

Assertive and Performative in Spouse Text in Stardew Valley Ridgeside Village

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ABSTRAK

Penelitian ini mengeksplorasi bagaimana asertif dan performatif berkontribusi dalam simulasi hubungan romantis dan pernikahan dalam ekspansi game *Stardew Valley Ridgeside Village*. Penelitian ini menyelidiki bagaimana bahasa berfungsi tidak hanya sebagai alat komunikasi, tetapi juga sebagai sikap dalam hubungan virtual. Pendekatan yang digunakan adalah deskriptif kualitatif, dengan menganalisis dialog dalam game yang dipilih dari karakter pasangan untuk mengidentifikasi tindakan yang menyampaikan fungsi emosional dan sosial. Data dikumpulkan dari interaksi teks yang terjadi sebelum dan sesudah pernikahan, dengan fokus pada dialog yang berulang kali terjadi mencerminkan rutinitas sehari-hari, ungkapan cinta, kepedulian, dan dinamika hubungan. Temuan menunjukkan bahwa ucapan asertif digunakan untuk menegaskan identitas, kondisi emosional, dan kebenaran dalam hubungan, sementara ucapan performatif menyimulasikan kepedulian, kasih sayang, dan keintiman melalui tindakan linguistik dan bahasa yang bersifat tindakan. Dialog-dialog ini mencerminkan pola komunikasi dunia nyata dalam hubungan romantis, menunjukkan bahwa ruang digital mampu membangkitkan keterlibatan emosional dan meniru irama kehidupan rumah tangga. Studi ini menyimpulkan bahwa bahasa dalam game berfungsi sebagai alat naratif dan relasional yang kuat, memperkuat keterikatan pemain melalui dialog yang bermakna dan disengaja.

Kata kunci : Tindak tutur, deskriptif kualitatif, keintiman digital, linguistik game

ABSTRACT

This study explores how assertive and performative speech acts contribute to the simulation of romantic and marital intimacy in the *Stardew Valley Ridgeside Village* game expansion. The research investigates how language functions not only as communication but also as action within virtual relationships. The study employs a qualitative descriptive approach, analysing selected in-game dialogues from spouse characters to identify speech acts that convey emotional and social functions. Data were gathered from textual interactions that occur pre and post-marriage, focusing on recurring lines that reflect shared routines, expressions of love, care, and relational dynamics. The findings reveal that assertive speech acts are used to affirm identity, emotional states, and relational truths, while performative utterances simulate care, affection, and intimacy through linguistic actions. These dialogues mirror real-world communication patterns in romantic relationships, demonstrating how digital spaces can evoke emotional engagement and simulate the rhythms of domestic life. This study concludes that language in games serves as a powerful narrative and relational device, enhancing player attachment through meaningful, intentional dialogue.

Keyword : Speech act, qualitative descriptive, digital intimacy, game linguistics

1. INTRODUCTION

Language, as employed in everyday communication, serves not only as a medium for conveying information but also as a mechanism for establishing social relationships, expressing emotions, and performing actions within various social contexts. Through language, individuals comfort, promise, apologize, express affection, and negotiate interpersonal relationships. This perspective underlies Speech Act Theory, which views language as a form of social action rather than merely a vehicle for transmitting meaning. Speech Act Theory, developed by Austin (1962) and further refined by Searle (1969), emphasizes that utterances do not simply describe reality but can also perform actions. Austin's classification of performative utterances and Searle's categorization of speech acts into assertive, commissive, directive, expressive, and declarative forms provide a theoretical framework for examining how language constructs social relationships and interpersonal intimacy.

Among the various categories of speech acts, assertive and performative utterances play a particularly significant role in the construction of interpersonal relationships. Assertive speech acts communicate beliefs, assumptions, or propositions regarding reality, while performative utterances accomplish actions through their very articulation. Within romantic relationships, these forms of speech function as linguistic resources through which emotions, commitments, and shared understandings are communicated and maintained. Consequently, the study of speech acts offers valuable insights into the ways intimacy and relational bonds are established through language.

The relevance of speech acts extends beyond face-to-face communication into digital and virtual environments. Contemporary video games increasingly incorporate complex social interactions that simulate

interpersonal relationships through dialogue systems. One prominent example is *Stardew Valley*, a farming simulation game that combines agricultural management with social interaction, community engagement, and relationship development. While the game is primarily recognized for its farming mechanics, it also provides opportunities for players to establish friendships, engage in romantic relationships, and enter into marriage with non-player characters (NPCs). The addition of the *Ridgeside Village* expansion enriches these interactions by introducing new characters, narratives, and relationship pathways that are developed through extensive dialogue.

Within this virtual environment, marriage functions as more than a gameplay reward. Instead, it represents an ongoing process of interaction maintained through recurring verbal exchanges between players and spouse characters. These dialogues contribute to the construction of intimacy by simulating everyday marital communication. According to Pei and Jurgens (2020), intimacy often emerges through emotionally charged lexical choices and personalized expressions that signal closeness between interlocutors. Similarly, the affectionate remarks, encouragements, complaints, and expressions of care found in *Stardew Valley* serve as linguistic indicators of emotional attachment. Such speech acts function as symbolic representations of relational maintenance, reflecting communicative practices commonly associated with real-world relationships.

The significance of digital dialogue in fostering emotional attachment is further supported by Turkle (2011) work on digital companionship, which highlights the capacity of virtual interactions to generate meaningful emotional engagement. Within this framework, assertive and performative speech acts in *Stardew Valley* can be

understood as symbolic acts of affection, trust, reassurance, and commitment. Through these linguistic practices, the game constructs a sense of continuity and emotional connection that mirrors aspects of human interpersonal relationships. Consequently, romantic and marital dialogues within the game become valuable sites for examining how intimacy is linguistically represented in virtual environments.

Relationship development in *Stardew Valley* progresses gradually through repeated interactions. Prior to marriage, players cultivate relationships through gift-giving, conversations, and shared experiences. During this process, character dialogue evolves from neutral exchanges toward increasingly personal and emotionally expressive interactions. Turkle (2011) argues that digital environments provide spaces in which emotional attachment and identity formation can occur through mediated communication. Likewise, Heritage (2025) observes that character dialogue in video games serves not only as a mechanism for player interaction but also as a means of constructing character identity and social positioning. As relational bonds strengthen, dialogue reflects increasing emotional intimacy, culminating in marriage proposals and marital commitments that are conveyed primarily through speech.

Following marriage, dialogue continues to function as a central mechanism for maintaining the relationship. Spouse characters engage in daily conversations that include greetings, expressions of concern, encouragement, domestic observations, and affectionate remarks. Although these interactions are often brief and repetitive due to programming constraints, they nevertheless contribute to the simulation of relational continuity. Wang & Zhang, (2026) and Yue & Hao (2025) argue that routine in-game interactions, such as morning greetings and meal offerings,

function as forms of relational maintenance that sustain emotional engagement and simulate the rhythms of long-term relationships. This phenomenon may also be understood through Cole & Morgan (1975) *Cooperative Principle*, which suggests that participants in communication assume meaningful intent behind utterances. As a result, players frequently interpret repetitive scripted dialogue as meaningful expressions of care and commitment rather than as purely mechanical game elements.

The linguistic patterns observed within these dialogues suggest that virtual relationships may be examined using analytical frameworks traditionally applied to real-world communication. Such an approach raises important questions regarding the ways video games simulate emotional bonds and how speech acts contribute to player attachment toward virtual characters. Despite growing scholarly interest in narrative design and player-character relationships, relatively limited attention has been devoted to the specific role of speech acts in constructing intimacy within game dialogue. Existing studies frequently emphasize narrative structures, gameplay mechanics, or character development while overlooking the linguistic mechanisms through which relationships are enacted and maintained.

At the intersection of language, narrative, and simulation lies the communicative power of dialogue. Through seemingly simple utterances, including greetings, compliments, expressions of affection, and statements of concern, *Stardew Valley* creates the illusion of an ongoing marital relationship. These speech acts contribute significantly to the representation of emotional intimacy within the game world. Therefore, this study seeks to investigate the manifestation and function of assertive and performative speech acts in the romantic and marital dialogues of

spouse characters in the *Ridgeside Village* expansion of *Stardew Valley*. By examining these linguistic forms, the study aims to explore how language constructs intimacy, maintains relational bonds, and represents marriage within a simulated digital environment.

Accordingly, this research addresses the following questions:

1. How do assertive and performative speech acts manifest in the relationship, romantic, and marital dialogues of spouse characters in *Stardew Valley: Ridgeside Village*?
2. What social and emotional functions do these speech acts fulfil within the context of simulated marriage?
3. To what extent do these speech acts reflect or diverge from real-world marital communication norms?

By addressing these questions, this study aims to contribute to the fields of digital discourse analysis, game linguistics, and speech act studies. Furthermore, it seeks to provide a deeper understanding of how marriage, intimacy, and interpersonal meaning are represented and negotiated through language in virtual environments.

2. THEORITICAL FRAMEWORK

2.1 Pragmatics

Pragmatics is a branch of linguistics that examines meaning in relation to context. Unlike semantics, which focuses on the literal meaning of words and sentences, pragmatics investigates how speakers convey intended meanings and how listeners interpret those meanings within specific social and situational contexts. According to Cooren (2015) and Yule (1996), pragmatics is concerned with the study of speaker meaning, contextual meaning, and the interpretation of utterances beyond their literal expressions.

Pragmatics recognizes that communication involves more than the exchange of linguistic forms. Meaning is often shaped by factors such as social

relationships, shared knowledge, cultural norms, and communicative intentions. Therefore, understanding language requires attention to both what is said and what is intended by the speaker.

In digital environments, including video games, pragmatic analysis is particularly relevant because character interactions are constructed through dialogue designed to simulate real-world communication. The dialogues between player characters and spouse characters in *Stardew Valley: Ridgeside Village* can therefore be examined through a pragmatic lens to understand how intimacy, affection, and relational commitment are communicated.

2.2 Speech Act Theory

Speech Act Theory was first introduced by Austin (1962) in his seminal work *How to Do Things with Words*. Austin argued that language does not merely describe reality but can also perform actions. When people speak, they are often doing something rather than simply conveying information.

Austin (1962) proposed three levels of speech acts:

2.2.1 Locutionary Act

A locutionary act refers to the literal meaning of an utterance.

Example:

"It is raining outside."

The speaker merely states information about the weather.

2.2.2 Illocutionary Act

An illocutionary act refers to the communicative intention behind an utterance.

Example:

"It is raining outside."

Depending on the context, the utterance may function as a warning, suggestion, or reminder.

2.2.3 Perlocutionary Act

A perlocutionary act refers to the effect of an utterance on the listener.

Example:

"It is raining outside."

The listener decides to take an umbrella.

Austin's theory was later refined by Searle (1969), who developed a classification system of speech acts based on their communicative functions.

2.3 Searle's Classification of Speech Acts

Searle (1969) categorized speech acts into five major types:

2.3.1 Assertive Speech Acts

Assertive speech acts commit speakers to the truth of a proposition. Through assertive utterances, speakers express beliefs, opinions, descriptions, explanations, or statements about reality.

Examples include:

- Stating
- Claiming
- Describing
- Reporting
- Explaining

Example:

"Today is a beautiful day."

In marital dialogues within Stardew Valley, assertive speech acts frequently appear when spouse characters describe their feelings, daily activities, observations, or personal experiences.

Example:

"I watered some crops this morning."

This utterance functions as an assertion because the speaker presents information believed to be true.

2.3.2 Directive Speech Acts

Directive speech acts attempt to get the hearer to do something.

Examples include:

- Requesting
- Ordering
- Advising
- Suggesting

Example:

"Please remember to eat breakfast."

2.3.3 Commissive Speech Acts

Commissive speech acts commit speakers to future actions.

Examples include:

- Promising
- Vowing
- Offering

Example:

"I will always support you."

2.3.4 Expressive Speech Acts

Expressive speech acts communicate emotional or psychological states.

Examples include:

- Thanking
- Apologizing
- Congratulating
- Praising

Example:

"Thank you for spending time with me."

2.3.5 Declarative Speech Acts

Declarative speech acts change social reality through their utterance.

Examples include:

- Declaring
- Naming
- Appointing

Example:

"I now pronounce you husband and wife."

2.4 Performative Utterances

Austin (1962) introduced the concept of performative utterances, which are statements that perform an action simply by being spoken under appropriate conditions.

Unlike descriptive statements, performatives do not merely report actions but actually accomplish them.

Examples include:

- "I promise."
- "I apologize."
- "I declare."
- "I accept."

The effectiveness of performative utterances depends on what Austin termed *felicity conditions*, namely the social and contextual circumstances that make the utterance valid.

In romantic and marital interactions, performative utterances often function as linguistic expressions of commitment, affection, reassurance, and relational maintenance. When spouse characters in Stardew Valley express commitment, gratitude, or emotional support, their utterances may perform social actions that reinforce the simulated marital relationship.

2.5 Digital Intimacy

Digital intimacy refers to the formation and maintenance of emotional connections through digital communication technologies. According to Nieves et al. (2024), digital environments increasingly serve as spaces where individuals experience companionship, emotional support, and relational attachment.

In video games, intimacy is often constructed through narrative interaction, dialogue systems, and repeated communication between players and virtual characters. Emotional attachment emerges when players perceive virtual characters as meaningful social actors rather than merely programmed entities.

(Stepkowska, 2025; Weinstein et al., 2024) argue that intimacy is frequently signaled through emotionally loaded language, personalized expressions, and repeated communicative routines. Such linguistic features can be observed in spouse dialogues within *Stardew Valley*, where characters express affection, concern, encouragement, and appreciation.

Consequently, digital intimacy provides an important framework for understanding how speech acts contribute to the development of emotional bonds between players and virtual spouses.

2.6 Marriage Communication and Relational Maintenance

Marriage communication refers to the ongoing exchange of messages that sustain emotional connection, mutual understanding, and relational stability between partners.

Relationship scholars argue that successful marital relationships depend on routine communicative behaviors, including:

- Expressions of affection
- Emotional support
- Appreciation
- Shared experiences
- Daily conversations

Relational maintenance theory suggests that repeated communicative practices help preserve relationship satisfaction and emotional closeness. Even seemingly ordinary interactions such as greetings, compliments, and expressions of concern contribute to maintaining intimacy.

In *Stardew Valley*, spouse characters engage in daily interactions that mirror these relational maintenance behaviors. Through repeated assertive and performative speech acts, characters communicate affection, encouragement, and commitment, thereby simulating aspects of real-world marital communication.

2.7 Conceptual Framework

This study integrates Speech Act Theory and Digital Intimacy Theory to examine how language constructs marital relationships within virtual environments. The framework assumes that:

1. Spouse dialogues contain assertive and performative speech acts.
2. These speech acts perform social and emotional functions.
3. Repeated speech acts contribute to relational maintenance.
4. Relational maintenance creates perceptions of intimacy.
5. Digital intimacy strengthens player attachment to virtual spouses.

Therefore, assertive and performative speech acts serve as linguistic mechanisms through which marriage and emotional intimacy are represented and maintained in *Stardew Valley: Ridgeside Village*.

3. METHODOLOGY

This study employs a qualitative descriptive research design to investigate the manifestation and functions of assertive and performative speech acts in the romantic and marital dialogues of spouse characters in the *Stardew Valley: Ridgeside Village* expansion. Qualitative descriptive research is particularly appropriate for studies that aim to provide a comprehensive and contextually

grounded account of a phenomenon as it occurs in its natural setting (Sandelowski, 2000). Rather than generating new theories or producing highly abstract interpretations, this approach seeks to describe and interpret phenomena in a manner that remains closely connected to the original data (Kim et al., 2016).

The study is situated within a naturalistic paradigm, which assumes that meaning is socially constructed and best understood through the examination of contextualized experiences and communicative practices (Burns et al., 2022). Within this framework, language is viewed not merely as a system of symbols but as a medium through which individuals construct relationships, express emotions, and negotiate social realities. In the present study, the primary data consist of dialogue utterances produced by spouse characters in *Stardew Valley: Ridgeside Village*. These dialogues are treated as textual representations of interpersonal communication that reflect various social and emotional dimensions of romantic and marital relationships.

The analytical framework of this study is grounded in Speech Act Theory, particularly Austin (1962) concept of performative utterances and Searle (1969) classification of speech acts. Speech Act Theory provides a valuable perspective for examining how language functions not only to convey information but also to perform actions and establish social relationships. Through this framework, the study explores how assertive speech acts communicate beliefs, observations, and emotional states, while performative utterances enact relational functions such as affirmation, commitment, affection, and reassurance within the simulated marital environment.

A qualitative descriptive approach is especially suitable for analysing dialogue in digital gaming environments because it enables researchers to capture linguistic nuances, contextual meanings,

and interpersonal dynamics without reducing them to numerical measurements. Furthermore, this approach facilitates a detailed examination of how emotional expression and relational maintenance are embedded within recurring conversational exchanges. By analysing the language used in romantic and marital interactions, the study seeks to reveal the communicative strategies through which virtual characters construct intimacy and sustain relational bonds.

Ultimately, the use of qualitative descriptive methodology allows for a nuanced understanding of how speech acts operate within a simulated marital context. The findings are expected to contribute to the fields of pragmatics, digital discourse studies, and game linguistics by demonstrating how virtual environments reproduce, adapt, or diverge from real-world patterns of interpersonal communication and relationship maintenance.

3.1 Source of Data

The primary data source of this study is *Stardew Valley: Ridgeside Village*, a fan-made expansion of *Stardew Valley*, a life simulation and role-playing game originally developed and published by ConcernedApe in 2016. The *Ridgeside Village* expansion, first released in 2020 by Rafseazz and collaborators, extends the original game by introducing new locations, storylines, and non-playable characters (NPCs), thereby enriching the social and relational dimensions of gameplay.

Within video game studies, NPCs are defined as game characters whose actions, behaviours, and dialogues are governed by pre-programmed scripts rather than direct player control. Although NPCs are artificial entities, previous research suggests that players often develop meaningful emotional attachments to them through repeated interactions and relational engagement. Coulson et al. (2012) argue that players

are more likely to form emotional bonds with NPCs when characters display responsiveness, consistency, and socially meaningful behaviours. These characteristics contribute to the perception of NPCs as relational agents capable of sustaining virtual interpersonal relationships.

In *Stardew Valley: Ridgeside Village*, NPCs play a central role in shaping the social and emotional environment of the game. Through dialogue, scripted events, and daily interactions, they contribute to the immersive quality of the game world and facilitate the development of player-character relationships. Among these NPCs, several characters are designed as romanceable and marriageable partners, allowing players to progress from friendship to courtship and eventually marriage. Following marriage, spouse characters continue to engage in regular interactions that include expressions of affection, encouragement, concern, appreciation, and domestic communication. These recurring dialogues provide a rich source of linguistic data for examining how intimacy and relational maintenance are represented through language in a virtual environment.

The present study focuses specifically on the spouse characters Corine and Daia from the *Ridgeside Village* expansion. These characters were selected because they offer extensive post-marital dialogue that reflects various dimensions of romantic and marital communication. The analysis concentrates on dialogue occurring after marriage, as this stage provides a stable relational context in which communicative patterns associated with intimacy, commitment, and relational maintenance can be observed more clearly.

The data consist of textual dialogues exchanged between the player and spouse characters during the post-

marriage phase. These dialogues include both routine daily interactions and dialogue associated with special events occurring after marriage. Particular attention is given to utterances that contain assertive and performative speech acts, as these categories constitute the primary focus of the study. The dialogue data were obtained through direct in-game interactions, manual transcription, and examination of available game script files to ensure data completeness and accuracy.

For the purpose of analysis, these dialogues are treated as linguistic texts that symbolically represent social and emotional interaction within a simulated marital relationship. As forms of mediated communication, the dialogues provide insight into how language is employed to construct intimacy, express emotional attachment, and maintain relational bonds within a virtual environment. Consequently, they offer a valuable corpus for investigating the role of speech acts in the representation of marriage and interpersonal relationships in digital games.

4. RESULT AND DISCUSSION

4.1 Result

4.1.1 Manifestation of Assertive and Performative Speech Acts in Spouse Dialogues

The analysis identified two dominant categories of speech acts in the selected dialogues of Corine and Daia: assertive speech acts and performative speech acts. A total of ten dialogue excerpts were examined, consisting of five utterances produced by Corine and five by Daia. The findings indicate that both characters employ assertive and performative speech acts to construct romantic relationships, maintain emotional intimacy, and simulate marital interactions.

1. Assertive Speech Acts

Assertive speech acts were found in utterances that communicate beliefs, emotions, observations, or relational states. Corine frequently uses assertive

utterances to express personal feelings and relational commitment. For example, the statement:

“It feels so refreshing to train here in your farm, honey.”

presents a subjective experience as a truthful observation. Similarly, the utterance:

“I love you, [Player].”

functions as a direct assertion of emotional attachment and commitment.

Daia also employs assertive speech acts to express personal attitudes and relational positions. The utterance:

“You're mine and only mine.”

asserts possessiveness and emotional exclusivity within the relationship.

Likewise, the statement:

“Oh, baby. It's quite cold.”

presents an observation that serves as the basis for further romantic interaction.

These findings demonstrate that assertive speech acts primarily manifest as expressions of affection, emotional states, personal experiences, and relational evaluations.

2. Performative Speech Acts

Performative speech acts were identified in utterances that accomplish actions through language itself. Corine frequently performs acts of care and relational maintenance through her speech. For example:

“Come over here, I made you some breakfast. I also made a packed lunch for you.”

does not merely provide information but performs the social act of nurturing and caring for a spouse.

Similarly, the utterance:

“Let's take a bubble bath together.”

functions as an invitation that creates an immediate social action involving shared intimacy.

Daia's performative utterances often take the form of requests, invitations, and playful commands. Examples include:

“Now come give me a kiss!”

and

“Why don't you give me a massage then?”

Both utterances encourage physical affection and reciprocal interaction between partners.

The findings reveal that performative speech acts are primarily manifested through invitations, requests, caregiving actions, affectionate commands, and proposals for shared activities.

4.1.2 Social and Emotional Functions of Speech Acts in Simulated Marriage

The analysis indicates that assertive and performative speech acts fulfil several social and emotional functions within the simulated marriage context.

First, assertive speech acts function as expressions of emotional affirmation. Utterances such as “I love you” and “You're mine and only mine” reinforce emotional commitment and relationship stability. These statements communicate affection and establish relational certainty between the spouse character and the player.

Second, performative speech acts function as relational maintenance strategies. Through acts such as preparing meals, inviting the player to engage in shared activities, or requesting physical affection, spouse characters simulate the everyday interactions commonly associated with long-term romantic relationships.

Third, both speech act types contribute to the creation of intimacy. The dialogues establish a sense of closeness through personalized language, affectionate nicknames, and recurring expressions of care. As a result, interactions become more than informational exchanges; they serve as mechanisms for sustaining emotional attachment.

Finally, the speech acts contribute to character identity construction. Corine is portrayed as nurturing, supportive, and domestically oriented, while Daia is

represented as playful, flirtatious, and emotionally expressive. These linguistic patterns help differentiate the characters while strengthening player engagement.

4.1.3 Reflection of Real-World Marital Communication Norms

The findings suggest that many speech acts found in the dialogues reflect communication patterns commonly observed in real-world romantic and marital relationships.

Expressions of affection such as “I love you” resemble verbal affirmations frequently used by married couples to maintain emotional closeness. Similarly, caregiving behaviours such as preparing meals and checking on a partner’s well-being reflect common relational maintenance practices observed in everyday domestic life.

Invitations to spend time together, engage in shared leisure activities, or provide emotional support also parallel communication strategies used by couples to strengthen intimacy and relational satisfaction.

However, certain dialogues diverge from real-world marital communication norms. Daia’s highly flirtatious remarks, exaggerated possessiveness, and references to non-monogamous experimentation reflect fictionalized and stylized forms of interaction designed to enhance player engagement. In addition, the repetitive nature of spouse dialogue is a consequence of game programming constraints rather than natural human communication.

Therefore, while the dialogues largely reproduce recognizable patterns of marital interaction, they simultaneously incorporate idealized and gamified elements that distinguish virtual relationships from real-world marriages.

4.2 Discussion

The findings demonstrate that assertive and performative speech acts play a central role in constructing romantic and marital relationships within

Stardew Valley: Ridgeside Village. Consistent with Searle (1969) classification, assertive speech acts were primarily used to communicate emotional states, beliefs, and relational commitments. Statements such as “I love you” and “It feels so refreshing to train here in your farm” illustrate how spouse characters present feelings and experiences as personal truths. These utterances contribute to the development of relational authenticity by creating the impression that characters possess emotional awareness and personal perspectives.

Performative speech acts, on the other hand, support Austin (1962) argument that language can function as action. Utterances such as “Come over here, I made you some breakfast” and “Let’s take a bubble bath together” do not merely describe events but actively perform caregiving, invitation, and relational maintenance. Through these speech acts, the game simulates the everyday communicative practices that characterize long-term romantic relationships.

The findings further indicate that speech acts serve important social and emotional functions within the simulated marriage. This supports Canary & Stafford (1992), Relational Maintenance Theory, which argues that relationships are sustained through recurring communicative behaviours such as reassurance, positivity, support, and shared activities. Corine’s nurturing dialogue and Daia’s affectionate invitations function as relational maintenance strategies that reinforce emotional bonds and create a sense of continuity within the marriage simulation.

The results also support Turkle (2011) concept of digital intimacy. Although the interactions occur between a player and a virtual character, the repeated use of affectionate language, emotional affirmation, and personalized dialogue creates a perception of closeness and

companionship. Through speech acts, virtual spouses become socially meaningful figures capable of eliciting emotional responses from players. These findings align with Pei & Jurgens (2020), who argue that intimacy frequently emerges through emotionally loaded language and recurring communicative routines.

Regarding the relationship between virtual and real-world marital communication, the findings reveal both similarities and differences. Similarities can be observed in the use of affectionate affirmations, caregiving behaviours, emotional support, and shared activities, all of which are commonly associated with healthy marital relationships. These communicative patterns suggest that the game draws heavily from real-world relational norms in order to create believable interpersonal interactions.

However, certain aspects of the dialogues diverge from real-world communication. The exaggerated romantic expressions, playful possessiveness, and highly idealized partner behaviour reflect the influence of game design objectives rather than everyday marital reality. Furthermore, the repetitive nature of spouse dialogue results from scripted programming limitations. Consequently, the game presents a hybrid representation of marriage that combines realistic relational maintenance behaviours with idealized romantic fantasy.

Overall, the findings demonstrate that assertive and performative speech acts function as key linguistic mechanisms through which intimacy, affection, and marital commitment are constructed in *Stardew Valley: Ridgeside Village*. Through these speech acts, the game successfully transforms scripted dialogue into meaningful social interaction, allowing players to experience a convincing simulation of romantic and marital relationships.

5. CONCLUSION

This study examined the manifestation and functions of assertive and performative speech acts in the romantic and marital dialogues of spouse characters in *Stardew Valley: Ridgeside Village*. Drawing upon Speech Act Theory proposed by Austin (1962) and Searle (1969), the analysis revealed that both speech act categories play a significant role in constructing and maintaining virtual romantic relationships.

The findings indicate that assertive speech acts primarily manifest through expressions of affection, emotional states, personal experiences, observations, and relational commitment. Through these utterances, spouse characters communicate beliefs and feelings that reinforce emotional attachment and relational stability. In contrast, performative speech acts are realized through invitations, requests, caregiving behaviours, affectionate commands, and proposals for shared activities. These utterances do not merely convey information but actively perform social and relational functions that sustain the simulated marriage.

Furthermore, the study found that both assertive and performative speech acts fulfil important social and emotional functions within the game environment. They serve as mechanisms of emotional affirmation, relational maintenance, intimacy construction, and character development. Through repeated expressions of care, support, affection, and companionship, spouse characters create a sense of continuity and emotional closeness that strengthens player engagement. These findings support the concept of digital intimacy, suggesting that emotional bonds in virtual environments can be fostered through recurring communicative practices and personalized interactions.

The analysis also demonstrates that the dialogues largely reflect real-

world marital communication norms. Expressions of love, caregiving practices, emotional support, and invitations to spend time together resemble communicative behaviours commonly observed in long-term romantic relationships. However, the findings also reveal certain divergences from real-world communication, including idealized partner behaviour, exaggerated romantic expressions, and repetitive dialogue patterns resulting from game design and programming constraints. Consequently, the representation of marriage in *Stardew Valley: Ridgeside Village* can be understood as a hybrid form that combines realistic relational maintenance strategies with elements of romantic fantasy and interactive storytelling.

Overall, this study contributes to the growing body of research on digital discourse, game linguistics, and virtual relationship studies by demonstrating how speech acts function as linguistic mechanisms for constructing intimacy and sustaining interpersonal relationships in digital environments. The findings highlight the capacity of video game dialogue to simulate meaningful social interaction and provide insights into how language shapes emotional experiences within virtual worlds.

Future studies may expand the scope of analysis by examining additional speech act categories, including directives, commissives, and expressives, or by comparing relationship dialogues across different simulation and role-playing games. Such investigations may further enhance understanding of how language contributes to emotional engagement, relationship formation, and social interaction in contemporary digital media.

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