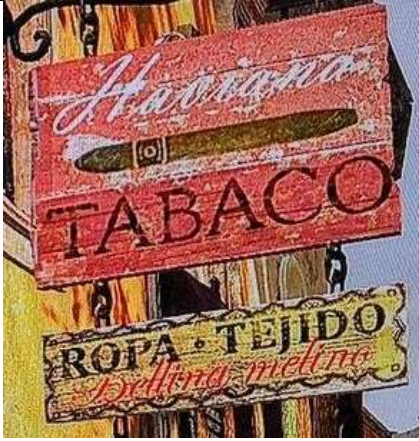

“Sand&Taylor”, the flower shop is called “Paradiso Flower”, and the tavern has the sign, “Marley Brewery”. The Harbormaster speaks English in Kingston, and a large number of British soldiers in red uniforms frequently patrol the streets. The town is surrounded by plantations and the workers there are all people of color: people with Latino/a or African origin. In comparison to the plantation’s workers, the town’s only mill employs mainly white men with a few Latinos among them, at its construction site. The prostitutes and mercenaries in Kingston are also different from Nassau: the mercenaries here are also white and Latino men, and the group of prostitutes consists of one black female and three white females.

The last settlement in the list is Havana, the most colourful city that can be found in the game.

Table 4: Street signs in Havana

Street Signs	Transcript	Analysis
	<p>“Apollo Antwan” “Taurina Polno”</p>	<p>“Apollo Antwan” is a pseudo-Spanish and English sounding name for a man from mixed origins. Apollo is the fictionalized version of Apollo, while Antwan is an existing name in English-speaking countries. “Taurina Polno” is also similarly a pseudo-Spanish name, since Taurina is an existing Spanish female name, but Polno is fictional. The sign includes traces of both Spanish and English languages.</p>

	<p>“Fernadia” “Hensen&Barkly”</p>	<p>While “Fernadia” is a pseudo-Spanish name without meaning, the names “Hensen” and “Barkley” suggest English origins.</p>
	<p>“Golden Panaderia”</p>	<p>While “Golden” is an English word, “Panaderia” means bakery in Spanish. The sign includes both Spanish and English languages.</p>
	<p>“Rum for All”</p>	<p>This street sign only includes English words.</p>
	<p>“Sireni” “Nori Dira”</p>	<p>The word “sireni” has resemblance to the Latin origins of the word siren, and it is not Spanish. The “Nori Dira” is another example of a Spanish or Latin sounding expression.</p>

	<p>“Haviana” “TABACO” “Ropa Tejido” “Bellina Melino”</p>	<p>“Haviana” could be taken as the Spanish-ized version of Havana, except it is a purely fictional word. Tabaco is the Spanish word for tobacco. “Ropa” means “clothes” in Spanish, and “tejido” means fabric. “Bellina Melino” is another example of the pseudo-Spanish, Latin sounding words the game employs to create more immersion for the player.</p>
	<p>“Whisky Wea[ineligible] “Extra Special Brand”</p>	<p>Wholly English text for a whiskey brewer. The text is old, and parts of it are not readable anymore.</p>

Havana is very similar to Kingston. The Spanish influence is present in the town’s culture. Havana has brick buildings with a significant amount of embellishments and colours, bent iron decorations on the balconies and windows and red tile roofs. It undoubtedly has a Mediterranean, richly populated resort atmosphere, which is only ruined by the “PYRATES BEWARE” sign at the front of the harbor (shown below).



Figure 5: "PYRATES BEWARE" sign in Havana's harbour

Surprisingly, there is one English flag to be found in Havana. In contrast, Spanish can be seen in many places in the town. The street signs are: "Haviana Tabaco", "Ropa Tejido Bellina Melino", "Frederico Ancia Canyao", "Fernandia Hensen & Barkly", "Sireni Nori Dira", "Taurina Polni", "Apallo Antwan", "Golden Panaderia" and "Savi. Co & Sons". Spanish soldiers in yellow uniforms also patrol the town and they speak Spanish, in contrast to Kingston's English speaking soldiers. The mercenaries include more Hispanic men, and the prostitutes are pre-dominantly Latina women. The Harbormaster speaks Spanish and the idle civilians on the streets also speak Spanish.

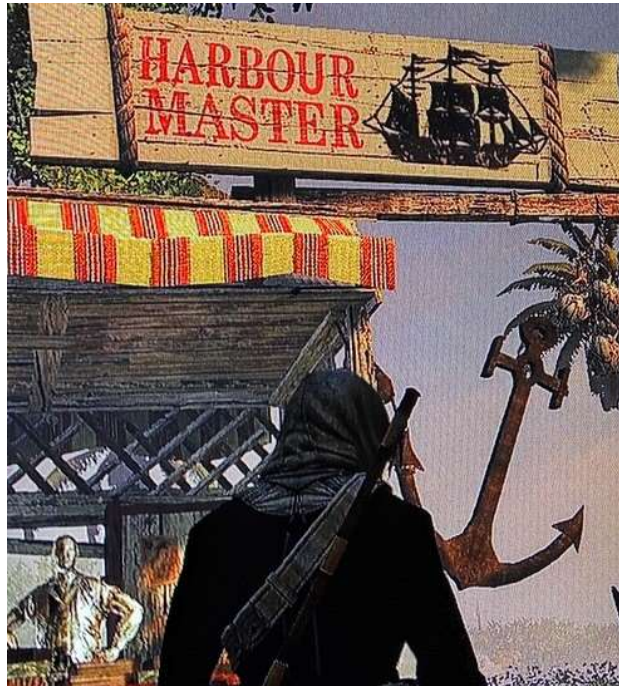


Figure 6: the Harbourmaster and the player character (screenshot original)

There is also a Native village in the uncharted territories on a remote island. The village also serves as a compound for the local branch of the Assassin Order. It includes no written signs in their settlement. After the initial quests to gain their alliance, the Natives also fall silent and in contrast to Nassau, Kingston and Havana, the villagers roaming the streets do not speak at all. In addition, as the descriptions show above, despite the presence of the Natives in the depicted world, we do not see indigenous people on the streets of Kingston, Havana or Nassau.

On the basis of these kinds of observations, it seems clear that the Natives in the game are a marginalized, if not an eliminated group. As suggested by Bleichenbacher (2008:24), one of the strategies with which fiction and film can deal with multilingualism is *'elimination'*. In this game, the villagers lose their voice after a certain point in the narrative, and will not be able to engage in dialogue with Kenway, nor does their village include any street signs in their own language. Their language is eliminated, and despite their importance in the narrative, their voice is only heard via Ah Tabai and Opia Apito.

The main cities (Nassau, Kingston and Havana) are depicted with a specific narrative strategy to enhance player immersion and world building: the street signs use pseudo-Spanish and pseudo-English names which indicate the presence of these languages for the player. The majority of the streets signs (in which an English word is paired with non-English words) fall under what Bleichenbacher calls “unrealistic code-switching” (2008:80): this means that code

switching “operates exclusively on the level of narration and not within the story” (ibid). From the above list, those shops which the player frequently visits are always and exclusively English (General Store, weapon trader, harbourmaster) without code-switching. “Unrealistic code-switches are a highly marked phenomena, in that they expose the semiotic absurdity of replacement by contrasting it with the more realistic presence” (ibid). This means that pairing an English word with a non-English one creates a stark contrast to be recognized by the player, and to be acknowledged by the player that his surroundings are a linguistically mixed environment. Examples include the signs such as “Golden Panaderia, Haviana Tabaco, Paradiso Flower”. The non-English words on the street signs of Havana all suggest Spanish sounding words, thus the player perceives the Spanish town’s impression as such. “Thus, while the unrealistic nature of the code-switch is foregrounded by the cinematographic technique, the linguistic context is skillfully adapted to embed the code-switch in the conversation and even lend it some pragmatic likelihood.”(ibid)

In *Assassin’s Creed: Black Flag*, the street signs function as tool to enhance immersion. Often, even though a street sign might mark a bakery in the alley, upon entering the narrow opening the player will not find the bakery. Similarly, there are no flower shops, fish stores etc., that the player could find and visit. They simply do not exist in the game world, yet the street signs indicate their presence in the world. If the player is crafty, they can use the street sign’s holster to climb up on the building in case they need a quick escape from a fight, but other than that, the signs do not have any function in the game other than their presence and contribution to the game world’s linguistic representation. They simply signal the presence of languages and therefore, are classified to be under the Signalization strategy of the Mares Taxonomy (Bleichenbacher 2008:24). Signalization is, when the non-standard language is mentioned in the narrative, either through names, metalinguistic comments, but the audience is left being aware of the presence of the language.

Through Edward’s adventures the player visits multicultural and linguistically diverse locations, and through the analysis above my reader also received impressions about these settlements. Now I will turn my attention to the analysis of the characters with impact on the narrative.

4.1.2 The Characters

Assassin’s Creed: Black Flag has approximately thirty-one non-playable characters who have an impact on the narrative. Each character has their own entry in the game’s encyclopaedia

known as Codex, where there is a brief written section about their backgrounds and overall personalities. Some only have a few lines; while others have lengthy summaries about their background stories. By playing the game in a chronological order, the player encounters the cast of these thirty-one characters gradually, and has enough time and opportunity to witness them in the narrative through the sixty-two-hour-long main storyline (without the less significant or menial side tasks, or the time spent with discovery, hunting, scouting etc.). Like in any other narrative, these characters are also equipped with motives, some degree of agency in the narrative (depending on their significance) and impact on the storyline as it progresses.

The characters can be categorized in different groups on the basis of the following criteria: ethnicity, age, gender and linguistic repertoire. As far as their ethnicity is concerned, there are the following ethnic groups in the game:

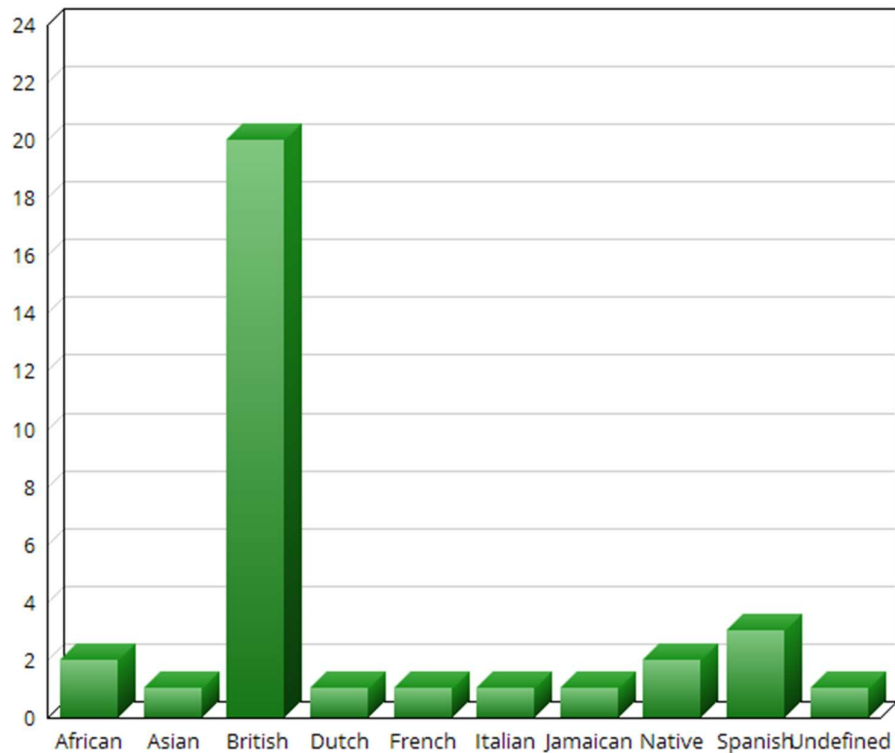


Figure 7. Non-playable characters with impact, sorted by origins

As seen in Figure 7, the cast of non-playable characters with impact on the narrative include two African characters, one Asian, twenty from the British Islands, one Dutch, one French, one Italian and Jamaican. There are two indigeneous to the Bahamas, three Spanish and one character whose origins could not be identified. The reason why I could not find information

about the character from undefined origins, is that there was no information in the game about it (Codex, dialogue, textual reference). By including this figure in my study, I demonstrate the easily recognizable amount of NPCs with impact who are from the British Islands, as opposed to any other group of characters from another place of origin, featuring smaller numbers of representatives. As I have already mentioned earlier in the study, the game is set in a highly multicultural environment (the Bahamas) and the player character meets a number of ethnicities during the narrative. Still, when I accumulated the exact numbers of the NPCs with origin, the imbalance between the number of white Anglo-Saxon characters versus everyone else was striking.

The categorization of the characters according to their age is much more straightforward. The oldest characters in the game are the King of Pirates, “Blackbeard” Edward Thatch, the main villain and Templar Grandmaster, Laureano de Torres y Ayala, and an ex-slave Assassin freedom fighter, Antó, all three belonging to the age group 45-60. The rest of the cast belongs to the age group 24-35. Since the characters never mention their age, the only way to deduce this information is by their manner of speech, clothing styles and behavioural patterns. With “Blackbeard” and Torres, the case was rather simple since “Blackbeard” has authority and power as his default attributes, and he speaks with the voice of a battle-hardened, experienced older man, a mentor and commander to all in his company. Antó’s depiction is highly similar to “Blackbeard”, since he also commands others with the voice of an experienced older man. However, his attire suggests a poor, more practical style of clothing. Torres, in turn, being the Templar Grandmaster, Spanish military governor and nobleman, employs a dignified, gentle yet authoritative voice, which does not leave space for arguments. His word is law, and both his clothing style and highly educated, sophisticated manners prove that.



Figure 8. “Blackbeard” Edward Thatch, Laureano de Torres y Ayala and Antó as they appear in the game (source: assassinscreedwikia.com)

As far gender is concerned, the game features seven women as non-playable characters with impact on the narrative, and the rest of the cast (twenty-six NPCs with impact) are all men.

The cast employs a number of languages in the game. At the same time, we only hear only a small number of utterances. Since the data for this study consists of the default English language pack, it is not going to be a surprise that the cast primarily speaks English in the game. However, some characters are announced to be bilingual or multilingual which makes them valuable in some game situations.

The languages in *Assassin's Creed: Black Flag* are the following: English (standard and the dialects), Spanish, French, Italian, and Taíno. Since some characters hide their bilingual or multilingual language capabilities, it would be difficult to create a chart like the above about the speakers of each language, but by playing the game numerous times, I was able to determine which characters understand, speak and employ more than one language. Next, I will describe these characters in the alphabetical order.

- Adéwalé was born in Trinidad. He is an African former slave who escaped with a player character's (Kenway) help. He was valuable as a slave and was en route to Spain to be an interpreter, since he speaks English, French and Spanish.

- Ah Tabai is an indigenous Taíno, and in the game he speaks English and his native language with equal proficiency.
- “Calico” Jack Rackham is a Jamaican born pirate, he speaks English but his upbringing suggests that he speaks Spanish as well.
- El Tiburón is a mercenary bodyguard to the Templar Grandmaster Torres. El Tiburón never speaks a word during the game, but when spoken to in English he acts according to the instructions, which indicates that despite being Spanish, he understands English on an advanced level.
- Jong Lang is a Chinese diplomat. It reads in her Codex entry that she is multilingual even though it was never defined which languages she speaks exactly. Chinese and English were definitely two of these, however, considering her place of origins.
- Julien du Casse is a French born Buccaneer, weapon and slave trader who speaks French, Spanish and English with expertise. He has a detectable French accent and the only utterance of French we hear from him are his dying words.
- Laureano de Torres Y Ayala is the highly-educated the Grandmaster of the Templar Order, a Spanish nobleman and military governor. He speaks English and Spanish with professional expertise with only little detectable accents and a few Spanish utterances (discussed below). On official meetings and during speeches and discussions with significance he uses monolingual English, yet in occasions when he experiences a personal, emotional moment he switches to Spanish in short utterances. He is the main villain of the narrative, since his agenda is to enslave the minds of humanity through the use of an ancient artefact.
- Laurens Prins is a Dutch plantation owner, and he speaks English without a traceable accent. It is not detectable in the game whether he spoke Dutch or not, since there is no indication of him using the language.
- Lucia Márquez is a prison-ridden Templar who speaks Spanish and English languages without an accent.
- Opia Apito is an indigenous a half-Spanish, half-Taíno warrior who employes a distinguishable speech pattern, using “us” and “we” when referring to herself instead of First Person Singular. She has a detectable foreign English accent. She speaks Taíno and English and did not seem to know any other languages.

The rest of the cast speak English (in its standard or accented form) and there are no hints if they could speak other languages or not. However, since some of them are highly educated military personnel or successful merchants, it can be assumed that they did. The narrative is set in the West Indies in the era when the Spanish and British already had a foothold in the area, so the merchants and higher-class military personnel or tradesmen were expected to speak multiple languages. Such characters with significant education or established trading businesses include Benjamin Hornigold, Hilary Flint, Kenneth Abrahams, Peter Chamberlain, Upton Travers, Vance Travers, Woodes Rogers.

The player's character, Edward Kenway has a special position when it comes to comprehending and using any other language than English, since the player must know what is happening even in situations when Edward hears a language he does not understand. Kenway's position is going to be discussed in a later section.

4.1.3. Language varieties in the game, and the use of Bleichenbacher's methods and the Mareš taxonomy

As mentioned in the Methods of analysis section (3.3.1.), the Mareš taxonomy (Bleichenbacher 2008:24) offers a range of four varieties of language content (*Elimination, Signalization, Evocation and Presence*). In this section, I am going to discuss the taxonomy's four strategies and how they can be found in *Assassin's Creed: Black Flag*.

Elimination is the case when there is no indication for any other language to be used other than the default language (English). The audience is not aware of any other language being present, since there are no noticeable hints for them to pick up (Bleichenbacher, 2008:24). In *Assassin's Creed: Black Flag*, the strategy of elimination is not frequently used, as there are only a few instances (discussed below with examples). Whenever the player's character, Kenway encounters a situation where some other language than English is being used, the game utilizes English subtitles in italics (in case Kenway does not understand the speech, but the player must).

The most frequently used strategies for including non-standard language in narrative fiction and cinema (Mareš 2000a.: 47-53) in *Assassin's Creed: Black Flag* is what Mareš calls evocation. *Evocation* "is used when characters speak a variety of the base language that is characterized by interference (transfer) from the language they would be speaking. For example, a Spanish accent or a number of short code-switches from English into Spanish can evoke an utterance that would have been monolingual Spanish in reality" (Bleichenbacher,

2008:24-25). As such, evocation can be found in all of the *Assassin's Creed* games. In *Black Flag* however, the only character whose speech can be categorized under this strategy is Templar Grandmaster Torres² himself. The Grandmaster's speech is however, only peppered by Spanish on a few occasions, which leads us to the conclusion that Torres uses Spanish utterances on purpose.

Kenway's story has already progressed far enough that he is contemplating on betraying the Templars and joining the Assassins, and he has agreed to tail and eavesdrop on the Templar Grandmaster to arrange a pact with the slave and plantation owner, Dutch-born Laurens Prins (Sequence 5, Traveling Salesman quest, *Assassin's Creed: Black Flag*). Kenway is tailing Torres, who is negotiating his deal with Prins, while taking a seemingly innocent walk in Kingston, a British province. During their small talk and Torres's attempt to charm Prins to become his ally, Torres uses short expressions in Spanish, such as "sí, señor, gracias". However, interestingly so, while talking to other allies in any other instances, he does not do so. In comparison, Prins's language use remains monolingual English at the meantime with a noticeable American accent.

Another occasion when Torres is speaking Spanish is when in the very beginning of the story, Kenway hands him an ancient, valuable artefact and Torres exclaims in wonder, "increíble", and later says "excelente" when Kenway agrees to accompany him the following day. Later, when Kenway's true identity is discovered, Torres yells "bastardo" in Spanish.

What is typical of Torres's speech is that he mostly uses monolingual English, with occasional short, one-word utterances in Spanish. He uses Spanish in emotional exclamations (such as hearty exclamations of *sí*, *increíble*, angry *bastardo*), and formalities (such as greetings). Only while during the rest of his speech, Torres speaks with a soft hint of Spanish in his voice.

Torres's characteristic speech pattern is not unique in its form, however. It is, in fact, an example of what Bleichenbacher has described as follows, "[t]he main reason for language variation among characters is to create narrative contrasts: specific language varieties mark certain characters as special and different from other ones [...]" (2008:31). *Assassin's Creed: Black Flag* achieves this by creating for Torres a distinguishable speech pattern (with occasional Spanish). It could even be argued that in this respect, his figure resembles a specific stereotype in Hollywood films in which the main villain's (often, a Russian, German or other

²Main villain by the type of lawful evil (<http://tvtropes.org/pmwiki/pmwiki.php/Main/LawfulEvil>). "Well-structured, large-scale and often scarily successful evil. May believe in keeping order *at all costs*, or may simply believe that a well-ordered system is so much easier to exploit."

non-English native speaker) English speech is dotted by hints of his foreign origin or otherness. For the audience, such hints distinguish such characters from the rest of the cast. I find it interesting that the game would pay special attention to the easily recognizable depiction of Edward's main adversary.

Other instances of evocation occur when Woodes Rogers (a member of the British military personnel, a slave and fleet owner, and a high-ranking Templar) occasionally greets Grandmaster Torres with a Spanish greeting, but then switches back to English right away. In such instances, since Woodes uses an amused, satisfied manner of speech, the player knows that Woodes uses Spanish in a pleased, friendly manner. In comparison, Woodes never speaks French to his French ally (du Casse), or any other language to any one else. His style of uttering small greetings to Torres, such as "*Buenos dias*" or "*Buenos noches*", but speaking English for the entire conversation otherwise suggests that the two have a friendly bond (as their interactions otherwise prove this). Woodes, in turn, attempts to humor Torres with such small, yet noticeable Spanish utterances. An example of this exchange is when Woodes says his goodbye before he sets sails back to England and return later as a military governor:

Example 1:

Torres: "By all means, Captain. Good speed, and fortune to you." (they shake hands)

Woodes: (shakes hands with Edward) "Good luck. I'll turn myself into a governor. And with my idiot King's blessing, no less." (starts walking away, waves a hand back) "*Adios!*"

(Assassin's Creed: Black Flag, 2013, Ubisoft)

In a significant confrontation with the Grandmaster, in the middle of the narrative, Kenway speaks in a mocking, provocatory manner. While doing so, he also uses one utterance of Spanish in the middle of his otherwise English speech. The scene is a dramatic one and resembles a power-play between the two characters. This is because Kenway shows up with his pirate crew and attempts to intimidate Torres into cooperation. As he makes his way into the room, he asks:

Example 2:

Edward: "Well hello, your Excellency. I'd got word you might be here."

Torres: "I know your face, pirate. But your name was borrowed the last time we spoke."

Edward: "Ah, yes. I recall... Mister Duncan Walpole, I miss that one. So... what's a Templar Grandmaster doing so far from his *Castillo*?"

Torres: “I’d rather not say.”

Edward: “And I’d rather not cut your lips off and feed ‘em to ya.”

(Assassin’s Creed: Black Flag, 2013, Ubisoft)

As a response, Torres remains calm and continues to employ his usual, sophisticated and polite manner of speech without a single utterance of Spanish.

Kenway’s choice of addressing language and wealth against Torres is simply because Torres is a man of riches, power and authority and by that point in the narrative Kenway grows to despise how Torres assumes and takes more power by using his personal entitlement and influence. In the scene where Kenway mocks Torres, he takes pride in having an upper hand on the villainous Templar and openly challenges his authority over that situation. By addressing Torres as “Templar Grandmaster” and calling his mansion *castillo* in the same line, Kenway addresses both Torres’s position of power and authority, as well as his wealth. Although Torres handles the conflict with the grace and politeness that is expected of a gentleman, he orders his guards to stay back to avoid bloodshed and allows Kenway to have his way as he usually would so the following powerplay can unfold: a seemingly chaotic neutral³ pirate lord against a lawful evil governor of Spanish colonies.

As such, the strategy of evocation is detectable in the game. It is used to convey multiple intentions. Intentionality plays an important part in structuring narrative in such large projects like *Assassin’s Creed: Black Flag*. By this I mean that starting from the characters leading to the visualization of environmental settings, there is a clear intention from the developers part. In such visually rich video games like *Black Flag*, the developers pay special attention to details to create interesting characters for the narrative, and how all that constitutes their characterization game is presented to the audience. Language use also belongs to this intentionality, the specific manners and methods of language use belongs to the same intentions how clothing and gestures contribute to building a character on screen. Since the cast of characters includes more than thirty characters, the players are invited to find their favorites and least favorites, since there are no two characters who speak, dress and act the same way. Linguistic stereotyping is not new in the film industry and, as seen above, the game’s cinematic

³<http://tvtropes.org/pmwiki/pmwiki.php/Main/ChaoticNeutral> “The ultimate free spirit, seeking their own fortune with little care for morals or the consequences of their actions when it comes to other people. Kenway’s alignment changes during the narrative but at that time, he is a chaotic neutral.

cut scenes and interactive storyplaying suggest that video games can also fall under the spell of using language as a tool for distinguishing characters from one another. Moreover, Torres's language use also fits the categorization Bleichenbacher builds in the following section about the negative characterization of Hispanic characters in Hollywood cinema and describes it as follows:

“Writing about Hollywood representations of Hispanics, Berg (2002:66ff) mentions a number of Latino stereotypes of characters who are often pitted against a “WASP male hero (67). [...] Moreover, the use of Spanish in exolingual interactions with English L1 character means that “the rules of “civilization no longer apply” because the narrative has moved “beyond the pale of rational discourse”[...]” (Bleichenbacher, 2008:37) Indeed, even though *Assassin's Creed: Black Flag* attempts to create realistic multilingual environments (Chapman 2016) and a cast with multilingual backgrounds, by keeping the main, Hispanic villain as the only person who frequently employs Spanish utterances in his English speech as shown above, and illustrated the strategy of evocation, it only enforces the negative representation of Hispanic characters.

This phenomenon negative characterization through language only becomes more apparent when we look at how Woodes and Kenway occasionally insert in their own, otherwise monolingual English speech some Spanish when speaking with Torres. Kenway does not mock anyone else's background or language use, only Torres's. Even if he despises and defeats the French du Casse or the Dutch Prins, he does not provoke them with their own language. Upon comparing du Casse's and Prins's language use to Torres's, they do not mix their use of English with French or Dutch, so they do not give an opportunity or reason for Kenway to mock them with it.

Another strategy in the Mares taxonomy is *presence*. It is the most optimal scenario for including languages, which are not the default ones in the cinematic or narrative work, in this case, English. There are two cases in which the audience meets any other language which is fully implemented into the game. First, the Taíno language, spoken by the Taíno people, indigenous to the group of islands where the narrative takes place. The second case occurs when the Spanish idle NPCs (such as guards and soldiers in Spanish settlements or on Spanish ships) speak in Kenway's close proximity, and if their speech bears any importance for the player to proceed in their current task, their speech is translated by the use of subtitles.

The Taíno people's arrival into the narrative is only after the player has completed one third of the main storyline. They are depicted as moderately militarized, cautious people who are distrustful of outsiders, but ultimately they are the local guardians of an ancient sci-fi-like

technology. From their numbers it is clear for the player that this community forms a large part of the Assassin order in the West Indies. While Kenway first scouts their uncharted territories, he sneaks by a number of Taíno guards in their indigenous styled clothing and hears them speak their native tongue.

The groups of guards are non-playable characters who don't have an impact on the narrative. The language is heard as it would be in a real-life-like encounter, meaning, we hear the Taíno language on screen, while the game shows the translated subtitles in italics, Kenway does not understand the language but the player must gain the relevant information from the speech in order to continue the on-going series of tasks. The motivation behind the use of Taíno by the non-playable characters is to depict language use which was not supposed to be understood by the player character as well as a quasi-real-life situation to enhance player immersion. Had Kenway understood the language of the natives right away, the player would become suspicious, since he hasn't previously been exposed to the language. Even so, the language is incomprehensible for the game's target audience and the Taíno language becomes a tool for world building, creating a bond with the Taíno and the uncharted territories, while suggesting a divide between Kenway and the player. Their otherness is highlighted by their monolingual Taíno utterances in the forest. We can hear them talking in their language, but the few, and short utterances are subtitled on the bottom of the screen, as seen in Example X when two unnamed Assassins talk (transcript: "He has been summoned though he does not know it.") However, once entering their village and their leader, Ah Tabai announces Kenway as an ally, the Taíno will cease to talk entirely and their leaders speak standard English without an accent. This is because, as far as the plot is concerned, by then they have served their purpose and Kenway's story goes on.



Figure 9: “Taíno speech subtitled for the player” (screenshot original, (*Assassin’s Creed: Black Flag*, 2013, Ubisoft))

Here, I would like to draw attention to the shift of strategies concerning the way languages are represented that takes place after the encounter with the Taíno. The strategy of *presence* is still detectable in the beginning of Kenway’s encounter with the Taíno, but it quickly changes to *elimination* (Bleichenbacher 2008:24), meaning that the language was only present to prove to the player that the Taíno people possess their own language and cultural identity. Other than their clothing, language use and Ah Tabai’s explanations of their history being connected to the ancient Mayans, the player cannot find more information about the indigenous people’s history. After this encounter and consequent allying with the Taíno, the player does not hear more Taíno from the locals. Bleichenbacher describes such instances as “erasure” (Bleichenbacher 2008:37) when other languages besides English are reduced to idle, easily dismissable conversations in the background, but the subtitles are still there to deliver important information to the player. Later on the game (when their purpose to deliver information is fulfilled) decides to erase the voice of the indigenous people entirely.

Assassin’s Creed: Black Flag is set in a multilingual, multicultural setting and Kenway journeys from Spanish to British and native territories across the West Indies. These the developers of the game decided to depict in a realistic way, creating an immersive environment including both cities and plantations. As such, while the player is exploring British colonies and plantations, the idle, non-playable characters (soldiers, mercenaries, prostitutes, citizens, shopkeepers) speak English with a noticeable British accent. However, once Kenway sets foot

on a Spanish owned island or enters a Spanish owned plantation, the idle characters switch into Spanish. At these point, no subtitles are given of their idle talk. And they do talk: for example, when Kenway draws attention to himself (fighting soldiers, bumping into a bystander, pickpockets a citizen or climbs on a market stand), the citizens comment on his activities in Spanish. Such scenes are, in fact, the clearest, most immersive use of a non-English language in the game. In this sense, they, too, represent the strategy of *presence* in the game.

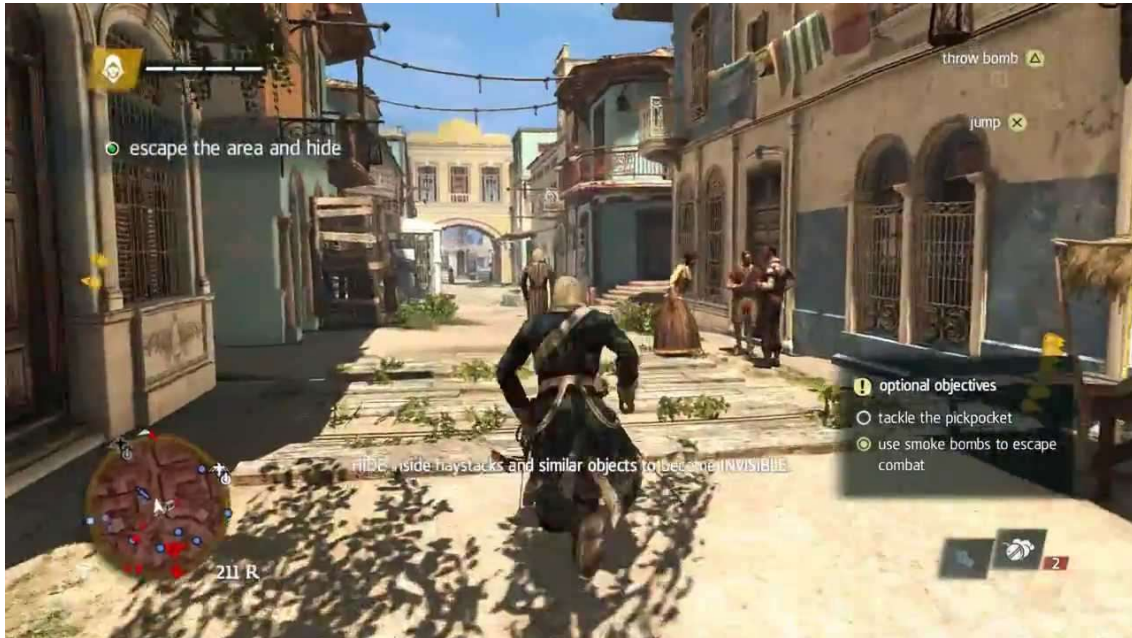


Figure 10. “Edward chases a pickpocket while idle NPCs chat in monolingual Spanish in the background, in Havana. There is no subtitle for their Spanish speech.”

(<https://i.ytimg.com/vi/Yss3kcKr4qk/maxresdefault.jpg>)

In sum, the game includes three to represent languages other than English. I found it interesting that the only case when the Elimination strategy is employed is the same case when the Taino people’s language use is eliminated from the game’s narrative and cinematic cutscenes. The second category which depicts non-English languages being used in the game is Evocation, when important characters (Torres and Woodes) pepper their monolingual English speech with short utterances of Spanish. The third strategy from the taxonomy is Presence, which is primarily detectable at the first meeting with the Taino people and during the time the player character roams in Spanish owned settlements, plantations and boards Spanish ships. What was interesting about these was that language use is an important asset in the game developers’ hands to create a more diverse, immersive experience for the player. It

becomes an unavoidable device to introduce a new culture in the game's storytelling. In order to depict a pseudo-realistic simulation of the Bahamas, and the people from so many ethnicities mingling together, the developers reached out to include more languages. Language as such, becomes an essential asset in creating a linguistically diverse, immersive experience for the player. In the next section, I will turn to the analysis of how the characters' language use contributes to their characterization.

4.1.4. Characterization and language use in *Assassin's Creed: Black Flag*

In this section I will discuss how the choice and use of specific language varieties contributes to the characterization of ethnic groups in *Assassin's Creed: Black Flag*. I will discuss how each ethnic group is portrayed by analyzing their language repertoire. As Bleichenbacher (2008: 100) states, characters can be categorized into two main groups: "monolingual characters, who always use their L1, and multilingual characters, who use more than one language" on the basis of how the characters perform in the movie scenes, and in some cases also on the basis of the "metalinguistic comments made by themselves or by other characters [...]" Next, I will investigate each character group one by one to find out what their proficiency of the standard (English) language is, whether or not they are multilingual, and how their language use becomes a part of their characterization.

Characters of African origins:

One of the African characters in the game is Adéwalé. He is Kenway's quartermaster, navigator and second in command. He grew up in Trinidad, on a plantation where he was also a slave. Later on, he was separated from his family. He is a multilingual, speaking French, Spanish and English. For this reason, he was a valuable slave to his owners and they sold him to the Spanish Crown so he would become an interpreter. When he was en route to Spain, Kenway helped him escape from the ship's prison, and thus Adéwalé's journey with Kenway began.



Figure 11. Adewalé and Edward on board of the *Jackdaw* (<http://firth.wikia.com/wiki/File:Assassins-Creed-4-Black-Flag-Caribbean-Sea-Adewale-And-Spyglass.jpg>)

He is a man of wisdom, passionate about justice. Later he joined the Assassin Order to return to his homeland and liberate the slaves (*Assassin's Creed: Freedom Cry*, 2013, Ubisoft).

Adewalé has a deep, pleasantly raspy and distinctly African American voice. While Kenway is journeying on the ship, he does a lot of talking. Despite he speaks several languages in his own storyline, which was later attached to the main game's content (*Assassin's Creed: Freedom Cry*, Downloadable Content, 2013), but during the base game we never hear Adewalé utter any other language besides English. Since my analysis only takes *Black Flag* (the base content) into consideration, *Freedom Cry* won't be a part of this study. Adewalé speaks English fluently without ever switching to any other language. Unlike Torres, he doesn't have any foreign accent.

In Kenway's absence he is a competent leader and remains his steadfast ally in liberating slaves and breaking the hold of Spanish and British colonizers in the West Indies. Adewalé is definitely a positive side character, and he has a significant impact on the narrative. For example, he often gives advice to Edward and by offering his perspective, Kenway (and thus, the player) gradually realizes his white, male, Anglo-Saxon privilege like shown in the following Example X. This dialogue happens when Edward and Adewalé escape from captivity in the beginning of the game, and Edward claims the ship they stole for himself. By this time, they are on good, friendly terms already.

Example: 3

Edward: “I’ve made my choice, Adé. I’m calling her the *Jackdow*, for a sly bird I loved as a child back in Swansea.” (pronounced as: [swanzi])

Adewalé: “A dark little creature, no?”

Edward: “Did it rub you wrong when I took this brig as my own?”

Adewalé: (soft laughter) “It was the sort of rub I have learned to endure sailing among faces of such... (pause, looks at Edward in the eyes) *fairness*.” (italics added for emphasis)

Edward: (nods) “It’s true. Most of these men wouldn’t accept you as a captain. So what fair role would complement such *unfairness*?” (italics added for emphasis)

Adewalé: “I’ll be your quartermaster. Nothing less.”

Edward: (nods) “Alright. [...]”

(Assassin’s Creed: Black Flag, 2013, Ubisoft)

From the situation it is clear Adewalé refers to his time spent among white people who consider themselves superior to him, and when he mentions this unfair treatment, Edward is openly willing to offer him a compensation for such bad experiences. He wishes to be different than the people Adewalé previously served with.

Adewalé’s character was developed to become Kenway’s ally from very early on in the narrative. However, he also has his own motives and agency: by becoming an Assassin, he shows he has his own free will to act without Kenway’s advice or influence. Although he is a side-character, he does not remain passive and irrelevant. Quite the contrary, he is the exact opposite: he voices his opinions frequently and does not hesitate to disagree with Kenway (and the player).

Example 4:

Edward: So what’ll you do with your share of the gold we take from Governor Torres?

Return to Africa? Prince among men?

Adéwalé: I cannot return to a place I have never been. I was born in Trinidad, a slave from my first breath.

Edward: Ah. But wouldn’t you feel... I don’t know... more welcome there?

Adéwalé: As you might feel more welcome in Paris? (pronounced as: [pa.ʁi], French)

Edward: Fair point.

Adéwalé: With this skin and this voice, where can I go in the world and feel at ease? This country here is my best chance. This country called *Jackdaw*, where I know the

names of all citizens, and they know mine, and we work together. Not always out of love, but to keep our country afloat.

Edward: I think I understand ye. Let's take her, then. For the Citizens of *Jackdaw!*

(Assassin's Creed: Black Flag, 2013, Ubisoft)

Another African character in the game is Antó. As a character, he is a bit more complex than Adéwalé. He is a successful Assassin, ex-slave and the organizer of his own private army.

“Antó was born to the Ashanti tribe in the Akon region of West Africa in 1670. Sold into slavery as a young man, he was sent to Jamaica to work on a sugar plantation. However, he managed to escape with the help of the warrior Cudjoe and fled to Kingston, where he founded a Maroon community. Forging connections with the local traders, Antó began coordinating plantation raids to free slaves and build an army. He eventually joined the Assassin Brotherhood and became leader of the Kingston bureau, which functioned as a safe haven for the men he rescued. While he was dedicated to the Assassins, Antó's first priority was always to free slaves from captivity. Antó's name translates to “born after the death of his father:.” (*Assassin's Creed: Black Flag, Antó character codex entry*, 2013, Ubisoft).

Antó's character is a non-playable character. He has an impact on the narrative, but his alignment is not clear. His objectives might be noble, but the player and Kenway never form a friendship with him beyond occasional alliances when the need arises. His primary objective in the narrative is to liberate other slaves and reward Kenway (the player) for helping him in this objective since unknowingly Kenway tells the location of Antó's organization to the Templars, so Antó considers Kenway to be indebted to him. He is celebrated as a hero amongst the Assassins. His manner of speech is professional, although he was initially skeptical of Kenway. He is brief and factual while talking. Similarly to Adéwalé, his voice is raspy, deep and he has a detectable African American accent as well. From the first moments of their acquaintance, a recurrent theme in his interactions with Kenway is ethnicity. This is because Antó mistakes Kenway for an Englishman.

Example 5:

Antó: “What do you want, Englishman?”

Edward: “Edward Kenway. I'm here to warn you of danger. And I'm Welsh.”

Antó: “You all look the same to me. Why should I need your warning? My life is all danger.”

Edward: “I may have brought it on you.”

Antó: (pleased chuckle) “This means you owe me. As it happens, I could use a man to help free some of my friends.”

Edward: “Slaves... you mean.”

Antó: “Brothers. Warriors, the hope of the Maroon.”

(Assassin’s Creed: Black Flag, 2013, Ubisoft)

Similarly, when Antó lets out that he needs help freeing his friends, Kenway jumps to the conclusion that they are slaves, and Antó corrects him (“Brothers. Warriors. Hope of the Maroon.”) And even after Kenway expresses that he is not English, later in the same dialogue Antó asks him to “mingle with his countrymen” to which Kenway reluctantly agrees.

It is hinted in the narrative that Antó speaks more than one language (his origins, accent and looks indicate that), yet we do not hear him speak in any other language besides English. Antó’s impact on the narrative is not significant. He does not reach beyond his primary objectives and he does not show any interest in changing these. He remains closely tied to his past being a slave and being a Black man who strives to fight for a better life for those who share his suffering under slavery. While Adéwalé also has the motivation to liberate his people from the binds of slavery, it does not cloud his judgement. Antó’s person is more military oriented. For example, this is shown in the way in which Antó organized a guerilla army of the liberated slaves, and led them before meeting Kenway. Even though he uses his Assassin skills and influence to help Kenway, his unfriendly, suspicious and skeptical behavior does not make him a positive character. Instead, he remains a battle-hardened, cautious man who is not afraid to use massive amount of violence to reach his objective. In this, he resembles Hollywood and video game stereotype of African American characters who prefer to solve social conflict by using violence.

In conclusion, while Adéwalé is a character whose alignment, position and impact on the narrative are positively enhanced by his language use, Antó is a much less positive character even though his intentions might be noble. Both characters’ origin stories and development are influenced by slavery in their character arcs and actively participate in attempts to break such oppressive systems to free other slaves who suffer under the same systems which enslaved them too. This dedication to freeing slaves and fight against the people who employ slaves defines their character arcs and is a central part of them. Even though the narrative suggests that both men are multilingual the game does include any scenes in which they would use any other language than English, so their language skills are merely referenced as part of their characterization. Both are intelligent, experienced men which make them wise talkers and compassionate people but while Adéwalé uses his compassion to become a better man and

travel back to Trinidad in the end of the narrative to free people from his homeland, Antó's compassion leads him to organize a militarized guerilla group from the liberated slaves. To an extent, the way in which they are depicted and the differences between them are examples of realistic historical simulation writing since in that historical era slavery was indeed a practice of colonizers. However, by associating both characters of African origin to the notion of slavery, the game presumes that every Black or African person in the game's depicted world is affected by slavery. This statement is also emphasized by Adewalé's dialogue with Edward in Example 4 (p.62). As the game does not feature any other non-playable African characters with an impact on the narrative, this enforces the negative stereotype that people of African origin were all affected by slavery and their answers to slavery ended in using violence.

Asian character(s)



Figure 12: Jing Lang, as she appears in the game (http://assassinscreed.wikia.com/wiki/Jing_Lang)

The only Asian character in the game is the Chinese diplomat Jing Lang. She is a skilled diplomatic advisor of a wealthy, influential Englishman called Vance Travers, a Templar. Her character codex entry says that “political disputes made her escape to piracy, in which she was ruthless and had the reputation of brutality. She feigned a relationship with an Assassin Vance Travers to gain access to a treasure, but in the end, Vance's brother Upton schemed her

assassination by Kenway’s help.” (*Assassin’s Creed: Black Flag* 2013, Ubisoft). Jing Lang is a non-playable character with an impact on the narrative, although her impact is small and her character only appears in the game for a short time. The player meets her only after killing all her hired soldiers whom she hired for her own protection, and she orders them to kill the player character. Even after their futile attempt (and death), she calls her deceased guards “fools” (example below).

It seems likely that Jing Lang’s characterization was influenced by the famous Chinese “Queen of Pirates”, Ching Shih (1775-1844). This is because she calls herself with this title in the game. This is another attempt by the game designers to recreate historical figures in the narrative and to respectfully nod at real history. Jing Lang wears Chinese Cheongsam style of clothing with embroidery, thus indicating her country of origin. At the same time, her accent is a mixture of French and Chinese. Although it is indicated in the game that she is a multilingual diplomat, Jing Lang actually only uses English, just like Adéwalé and Antó before her. Nor does she switch into any other language. Since she appears only briefly on screen, her characterization is heavily influenced by what other characters tell about her. For example, Upton Travers, her brother in law, calls her names and repeatedly uses her Templar affiliation as a curse. We hear her speak at the same time when Edward has already struck the killing blow on her, and her dying words are as follows in the Example below:

Example 6:

Jing Lang: “Imagine... [iməʒjɪn] (pants) the Queen of Pirates! Jing Lang! [ʃɪn’ lɑːn] (pants in pain) Defeated [dɪfiːtɪd] (0.3 pause for pained inhale) for a fake map! [fə fæɪk mɑːp] (pants) I have been arrogant. [əʃ hæv biːn ɛrəˈɡɑːnt] (inhales with agony)”

Edward: (with curiosity) “Really?”

Jing Lang: “Yes! I stole the real one. Both halves! My husband has it.”

Edward: (surprised) “Your husband?”

Jing Lang: (pained breathing) “Better men than these... fools.” [bɛtər mɛn ðæn ðɪz fuːlz]
(exhales, then dies)

(*Assassin’s Creed: Black Flag*, 2013, Ubisoft)

The traces of her foreign accent are there in her pronunciation of “imagine”, her own name and in the parts when she is also panting in an agonized manner.

It is important to note here, that the game only features eight female characters. The only Asian female character whom Kenway (and thus, the player) meets is a villain with the reputation of brutality. She is represented in a stereotypical way, reflecting the manner in which

many Chinese, Japanese and other Far-Eastern characters have been depicted in films and games (Yakuza, mafia associations and affiliations, turncoats, militaristic views). They have often been assigned the role of ruthless members of criminal organizations who are in it for personal gain and who are capable of brutality. For example, the frequent appearance of the Japanese yakuza as criminals in Chinese Jackie Chan films are prime examples for this. Jing Lang's language use is also influenced by her foreign origins, therefore her otherness which implies that even though she was a skilled diplomat and multilingual individual, her origins still shone through despite her professional background.

British characters

As shown in Figure 5 (p.47), British characters are the majority in the game. Characters with origins from the British Isles (one Welsh, one Scottish, three Irish) are numerous. All of them are white, Anglo-Saxon protestant people.

The English cast predominantly consist of highly educated military-personnel or middle-class people who speak with a clear English accent. They include

- Benjamin Hornigold (leader of the Pirate Republic),
- Caroline Scott (middle class, Kenway's deceased wife),
- Charles Vane (soldier, succumbed to madness),
- Duncan Walpole (military officer, traitor),
- "Blackbeard" Edward Thatch (King of Pirates),
- Hilary Flint (aristocrat born military officer, Templar),
- Kenneth Abrahams (educated military commander, Templar),
- Mary Read (cross dresser, widow to a soldier, famous pirate),
- Peter Chamberlain (Admiral of the navy, a man of cunning authority, ordered the slaughter of a town just to cross his commander),
- Upton Travers (smuggler),
- Vance Travers (smuggler),
- Stede Bonnet (middle class merchant),
- Woodes Rogers (high class governor of the Bahamas, Templar).

It is no secret that the majority of these people are men, and even so they have, or used to have some kind of military affiliation. The majority of the English cast also display the motif of betrayal, cunningness and the sense of authority in their characterization (even Caroline

Scott who defied her father and the idea of arranged marriage to marry Kenway instead). It is also apparent that the majority of the English military personnel are affiliated with the Templar Order, the main group of villains in the narrative, which can be interpreted as the reinforcement of the common Hollywood stereotype of the English people commonly being used as villains.

In contrast to the English cast, the Irish cast consists of a few people only. Anne Bonny (infidel, pirate), John Cockram (friend of the main villain, Benjamin Hornigold) and Josiah Burgess (Hornigold's lackey) and they all have a questionable background. They all have a lower middle class or lower class origin. This has led them to follow criminal lives. They all have a distinct Irish accent.



Figure 13: Anne Bonny (left) and Mary Read (right), close friends and pirates (screenshot original)

Anne Bonny has a strong impact on the narrative, she becomes a close friend and ally to Edward Kenway, in the end of the game they embark together for the final confrontation against Grandmaster Torres. It is for her benefit that Kenway stages prison breaks: he strives to rescue her or to give her the aid she needs in exchange for her alliance. Despite the hardships she goes through before meeting Kenway, Bonny is a positive depiction of a strong, independent woman who embraces her low origins and forges strength from it.

Example 7:

Edward: "Evening, Anne."

Anne: "Edward." [edVərd]

Edward: “I’ll be sailing for London in the next few months. I’d be a hopeful man if you were beside me.”

Anne: “England’s the wrong way ‘round the globe for an Irishwoman.” [ɛŋɡlənd s ðe vrɒŋ vay ‘raʊnd ðe ɡləʊb fɔr ən ɪrɪʃ, wʊmən]

Edward: “Will you stay with the Assassins?”

Anne: “No. I haven’t got that kind of conviction in my heart. You?” [nəʊ aɪ hævnt ɡɒt ðæt kənˈdɪkʃən ɪn maɪ hɑːrt. ju]

Edward: “In time, aye... when my mind is settled and my blood is cooled.”

(Assassin’s Creed: Black Flag, 2013, Ubisoft)

In contrast to Cockram and Burgess, Bonny is not mad at the English but despises authority that causes grief to the common people. Understandably, she joins Kenway’s cause to stop the Templars and becomes an ally to the Assassin order as well. Overall, the Irish characters are seen as people who struggle through economic hardships by forging their fortunes in their own individual ways. This is a more positive depiction of them than the examples Hollywood produces, in which Irish are often depicted as loud and ferocious people who have tendencies to drink excessive amounts of alcohol (a recent example is *Wonder Woman*, 2017, dir. Patty Jenkins). The characters’ accents are part of the developers’ attempt to create and re-enact a diverse, multinational environment in the West Indies and by giving accents to these characters, the player’s perception is going to now include Irish members of the British community as well.

The only Scottish member of the cast is Rhona Dinsmore. She is a character with impact on the narrative as she is an Assassin herself, and has a deal of mutual help with Kenway, if he helps her to reach her her objectives as well. Her Scottish accent is highlighted in the sense that from the very first interactions Rhona’s origins are clear; she speaks with a very strong Scottish voice. She is hiding behind a building while being shot at, when Edward finds her, as shown in the example.

Example 8:

Kenway: “It’s... Rhona, right?”

Rhona: “Kenway! Looking for trouble, I assume?” [lʊkɪŋ fɔ trʌbl əj əsu:m?]

Kenway: “Hm. See you haven’t lost your charm.”

Rhona: (shoots twice at her attackers, turns back to Edward) “And you’re still boosey as a swill tub. What do you want?” [ænd jʊr stɪl bu:zɪ əz ə swɪl tʌb, wɒt dʒə wɑnt]

Kenway: “I’ve come to warn you. Your life is in danger.” [aj v ɔɫm to warn yu yor laɪf
iz in dændʒə:]

Rhona: (shots hit the wall not far from her head) “Aren’t you the crafty one? Whatever
gave it away?” [e:ɪnt ju ðe kraɪfti wan watevər ge:ɪv it aveɪ]

Then later, when Edward helps her fight off the soldiers, she turns to him again.

Example 9:

Rhona: “So, is this your new persona? Sir Edward of Havana, rescues damsels in distress?” [So,
iz ðis yor nu: peɪso:nə? Sə:r Edwərd of haVana, reskjus dAmsels in disTress?]

Kenway: “And does it suit me, Mopsie?”

(Assassin’s Creed: Black Flag, 2013, Ubisoft)

Rhona is depicted as a confident, skillful woman’s who does not hesitate to get her hands dirty to achieve her goals, and yet she is kind and light-hearted in stressful situations as well (for example, while being shot at and crouching at a wall, she is musing about Kenway’s accidental and unknowing betrayal of her organization). Her dialogue with Kenway also suggests that they are old-time friends (Kenway calls her Mopsie, and she reminisces about Kenway’s old personality), and by default Kenway talks to her as his steadfast ally. Rhona’s depiction is definitely positive, as she is portayed to be a good hearted, resourceful woman who is among such people in the cast who can think beyond themselves and aid others without looking for personal gain. Her accent contributes to the game’s world building and developing a more ethnically diverse cast by indicating the place of her origin right upon the first meeting with her.

When playing *Assassin’s Creed: Black Flag*, the player notices Kenway’s accent right away in the game: he speaks with a moderate Welsh accent, which is sometimes affected by English pronunciation. Kenway is not only proud of his Welsh upbringing; he corrects people when they mistake him for an Englishman (see example x above). Even though we never hear Kenway utter Welsh words, he still takes pride in his origins and as he points it out, in not being English. His ethnic background does not surface in any other point in the narrative, however, which indicates that he only emphasizes his otherness from the people who, in the game’s re-enacted historical era have done crimes against humanitarian law and who are depicted as militarized, cunning people. Kenway, as the most important Welsh member of the cast, is assigned a distinctively recognizable accent and is thereby characterized as Welsh. Despite this, as such, Welshness is merely another of his attributes, just like Scottishness is of Rhona is Scottish or Irishness of Anne Bonny. The same strategy is also employed in the

characterization of Bartholomew Roberts, whose high importance in the narrative is not affected by his Welsh origin in the slightest. It is mentioned a few times in the narrative, but it does not have a significant role compared to the importance of Opia Apito's or Adewalé's origins.

Example 10:

Adewalé: What's our course today, Captain? It's a fine day for any kind of mischief.

Edward: What's your feeling? [vat s yo:r fi:liŋg]

Adewalé: I'll make no secret of wanting to see the British brought to heel. If we can take some their gold and put it to use ourselves, I'd be a happy man.

Edward: Spoken like a true Welshman, Adé. [spookən laik ə tru: 'wɛlʃmən, ædeɪ]

(Assassin's Creed: Black Flag, 2013, Ubisoft)

So far, it thus seems that assigning an ethnicity to the characters who originate from the British Isles is merely a tool to enhance the game's immersive world building and the depictions do not go into any depth about the characters cultural differences. Since neither Kenway, nor Rhona, or Anne ever comment on each other's place of origins or the meanings of their cultural differences, we can safely conclude that beside their accents and claimed places of origins, there is nothing that connects them to their ethnic groups.

Dutch character(s)

Laurens Prins is a Dutch man, a slave and plantation owner who has a cold, ruthless heart. He is also depicted as an unhygienic, raggedy and selfish man who has a picture of himself posing with a rifle in his own tavern. It is no surprise that he has a large number of enemies among the Assassins. To show an example of ideological views and accent, I include a short transcript below.

Example 11:

Torres: "Have the English at last taken to convert the slaves to the Christian faith?"

Prins: (loud exclaim) "HA! CONVERT THEM? God noes, Torres. There is none here so foolish as that. [kanvɔrt ðɛm? gad no:s Torres. ðɛr ɪz nən hɪr so fu:lɪʃ æz ðæt.]

Torres: "Foolish? How do you mean?"

Prins: "Isn't it another sin, to enslave a fellow Christian? Therefore, to transmute a slave's soul from animal to man, would be then amount to inviting one's cattle

to the dinner table.” [ɪzənt it ənəðər sɪn tu ɛnslev e fɛlo krɪstʃən? ðɛrfɔr tu
transmjut e slɔv’s sol frəm ænəməl tu mæn wʊd bi ðen əmawnt tu ɪnvajtɪŋ wɑn’s
kætəl tu ðə dɪnər tebəl]

(Assassin’s Creed: Black Flag, 2014, Ubisoft)

Eventually Kenway confronts and kills him for all the cruelties and brutalities he committed. His Dutch origins are pointed out by Templar Grandmaster Torres, when Prins refuses to make a deal with him and Torres asks if Prins has some Protestant, ideological motivation that makes him to refuse their deal in the last moment. Prins denies this, and points out that, as Kenway and Read were tailing them, the Templar has unknowingly brought Assassins to Prins’s doorstep. Therefore, because Torres promised to arrive alone, Prins will not bargain with him. His Protestant, Dutch upbringing is certainly called out in this scene. The same time, it only portrays Prins as a man who does not work with people who cannot guarantee to keep their promises. Interestingly, Prins has a generic American accent and he never utters a Dutch word during his screentime, nor does he make any other reference back to his place of origin. His name means ‘prince’ in Dutch, which might also be a hint at his status on his own plantation, but, as he also confesses, he is a low-born man with no social connections. Even so, on his own territory, Prins is the ruler of life and death and his name might be a reference to that. Similarly, to the cast from the British isles, Prins’s ethnic origins are simply one of his attributes, and his origins only have a small impact on how his character is perceived in the narrative. His origins thus is not a defining trait, but through Torres’s comment, the player’s attention is still directed to Prins’s origins, even if it is only for a short time.

French character(s)



Figure 14: Julien du Casse as he appears in the game
(http://assassinscreed.wikia.com/wiki/Julien_du_Casse)

The only French member of the cast is Julien du Casse. Du Casse fought in the Spanish War of Succession (1701-1714) and became disillusioned with the Crown, and he picked up a weapon and got engaged in slave trade business in the Bahamas. Since it turned out that he did not have the cruelty and indifference that the business required, he gave that up and became a mercenary. When Kenway meets him, du Casse is Torres's own hitman. Du Casse joins the Templar Order with the same hopes as Torres did: to create a world without lies through constant surveillance. As already noted above, Du Casse speaks with a moderate French accent and yet the only instance the player hears him speak French is at the time of his death.

Example 12:

Edward: You remember the gift you gave me? Well it answers just fine.

Julien: *Fils de putain!* (You son of a whore!) As bold as a musket ball, and still half as sharp.

Edward: I'm sorry about this, mate. But I can't risk you telling your Templar friends about me still kicking around.

Julien: I pity you, *boucanier* (Buccaneer). After all you have seen, after all we showed you of our Order, still you embrace the life of an ignorant and aimless rogue.

Edward: What's this...? (takes an object from Julien's injured figure)

Julien: Is petty larceny the extent of your ambition? Have you no mind to comprehend the scope of ours? All the empires on Earth, abolished! A free and opened world, without parasites like you! *Que l'enfer que tu trouveras soit le fruit de ton insouciance!* (May the Hell you find be of your own making). (moans painfully and dies)

(Assassin's Creed: Black Flag, 2013, Ubisoft)

Even so, du Casse's visual portrayal coincides with the cinematic stereotype about French people: he dresses with a certain distinguishable style and has a sense of fashion such as the French New Wave films in the 1960's (Kruspe, fashionista.com). Simply on the basis of his appearance, du Casse is very easy to recognize and distinguish from any other member of the cast: he wears a large pheasant's plume on his hat, wears a white linen shirt with is left unbuttoned at the top, a thick line of belts at his middle and a red cape draped over his shoulder. No other character in the cast dresses so excessively. His characterization also includes his love for beauty and collecting relics (hidden blades of dead Assassins). While he speaks fluent and grammatically correct English, du Casse's speech pattern is still marked by a French accent. In addition, on the basis of his interactions with other characters, the player knows that du Casse has a much more complex character than the average "funny Frenchman with poor English" character (Bleichenbacher 2008:142). Despite functioning as a minor character in the narrative, du Casse is a stylish, likeable hitman from the first moments.

Italian character(s)

Like du Casse, the only Italian character also employs an easily recognizable accent although he only has a few minutes screen time, and he has no importance in the narrative. We do not know his name or anything about his background other than his origins (Italy) and his status as a diplomat. He also falls under the same category as du Casse, in that he also prefers to wear finely tailored clothes. However, the Italian character is complaining about the overall filth covering the streets of the English-ruled town Kingston, and how he despises the way in which the English can live their lives without sophistication.

Example 13:

Italian Diplomat: "There is no beauty to this city! No expression of joy, no aesthetic plan! Ugh! (disgusted noise) You walk your streets like animals! Cattle with no sense of decorum!

(Assassin's Creed: Black Flag, 2013, Ubisoft)

Then later:

Italian Diplomat: “Who can drink rum more than once a month? *Dios mio*. It is revolting.

Bastardo! Now I’m lost! How preposterous this city is! All straight lines and rigid blocks, no sense of order!

(ibid)

He complains about the available alcohol in the city, and reminisces about good Italian wines compared to English rum, as well as complaining about the city’s looks and streets. His impression is that of a picky upper-class person’s, who finds it degrading that he has to walk in a lower-class district.

The only function he has in the narrative is that Kenway murders him to steal his clothes. Therefore, that is all the value that this particular character has in the game. The player never learns his name, and the only information Antó discloses to Kenway is that the Italian man is a diplomat who has been invited to a party. In the game’s database his name is Ruggiero Ferraro, but this information is never shared with the player, which led me to the conclusion that the diplomat’s identity is not important to the narrative. In addition, the player is constantly reminded by the man’s foreignness. In these ways, the character depicted in a negative way, implying s the already existing negative stereotypes about Italian people. His accent is highlighted in his manner of speech, which makes him a “complaining, pecky Italian with only a considerable amount of control over his English”. It is important to note that the Italian character’s voice actor is the same actor (Roger Craig Smith) who lent his voice to the main protagonist Ezio Auditore da Firenze in *Assassin’s Creed II* (2009), *Assassin’s Creed: Brotherhood* (2010) and *Assassin’s Creed: Revelations* (2011) and his appearance serves as a cameo for the seasoned fans.

Jamaican character(s)

The cast includes a Jamaican man by the name of “Calico” Jack Rackham, “a betrayer, drunkard pirate who was rarely serious about anything and spent most of his life chasing women. He used his outrageous and offensive charm to keep out of most trouble. But a strategist and fighter he was not.” (Character codex, *Assassin’s Creed: Black Flag* 2013, Ubisoft) Indeed, in the narrative, Rackham is a bothersome, unpleasant character who betrays Kenway and the player needs to eliminate him from the narrative in order to proceed. His betrayal enrages Kenway’s ally Charles Vane as well, who is also present at the scene. It begins with Vane shooting a man who was claiming his share from the riches the pirates recently won.

Example 14:

Kenway: “Damn it, Vane!” (looks angrily at Vane, who just shot a man)

Jack: “Oh Charles! (singsong) What a surly devil you are!”

Vane: (warningly) “Don’t fuck with me, Jack.”

Jack: “But it’s my mandate to fuck with you, Charles. Lads!” (calls to his men)

(the surrounding sailors point guns at Kenway, Vane and Adewalé, who’s pushed to kneel on the ground)

Jack: “See... the boys and I had a bit of a council while you were wasting time with this lot, and well, they figured that I’ll be a fitter Captain... than you reckless dogs.”

(Assassin’s Creed: Black Flag, 2014, Ubisoft)

His language use is that of an uneducated, aggressive man’s. His occupation also categorizes him as an outlaw. Since he never speaks any other language than English, despite being a Jamaican man, his origins only serve as tweaks in his characterization for the player, for a more immersive world building. Other than that, his origins never receive an active role in the narrative. His depiction is negative.

Indigeneous characters

The play also includes two indigeneous characters: Ah Tabai and Opia Apito. Their number is thus very small, in contrast to the cast from the British Isles. Interestingly, however, their linguistic repertoire is far more diverse than that of any other characters, and it contributes to their depiction in a significant way.

Ah Tabai is an important character in the game. He is the experienced, wise leader of the Assassin Order’s branch operating on the West Indies. He has, in fact, committed his life to serve under the guidance of the Assassin tenets. He is a middle-aged man with great fighting and strategic skills. These make him an extraordinarily intelligent member of the cast. During the course of the game, Ah Tabai gradually becomes a spiritual mentor to Kenway and initiates him into the Assassin Order, but he also helps Kenway reflect on his selfish ways of life, and offers him a more responsible perspective. He both believes and states explicitly that Kenway possesses the potential to become great, and answers all questions Kenway has about the Assassin tenets. Ah Tabai is a steadfast ally and mentor to the player with an indomitable sense of duty.



Figure 15: Ah Tabai and Opia Apito in *Assassin's Creed: Black Flag*

His clothing style indicates the pride he takes in being an Assassin and member of the Taíno people. His language use is that of an educated, well-mannered man's who has great experience in guiding and aiding others in their time of need, as he accepts Mary Read and Adewalé into the Assassin Order when they sought guidance and new purpose for their lives.

Example 15:

Edward: "No. For years I've been rushing around, taking whatever I fancied, not giving a tinker's curse for those I hurt. Yet here I am... with riches and reputation, feeling no wiser than when I left home. Yet when I turn around, and look at the course I've run... here's not a man or woman that I love left standing beside me."

Ah Tabai: "There is time to make amends, Captain Kenway."

(Assassin's Creed: Black Flag. 2013. Ubisoft)

Ah Tabai also speaks with only a hint of an accent in his speech and commands English with expertise, but also colors his speech with a few greetings in the Taíno language (which is

also translated for Kenway and the player right away in the form of subtitles on the bottom of the screen).

Example 16:

Ah Tabai: [Yannu mut awolye tel apishan.] (in subtitles: You have strength and spirit.) And once more you have our Thanks, Edward. You are welcome here.”

(Assassin’s Creed: Black Flag, 2013. Ubisoft)

While Torres’s speech patterns are characterized by his frequent utterances in Spanish, Ah Tabai speaks purely English with Kenway and the only times the player hears him speak Taíno are indeed those instances when he utters ritual words of greetings and initiation to Kenway.

It should be emphasized that in the narrative, Torres is the stark opposite of Ah Tabai even though both men are leaders of their secretive organizations and both are cunning and extraordinarily intelligent. Despite all the positive depiction of Ah Tabai’s character, he is a reflection of the other that has been famously been discussed by Said (1978) in his book *Orientalism*. He is also an example of the exotic old man trope who shares exotic “wisdom” (Perry, 2016: 170) and guidance with the White main character and otherwise fades away in the narrative. His linguistic repertoire is certainly a positive trait as it helps depicting him as an educated and wise leader of his community, as it is not only a descriptive but essential attribute.

In contrast to Ah Tabai, Opia Apito is described in a very different way. Her character is that of a battle-hardened, but wounded and troubled young woman’s. Apito only has limited and much shorter screen time than Ah Tabai. From the beginning of the game onwards, she employs a heavily accented English that also contains a lot of grammatical lapses. She does not pronounce the ‘d’ sound on the end of words like “and, Grand”, her A vowels are more closed and produced in a higher tone than what IPA suggests for a native speaker (see example below). Furthermore, she refers to herself as “we” and “us” instead of First Person Singular.

Example 17:

Opia Apito: (to Edward) “The white jaguar! A fine catch. You have more than proven yourself. We accept your help.” [ðə waɪt ‘dʒæ:ɡjʊə! a faɪn kɑːʃ. ju hav mɔː ðan ‘pru:vən jɔ: ‘self. wi: əsept jɔ help]

Edward: “With what?”

Opia Apito: “Look!” (points in the distance on the sea) [lʊk]

Edward: “Frigates. Why? Is there anything out there but fish?”

Opia Apito: “No. Those are your Templars. You have a ship and a pale face. Vessel and passport. Meet us at Grand Cayman to help us investigate.” [nəʊ. ðəʊz ɑr jɔr 'tɛmplərz. ju: hæv æ ʃɪp æn æ peɪl feɪs. 'vɛsl æn 'pɑ:spɔ:t. mi:t əs æt grɑn 'kɑɪmən tu: hɛlp əs ɪn 'vɛstɪgæɪt.]

(Assassin’s Creed: Black Flag, 2013, Ubisoft)

Apito’s origins are also mixed: she is half-Indegenious, half-Spanish, which affects her storyline as well. Her strong indigeneous accent and her Spanish lineage, and her effortless Spanish pronunciation characterize her speech in the middle her primarily English communication with Kenway. She also wears a quite revealing, impractical Indigeneous-styled piece of clothing as it is seen above. (It is impractical in that it is very revealing, and her outfit is not equipped with enough sheaths for her knives, and she does not wear a utility belt like the other fighting female characters Mary Read or Anne Bonny do). Overall, the way in which Apito is characterized is not very positive, despite the help she gives Kenway in order to receive his help in return. Her objective is also closely tied to her origins: being a Master Assassin herself she is tasked to hunt down a Spanish Templar by the name Lucia Márquez. Upon completing this task and hearing Márquez’s dying words, Apito denies Márquez’s criticism against her people and rejects the wealth and culture the civilized Spanish would have brought to them. Apito states that “her people had already been living freely” (http://assassinscreed.wikia.com/wiki/Op%C3%ADa_Apito).

Overall, Apito’s characterization does not go beyond the the image of an exotic, troubled female warrior whose plight is bound to her difficult past and never-ending fight to protect her people. Her inability to speak correct English supports a negative stereotype that I have already indicated. In Apito’s case, her grammar mistakes are systematic and repetitive, implying that she has either some psychological problem (arising from childhood or later traumas) or from her inability to produce grammatically correct English, although she understands it without any problems. She thus stands in a stark contrast to Ah Tabai in many ways. Most significantly, The experienced mentor also considers the fight for the freedom of his people important, but, unlike Apito, he was not backgrounded in the narrative. In fact, Ah Tabai’s linguistic skills and his highly respected position in the Assassin Order place him high above Apito as far as his narrative importance and positivity is concerned. His otherness does not primarily derive from his language use and appearance, but from his position in the narrative as a mentor and leader of Assassins. By using his title as Master Assassin, Ah Tabai’s otherness is mixed with a higher

purpose and wisdom. In contrast, Apito's otherness is strongly emphasized by her language use (i.e. her strong accent paired with incorrect grammar), clothing style and her role in the narrative, that of a revenger on oppressing superpower, and a defender of the indigeneous people's freedom. Undoubtedly, Apito remains "enclosed in the language of her class, her region, her occupation, her heredity or her history" (Bleichenbacher 2008:31). While the unique speech patterns she employs are not there merely to signify her otherness, they deliberately emphasise it and create a communicational, cultural, regional, historical divide between her and Kenway (and the player). In contrast to her depiction, there is much less division between Ah Tabai and Kenway – their difference is mostly ideological and historical.

Spanish characters

Without a doubt, in *Assassin's Creed: Black Flag*, the Spanish cast are pre-dominantly villains in the narrative. Laureano de Torres Y Ayala, El Tiburón and Lucia Márquez all belong to the Templar Order and work to achieve their rule over the rest of the humanity. Since Torres's language use was already discussed above in detail, I will here concentrate on analyzing these three other Spanish characters.

El Tiburón's language use is unique in the game's narrative, since he is mute. It is not common in historical adventure roleplaying games like *Assassin's Creed* to feature mute characters. In so I am going to discuss El Tiburón's lack of verbal communication and depiction from the perspective of representation and narrative function. El Tiburón, "The Shark", is Torres's first bodyguard and ex-military training officer, but he also is connected to Kenway from the time when he acted as a training officer. During the course of the narrative, we never hear him utter a single word, not even on his death when Kenway begs him to speak. From that short scene, the player realizes that El Tiburón used to have Kenway's respect and that, in the past, he actually had the ability to speak. In addition, we never learn whether El Tiburón lost his ability to speak whether it was a personal choice for him to remain quiet. His giant, armored figure still commands authority and respect by Torres's side, a silent guardian who accompanies his master everywhere like a shadow, and follows orders without question. With Torres he does it in a surprisingly cautious and gentle way, but in every other situation, his moves are decisive, speedy and powerful. The way he is characterized in the game is neither positive or negative.



Figure 16: Lucia Márquez (http://assassinscreed.wikia.com/wiki/Lucia_M%C3%A1rquez)

Lucia Márquez is another Spanish character and Templar in the game. Márquez spent some time in prison, has a modest social background, and when speaking English, she has an accent that, in her case, marks her origins as Spanish. Like Jing Lang, she has a strong accent, it is easily notable, since her pronunciation of vowels such as “i, u, and a” are shorter than the standard English length, she also emphasizes her pronunciation of “k, s, and d” consonants.

Example 18:

Lucia Márquez: (to Opia Apito) “No! I cannot die at the hands of the Taíno. My father saw such potential in these islands. Gold... (painful exhale) industry... freedom, all of it squandered. You have not a clue how to use it. He could have brought you wealth.” [no: əj kænət daɪj æt ðə hændz əv ðə Taɪno: . məj fɑðər sɔ sætʃ pətɛnsjəl ən ðɪz əjləndz. [...] əl əv ɪt skwændərd. ju hæv nat e klu haw tu jus ɪt. hɪ kɒd hæv brɒt ju wɛlθ]

Opia Apito: “You believe we wasted freedom by living freely? You die a prisoner of your Templar mores.”

(Assassin’s Creed: Black Flag, 2014, Ubisoft)

Márquez wears similar clothing than Mary Read except her Spanish and taste that is more extraordinary by her use of more embellishments and decoration. During her very short screen appearance, Márquez remains loyal to her Templar ideologies, but, unlike Mary Read and Anne Bonny, Márquez does not tolerate criticism. She is a villain's who is capable of anything to validate their own. As opposed to common cinematic depiction on of Latina or Hispanic women, Márquez was not represented as a "heterosexual, exotic, sexy, bilingual embodiment of otherness" (Perry, 2016:185) but was depicted as another strong-willed individual who believed in the Templar ideology and died defending it.

Overall the depiction of Spanish members is defined by their ideologies residing in the Templar code. Torres, Márquez and even El Tiburón command with authority and cruelty and both Torres's and Márquez's speech indexes their Spanish origins.

Characters with undefined origins

Mary Read created James Kidd as her alterego, so she could hide amongst the pirates and continue her Assassin duties undisturbed: men left James Kidd to mind his own business, whereas as a woman Read was often subject of catcalling or comments about her other past deeds as a renowned pirate. Read kept her disguise and manner of speech so long in the narrative that Kenway was more than surprised to learn that in fact, his friend and Assassin ally James Kidd is a well-known and dangerous pirate, Mary Read. James Kidd never referred back to his homeland and regarded his personal information with secrecy, his identity remained unknown to Kenway for some time. James Kidd's character is a more tempered version of Mary Read, even though he does employ a more confident voice against male members of the cast. The narrative function of James Kidd is undoubtedly the realistic simulation of history in the game world, in which women were often exposed to rough treatment by men, so Mary Read choosing to hide her real gender was not unheard of at the time.

In this section my aim was to describe how the list of non-playable characters with impact includes a multicultural, ethnically diverse cast, whose linguistic repertoire is also part of their characterization. All the featured non-playable characters with impact on the narrative can easily be distinguished from each other on the basis of their clothing and their language use, aside from their particular relation to the player character. The default language in the game is English, and the cast of the main characters (Edward, Adewalé, Mary Read, Anne Bonny) speak it without including non-default languages. In comparison, it is a purposeful decision from the

developers part to have the main villain of the narrative (Torres) speak with a mixture of English and Spanish, distinguishing him from the rest of the English-speaking members of cast who do not come from the British Isles, and still possess an expert command of English (for example Ah Tabai). It was also interesting to see that minor characters with impact on the narrative employ accents and occasionally utterances of their native tongue (du Casse on his death, the Italian diplomat's complaints), only these characters utter their mother tongue in specific cases, while Torres's speech is characterized by his frequent use of Spanish words. At last, it is important to mention that the English speaking cast of the characters with impact features characters from all across the globe, such as Jing Lang from China, Adewalé from Trinidad and Jack Rockham from Jamaica (among others), and their use of language also contributes to the impressions the player gains about them.

5. DISCUSSION

In Section 4, I described the portrayal of languages in *Assassin's Creed: Black Flag*. In analyzing this, I relied on the methods of multilingual cinematic discourse suggested by Bleichenbacher. They enabled me to highlight patterns of language use and characterization in the game. Further, with the help of Bleichenbacher's revised version of the Mareš taxonomy (2008:24), I could analyse the portrayal of languages in a fairly rigorous way, while it also gave me an opportunity to look at the game as a dynamic system of rules as suggested by Bogost (2009). In addition, my analysis also drew on the idea of realistic simulation in narrative based video games suggested by Chapman (2016.). With the help of these theories, I could pinpoint several types of linguistic representation or replacement strategies in the game.

The first part of my analysis included the examination of the game world's linguistic landscape. After the examination of the linguistic landscape, I could move on to the examination of the characters, since the world they inhabit is represented as another instance in which the game is blurring the lines between monolingual and multilingual representation of a realistic historical setting. As shown in the analysis, the towns belonging to the British, the Spanish and the pirates are represented as bilingual (English and Spanish). In contrast, the Natives are shown as having no street signs or any marking in their settlement. As such, this means that the way their linguistic landscape is depicted in the game relies on the strategy of elimination. According to the narrative, the leaders of the Assassin Order and thus, leaders of

the Natives could read and write, but it is highly unrealistic that they would keep those skills to themselves without sharing them with the rest of their people. The prestige of the British and Spanish (having their own street signs and other linguistic representations in the game world, such as flags and their own style of building their cities) stands in stark contrast to the depiction of the village where the Natives silently roam the streets without any signs. Now we understand how the game presents the world our characters live in with the use of linguistic signs. Next, I will move on to discuss the different ways the characters with impact are presented.

The basis of my analysis was the following research question: *How are different ethnic groups represented linguistically and narratively in Assassin's Creed: Black Flag?* As directed by this question, my analysis showed, firstly, that some characters do not have strong ties to the ethnicities the game claims them to belong to, while other characters (African, Native) are strongly affected by their ethnic belongings and their functions in the narrative correspond to those belongings. To clarify, in my analysis I concentrated on analyzing, on the one hand, the groups whose language behaviour was affected by their ethnicity, and, on the other hand, the groups whose language didn't show any markers of their ethnicity. The differences between the two groups are noticeable, and they show on three scales. The first of these scales is the group whose language behavior is (a) strongly affected by their ethnic groups, and the second is the group whose language is (b) moderately affected by their ethnicity, while the third group consists of the characters whose language uses are (c) not affected at all. The differences between these groups are quite clear, and when the linguistic differences are looked at in connection with how they are represented in the narrative their characteristics become even clearer. In group (a), the characters whose language behavior is strongly affected by their ethnicity. They are often represented in a stereotypical way. In group (b), the characters employ a distinguishable, recognizable language variety that helps the player identify these characters as belonging to a certain ethnic group, but beyond that, there is little or no effect of that ethnic connection to their progress or depiction in the narrative. This means, that in group B, we might hear them speak with the use of accents or in a special style of clothing, but the narrative does not include dialogues or story elements to reflect on the characters' origins. Last, in group (c), the characters wear their ethnic connection like a label, but it does not surface in any of their linguistic utterances, nor is it part of their overall representation of that particular ethnic group in the narrative.

In group (a) we find the African, English, French, Indigeneous, Italian, Spanish characters whose language uses are *strongly affected* by their ethnic background. In addition, their narrative functions and position in the storytelling also reflect their background. The two

African members of the cast are both deeply tormented by their histories as slaves, and they both have the “freedom fighter” future in the story. They both speak with a strongly accented voice. In this they differ from all the other characters manner of speech. Without exception, the English characters have a military background and have a strong sense of social hierarchy. All of them are affected by the decisions made in their home country. For instance, these include King George’s pardon to pirates, or his appointment of a new navy admiral to hunt them down. The two Natives (Ah Tabai and Opia Apito) are in many respects similar to the African characters: they, too are freedom fighters and peerless warriors, who are distinguished from all the others thanks to their unique and easily distinguishable clothing. Linguistically, the two characters are quite different from one another. While Opia Apito speaks with a heavy accent and employs a distinct, grammatically incorrect style of speech, Ah Tabai speaks English in a professional way, with only a hint of an accent. Nevertheless, they differ from all other characters. In Apito’s case this is because her speech stands in a strong contrast with all the other character’s language use. This is because her English is the most broken. Ah Tabai differs from all the rest in the way in which he occasionally switches into his own language, Taíno. Finally, the Spanish cast can be distinguished on the basis of their Spanish accent and code-switching practices. They are also different from all the rest because of their their ideologies deriving from the Templar Order, and because they are the main villains of the narrative. The French and Italian characters employ accents and occasionally switch into their first language, and their clothing style also contributes to the depiction of their ethnicity.

Group (b) includes the Asian, Dutch, Irish, Scottish and Welsh cast – all of their language uses are moderately affected by their ethnicity. This means that beside the use of accents and/or clothing style, their origins do not affect their decisionmaking, their roles in the narrative do not require the audience to know about their past. Their personal adventures in the past and future are not defines by the plight of their people (see in comparison: African and Indigeneous characters), and they do not use their mothertongue in their speech. Except for the Dutch Laurens Prins, their linguistic representation, espeacially their accents, suggest that they belong to a particular group. Jing Lang’s distinctive accent and style of clothing are clear indications of her Chinese origin, but her home country or cultural differences never appear in the narrative, nor do we hear her switch back to her native tongue. Similarly, the Irish, and Scottish characters speak with a moderate or strong accent. The Scottish and Irish members have such a distinguishable accent that their ethnic background is explicitly highlighted through their voice, but their roots do not take up such a huge portion of their narrative role like in the example of African, Indigeneous or Spanish characters. The Dutch Prins belongs to

this category, because of his name refers to his social status on his own plantation. Torres refers to his ethnic and cultural background as a defining factor of his behavior, but Prins denies that and claims he is a mere businessman. The Welsh cast consists of Kenway and Bartholomew Roberts. From these two, Kenway is the one who is moderately affected by his origins: his accent and behavior both emphasize his ethnic belonging, but he does not reflect on himself being Welsh in any other aspect. Roberts's ethnic background is only mentioned in his Codex entry, and in the game narrative there is no utterance or hint of his ethnicity affecting anything.

In group C, the Jamaican cast's only member, Rackham, is not affected by his origins in the slightest. It is simply one of his attributes. It does not surface during the narrative on any significant level, besides as a trivial label to distinguish him from all the other characters. He is a monolingual English speaker, although, from the perspective of realistic historical representation, he should be at least bilingual. As the only member belonging to the Jamaican ethnic group, Rackham is an example of negative ethnic representation. This is because of his deeds in the narrative and his lack of belonging to his claimed homeland.

The answer to my research question is still not fully explained yet. Thanks to the fact that some characters' language uses are more carefully described in the game, they are placed in the spotlight, compared to others. In addition, because of their habit of code-switching, their image and function in the narrative are also clearer than those by characters who are claimed to be multilingual by the narrative and yet remain monolingual on screen. An example like this is Adéwalé, one of the African characters in the game. The characters who code-switch are Torres (Spanish), Ah Tabai (Taíno), du Casse (French), the Italian Diplomat (Italian), Opia Apito (Spanish), and Woodes Rogers (Spanish).

According to the observations above, from these members, the Italian Diplomat as well as Woodes Rogers use code-switching to create comedy intended by the developers. The Italian Diplomat's accent and code-switch highlight his foreignness in the game's world and serve as means for a comical, negative depiction of Italians as having a high regard for style and fashion. In contrast, Woodes Rogers uses code-switch to amicably mock Torres's Spanish origins, and possibly his frequent manner of code-switching. Even so, Rogers's mocking calls Torres out on his otherness from the Englishman and emphasizes their linguistic and cultural, ethnical differences. Such actions, mocking a character for his/her language use, always has a function in cinematic and video game storytelling as well: it directs the player's attention at the object of the mocking; in this case, Torres's frequent code switching and Spanish origins. In this sense, such mocking of characters enforces what Bleichenbacher (2008:64) suggested about the effect of code switching in cinema: in his view, "there is a clear sense in which evocation through

code-switching, rather than accents, distinguishes negative characters from the more positive ones”. Despite such mocking, and the fact that the Spanish cast belong entirely to the group of main villains, also self-identifying as villainous, Bleichenbacher’s statement is not entirely true in the case of *Assassin’s Creed*. This is because the Spanish characters are clearly depicted in a negative, differentiated way from the other members of the cast who occasionally code-switch.

Other interesting examples of code-switching include Ah Tabai’s and du Casse’s code switching. Ah-Tabai code switches only twice in the game. Both of these instances are depicted in a positive, respectful way. The first time this happens is when the spiritual mentor greets Kenway, and for the second time when he initiates and explains an ancient ritual. In a similar way, one of the game’s villains, du Casse’s code switches only once in the game, when upon his dying moments he curses Kenway in French. Du Casse’s overall depiction as a Frenchman is not negative: in contrast to Torres and Márquez, he is shown to be more of a disillusioned soldier turned a successful, stylish hitman, than an inherently evil mastermind. His language uses are depicted in a respectful and moderate way. Despite his allegiance with the Templars, du Casse is not described in as negative way as Torres is.

Yet another character who code switches is Opia Apito. As was also suggested above, the way in which she is made to speak in the game is far from positive. Even though it cannot be expected that all the Natives speak perfect English without an accent, Apito’s heavily accented pronunciation and incorrect grammar forms a stark contrast with the few occasions when she switches into Spanish. Her code switches thus emphasize her lack of competence in the English language, while also indicating that she has a better command in Spanish (the language of the enemy). As she is a native Taíno, all these strategies of linguistic representation thus contribute to an image of her as a tormented, distrustful individual.

In this chapter my aim was to draw the final answers to my research question. to achieve this, I presented my findings about the game’s linguistic landscape and only after, could I successfully show how the characters are also represented in the game, on the basis of their linguistic repertoire and role in the narrative.

6. CONCLUSION

According to these observations, it is clear that those characters who have a significant impact on the narrative employ easily distinguishable styles of speech and their linguistic repertoire is

more detailed and colourful than those of the characters' who have a smaller impact on the narrative. The main characters' use of language distinguishes them further from the less significant characters. This is why all the Spanish, Native and African characters have easily recognizable, patternised manners of speech.

Another interesting observation was that the game employs cinematic tools to enhance storytelling and world building for a more effective player immersion. Such cinematic tools also include the characters' language use. The villains and the main protagonist's closest allies employ a heavily accented style. Some are even made to code-switch to highlight their uniqueness. In short, their linguistic repertoire and language uses become an essential part of their depiction. The game also employs the strategy familiar from mainstream Hollywood cinema when non-English languages appear in the narrative. This is illustrated by the unrealistic or comedic code switches by some of the characters, whereby the audience are informed in an efficient way of the characters' relationships and characteristics. In addition, in cases where a "language that is unknown to a much larger part of the audience than in the case of French, Spanish" (Bleichenbacher 2008:2019) the game employs subtitles, very similarly to the cases Bleichenbacher also examined in his study. I am referring to the use of Taino in this case.

In contrast to Bleichenbacher's assertion that "movie characters whose first language is not English are more likely to be negative characters" (2008:220), it seems that in the game under investigation in this study, this is not the case. While indeed, the Spanish, Asian, French, Jamaican cast belong to the group of villains, the Natives and Africans are not. At the same time, speakers of non-standard English (such as Irish, Scottish, Welsh) are more likely to belong to the positive protagonists. Their characterization is also less stereotypical than the one of the villainous Spanish or French. It is always tricky to generalize depictions and draw general conclusions, that is why in the analysis section I made clear differences about where the characters stand in the narrative and how their language use reflects on their representation of themselves as well, not only their ethnicity. By this I mean, that I aimed to have an unbiased point of view during my analysis, so in order to show how the game presents them through their role in the storytelling and through their use of language. Characters such as Anne Bonny, Mary Read and Rhona Dinsmore speak with a heavy accent which highlights that they do not belong to the same group from the British Isles. The majority of the NPCs with impact uses English as their mothertongue (see the long list of English native speakers), and as such, English is the standard language in the game. By the appearance of a non-English language, there is a special significance, a specific function it possesses. The fact, that how diverse a

character's linguistic repertoire is, depends heavily on their role in the narrative. As such, in comparison to the standard role of the English language, the prestige and position of non-English languages becomes highlighted. In my analysis, I intended to show the different ways how the characters are represented linguistically and ethnically, through their depiction in the narrative.

In contrast to the accents of the English-speaking characters, the characters whose L1 is not English blend into the game's world even further in the form of accents. On a more general level, the use of non-English languages is restricted to certain social situations and to specific characters and cinematic cut scenes. In the game, the English native speakers are depicted as monolingual while it is only characters whose mother tongue is not English are claimed to be multilingual by the narrative. There is no exception to this pattern, other than Woodes's Rogers comical code-switching to mock Torres by his brief uses of Spanish. Similarly to Bleichenbacher's findings, in *Assassin's Creed: Black Flag*, there is not a single multilingual dialogue where English would not be present (2008:221). This feature of the game hinders the game's attempt at a realistic historical simulation (Chapman, 2016); Instead, it emphasizes the prominent role of English in any and all social interactions. In fact, instances in which a non-English native speaker switches to their native tongue "even if no interlocutor understands them" (Bleichenbacher 2008:221) only occurs twice in which Ah Tabai, the spiritual mentor of the protagonist greets Kenway in Taíno and later initiates an ancient ritual, but neither of these occurrences have any significance in the narrative.

The representation of languages therefore reflects and highlights the trends that Bleichenbacher explored in his study (2008), with only a few marked differences. It is unsure whether in Hollywood films or in *Assassin's Creed: Black Flag*, the developer studio Ubisoft "simplifies multilingual realities and impose a monolingual bias by means of its representations, or whether it does not simply reflect the fact that for many people, monolingualism may still be considered more normal and less problematic than many linguists would prefer." (Bleichenbacher 2008:221) This means, that as linguists we would expect a more multilingual representation of the game's suggested realistic simulation, but the general audience might not even pay attention to the game's presented linguistic repertoire, because their attention is directed at the game's dynamic storytelling. For them it might seem natural, that in a multicultural, multilingual environment there are more than one languages present, with one (the standard language) dominating the linguistic presence in the game.

I hope that on the basis of my research, other scholars of may be inspired to analyze other narrative based historical role-playing games and learn more of the role of the language

in digital games. Since historical narrative role-playing games are very popular nowadays, there are a large number of games to analyse. My present analysis reported on in this thesis can provide others with ideas on how to examine games in the future. As I have already mentioned in the beginning of the study, the way in which languages are represented in games is an equally important topic for study as the representation of age, gender and race. This is because it is only through linguistic means of communication that we can understand and interpret the world around us.

Finally, to conclude my thesis, I would like to highlight one more time that video games possess the inherent power to depict our world and give us an opportunity to re-live, re-enact historical periods, which would otherwise only exist in books and films. In such worlds, such eras, whether futuristic or in the past, the element of representation is crucial. It makes it possible to build a more inclusive experience of immersion for all players around the world who wish to embark on the game world's journey. In my case, my passion for video games was sparked, because it offered me the opportunity to make my own journey into and within an interactive, immersive storyplaying experience where I could meet and get to know people from ethnicities and backgrounds I never would have otherwise. Video games constitute a medium in which the borderlines between fiction and reality can be blurred, and in that grey area where characterization, world building and narration combine, we can find languages at the very core, a vital element in the mixture.

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