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Guild Names in *World of Warcraft*

Nazwy gildii w grze *World of Warcraft*

INTRODUCTION

Computer games, as a significant element of contemporary popular culture, have become the subject of research under a new discipline: game studies. Within the discipline, on the one hand, a computer game is considered a continuation of its literary form, and the researchers' attention is focused on the story, narration, and experience of the history presented in the game (narratological approach); on the other hand, the function of game mechanics, gameplay, and the way it is played, which distinguishes computer games from other media (ludological approach), is emphasised. The central categories mentioned in the game studies' deliberations are immersion, understood as a spontaneous experience of experiencing the world evoked by playing within the framework of its mechanics, and interactivity, i.e. the possibility of the recipient's active participation in the presented world (for more information on these categories cf. Prajzner, 2009).

Computer games may also be of interest to other fields, such as onomastics, as they are new areas of operation for various types of proper names. Some of them are somehow "given" to the audience by the creators of the game, belong to the world presented and are not subject to modification by the players. This group can be considered similarly to the case of proper names in literary texts.

Some types of games allow the players to modify the name or even require that they create a name that most often refers to the avatar character they are playing. This is particularly evident in the case of MMOG (*Massively Multiplayer Online Game*), i.e. online multiplayer games in which the character names are visible to other players from their perspective and are part of the game world. The possibility of creating a name is, therefore, an interactive property of the game, the player makes an individual decision, interacting with the common environment of the game.

Contacts with other players, cooperation and competition are an important element of playing MMOG, which can lead to the formation of smaller or larger virtual communities. In addition to their basic ludic function, MMOGs also have a social function: they are a platform through which virtual communities of players are created, which often go beyond the game environment, and operate on social networking sites, forums, and are transferred to other games (e.g. multi-gaming guilds). These relationships may extend beyond the virtual space, players meet in the real world at rallies and conventions, where they exchange experiences from playing and sometimes make social contacts not related to the game. This causes the names created in computer games to function as pseudonyms beyond the game reality.

The subject of consideration in this article is the names of guilds – virtual communities created in the computer game *World of Warcraft*. The game belongs to the MMORPG (*Massively Multiplayer Online Role Play Game*) genre, i.e. storyline based MMOGs, in which players take on the roles of fictional characters and direct the actions of these characters. It is a game developed by the American company Blizzard Entertainment which was released in its basic version in 2004, and is today, one of the most popular games of this type.[1] It is part of a series of various publications – games, novels, films, and comic books – based on the Warcraft universe, for which the starting point is the fictional world of Azeroth, inhabited by people, orcs, dwarves, elves, trolls and other fantastic races. The plot of the series is based on a conflict between two enemy factions: the Alliance and the Horde. Players can compete as different races and choose different classes, such as Warrior, Mage, Warlock, Rogue,[2] etc. which partly depends on the selected side of the conflict.

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[1] The popularity of the game can be proved by the fact that, since the release of the basic version in 2004, 7 expansion sets have extended the game, developing history and expanding the game world even further. According to the developer, 3.4 million copies of the latest expansion, i.e. *Battle for Azeroth* were sold on the day of the release, which made it the fastest selling computer game so far (Blizzard 23.08.2018).

[2] World of Warcraft does not have an official Polish language version – although Polish versions do exist among the Polish communities of players (such as wowpopolsku.pl or wow-translator) and in the form of additional programs (so-called addons) that exchange original English texts with amateur translations.

The game requires that each player creates their names: first of all, the account name of the so-called Battletag, identifying the specific player, then the name of the character. Players also give names to guilds – organizations that band their characters together[3] in the game in larger groups. Guilds make it easier to gather teams to perform the various tasks set by the game, give additional benefits for members, and create a space for experiencing the game together with a specific attitude to the game and in a friendly atmosphere.

Names are usually invented by the players who decide to open a new guild. They may be created by the founder or they may be the result of the joint effort of a group which, guided by its specific motivations, seeks to express its character. The guild name will be seen by other players, it will be an element determining affiliation, and also partly the identity of the character. Information on guild affiliation and migration between guilds can be found in the online rankings of the characters, as well as on websites that allow players to "preview" statistics and equipment.

NAMING MOTIVATIONS

There are various motivations for creating guild names. The main ones include the desire to create a unique and original name, to enter the world presented by reference to its organization, to awaken appropriate associations (the name "sounds good"), to express common values, such as attitude to the game or common interests, and sometimes to refer to relations within the guild and between guilds.

From a technical point of view, the way the name is created is governed by the "World of Warcraft Naming Policy" made available by the game publisher. Names are to have a certain number of characters, must be devoid of accents, numbers, and symbols, and uppercase and lowercase letters cannot be mixed. They must also comply with the "Blizzard's Code of Conduct", so they must not be inappropriate[4], offensive or vulgar. The requirements of the game are related to the uniqueness of the name: guilds with the same formal name cannot operate on the same server. Players use different notation techniques to distinguish themselves from other guilds: writing the entire name in capital letters, using spaces between the letters, or using equivalent letters from the available set of special characters. Another method is to use or omit the definite article "the" in English names, e.g. *Union*, *The Union*.

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[3] Player can have many characters, each of which can be in a different guild.

[4] The compliance of the name depends on the nature of the game played on a given server. Cf. *role play* hereunder.

The same formal names may be repeated on different servers. "Borrowing" a name from server to server may be associated with the creation of a branch of a guild, or with the fact that a name functioning on another server was liked by players creating that guild.

Motivations for naming a guild are sometimes expressed directly by the namers or guild members. They can be found on forums or guild websites or Internet portals related to the game *World of Warcraft*, e.g. "[...] the choice of Accidentally was determined by two factors: the lack of any other guild with this name in the world and the joke contained in the name. We wanted to show that we're taking it lightly, with a pinch of salt" (Darkelf, 2011a). Some names reflect the circumstances of the formation of the guild, which is declared by their founders, e.g. *The Seekers*: "We are a group of people who recently could not find their place on different servers of World of Warcraft" (Wowprogress The Seekers, 2019); *The Exiled*: "The Exiled guild was created by active people formerly from the *Veritas Aequitas* guild" (Wowprogress The Exiled, 2019). Choosing a guild name at the time of its establishment sometimes causes many difficulties and requires the consent of all interested players, e.g. *Signum* "We were wondering about the name all night – after all, someone proposed the name Signum, everyone liked it, so this name prevailed" (Darkelf, 2011b). Sometimes, however, the question is left to one person, as in the case of the *Hypnosis* guild: "The name Hypnosis was invented by Voki, who no longer plays the game. He was a positively twisted man and I have an impression that that's where the name came from" (Darkelf, 2011c).

Guild names can also be created with a view to the context in which they occur. By default, the characters of the players are displayed with their name, and just below it, in parentheses, the name of the guild to which the character belongs. The creator of the guild's name gives it such a shape that together with the character's name it forms a whole, e.g. *Is a Living Legend*, *has cookies for you*, *is procrastinating*, *has words under my name*. Such names may refer to the player's skills, constitute a challenge of some kind, and introduce foreign elements into the world presented: references to Internet memes ("come to dark side, we have cookies"), a struggle with everyday difficulties (procrastination) or constitute a metatextual commentary (having letters under the character's name).

NAMING SPECIFICITY

The names created by the players differ in their degree of coherence with the world presented in the game. They can interact with Warcraft's realities, be based on name-formation models functioning in the universe or in accordance with the

genre's archi-text, distance themselves from the world presented through irony or humour, refer to the mechanics of the game to reveal the character of the medium or introduce completely alien elements taken from culture and everyday life.

The most consistent are the names created by the players who play the game with the emphasis on *role play*. They try to embody the character as faithfully as possible, which involves "playing it" in interaction with the world and other players, according to the parameters provided by the game (race, class, specialization), but also on the basis of additional information created by the player himself, concerning the origin of the character, its past or character. *Role-play* gamers not only adopt a specific way of playing but also require it from other players, which prompts them to create characters on specially designed *role-play* servers. On the Internet, you can find manuals that regulate how to create your own names, so that they are compatible with the universe, do not break its consistency and do not "spoil the fun" for others.

On other servers, players do not pay much attention to matching the character's name to the game universe. Guild names may fit into or break out of the presented world to different degrees. Thus, one can distinguish names consistent with the universe, which can be created within its framework; referring to the mechanics of a game and the way it is played; referring to players and their communities, as well as "alien" names, referring to culture, literature, other games, etc. The names of a given universe can be distinguished.

The analysed naming material was obtained from Wowprogress, one of the websites allowing to track the progress in the game of individual characters and guilds. The analysis included guilds from European servers, which declared that the main language used by the players associated with them is Polish. This criterion significantly reduces the amount of material, because not all guilds use Wowprogress; there are other Polish-speaking guilds that did not declare their main language, which makes it difficult to find them. The following review is therefore limited in scope. Study of all names regardless of the declared language could reveal other phenomena that appear in guild names. The material was collected at the end of the "Legion" expansion set and supplemented with names created at the beginning of "Battle for Azeroth". Some guilds are ephemeral, they are formed for a short period of time and then disintegrate, disappear or merge with other guilds, so some of the names analysed below no longer exist in that context.

The dominant language in which the analysed onyms were created is English, the second language is Polish. There are also names in artificial languages, taken from cultural texts, and there is a clear minority of Latin and modern languages such as Japanese, German and Italian.

NAMES RELATED TO WARCRAFT UNIVERSE

The names directly related to the Warcraft universe refer to individual elements of the world presented in the game *World of Warcraft*, as well as in other related games, books, comics, and films. The research material included names which evoke events from the history of the universe: *Twilight of Lordaeron* (referring to the murder of the king of one of the human kingdoms in Azeroth[5]); which refer to the structure of the world: *Different Dimension* (there are different dimensions in the universe), *The Edge of Nether* (reference to Twisting Nether, a chaotic astral plane existing between the worlds); and places available to the player *Grizzly Hills* (a forest in the eastern part of Northrend), *Spearhead* (a small Horde camp in Southern Barrens), *Dreamway* (referring to the Emerald Dreamway, a forest meadow in the spiritual world of Emerald Dream). Some of the local names used in guild names have an intertextual character because the Warcraft universe includes many references to mythology, beliefs, and religion. An example of such a name is *Helheim*, the world of the dead known from Nordic mythology, ruled by the goddess Hel, which exists in the world of the game and whose name also functions as the name of the Polish-speaking guild.

The names of the guilds also reflect the constitutive for the plot, division into two enemy factions: the Alliance: *Alliance Crusade, Wrogowie Hordy* and the Horde: *Najemcy Hordy*, *Only Horde.* Among them, one can find names of a humorous nature *Lej Horde W Morde* (Alliance Guild)*, Alpaki Hordy* (Horde Guild). The division into fractions is connected with the division into races: the name of the Horde guild *Gnomeaters* is a contamination of *gnome* "one of the races belonging to the Alliance" and *eaters*. The universe also comprises smaller fractions, which sometimes appear in the game plot, and whose names can also function as guild names, such as *The Frostborn*.

The Warcraft universe is also referred to by names such as *Murlocs of Azeroth*, *Sha of Happiness,* which are the names of creatures living in the world of Azeroth.

NAMES CONNECTED WITH GAMEPLAY

The names associated with gameplay include *Practice Makes Perfect*, *High Performance*, *Maiori Cede*, *Away Of Death*, the humorous *At Least We Tried*, *We Die A Lot* and the ironic *Almost Progress, R E G R E S*, *Regression Routine* – as

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[5] *The Fall of Lordaeron* is also the name of a mission in another game of the universe, Warcraft II, and part of *The Fall of Lordaeron and the Scouring of the Eastweald* – an item available in *World of Warcraft*.

opposed to the progress the players strive for – *Fatal Error*, *Panica Gaming*, or *Rage Quit* (a term meaning a situation in which the player angrily leaves in the middle of the game). The name *CEBULA GAMING* has a humorous character. Cebula (Eng. onion) is a self-ironically used symbol of Polishness, functioning among Polish Internet users.

Many names refer to elements of World of Warcraft itself: game mechanics – *Versatility* (one of the character statistics), *Damage Incorporated*, *Terrible Terrible Damage* (damage suffered most often as a result of an attack), *Barracuda Mrglgagh* (food type), *Safety Dance* (achievement[6] name), *Vengeance Incarnate* (titles that can be obtained by completing specific quests). Among them, is a large group of names referring to the transition of the so-called instances[7], especially raids[8], which are one of the main types of quests in the game. These are the names indicating the interest of guild members in raids: *Underground Raiders*, *Fun Raiders* and *Raid Warning* (a signal to start an attempt to pass a part of the game, transmitted through add-ons – additional programs used by the players); names referring to the experience of members of the guild, e.g. *Retired Raiders*, *Wywalony Skład Rajdowy*. Numerous names are motivated by the term *wipe*, which means a situation in which all raid characters die or deliberately kill themselves in order to try to go through some part of the game again: *Wipe, Wipe It*, *Wipe Nation*, also *Wipe Vendor, Wipeforged* (similar to the *Titanforged* and *Warforged*, terms for item statistics) and *Wipe is for the Wicked* – a transformation of popular in pop-culture expression from the Bible "no rest/peace for the wicked". The names *Stack or Spread* (*stack* "very close to each other", *spread* "arrangement of the character at a certain distance from one another"), *Dont Stand In The Fire* (Wowwiki "Stay out..."), *Dawaj Hero* (*Hero* "an expression for the skills of different classes of characters, which temporarily increase the speed of all group members' actions") refer to the raiding tactics. Among the guild names, there are other names of the character's skills, such as Warrior's *Surge*, *Deathrow*, *Slaughter House* or Monk's *Dotyk Karmy*.

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[6] Achievement is a distinction for performing tasks in the game in a specific way. It has no influence on the plot or subsequent gameplay, and for the players, it is an end in itself, an additional level of experience of the game, thanks to which they can demonstrate different skills.

[7] Instance is a restricted copy of a location isolated from the game world, available for one or more players. *World of Warcraft* instance includes scenarios, dungeons, raids, and battlegrounds.

[8] An instance where a multiplayer team of 10 to 30 players passes through, defeats enemy creatures (mobs) and more dangerous and powerful bosses along the way and collects obtained and otherwise found treasures.

NAMES CONNECTED WITH THE COMMUNITY

The community of *World of Warcraft* players is divided not only according to the factions the players are in favour of, or guilds in which they are associated, but also according to the server on which the players create their characters. Migration of players and sometimes entire guilds between servers is possible and is reflected in the names, e.g. *Legion TOD*[9], *Exiles of Alaris*, both referring to the no-longer-existing private servers Theatre of Dreams and Alaris. *Burning Onion* is a humoristic transformation of the name of the Burning Legion server, dominated by Polish players, with reference to the onion as a symbol of Polishness.

When naming, players are also guided by the fact that the name somehow defines the character of the group that creates it: *Nicponie*, *Moczymordy*, *Czarne Owce*, *Troublemakers*, *Old Dogz*, *The Outcasts*. These are mostly self-mocking names, e.g. *The Slackers*, *N E R D*, *Noobs from Proland*, derived from the terms used in the internet jargon *slacker* "a player who does not put enough effort into the game, slacks around", *nerd* "a person fascinated by science, especially computer science, and computer games" (Czapliński, 2014), *noob* "a player who lacks the skills necessary for the game, a novice".

The examined material contained names that might suggest the type of organization or relations prevailing in them, e.g. *Tyranny*, *Hegemonia*, *Res Publica* or emphasizing the community character, e.g. *Union*, *De Integro*, *Forever as One* or the atmosphere of peace and security, e.g. *Enklawa*.

A separate group is formed by the names of the so-called multi-gaming or multi-mmo guilds, whose members play other computer games together. These include *Circle of Nine*, *Novasociety*, *Royal Legion*, and *Steel and Magic*.

NAMES REFERRING TO CULTURE

The last group consists of guild names reflecting other interests of players, referring to broadly understood culture and its creations. There are names that refer to high culture, especially Latin, such as *Acta Sanctorum, Danse Macabre, Lux in Tenebris* and various mythologies: *Hellada*, *Valhalla* or *Ridens Moriar* from expressions from the Scandinavian song "Krákumál", telling the story of the death of Ragnar Lothbrok. Some names are related to religious practices: *Crucify*, *Cyrograf*, *Supreme VooDoo*, and religious organizations *Zakon Templariuszy*, *Wolnomularze*,

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[9] There may also be another motivation for the name, derived from *Touch of Death*, one of Monk's skills.

Argentum Astrum and *Silver Star*. The last two are associated with the Order of the Silver Star created by Aleister Crowley.

Among the names referring to culture, one can also find those that emphasize the national affiliation of players associated in the guild by recalling history: *PRL*, *Sarmatia*, *Liberum Veto*; certain stereotypical traits such as propensity to alcohol: *Cztery razy Wóda*, *Wyborowa* or drawing on popular expressions: *Everybody Kombinerki*, *Wesoły Autobus*, *Lepszy sort*.

A separate group is formed by the names of military organizations, mostly Polish: *GROM*, *Gwardia Polska*, *BOROWIKI* "colloquially officers of the Government Protection Bureau", as well as historical units: *IX Kohorta*, *Pretorianie*.

Many names refer to the phenomena of contemporary popular culture, for example, *Simulacrum*, *Singularity* or *Skittles* "brand of fruit-flavoured candy". The names *Big Pull Theory* and *The Big Wipe Theory* are formally motivated by the title of the popular sitcom "The Big Bang Theory".

There are many names referring to Internet memes: *ayylmao*, *Deep Dark Fantasy*, *World of Nyan* and computer games. These, in turn, are referred to directly by borrowing the title *Angry Birds*, *Tomb Raider*, and indirectly by using the names used in these games, such as *Emberwake* "a unique ring from the game Path of Exile", *The Forgotten Grimoire* "an item from the game Final Fantasy XII" or *Ordo Hereticus* "name of the organization known from the Warhammer 40000 universe".

A large group is made up of names referring to literature. The names of literary works are borrowed directly, e.g. *Czarna Kompania*, *Emerald Sea*, *Ostatni Mohikanie*, *The Tempest*. The source of the most frequent references is the work of Andrzej Sapkowski. The titles of the parts of the so-called Hussite Trilogy are used as guild names: *Narrenturm*, *Lux Perpetua*, references to *The Witcher* series are visible in e.g. *Kaer Morhen* and *Caern Morghen* from Kaer Morhen "a castle where witchers are trained", *Empire of Nilfgaard* "one of the state forces in the universe of *The Witcher*", *Bractwo Starszej Krwi*, referring to Elvish legends including the universe (Wiedźmin Wiki "Starsza Krew") and *Aen Hanse* in the artificial Nilfgaard language, defined in the cycle as an "armed team of friends" (Wiedźmin Wiki "Hanza"). There are also references to J.R.R. Tolkien's works: *Fellowship of the Bling* is a transformation of the English title *The Fellowship of the Ring*, the first volume of the *Lord of the Rings* cycle; *Cirith Ungol* "a pass known from the mythology of Middle-earth", *Quenya* "so-called elven Latin, an artificial language developed by Tolkien", and George R.R. Martin: *Valar Morgulis* from *A Song of Ice and Fire* saga's expression *valar morghulis* meaning "everyone must die" in the Valyrian language.

In addition, the guild names reflect an interest in other areas of culture: film *BRATERSTWO WILKOW*, *BRAVEHEARTS*, *Gang Dzikich Wieprzy*, *Parszywa*

Dwunastka, *The Inside Job*, as well as the humorous *Brygada Papy Smerfa*; anime *Last Order*, *Mugiwara no Ichimi*; music *Death Cult Armageddon* – the name of the album of Norwegian black metal band Dimmu Borgir.

CONCLUSION

Thanks to the guild system, players in *World of Warcraft* can join and act within micro-communities. Guild communities lead the gameplay together, experience the game together, support their members, and sometimes they are a place of establishing closer friendly relationships, going beyond the virtual world. The game requires the creation of a guild name by the founder; therefore, the naming activity is an interactive element of the game. Guild names are used to identify the micro-community, define belonging to a virtual group, and express the aspirations of players, their attitude to the game, interest, and sense of humour. The genre of the hypotext, in which the world presented can be seen, in this case *fantasy* is more important than the names of the characters (cf. Domaciuk-Czarny, 2015). An exception to the above comprises guilds created on *role-play* servers. Apart from them, the guild nomenclature expresses the specificity of the *World of Warcraft* gaming environment to a greater extent.

The names of the guilds feature various motivations between two extremes: the desire to blend in with the presented world and the desire to break out of it. In between, there is a whole spectrum of expression strategies, including irony, the introduction of foreign elements in relation to the presented world, or a metatextual commentary revealing the mechanics of the game.

Guild names can be analysed not only in relation to the world presented in the game itself, but also to the whole universe of Warcraft, which goes beyond it and is presented in fragments in other instalments of the franchise. This means that players are familiar with the different parts of the world available in other media. An additional layer referred to by the names under discussion is the layer of game mechanics, a way of playing a game that is slightly different for each class of characters, specific of particular challenges faced by the player, such as raids and methods of their passage.

An important feature of guild names is their intertextuality[10], which is a result of the competence and creativity of players as participants of modern culture. The vast majority of the analysed names are borrowings from other texts – whether

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[10] For more information about onymic intertextuality cf. Aleksandra Cieślikowa (1993), Małgorzata Rutkiewicz-Hanczewska (2006, 2012), Magdalena Graf (2015).

game-text, universe-text or other texts of culture. These borrowings are subject to various transformations, they are a kind of language game, and can be in the form of quotes, language games, allusions. They constitute a rich collection of onyms that could illuminate further research from a textual perspective.

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

MMOG – Massively Multiplayer Online Game
MMORPG – Massively Multiplayer Online Role Play Game

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ABSTRACT

The subject of the analysis are guild names created by players in the *World of Warcraft* MMORPG. Guilds are organizations that give structure to virtual micro-communities created in the game. Their names reflect the specific nature of the *World of Warcraft* gaming environment. The article discusses the names of Polish-speaking guilds in terms of their consistency with the world presented. Four types of onyms were distinguished: consistent with the Warcraft universe; referring to the game mechanics and the way the game is played; referring to players and their communities and taken from other areas of culture.

Keywords: guild name, MMORPG, player community, world presented

ABSTRAKT

Przedmiotem analizy są nazwy gildii tworzone przez graczy w grze MMORPG *World of Warcraft*. Gildie są organizacjami nadającymi strukturę wirtualnym mikrospołecznościom tworzonym w grze. W ich nazwach odbija się specyfika społeczności graczy w *World of Warcraft*. W artykule omówiono nazwy polskojęzycznych gildii ze względu na ich spójność ze światem przedstawionym. Wyróżniono cztery typy onimów: zgodne z uniwersum Warcrafta; nawiązujące do mechaniki gry i sposobu prowadzenia rozgrywki; odwołujące się do graczy i ich społeczności oraz zaczerpnięte z innych obszarów kultury.

Słowa kluczowe: nazwa gildii, MMORPG, społeczność graczy, świat przedstawiony