

CONSTRUCTING GAMEPLAY MOTIVATION IN *HARVEST MOON: BACK TO NATURE*: A MULTIMODAL DISCOURSE ANALYSIS

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Abstract

This study examines how gameplay motivation is constructed in the opening sequence of the video game *Harvest Moon: Back to Nature*.

While previous research on farming simulation games has primarily focused on mechanics, player experience, and nostalgia, studies analyzing how opening sequences build player motivation through an integrated linguistic and multimodal lens remain scarce. Addressing this gap, this study employs a descriptive qualitative design that integrates the Transitivity system of Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL) and Multimodal Discourse Analysis (MDA). The data consist of 67 verbal clauses and accompanying visual and audio elements from the game's opening sequence. The findings reveal that Material Processes dominate (29.9%), followed by Relational (26.9%) and Mental Processes (22.4%), which collectively position required gameplay actions within a rich emotional and social context. Consequently, three primary motivational constructs are identified: Restorative Motivation, Relational & Social Connection Motivation, and Legacy & Inherited Responsibility Motivation. Ultimately, this study concludes that the opening sequence serves as a multimodal discursive space that prepares players cognitively, emotionally, and socially, aligning with Self-Determination Theory to drive player engagement.

INTRODUCTION

The evolution of video games as a form of entertainment is closely linked to semiotic texts. Video games constitute a multimodal discourse that integrates various semiotic modes. These include visual imagery, animation, written and spoken language, sound effects, music, color, and interactive elements. These semiotic modes aim to construct meaning and shape the player's experience (Valera et al., 2022; Jiang, 2019; Tan et al., 2016; Matumoto & Gonçalves-Segundo, 2022; Belyaev, 2023). They are understood as technological products containing communicative texts characterized by specific structures, narrative sequences, situational meanings, and sociocultural contexts that influence how players interpret and respond to the game world (Jiang, 2019). This multimodal nature has attracted the attention of researchers across various fields, including game studies, digital semiotics, literacy, and language education, who seek to understand how diverse semiotic resources function in concert during the process of meaning-making (Tan et al., 2016; Matumoto & Gonçalves-Segundo, 2022; Belyaev, 2023). So, analyzing video games requires an analytical framework that connects linguistic, visual, auditory, and interactive elements.

The opening section of a video game serves as a crucial space for establishing context and revealing the game's objectives. An opening sequence functions not merely as a visual prelude before play begins, but as a starting point that introduces the game world, characters, situations, atmosphere, and the underlying issues driving the experience. Studies indicate that the opening section can establish a narrative orientation and shape how players perceive the game world from the outset (Folléa, 2020; Gallagher, 2022; Valente, 2015). At the same time, the visual and cinematic elements used in the opening can shape player expectations about the atmosphere, narrative flow, spatial setting, pacing, and the nature of interactions they will encounter during gameplay (Kirkland, 2015; Dis correlation and Post-Cinema, 2020). Thus, the opening sequence is viewed as an entry point that bridges the narrative with the experience of playing. In this context, players are not only introduced to the contents of the game world but are also guided to understand the situation, objectives, and potential actions available to them. This role makes the opening sequence a significant subject of study, as the representations introduced at this early stage can shape player engagement and readiness for the gameplay activities that follow.

The orientation established through the opening sequence can subsequently shape the player's motivation to engage in and continue gameplay activities. Gameplay motivation is understood as a psychological drive stemming from game mechanics, such as rewards, challenges, or achievements, and as something constructed through discourse that provides

reasons, goals, and values for the player's actions. Language and semiotic resources within video games establish social contexts, identities, interaction goals, and expectations regarding the actions players must perform (Stein, 2023; Beltrama, 2020; Blommaert, 2019). Studies on language within gaming communities, for instance, show that register choices convey information, improve communication efficiency, build atmosphere or "hype," and strengthen group relationships and identities (Putra et al., 2024). Although this research focuses on player-to-player interaction, the findings indicate that language within the gaming environment guides actions and constructs social meaning. An examination of these studies yields an interesting insight. In-text dialogue can influence a player's desire and motivation to complete the goals set in a video game's opening sequence.

This framework becomes particularly compelling when applied to *Harvest Moon: Back to Nature*, a game that establishes a narrative foundation for the player's actions right from its opening sequence. The game casts the player as a character returning to a village to take charge of their late grandfather's long-neglected farm. The story blends childhood memories, the grandfather's passing, the farm's dilapidated state, and the imperative to restore the property while integrating into village life. Rather than being handed a plot of land to manage, the player is first placed in a context that explains why the farm requires restoration and why successful management matters. This narrative context translates into a series of gameplay activities, such as clearing land, planting and harvesting crops, raising livestock, expanding the farm, and building relationships with villagers. Then, the opening of *Harvest Moon: Back to Nature* warrants analysis for the way it establishes a cause-and-effect link between the story and gameplay actions. The narrative setup provides the rationale for the objectives the player must pursue through gameplay; the motivation to play does not stem merely from the farming activities themselves, but is constructed through a narrative that gives the player a reason to engage in those activities and strive toward specific outcomes within the game.

Previous research on *Harvest Moon* and similar games has largely focused on aspects such as nostalgia, farming mechanics, life simulation, player experience, and cultural dimensions (Lepistö, 2025; Sloan, 2016). Studies on nostalgia, for instance, emphasize that games can evoke positive emotional responses that encourage players to explore the game world (Sloan, 2016), while other research highlights player engagement and immersion (the desire to enter the game world) within the farming simulation genre (Lepistö, 2025). So, Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) studies of video games remain limited; most discursive analyses to date have focused on the construction of ideological values and social representations in games generally (Whitton & MacLure, 2015). Multimodal approaches to game discourse have begun to emerge,

such as in the analysis of tutorials and game textuality (Ensslin, 2015; Wildfeuer & Stamenković, 2021). Then, research specifically examining how opening sequences build player motivation through language and visual representation remains scarce. Even fewer studies integrate Transitivity analysis within the framework of Systemic Functional Linguistics (Isabella, 2024) with Multimodal Discourse Analysis (Song, 2025) to investigate this phenomenon. Thus, there is a clear research gap regarding the study of *Harvest Moon* opening sequences through the integration of Transitivity and Multimodal Discourse Analysis, aiming to understand how language and visual representation collaboratively foster player motivation to continue playing.

Addressing this gap, this study aims to analyze how gameplay motivation is constructed through transitivity and multimodal elements within the opening sequence of *Harvest Moon: Back to Nature*. Specifically, the study identifies and analyzes transitivity patterns in the verbal discourse to reveal how actors, actions, processes, and circumstances are represented in establishing the situations and goals that underpin gameplay activities. Furthermore, the study examines how multimodal resources interact with these linguistic meanings to shape the player's interpretation of the game world, situations, and objectives. By integrating transitivity analysis from the perspective of Systemic Functional Linguistics with Multimodal Discourse Analysis, this study seeks to explain how language and various semiotic resources collectively construct the reasons, goals, and drives that prompt players to engage in and continue gameplay. Thus, the study views the opening sequence not merely as a narrative introduction, but as a discursive space where the motivation to play is actively constructed.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Transitivity is a key component of the ideational metafunction within Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL), representing human experience through configurations of processes, participants, and circumstances within clauses. Through this system, language is viewed not merely as a tool for communication but as a resource for meaning that enables speakers to construct social realities and specific experiences (Hu, 2023; Owusu et al., 2022; Win, 2024; Abouelenin, 2023). Transitivity analysis identifies six process types: material, mental, relational, verbal, behavioral, and existential. Each fulfills a distinct function in constructing representations of actions, perceptions, relationships, and existence. Research indicates that transitivity analysis has been widely applied across diverse genres such as political speeches, media discourse, literary texts, and corporate reports to reveal how identities, ideologies, and power relations are constructed through linguistic choices (Waseem, 2023; Mohamed, 2021).

Consequently, transitivity offers an effective analytical tool for examining how a text frames experience and shapes the audience's interpretation of the represented reality.

In this study, transitivity analysis is employed to reveal how gameplay motivation is constructed through the opening narrative of *Harvest Moon: Back to Nature*. The game's opening sequence presents a series of events introducing the protagonist, the farm conditions requiring restoration, and the social expectations attached to the player's success. By identifying dominant process types, this study shows how actions, goals, and challenges are represented to position the player as an agent responsible for successfully managing the farm. Previous findings indicate that material processes often dominate action-oriented texts, as they serve to highlight activities, changes, and the achievement of goals (Waseem, 2023; Nyamao & Wakarindi, 2024). Furthermore, beyond identifying patterns of experiential representation within game narratives, this research explains how linguistic and multimodal choices create an impetus for players to accept roles, complete tasks, and achieve success within the game world (Mohamed, 2021).

In addition to the linguistic aspects analyzed via the transitivity system, this study employs a multimodal perspective to understand how the motivation to play is constructed through the interaction of various semiotic resources in the opening sequence of *Harvest Moon: Back to Nature*. Multimodal studies of video games posit that meaning is generated not merely by text or narrative, but by a combination of visuals, audio, interface design, game mechanics, and game-world rules that function cohesively as a meaning-making system (Cardona-Rivera et al., 2022; Koenitz & Eladhari, 2021). Consequently, elements such as the depiction of the neglected farm, character expressions, emotionally evocative music, and the narrative regarding the protagonist's responsibilities cannot be understood in isolation; rather, they act as mutually reinforcing multimodal elements that shape the player's interpretation. Aligning with contemporary developments in game studies, the multimodal approach integrates ludological and narratological perspectives to explain how narrative elements and game mechanics collaborate to construct the values, ideologies, and objectives the player seeks to achieve (Núñez-Pacheco & Penix-Tadsen, 2021; Chen et al., 2023). Thus, the multimodal analysis in this study complements the transitivity findings by revealing how the game's various semiotic modes simultaneously guide the player to accept the role of farm manager and cultivate the motivation to succeed within the game (Cardona-Rivera et al., 2022; Jager, 2022).

METHOD

This study employs a descriptive qualitative design to identify and interpret how gameplay motivation is constructed through linguistic choices and multimodal resources in the opening of *Harvest Moon: Back to Nature*. This design was selected because the study focuses on a deep understanding of a phenomenon through data analyzed as words, clauses, visuals, audio, and other multimodal elements, rather than through statistical measurement or experimentation. A descriptive qualitative approach allows the researcher to remain close to the data and present the findings systematically based on the characteristics of the observed phenomenon (Sandelowski, 2000; Colorafi & Evans, 2016). In this study, the approach is applied using Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL), specifically the transitivity system, as a framework to identify how experiences, actions, goals, and relationships are represented through processes, participants, and circumstances. This analysis is then integrated with a multimodal discourse perspective to explain how language, visuals, audio, and gameplay elements interact to construct meaning. Thus, the descriptive qualitative design enables the study to describe the linguistic and multimodal forms that emerge in the game's opening. Furthermore, this study interprets how these configurations contribute to constructing player motivation to fulfill roles and achieve the game's objectives.

The data in this study consist of verbal and multimodal units contained in the opening of *Harvest Moon: Back to Nature*, particularly the introductory narrative portion that introduces the main character's background, the state of the farm, the events leading up to the game, and the goals to be achieved by the player. Verbal data consist of clauses or utterances analyzed using SFL's transitivity system. In contrast, multimodal data encompass visuals, music, sound effects, animations, character expressions, and interactive elements present simultaneously throughout the opening sequence. The opening was selected as the data source because a video game's introductory sequence serves as the initial stage of communication between the game and the player by introducing the story, game world, rules, actions, and objectives to be undertaken (Wildfeuer & Stamenković, 2022). In multimodal video game analysis, various semiotic resources such as language, moving images, sound, music, color, animation, and interactive elements are understood as interacting resources that construct meaning and influence the player's interpretation and experience (Wildfeuer & Stamenković, 2022). Then, research data were collected through observation and documentation of the game's opening, then transcribed and documented in the order of appearance to enable an integrated linguistic and multimodal analysis. This approach aligns with multimodal research on video games that

uses gameplay recordings as data sources to identify combinations of verbal, visual, and action modes in constructing gameplay experience and meaning.

Research data were collected using documentation and multimodal observation techniques applied to the opening of *Harvest Moon: Back to Nature*. The data collection process involved playing and recording the entire game opening, followed by repeated observation of each scene to identify verbal and multimodal elements relevant to the construction of gameplay motivation. Verbal elements appearing in the narrative or dialogue were transcribed and segmented into clause units as the basis for transitivity analysis. In contrast, multimodal elements consisting of images or characters were documented based on their appearance within scenes. Subsequently, each data unit was coded according to scene sequence and categorized into two analytical groups: (1) linguistic data, analyzed based on process types, participants, and circumstances within the transitivity system; and (2) multimodal data, analyzed based on the visual elements' contribution to the constructed meaning.

Next, the data were analyzed using qualitative descriptive analysis by integrating the transitivity system of Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL) and multimodal discourse analysis. The analysis was conducted in stages. First, the transcribed verbal data were broken down into clause units and classified according to the six transitivity process types: material, mental, relational, behavioral, verbal, and existential, along with their accompanying participants and circumstances. Second, each clause was analyzed based on its representational function to identify how actions, experiences, states, goals, and participant relationships are represented in the game's opening. Third, each linguistic unit was linked to its accompanying multimodal context, including visuals, characters, expressions, movements, music, sound effects, and game elements, to observe how these modes function cohesively to generate meaning. Fourth, the identified patterns were interpreted by connecting transitivity choices and multimodal configurations to the construction of gameplay motivation, specifically focusing on how the opening establishes reasons, goals, responsibilities, and incentives for player engagement.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

This section presents the results of an analysis regarding how gameplay motivation is constructed in the opening of *Harvest Moon: Back to Nature* through linguistic choices and multimodal resources. The initial analysis identifies the transitivity patterns used to represent experiences, actions, states, and relationships among participants within the opening narrative. Subsequently, these linguistic patterns are linked to multimodal elements such as visuals,

music, sound effects, character expressions, and scene sequences to demonstrate how various semiotic modes work in concert to construct meaning. Based on the identified patterns, the study focuses on key aspects of gameplay motivation construction: how the opening establishes the game's background and objectives and positions the player as an agent. It fosters the drive to restore and develop the farm. The following figures represent the findings of this study:

Table 1. Distribution of Transitivity

Process Types	Clauses	Percentages (%)	Description
Material	20	29.9%	The acts of farming, managing land, traveling, and canceling appointments.
Relational	18	26.9%	Assessment of agricultural conditions, character identification, family relationships, and employment status.
Mental	15	22.4%	Hope, memories of the past, feelings of loneliness, and a liking for nature.
Verbal	6	9.0%	Promises from the past, conversations between residents, and messages for parents.
Behavioral	6	9.0%	Children's play activities and physical gestures (nodding).
Existential	2	3.0%	The presence of other children in the village and the lack of entertainment there.

Table 1 shows the distribution of six types of transitivity processes found in the opening of *Harvest Moon: Back to Nature*. Of the 67 clauses, the Material Process is the most dominant, accounting for 20 clauses (29.9%). This dominance indicates that the opening largely represents actions and activities, particularly those related to farming, land management, travel, and the characters' daily lives. The Relational Process ranks second with 18 clauses (26.9%), primarily establishing relationships and conditions, such as describing the state of the farm, identifying characters, explaining family ties, and indicating specific statuses or states. Meanwhile, the Mental Process appears in 15 clauses (22.4%), representing the characters' internal experiences, such as hopes, memories of the past, feelings of loneliness, and an appreciation for nature. Together, these three processes: Material, Relational, and Mental, comprise 53 of the 67 clauses (79.1%), thereby serving as the primary foundation for representing experience within the game's opening.

In contrast, Verbal Processes and Behavioral Processes appear in 6 clauses (9.0%) each, while Existential Processes occur in only 2 clauses (3.0%). Verbal processes mainly represent past promises, conversations between villagers, and messages conveyed to the protagonist, whereas behavioral processes represent children's play and physical gestures. Existential processes serve to introduce the presence of other children and recreational activities in the village. Overall, this pattern demonstrates that the opening of *Harvest Moon: Back to Nature*

does more than introduce the game world; it also establishes a motivational narrative through a combination of actions, conditions, and mental experiences. The dominance of the Material Process positions activity and action as crucial elements of the game world, while Relational and Mental Processes provide context regarding the necessity of these actions and their significance to the protagonist. Thus, this distribution of transitivity processes offers an initial indication that gameplay motivation is constructed through the interplay between required actions, the conditions that must be faced, and the desires or goals driving those actions. The following are the results of the analysis of the findings:

Transitivity processes in the in-game dialogue during the opening of the video game *Harvest Moon: Back to Nature*

An analysis of transitivity processes in the in-game dialogue of the *Harvest Moon: Back to Nature* opening sequence was conducted to identify how experiences, actions, states, and relationships between characters are represented through language. From the perspective of Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL), transitivity is part of the ideational metafunction, realizing experiential meaning through choices of processes, participants, and circumstances. Consequently, transitivity patterns in the in-game dialogue are significant for understanding how linguistic choices help shape the narrative context that motivates players to proceed with the game's activities.

Material process

The material processes used in the opening represent the actions of farming, managing land, traveling, and breaking an appointment. The following is an example of an analysis of material processes.

Data (1)

It's been neglected for quite some time.

It	has been neglected	For quite some time.
Goal	Material Process	Circumstance: Extent / Duration

The sentence "It has been neglected for quite some time," found in the opening of the game *Harvest Moon: Back to Nature*, depicts the initial state of the grandfather's farm using a passive transitivity structure. Ideationally, the clause positions "It" (the grandfather's farm) as the Goal participant. The choice of a passive clause, omitting the Actor (the agent responsible for the neglect), obscures accountability for the farm's condition while shifting the narrative focus entirely onto the physical state of the neglected object. The action is represented through a Material Process ("has been neglected"), illustrating the neglect of the farm and implicitly

inviting the player to restore it. The Circumstance: Extent (Duration* element ("for quite some time")) reinforces the gravity of this neglect by emphasizing the significant duration involved.

Mental process

Data (2)

I like it here too.

I	like	it	Here too
Senser	Mental Process	phenomenon	Circumstance: Place

In the conversation between the Girl and the protagonist, the clause "I like it here too" represents the formation of a personal bond and experience through the mental process ("like"). The Girl is positioned as the Senser ("I"), the subject expressing positive feelings. Meanwhile, "it" functions as the Phenomenon that refers to the activity of playing and their presence in the forest area. The inclusion of the Circumstance: Place ("here too") plays a crucial discursive role; the word "too" underscores a shared affection between the Girl and the protagonist for the forest environment. By saying she also likes the place, the Girl emphasizes that the forest and the rural area are a safe, enjoyable, and meaningful space for her.

Relational Process

This was your grandpa's farm.

This	was	Your grandpa's farm
Token	Relational: Identifying	Value

The utterance "This was your grandpa's farm" establishes identity and history through a Relational Process: Identifying (realized by "was"). The demonstrative "This" functions as the Token, pointing directly to the farmstead, while the phrase "your grandpa's farm" serves as the Value, assigning meaning, ownership status, and genealogical identity to the land. The use of the past tense ("was") underscores a temporal boundary, signals that the grandfather's era of ownership has ended and marks a transitional period of status vacancy for the farm. This relational process construction effectively transfers responsibility and emotional attachment. Specifically, the family legacy is transferred directly to the protagonist (the player). By defining the land as belonging to the grandfather, the game's discourse constructs a moral call to action for the player to assume the role, carry on the legacy, and revitalize the farm as the central objective of the gameplay.

Verbal Process

But I asked Grandpa if you could stay at this farm.

But	I	asked	Grandpa	if you could stay at this farm.
Conj.	sayer	verbal	Receiver	Verbiage

The data in the utterance above highlights the context of the father's physical absence due to work commitments. The clause "But I asked Grandpa if you could stay at this farm" constructs a mechanism for emotional compensation through a Verbal Process ("asked"). The father is depicted as the Sayer ("I") initiating a verbal action toward the grandfather as the Receiver ("Grandpa"). At the same time, the projected clause "if you could stay at this farm" functions as the Verbiage containing the substance of the request for compensation. The adversative conjunction "But" at the beginning of the sentence marks a narrative pivot. This shifts the focus from the father's failure to provide playtime to an alternative solution situated in a natural setting. The verbal process also represents the father's way of alleviating his guilt by offering the player the option to stay at the grandfather's farm. This fosters gameplay motivation, encouraging the player to appreciate and restore the farm as a gesture of valuing their family bond.

Behavioral Process

I'm sorry. I know I promised you. Please understand... I'm very busy.. I'll make up for this. I'm very sorry, dear... But I asked Grandpa if you could stay at this farm. ***Take it easy*** and enjoy nature for a change.

You (implied)	Take it easy
behavior	Proses behavioral

This utterance occurs between the father and the protagonist (the player). The phrase "Take it easy," an imperative, suggests a shift in one's psychophysical state, represented here through a "Behavioral Process." By explicitly omitting the "Behaver" participant ("You"), the father issues a direct instruction while simultaneously adopting a nurturing tone toward his child (the protagonist). This use of a behavioral process signals an encouragement to transform tension or disappointment into a state of relaxation; this follows an earlier part of the dialogue explaining that the father had to cancel a planned vacation due to his busy schedule. Through this behavioral process, the game begins to shape the player's mindset right at the start of *Harvest Moon: Back to Nature*. The player is presented with a vision of a delightful village life, such as farming, raising livestock, developing the homestead, and interacting with fellow villagers. Players can also participate in various events that reinforce the game's relaxed atmosphere.

Existential process

There's not much excitement out in these parts

There	is not	much excitement	out in these parts.
	Existential Process	Existent	Circumstance: Place

The statement "There's not much excitement out in these parts" establishes the environmental reality through an Existential Process ("is not"). The word "There" functions as a grammatical marker of existence devoid of a participant role. At the same time, the phrase "much excitement" serves as the Existent that represents the bustle or thrill whose presence is described as minimal. This state of affairs is contextualized by a Circumstance: Place ("out in these parts"), referring to the rural area where the farm is located. This portrayal frames the village as a quiet, tranquil space untouched by urban dynamism. The emphasis on the lack of "excitement" is not intended to deter the player, but rather to temper expectations of a highly developed farm; instead, it focuses the player's attention on the serenity of rural life and offers the opportunity to revitalize an abandoned family farm, thereby fostering a sense of pride and happiness among the villagers.

Multimodal representation (combination of text and visual transitivity) in the opening of *Harvest Moon: Back to Nature* to form a discourse of player motivation in managing the garden

Restorative Motivation



Figure 1: The Major explains the farm's condition

The construction of "Restorative Motivation" in this scene is established through a mutually reinforcing relationship between the text's transitivity structure and the visual representation of the farm environment. The clause "This was your grandpa's farm" (Relational Process: Identifying) establishes the land's identity as a grandfather's legacy, thereby affirming the player's right of inheritance; this is followed by the clauses "It's been neglected for quite some time" (Material Process) and "so it's a bit of a mess..." (Relational Process: Attributive). The use of a passive material process in the second sentence positions the farm ("It") as the neglected *Goal* without introducing an *Actor* (the agent of neglect), thereby focusing the player's attention entirely on the object's dilapidated physical state. Background elements, such

as wooden crates, overgrown brush, and untended land, visually validate this process. At the same time, the standing positions and gazes of both the Protagonist and the Mayor are directed straight at the area. The absence of an *Actor* participant in the clause creates a void that implicitly invites the player to step into that role. This combination generates narrative tension, specifically a state of "lack" that triggers Restorative Motivation, compelling the player, morally and emotionally, to take control, clear the land, and restore the inherited farm from chaos to a better condition.

Relational & Social Connection Motivation



Figure 2: Player meets with the girl

The construction of the "Relational & Social Connection Motivation" process in this scene is shaped by the interplay between relational processes and the composition of the characters' visual interactions. The Girl character's dialogue begins with a question, followed by the clause "I like it here, too..." (Mental Process: Affection); this positions her as the Senser ("I") harboring positive feelings toward the forest, viewed as a comfortable place to play (Phenomenon: "it" / Circumstance: Place: "here, too"). The subsequent clause reinforces this emotional attachment, "...so I come here a lot to play alone" (Material Process), in which she acts as the Actor ("I"), routinely performing the physical actions of visiting ("come") and playing ("play") in the area. The inclusion of the Circumstance: Manner ("alone") and the marker of shared emotion ("too") underscores a shared experience of solitude between the Girl and the player. Visually, the scene portrays this solitary boredom through a framing composition that shows the two characters standing together, facing each other amid the forest. This physical closeness and face-to-face positioning create a direct interaction that disrupts the

sense of isolation expressed in the text. Furthermore, this combination encourages the player not only to complete the mission of restoring their grandfather's farm but also to enjoy the freedom of exploration within the game's open-world environment.

Legacy & Inherited Responsibility Motivation



Figure 3: The major giving advice

The motivation rooted in legacy and inherited responsibility in this scene is constructed through the Mayor's (Mayor Thomas) dialogue and the visual composition of the workplace setting. Textually, the speech opens with the clause "Your grandfather took real good care of this farm" (Material Process), positioning the grandfather as the Actor ("Your grandfather") and the farmland as the Goal ("this farm"), combined with a Circumstance of Manner ("real good care"). This historical material process frames the farm not merely as a vacant plot of land, but as a life's work and an achievement of the previous generation. This structure continues with the clause "We respect his wishes..." (Mental Process: Cognition/Affection), positioning the village collective as the Senser ("We") paying moral respect to the grandfather's wishes (Phenomenon: "his wishes"). This representation is validated by the Protagonist's position standing right in the middle of a farm plot cluttered with physical obstacles, specifically large boulders and logs. The Mayor's position beside the dialogue box, along with the obstacles surrounding the Protagonist, visually constructs the tangible challenges the player must face. The juxtaposition between the discourse regarding the grandfather's esteemed past and the land's current, obstacle-ridden physical state creates a burden of emotional expectation. This intersemiotic combination effectively constructs a motivation based on legacy and inherited responsibility: the player is driven to engage in gameplay actions (clearing the land

and cultivating the soil) not solely for in-game financial gain, but to fulfill a moral obligation, continue the family legacy, and prove their own capabilities to the village community.

Discussion

This study demonstrates that the opening sequence of *Harvest Moon: Back to Nature* operates not only as a narrative introduction but also as a discursive space that sets out the grounds, aims, and orientation for the player's subsequent actions. Of the 67 clauses analyzed, the Material Process was the most prevalent (20 clauses, or 29.9%), followed by the Relational Process (18 clauses, or 26.9%) and the Mental Process (15 clauses, or 22.4%). Taken together, these three processes comprise 53 clauses, or 79.1% of the dataset, suggesting that the construction of gameplay motivation depends primarily on representations of action, identity and relationships, as well as internal experience. The predominance of Material Processes shapes the game world through activities such as farming, land management, traveling, and decision-making, which casts the player as an active Actor expected to participate in and alter the game environment. This result aligns with Siahaan et al. (2024), who emphasize the dominance of Material Processes in texts focused on activities, actions, and goal attainment. Nevertheless, the importance of this finding goes beyond the sheer frequency of action-oriented processes. From the perspective of CDA, the Material Process helps position the player in discourse by portraying specific kinds of action as significant and indispensable within the game world. Accordingly, the opening does more than inform players about what occurs; it constructs an action-centered framework that enables subsequent gameplay to be understood and pursued.

The importance of Relational and Mental Processes is especially evident in accounting for why these actions are framed as meaningful. Relational Processes link agricultural conditions, family identity, and the protagonist's social standing within a wider constellation of meanings. Accordingly, the farm is depicted not merely as an economic asset, but as embedded in a family identity and an inherited social bond. In a similar way, interactions involving the grandfather and other villagers, together with community expectations, give rise to a kind of Social Connection Motivation that supplies a social basis for farming, securing acceptance, and forming relationships with other characters. Mental Processes add an experiential layer by portraying memories, hopes, loneliness, and an affinity with nature. The protagonist's recollections of the grandfather reconfigure the farm into an emotional inheritance, while the wish to return to a natural setting offers an affective foundation for engagement. These patterns indicate that gameplay motivation is not produced by action alone, but through the interplay

among action, social meaning, and internal experience. This reading can be connected to Self-Determination Theory, particularly the needs for competence, autonomy, and relatedness (Przybylski et al., 2010). For CDA, more crucially, the results show how grammatical choices structure specific meanings around the player's anticipated actions. The game's discourse associates farming with responsibility, social ties, personal memory, and emotional attachment, which in turn makes certain modes of participation seem purposeful within the depicted world.

The development of gameplay motivation is further strengthened by the interplay among linguistic, visual, auditory, and gameplay-related modes. The depiction of a dilapidated farm cluttered with obstacles portrays a material state that calls for restoration, whereas the account of the grandfather's past offers an emotional and interpersonal justification for undertaking that restoration. Auditory components tied to nostalgia, solitude, and hope additionally intensify the link between the game's represented conditions and the protagonist's internal experience. These results align with Shalamay's (2022) argument that video games operate as multimodal discourse, in which distinct modes help shape player experience. In *Harvest Moon: Back to Nature*, dialogue, visual elements, movement, audio, and potential gameplay actions do not work as self-contained resources. Rather, they work together to connect depicted circumstances with what players can plausibly do. The dilapidated farm, for instance, is not only a visual marker of physical decay; when it is combined with the narrative of familial inheritance and the protagonist's memories, it functions as a discursive impetus for restoration. Multimodality thus expands the meaning formed through transitivity by supplying sensory and contextual resources that enable linguistic representations to take on greater significance for player engagement.

CONCLUSION

The construct of gameplay motivation in the opening section of *Harvest Moon: Back to Nature* is not formed instantaneously or mechanically; rather, it is systematically constructed through intersemiotic complementarity among linguistic, visual, and audio elements. An analysis of 67 clauses reveals a predominance of Material Processes (29.9%), Relational Processes (26.9%), and Mental Processes (22.4%), which cumulatively account for 79.1% of the total data. Material Processes position the player as an Actor directed to perform concrete actions, such as managing and restoring the land; Relational Processes provide social context and identity to the farm space; and Mental Processes present internal experiences involving the characters' memories, hopes, and feelings. The configuration of these three processes

demonstrates that the act of playing is driven not merely by the need to engage in in-game activities, but also by the social, emotional, and historical reasons underlying those actions.

Based on the integration of linguistic and multimodal elements, three primary constructs of gameplay motivation were identified: Restorative Motivation, Relational & Social Connection Motivation, and Legacy & Inherited Responsibility Motivation. Restorative Motivation is established through the representation of the land's neglected state, including passive constructions that do not explicitly identify an Actor responsible for the neglect. This absence of an agent creates space for the player to assume the role of a new Actor responsible for restoring the farm. This construct is visually reinforced by fields overgrown with weeds and cluttered with stones and other obstacles. Meanwhile, Relational & Social Connection Motivation is built on the protagonist's relationships with other characters and a shared attachment to the rural environment, transforming the farm space from a mere game location into a potential setting for forming social and emotional bonds. Finally, Legacy & Inherited Responsibility Motivation is constructed through the representation of the land as a family inheritance and the villagers' respect for the grandfather's wishes; consequently, managing the farm acquires moral and historical significance, transcending a purely mechanical objective of generating in-game profit.

These three motivational constructs demonstrate that the opening sequence of *Harvest Moon: Back to Nature* serves as a multimodal discursive space that prepares the player cognitively, emotionally, and socially before the game fully commences. These constructs also align with Self-Determination Theory: material actions offer players opportunities to build competence, decision-making provides scope for autonomy, and family memories alongside interactions with other characters satisfy the need for relatedness. Consequently, integrating SFL transitivity analysis with multimodal discourse analysis reveals that gameplay motivation is constructed not merely through the narrative itself, but through the interplay of language, visuals, audio, and potential in-game actions in shaping the player's interpretation. Thus, the opening sequence functions as both a narrative introduction and a discursive mechanism that fosters mental readiness, establishes a rationale for action, and directs the player toward the game's goals and orientation before the start of the main gameplay.

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