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# *Soulslike video games — a corpus linguistic analysis of the language of Elden Ring*

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*“The Elden Ring, oh Elden Ring, shattered by someone...or something. Don't tell me you don't see it. Look up at the sky. It burns.”*

## CONTENTS

<b>ABSTRACT .....</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>CHAPTER 1 INTRODUCTION.....</b>	<b>5</b>
1.1. Introduction.....	5
1.2. Soulslike games.....	5
1.3. What <i>Elden Ring</i> is.....	8
1.3.1. White Mask Varré’s quest as an example of relationship with an NPC in <i>Elden Ring</i> .....	10
1.4. What makes <i>Elden Ring</i> stand out from other soulslikes.....	13
1.5. The language of <i>Elden Ring</i> .....	13
1.6. Conclusion .....	14
<b>CHAPTER 2 BACKGROUND AND METHOD .....</b>	<b>15</b>
2.1. Introduction.....	15
2.2. Background .....	15
2.3. Method .....	17
2.3.1. Data collection.....	17
2.3.2. The research questions.....	25
<b>CHAPTER 3 RESULTS AND DISCUSSION .....</b>	<b>27</b>
3.1. Introduction.....	27
3.2. The language of <i>Elden Ring</i> (RQ1).....	27
3.2.1. Frequent words and positive keywords in the Characters sub-Corpus (RQ1a-b).....	27
3.2.2. Frequent words in the <i>Objects sub-Corpus</i> (RQ1c-d).....	34

3.2.3. Frequency of use of <i>Elden Ring</i> 's vocabulary (RQ1e).....	36
3.2.4. General traits of the language of <i>Elden Ring</i> .....	38
3.3. The language of Alexander, Melina, Ranni and Varré (RQ2a-b).....	38
3.3.1. Alexander's frequent words, keywords and n-grams .....	38
3.3.2. Melina's frequent words, keywords and n-grams.....	42
3.3.3. Ranni's frequent words, keywords and n-grams .....	46
3.3.4. Varré's frequent words, keywords and n-grams.....	49
3.3.5. Implications .....	52
3.4. The language of object descriptions in <i>Elden Ring</i> (RQ3) .....	52
3.4.1. Keywords in the <i>Objects sub-Corpus</i> (RQ3a).....	52
3.4.2. Phraseologies in the <i>Objects sub-Corpus</i> (RQ3b).....	53
3.4.3. Considerations about the linguistic traits of the <i>Objects sub-Corpus</i> .....	55
3.5. General implications .....	55
<b>CHAPTER 4 CONCLUSION</b> .....	<b>57</b>
4.1. Introduction.....	57
4.2. My goals and results .....	57
4.3. Pros and cons of the study.....	58
4.4. Suggestions for future research.....	60
<b>BIBLIOGRAPHY</b> .....	<b>62</b>
<b>WEBLIOGRAPHY</b> .....	<b>65</b>

## ABSTRACT

Video games have been enjoying world-wide popularity among gamers and fans alike to the point that academics from various fields, too, have started devoting their attention to them. For example, literary scholars have studied how narration is developed in video games, archaeologists have studied the “archaeological” techniques for looking for in-game objects, and psychologists have focused on the impact that gaming skills have on learners’ minds. However, ‘soulslike’ games have not received much academic attention. Soulslike games are role-playing video games, usually set in medieval and fantasy environments, in which the player has to “immerse” him-/herself in the game by crafting materials, finding useful objects and assembling equipment for facing various dangers during the game. This involves speaking to characters and looking for items, accompanied by some verbal description, that may turn out to be useful.

Linguists, too, have shown interest in video games, investigating their slang and its relevance to students’ everyday life, the usefulness of video games in learning and practising languages, and the complexity of translating video games. However, a detailed examination of their discourse is still lacking. In this dissertation I provide a linguistic analysis of *Elden Ring*. *Elden Ring* is the first open world soulslike game, that is one characterised by a large and completely explorable game world. My analysis describes the lexical make-up of the speech of the main characters in *Elden Ring* (Blaid, Boc, the Dung Eater, Fia, Gideon, Alexander, Melina, Millicent, Miriel, Nepheli, Ranni, Roderika, Sellen, Tanith, and Varré) and the descriptions of the main objects related to them (e.g. weapons, armours, spells). To this end, I used a corpus-driven approach, exploring the recurrent phraseologies of each of the above, pointing out shared and unshared vocabulary choices. By using the software AntConc, I identified the most frequent words, the keywords and the word combinations of characters’ talk and of object descriptions. The findings show that the speech of soulslike games’ characters, who embody stereotypical roles, is characterised by distinctive lexico-grammatical patterns, which contribute to shaping the personality of the characters. They also show that the texts about the game objects have a descriptive and a narrative component which complement the mysterious content of the characters’ discourse, crucially leading to a thorough understanding of the characters in *Elden Ring*.



## CHAPTER 1

### INTRODUCTION

#### 1.1. Introduction

This study aims to analyse the discourse (i.e. recurrent phraseologies) of some of the main characters of the video game *Elden Ring* in order to shed light on aspects of their personality and gain a better understanding of the game itself. In this chapter, I give a brief introduction to the video game genre *Elden Ring* belongs to (Section 1.2.), including an outline of the video game itself (1.3.) and a general description of its linguistic characteristics (1.5.). In the end, I motivate my study and provide an overview of the next chapters (Section 1.6.).

#### 1.2. Soulslike games<sup>1</sup>

*Elden Ring* is the latest representative of the "soulslike" game sub-genre, which is part of the role play game (RPG) genre.

RPGs are typically characterised by a realistic, although fictitious, explorable game world, in which the player is supposed to organise her/his fight against hostile creatures and interact with the environment and its inhabitants in order to gain information which will be useful not only to understand the game's plot, but mainly to survive. The fight a gamer engages in, thus, is based on the effective management of an *inventory*, that is a "virtual bag" consultable as a menu, in which it is possible to find all the items collected and crafted during the game (see Picture 1). At the beginning of the game, the player will create her/his avatar, which will evolve as the story progresses, by developing new skills, using new weapons and acquiring new powers, as the need arises. Therefore, the player plays the roles of different characters (e.g. as a knight, a magician, an archer), depending on the dangers and challenges she/he will have to face (see Picture 2). Assuming these different roles is indeed the reason why these games are called RPGs.

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<sup>1</sup> The following information derives from my own gaming experience and knowledge of the video game genres that I describe.



Picture 1: Inventory in *The Witcher 3* (credit: retroneogames.com).



Picture 2: Examples of players' characters in *Elden Ring* (edited, original image credit: altchar.com).

As a sub-genre of RPG, soulslike games inherit the properties of RPGs. However, some aspects make these games stand out from the genre they belong to.

Firstly, soulslike games are usually characterised by a dark fantasy setting. A classic exemplar is *Bloodborne*, an iconic soulslike game created by FromSoftware, in collaboration with Sony. It is set in an extremely dark and Lovecraftian early 19th-century world, with contorted and terrifying beasts in every corner. Another representative is *Dark Souls*, a video game trilogy published by FromSoftware and Bandai Namco between 2011 and 2016, which also gives its name to the video game genre. *Dark Souls* is set in a



medieval dark world – as the name suggests – mainly coloured with a black, grey and dark red colour palette, with decaying castles, ancient menacing dragons and knights who have lost their mind, rotten by the same curse afflicting their whole land.

Another essential feature of soulslike games is immersion. This means that they are developed with the idea of making players feel as if they themselves are living the adventures that their avatars live under their control. In other words, the player does not only move her/his character as a puppet, but she/he is actually part of the game's world.

Soulslike games are usually characterized by a linear type of exploration, in which the player can explore wide areas, but only one at a time, and only moving from one to another through a pre-established path. *Elden Ring*, however, does not present this characteristic, as it identifies as an open world game (see Section 1.3.).

As happens in all RPGs, soulslike players usually meet Non-Playable Characters (NPCs). These are characters interacting with the players' own characters: they give suggestions to the players, make them take choices, make requests of them, and, when these are fulfilled, they offer players rewards (e.g. items usable in the game or in-game currency for buying items). In the video game world, relationships of this kind with NPCs are called *quests*. The items obtainable by exploration, quests or defeating enemies are called *droppable* items or simply *drops*. Besides “standard” NPCs, players can also come in contact with other online players as if these were NPCs. That is, a player in a soulslike game can make another player's avatar appear in the game world and make them act as a friend —who can help you defeat enemies or explore the setting of the game – or alternatively as an enemy to fight against, eventually obtaining rewards for defeating them. It is also possible to invade other players' worlds as an enemy-aggressor. In the video game world, this gives rise to battles between players online, which are named Player Versus Player (PVP) battles.

Narration in soulslike games stands in stark contrast to other video game genres – in every soulslike world, no-one informs the gamer of what is going on. In other words, there is no narrator, let alone a guide or instructions. The narration consists in environmental storytelling. That is, a player gradually comes to know a complex and intricate story through the gaming experience itself – the characters they meet during their exploration, the objects they are given, the objects they can find on the map, won by defeating enemies

or bought with the game's currency. In this extremely inclusive and immersive narration, the information players gather depends on the choices they make and the consequences these choices bring about. This means that different players – or the same player on different occasions – are exposed to multiple points of view of the “same” game.

In order to thoroughly complete soulslike games – that is, not only to succeed in achieving the final goal, such as defeating the main enemy, but also to fully understand the whys and wherefores of the games – it is crucial to use web guides, administrated by IT experts, video games technicians and gaming experts. These web resources provide transcriptions of the games' dialogues. This is useful for two reasons. One is that players can make up for the parts of dialogues they may have missed while playing in the games, a loss which would otherwise have very unpleasant consequences for the gamer. The other reason is that it is possible to search for the name of a specific character of a given game and obtain all the information existing about this character, including all the descriptions of the objects related to her/him.

In sum, both spoken language (i.e. the dialogues with NPCs) and written language (i.e. descriptions of the *droppable* items) play a crucial role in soulslike games, as they provide the player with information necessary to understand the plot and to survive and become more powerful in the game world.

### **1.3. What *Elden Ring* is<sup>2</sup>**

*Elden Ring* is a fantasy video game belonging to the RPG genre, published by FromSoftware and Bandai Namco in 2022. It was recently awarded the prestigious Game of the Year prize – the most important annual prize for a video game – attesting to its very high value. Its authors, who developed its setting and plot, are Hidetaka Miyazaki (visionary author of trendsetting video games such as *Dark Souls* and the award-winning *Bloodborne*) and George R. R. Martin (a contemporary icon for medieval fantasy literature, author of the *Game of Thrones* saga).

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<sup>2</sup> The following information come both from *Elden Ring*'s official website and my personal gaming experience.

Surrounded by a crepuscular medieval environment, it is set in the Lands Between, a fictional world ruled over by Demigods. As players gradually come to understand as a result of exploring this unfamiliar world, a long time before the events taking place in the game, the Demigods' mother, the immortal queen Marika, used to rule upon these lands thanks to the *Elden Ring*, a magic item giving enormous powers to its possessor. But then, suddenly, Marika shattered the artifact and disappeared, leaving the Lands Between without anyone to rule it. At that point, her sons and daughters started a crazy hunt for the *Elden Ring*'s shards – called *Great Runes* in the game's world – in order to ascend the throne that belonged to their mother, thus fighting with each other. However, not being effective as gods, when they found and took possession of the shards, they were corrupted by their strength. This became too heavy a “burden” for them to carry, and they turned into blind beasts thirsty for glory and dominion.

Therefore, when a player enters this fantasy world, their role is to cross the Lands Between to find and kill all the crazy possessors of the Great Runes, collect the powerful shards to reforge the *Elden Ring* and become its ‘Elden Lord’, restoring the original order in the end. The game thus requires players to be practically living in the game's world – exploring its map – and using the character they create as their avatar. Taking decisions about the way to interact with the characters living in the game's world and creating a well-constructed ‘build’ (the armour, weapons and spells that a gamer decides to use) are the basis of the gaming experience.

When I played my first *run* in *Elden Ring*, that is, when I first completed the game, everything sounded and looked mysterious: a blue-skinned witch talking about unknown entities in a kind of poetic language, a vase with arms and legs telling about its valour in war as a soldier, and old women speaking solemnly, giving voice to some divine entity are only a few examples of the encounters that a gamer experiences in *Elden Ring*. In addition, a huge number of descriptions are provided of various items in this game, contributing both to the novice player's sense of loss and to the veteran's understanding of the game. By paying attention to dialogues and descriptions, players can gradually come to know about the background events of the Lands Between.

### 1.3.1. White Mask Varré's quest as an example of relationship with an NPC in *Elden Ring*

I will now provide a practical example of part of a quest in *Elden Ring* (the transcription of the dialogues in the same quest is found in Section 2.3.1.), illustrating how interaction with NPCs takes place in this game, which applies also to soulslike games in general.

In *Elden Ring*, the gamer's character can communicate with the NPCs, but unlike them, she/he cannot produce any sound. NPCs speak to the player's character and the player can answer (in case of questions) or, in general, contribute to the conversation by selecting one of the few options (e.g. a sentence, a word or silence) available from a drop-down menu, which shows up every time the player's character needs to "speak". Obviously, the selection made by the player affects the development of the quest in which the conversation takes place. There are plenty of possible developments for the same quest, depending on the degree of agreement between the gamer's character and the NPCs. Interestingly, it is possible to set the subtitles to see the transcription of what NPCs and other characters say every time they speak (see Picture 3). This does not apply to the player's character, at least as long as her/his contribution to the conversation is limited to a choice from a menu (see Picture 4).



Picture 3: Varré speaking to the player (edited, original image credit: [interfaceingame.com](http://interfaceingame.com)).



Picture 4: Example of answer choices during a conversation with an NPC in Elden Ring (original image credit: gamersheroes.com).

The quest I am going to present, White Mask Varre's quest, is one of the main quests in *Elden Ring*, meaning that the decisions taken by the player and her/his interactions with the NPCs he/she becomes involved in in this quest are crucial to the development of the game's plot. Also, because of Varré's extremely mysterious and subtle behaviour, I consider it to be the most intriguing one in the whole game.

When the gamer begins playing *Elden Ring*, her/his character wakes up in a sepulchre situated in Limgrave (see Picture 5). Here, right outside the sepulchre, when she/he first sees the sunlight, the gamer meets Varré, who seems to be waiting for her/his arrival.

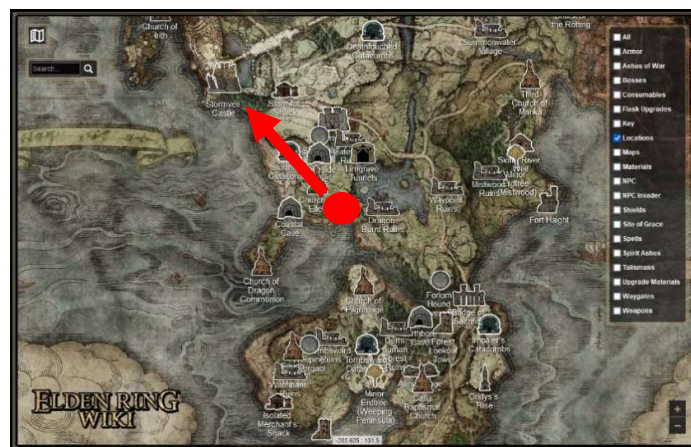


Picture 5: Limgrave (credit: eldenring.wiki.fextralife.com).

The player can interact with Varré simply by pressing the button indicated next to “Talk” (see Picture 6). Once the player has done this, Varré will talk to the player and tell her/him she/he is a “Tarnished” (i.e. a non-dead person, who has come back from death) without a guide and needs to head towards some “Castle Stormveil”, “home of the decrepit demigod, Godrick the Grafted” to find the way. His words are cryptic and sound confusing, but they are the only guidance that the player has at the beginning of the game (see Picture 7).



Picture 6: First meeting with Varré in Limgrave (edited, original image credit: holdtoreset.com).



Picture 7: Path suggested by Varré (edited, original image credit: eldenring.wiki.fextralife.com).

Once the player has explored the entire Limgrave, has arrived at the castle and has defeated Godrick, she/he can head back to where Varré is, and Varré now appears to want to test the player, and to ascertain her/his intentions. Here, if the player presents her/himself as virtuous and sinless, Varré will refuse to say anything else. On the other hand, if the player assumes an attitude similar to Varré's, in other words if the player starts to agree when Varré asks for feedback on his statements and proves to be as cynic as him when answering his questions, Varré will continue talking, and reveal where to go next. Eventually, if the player follows Varré's advice, he/she will meet him again at the new location so that the quest may proceed.

#### **1.4. What makes *Elden Ring* stand out from other soulslikes**

Three aspects make *Elden Ring* stand out from other soulslike games. The most important is that *Elden Ring* is an open world game, that is, it has a very extended area, called *map*, which is completely freely explorable by the player, who orients her/himself by consulting an actual geographic map, usually accessible from the game's menu. The other innovative aspect is the possibility for the player to evoke allied spirits (ghosts) who can help defeat enemies, by using a special item present in the inventory (see Section 1.2). Lastly, a player can evoke "offline" spirits just by using an item, whenever and wherever he/she wants, rather than only in specific places, as is the case in other soulslike games. For the above reasons, *Elden Ring* could be defined as a trend-setting game, as it is an open world soulslike game with a wide use of evocations.

#### **1.5. The language of *Elden Ring***

An interesting aspect of *Elden Ring* is its language. It partly sounds old-fashioned – reminding players of earlier stages of English – and it is partly idiosyncratic, that is, character-specific.

All the verbal input that is audible in *Elden Ring* – apart from environmental and animal sounds – is in English. It is possible to set the game's interface in 14 different languages, but it is not possible to change the audio of the dialogues, even in the original Japanese version. This is a specific choice made by the author Miyazaki, who believed that this was the best option to create a western fantasy atmosphere in the video game. Given that

the goal of the game was to contribute to the creation of a late medieval fantasy environment, the English used necessarily had to “sound old”.

Each character’s linguistic peculiarities are motivated by their background, personal history and personality; for example, the characters with a higher social status (such as the Emphyreans), tend to speak in a formal way, while those belonging to lower classes (like soldiers or merchants) use a more colloquial register (see Section 3.3.).

By paying attention to how a character speaks (e.g. the degree of formality of his/her register, the concepts she/he expresses, how she/he addresses the player, how explicit or cryptic he/she is, what interjections he/she uses, when and how often she/he pauses), a player can predict the development of the quests he/she engages with when dealing with that character as well as the role that the character plays in the overall plot.

## **1.6. Conclusion**

Academic researchers in various fields have examined the phenomenon of video games. Psychologists have analysed the impact of video games on players’ minds and the learning approach that they foster; queer studies scholars have studied the representation of gender in games; and literary scholars have considered video games’ narrative techniques. In addition, archaeologists have examined the archaeology techniques used in video games. Finally, linguists have focused their attention on the terminology of games, and some articles have also been published about *Elden Ring*. What has been left largely unexplored is the complexity of the discourse of *Elden Ring*’s different characters, and the descriptions of the items in the game, both of which move the narration forward.

In Chapter 2, indeed, I first overview the literature relevant to video games. Next, I specify the aims of my study and report on how I collected the data for my analysis. After that, I outline and exemplify the actual process of analysis which I carried out. Finally, I present and comment on my findings, and draw some conclusions from them.



## CHAPTER 2

### BACKGROUND AND METHOD

#### 2.1. Introduction

This chapter aims to contextualise and present my examination of *Elden Ring* characters' personality traits and experiences on the basis of the language attributed to or somehow related to them. I first give an overview of relevant literature (Section 2.2.). Then I illustrate how I collected and analysed the data, and finally I present the research questions addressed, together with their operationalization (Section 2.3.).

#### 2.2. Background

To set the context for my project, I first checked whether studies had already been published on *Elden Ring*. I started out by carrying out searches on Google, using *Elden*, *Ring*, and *Elden Ring* as my search words. The results of these searches were mostly reviews by famous video games magazines (like *Everyeye* or *IGN*), Reddit posts by players who discuss with other players various aspects of the game, links to YouTube videos, guides on how to complete the game (Everyeye.it; Multiplayer.com<sup>3</sup>; Bandai Namco).

Next, I consulted GalileoDiscovery, the online library catalogue of the University of Padova. Here I typed in *Elden* and *Ring* in the *Title* field, selecting as databases those called *Tutto* and *EBSCO*. These new searches returned lists of publications dealing with various aspects of the game. For example, one of these is the “archaeology” of the game. Nicholls and Cook (2022) analyse *Elden Ring* by comparing how information is collected in archaeological sites and how information is collected about the game's plot by a player who looks for clues all over the map of the game. Other publications provide psychological analyses of consumers' decisions in purchasing video games or how they may organise their busy weekly schedule in order to have time to play video games (Riyanto et al., 2022; MacDonald, 2022).

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<sup>3</sup> Everyeye.it and Multiplayer.com, along with websites as IGN.com, are among the most famous and trustable online magazines about video games, since they always have early access to the games and the news about them, and they report exclusive interviews with real game developers and directors.

Later I conducted searches also on such websites and platforms such as Google Scholar, ResearchGate, Academia.edu, and – at the suggestion of librarians at my university – also Worldcat and KVK (Karlsruhe Virtual Catalog), but I did not find any scientific publication about *Elden Ring*.

At this point, I decided to expand my search, looking for possible publications on video games in general, in the same sources I mentioned above, using as my search words “Video game”, “Language”, “Video game” and “Language”. This returned a high number of references to publications dealing with the various aspects of the world of video games, namely: narration in video games (e.g. Suter, 2021; Attademo, 2022); the psychological benefits that video games can offer (e.g. Cejudo et al., 2019; Declos, 2021); the highly engaging learning processes made possible by playing video games (e.g. Thomas, 2011; Prensky, 2001); and especially the connection between video games and language, such as the communicative processes taking place in video games and their peculiar language (e.g. Ensslin, Balteiro, 2019; Iaia, 2016), and the translation of the language in video games (e.g. Bernal-Merino, 2015; O’Hagan, Mangiron, 2013).

Some of these publications present analyses based on people effectively playing a video game. For example, Costuchen et al. (2022) report on an investigation about the relationship between language learning at various ages and space exploration in a video game specifically created for this purpose. Similar analyses are reported, for instance, in Hitosugi et al. (2014) and Muñoz González et al. (2021).

Other articles analyse the issue of education and language learning through video games from a more academic point of view (Koutsogiannis, Adampa, 2022; Soyooof, Jokar, 2014; Casañ Pitarch, 2017). Fewer are the articles dealing with linguistic aspects of video games apart from language learning issues, translation or education. For example, Heritage (2021) analyses the linguistic representation of gender in the famous *The Witcher* saga; Touiserkani (2015) deals with the adaptation techniques of audio-visual products to other languages; Halaczkiwicz (2020) analyses the influence that informal language in video games can have on gamers’ academic writing in an education context.

However, one aspect of video games in general, and of *Elden Ring* in particular, that has remained underexplored is the discourse of video game characters and what this may reveal about their personality, attitude and behaviour. This is where I aim to give my

contribution. My impression of the language of *Elden Ring* (i.e. the speech of characters and descriptions of objects) is that it sounds archaic in general, and also that it varies considerable across characters. My goal in this thesis is to verify to what extent this may be true.

### 2.3. Method

In this section, I report on how I collected and analysed the data. First, I detail and illustrate the steps taken to gather data. Next, I outline how I operationalised my research questions.

#### 2.3.1. Data collection

Collecting data about a videogame is very easy nowadays thanks to the online contributions of game communities. The soulslike games' *community*<sup>4</sup> is no exception. The data I used for analysis comes from two sources. One is *Elden Ring* Wiki, a website entirely devoted to *Elden Ring*. This includes information for gamers such as dialogues, characters' biographical information, *bossfights*<sup>5</sup> tutorials or descriptions of objects and their location on the game's virtual map and the best way to use them. The data that I collected on the *Elden Ring* Wiki comprises the speech of the characters that are frequently present in *Elden Ring*, and descriptions of objects relevant to them (see below). My other source of data is the first volume of the *Elden Ring's Books of Knowledge* (2022), which contains accurate information about the game's gameplay mechanics, world (maps and descriptions of the Lands Between's territory), quests and plot and which I used to select the object descriptions included in my analysis (see below).

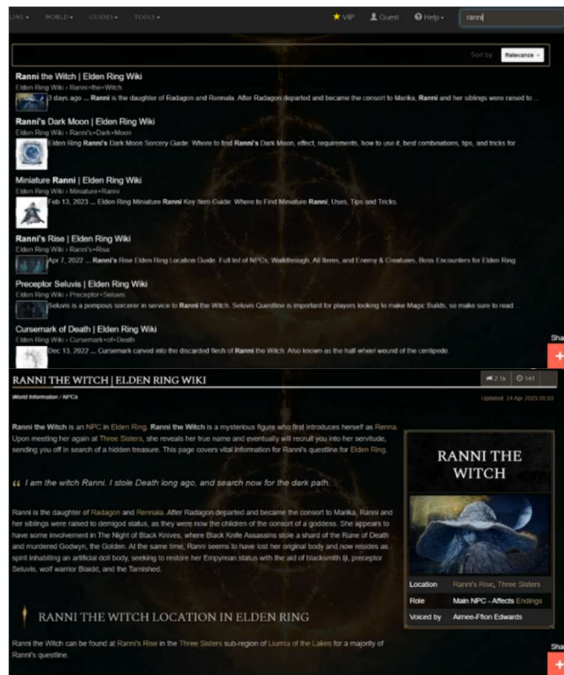
To collect the words told by a given character, I searched for her/his dedicated page on the *Elden Ring* Wiki, by typing her/his name in the search bar (see Picture 8), scrolled down to the dialogues section and copied the content of the section (except for the context

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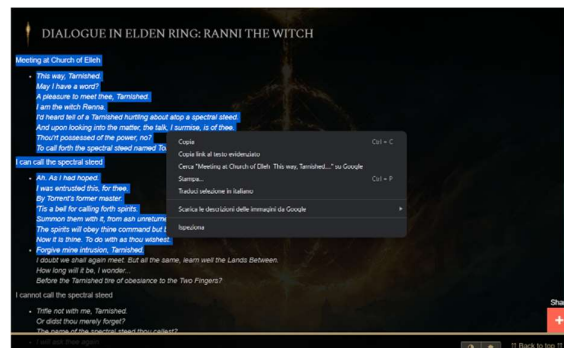
<sup>4</sup> Soulslike games' *community* corresponds to soulslike games' fanbase, in the video games' slang. It is the group of fans supporting these games and also supporting each other, by exchanging useful information in the forums or through social media.

<sup>5</sup> A *bossfight* is a fight against a *boss*, that is, a particularly powerful enemy in a video game, usually the most powerful in a given area of the game, who a gamer is supposed to face after completing the exploration of that area and defeating all the other enemies.

explanation lines added to it; see Picture 9), pasting it onto a Word file (named after the character’s name), which I saved to my *Elden Ring Characters* folder. This way, I created as many Word files as the characters whose speech I had decided to examine, each file containing the complete speech of a single character.



Picture 8: Partial screenshot of some of the text material retrieved by entering “ranni” on *Elden Ring* Wiki, and the page of the website devoted to the character ‘Ranni the Witch’.



Picture 9: Exemplification of a character’s speech as reported in the Wiki.

To give an idea of what “characters’ dialogues look like, I report two examples. Example 1 shows the lines attributed to Iron Fist Alexander, a “warrior jar”.

Example (1), about Iron Fist Alexander:

Hello-o? Can you hear me?  
Help me! I’m stuck.  
Hello? Hellooo! Anyone!

Oh my stars I’m so happy to see you!  
I am Alexander, also known as the Iron Fist. And as you can see, I’m stuck here.  
Please, can you help me out of this?

My thanks! A thousand thanks! Just give me a good smack from the rear, with something nice and big.

When players first meet Alexander, he is stuck in a hole in the ground (see Picture 10), and will continue putting himself in dangerous situations, asking the gamer to help him throughout the game. He looks funny (he is a big jar with arms and legs), but has a friendly (see, e.g. “Oh my stars I’m so happy to see you!”) and kind (see, e.g. “My thanks! A thousand thanks!”) attitude towards the player.



Picture 10: First meeting with Iron Fist Alexander (credit: gamesource.it).

Example 2 illustrates the speech of Gideon Ofnir, the leader of the “Roundtable Hold”, the place which players are supposed to reach at the beginning of *Elden Ring* to look for allies.

Example (2), about Gideon Ofnir:

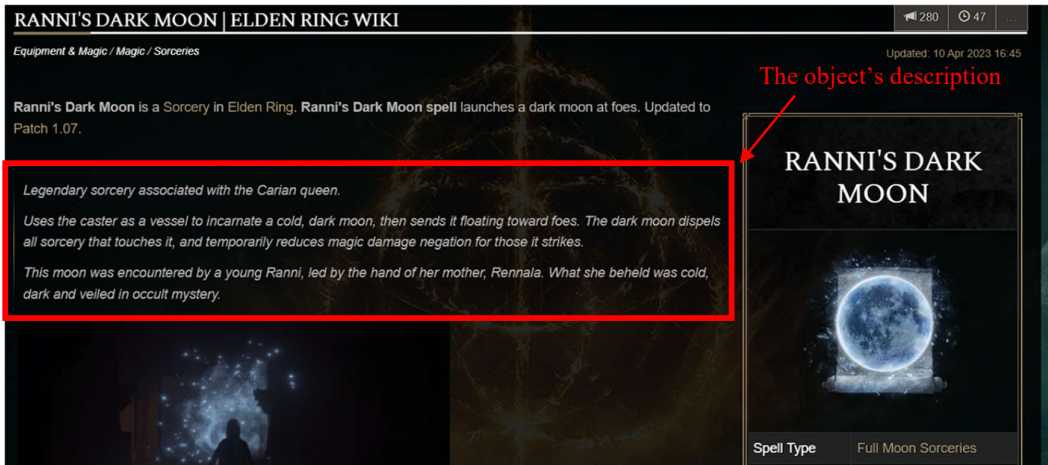
Oh, this is a rare occasion. I can't remember the last time a new Tarnished made their way to the Roundtable.  
Very well. As your senior, I bid you welcome. It is safe here. You may let down your guard. Allow me a word of advice, as your senior. You are a mere visitor to the Roundtable, nothing more. A house guest, yet to earn their keep. Remember your place, newcomer.  
There's nothing left to say. Be at your leisure.  
"What do you need? I have little time to spare".

Gideon is a merciless and greedy seeker of knowledge, which he thinks could give him a lot of power, who goes by the name of "the All-Knowing" (see Picture 11).



Picture 11: Gideon Ofnir while busy studying, an activity which he carries out throughout the game (credit: top-mmo.fr).

To collect the texts of the object descriptions, I proceeded in a similar fashion. I used my experience and knowledge of the game along with the list of objects included in *Elden Ring's Books of Knowledge* vol. 1 to identify the objects most relevant to the plot. Then, I searched for the pages dedicated to them on the website by writing the object names in the search bar. Therefore, for each object, I copied the description offered on its specific page (see Picture 12). Then I pasted all the object descriptions relevant to a particular character onto a Word file, which I called *\*Character's Name\* – OBJECTS*, saving all these Word files in a folder which I called *Elden Ring – OBJECTS*.



Picture 12: Screenshot from the Elden Ring Wiki page dedicated to Ranni's Dark Moon (a droppable sorcery in Elden Ring associated to Ranni the Witch).

Below I give two examples of object descriptions. The first one (see Picture 13 and 14, and Example 3) refers to the Spectral Steed Whistle. This object is for making Torrent, a horned horse, appear. The second example (see Picture 15 and Example 4) reports a description of a weapon called the Fingerslayer Blade<sup>6</sup>.

These two examples show how object descriptions contain useful –although not rich or detailed – information about what objects are for, how they can be used, and what the consequences may be for using them in given ways.



Picture 13: The Spectral Steed Whistle (edited, original image credit: shacknews.com).

<sup>6</sup> In *Elden Ring*, the Fingerslayer Blade was allegedly used to kill a demigod of the Golden Order, the decaying royal family in *Elden Ring* (see Section 1.3.).



Picture 14: The player mounting Torrent (credit: it.jugomobile.com).

### Example (3)

A delicate goldwork ring. Can be used as a finger whistle.  
Sound the whistle to summon and ride Torrent, the spectral steed.  
(Dismounts steed when used while on horseback.)  
Upon his death, the spectral steed can be summoned again, but doing so drains the  
Flask of Crimson Tears.



Picture 15: The Fingerslayer Blade (credit: eldenring.wiki.fextralife.com).

### Example (4)

The hidden treasure of the Eternal City of Nokron; a blade said to have been born of a  
corpse.  
This blood-drenched fetish is proof of the high treason committed by the Eternal City  
and symbolizes its downfall.  
Cannot be wielded by those without a fate, but is said to be able to harm the Greater  
Will and its vassals.



For my analysis, I considered the texts relevant to 15 *Elden Ring* characters and 76 objects which are particularly relevant to them in the game.

Table 1 lists the characters’ names, and specifies the length (in number of words) of their speech and of the descriptions of objects relevant to them.

<b>Characters</b>	<b>Characters’ speech: No. of tokens</b>	<b>Object descriptions: No. of tokens</b>
Blaid the Half-Wolf	934	140
Boc the Seamster	1,039	51
Dung Eater	502	276
Fia	1,023	331
Gideon Ofnir	2,076	278
Iron Fist Alexander	1,710	122
Melina	1,672	100
Millicent	899	307
Miriel, Pastor of Vows	732	49
Nepheli Loux	720	106
Ranni the Witch	1,792	237
Roderika	1,354	140
Sorceress Sellen	1,262	680
Tanith	947	734
White Mask Varré	1,192	214
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>17,854</b>	<b>3,765</b>

Table 1: Number of tokens making up the speeches of 15 *Elden Ring* characters and the descriptions of their objects. (Note: the token count was obtained with AntConc.)

I chose these characters as they are particularly salient in the plot. Indeed, they often interact with the player, giving him/her information he/she needs to move on in the game. For example, Alexander supports the player throughout game and also fights by her/his side. Melina guides the player, indicating her/him the path to follow. Miriel hints at what a player can expect from the game’s ending. Since the characters have a typically hermetic way of speaking, the size of the dataset of their speech, in number of words, is small.

Identical descriptions of given objects recur repeatedly in the game, since a player can encounter different parts or versions of a given object multiple times while moving in the world of *Elden Ring*. Therefore, I decided to include in my object description dataset only a single description per object. The objects which I took under consideration for each character are listed in Table 2.

Characters	No. of objects	Objects
Blaidd the Half-Wolf	2	Blaidd's Set, Royal Greatsword
Boc the Seamster	2	Sewing Needle, Gold Sewing Needle
Dung Eater	6	Omen Set, Sword of Milos, Sewer-Gaol Key, Seedbed Curse, Seluvis's Potion, Mending Rune of the Fell Curse
Fia	7	Knifepoint Clue, Weathered Dagger, Cursemark of Death, Mending Rune of the Death Prince, Fia's Set, Baldachin's Blessing, Radiant Baldachin's Blessing
Gideon Ofnir	5	Black Flame's Protection, Lord's Divine Fortification, Law of Causality, Scepter of the All-Knowing, All-Knowing Armor Set
Iron Fist Alexander	4	Jar, Warrior Jar Shard, Shard of Alexander, Alexander's Innards
Melina	2	Spectral Steed Whistle, Rold Medallion
Millicent	6	Unalloyed Gold Needle, Prosthesis-Wearer Heirloom, Valkyrie's Prosthesis, Rotten Winged Sword Insignia, Millicent's Prosthesis, Sombre Ancient Dragon Smithing Stone
Mirielle, Pastor of Vows	1	Celestial Dew
Nepheli Loux	3	Arsenal Charm, Stormhawk Axe, The Stormhawk King
Ranni the Witch	5	Fingerslayer Blade, Miniature Ranni, Discarded Palace Key, Dark Moon Ring, Dark Moon Greatsword
Roderika	3	Spirit Jellyfish Ashes, Crystals' Memento, Crimson Hood
Sorceress Sellen	11	Comet Azur, Sellian Sealbreaker, Sellen's Primal Glintstone, Stars of Ruin, Eccentric's Set, Shard Spiral, Glintstone Kris, Witch's Glintstone Crown, Sellen's Bell Bearing, Azur's Glintstone Set, Lusat's Glintstone Set
Tanith	15	Volcano Manor Invitation, Drawing-Root Key, Magma Shot, Scaled Armor Set, Serpentine Blade, Crepus's Vial, Taker's Cameo, Hoslow's Petal Whip, Hoslow's Armor Set, Tonic of Forgetfulness, Dancer's Castanets, Consort's Attire Set, Aspects of the Crucible: Breath, Letter from Volcano Manor, Red Letter
White Mask Varré	4	Great Stars, Lord of Blood's Favor, Pureblood Knight's Medal, Varre's Bouquet

Table 2: Objects whose descriptions were analysed, next to the characters which they are relevant to.

The characters' speech and object descriptions that I collected form a corpus (Bowker, Pearson 2002: 24), that is, they are collections of authentic texts (i.e. not elicited, not produced for research purposes), stored in electronic form (i.e. digital files) according to specific criteria (i.e. they are meant to be representative of different characters and their equipment), and which are then examined for their linguistic properties. From now on, as I consider them the components of a macro-corpus, the *Elden Ring Corpus* (21,619), and I will refer to them as the *Characters sub-Corpus* (17,854 words) and the *Objects sub-Corpus* (3,765 words).

### 2.3.2. The research questions

To investigate the language of *Elden Ring*, I addressed the following research questions (RQs):

- RQ1: Can the language of *Elden Ring* be accurately described as archaic-sounding?
- RQ2: Can distinctive lexical traits be identified in the speech of different characters in *Elden Ring*?
- RQ3: Does the language of the object descriptions markedly differ from that of object descriptions?

In order to find answers to my research questions, I operationalised them as follows:

RQ1a: What are the 200 most frequent words in the *Characters sub-Corpus* and what are its top 200 positive keywords<sup>7</sup> extracted by comparing to spoken corpora of general English? That is, what words are typical of this sub-corpus?

RQ1b: What topics or themes do they appear to be relevant to? That is, do they mention or describe elements and phenomena that could be related to a “distant” world?

RQ1c: What are the 100 most frequent words in the *Objects sub-Corpus*? That is, what words are typical of this sub-corpus?

RQ1d: What topics or themes do they appear to be relevant to? That is, do they mention or describe elements and phenomena that could be related to a “distant” world?

RQ1e: How frequently are these words used nowadays according to the online *Oxford English Dictionary* (OED)? That is, are they common in Modern English?

RQ2a: What are the 200 most frequent words and the top 200 positive keywords of the speech of four main characters in *Elden Ring* (Alexander, Melina, Ranni, Varré<sup>8</sup>),

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<sup>7</sup> Positive vs negative keywords are, respectively, words that are unusually frequent vs infrequent compared to a reference corpus.

<sup>8</sup> The motivation behind the choice of these characters is twofold. First, they are my favourite NPCs, due to their personality, background and appearance. These features make them iconic characters of this game. Second, my impression is that their way of expressing themselves is different from that of the other inhabitants of the Lands Between.

extracted by comparing the speech of each of these characters against the rest of the *Characters sub-Corpus*? That is, what is lexically distinctive about the speech of each of these characters?

RQ2b: What are recurrent n-grams in the speech of four main characters in *Elden Ring* (Alexander, Melina, Ranni, Varré) compared against the speech of all other characters? That is, what are their favourite expressions, if any?

RQ3: Does the language of object descriptions markedly differ from that of the characters?

RQ3a: What are the positive keywords that characterise the *Objects sub-Corpus* compared to the *Characters sub-Corpus*?

RQ3b: What distinctive phraseologies, if any, are peculiar to this sub-corpus, that is, what do recurrent n-grams reveal about the lexico-grammatical preferences of this sub-corpus, if anything?

In the next chapter, I present the results of my analysis.

## CHAPTER 3

### RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

#### 3.1. Introduction

In this Chapter, I present the results of my analysis of the language of *Elden Ring*, addressing my RQs (see Section 2.3.2.). First, I address the first RQ (see Section 3.2.), then I address the second one (see Section 3.3.) and the third one (see Section 3.4.). Finally, I comment on the whole analysis and the results obtained (see Section 3.5.).

#### 3.2. The language of *Elden Ring* (RQ1)

Here I present the results of the analysis relevant to RQ1, by examining the most frequent words and the positive keywords in the *Characters sub-Corpus* (see Section 3.2.1) and the most frequent words in the *Objects sub-Corpus* (see Section 3.2.2.), then tracing their frequency of use of in contemporary English and over time (see Section 3.2.3.).

##### 3.2.1. Frequent words and positive keywords in the *Characters sub-Corpus* (RQ1a-b)

To outline a lexical profile of the characters' sub-corpus, I examined the list of its 200 most frequent words, reported in Table 3 (RQ1a). The content words in this list are mostly common everyday English words. However, there are some exceptions, such as characters' names (*Marika*, *Ranni*, *Radahn*, *Torrent*) and two unattested forms: *Erdtree*, which is the tree around which all the Lands Between dwell, and *Glintstone*, an important shiny mineral (as its name suggests) related to sorceries in *Elden Ring*. Interestingly, *erd-* is an old prefix, dating back to the Old English<sup>9</sup> period, which indicates “the land where one dwells” or “the world on which the humankind lives” (OED) (RQ1b).

I also identified some content words which do not sound particularly common in contemporary English (*lord*, *roundtable*, *tarnished*, *master*, *apprentice*, *guidance*, *warrior*, *rot*, *champion*). Therefore, I searched for information about their semantic and

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<sup>9</sup> Old English is the English language attested from around the fifth century CE to about 1100.

historical collocation (RQ1b), finding that these words mostly belong to past historical contexts and grammatical uses.

In particular:

- *Lord* was an address term reserved to members of a high social class, which was in use especially between 1450 and 1730 (OED) and is instead used much more rarely today; in *Elden Ring* it mainly refers to the *Elden Lord*, that is the warrior conquering the Lands Between by accessing the *Elden Ring* (see Section 1.3.), although it is also used to indicate other socially or hierarchically relevant figures (e.g. *Lord of Blood*, *Lord of Stormveil*).
- *Roundtable*, although still in common use (e.g. *roundtable discussion*), was particularly common between around 1325 and 1543 (especially in reference to King Arthur's story) (OED); in *Elden Ring*, it refers to *the Roundtable Hold*, a meeting place for all the defenders of the Golden Order, in a way similar to the Arthurian cycle.
- *Tarnished* is a term originated in early 1700s (OED), indicating someone or something "having lost purity or lustre"; in *Elden Ring*, it is used to describe the people who were once guided by Queen Marika in their path to conquer the Lands Between throne (the *Guidance of Grace*) and were then deprived of this guide, thus becoming blemished.
- *Master* was used to signal somebody's artistic or crafting ability between 1607 and 1766 (OED), and by extension their social superiority. While nowadays *master* typically indicates (the holder of) a university degree, in *Elden Ring* it mostly indicates expert smiths (e.g. *Master Hewg*) or powerful wizards (e.g. *Master Lusat*).
- *Apprentice* is a term originated in Middle English to indicate "a learner of a craft" (OED), and in *Elden Ring* it is used by *Sorceress Sellen* to address the player, when providing him/her with knowledge about the world of sorcery.
- *Guidance*, "the action of guiding" (OED), started being used in the mid-16<sup>th</sup> century; it is still a term in common use; in *Elden Ring* it is used to refer to the *Guidance of Grace* (see *Tarnished* above).

- *Warrior* is a word from Middle English (OED). Its use is nowadays limited to historical contexts and literature, as in *Elden Ring*.
- *Rot*, intended as decadence, corruption, from which *rotten* derives, originated in Middle English (OED); in *Elden Ring* it indicates the *Scarlet Rot*, the plague devouring a big part of the game map, hitting every kind of living organism, causing mental illness and physical decadence (see Picture 16).



Picture 16: The landscape of *Caelid*, the “rotten zone” of the game (credit: top-mmo.fr).

- *Champion* comes Middle English, too (OED), indicating “a person who holds the first place in prize-fighting, rowing, walking, or other trial of strength or skill”; in *Elden Ring*, it refers to war and fighting in particular. Today, however, this word is mostly used in sports to denote the winner in a competition.

The word frequency list also includes a few function words that sound archaic. These are the pronominal and adjectival forms of the 2<sup>nd</sup>-person singular pronoun: *thou* (subject form, e.g. *Thou’rt a fitting choice*<sup>10</sup> or *Whatapest thou to profit?*), *thee* (object form, e.g. *Mother’s rich slumber shall not be disturbed by thee, I have called for Blaidd to greet thee below*) and *thy* (possessive adjective, e.g. *Then, after thy death [...] or I divest each of thee of thy grace*). Dating back to the Old English period, they were still used in Middle

<sup>10</sup> All the examples reported in these two paragraphs are taken from Ranni the Witch or Melina’s discourses (see Section 3.3.3).

English<sup>11</sup>, and have survived in Modern English<sup>12</sup> only in some official formulae (e.g. *I take thee to my wedded husband, With this ring I thee wed*).

Although not listed in the top 200 most frequent words in this sub-corpus, the possessive pronoun *thine* is also attested (e.g. *The choice is thine*, or, mostly, possessive adjective, e.g. *With thine eyes dimmed [...]*). Interestingly, in the *Characters sub-Corpus* one can also find archaic forms of the 2<sup>nd</sup>-person singular present tense ending in *-(e)st* (e.g. *The name of the spectral steed thou callest?, To do with as thou wishest*) or *(a)rt* (e.g. *Thou'rt possessed of the power, no?, Thou'rt a rare sort*), once used also for the plural (a.g. *Blaidd, and Iji both... Art willing to give too much to me*), and of the 3<sup>rd</sup>-person singular present tense in *-(e)th* (e.g. *Now cometh the age of the stars or As the path stretcheth into darkness*). In total there are 10 instances of *-(a)rt*, 12 of *-(e)st* and 5 of *-(e)th*.

In order to retrieve the first 200 positive keywords in the *Characters sub-Corpus*, I compared it against four General Modern English corpora of spoken discourse (*Text, TV Text, Soap Text, Movies Text*; 7,686,734 total tokens), available on Corpusdata (<https://www.corpusdata.org/>), which I combined together into one macro corpus. The keywords identified (see Table 4) are similar to the most frequent words (see Table 3). Indeed, they are relevant to a medieval world of knights and aristocrats (e.g. *lord, roundtable, manor, queen, dynasty*), and the characters and “plot” of the game (e.g. *golden, guidance, grace, warrior, master, shackles*); they also include neologisms (e.g. *Erdtree, glintstone*), proper names (e.g. *Ranni, Radahn, Azur*) and old function words and morphemes (e.g. *thou, thee, hopest, wouldst*). Overall, 64 of the words appearing in keyword list also appear in the frequency word list.

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<sup>11</sup> Middle English is the English language spoken from about 1100 to about 1450.

<sup>12</sup> Modern English is the English language used since about 1450.



Word	Frequency	Word	Frequency	Word	Frequency	Word	Frequency
the	966	from	52	when	28	allow	18
i	753	by	50	ask	26	back	18
you	605	who	50	even	26	did	18
to	534	on	48	long	26	heard	18
of	457	just	47	re	26	life	18
a	370	at	46	such	26	little	18
and	253	her	45	thank	26	other	18
my	251	please	45	their	26	than	18
it	242	elden	43	too	26	thing	18
is	209	again	41	two	26	warrior	18
me	196	then	41	d	25	about	17
in	172	time	40	how	25	dear	17
s	170	us	40	path	25	end	17
that	170	them	38	an	24	enough	17
for	150	roundtable	37	been	24	glintstone	17
your	140	great	36	she	24	much	17
be	139	his	36	apprentice	23	radahn	17
but	136	know	36	may	23	rot	17
this	134	like	36	myself	23	true	17
have	122	tarnished	36	need	23	after	16
with	112	ah	35	right	23	another	16
as	110	more	35	shall	23	any	16
lord	105	think	35	way	23	being	16
are	102	erdtree	34	which	23	done	16
t	91	our	34	death	22	first	16
will	90	could	33	find	22	flesh	16
what	89	let	33	hold	22	meet	16
m	85	good	32	make	22	never	16
was	85	has	32	or	22	order	16
all	84	only	32	still	22	rune	16
can	83	something	32	thanks	22	say	16
if	78	thou	32	come	21	torrent	16
we	76	out	31	give	21	up	16
not	75	take	31	guidance	21	where	16
well	74	perhaps	30	into	21	why	16
no	65	they	30	ever	20	wish	16
do	62	don	29	go	20	yourself	16
ve	62	him	29	marika	20	champion	15
one	60	master	29	though	20	flame	15
so	60	once	29	yet	20	help	15
am	59	should	29	day	19	journey	15
he	59	thee	29	ha	19	might	15
there	59	upon	29	queen	19	new	15
now	58	very	29	ranni	19	some	15
see	58	become	28	ring	19	were	15
would	58	before	28	sure	19	curse	14
ll	57	fingers	28	tell	19	feel	14
oh	57	grace	28	thy	19	hear	14
must	56	own	28	academy	18	lands	14
here	54	place	28	ahh	18	leave	14

Table 3: The 200 most frequent words in the *Characters sub-Corpus*.

<b>Word</b>	<b>Keyness</b>	<b>Word</b>	<b>Keyness</b>
<i>lord</i>	610.309	<i>luminary</i>	90.807
<i>elden</i>	499.729	<i>flesh</i>	89.401
<i>roundtable</i>	433.292	<i>of</i>	88.531
<i>erdtree</i>	412.644	<i>ah</i>	87.106
<i>tarnished</i>	402.499	<i>manor</i>	86.374
<i>thou</i>	264.861	<i>lands</i>	85.954
<i>ranni</i>	230.579	<i>lambkin</i>	84.946
<i>thee</i>	219.110	<i>maidenless</i>	84.946
<i>apprentice</i>	212.784	<i>mohg</i>	84.946
<i>radahn</i>	206.306	<i>haligtree</i>	84.946
<i>glintstone</i>	206.306	<i>iji</i>	84.946
<i>my</i>	196.294	<i>become</i>	84.881
<i>marika</i>	190.226	<i>aren</i>	84.204
<i>rune</i>	186.568	<i>boc</i>	83.254
<i>fingers</i>	177.451	<i>cannot</i>	81.823
<i>torrent</i>	174.172	<i>journey</i>	80.572
<i>radagon</i>	169.897	<i>curse</i>	79.458
<i>the</i>	161.790	<i>volcano</i>	77.988
<i>rennala</i>	157.760	<i>academy</i>	77.392
<i>caelid</i>	157.760	<i>champion</i>	76.488
<i>guidance</i>	156.344	<i>queen</i>	73.611
<i>path</i>	152.983	<i>miquella</i>	72.810
<i>seamster</i>	145.624	<i>hallowbrand</i>	72.810
<i>thy</i>	134.129	<i>lusat</i>	72.810
<i>stormveil</i>	133.488	<i>rykard</i>	72.810
<i>rot</i>	132.430	<i>carian</i>	72.810
<i>don</i>	127.251	<i>limgrave</i>	72.810
<i>wilds</i>	126.609	<i>shall</i>	72.403
<i>upon</i>	125.316	<i>allow</i>	69.295
<i>blaidd</i>	121.352	<i>sorcery</i>	68.668
<i>godrick</i>	121.352	<i>fate</i>	67.612
<i>grace</i>	120.041	<i>will</i>	67.075
<i>warrior</i>	119.105	<i>linger</i>	65.570
<i>master</i>	118.130	<i>am</i>	65.282
<i>must</i>	115.782	<i>rt</i>	64.354
<i>flame</i>	115.338	<i>i</i>	61.978
<i>perhaps</i>	113.396	<i>nepheli</i>	60.675
<i>godwyn</i>	109.217	<i>loux</i>	60.675
<i>hewg</i>	109.217	<i>zorayas</i>	60.675
<i>malenia</i>	109.217	<i>demigod</i>	60.675
<i>lucaria</i>	109.217	<i>ring</i>	58.803
<i>defile</i>	104.619	<i>wouldn</i>	57.494
<i>ahh</i>	103.210	<i>purpose</i>	57.006
<i>demigods</i>	102.720	<i>warriors</i>	56.337
<i>raya</i>	102.720	<i>frenzied</i>	56.202
<i>nokron</i>	97.081	<i>echoes</i>	56.050
<i>seluvis</i>	97.081	<i>primeval</i>	55.273
<i>scarlet</i>	91.243	<i>sorcerer</i>	55.273
<i>runes</i>	90.991	<i>apologies</i>	54.013
<i>grafted</i>	90.807	<i>medallion</i>	53.726

Table 4a: The first half of the top 200 positive keywords of the *Characters sub-Corpus*.

<b>Word</b>	<b>Keyness</b>	<b>Word</b>	<b>Keyness</b>
<i>spirits</i>	53.537	<i>altus</i>	36.405
<i>indeed</i>	53.526	<i>gelmir</i>	36.405
<i>blessing</i>	53.272	<i>baleful</i>	36.405
<i>reborn</i>	52.993	<i>seedbed</i>	36.405
<i>cursed</i>	52.969	<i>hopest</i>	36.405
<i>golden</i>	52.735	<i>wouldst</i>	36.405
<i>shackles</i>	52.662	<i>tuning</i>	35.316
<i>once</i>	51.416	<i>your</i>	35.263
<i>azur</i>	50.104	<i>shouldn</i>	35.107
<i>ye</i>	49.316	<i>remain</i>	34.636
<i>eater</i>	49.172	<i>spectral</i>	34.505
<i>dung</i>	49.172	<i>kindred</i>	34.152
<i>throne</i>	49.131	<i>ha</i>	33.966
<i>brandish</i>	48.540	<i>battle</i>	33.917
<i>empyrean</i>	48.540	<i>though</i>	33.885
<i>redmane</i>	48.540	<i>ordeal</i>	33.757
<i>ensha</i>	48.540	<i>dynasty</i>	33.701
<i>shardbearers</i>	48.540	<i>despite</i>	33.544
<i>cursemark</i>	48.540	<i>reward</i>	33.442
<i>roderika</i>	48.540	<i>craven</i>	33.300
<i>castle</i>	45.962	<i>lies</i>	33.255
<i>rite</i>	45.902	<i>shattering</i>	33.063
<i>farewell</i>	44.649	<i>great</i>	32.931
<i>aid</i>	44.573	<i>to</i>	32.850
<i>rogier</i>	44.407	<i>truly</i>	32.758
<i>maiden</i>	44.067	<i>share</i>	32.230
<i>but</i>	42.680	<i>strength</i>	32.218
<i>stars</i>	42.396	<i>me</i>	32.118
<i>witch</i>	40.630	<i>harboured</i>	31.911
<i>please</i>	40.411	<i>reviled</i>	31.911
<i>again</i>	40.337	<i>propriety</i>	31.911
<i>spoken</i>	39.976	<i>slumber</i>	31.834
<i>champions</i>	39.360	<i>spirit</i>	31.794
<i>death</i>	38.677	<i>words</i>	31.788
<i>ask</i>	38.521	<i>wisdom</i>	31.478
<i>dear</i>	37.773	<i>hold</i>	31.336
<i>thine</i>	37.696	<i>deathbed</i>	31.193
<i>smack</i>	37.650	<i>fellow</i>	31.026
<i>needle</i>	37.457	<i>companion</i>	30.684
<i>mere</i>	37.372	<i>such</i>	30.663
<i>heh</i>	37.171	<i>adjustments</i>	30.601
<i>myself</i>	37.128	<i>tread</i>	30.601
<i>festival</i>	36.937	<i>as</i>	29.943
<i>summon</i>	36.673	<i>blighted</i>	29.684
<i>malison</i>	36.405	<i>dogmatic</i>	29.684
<i>mohgwyn</i>	36.405	<i>surmise</i>	29.684
<i>mountaintops</i>	36.405	<i>own</i>	28.832
<i>darriwil</i>	36.405	<i>godfrey</i>	28.168
<i>leyndell</i>	36.405	<i>slain</i>	28.168
<i>lieth</i>	36.405	<i>exalted</i>	28.101

Table 4b: The second half of the top 200 positive keywords of the *Characters sub-Corpus*.

### 3.2.2. Frequent words in the *Objects sub-Corpus* (RQ1c-d)

The top 100 most frequent words in the *Objects sub-Corpus* (RQ1c) are given in Table 5. They include proper names (*Ranni, Lusat, Azur, Blaidd*), names of “institutions” (e.g. *Raya Lucaria*, the most important Lands Between’s magic academy, or *Volcano Manor*, home of the dissidents guided by *Tanith*) and neologisms (*Glintstone, Erdtree*). *Carian* means ‘belonging to the *Royal Family of Caria*’, an important lineage of mages. *Hoslow* is the name of another important family in the Lands Between. Overall, proper names (including adjectives derived from them) and neologisms are more common here (total: 11 instances among the 100 most frequent words) than in the *Characters sub-Corpus* (total: 6 instances over the 200 most frequent words).

In this sub-corpus, too, there are “archaic-sounding” words (e.g. *primeval, blade, knight, sorcerer, manor, sorcery, oath, grand, queen, crown*), not because they are attested since Old English (*blade, knight, oath, queen, crown*), Middle English (*manor, sorcery, grand*) or early Modern English (*primeval, sorcerer*) – indeed, they are all words of *Modern English* – but rather in the sense that they mostly refer to a royal or feudal social context, which is no longer characteristic of our times (RQ1d).

In particular:

- *Primeval*, originated in the mid-17<sup>th</sup> century, meaning “original”, “primitive” (OED) is rarely used nowadays; in *Elden Ring* it refers to the *Primeval Current*, the origin of sorceries.
- *Blade* comes from Old English (OED). Its current use refers to the key component of commonly used tools, such as scissors, knives or razors; in *Elden Ring*, it refers to the component of the knights’ typical weapon, the sword.
- *Knight* originated in Old English (OED) and it is used in *Elden Ring* with the proper medieval sense of the term; nowadays, however, it is barely used, apart from figurative expressions such as “knight-errantry” or “knight of the road”.
- *Sorcerer* started being used in early 16<sup>th</sup> century (OED). Its use is nowadays confined to fantasy literature, as happens in *Elden Ring*.
- *Manor* is a Middle English term used to indicate the main house of an aristocratic estate, as in *Elden Ring*; it only remains in *Modern English* as a colloquial expression referring to “a person’s home ground” (OED).

Word	Frequency	Word	Frequency	Word	Frequency	Word	Frequency
the	271	but	15	hoslow	9	volcano	7
of	171	will	15	used	9	blaidd	6
a	142	at	14	were	9	blue	6
to	87	blood	14	would	9	body	6
and	57	upon	14	ancient	8	erdtree	6
by	54	who	14	are	8	flesh	6
is	49	into	13	blade	8	grand	6
in	41	no	13	current	8	half	6
be	32	worn	13	glintstone	8	jar	6
s	30	once	12	knight	8	key	6
it	29	can	11	ring	8	knowing	6
with	28	on	11	sorcerer	8	lucaria	6
from	27	ranni	11	time	8	oath	6
this	27	their	11	academy	7	order	6
that	26	within	11	armor	7	queen	6
was	26	black	10	had	7	raya	6
for	24	found	10	have	7	received	6
one	22	its	10	lord	7	there	6
as	21	lusat	10	made	7	which	6
an	20	primeval	10	manor	7	bestowed	5
all	18	said	10	new	7	carian	5
her	18	weapon	10	power	7	cold	5
he	17	after	9	she	7	companion	5
his	17	azur	9	sorcery	7	corroded	5
when	16	death	9	those	7	crown	5

Table 5: Word frequency list of the 100 most frequent words in the *Objects sub-Corpus*.

- *Sorcery* originated in Middle English, too (OED). Similarly to *sorcerer*, its use is rare nowadays.
- *Oath* comes from Old English (OED), meaning “a solemn or formal declaration invoking God (or a god, or other object of reverence) as witness to the truth of a statement”, as is the case in *Elden Ring*; in current times, the term is only used in official administrative contexts when performing an act of loyalty or assuming responsibility in public service.
- *Grand* originated in Middle English (OED), mainly indicating important public or government authorities (e.g. *grand committee*), as in *Elden Ring* (e.g. *grand masters Azur and Lusat*, i.e. two of the most important sorcerers of the Academy of Raya Lucaria; see above). The use of *grand* is nowadays mostly evaluative, and is found in such expressions as the *Grand Old Party*, the American Republican Party.

- *Queen* and *crown* both come from Old English (OED) and have kept the same meaning over the centuries. Indeed, they are still used to indicate, respectively, the female sovereigns and the symbolic headgear in contemporary monarchies.

The function words in the word list given in Table are very similar to those in Table 3, except that – as to be expected – they lack 2nd-person pronouns and possessive *thou*, *thee* and *thy*.

### 3.2.3. Frequency of use use of *Elden Ring*'s vocabulary (RQ1e)

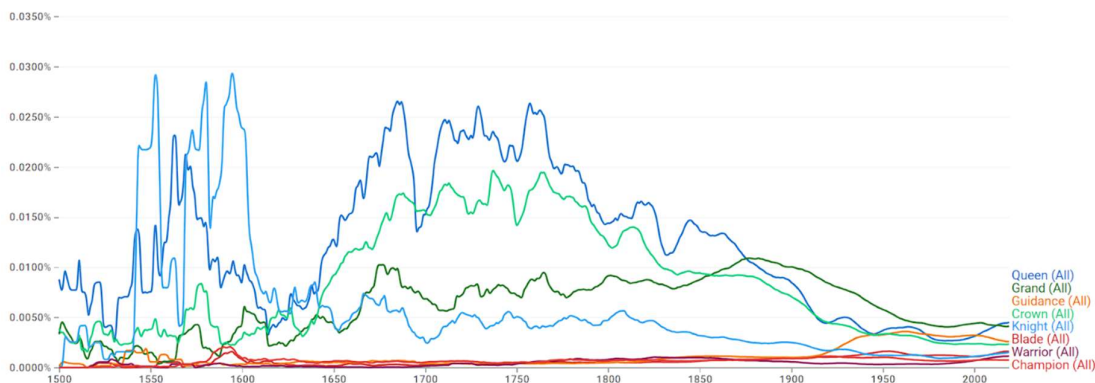
Some of the “archaic-sounding” words which I observed in the two sub-corpora are still in use (*tarnished*, *apprentice*, *guidance*, *rot*, *primeval*, *blade*, *knight*, *sorcerer*, *manor*, *sorcery*, *oath*, *grand*, *queen*, *crown*; see Sections 3.2.1.–3.2.2.). In order to verify to what extent they are actually in use in *Modern English*, I first looked them up in the OED to determine their frequency per million words in today’s textual sources. Additionally, I observed the variation in the frequency of use of these words over time on the Google Ngram Viewer (<https://books.google.com/ngrams/>). This tool allows an analyst to check the frequency of use of one or more words as a percentage value of all the Google library (used as a huge corpus) over a chosen period of time.

Word	Hits per million words reported by OED
Queen	Slightly above 20
Blade	20
Grand	20
Guidance	20
Crown	10
Warrior	10
Knight	8
Champion	7
Oath	Between 5 and 6
Apprentice	4
Manor	3
Rot	2
Sorcerer	1
Sorcery	1
Primeval	1
Tarnished	0.03

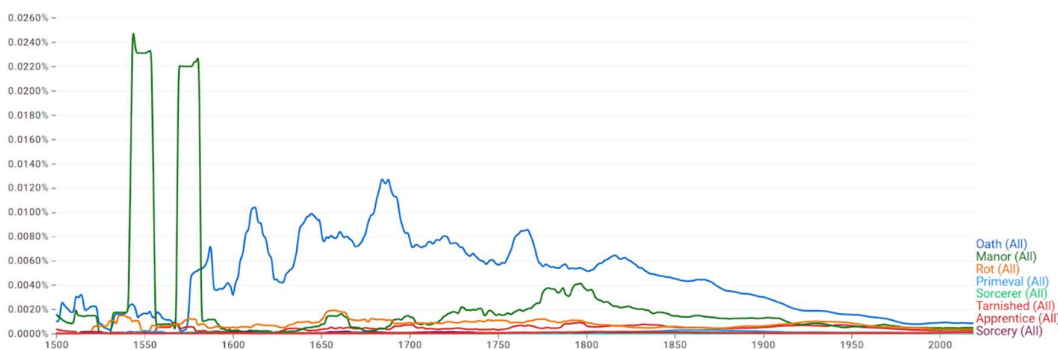
Table 6: Number of hits per million words of archaic-sounding words in Modern English.

Table 6 shows the frequency of use of the words under analysis in Modern English (OED). It appears that the use of these words is uncommon in contemporary English, being limited to a few tokens per million words.

Picture 17 and Picture 18 show the fluctuations in frequency of use – from 1500 to the present – of the words in Table 4, as given by Google Ngram Viewer. Picture 17 shows the frequency curves of *queen*, *grand*, *guidance*, *crown*, *knight*, *blade*, *warrior*, *champion*, while Picture 18 is relevant to *oath*, *manor*, *rot*, *primeval*, *sorcerer*, *tarnished*, *apprentice* and *sorcery*. The use of most of these terms has remarkably decreased over the last decades. Indeed, *knight*, *manor*, *queen* and *crown*, in particular, reached a peak of use between c1550 and c1770, but they are much more rarely used nowadays. Although they are not, strictly speaking, archaisms, these words are related to “distant” historical and socio-cultural contexts.



Picture 17: Ngram Viewer results for *queen*, *grand*, *guidance*, *crown*, *knight*, *blade*, *warrior* and *champion*.



Picture 18: Ngram Viewer results for *oath*, *manor*, *rot*, *primeval*, *sorcerer*, *tarnished*, *apprentice* and *sorcery*.

### 3.2.4. General traits of the language of *Elden Ring*

Overall, the lexis of *Elden Ring* is not, technically speaking, archaic except for the presence of old inflectional morphemes (i.e. *-rt*, *-st*), function words (i.e. *thou*, *thee*, *thy*). However, it appears to be relevant to the fantasy world it depicts (a world of sorceries, legendary knights and gods), since it includes a number of words that refer to a feudal society as typical of the Middle Ages. This effect is emphasised by the presence of archaic-sounding compounds (e.g. *glintstone*, *Erdtree*), made-up proper names (e.g. Ranni) and common nouns as proper names (e.g. *Torrent*). The general impression is that the lexical make-up of the discourse of *Elden Ring* depicts a world that is emotionally, historically, socially and psychologically removed from the today's world.

### 3.3. The language of Alexander, Melina, Ranni and Varré (RQ2a-b)

In this section I address RQ2, analysing Alexander's, Melina's, Ranni's and Varré's speech. I consider the 200 most frequent words and the top 200 positive keywords in their speech, along with their most distinctive n-grams (see Sections 3.3.1.-3.3.4.). Finally, I comment on the results obtained (see Section 3.3.5.).

#### 3.3.1. Alexander's frequent words, keywords and n-grams

Alexander can be informally defined as the "buddy" character in *Elden Ring*. He is friendly, clumsy and funny. However, he does not spare himself when it is time to fight, as a matter of honour. This is due to his nature. Indeed, Alexander is a warrior jar (see Picture 19), a magical humanoid jar containing an unknown powerful warrior's flesh. Alexander, thus, has a very high opinion of himself, considering himself an unbeatable warrior.

Table 7 shows Alexander's most frequent 200 words. Among the function words, the pronoun *I* stands out, with a frequency of 91 tokens, much more frequent than the second most frequent word in the list. This is, of course, a very frequent word in general, but also suggests that Alexander is self-centred and often talks about himself. Indeed, his speech mostly focuses on his opinions, his knowledge and his dream of becoming a hero (e.g. *I was created to be a warrior vessel, I am the warrior jar known as Alexander, It's [...] the*



*reason for which I quest*). In the *Characters sub-Corpus*, Alexander is the NPC with the highest frequency of *I*, with only Ranni (89 hits) and Roderika (84 hits) reporting similar values, and followed by Boc the Seamster with a much lower frequency of 70 hits. In other words, Alexander is a self-referential character.

Alexander also makes frequent use of interjections like *ha*, *heh*, *ah*, *oh*, *eh*, *o*, *ahh* and *ngh*, the last two of which are only used by Alexander in all the *Characters sub-Corpus*, (e.g. *Ahhh! Ahh! Well player, good lady/sir, Ngh! What are you playing at?*).

The presence of words such as *ordeal*, *castle*, *warrior*, *battle* or *combat* is due to the jar's dream of being a legendary knight, which constantly shapes his way of seeing the events in the game. Apart from a single use by Melina, *ordeal* is only used by Alexander (e.g. *Would you kindly undertake my ordeal?*). Another relevant word is *Caelid* (see Section 3.2.1), which denotes where the Warrior Jar's most epic battle takes place in the game, by the player's side.

Alexander's list of the top 200 most frequent words also includes colloquial expressions like *hello* (also the longer version *hellooo*), *gosh* (e.g. *Gosh, that dead-end had me rather stumped!*) and *smack* (e.g. *That's my face! Smack from the other end!*). While Melina and Millicent also use *hello*, but only once, no other character uses *gosh* or *smack*.



Picture 19: Alexander talking to the player (YouTube thumbnail, credit: Games from Mars).

Word	Frequency	Word	Frequency	Word	Frequency	Word	Frequency
i	91	ah	6	sure	4	champions	2
the	63	am	6	than	4	chip	2
a	54	could	6	we	4	closer	2
you	54	do	6	after	3	combat	2
to	47	end	6	ahh	3	crack	2
me	32	hello	6	battle	3	crook	2
of	31	know	6	been	3	day	2
it	27	myself	6	blighted	3	despite	2
my	26	nice	6	break	3	doesn	2
and	20	no	6	d	3	eastward	2
s	19	now	6	dead	3	fear	2
as	18	smack	6	edge	3	feel	2
m	17	stuck	6	eventually	3	feeling	2
this	16	thanks	6	fine	3	find	2
in	15	think	6	greater	3	flame	2
good	13	again	5	hardly	3	flames	2
is	13	big	5	held	3	flesh	2
just	13	by	5	lady	3	fought	2
that	13	caelid	5	let	3	found	2
be	12	champion	5	look	3	get	2
from	12	don	5	might	3	giant	2
ha	12	face	5	pop	3	gosh	2
ll	12	help	5	rot	3	greatest	2
out	12	how	5	scarlet	3	heading	2
what	12	oh	5	set	3	hear	2
but	11	other	5	sir	3	heard	2
can	11	re	5	so	3	hellooo	2
have	11	thought	5	southern	3	his	2
was	11	wait	5	stop	3	hitting	2
here	10	warriors	5	take	3	hole	2
see	10	which	5	then	3	if	2
t	10	wilds	5	thing	3	indeed	2
ve	10	would	5	though	3	journey	2
all	9	about	4	time	3	known	2
are	9	at	4	us	3	made	2
one	9	behind	4	vessel	3	man	2
there	9	come	4	where	3	many	2
your	9	eh	4	who	3	mighty	2
heh	8	ever	4	yourself	3	mountain	2
on	8	fist	4	aflutter	2	never	2
warrior	8	friend	4	air	2	ngh	2
with	8	inside	4	an	2	old	2
alexander	7	iron	4	anyone	2	or	2
festival	7	jar	4	appearance	2	perhaps	2
for	7	like	4	back	2	pity	2
give	7	more	4	before	2	place	2
great	7	o	4	being	2	played	2
something	7	off	4	bodies	2	ready	2
such	7	ordeal	4	calculations	2	redmane	2
well	7	please	4	castle	2	right	2

Table 7: Alexander's 200 most frequent words.

Interestingly (and as to be expected), the jar’s most peculiar linguistic feature is the use of the lexis of vessels, such as *jar*, *break*, *vessel* (e.g. [...] *without fear of cracking this vessel*), *chip* (e.g. *I am but a chip off a greater jar*), *crack* (e.g. *One hit was all it took to crack me*) and *crock* (e.g. *I [...] am nothing but a crock*). Indeed, apart from a single use of *break* by Miriel, all the other terms listed are only used by Alexander.

Table 8 shows the positive keywords in Alexander’s speech when compared to the rest of the *Characters sub-Corpus*. All the keywords identified are also listed among the 200 most frequent words (see Table 7), including interjections (e.g. *ha*, *heh*), expressions of a colloquial register (e.g. *smack*, *hello*) and terms relevant to vessels (e.g. *jar*).

<b>Word</b>	<b>Keyness</b>
<i>alexander</i>	32.866
<i>ha</i>	32.766
<i>smack</i>	28.168
<i>heh</i>	25.276
<i>big</i>	23.471
<i>nice</i>	22.627
<i>good</i>	21.649
<i>hello</i>	19.572
<i>stuck</i>	19.572
<i>festival</i>	19.248
<i>out</i>	18.796
<i>fist</i>	18.774
<i>iron</i>	18.774
<i>jar</i>	18.774

Table 8: Alexander’s distinctive keywords.

The 3-grams and 4-grams with a frequency of 3 or more hits in Alexander’s speech are reported in Table 9. Among these, *ha ha ha* (6 hits) and *a good smack* (5 hits), along with all the n-grams including *smack*, appear to be in line with the character’s personality, that is his use of interjections and a colloquial register.

Overall, Alexander’s distinctive linguistic traits are the use of interjections, colloquial expressions, chivalric lexis and the use of specific terminology related to vases.

Frequency	3-grams	4-grams
6	<i>ha ha ha</i>	- - -
5	<i>a good smack give me a good smack from me a good with something nice</i>	<i>a good smack from give me a good me a good smack</i>
4	<i>behind with something from behind with nice and big smack from behind something nice and</i>	<i>behind with something nice from behind with something good smack from behind smack from behind with something nice and big with something nice and</i>
3	<i>blighted caelid wilds i ll pop i m stuck i m sure iron fist alexander just you wait me i m rot blighted caelid scarlet rot blighted the scarlet rot there s a to be a</i>	<i>ha ha ha ha rot blighted caelid wilds scarlet rot blighted caelid the scarlet rot blighted</i>

Table 9: Alexander's most frequent n-grams. (Note: - - - stands for 'No relevant n-gram'.)

### 3.3.2. Melina's frequent words, keywords and n-grams

Melina is the gentle guide who accompanies the player during the whole game, giving suggestions and indications about her/his mission in the Lands Between. She gives the player her/his steed and sacrifices herself before the end of the game to burn the Erdtree, allowing the player to defeat Queen Marika. Melina is thus a key figure in *Elden Ring*.

Table 10 shows the most frequent words in Melina's speech. These are connected to the journey that the player undertakes in the lands between and her/his final sacrifice: *lord*, *Marika*, *Erdtree*, *Flame*, *Grace*, *Elden*, *Torrent*, *echoes* (the *Echoes of Queen Marika*, messages left by Marika which only Melina perceives), *Queen*, *Frenzied* (the *Frenzied Flame* is one of the most dangerous negative forces in *Elden Ring*, which the player has to protect her/himself from), *mother*, *guidance*, *maiden*, *giants* (who own the fire to burn the Erdtree), *golden*, *guide*, *journey*, *lands*, *order*, *ruin*, *summon*, *tarnished*, *burn*, *burned*, *destined*, *faith*, *finger*, *god*, *Godfrey* (the boss who challenges the player before the game's

final *bossfight*; see Section 2.3.1.), *inherited*, *mountaintops* (where the flame to burn the Erdtree is held), *rays*, *reason*, *search* and *seek*. Interestingly, these words are part of the top 200 most frequent in the *Characters sub-Corpus*, but a high number of their tokens are found in Melina's speech only (e.g. *flame* has 15 hits in the *Characters sub-Corpus*, 11 of which only in Melina's speech, and 40% of the total use of *Erdtree* by the game's characters is found in her speech).

In order to identify positive keywords in Melina's speech, I compared it against the rest of the *Characters sub-Corpus*. These words are reported in Table 11, and are also listed among the most frequent ones in Table 10. They highlight the relevance of Melina's role to the player's journey (e.g. *Marika*, *flame*, *frenzied*, *Erdtree*, *Torrent*). Interestingly, one keyword that is not also a frequent word is the form *ye*, the Old English 2<sup>nd</sup>-person plural subject pronoun, also used "as a mark of respect, deference" (OED); (e.g. *Ye will wage war in a land afar, where ye will live, and die*).

Melina's most recurrent n-grams are reported in Table 12. They mostly involve reference to Marika. Indeed, Melina's role in the game mostly depends on the magic tracks left by the queen, which the player is supposed to follow, thanks to Melina's help (see *Tarnished* in Section 3.2.1.). One can also notice the recurrent mention of Melina's willingness to be of use to the player (see *shall I share* and *share them with you*).

Thus, the results show that Melina's lexis is mostly focused on the journey in the Lands Between, which emphasises her function as a guide. Indeed, she supports the player during the entire game, and addresses her/him with the archaic and deferential form *ye*, which suggests Melina's reverence for the future lord of the Lands Between.

Word	Frequency	Word	Frequency	Word	Frequency	Word	Frequency
the	104	all	6	into	3	challenge	2
i	66	frenzied	6	journey	3	chaos	2
you	65	if	6	land	3	clouds	2
to	59	long	6	lands	3	commit	2
of	52	m	6	life	3	d	2
a	29	mother	6	live	3	day	2
is	27	no	6	now	3	deny	2
my	26	purpose	6	or	3	destined	2
and	20	upon	6	order	3	divest	2
in	20	very	6	our	3	do	2
with	19	was	6	path	3	does	2
me	18	aid	5	put	3	done	2
that	17	at	5	rest	3	end	2
lord	16	death	5	ruin	3	epoch	2
for	14	guidance	5	see	3	eyes	2
it	14	let	5	should	3	faith	2
marika	14	must	5	summon	3	finger	2
your	14	please	5	take	3	glad	2
as	13	strength	5	tarnished	3	god	2
erdtree	13	who	5	thank	3	godfrey	2
shall	12	yet	5	thanks	3	goodbye	2
flame	11	an	4	then	3	hark	2
here	11	fit	4	they	3	hear	2
s	11	from	4	through	3	however	2
well	11	maiden	4	thy	3	inherited	2
are	10	moment	4	till	3	just	2
but	10	new	4	time	3	leave	2
grace	10	offer	4	turn	3	lend	2
will	10	only	4	warriors	3	lies	2
become	9	runes	4	what	3	lifeless	2
elden	9	we	4	when	3	like	2
have	9	world	4	which	3	lost	2
not	9	would	4	wish	3	make	2
own	9	accord	3	above	2	may	2
torrent	9	ago	3	act	2	mine	2
ye	9	am	3	after	2	mountaintops	2
be	8	ask	3	ahead	2	need	2
by	8	between	3	allow	2	o	2
ring	8	continue	3	almost	2	once	2
share	8	face	3	ascertain	2	other	2
them	8	far	3	asking	2	over	2
this	8	foot	3	back	2	place	2
words	8	giants	3	being	2	prepared	2
can	7	given	3	beyond	2	preside	2
echoes	7	golden	3	births	2	rays	2
linger	7	guide	3	born	2	reach	2
one	7	hand	3	brandish	2	reason	2
queen	7	has	3	burn	2	rt	2
spoken	7	he	3	burned	2	search	2
there	7	him	3	cardinal	2	seek	2

Table 10: Melina's 200 most frequent words.

<b>Word</b>	<b>Keyness</b>
<i>marika</i>	43.153
<i>ye</i>	42.672
<i>flame</i>	35.551
<i>echoes</i>	33.182
<i>linger</i>	33.182
<i>frenzied</i>	28.438
<i>shall</i>	27.223
<i>spoken</i>	24.039
<i>share</i>	23.433
<i>torrent</i>	22.111
<i>erdtree</i>	20.533
<i>words</i>	19.979

Table 11: Melina's distinctive keywords.

<b>Frequency</b>	<b>3-grams</b>	<b>4-grams</b>
8	<i>share them with</i>	- - -
7	<i>in marika s marika s own of queen marika of the erdtree s own words them with you</i>	<i>in marika s own marika s own words share them with you</i>
6	<i>as well shall echoes of queen here as well i share them linger here as marika linger here queen marika linger shall i share spoken echoes of well shall i with you in you in marika</i>	<i>as well shall i echoes of queen marika here as well shall i share them with linger here as well marika linger here as of queen marika linger queen marika linger here shall i share them spoken echoes of queen them with you in well shall i share with you in marika you in marika s</i>
5	<i>the elden ring</i>	- - -
4	<i>the frenzied flame</i>	- - -
3	<i>but a moment flame of ruin foot of the for but a hand rest upon let my hand my hand rest rest upon you the flame of the foot of the lands between upon you for you for but</i>	<i>foot of the erdtree for but a moment hand rest upon you let my hand rest my hand rest upon rest upon you for the flame of ruin the foot of the upon you for but you for but a</i>

Table 12: Melina's most frequent n-grams. (Note: - - - stands for 'No relevant n-gram'.)

### 3.3.3. Ranni's frequent words, keywords and n-grams

Ranni is the mysterious figure behind the betrayal which caused the disruption of the Golden Order, the architect of the demigods' falling. She comes into contact with the player, as their mission is very similar, and thus they can be very useful to each other. Indeed, the player can even marry her. She is the only actual *demigod* with whom the player establishes a friendly relationship.

The 200 most used words by Ranni the Witch are reported in Table 13. Ranni is the only character to frequently use archaic function words. Indeed, 30 of the 32 total hits for *thou* in the *Characters sub-Corpus* belong to Ranni; similarly, 28 of the 29 instances of *thee*, 16 of the 19 instances of *thy* and 3 of the 5 instances of *thine* are found in Ranni's speech.

In line with this, most of the verbs with archaic 2<sup>nd</sup>-person and 3<sup>rd</sup>-person endings found in the *Characters sub-Corpus* belong to Ranni's speech. They include those listed in Table 13 (i.e. *-rt*, *wouldst*, *canst*, *cometh*, *didst*, *lieth*), but also 9 of the 10 verbs ending in *-(e)th* (e.g. *Here beginneth the chill night [...]*), all the 12 occurrences of the verbs ending in *-st* (e.g. *Whouldst thou come to me [...]*) and 8 of the 10 occurrences of the verbs ending in *-rt* (e.g. *Art thou aware of the star that struck Limgrave?*). These register choices might have been intended to highlight her divine nature in contrast to the other characters.

Moreover, Ranni's lexis includes many words (e.g. as *witch*, *dark*, *death*, *spectral*, *hidden* or *moon*) revealing her fascination with darkness, death and shadows.

The positive keywords in Ranni's speech are also listed among her most frequent words. As Table 14 shows, Ranni's keywords include archaic morphemes (e.g. *thou*, *thee*, *thy*, *-rt*) and lexis depicting a "dark" world (e.g. *dark*, *witch*). However, the keywords also include words not part of the frequency word list, namely the function word *hath*, an archaic form of *has*, and the word *Empyrean*, which serves to refer to Ranni's privileged divine nature (e.g. *I was once an Empyrean. Of the demigods, only I, Miquella, and Malenia could claim that title*).



Word	Frequency	Word	Frequency	Word	Frequency	Word	Frequency
the	107	rt	6	fine	3	between	2
i	89	see	6	flesh	3	beyond	2
to	47	witch	6	forget	3	body	2
of	45	an	5	forth	3	both	2
and	35	good	5	go	3	breath	2
a	32	into	5	hidden	3	call	2
it	30	long	5	hopest	3	came	2
thou	30	may	5	lands	3	can	2
is	28	mine	5	last	3	canst	2
thee	28	name	5	leave	3	chill	2
my	27	one	5	moon	3	chosen	2
in	18	order	5	more	3	cometh	2
not	17	past	5	much	3	command	2
thy	16	ranni	5	must	3	counselor	2
but	15	there	5	nokron	3	cursing	2
for	15	they	5	oh	3	dear	2
have	15	too	5	on	3	didst	2
that	15	dark	4	once	3	doing	2
this	14	death	4	other	3	enough	2
what	13	each	4	our	3	every	2
as	12	empyrean	4	profit	3	far	2
be	12	hath	4	quite	3	fate	2
me	12	here	4	seluvis	3	feel	2
with	12	iji	4	shadows	3	finally	2
am	11	lord	4	since	3	form	2
now	11	night	4	slumber	3	former	2
was	11	only	4	so	3	found	2
we	11	perhaps	4	stole	3	gaining	2
all	10	same	4	such	3	great	2
will	10	spectral	4	sure	3	haste	2
would	9	steed	4	take	3	he	2
fingers	8	their	4	tell	3	heard	2
s	8	then	4	thanks	3	heart	2
shall	8	when	4	thine	3	heed	2
them	8	again	3	time	3	him	2
two	8	allow	3	treasure	3	indeed	2
blaidd	7	aren	3	us	3	indulge	2
by	7	ask	3	way	3	journey	2
from	7	away	3	which	3	just	2
service	7	baleful	3	wouldst	3	kind	2
t	7	become	3	about	2	let	2
tarnished	7	been	3	advantage	2	lieth	2
torrent	7	below	3	age	2	living	2
upon	7	city	3	ago	2	master	2
well	7	cursemark	3	another	2	matter	2
ah	6	doubt	3	art	2	meet	2
are	6	enter	3	arts	2	merely	2
before	6	eternal	3	assassins	2	might	2
no	6	even	3	at	2	named	2
path	6	find	3	back	2	or	2

Table 13: Ranni's 200 most frequent words.

Word	Keyness
<i>thou</i>	123.842
<i>thee</i>	120.643
<i>thy</i>	57.749
<i>blaidd</i>	20.624
<i>rt</i>	19.029
<i>dark</i>	18.399
<i>empyrean</i>	18.399
<i>hath</i>	18.399
<i>service</i>	16.962
<i>witch</i>	16.780

Table 14: Ranni’s distinctive keywords.

Ranni’s most recurrent n-grams are reported in Table 15. The most frequent 3-gram is *the two fingers*. The Two Fingers are manifestations of the greater will in the Lands Between, and therefore have always been consulted by the sovereigns as oracles, establishing the demigods’ destiny. Ranni fights against this predestination; thus it is not surprising that she recurrently refers to it. The second most recurrent 3-gram, *the dark path*, is reminiscent of Ranni’s shadowy and lunar nature, in opposition to the shiny Golden Order.

Frequency	3-grams	4-grams
7	<i>the two fingers</i>	- - -
4	<i>the dark path</i>	- - -
3	<i>am the witch</i> <i>aren t we</i> <i>hopest thou to</i> <i>i am sure</i> <i>i am the</i> <i>ranni the witch</i> <i>the baleful shadows</i> <i>the name of</i> <i>the spectral steed</i> <i>thou rt a</i> <i>thou to profit</i> <i>what hopest thou</i>	<i>hopest thou to profit</i> <i>i am the witch</i> <i>what hopest thou to</i>

Table 15: Ranni’s most frequent n-grams.  
(Notes: - - - stands for ‘No relevant n-gram’. There are no n-grams with a frequency of 5 or 6 tokens.)

Overall, Ranni's speech appears to highlight, on the one hand, her divine nature (e.g. her use of Empyrean and of archaic grammatical forms stress her social distance from the other characters and the gamer), and on the other, her connection to darkness (see, e.g. her use of *shadows*, *dark*, *baleful* and *spectral*).

### 3.3.4. Varré's frequent words, keywords and n-grams

Varré is the "tempting devil" of the game. He is a former war surgeon, turned into a psychopath by a plague (the *Lord of Blood's curse*) which killed all his colleagues, but which he was able to survive. Thus, he thinks he was chosen by the Lord of Blood to be his spokesman. He is agreeable to the player (despite his evident mental insanity), tempting her/him with apparently convenient and honourable purposes which, systematically, lead her/him to very risky situations.

Varré's 200 most frequent words are reported in Table 16. Varré's lexis is mostly about the Golden Order, which he describes in a negative way (e.g. [...] *the decrepit demigod* [...], [...] *the Fingers harbor no love for our kind*), his faith in Mohg, the Lord of Blood and his dynasty (e.g. *Luminary Mohg*, *dynasty*, *Mohgwyn*), and the indications which he gives to the player about the steps to follow to prove her/his faith in Mohg (e.g. *Roundtable*, *Stormveil*, *blood*, *trial*, *cloth*, *maiden/maidenless*). The reason why the words *maiden* and *maidenless* occur in the list is that, at a certain point in the game, Varré will ask the player to kill a maiden and bring her blood, collected on a cloth, to him, as a proof of faith.

Varré also uses the endearment term *lambkin* to address the player (comparable to Ranni's *dear consort* (if married), *Fia's my dear* and Alexander's *good lady/sir*). Considering that it is very rare to hear a character use nice words in *Elden Ring* in general, and that Varré is a mean character, in particular, this word only contributes to highlighting Varré's pretence – he sounds sarcastically sweet and contextually inappropriate, while talking about blood and murder (e.g. *Right, my lambkin? [...] You seek violence [...], I'll ensure you regret this, my lambkin. Enjoy your miserable death*).

Word	Frequency	Word	Frequency	Word	Frequency	Word	Frequency
the	77	without	5	very	3	wise	2
you	72	ahh	4	was	3	worse	2
to	36	at	4	who	3	yourself	2
a	32	audience	4	would	3	acquired	1
of	32	castle	4	yet	3	after	1
i	19	even	4	acquire	2	agony	1
for	17	godrick	4	again	2	also	1
it	16	hold	4	ah	2	always	1
my	15	love	4	am	2	anoint	1
and	14	me	4	as	2	another	1
your	14	new	4	chamber	2	answer	1
s	13	on	4	choice	2	answers	1
that	12	please	4	day	2	any	1
are	11	ve	4	decrepit	2	anyone	1
be	11	way	4	demigod	2	aren	1
have	11	we	4	die	2	assist	1
with	11	yes	4	final	2	badge	1
but	9	all	3	find	2	basking	1
fingers	9	an	3	finger	2	beens	1
oh	9	been	3	follow	2	before	1
roundtable	9	by	3	gift	2	behold	1
two	9	cliff	3	give	2	being	1
in	8	course	3	golden	2	believe	1
luminary	8	don	3	grant	2	beside	1
must	8	done	3	granted	2	besides	1
this	8	elden	3	guide	2	between	1
will	8	go	3	had	2	binds	1
grace	7	grafted	3	he	2	blame	1
ha	7	has	3	hear	2	bless	1
lambkin	7	indeed	3	here	2	can	1
may	7	knight	3	home	2	cannot	1
mohg	7	maiden	3	however	2	care	1
t	7	mm	3	inductee	2	ceremony	1
blood	6	mohgwyn	3	inner	2	certainly	1
do	6	no	3	its	2	challenge	1
dynasty	6	now	3	just	2	chance	1
guidance	6	off	3	kind	2	chests	1
if	6	or	3	m	2	chock	1
is	6	out	3	matter	2	circumventing	1
maidenless	6	path	3	most	2	claimed	1
so	6	perhaps	3	noble	2	clear	1
stormveil	6	proper	3	not	2	clench	1
then	6	re	3	only	2	cloth	1
well	6	ring	3	seek	2	come	1
what	6	say	3	something	2	commences	1
great	5	see	3	think	2	completed	1
lord	5	should	3	trial	2	comprehend	1
one	5	strength	3	try	2	congratulations	1
rune	5	take	3	why	2	corrupted	1
tarnished	5	there	3	wisdom	2	death	1

Table 16: Varré's 200 most frequent words.

Varré’s positive keywords, reported in Table 17, highlight his interest in the player’s path to the throne (e.g. *audience*, *Stormveil*, *Fingers*), his connection to the Lord of Blood (e.g. *luminary*, *Mohg*, *Mohgwyn*, *blood*) and his frequent interaction with the gamer, addressed as *lambkin*. All the keywords also show up among the most frequent words (cf. Table ).

Varré’s most recurrent n-grams are reported in Table 18. The most recurrent 3-gram is *the two fingers*, entities he fights against (like Ranni; see Section 3.3.3.). The other recurrent n-grams mostly refer to the mission which the player is destined to undertake (*a Great Rune* that is a components through which the player is supposed to recreate the *Elden Ring* (see Section 1.3.); *the Roundtable Hold* is one of the first places which she/he is supposed to reach in the game).

Word	Keyness
<i>luminary</i>	43.356
<i>lambkin</i>	37.931
<i>mohg</i>	37.931
<i>dynasty</i>	26.903
<i>maidenless</i>	26.903
<i>you</i>	22.762
<i>audience</i>	21.665
<i>stormveil</i>	18.037
<i>two</i>	17.574
<i>blood</i>	16.697
<i>knight</i>	16.247
<i>mm</i>	16.247
<i>mohgwyn</i>	16.247
<i>fingers</i>	16.226
<i>ha</i>	14.572

Table 17: Varré’s distinctive keywords.

Frequency	3-grams	4-grams
8	<i>the two fingers</i>	---
7	---	---
6	---	---
5	<i>a great rune</i>	---
4	<i>of the two the roundtable hold</i>	<i>of the two fingers</i>
3	<i>audience with the godrick the grafted on the cliff the elden ring to castle stormveil with the two you are maidenless</i>	<i>audience with the two with the two fingers</i>

Table 18: Varré’s most frequent n-grams. (Notes: --- stands for ‘No relevant n-gram’.)

Overall, the lexis in Varré's speech is relevant to his role-relationship with the player on his way to the throne and becoming the Lord of Blood's reign.

### **3.3.5. Implications**

To sum up, Alexander speaks in a colloquial and, at the same time, chivalric way, using specific lexis related to vases. He is, indeed, a friendly although proud warrior jar. Melina speaks as and like a guide, addressing the player with indications about the path to follow. Ranni's speech is archaic-sounding and full of references to obscurity, night and death, revealing her nature as a powerful demigod of night. Varré's obsessive opposition to the Golden Order, along with his shrewdness, show up in his recurrent reference to the Lord of Blood and the Golden Order, along with the sneaky nice way of addressing the player. The results thus suggest that each character's speech has distinctive characteristics in line with the character's personality.

## **3.4. The language of object descriptions in *Elden Ring* (RQ3)**

In this section, I address RQ3 by firstly comparing the two sub-corpora in order to find the positive keywords that characterise the *Objects sub-Corpus* (see Section 3.4.1.), and then identifying this sub-corpus's distinctive phraseologies (see Section 3.4.2.). In the end, I make some general considerations (see Section 3.4.3.).

### **3.4.1. Keywords in the *Objects sub-Corpus* (RQ3a)**

AntConc retrieved 25 keywords in the *Objects sub-Corpus* compared to the *Characters sub-Corpus* (see Table 19). These include nouns like *weapon, blade, armor, oath, robe, gauntlets, crown, glintstones* and adjectives describing them (e.g. *used, black, primeval, worn, blue, corroded, cold*), which denote the properties of objects relevant to a decaying chivalric world. *Hoslow* is a surname (see Section 3.2.2.). Other words, such as *raises, increases* and *potency* belong instead to technical aspect of gameplay. Indeed, these terms are present in sentences like *Greatly raises attack power with successive attacks, Charging increases duration of the breath* or *Charging enhances potency*, which refer to

talismans or spells and represent suggestions about how the player is supposed to use these tools in the most proficient ways when fighting.

<b>Word</b>	<b>Keyness</b>
<i>by</i>	64.296
<i>worn</i>	45.481
<i>of</i>	38.488
<i>a</i>	34.303
<i>hoslow</i>	31.479
<i>weapon</i>	28.658
<i>blade</i>	27.979
<i>armor</i>	24.480
<i>used</i>	21.811
<i>blue</i>	20.982
<i>oath</i>	20.982
<i>black</i>	19.754
<i>an</i>	18.514
<i>primeval</i>	17.792
<i>blood</i>	17.671
<i>robe</i>	17.484
<i>raises</i>	17.484
<i>increases</i>	17.484
<i>potency</i>	17.484
<i>gauntlets</i>	17.484
<i>crown</i>	17.484
<i>corroded</i>	17.484
<i>cold</i>	17.484
<i>glintstones</i>	17.484
<i>the</i>	17.379

Table 19: The 25 keywords in the *Objects sub-Corpus*.

### 3.4.2. Phraseologies in the *Objects sub-Corpus* (RQ3b)

The most frequent 3-grams and 4-grams in the *Objects sub-Corpus* are reported in Table 20. Some are built around the verb *find* (e.g. *can be found*), which occur in sentences in which the player is given indications about how to proceed in the game (e.g. *The door can be found in the westward corridor [...]*, *The forge of the flame of ruin is said to be found upon their peaks [...]*). Other recurrent n-grams include proper names referring to places (e.g. *Raya Lucaria*) or characters (e.g. *the Dung Eater*) of the game, and which thus the player has to be informed about.

As to be expected, the *Objects sub-corpus* shows only a negligible presence of 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup>-person pronouns, especially in comparison to the *Characters's sub-Corpus* (see Table

21). Also, apart from a single instance of *you*, the other tokens retrieved are found in the transcripts, that is, quotes from characters' utterances. The likely reason for this discrepancy is that the sentences contained in the *Objects sub-Corpus* almost always have a third-person subject, as is typical of a discourse focused on the description of entities and events.

Frequency	3-grams	4-grams
9	<i>one of the</i>	- - -
5	<i>found in the of raya lucaria the dung eater</i>	- - -
4	<i>academy of raya be found in corroded by blue is said to primeval current sorcerer said to be the academy of the all knowing</i>	<i>academy of raya lucaria the academy of raya</i>
3	<i>armor gauntlets greaves by lusat primeval by the dung can be found fia the deathbed glimpsed into the helm armor gauntlets ranni the witch said to have the deathbed companion the eternal city the golden order the volcano manor</i>	<i>by the dung eater can be found in fia the deathbed companion is said to be</i>

Table 20: The *Objects sub-Corpus*'s most frequent n-grams.

Word	Frequency in the transcripts of the <i>Objects sub-Corpus</i>	Frequency in the prose texts of the <i>Objects sub-Corpus</i>	Frequency in the <i>Characters sub- corpus</i>
<i>I</i>	2	0	753
<i>Me</i>	0	0	196
<i>Ye</i>	0	0	9
<i>You</i>	4	1	605
<i>Thou</i>	1	0	32
<i>Thee</i>	0	0	29

Table 21: Frequency of 1<sup>st</sup>- and 2<sup>nd</sup>-person pronouns in the *Objects sub-Corpus* and the *Characters sub-Corpus*.



### 3.4.3. Considerations about the linguistic traits of the *Objects sub-Corpus*

Overall, the frequent presence of terms referring to objects (particularly medieval weapons or armors and spells) and, to a lesser extent, characters, along with the presence of technical gameplay-related expressions suggest that the *Objects sub-Corpus* is meant to be directly relevant to the needs of a gamer who has to orientate him-/herself in moving in the video game's world.

### 3.5. General implications

The first impression I had of the language in *Elden Ring* while playing the game was that it sounded archaic. With this investigation, I set out to determine what this might be due to (see RQ1). What I found was only partly in line with my expectations: the language *Elden Ring* language is not, technically, archaic: it mainly consists of words still present in Modern English; but some of these words are used in the game in senses that are no longer the default ones nowadays, but were more common in the past (e.g. *master* is used to mean 'expert smith' rather than 'university degree', *champion* is used to mean 'winning warrior' rather than 'sports champion'). In addition, it includes archaic function words and morphemes, archaic-sounding neologisms and esoteric proper names relating to a historically and socially distant chivalric world (see Section 3.2.). All of this contributes to creating the impression of a historically distant context.

Another impression I formed as a player was that the characters' ways of expressing were very different from one another and always in line with their personality and role in the game (see RQ2). The analysis of the speech of four main characters, compared against the speech of all the other characters, provided support for my impression. The frequent words, keywords and recurrent n-grams in a given character's speech is indeed peculiar to and distinctive of that character only, being hardly ever shared with those of other characters.

Finally, the last part of the analysis shows what is distinctive about the object descriptions (see RQ3), something that I had also intuitively notice: rather than giving additional information relevant to the plot, the object descriptions especially tend to give practical gaming indications to the player. Thus, I would state that the *Characters sub-Corpus*

addresses the avatar impersonating the gamer in the game world, while the *Objects sub-Corpus* addresses the player behind it (see Section 3.4.).

In the final Chapter, I will offer general considerations about the present analysis.

## CHAPTER 4

### CONCLUSION

#### 4.1. Introduction

In this Chapter, I firstly summarise the goals and results of my study and relate them to my RQs (Section 4.2.). Then, I highlight the pros and cons of my work (Section 4.3.), and finally offer suggestions for future research (Section 4.4.).

#### 4.2. My goals and results

With this study I wanted to shed light on the lexical features of a soulslike game, *Elden Ring*, which I am passionate about, and which, as far as I know, had never been examined before from a linguistic point of view. As an expert player of this game, I had made some impressionistic observations about it. First, I thought I had noticed that the language of *Elden Ring* sounded archaic, considering how the characters speak, how objects are described, what characters (e.g. *Lord of Blood*, *Queen Marika*) and places (e.g. *Volcano Manor*, the *Academy of Raya Lucaria*) are called, and how characters are addressed (e.g. *master*, *champion*). Second, I had the impression that each character has a distinctive way of speaking (i.e. in their use of phraseologies), which is in line with their personality, behaviour and role in the game. Finally, it seemed to me that the language spoken by the characters interacting with the player's avatar was quite different from the language used to describe the objects used in the game, which is instead more directly relevant to the player him-/herself. It was these observations that prompted my research questions.

In order to draw a lexical profile of the language of *Elden Ring*, I adopted a corpus-driven approach. Therefore, I created two sub-corpora, one containing the speech of the characters and one containing the descriptions of the objects relevant to them. I then set out to examine their most frequent words, positive keywords and recurrent n-grams. I thought this would enable me to identify themes often mentioned in the game and recurrent phraseological patterns. I also examined if the frequency of use of a few selected frequent words and prominent keywords in *Elden Ring* had changed over the centuries, in order to determine if their usage was more common in earlier or in modern times. Moreover, I compared the speech of each of 4 main characters against the speech of all

other characters so as to identify distinctive lexis and phraseology of each of those characters.

The identification of frequent words, keywords and n-grams in the *Characters sub-Corpus* showed the presence of archaic function words (e.g. *thou, thee, thy, ye*) and morphemes (e.g. *hopest, cometh*), and the recurrence of terms referring to entities and phenomena relevant to a crepuscular medieval fantasy world (e.g. *manor, warrior, sorcerer*), rather than today's world.

I also found that, although most oft words in *Elden Ring* are still in use, they may give an impression of antiquity for two reasons: some are used less frequently nowadays compared to the past, while others have a default present-day meaning which is not the meaning that applies in *Elden Ring* (e.g. *champion* means a prize-winning athlete in Modern English, but an undefeated warrior in *Elden Ring*).

When I compared the speech of each of four chosen main characters against the speech of all the other characters in the game, I was able to identify its distinctive traits, that is, each character's peculiar way of speaking (i.e. recurrent "pet phrases") is in line with their personality and role in the game (e.g. Alexander, the warrior jar, speaks in a friendly, colloquial way, often referring to vases; Melina, a guide for the player, often talks about the journey the player undertakes; Ranni, the dark semi-divine witch, often refers to the world of darkness, and uses Old English words; Varré, the insane adept of the Lord of Blood, often uses lexis dealing with blood and addresses the player with formally nice, but sarcastic, address term).

Finally, I found that object descriptions include terms related to medieval armours and weapons, and others typical of the "technical" RPG jargon unique to this sub-corpus. This suggests that object descriptions are a distinct sub-genre, as they serve a different communicative function compared to the characters' speech; indeed, they include information and suggestions useful to the player.

#### **4.3. Pros and cons of the study**

My work is innovative in that it presents a linguistic analysis of *Elden Ring*, drawing a partial lexical profile of it, which was not carried out before. It shows that, in this context

too, language both reflects and contributes to shaping the role and personality of specific characters, as well as determining the different communicative function of different parts of the game. In addition, my work is relevant to players: these can improve their efficiency in *Elden Ring* if they pay attention to what characters' speech reveals about them, that is, players can reduce the risk of being involved in dangerous situations in the game world.

Moreover, in my analysis assessed the degree to which *Elden Ring*'s language sounded archaic not only by identifying obsolete words and morphemes, which are a minority in the whole dataset which I considered, but rather I also focused on the less common uses of these words in Modern English and their decreasing use over time. This informal "data triangulation" contributed to determining to what extent *Elden Ring* may be described as archaic-sounding.

However, my work also suffers from some limitations. First, my analysis of the language of *Elden Ring* is not exhaustive. *Elden Ring* is a huge game and thus impossible to examine single-handedly. Indeed, my data did not include the transcripts of the speech of all the characters in the game. This means that my findings cannot be generalised beyond the stretches of discourse considered.

Also, since I analysed the speech of only some characters and the objects relevant to them; I did not consider the full range of neologisms, placenames, and characters' proper names to be found in *Elden Ring*. It is possible that an examination of their etymology could contribute to illustrating the relevance of Old English and Middle English to the discourse of the game.

Moreover, I compared the characters' speech to the speech of modern speakers of English, rather than the speech of characters in other video games. As the two corpora consist of texts produced in different contexts and relevant to different historical periods, a high number of differences necessarily emerged. Maybe more enlightening results could emerge from comparing the speech of *Elden Ring*'s characters to that of characters in other soulslike games, such as *Bloodborne* or, better, *Dark Souls* (also set in a medieval decaying world).

#### 4.4. Suggestions for future research

Future research could examine the semantic roles (e.g. Agent, Patient, Experiencer, Carrier of attribute) played by the referents of the subject noun phrases identifying the four main characters and the player. The frequency and dispersion could reveal the degree of agency attributed to the characters vs the player in the game.

Studies could also examine the length and syntactic complexity of the utterances in the characters' speech in order to check if a correlation can be established between their way of speaking and their behaviour; for example, my impression is that characters that tend to express themselves in a hermetic, and syntactically complex, way have secrets to keep.

A perception study could also be carried out among players, asking them to indicate how archaic they perceive the language of the game to be in general, or to describe the language of some characters in particular and provide the motivations to their answers.

Future linguistic studies of *Elden Ring* could also focus on the comparison of the speech of the characters believing in the Golden Order and that of its opponents to check whether their different roles are also reflected in their discourse. My impression is that the characters believing in the Golden Order, in general, use lexis related to "light", while their opponents use lexis relevant to "darkness". This could involve identifying keywords and recurrent phraseologies in the two datasets and checking the degree to which they are unshared.

Another linguistic analysis could be focused on loanwords in *Elden Ring*. Indeed, while playing the game, I noticed the occasional use of Latin by some characters (e.g. characters similar to harpies can be heard singing a Latin sad song from the distance and the Lord of Blood uses a Latin countdown before showing his true power in the *bossfight* against him: *tres, duo, unus, nihil*), and of German to denote objects or characters (e.g. a long sword called *Zweihander* 'two hands') or Japanese to denote characters (e.g. *Samurai*); it would be interesting to determine whether these words are typical only of some characters, and if so which ones, and thus to explore the possible relevance of these other languages to their different personality traits.

Studying *Elden Ring* in relation to other soulslike games, too, would be worthwhile. For example, there are some characters, weapons, armours or objects in general which are

recurrent in soulslike games. For example, one of *Elden Ring*'s characters, called *Patches*, is also present in the *Dark Souls* trilogy and in *Demons Souls*. Comparing this character's speech in different narrative universes could reveal whether his recurrent words and phraseologies indeed remain the same in the different games or not. Similarly, this method could be applied to descriptions of armours and weapons such as the *Moonlight Greatsword*, which are found in various soulslike games, and see if they are described in the same way across games or not.

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