

**“Damn I miss this game” –  
Nostalgic Retro Game Discourse in YouTube Comment Sections**

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Pro gradu -tutkielmani käsittelee retropelinostalgian diskursiivista rakentumista kymmenen YouTube -verkkovideoopalveluun ladatun pelivideon kommenttikentissä. Tutkielmassa tarkastellaan, miten usein ja millä tavoin kahden vuonna 1998 julkaistun 3D-tasohyppelyvideopelin – *PlayStation 1* -peli *Spyro the Dragonin* ja *Nintendo 64* -peli *Banjo-Kazooien* – herättämä nostalgian tunne ilmenee kielellisesti niitä käsitteleviin videoihin kohdistuvissa käyttäjäkommenteissa. Tutkimuksestani käy ilmi, että kyseisiä retropelejä kohtaan tunnetulla nostalgialla on diskursiivinen olomuoto, joka on vahvasti läsnä videonkatselijoiden jättämässä kommentteissa ja rakentuu erinäisten kielipiirteiden yhteisvaikutuksesta. Mikrotason nostalgisten sanavalintojen voidaan nähdä muodostavan laajempia temaattisia kokonaisuuksia, jotka valaisevat retropelinostalgian kytköksiä yksilön henkilökohtaisiin ja kulttuurisiin kokemuksiin ja antavat siten osviittaa videopeleihin kohdistuvan nostalgian ainutlaatuisesta luonteesta myöhäismodernismin aikakaudella.

Tutkimusmetodinani käytän datalähtöistä verkkodiskurssianalyysia, jonka ensimmäisessä vaiheessa erittelen nostalgiset kommentit ei-nostalgisista. Määritelmäni mukaan nostalgisiksi voidaan luokitella kommentit, jotka ovat emotionaalisesti latautuneita ja ilmaisevat kaipausta kyseisiä pelejä kohtaan, painottavat pelien arvoa ainutlaatuisina nostalgisina hyödykkeinä, tai korostavat niiden roolia retropelikulttuurin edustajina. Toisessa vaiheessa jaottelen nostalgiset kommentit tulkinnallisiin repertuaareihin niiden ilmentämien teemojen mukaan. Viimeisessä vaiheessa taas keskityn tarkastelemaan yksittäisissä kommentteissa esiintyviä tunnesanoja (*emotion words*), vahvistussanoja (*intensifiers*), interjektioita (*interjections*), hymiöitä (*emoticons*) ja kirjoitusasun tunteellisia piirteitä.

Tutkimustulosten mukaan 35,5 prosenttia kaikista videoiden alle jätetyistä kommenteista voitiin pitää nostalgisina, mikä vahvistaa yleistä käsitystä nostalgian ja retropelien välisestä yhteydestä sekä YouTuben kaltaisen sosiaalisen median roolista nostalgian ilmaisulle otollisena ympäristönä. Nostalgiset kommentit jaettiin henkilökohtaisesti nostalgisiin (50,9%), kulttuurisesti nostalgisiin (39,3%) ja yleisesti nostalgisiin (9,8%). Henkilökohtaisesti nostalgisissa kommentteissa pelit liitettiin kommentoijille rakkaisiin lapsuutta, läheisiä ihmisiä, pelisankarina toimimista ja ensimmäisiä pelikokemuksia koskeviin muistoihin. Kulttuurisesti nostalgiset kommentit puolestaan korostivat pelien kulttimainetta viittaamalla niiden rooliin laadukkaina ja miellyttävinä klassikoina, siinä missä yleisesti nostalgiset kommentit ilmensivät pelien herättämää nostalgian tunnetta yleisellä tasolla. Tärkeimmäksi nostalgiseksi teemaksi nousi kommentoijan toimiminen aktiivisena pelisankarina, mikä puoltaa näkemystä, jonka mukaan yksilöllä itsellään on lähes poikkeuksetta keskeinen rooli nostalgisissa kokemuksissaan. Nostalgisissa kommentteissa esiintyi useita affektiivisia kielipiirteitä, joista yleisimmät vahvistivat positiivisesti latautunutta, lämminhenkistä kuvaa retropelinostalgian tunnesisällöstä. Kaiken kaikkiaan retropelinostalgia näyttäytyy kommentteissa henkilökohtaisesti ja kulttuurisesti tärkeänä ilmiönä, jonka keskiössä on pelikokemus itsessään, ja jota rakennetaan ja jaetaan kielen kautta monivivahtaisen diskurssin muodossa.

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Avainsanat: *nostalgia, retropelit, affekti, verkkodiskurssi, tulkinnallinen repertuaari*

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## 1 Introduction

“There are no days more full than those we go back to.”

– Colum McCann, *Zoli* (2007)

Because of their interactive nature and intense emotional engagement, video games can be considered as a complex medium and a unique form of popular culture. As a consequence of rapid advances in technology, video gaming has undergone significant changes over the last three decades, which has further expanded the generational gap between older and newer games and their players. Amidst today’s highly advanced gaming culture, there exists and thrives a *retro game* community – a specific subculture still treasuring the experience of playing classic old-school video games. As stated in the *Oxford English Dictionary (OED)*, the word *retro* refers to something “backward-looking, nostalgic” (s.v. *adj*), and is thus closely connected to the concept of *nostalgia*, a sentimental yearning for the past. In fact, contemporary retro game culture appears to be firmly rooted in the universal experience of nostalgia, and this affective union is shaped and constructed discursively through language as people share their nostalgic feelings and experiences with others.

The Internet, especially through different types of social media, serves to promote the experience of retro game nostalgia and the discursive construction of the concept, making the 21<sup>st</sup> century a particularly fruitful period for both retro gaming and the nostalgia it entails. The digitalized era of late modernity, characterized by identity fragmentation and objectivization of space and time, not only fosters nostalgic affect but also offers novel ways of coping within its bittersweet grasp (Estévez, 2009, 403-7). Indeed, as Suominen (2008) points out, the Internet can be regarded as “a central processing unit of the memory machine in today’s retro gaming”, providing easily accessible video game content and various platforms for voicing one’s nostalgic sentiments. Furthermore, online environment gives its own touch to affective language use, making it possible for people to express

emotion in a uniquely deliberate manner by utilizing creative textual tools as a way of compensating for missing auditory and gestural cues (Herring, 2003, 3-6).

This thesis examines how retro game nostalgia is discursively constructed in the comment sections of ten YouTube game videos. The footage under analysis features gameplay material from two 1998 retro games: *Banjo-Kazooie* and *Spyro the Dragon* (released for *Nintendo 64* and *PlayStation 1*, respectively), both of which enjoyed immense popularity in their time and can be considered as archetypal representatives of a specific era of gaming. With data-driven discourse analytical methods, my aim is to uncover some of the ways in which people communicate their nostalgic affection towards these games in an online environment: how they use language to express sentimental longing for them, construct them as artefacts with nostalgic value, and situate them within the wider retro game subculture among other beloved classics. My approach involves a close interplay between the micro and macro levels of nostalgic retro game discourse, focusing on *both* the specific linguistic features used in the nostalgic comments *and* the larger nostalgic themes that those features serve to construct. In this way it is possible to catch a glimpse of the cultural and personal aspects underlying retro game nostalgia in today's society and the ways in which those aspects relate to general conceptions about nostalgic affect. All in all, this study addresses the following questions:

- How prevalent is nostalgic discourse in the ten comment sections of *Spyro the Dragon* and *Banjo-Kazooie* -related YouTube videos?
- What kinds of broader themes arise from the nostalgic discourse found in the comment sections?
- What types of linguistic features are used in the discursive construction of *Spyro the Dragon* and *Banjo-Kazooie* -related retro game nostalgia?

*and...*

- What do the abovementioned three aspects imply about the nature of retro game nostalgia?

My study adopts a strongly multidisciplinary approach, drawing from the interconnected fields of linguistics, social studies, psychology, anthropology, media studies and game studies. While the main topic of the thesis combines all the aforementioned fields, my methodology applies principles of data-driven discourse analysis to examining online communication. By employing a more material-oriented discursive approach to studying emotion, this thesis abandons the reductionist and positivistic methods commonly used in analyzing psychological phenomena. Instead, the concept of retro game nostalgia is considered from the perspective of *social constructionism*: the view that our understanding of reality – including emotions as psychological entities – is *constructed and maintained through the use of language* (Alba-Juez, 2009, 214).

A lack of previous academic research on nostalgia, especially concerning the discursive essence of the affect, has admittedly posed challenges for the execution of this study while also making the task in question particularly inspiring. By analyzing how retro game nostalgia is discursively constructed in an online environment, I wish to provide an insight on the nature of nostalgic experience and its role in late modernity. Furthermore, I hope that this thesis has the potential to contribute to an image of video games as valuable cultural artefacts with emotional significance for their players. My preliminary hypothesis is that nostalgic discourse features frequently in the material analyzed, and that it is characterized by broader themes relating to video gaming and gamers' personal life experiences. There is reason to believe that nostalgic retro game discourse on YouTube exhibits distinguishable features of affective language, and that the expressions used incorporate characteristics of online communication.

The structure of this thesis is as follows: the next section sheds light on the theoretical foundation of my study, providing essential information about the concept of nostalgia, video games and retro game culture, YouTube as a nostalgic medium, and the role of language in constructing our affective reality. Section 3 serves to familiarize the reader with my data and methods, discussing the comments and videos involved in the study and introducing the analytical process more thoroughly.

In section 4, the analysis itself is presented on a step by step basis through addressing nostalgic themes emerging from the data and detecting some of their nostalgically significant linguistic features. The obtained results are summarized and discussed in section 5, after which chapter 6 concludes the thesis.

## **2 Theoretical background**

This chapter introduces the primary theoretical background that my study is built upon. Section 2.1 sheds light on the concept of nostalgia, the main characteristics of nostalgic experience, and the nature of nostalgia in late modernity. Section 2.2 provides relevant background information about video games and retro gaming, briefly introducing retro game culture itself and discussing the relationship between video game classics and nostalgia. Section 2.3, on the other hand, outlines the role of YouTube as an influential social medium with cultural and communicative possibilities likely to promote the discursive construction of retro game nostalgia. Finally, section 2.4 focuses on the discursive basis for constructing and understanding human emotions, discussing affective language and its use in an online environment such as YouTube.

### **2.1 On nostalgia**

Say you're listening to the radio on your way to work, and a favorite song from 20 years ago starts playing. A sense of wistfulness overcomes you, evoking fond memories of the past. A familiar smell can elicit a similar sensation, as can a movie resurrected from childhood... The feeling is bittersweet, though ultimately pleasant. Sound familiar? You've experienced nostalgia.

(Leibach, 2013)

Although the bittersweet feeling of nostalgia is familiar to most people in one way or another, it appears to be surprisingly difficult to fully communicate and understand. Probably the most concise definition for the concept is found in the *OED*, which describes it as “a sentimental longing for a

period in the past” (s.v. *n2*). However, the very sentimentality involved in nostalgic experience has proven to be highly complex, involving hues of both sadness and joy, consciously or subconsciously triggered by personally significant memories (Seehusen et al., 2013, 904). Indeed, in most definitions of the affect, nostalgia is presented as a delicate mixture of happy and melancholic characteristics, as illustrated in the following extracts from three popular English dictionaries:

***Nostalgia*** (s.v. *n*)

- “a feeling of pleasure and also slight sadness when you think about things that happened in the past”  
– *Cambridge Dictionaries Online*
- “a feeling of sadness mixed with pleasure and affection when you think of happy times in the past”  
– *Oxford Learner’s Dictionary*
- “pleasure and sadness that is caused by remembering something from the past and wishing that you could experience it again”  
– *Merriam-Webster Online Dictionary*

Due to its multidimensional nature, nostalgia is notorious for posing problems for researchers, and for decades it has frustrated psychologists, sociologists and philosophers alike (Boym, 2001, 11). In fact, nostalgic affect has been said to “speak in riddles and puzzles” (ibid.), and in that sense analyzing retro game nostalgia and its discursive construction is virtually like playing a game in itself.

Largely for reasons described above, academic research on nostalgic affect remains scarce, focusing predominantly on the field of consumer psychology and the market success of certain nostalgic commodities (Wildschut et al., 2006, 976). While researchers have mostly been interested in the economic potential of the sentiment, its psychological nature and linguistic manifestation have received less attention. Indeed, although the previous research on nostalgia and consumerism is by no means to be underestimated, one might need to approach the concept of nostalgia from a broader perspective if one wishes to investigate its affective content more thoroughly (ibid.). That being one of the main objectives of my study, the purpose of this section is to shed light on different

understandings of nostalgia and provide relevant background information about the complex and intriguing concept. While this part of my thesis focuses on the content of nostalgic affect, the *discursive construction* of emotions such as nostalgia will be discussed in more detail in section 2.4.

### **2.1.1 Theories of nostalgia**

The literal meaning of *nostalgia* derives from two Greek words: *nostos* and *algos*, meaning “return” and “suffering”, respectively (Wildschut et al., 2006, 975). The term was coined in 1688 by a Swiss physician named Johannes Hofer, who used it to refer to “a state of moral pain associated with the forced separation from family and social environment” (Fuentenebro de Diego & Valiente Ots, 2014, 404). Hofer conceptualized the affect as a medical or neurological disease, based on his observations of Swiss mercenaries who had left their home to fight in another country. The homesick soldiers seemed to be suffering from several psychological and physiological symptoms, including anxiety, insomnia, irregular heartbeat, smothering sensations, and persistent thinking of home (Wildschut et al., 2006, 975). The view of nostalgia as a medical condition dominated for centuries, and it was not until the 1900s that people started to recognize the affect as a natural human characteristic and understand its triggers and functions more effectively (ibid.).

There now appears to be considerable consensus about the nature of nostalgia as an *emotion*, a bittersweet longing for something from one’s past. In fact, in recent theoretical discussions concerning the affect, nostalgia is usually taken for granted as something everyone has a similar understanding of (Howard, 2012, 641). At the same time, however, nostalgic experience is recognized as a complex phenomenon with multiple layers and structures. Probyn (1995, 456), for example, conceptualizes nostalgia as “at once a structure of feeling, a rhetorical strategy, and a historical example of the pathologization of the affections”. As Probyn’s definition implies, the concept of nostalgia is thus not restricted to the realm of emotions, but also negotiated through discourse and

shaped according to the wider cultural context – as becomes evident from the very fact that people’s conception of nostalgia has changed with time.

Nostalgia deviates from other types of longing for one important reason. Its uniquely bittersweet nature stems from the realization that *the object of longing is definitively out of reach* – that it is impossible to relive the nostalgic moment as it exists in one’s memory (Howard, 2012, 641). As Boren (2013) notes, nostalgic affect is “given life by a symbol, object or feeling that reminds us of the linearity of time, signifying something familiar and safe that cannot be recaptured”. The Swiss soldiers, for instance, could never return to their longed-for home, since upon arrival they would realize that the place is not what it used to be. The same holds true for anything one has a nostalgic longing for: whether it is a place, a person, a specific moment or feeling – it is unattainable as it once existed.

I think of those Swiss soldiers returned from the war, cured of their nostalgic pain, only to wander their little villages wondering, “is this all there is?”

(Probyn, 1995, 456)

The function of the bittersweet emotion under discussion has interested scientists for a reason. It appears that nostalgia serves a humane biological purpose with both psychological and physiological benefits, generating positive affect, enhancing high self-esteem, serving as a repository of social connectedness and – most importantly – creating and preserving meaning in life (Routledge et al., 2012, 453). Indeed, one of the main purposes of the affect is to function as a compensatory strategy in response to belongingness deficits (Seehusen et al., 2013, 908) by establishing a connection between the past and present, thus building and maintaining identity coherence (Van Tilburg et al., 2013, 450). In addition, a study by Zhou et al. (2012) reveals that nostalgic experience even has a more wholesome homeostatic role, helping people cope better with physical discomfort, such as cold temperature. In the light of these findings, Van Tilburg et al. (2013, 451) seem to

encapsulate the main purpose of nostalgia by describing the affect as “a potent self-regulatory tool in coping with existential threats and in sustaining meaning in life”.

### **2.1.2 Nostalgia as a yearning for the past**

Nostalgia appears to be a longing for a place, but it is actually a yearning for a different time – the time of our childhood, the slower rhythms of our dreams.

(Boym, 2001, 8)

As the previous quote by Boym poetically illustrates, time is a central concept in nostalgic experience. Often the nostalgic person remembers being somewhere, in a certain space, but is actually reminiscing wistfully about the moments that took place in that setting. One’s childhood home, for instance, is likely to elicit nostalgic affect not merely as a familiar location, but as a backdrop for one’s childhood activities, the physical context of a particularly nostalgic era. In other words, it appears that past time, memories of life lived, are located at the heart of nostalgic sentimentality.

The expression “the good old days”, commonly associated with nostalgic affect, is perhaps one of the most befitting ways of verbalizing the bittersweet longing for one’s past. In fact, nostalgia tends to involve a silent judgement: an idea that the past is superior to the present. At a moment of nostalgia, the times gone by are often observed through rose-tinted glasses – idealized as even more joyous and beautiful than they were at the time – as the affect imaginatively projects desirable features onto the past instead of representing the past realistically as it was (Howard, 2012, 643). It is not uncommon for the nostalgic individual to start with a conscious or subconscious negative assessment of the present and after that flee to an idealized version of the happy times recalled (*ibid.*). Accordingly, as Batcho (1995, 131) notes, the nostalgia one feels at any point in life might be dependent upon how pleasant the past had been relative to the present, which partly explains why people tend to feel most nostalgic during stressful and troublesome times. As Van Tilburg et al.

(2013, 451) point out, nostalgia is likely to be triggered by aversive stimuli or conditions, such as negative mood, loneliness, meaninglessness, or death reminders.

The bittersweet nature of nostalgic experience appears to be primarily motivated by “the felt deprivation of the older self” (Howard, 2012, 643). In fact, the longed-for older self is often a considerably *younger* self, since most nostalgic memories seem to emanate from the carefree days of youth. Childhood, arguably one of the most glorified life phases, serves as a great example of this, being widely recognized as a main subject of nostalgic experience. Since the time of the Romanticism, it has been considered as an era of innocence and play freed from responsibilities (Vanobbergen, 2004, 167), which unquestionably adds to its nostalgic appeal. Probyn provides an insightful account of the relationship between childhood and nostalgia, proposing that nostalgia stems from the *irretrievable nature* of childhood, functioning as an obscure solution against the inescapable chronology of time:

Images of childhood, from childhood, pull us back to a space that cannot be revisited; they throw us into a present becoming, profoundly disturbing any chronological ordering of life and being. And as I will argue, one of the lines that can be used to scramble this order is that of nostalgia. Nostalgia not as a guarantee of memory but precisely as an errant logic that always goes astray. Nostalgia performed in that empty dimension of childhood freed of its moorings in time. Nostalgia as the impossibility of placing true origins, nostalgia for an irretrievable childhood.

(Probyn, 1995, 439)

Thus, as Moran (2002, 17) notes, childhood nostalgia can be regarded as resonating with “our own deepest longings for identity, security and belonging” similarly to nostalgic affect more generally. In a sense, it goes hand in hand with the humane fear of the passing of time, helping to establish a meaningful connection between an individual’s past and present self.

More than being tied to a specific life stage, however, nostalgia tends to be focused around individual experiences that took place in one’s past. It appears to be inherently connected to momentous occasions in one’s life – memories that, for one reason or another, are particularly

appealing and heartwarming to reminisce (Van Tilburg et al., 2013, 451). Indeed, As Routledge et al. (2012, 458-9) note, nostalgia is more than just a vague positively toned memory: it is a “self-focused emotional process through which people recollect experiences that imbue their lives with meaning”. By bringing these special moments into consciousness, nostalgia reminds people not only of their past state of being but also of their role in specific cultural traditions (Madigan, 2013), the wider social context of individual nostalgic moments. This serves as an explanation for people’s fascination with certain nostalgic decades, products, styles, and practices. Video gaming as an interactive pastime and a cultural practice holds unique nostalgic potential that will be outlined in section 2.2.2.

It has thus far been established that nostalgia, although an inherently subjective experience, tends to be connected to broader distinguishable themes: past life stages, namely childhood, and momentous events that took place back in those days. However, it would be a misconception to perceive nostalgia as an unchangeable entity or a fixed emotional experience. Instead, the concept of nostalgia as an affect is shaped by people as individuals and by changes in the surrounding society – as discussed in the following section from the perspective of late modernity.

### **2.1.3 Nostalgia in late modernity**

Nostalgia can be considered as an exceptional emotion not only because of its complex nature but also by virtue of its connection to the society at large. In addition to its significance as an individual experience, it can be regarded as “a symptom of our age” (Boym, 2001, 8), a core characteristic of the contemporary human condition:

Nostalgia is not “antimodern”; it is not necessarily opposed to modernity but coeval with it. Nostalgia and progress are like Jekyll and Hyde: doubles and mirror images of one another. Nostalgia is not merely an expression of local longing, but a result of a new understanding of time and space that makes the division into “local” and “universal” possible.

(Boym, 2001, 10)

Indeed, as a consequence of the digitalized and globalized culture of our late modern age, the concepts and boundaries of time and space have become blurred, resulting in confusion and uneasiness in people trying to construct and maintain a coherent identity. As an affective state intertwined with notions of time, space and belonging, nostalgia plays a natural part in managing this newly experienced confusion. In other words, the mourning of displacement and irreversibility of time characteristic of late modernity can be seen to provide fertile soil for nostalgic affect (ibid.).

On the same note, Estévez (2009, 403) addresses the role of contemporary nostalgia by describing the affect as “an epidemic worsened by the objectivization of space that accompanied the objectivization of time”, underlining the prevalence of nostalgic experience in today’s society. It is important to note, however, that the term *epidemic* carries a negative connotation by associating the affect with sickness – similarly to the word *symptom* used by Boym (2001, 8) in the previous block quotation. Instead of resorting to such an outdated way of constructing nostalgia as a problematic condition, I argue that the affect should be defined in more positive terms as a natural source of comfort for a fragmented identity.

However, despite her somewhat pessimistic choice of words, Estévez does indeed acknowledge the utilization of nostalgia as a means of coping in the complex and confusing late modern society. She employs the concept of *digital nostalgia* to describe the “conscious use of simultaneity offered by digital technologies to construct an ‘effect’ of continuity”:

Modern people are deliberately using the effect of continuity – the erasure of distance – to strengthen a sense of belonging. This helps them reverse the global process of fragmentation and uprooting of individuals in postmodern societies.

(Estévez, 2009, 407)

Our contemporary digitalized society thus has a twofold relationship to nostalgia, both bolstering the affect while simultaneously providing new ways of dealing with it. The Internet in particular serves as an adequate example of this, on one hand contributing to the experience of estrangement and

fragmentation, while on the other hand providing meaningful content and social connections with the help of which feelings of emptiness and isolation can be alleviated. The concept of nostalgic content on the Internet, especially in relation to YouTube, is discussed more thoroughly in section 2.3.1.

Moreover, not only does contemporary nostalgia lurk in the depths of the Internet, but it also permeates the 21<sup>st</sup> century popular culture more generally, as “technological advances and special effects are frequently used to recreate visions of the past” (Boym, 2009, 10.). This becomes particularly evident in films, television shows and advertisements drawing from specific eras of the past, reconstructing nostalgic milieus with meticulous detail. Nostalgia has become intensely commercialized, and its emotional appeal is actively utilized in the marketing of various commodities, which has resulted in the affect being present in numerous familiar settings from grocery stores to people’s own living rooms. Thus, the experience of nostalgia has gone through an important cultural shift, no longer concerning only those away from home, but instead having become an essential part of people’s everyday life (Estévez, 2009, 403). In the light of this information, our current digitalized, commercialized, and fragmented late modern reality can be considered as an exceptionally nostalgic realm, placing the emotion on a pedestal and providing further reasons for examining its complexity.

Nevertheless, despite the abovementioned novel ways of dealing with and experiencing nostalgia in today’s society, the affect itself is in many respects as it used to be (Boym, 2001, 18). Although the triggers, objects and managing of nostalgic experience have arguably been reshaped by late modernity, the affective content of nostalgia and its nature as a sentimental longing for the past has remained the same – responding to the fundamental human needs of meaningfulness and belonging it governed in the case of the Swiss soldiers in Hofer’s time. After introducing video game culture more generally, the following section moves on to discuss the topic of retro games and their connection to nostalgic affect in our contemporary society.

## 2.2 On video gaming

*OED* defines video games as “games played by electronically manipulating images displayed on a television screen.” (s.v. *n*). The game, usually contained in a disc or a cartridge, is played on a gaming platform (i.e. a console) connected to a television set that displays the image. The player then uses the console’s controller – pressing buttons and/or moving sticks – to perform different actions in the game world. As Juul (2006, 3) notes, the history of video games can be considered as both very brief and very long, the medium being a relatively recent innovation with an exceptionally eventful evolution. The first video game, *Spacewar!*, dates from 1961, being slightly more than fifty years old and a part of popular culture for around forty years (ibid.). Hence, video games can be considered as a relatively new cultural form, characteristic of modern and late modern technologically laden society.

As Tavinor (2009, 1) points out, in the course of their history, video games have gradually evolved from “rudimentary artefacts” into “a new and sophisticated form of popular art”. They combine elements from narrative fiction, music and sports, and might be regarded as a sister art to the moving image (Smuts, 2005). However, although video games have several similarities with other media, their interactive nature makes them unique. It is the intense gaming experience, being *actively* involved in a vivid imaginary environment, that distinguishes them from other forms of entertainment. As Homan & Homan (2014, 170) note, spectators of films and plays have always been “players” in the loose sense of the word, filtering the events on stage or screen through their own life experiences and preoccupations. However, spectators rarely have a hand in the plot or a say in the unfolding events as video game players do (ibid.), the role of the player as a *protagonist* constituting the core of any video game experience. Accordingly, players and critics tend to evaluate video games based on the way they immerse the player, i.e. the way they *feel*, and in that regard emotions can be considered as strongly involved in gaming (Tavinor, 2009, 5-6).

The one of a kind interactive nature of video games results from a complex interplay between the game world and a specific set of rules for surviving and progressing in that world. Juul (2006, 1) defines video gaming as “interacting with real rules while imagining a fictional world”, emphasizing the combination of game rules and game fiction as its most essential aspect. Indeed, in having fictional worlds, video games deviate from abstract and traditional nonelectronic games, which constitutes part of their newness (ibid.). Clearly defined rules provide the player with guidelines and boundaries for roaming the game’s fantasy world, and the various tasks and problems faced by the protagonist serve to create a unique effect for each game. Based on their gameplay mechanics and characteristic tasks, video games are categorized into various genres, the qualitative differences between which can be considerable (Dobrowolski et al., 2014, 59).

The two games under analysis in this study are archetypal examples of the so-called *3D platform game* genre, which dominated from the mid-1990s to the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. As the term suggests, 3D platform games involve moving and jumping on different platforms in a three-dimensional environment, and they often feature a single protagonist navigating through detailed, scenic levels. Between different game genres, there is a general scale from highly replayable multiplayer games to more subjective “complete-once” adventure games, where the player only faces each setting once and is thus more likely to take the fictional world at face value (Juul, 2006, 6). 3D platformers tend to be situated close to the latter end of the scale, being particularly dependent on a fictional narrative unfolding concomitantly to the protagonist’s progress. Also known as *cinematic platformers*, they emphasize adventure, exploration and problem-solving (Internet source 3), stressing the player’s individual capacities and immersing the protagonist into a vivid imaginary realm.

Taking into account their permeating influence on late modern commercialized society, it is hardly surprising that video games are faced with both appraisal and criticism, regularly involved in heated debates over their potential positive and negative effects. By now it has become common

knowledge that video gaming, despite its popularity, suffers from an unfavourable reputation in many respects – a fact humorously yet concisely stated in the following account:

Video games have always had something of an image problem. Among the common charges are that video games are a pointless waste of time, are offensive, misogynistic, immature, addictive, encourage sedentary behavior and hence obesity, cause seizures, dumb children down, hype children up, keep them up late at nights, cause occupational overuse syndrome, destroy the culture of reading, involve players with the occult, lead to suicide pacts, and attack the moral fiber of our society.

(Tavinor, 2009, 9)

Among the most prevalent arguments is that certain types of video games bolster violence and aggression, thus having a corrupting influence on their enthusiastic players (Tavinor, 2009, 8). The issue in question tends to surface in the media from time to time, and it remains a grey cloud in the discourse of video gaming in general. Consequently, under the shadow of this negative stereotype, games' deeper and more positive significance for their players is often ignored.

Indeed, the discourse of gaming would benefit from a less exaggerated viewpoint and a more unprejudiced perspective, recognizing the full potential of video games as culturally and subjectively meaningful artefacts (Granic et al., 2013, 66). Currently a more positive perspective on video games acknowledges their effects on players' cognitive abilities, such as visual attention and short-term memory, aspects of cognitive control, and general processing speed (Dobrowolski et al., 2014, 59). In fact, only recently a small body of research focusing on the benefits of video games has started to emerge beside the dominating skeptical accounts. As Granic et al. (2013, 66) point out, there is now evidence of video games providing their players with “immersive and compelling social, cognitive, and emotional experiences” that might have the potential to enhance mental health and well-being. The next section on retro game culture illustrates that video games can indeed carry positively toned emotional significance, serving not only as a mindless way of killing time but as a meaningful hobby and a way of life.

### 2.2.1 Introducing retro game culture

As Tavinor (2009, 12) points out, the last two decades have witnessed rapid maturation of the video game medium, which has undoubtedly reinforced the boundary between older and newer games. It is important to note that although many of today's games provide stunning visuals and a thrilling gaming experience, gamers are also a nostalgic community, often wishing to revisit their childhood favourites (Robbins, 2015). Indeed, although their graphics tend to be more pixelated and certain features more underdeveloped compared to their modern counterparts, classic *retro games* are still being played – often treasured as valuable and unparalleled products in all their old-school glory.

Providing a detailed definition for a *retro game* is difficult, since there exists no clear-cut consensus about the matter. Every gamer appears to have their own opinion on what exactly constitutes a retro game, and different understandings about the issue may vary considerably. Generally, however, the term is applied to video games that are at least 10 years old, and were released for a platform that has since been superseded by newer console generations (Internet source 4). Certain retro games, such as the original *Super Mario Bros.* series, have acquired a cult status and become pop culture legends in their own right, commonly treated as representing and defining the entire retro game genre. Thus, in a sense, retro games are not only characterized by their old age and nearly obsolete status, but also by specific visual and other in-game features widely recognized as 'retro' among the general public.

As Swalwell (2007, 262) notes, retro gaming has “certainly attained a degree of cool” in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, having become a relatively well-known activity with a devoted international community. The trade in retro games and associated gaming platforms now creates a culture of circulation with its own economy, and the collectors' market is serviced by a number of media catering to those interested in the avocation (ibid). Having noticed this newly found blossom of retro game enthusiasm, some game developers have even started to revisit their original classics by

releasing old games in a format compatible with the newest hardware (Robbins, 2015). PlayStation Network, Xbox Live, and Wii U's digital marketplace are stocked with rereleases of games from previous consoles, which provides a major selling point for the system and an opportunity for players to relive their nostalgic memories with little effort on their own part (ibid.).

One might draw the conclusion that people's fascination with retro games appears to be inextricably linked to the games' status as nostalgic products: representatives of the cultural heritage of video gaming and objects associated with heartwarming memories of one's past. Swalwell (2007, 267) emphasizes the significance of retro games for the moving-image pop culture in general, arguing that if early digital games are to be remembered in the fullest sense they also need discourses in which that significance is articulated. Such discourses playing an essential part in the present study, the next section outlines the nostalgic significance of classic games in more detail.

### **2.2.2 Retro games and nostalgia**

Video games have at this point been around long enough that it's not uncommon to encounter people thinking back wistfully about the days of blowing the dust off cartridge contacts, fiddling with HIMEM.SYS files, and covering their 28.8K modem with a pillow so their parents didn't hear them calling a friend to play some *DOOM* deathmatch.

(Madigan, 2013)

The previous quote by Madigan addresses the role of retro games as nostalgic products, personally significant artefacts evoking memories of the past. Truly, the connection between retro games and nostalgia is commonly acknowledged, and the unique charm of classic games seems to be largely based on their emotional appeal. As Suominen (2008) notes, "retro gaming hints usually at returning, whether it means the consumer's return or retrogression to childhood, or an intention to (re-)achieve something pure or preferable". In fact, to a great extent, fascination with retro gaming stems from a

yearning for an acquainted set of rules and familiar fictional worlds (ibid.), thus bearing a curious resemblance to the Swiss soldiers' homesickness.

First of all, because of their considerable personal significance, momentous events and achievements in which one is the key actor dominate most nostalgic reminiscences (Wildschut et al., 2006, 988). Almost without exception, nostalgic reveries feature the self as an active and central player, which distinguishes them from other time-oriented psychological states such as remembering (Vess et al., 2012, 274). The word *player* in the context of this thesis is particularly convenient, since video games might hold exceptional nostalgic potential as they throw the gamer in the position of an active protagonist, thus fostering a sense of achievement in that individual (Madigan, 2013). Memories of successfully completing quests and tasks in a video game can constructively contribute to a positive self-image in a player, providing tools for building and maintaining identity coherence later in life as well. Underlining the game's nature as a one-of-a-kind experience and emphasizing the player's role as a protagonist, 3D platform games in particular are likely to elicit nostalgic responses in people.

Secondly, as already established in section 2.1.2, people tend to feel exceptionally nostalgic about special "once in a lifetime" moments – in other words, experiences that mark a significant point in one's subjective life history (Holak & Havlena, 1992). Wildschut and colleagues (2006, 976) found out that momentous events feature prominently in people's nostalgic accounts, and that these moments are often memorable largely because of the presence of close others. Indeed, as Van Tilburg et al. (2013, 451) note, nostalgic memories tend to involve the self in relation to loved ones, revolving around special moments shared with other people. According to Holak & Havlena (1992), "key people are consistently the focus of nostalgic experiences – from immediate and more distant family members, both living and deceased, to classmates and school chums, friends, co-workers, and romantic partners." Since nostalgia is closely tied to social connections, games have the potential to evoke more of that emotion than any other medium because of their inherently social

nature (Madigan, 2013). In other words, video games attain nostalgic value not only as enablers of personal achievement but also as a social pastime engaged in with friends and family:

We tend to star in our nostalgic memories, it seems, but we usually have a supporting cast. You may reminisce about playing the original Starcraft but chances are you're most nostalgic thinking about throwing down with friends in multiplayer or at least bonding with them over the shared experience of how you each managed the single player campaign. For us gamers, our most nostalgic memories probably revolve around sharing the hobby with others, making new friends through gaming, and enjoying a good couch co-op experience.

(Madigan, 2013)

The third main link between video games and nostalgia has to do with childhood, as by this time several generations have been brought up at an era when games now considered as retro were at the peak of their success. In other words, retro games elicit nostalgia not only because of their specific characteristics but also as personally significant products reminding people of their carefree days of youth. Such as nostalgic affect in general, retro game nostalgia has implications for sustaining meaning in life as people construct their identities through reminiscing the history of gaming they were part of (ibid.).

In addition to the overall nostalgic potential of video games, specific types of games can be regarded as being more nostalgic than others, featuring aspects likely to elicit bittersweet emotions. Sykes, using the classic 3D platformer *Super Mario 64* (1996) as an example, describes how the visual setting of a game may spark nostalgic reminiscences through appealing imagery:

The opening scene of *Mario 64*, for example, portrays bright sunlight, trees, a gentle river, butterflies flying around the main character, Mario skipping on the grass. All of this imagery and symbolism makes the player feel good because implicit memories of their childhood are being subconsciously awoken.

(Sykes, 2006, 81)

The type of light affective tone described by Sykes is not exclusively characteristic of *Super Mario 64*, but also a prominent feature of the 3D platform game genre in general. The two 3D platformers under analysis in this thesis, *Spyro the Dragon* and *Banjo-Kazooie*, are strongly defined by a similar

delightful spirit, featuring bright worlds dominated by primary colours and upbeat music accompanying the protagonist(s) throughout the journey. Admittedly, 3D platform games tend to have “a fixation for the cute and cuddly” (Bernstein, 2013), and establishing a happy and carefree atmosphere they may manage to trigger particularly nostalgic responses in their players.

Taking into account the close-knit community of old-school video game enthusiasts, retro game nostalgia is not to be mistaken as an emotion experienced solely behind closed doors. Instead, there exists an intricate and widespread discourse through which nostalgia towards retro gaming is shared, constructed and negotiated socially with other people, and without which retro game culture as such would not exist. Suominen (2008) emphasizes the role of the Internet and other technological innovations in maintaining a universal retro game community, characterizing the nostalgic discourse of video gaming as “not just a way of talking, but at the same time both a uniting and separating form of action, a practice interlaced with digital technology”. As a uniting and separating cultural practice, nostalgic retro game discourse serves to create more distance between retro gamers and non-retro gamers, simultaneously bolstering the feeling of connectedness within the retro game community as a group of people with a common interest. The next section discusses the role of YouTube as one of many online platforms catering for different discourses and communities.

### **2.3 YouTube as a nostalgic platform**

Interestingly, the loss of the confines of time and space – the main triggers of modern nostalgia – can be regarded as a core characteristic of contemporary social media environments. As already established in section 2.1.3, the Internet contributes to the experience of estrangement and fragmentation in late modern digitalized societies by blurring the lines between time and space continuity, while also providing new means of coping with the very confusion it fosters (Estévez, 2009, 407). Arguably among the most powerful online networks of our time, the video sharing

website YouTube has implications for contemporary retro game nostalgia on both ends of the spectrum.

YouTube was officially founded in June 2005 by Chad Hurley, Steve Chen, and Jawed Karim (Burgess & Green, 2009, 1). It is the most popular site for online video sharing (Siersdorfer et al., 2010, 891), based around user-generated audiovisual content and providing possibilities for social interaction. The site is comprised of channels, pages of individual users promoting their own video content for others to watch and follow. Most videos posted on YouTube feature a comment section for users to share their thoughts and opinions on the content (the comment section is a default feature, but it can be disabled by the uploader if he/she so wishes). The site is now universally acknowledged as one of the most influential on the Internet, which is reflected in the fact that traffic to and from its pages accounts for over 20% of the web total and comprises 60% of the videos watched online (ibid.). Indeed, YouTube can be regarded as a central platform for expression and interaction on the Internet (Stein, 2013, 353), and its diverse content and social nature hold potential for both experiencing nostalgia and sharing the affective experience with others.

The nostalgic potential of YouTube is largely based on the fact that the site is characterized by both *convergence* and *divergence* (Leppänen & Häkkinen, 2012, 19). As an example of convergence culture, it is a forum in which different people, media, practices, and ideologies come together and in which the borderlines between them are blurred (Jenkins, 2008, 3). The site is based on a principle that consumers can be active in the creation and circulation of new content, fostering user participation and blending practices of production and consumption (ibid.). The opportunity for people to share and upload their own content guarantees an endless flow of videos covering various subjects and interests as, in a sense, YouTube is essentially the sum of its users. Moreover, YouTube bridges different media together by featuring diverse content relating to video games and other entertainment from previous decades, providing an erasure of time and distance and allowing people to experience personally significant imagery all over again. On YouTube, people can thus stumble

on nostalgic material easier than ever, either by accident or by deliberately browsing and searching for content associated with the good old days.

While convergence on YouTube creates novel possibilities for experiencing nostalgia, divergence has social implications for the nostalgic retro game community in particular. The divergent nature of YouTube means that “individuals and groups representing different traditions and backgrounds can find their own communicative and socio-cultural niches” (Leppänen & Häkkinen, 2012, 19), and that people from different parts of the globe can become united through a shared interest. In other words, YouTube functions as a virtual meeting place for people with similar values, experiences, hobbies, and passions (ibid.). The nostalgic comments analyzed in this thesis, for instance, serve as an example of how people with a similar interest in *Spyro the Dragon* or *Banjo-Kazooie* have first gravitated towards the same video content and then decided to verbalize their affection for the material in the comment section. By offering a space in which to communicate with other people interested in the same video game material, YouTube reinforces the notion of retro game discourse as what Suominen (2008) calls “a uniting and separating form of action”, contributing to the emergence and maintenance of specific subcultures. All in all, the cultural and communicative potential of YouTube – as it pertains to the experience of nostalgia – might be summarized as follows:

The reason why YouTube has become such a popular platform for the production and consumption of media content has a great deal to do with its capacity to offer a multi-dimensional space for mediated cultural activities and products. This, on the one hand, allows interconnections and intertwining of a range of media platforms and products, and, on the other hand, offers relatively free and non-moderated opportunities for staking a niche medium for specific groups and interests.

(Leppänen & Häkkinen, 2012, 19)

Thus far it has been proposed in this theoretical background that nostalgic retro game discourse on YouTube involves a complex interplay between the nature of nostalgia as an affect, its connection to video gaming and the retro game subculture, and the role of YouTube as a late modern online environment characterized by convergence and divergence. Now that some of the broader

cultural aspects underlining late modern retro game nostalgia have been outlined, my focus turns to affective language and discourse in more detail. The next sections look into the discursive construction of emotions, introducing features of affective language with particular relevance for this study and discussing the impact of an online environment on emotionally laden language use.

## 2.4 The discursive construction of emotions

The methodological nature and procedures of this thesis are fundamentally based on *a constructionist view of language* – the understanding that language signifies reality by *constructing meanings* instead of merely referring to objects which are taken to be given in reality (Alba-Juez, 2009, 214). According to a constructionist perspective, language always simultaneously reflects and constructs the situation in which it is used (Gee, 1999, 82), meaning that by adopting certain ways of speaking, we take part in a process where our taken for granted conceptions about reality are actually being formed, negotiated and reinforced. Therefore, a constructionist perspective adds a crucial dimension to the conventional and unarguably limited view of language as a representational tool subsidiary to the real world. It underlines the relationship between language and reality as twofold, acknowledging that language is both determined by its wider situational context and used in creating that very context:

Language has a magical property: when we speak or write we craft what we have to say to fit the situation or context in which we are communicating. But, at the same time, how we speak or write creates that very situation or context. It seems, then, that we fit our language to a situation or context that our language, in turn, helped to create in the first place.

(Gee, 1999, 11)

At the heart of constructionism lies the concept of *discourse*. Discourses are broader patterns of linguistically constructed meanings and arguments or, in Fairclough's (1995, 14) words, "ideologically invested ways of signifying a particular domain of social practice from a particular perspective". When talking about *the discursive construction of reality*, we are thus referring to the

different processes of meaning-construction that people take part in through the use of language. As will be reflected in the upcoming analysis, the discursive construction of reality functions on multiple levels, from the most detailed linguistic characteristics and word choices to broader discursive patterns and meanings established through those very choices (Hengeveld, 2004, 1). The construction of reality through linguistic means extends to phenomena commonly misconceived as existing outside the realm of language – also to psychological entities such as affective states.

Indeed, contrary to the conventional conception of emotions as fundamentally natural and biological in their existence, human feelings are not left unaffected by the impact of language from a constructionist perspective. As Bamberg (1997b, 336) points out, language and discourse serve as important building blocks in the formation of *emotions as social constructs*. While language is often thought of as a mere vessel for communicating our inner states, growing research suggests that it also helps constitute emotion by cohering sensations into specific word choices (Lindquist et al., 2015, 99), which challenges the general understanding of feelings as independent from their representation. It has been proposed that our ways of talking about affective states influence how we enact feelings and respond to them, and that emotional functions are always interlaced with their social and cultural conceptualizations (Parkinson, 1995, 228-229). In other words, it appears that different ways of communicating emotion contribute to our understanding about those emotions on a broader level, constituting a significant component of our reality as profoundly sentimental beings.

Although there exists an endless arsenal of linguistic choices with which it is possible to address affective concepts, there are certain generally acknowledged communicative features that are frequently employed in the discursive construction of emotion. Before moving on to discuss affective language use in more detail, one aspect concerning the terminology of emotions needs to be clarified. Regardless of their apparent similarity, the concepts of *emotion*, *feeling*, *affect* and *sentiment* are usually not to be thought of as synonymous: in an academic context, they are often considered as conveying different meanings, and different disciplines tend to favor one expression over the others

(Shouse, 2005). In this thesis, however, these four terms are used more or less interchangeably when referring to nostalgia as an emotional experience – on one hand because the multidisciplinary nature of the study allows for it, and on the other hand because the differences are not crucial in this context inasmuch as the core characteristics of nostalgic experience are adequately established.

#### **2.4.1 Emotion words, interjections and intensifiers as features of affective language**

One question inevitably arises relating to the discursive construction of emotions: what exactly are the micro level elements of language that serve as components in affective constructions? While any linguistic item can have emotional relevance in a certain context, there are indeed specific types of words that feature prominently in affective discourse. In this thesis, my focus is on two groups of affective language items: 1) three generally acknowledged features of emotional language and 2) emoticons and creative punctuation characteristic of online discourse.

This section introduces the linguistic features in group 1: *emotion words*, *interjections* and *intensifiers*. I chose to restrict the analysis to these three types of words because, due to its relatively limited scope, this study would not lend itself well to an all-encompassing analysis of every linguistic item with possible affective relevance for the comments. While such an extensive undertaking is out of the question, emotion words, interjections and intensifiers serve to provide a sufficient amount of data for my purposes, being among the most common features of affective language and thus likely to contribute to nostalgic constructions as well.

As one might expect, *emotion words* – words that refer directly to emotions – stand among the clearest representatives of the affective lexicon (Ortony et al., 1987, 343). They are straightforward references to an affective state, spanning from certain verbs (e.g. *laugh*, *cry*) and nouns (*happiness*, *sadness*) to adjectives (*happy*, *sad*) and adverbs (*happily*, *sadly*). By using words with a generally established and culturally negotiated emotional meaning, people draw on shared

representations of what particular feelings involve – and cultivate those representations to describe their inner states in a decidedly deliberate manner (Parkinson, 1995, 242). In other words, the use of emotion words is based on a process of “buying into the socially established description” of the emotion one wishes to convey (ibid.), making it a relatively unambiguous means of letting others know what one is feeling. Instead of relying on indirect cues when communicating nostalgia, for example, one might simply say “I am nostalgic” and address the concept of nostalgia itself. However, while emotion words in all their clarity and intentionality serve to comprise a central linguistic domain in communicating one’s sentiments, they are not the only group of expressions used when sharing feeling states through language. Indeed, as Ortony et al., (1987, 343) point out, the affective lexicon also includes words that *implicate* emotions instead of referring to them directly, and *interjections* and *intensifiers* are among them.

*Cambridge Dictionaries Online* defines an *interjection* (*n*) as “a word that is used to show a short sudden expression of emotion”. Interjections tend to be more common in speaking than in writing, resemble sounds rather than “actual” words, and come at the beginning or at the end of what is said (ibid.). They are so-called ‘quasi-linguistic’ vocal gestures used to portray the speaker’s mental state (Schourup, 2001, 1045), and most often words or short phrases that can constitute an utterance by themselves (Ameka, 1992, 105). Interjections can be considered as particularly potent signals of affective states, and they are commonly used to convey either positive or negative emotional involvement (Aijmer, 2004, 100). *Oh* and *ah* are among the most common interjections in the English language (ibid.), along with words such as *ouch*, *gosh*, *damn*, *boy*, *shit*, and *my goodness* (Norrick, 2009, 867-868). As Smidt (2002, 197) notes, interjections have large semantic potential and can be “filled like a carrier bag with twenty different senses and a hundred different shades of meaning, all dependent on the context”. In this thesis, interjections are examined in a nostalgic context, meaning that their affective content is interpreted from the perspective of nostalgia.

*Intensifiers* are relatively similar to interjections in that their main function is to add emotional emphasis to what is being said. They are most often adverbs or adjectives that have little meaning in themselves but are used to add force to other adjectives, verbs, or adverbs (*Cambridge Dictionaries Online*, intensifier *n.*) The category includes words such as *very*, *really*, *even*, *such*, *absolutely*, etc. As vehicles for expressivity and emphasis, emotionality and involvement, intensifiers are semantically flexible, meaning that their linguistic category is constantly going through changes at a rapid pace (Cacchiani, 2006, 219). Since the category is always under fast-paced development, it can be challenging to determine which words to consider as intensifiers and which to leave out (*ibid.*). In the case of the present study as well, the boundaries of the intensifier group can be regarded as somewhat blurry, and some other analyst might disagree with or question my choices concerning the intensifiers picked out from the data. However, similarly to interjections, intensifiers are interpreted in this thesis from the perspective of the wider nostalgic context, meaning that their capacity for emotional emphasis is approached from the viewpoint of nostalgic affect.

#### **2.4.2 Affective language in online communication**

The constructionist view of language being determined by its wider situational context holds true also in the case of affective expressions. In other words, how we communicate emotion linguistically depends on several factors affecting the situation in which the communication takes place. In the 21st century, the Internet has become a central environment for human communication, more or less revolutionizing social interaction, which arguably has implications for emotional language use as well. Indeed, at a time when a great part of our interaction takes place online, it is natural and crucial to wonder what happens to emotions as a key ingredient of communication (Bensky & Fisher, 2014, 2). In this final section of the theoretical background of my study, I take a look at some of the implications that an online environment has concerning the discursive construction of emotions.

Up until this point I have used the term *online communication* when referring to the type of Internet interaction under analysis in this thesis. More specifically, however, the sort of online discourse under discussion can be characterized as *computer-mediated communication* (CMC), emphasizing the role of the computer as a medium of linguistic interaction (Herring, 2003, 1). Recently the concept of *digital discourse* has started to emerge beside that of CMC (e.g. in Thurlow & Mroczek, 2011), but this thesis sticks with the latter because of its more conventional and explicit connection to the Internet.

The term *computer-mediated communication* was first introduced in the 1980s, and it is used to encompass a range of platforms for conversing online, including email, listservs, chat, instant messaging, etc. (Baron, 2008, 11). CMC is often treated as a new means of communication with its unique characteristics, as it differs from face to face (FtF) interaction in many respects and is characterized by blending of both written and spoken language features (Komrsková, 2015, 1290). Crystal (2001, 48) views it as a medium that, combining spoken, written, and electronic properties, serves to create an exceptional communicative environment in the 21st century. However, CMC should not be thought of as an internally uniform branch of communication, since different types of computer-mediated discourse have their own distinguishable features that depend on the wider context in which they occur. From the perspective of affective language use in YouTube comment sections, three distinctive characteristics of CMC can be considered as having major relevance:

1. Lack of gestural cues
2. Impression of privacy
3. Greater cautiousness concerning word choices

First of all, a crucial way in which CMC differs from FtF interaction has to do with its lack of gestural cues. When conversing FtF, communicational information is available through multiple channels – namely visual, auditory and gestural – while in CMC only the visual channel is in use and the information limited to typed text (Herring, 2003, 3). This reduced cue environment

might lead to the misconception that CMC undermines the expression of emotions since it filters out nonverbal signals conveying affective information (Tong & Walther, 2015, 191). Instead, however, it has been found that people are extremely skillful in conveying emotion through typed text, employing various linguistic devices to creatively adapt the text-only medium to their expressive needs (ibid.). The use of emoticons and creative punctuation – two notable linguistic means by which these expressive needs are met online – are involved in my analysis of affective language features and introduced towards the end of this section.

Secondly, although computer-mediated messages are often distributed to an unseen and unknown audience, they tend to create an impression of private exchanges. The veil of anonymity provided by online environments serves to lower people's boundaries of self-disclosure which, in turn, encourages Internet users to behave in an unusually open and honest manner (Crystal, 2001, 51). In most social networking sites – YouTube included – individuals have the opportunity to conceal their true identity behind a username, which makes them more likely to let their guard down when it comes to expressing emotion. As proposed by Baron (2008, 14), this perceived level of online intimacy is linked to two dimensions of electronic communication: its *synchronicity* (i.e. whether the communication happens in real time or whether the senders ship off their messages at their own convenience) and *audience scope* (whether the communication is intended for a single person or for a larger audience). YouTube comments represent so-called *asynchronous one-to-many interaction*, meaning that users send their messages at their own pace while the messages distributed are visible for a massive group of unknown people. This creates an interesting quality for YouTube as an affective platform, inviting people to reveal their private inner world for strangers all over the globe – and to do so *carefully* in their own way.

Accordingly, the third implication of CMC regarding the expression of emotion relates to carefulness concerning word choices. Text-only CMC is a surprisingly effective means of affective communication, since typing as an activity “imposes a strong pressure on the sender to be selective

in what is said” (Crystal, 2001, 57). For this reason, computer-mediated textual interaction can be regarded as a convenient tool for expressing one’s sentiments in a constructive manner. As a form of asynchronous CMC, YouTube provides a particularly suitable environment for communicating emotion with meticulous thought (Herring, 2003, 6), users being able to craft their comments for as long as they please. Furthermore, the fact that YouTube comments stay on the screen for a lengthy period of time – before the arrival of new comments makes them scroll out of sight – means that people have considerable time to reflect upon each other’s messages (Crystal, 2001, 44-45).

The three elements of CMC outlined above – lack of gestural cues, impression of privacy, and greater cautiousness concerning word choices – affect the linguistic behavior of people communicating emotion in a computer-mediated environment, resulting in the adoption of special micro level linguistic characteristics suited for expressive purposes. Herring (2003, 5) makes an important remark by stating that, while computer-mediated language is often deemed as less correct than its standard written counterpart, only a small percentage of non-standard CMC language features are errors caused by inattention or lack of linguistic knowledge. Instead, the majority of such supposed “errors” are deliberate choices made in order to mimic spoken language features or express oneself creatively (ibid.) as people strive to compensate for missing auditory and gestural cues. *Emoticons* and *creative use of punctuation*, two well-known characteristics of affective CMC, stand out among the clearest examples of this adaptation process (Komrsková, 2015, 1290) and are also the most relevant CMC-specific nostalgic features found in the comments analyzed in this thesis.

As Komrsková (2015, 1290) describes, the term *emoticon* (short for “emotion” + “icon”) refers to a string of keyboard characters that represent a face expressing a particular emotion (e.g. :) for happiness) or a motion generally connected with the emotion in question (e.g. the winking emoticon ;) for flirtation or joke). Emoticons have a notable expressive role in computer-mediated communication, carrying the reputation of the most obvious means of displaying feelings online (Svensson, 2014, 21). According to Crystal (2001, 36), they constitute a rough but potentially helpful

means of capturing basic facial expressions, although – due to their several possible functions and interpretations – they are notoriously difficult to examine linguistically. Indeed, since an individual smiley allows for a range of different readings depending on the context, analyses of emoticons tend to operate only with a clear-cut classification into positive and negative faces (ibid.). Keeping this in mind, much like in the case of interjections and intensifiers discussed in the previous section, emoticons are interpreted in the present study according to the most obvious meaning that stems from their nostalgic context. Most emoticons encountered in the comments are characterized as happy, unhappy or bittersweet, although other types of emoticons do occur as well.

In addition to emoticons, *creative use of punctuation* is used as an affective tool in online communication (Svensson, 2014, 22). It covers several linguistic strategies that utilize forms of spelling and punctuation in adding emotional emphasis to text-only CMC, ranging from the use of symbols and punctuation marks to repeated or capitalized letters (Crystal, 2001, 34). To clarify, most common forms of creative punctuation include:

- Repetition of letters/punctuation marks (aaahh, eeeek, ???, ...)
- Exclamation marks (!)
- Capitalization (NO WAY, WOW)
- Symbols (<3, \$)

The function of the abovementioned creative strategies is to replace the auditory cues present in FtF interaction but lacking in textual online communication – such as intonation, stress, rhythm and tone of voice – signifying the sender’s affective state. While features of creative punctuation are indeed capable of a certain expressiveness, Crystal (2001, 35) notes that the range of meanings they signal is relatively small and often restricted to extra emphasis. However, although creative punctuation might not cover the most subtle nuances of communication, it is useful in detecting the type of emotional emphasis and exaggeration of interest in this study.

### 3 Data and method

In order to examine how retro game nostalgia manifests discursively in YouTube communication, the comments and games involved in the study must first be introduced and the means of analyzing them outlined. The purpose of this chapter is to familiarize the reader with my data and methodology.

#### 3.1 Retro game comments under analysis

The primary material for this study consists of comments posted under ten gameplay videos on YouTube. The videos that the comments are directed to feature gameplay footage from two games released in 1998: *Spyro The Dragon* and *Banjo-Kazooie* (five videos of each). Two subcorpus are constructed, one of the five videos concerning *Spyro the Dragon* and another of those concerning *Banjo-Kazooie*, after which the material from both is gathered under an overall two-part corpus.

There are several reasons for choosing *Banjo-Kazooie* and *Spyro The Dragon* -related comments as my material. Firstly, the games have only recently started to build their reputation as nostalgic classics, providing an opportunity to examine how nostalgic discourse manifests in connection with a younger retro game generation. Secondly, both games are the prequels of a longer game series and have later been superseded by more advanced versions, which adds to their originality as unique cultural artefacts, the first of their kind. The fact that the games were designed for different platforms – *Spyro the Dragon* for *PlayStation 1*, *Banjo-Kazooie* for *Nintendo 64* – further reinforces this uniqueness, also making the analysis more comprehensive. Moreover, as characteristic representatives of the 3D platform game genre, *Spyro the Dragon* and *Banjo-Kazooie* might have the potential to elicit more nostalgia than other types of games, emphasizing the player's role as a protagonist (Internet source 3) and being characterized by a happy affective tone (Bernstein, 2013).

In determining which gameplay videos to choose as my material, I focused on the content of the videos, their number of views and comments, and the date when they were uploaded

on YouTube. First of all, the content of each chosen video consists of actual gameplay material – that is, footage of someone playing the game in question. In the case of both games, there are videos featuring casual gameplay (i.e. playing for fun with no special requirements) as well as those featuring speedrunning (i.e. an attempt to complete the game as quickly as possible). In some cases, the length of the video covers a whole playthrough of the game from start to finish, whereas in others the player is seen to complete only some parts of the game. Some of the videos include an audio commentary from the player, others do not. By choosing gameplay videos with slight differences in content, it is possible to get a more inclusive overall picture of the nostalgic discourse found.

The number of views for each video falls within the range of 20 000 and 150 000, most of the videos having been watched 60 000-100 000 times. While each of the videos can be considered as relatively popular, the variation among view counts serves to form a comprehensive sample of comments, avoiding the possible analytical bias that a narrower range might encourage. Similarly, the number of comments for each video falls between 90 and 350, providing a sufficient amount of data while allowing for the variation needed in order to obtain reliable results. Finally, the videos involved were uploaded on YouTube between January 2009 and March 2013, covering a time span of 4+ years while providing relatively fresh data concerning nostalgic discourse in late modernity.

Something about the comments and commenters involved in the analysis needs to be addressed. In this study, the social background of the commenters is not considered relevant, which means I have not focused on the gender, nationality, or age of the YouTube users whose comments are examined in this thesis. There are two reasons for this. First of all, such social variables do not provide any crucial information about retro game nostalgia from the perspective applied in this study. The purpose of my analysis is to get *an overall glimpse of* how retro game nostalgia can be discursively constructed, not to compare how people from different backgrounds engage in this construction process (although it would make an interesting topic for a study of its own). Secondly, there is no guarantee of the reliability of the background information provided in a commenter's

profile. As it is common for people to fake or twist their identity online, it would be naive and unprofessional to make interpretations solely based on the information found on the profile page of a YouTube account. If one was to obtain bulletproof information about the commenters' background, one ought to contact the users directly which, in turn, would be extremely difficult and raise tens of issues that are beyond the scope of this study.

As YouTube users are allowed to post more than one comment under a video, a single comment section can include several messages from the same individual. In the comment sections analyzed for this thesis, however, multiple comments from the same user were rarely encountered and did not have an impact on either the process or the outcome of the analysis. YouTube also allows users to leave messages as responses to other users' comments, which enables smaller scale "subconversations" to be formed *within* the actual comment section. In the present study, comments were analyzed in the same manner regardless of whether they were a part of a smaller scale conversation or not. Some individual nostalgic messages were posted as responses to other – often non-nostalgic – messages, while conversations comprised solely of nostalgic comments were scarce. A rare example of a nostalgic subconversation is presented in section 4.3.3.

The methods of analyzing the nostalgic comments are discussed more thoroughly in section 3.2, but first, in order to provide the contextual background needed for making sense of the emerging discourse, a brief overview of the two games involved is in order.

### **3.1.1 *Spyro the Dragon***

*Spyro the Dragon* is a single-player platform game released in 1998 for *PlayStation 1*. It was developed by *Insomniac Games*, produced by Mark Cerny and published by *Sony Computer Entertainment America*. The title character of the game is a small purple dragon on a mission to rescue his fellow dragons who have been turned into crystal statues by the evil Gnasty Gnorc, the main

antagonist of the game. Spyro must travel across six different worlds (a total of 35 locations), free 80 dragons and collect stolen treasure, defeating several bosses on the way. The player can explore the levels by running, jumping and gliding, and attack enemies and open treasure chests mainly by charging or flaming them. In addition, the game has four special levels where the player has to fly through rings or arches and flame certain items before the time runs out.

*Spyro the Dragon* was one of the pioneering 3D platform games of the late 1990s, receiving highly positive reviews and being praised especially for its animation and playability (Harris, 1998). It belongs to the first generation of video gaming that enabled the player to fully explore



**Picture 1.** *Spyro the Dragon* title screen (Internet source 1).

the game world and roam around the levels in a relatively free manner, thus strengthening the player's role as a protagonist. The worlds featured in the game are playful and mystical, and they follow distinguishable themes inspired by nature (gardens, canyons, mountains and swamps), magic (castles and fantasy lands) and modern civilization (harbors, towns and combat fields). *Insomniac Games* created two sequels for the game, *Spyro 2: Ripto's Rage!* or *Spyro 2: Gateway to Glimmer* in Europe (1999), and *Spyro: Year of the Dragon* (2000), after which the developers have changed several times and the Spyro franchise has spread into a branch of games that differ quite dramatically from the original.

On YouTube, the keyword 'Spyro the Dragon' generates approximately 127 000 results, of which I have chosen five different gameplay videos as the source of my material. The following chart presents the basic information needed about each video: the title, date when uploaded

on YouTube, content of the footage, total number of views and comments on December 11, 2014, as well as the number of comments in English comprising the analyzed corpus.

**Table 1.** Basic information about *Spyro the Dragon* material analyzed.

Video	Uploaded	Content	Views	Comments in total/ in English
PSX Longplay [160] Spyro the Dragon	Jan 27, 2013	A playthrough of the game	98 632	217/ <b>215</b>
Spyro the Dragon   120% Speed Run   1h 55m [Ntsc] by Crash41596	Nov 26, 2011	A playthrough of the game as fast as possible	80 107	307/ <b>307</b>
Spyro the Dragon Walkthrough – Part 1 (PSX)	June 16, 2012	Gameplay from the first world of the game	67 603	159/ <b>156</b>
Spyro the Dragon FOR PC DOWNLOAD gameplay	March 25, 2011	Gameplay from the first world of the game	55 855	122/ <b>107</b>
Spyro the Dragon -33- Gnasty Gnorc	June 16, 2009	Footage from the final battle and credits of the game	73 809	142/ <b>141</b>

All in all, the five *Spyro the Dragon* videos feature a total number of 926 comments. In the analysis section, comments posted under *Spyro the Dragon* videos are marked with a code consisting of the letter **S** followed by their running number in the subcorpus, e.g. **(S1)**.

### 3.1.2 *Banjo-Kazooie*

*Banjo-Kazooie* (1998) belongs to the same video game generation as *Spyro the Dragon*, being one of the first single-player 3D platformers of the 1990s with various worlds to freely explore. It was developed and published by *Rare* for *Nintendo 64* and was a critical and commercial success. The title characters and protagonists of the game are a bear and a bird (Banjo and Kazooie, respectively) who embark on an adventure to save Banjo's little sister, Tooty, who has been kidnapped by a witch

named Gruntilda. The player is provided with a range of moves and attacks involving either the bear, the bird, or both; while Banjo is stronger and slower, Kazooie – residing in Banjo’s backpack – can be used for faster movement and flying.

The worlds of *Banjo-Kazooie* range from lovely to gloomy, including realms such as a sunny beach, a leafy forest, a haunted house and a polluted bay. The main objective of the game is to travel through nine different levels collecting musical notes (with which to open doors to new



**Picture 2.** Banjo and Kazooie on a jiggy hunt (Internet source 2).

areas) and jigsaw pieces (with which to solve puzzles and get access to new levels). The player must also rescue jinjos, little creatures scattered around the worlds, in order to be able to defeat Gruntilda in the final battle. *Rare* developed one sequel for the game, *Banjo-Tooie*, which was released in the year 2000. As with the *Spyro the Dragon* franchise, however, the developers of the series changed after the sequel’s release, which led to the introduction of new *Banjo-Kazooie* games that bear little resemblance to the two original ones.

On YouTube, the keyword ‘Banjo-Kazooie’ generates approximately 158 000 results, of which I have chosen five videos for analysis. The following chart presents the same basic information about the videos as in the case of *Spyro the Dragon*: the title, date when uploaded on YouTube, content of the footage, total number of views and comments on December 11, 2014, and the number of comments in English.

**Table 2.** Basic information about *Banjo-Kazooie* material analyzed.

Video	Uploaded	Content	Views	Comments in total/ in English
Banjo-Kazooie 100% speedrun in 2:23:26 (2:09:47 game time)	March 28, 2013	A playthrough of the game as fast as possible	80 076	90/ <b>89</b>
TAS Banjo-Kazooie N64 in 144:32 by Sami Outinen	Nov 6, 2009	A playthrough of the game as fast as possible	97 929	145/ <b>139</b>
Let's Play Banjo-Kazooie part 1	Aug 16, 2009	Gameplay from the first world of the game	23 336	140/ <b>137</b>
Let's Play! - Banjo-Kazooie   Part 1	April 27, 2010	Gameplay from the first world of the game	65 238	286/ <b>286</b>
Banjo-Kazooie Final Boss Battle: Grunty	Jan 3, 2009	Footage from the final battle and credits of the game	149 178	345/ <b>344</b>

The five *Banjo-Kazooie* videos feature a total number of 995 comments in English. In the analysis section, comments from *Banjo-Kazooie* videos are marked with a code consisting of the letter **B** followed by their running number in the corpus, e.g. **(B1)**.

All in all, my data consists of a total of 1921 comments when the *Spyro the Dragon* and *Banjo-Kazooie* subcorpuses are combined into one. The next section delves into my methods of analyzing the obtained data.

### 3.2 Methods of analysis

The method used in this thesis can be characterized as a multidisciplinary form of *computer-mediated discourse analysis*: that is, analysis of computer-mediated discourse incorporating elements from other disciplines – namely social studies – as well. Indeed, the type of discourse analysis adopted can be regarded as closely connected to a wider social constructionist approach, as it is centered on the

way in which language shapes our subjective and cultural reality. In a nutshell, the approach applied in the present study adheres to and is fueled by the following kind of discourse analytical perspective:

This type of analysis is specifically concerned with questions about the organization of language and the consequences of this organization. For instance, how are accounts constructed; what effects do particular accounts have, and more generally, how do people construct a coherent social world for the occasions at hand given a particular set of linguistic resources?

(Wetherell et al., 1987, 60)

When examining nostalgia or other psychological concepts through the lens of discourse analytical methodology, the analyst is encouraged to pay close attention to “the interactive subtleties” of language use (Bamberg, 2004, 222). As already established in this thesis, these micro level linguistic subtleties constitute a crucial part of our taken for granted conceptions about reality (ibid.), and for that reason they provide fruitful – yet unarguably challenging – material for analysis. The interconnection between micro and macro levels of language becomes particularly visible when analyzing computer-mediated discourse, since CMC evokes a range of human experiences that invite people to examine the multiple layers of interaction (Herring, 2003, 13). Indeed, as a rich and diverse form of communication, CMC can easily forge meaningful theories of discourse and social action (ibid.), which further contributes to its potential as an advantageous source of data for the analysis of emotional language.

On a similar note, Benski & Fisher (2014, 6) point out that the Internet can be thought of as a unique laboratory for studying emotion for two reasons: not only because it encourages a huge diversity of communication from a large group of people, often reflecting immediate feelings as they occur, but also because these communication acts are all registered. A computer-mediated environment provides easy access to a large amount of emotional data, which assists the work of a discourse analyst as the material already exists online and is thus “handed on a silver platter”. In analyzing online data, a combination of both quantitative and qualitative methods has proven as particularly handy: qualitative methods are needed as it is difficult to reduce human communication

solely to quantitative features, while the huge amount of linguistic items under analysis requires the use of quantitative methods as well (ibid.). In introducing my analytical process more thoroughly, the upcoming section (3.2.1) discusses how quantitative and qualitative methods are combined in my attempts to identify different layers of nostalgic retro game discourse in this study.

Since there exists no critical consensus about the characteristics and subtleties of nostalgic language in particular, my task in this thesis can be regarded as somewhat problematic. In order to answer my research questions about nostalgic discourse – its prominence, themes, and linguistic manifestation in the data – one ought to know first *what nostalgic language use is*. However, the very question of what constitutes nostalgic language is exactly what the study at hand seeks to answer. Thus, I am faced with a dilemma: in order to answer my research questions, I would first have to have answered them. In a stalemate such as this, the study must take on a more creative approach: instead of searching the material for pre-defined nostalgic characteristics, one needs to inspect it for *emerging* characteristics most likely to promote nostalgic discourse. Doing precisely that, this study should not be taken as a concise description of nostalgic discourse, but as a glimpse of how certain discursive features *can lend themselves* to the construction of retro game nostalgia.

For the reasons presented above, my approach to studying nostalgic discourse is *data-driven*, meaning that instead of attempting to establish pre-defined criteria for nostalgic language use and applying it in identifying nostalgic discourse, I started with a close reading of *the data itself*. A data-driven approach emphasizes that “concepts and hypotheses should be based on careful consideration of the data rather than drawn from theoretical preconceptions or ideological preferences” (Ten Have, 2006). In other words, data-driven analysis means that the researcher approaches the data with an open mind and allows whatever emerges as interesting, salient or frequent to drive the analysis along (Baker & Ellece, 2011, 29). Adopting this view as a point of departure, my approach acknowledges the fact that all linguistic features can potentially be relevant for the construction of nostalgia, taking into account the complexity of nostalgia as an emotion that can be

linguistically formulated in different ways depending on the individual. This provides a more comprehensive and context-dependent perspective to studying psychological phenomena that are often approached from a more reductionist and positivistic starting point (Wetherell et al., 1987, 60).

The following section sheds light on my analytical process more thoroughly.

### **3.2.1 Identifying and examining nostalgic comments: the analytical process**

Since the analytical approach applied in this thesis relies strongly on a data-driven, material-oriented perspective, it is of utmost importance to make it as transparent as possible. Particularly as I am dealing with as vague and complex a concept as nostalgia, not to mention engaging in a process of identifying its linguistic existence, the steps I have taken in order to accomplish this goal must be outlined. This section delineates my means of approaching nostalgic retro game discourse within the context of this study.

Firstly, in order to identify nostalgic expressions in the data, I needed to establish a set of criteria for nostalgic comments – in other words, to formulate a rough hypothesis of what exactly might one consider as nostalgic language use. With this goal in mind, I engaged in a process of *close reading*, inspecting the material for recurring discursive patterns that could be regarded as most likely to convey nostalgic affect. After an in-depth reading of the material, three main nostalgic patterns emerged: comments that could be seen as...

- Expressing a sentimental longing for the game
- Emphasizing the game's value as a nostalgic product
- Representing the game as being part of a nostalgic retro game culture.

Comments falling under these three categories comprised the first step in identifying nostalgic discourse from the material. A new two-part corpus was then built solely from the comments

employing the discursive patterns outlined above, drawing together all potentially nostalgic comments found in connection with the *Banjo-Kazooie* and *Spyro the Dragon* videos under analysis.

The second step in identifying nostalgic discourse was to inspect all potentially nostalgic comments for recurring linguistic features used. Through another process of close reading, I was able to distinguish nostalgic comments from non-nostalgic on the basis of certain *frequently occurring linguistic characteristics*. Comments considered as nostalgic included a reference to one or more of the following:

- Nostalgia, memories, or longing
- Sentimental state triggered by the videos
- Past times playing the game
- Positive characteristics of the game as a product of the past.

In order to be regarded as nostalgic, a comment thus had to fit at least one of the criteria presented above. First of all, a straightforward linguistic reference to nostalgia, memories, or longing (e.g. the emotion word *nostalgia*, the noun *memories*, or the verb *miss*, respectively) was considered as a valid indicator of nostalgic affect in itself. In addition, comments referring to a sentimental state elicited by the videos – namely to the act of crying – were viewed as evidence of nostalgic affect. However, comments concerning gameplay or characterizing the games in positive terms were only regarded as nostalgic if they involved a linguistic reference to the *past*. Consider, for instance, the following hypothetical examples:

<b>Non-nostalgic</b>	<b>vs.</b>	<b>Nostalgic</b>
“I play this game a lot!”		“I <i>used to</i> play this game a lot!”
“I love playing this game.”		“I <i>loved</i> playing this game.”
“This game is the best.”		“This game is the best <i>ever</i> .”
“This is my favourite game.”		“This <i>was</i> my favourite game <i>as a child</i> .”

As becomes evident from the examples above, differences between my analytical conception of nostalgic and non-nostalgic comments can appear minor although being critical. Since nostalgia as a concept is inextricably connected to the past, *references to past time* served as a guiding principle in determining which comments to consider as nostalgic and which to leave out. While it is perfectly possible that some of the comments not regarded as nostalgic were, in fact, written at a moment of nostalgia, one must draw a clear line in order to prevent including invalid data in the analysis.

After establishing criteria for the discursive components of retro game nostalgia, I turned to examining the broader nostalgic themes that those components serve to address. In sociological and psychological discourse analysis, such themes are often referred to as *interpretive repertoires*, “discursive patterns of sense-making through which people develop accounts and versions of reality” (Wetherell, 2006, 1). By inspecting the corpus of nostalgic comments, I managed to distinguish specific interpretive repertoires comprised of different patterns of nostalgic language use. In this way it was possible to learn something about the nature of the constructed retro game nostalgia, detecting broader personal and cultural aspects that it is connected to.

Based on the personal and cultural aspects addressed, nostalgic comments were classified into three main interpretive repertoires that are presented in the analysis section. Two of the main interpretive repertoires were further categorized into subrepertoires of their own, which were examined individually. After identifying the repertoires, I analyzed their frequencies by counting the number of comments representing each theme. Overlap between different interpretive repertoires was a rule rather than an exception – meaning that a single comment could often be seen as representing more than one discursive theme – but since the prominence of each repertoire was determined by the overall number of comments in which it is present, such overlap did not affect the results.

The final stage of the study consisted of identifying the type of affective language that the commenters use for emotional emphasis in their nostalgic messages. In order to make the analysis

fit the scope of this study, I had to limit the number of linguistic features which to focus on. I chose to inspect the emotion words, interjections and intensifiers used, since they are among the most common language items used to convey emotion, providing a sufficient amount of data for the purposes of this small-scale study. In addition, two characteristics of affective online communication – emoticons and creative punctuation – were examined in order to catch a glimpse of how CMC-specific language contributes to the discursive construction of nostalgia.

Following the method of Schnoebelen (2010, 1), my objective was to find out how different affective words pattern across different thematic categories – in this case, the wider nostalgic repertoires found. This means that, instead of inspecting the abovementioned affective features from all nostalgic comments, they were examined from specific examples picked out from the data. In other words, in order to construct an objective “sample” of affective language features contributing to nostalgic discourse, examples from the data were first chosen to be presented according to the interpretive repertoires they address and only after that inspected for interjections, intensifiers, emotion words, emoticons, and forms of creative punctuation. After the analysis of each interpretive repertoire, the affective features found are summarized in a table that shows the number of comments in which they occur, which makes it possible to detect which linguistic items dominate the nostalgic accounts.

My analysis of nostalgic retro game discourse can thus be regarded as twofold, focusing on *both* the linguistic items used in constructing the nostalgic messages in the first place *and* the specific features of affective language further contributing to those messages. The distinction between these two overlapping linguistic layers helps to distinguish how nostalgic retro game discourse is constructed on multiple levels, and despite being somewhat arbitrary it serves a useful analytical purpose within the context of this thesis.

The following chapter presents the actual analysis described in this section, beginning with an overview of the nostalgic retro game discourse found and then moving on to discuss the interpretive repertoires and their nostalgically relevant linguistic components.

#### **4 Nostalgic retro game discourse**

From the corpus of 1921 individual comments, 682 were categorized as nostalgic according to the established criteria. In other words, they express a sentimental longing for the game, emphasize the game's value as a nostalgic product, or situate the game within a nostalgic retro game culture by referring to 1) nostalgia, memories, or longing, 2) sentimental state triggered by the videos, 3) past times playing the game, or 4) positive characteristics of the game as a product of the past. When converted into percentages, nostalgic discourse comprises 35.5% of the material, meaning that over a third of the comments feature nostalgic language in the manner hypothesized.

Of the two games under analysis, *Spyro the Dragon* (hereafter *SD*) elicited 14% more nostalgia than *Banjo-Kazooie* (hereafter *BK*), which is an interesting detail that might be explained by a number of factors concerning the chosen video material or the games and their players. One possible explanation for the difference relates to the players' role as a protagonist and is presented in chapter 4.3.1. Overall, however, the difference between the games is not critical enough to be considered relevant for this study, the main focus of which is the nostalgic discourse found in general. Of interest in the results is that nostalgic constructions appear to be noticeably prominent in the material, and that they occur frequently in both *SD* and *BK* -related video comments.

The next sections examine the nostalgic retro game discourse found in more detail, providing an account of the linguistic features considered as nostalgic, the discursive themes and repertoires that those features serve to create, and specific affective language items used in reinforcing the nostalgic tone of the messages. The upcoming analysis sheds light on how these micro and macro

levels of nostalgic discourse are fundamentally intertwined, discussing nostalgic language use in connection with the broader issues it addresses.

#### 4.1 General retro game nostalgia

The first interpretive repertoire of nostalgic comments constructs the games as purely nostalgic in general – without addressing any specific cultural or personal aspects concerning the affect. The comments in this category are straightforward and rather self-explanatory references to nostalgia triggered by *BK* and *SD* video material, focusing around the bittersweet emotion without further explaining or justifying it. Generally nostalgic comments comprise 9.8% of the corpus of nostalgic comments with a total of 92 occurrences, and they are constructed through linguistic references to nostalgia, memories or longing, sentimental state triggered by the videos, or past times playing the game.

First of all, straightforward references to nostalgic affect constitute the most apparent way in which YouTube users convey general nostalgia in their comments. By using the emotion word *nostalgia* in their entries, the commenters express sentimental longing towards the games in a simple and concise manner, constructing nostalgia through its literal culturally negotiated meaning:

1. Nostalgia (**S132**)
2. Nostalgia.. So much of it. (**S2**)
3. Thumbs up if nostalgia brought you here! (**B136**)
4. I remember this game with fond nostalgia :) (**S137**)

By using the emotion word *nostalgia* itself, the commenters are not only engaging in a process whereby the concept of nostalgia is renegotiated and maintained through discourse, but they are also expressing their feeling states online in a particularly deliberate manner. Aside from referring to the bittersweet emotion directly, examples 2-4 above exhibit linguistic characteristics further

emphasizing the affective tone of the comments. As a way of underlining the intensity of the experienced longing, commenter 2 combines the emotion word *nostalgia* with the use of repeated dots – commonly referred to as *ellipsis* – which, in turn, bridges the expression with an affective intensifier *so much*. In message number 3, an exclamation mark concluding the sentence adds extra enthusiasm to the nostalgic expression. Commenter 4, on the other hand, employs the emotion word *fond* in describing his/her nostalgic state, which establishes a heartwarming image of retro game nostalgia when paired with the use of a smiling emoticon.

In addition to generally acknowledging their state of nostalgic longing, commenters sometimes combine the word *nostalgia* with an attempted description of the emotion. Similarly to the expression of fond nostalgia in example 4, comment 5 below represents nostalgic affect as a warm feeling, the positive connotation of which is further emphasized by the use of a happy emoticon:

5. nostalgia washed over me like a warm ocean current :) (B137)

Example 6, in turn, draws attention to the depth of nostalgic experience by locating it in the commenter's heart, the metaphorical core of the most vigorous of human emotions. Interestingly, the commenter also addresses the indescribable nature of nostalgia, thus constructing the emotion as puzzling and complex – a notion in keeping with general conceptions of the affect:

6. Nostalgia. My heart. I can't describe it. (B2)

Secondly, apart from using the emotion word *nostalgia* itself, commenters construct general retro game nostalgia by addressing their state of sentimentality triggered by the videos. Arguably the most explicitly sentimental descriptions of retro game nostalgia, such comments often involve a direct reference to *crying*. Indeed, the data includes several messages that, through the use of the emotion verb *cry*, explicitly announce how the gameplay video affects viewers' feelings through nostalgic imagery. These comments provide an adept example of how emotions can be

expressed and shared in a computer-mediated environment, simultaneously illustrating the potential intensity of nostalgia triggered by online material:

7. oh my god, the nostalgia! i think i might cry (S5)
8. After this video, I just started to cry. What to say...memories... (S254)
9. i think I'm gonna cry.... (S147)

In example 7, the commenter starts with an affective interjection *oh my god*, which serves as a linguistic tool reinforcing the nostalgic message. After explicitly referring to nostalgic affect, emphasizing the expression with an exclamation mark, the writer goes on to mention that the video is about to make him/her cry. In comments 8 and 9, ellipsis is used to underline the affective constructions, mimicking sighs and pauses characteristic of sentimental FtF communication.

References to crying were not, however, limited to the actual emotion verb *cry* itself. An exceptionally concise nostalgic expression, comment 10 provides an adequate example of this, consisting merely of an emoticon smiling and crying simultaneously. The message represents creative CMC at its simplest, and by conveying bittersweet, sentimental happiness, it promotes the general conception of nostalgic affect as a delicate mixture of pleasure and sadness:

10. :') (S149)

In addition to describing their affective nostalgic state, commenters construct *BK* and *SD* as generally nostalgic by addressing the concept of the *good old days*. Combining references to past time with positive adjectives, they create a glorified image of their nostalgic gaming experiences from the days gone by, observing the past through the famous rose-tinted glasses characteristic of nostalgia. While there is slight variation between the exact words through which this is accomplished (e.g. *days/times*, *good/awesome* in the following examples), these messages construct general retro game nostalgia by drawing from the cultural conception of nostalgic experience as glorification of the past:

11. Good old days (S11)
12. Ahhh, i remember the good ol days :) (S136)
13. Oh good times! (S13)
14. i love this game so much awesome times :.) (S138)

Interjections *ah* and *oh*, the former with its repeated letters, serve to underline the emotional tone of comments number 12 and 13 respectively. The sentimentality of example 13 is given further prominence by the accompanying exclamation mark, while emoticons conveying happy (12) and bittersweet (14) feeling states stand out as adequate representatives of affective CMC. In addition, commenter 14 uses the emotion word *love* as a way of expressing his/her nostalgic feelings towards the game, emphasizing the expressed fondness with the intensifier *so much*.

The games' nostalgic significance for the commenters is further illustrated in the data through the use of the plural noun *memories*, consistently combined with a positive evaluation. Several constructions convey an image of the game as a memorable part of the writer's past, portraying it as an artefact with marked nostalgic value. In example 15, the viewer explicitly addresses the nostalgic influence of *SD* by describing associated memories as *the best*, while commenter 16 reinforces the air of nostalgic longing through ellipsis and exclamation:

15. this game brings back the best memories (S14)
16. the memories... they're all flowing back to me! (S8)

Some comments exhibited notable similarities in addressing the writers' nostalgic memories, as becomes evident from examples 17 and 18 below. While the two comments can be considered as curiously alike in their nostalgic content – both beginning with the affective interjection *ah* with repeated letters – they differ in terms of emotional emphasis established through certain CMC-specific affective features. The use of capitalization, multiple exclamation marks, and a

bittersweet emoticon as opposed to a regular happy one distinguishes message 17 from 18, drawing attention to nostalgic affect in a more pronounced manner:

**17.** AHFFF THE MEMORIES!!! :) (**B140**)

**18.** Ahhh so many memories. :) (**B3**)

Although the former construction might seem “more nostalgic” than the latter, it is important to bear in mind that individuals differ in their ways of expressing emotion – meaning that the utterances in question do not provide a sufficient basis for arguing whether one commenter feels more nostalgic than the other. Moreover, comment 18 includes an affective linguistic item lacking in message 17, emphasizing the intensity of evoked memories with the intensifier *so many*.

Lastly, general nostalgia towards *SD* and *BK* is constructed through commenters’ accounts about *missing* the games, expressions of sentimental longing towards them as nostalgic artefacts of the past. The commenters disclose their nostalgic yearning in a direct manner, often accompanying their messages with emoticons conveying sadness. While comment 19 represents a relatively standard form of expressing sentimental longing towards the game, the interjection *damn* and the intensifier *really* add extra emphasis to comments 20 and 21, respectively:

**19.** I miss this game :( (**S233**)

**20.** damn I miss this game :( (**S15**)

**21.** I really miss this game :( (**B26**)

Furthermore, aside from directly stating how they miss *BK* and *SD*, some commenters communicate their longing by expressing a strong willingness to reobtain the games and relive the nostalgic past associated with them. Providing an example of this, the writers of the following messages verbalize their longing by using the expression *need back* with the game (22) or the gaming platform (23) as an object:

22. i need to go back in time!!!! a matter of fact i need back this game!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!! >\_< (S17)
23. I NEED MY PSX'S BACK !!!! (S18)

The linguistic expressions used in examples 22 and 23 are characterized by intense sentimentality. The presence of multiple exclamation marks in both comments emphasizes the expressed need to play the nostalgic games again – the wish to return to the good old days associated with past gaming experiences. Moreover, capitalization (23) along with the use of an emoticon conveying frustration and unhappiness (22) illustrate how affective CMC features can contribute to generally nostalgic retro game discourse.

#### 4.1.1 General retro game nostalgia: a summary

92 comments in the material analyzed – a total of 9.8% of the corpus – contribute to an interpretive repertoire that represents *BK* and *SD* as nostalgic retro games in general. Without addressing any specific factors underlying the games' nostalgic effect, generally nostalgic comments are focused on the core of nostalgic experience itself: sentimental longing towards something treasured from one's past. To sum up, comments constructing the games as generally nostalgic do so by referring to...

- nostalgia, memories, or longing
  - the emotion words *nostalgia* and *miss*
  - the noun *memories*
  - the construction *need + back*
- sentimentality triggered by the videos
  - the emotion word *cry*
  - emoticon ' :)' portraying bittersweet feelings
- past times playing the games
  - references to past time + favourable adjectives

The 23 generally nostalgic comments examined are accompanied by emotion words, interjections, intensifiers, emoticons and creative forms of punctuation contributing to their

sentimental tone. The comments examined feature a total of 5 different emotion words, of which the noun *nostalgia* is the most prominent with 7 occurrences. Out of four interjections and three intensifiers used, in turn, the common English interjection *ah* and the intensifier *so much* are more frequent than the others. When it comes to affective CMC, three creative forms of punctuation – capitalization, the use of exclamation marks, and the repetition of letters and punctuation marks – are used in the messages. Of these, repetition is the most common linguistic tool with 9 occurrences. Finally, the commenters use happy, unhappy and bittersweet emoticons in their nostalgic entries, happy and unhappy both being present in a total of four comments. Table 3 summarizes the affective linguistic items used in emphasizing general retro game nostalgia and arranges them according to the number of comments in which they occur (in columns):

**Table 3.** Features of affective language contributing to the generally nostalgic examples examined.

Emotion words	Interjections	Intensifiers	Punctuation	Emoticons
<i>nostalgia</i> (7)	<i>ah</i> (3)	<i>so much</i> (2)	<i>repetition</i> (9)	<i>happy</i> (4)
<i>cry</i> (3)	<i>damn</i> (1)	<i>really</i> (1)	<i>excl. marks</i> (7)	<i>unhappy</i> (4)
<i>miss</i> (3)	<i>oh</i> (1)	<i>so many</i> (1)	<i>capitalization</i> (2)	<i>bittersweet</i> (3)
<i>fond</i> (1)	<i>oh my God</i> (1)			
<i>love</i> (1)				

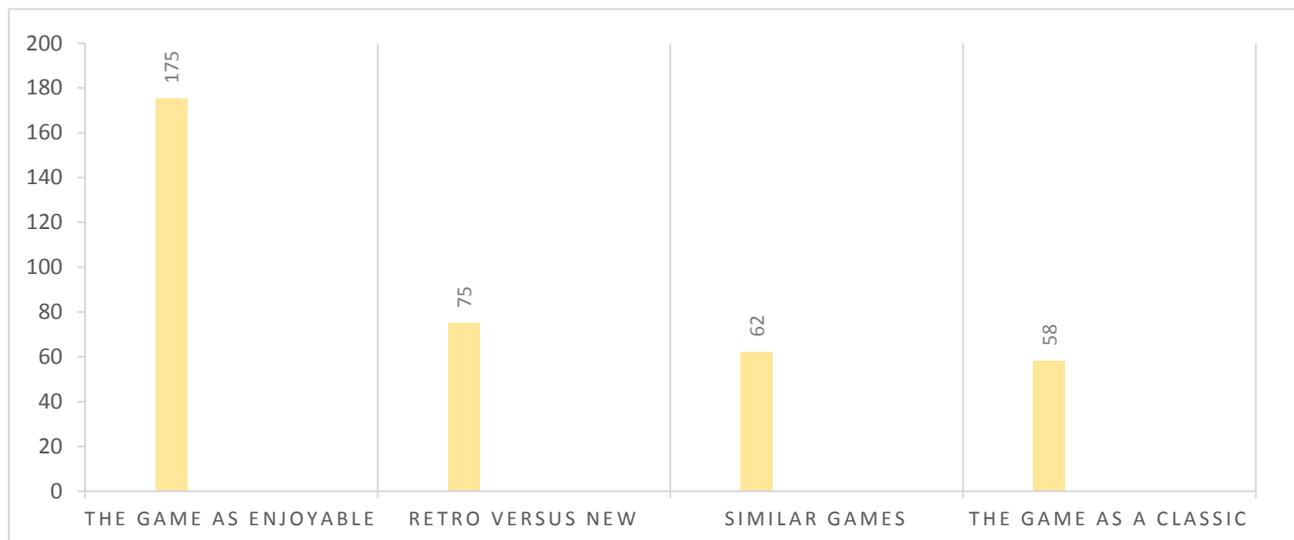
## 4.2 Cultural retro game nostalgia

While generally nostalgic comments did not address any specific factors underlying the games' nostalgic effect, the majority of nostalgic comments found in the data did. Indeed, the second main interpretive repertoire emerging from the comment sections could be described as cultural nostalgia, constructing *SD* and *BK* as culturally valuable and enjoyable products, the nostalgic potential of which is closely connected to their characteristics as classic representatives of the retro game subculture. Most culturally nostalgic comments are constructed by referring to positive characteristics of the games as products of the past, although some of them are formulated through straightforward

references to nostalgia, memories, longing, or past times playing the games. All in all, the discursive category of cultural nostalgia consists of a total number of 369 comments, comprising 39.3 percent of the corpus and thus constituting a notable discursive presence in the data.

Through close reading I was able to distinguish four types of culturally nostalgic subrepertoires: comments promoting an image of the game as either enjoyable, classic, superior to newer games, or similar to other nostalgic retro games. The prominence of each culturally nostalgic interpretive repertoire is illustrated in figure 1 below, after which the four discursive themes are examined in more detail in order of frequency.

**Figure 1.** Culturally nostalgic subrepertoires and their number of occurrences in the data.



#### 4.2.1 The game as enjoyable

The vast majority of culturally nostalgic comments construct *SD* and *BK* as *enjoyable products*, valuable cultural commodities in their own right. 175 of all nostalgic comments examined involve the commenter praising the game in general, some of its specific features, or both – making the subrepertoire the second most common found in the whole data. By drawing attention to their

entertaining qualities, linguistically evaluating them positively as products of the past, commenters can be seen to justify the two games' nostalgic potential.

The majority of commenters representing the games as enjoyable do so by simply praising them as the best. YouTube users construct nostalgic accounts of *SD* and *BK* as games that were, and still are, intrinsically valuable – unique products that continue to be superior although their golden age has passed. This is achieved linguistically through the use of the adjective *best* in connection with a time reference such as *ever* or *in history*, thus evaluating the game positively while situating it in the past:

24. best game ever (S167)
25. The best video game in gaming history. (S165)
26. Best game I have ever played. Ah, it brings back so many good memories (B46)
27. man, the music is so freaking epic! i always will consider this game like the best game EVER! (B32)

The latter two comments above include specific linguistic items contributing to their nostalgic tone. Firstly, commenter 26 emphasizes the superior quality of *BK* by addressing the good memories it evokes, establishing a positive image of the nostalgic reminisces with the intensifier *so many*. The emotionally laden statement is further reinforced with the accompanying interjection *ah*, mimicking the auditory essence of a sentimental sigh. Comment 27, in turn, provides an example of several linguistic features that attain nostalgic value in their context of use: the interjection *man* beginning the sentence, the intensifier *freaking* underlining the game music's epicness, and the use of affective punctuation in the form of capital letters and exclamation marks.

In addition to praising the game in general as superior, the commenters use the *best ever* -construction to characterize individual features of the game. Most often these are certain stages in the gameplay (28), specific in-game areas (29), or levels with particularly enjoyable features (30) representing the longed-for fictional worlds of *SD* and *BK*:

- 28. Best final battle ever. **(B56)**
- 29. Spyro had one of the best overworlds ever! **(S33)**
- 30. click clock wood = BEST LEVEL EVER that level had it all. music, character, clever design. fricken brilliant **(B176)**

The commenters' use of exclamation marks (29) and capital letters (30) adds affective emphasis to the latter two examples presented above. It is also worth noting that, when characterizing the enjoyable level in example 30, the commenter supports the given positive evaluation with the word *fricken* (a colloquial way of typing the intensifier *freaking*).

In addition to being characterized as the best, the games are presented as valuable commodities through various other positive evaluations embedded in the comments. Similarly to the word *best*, most of them are superlative adjectives describing either the game in general (31, 32) or specific stages in the gameplay, such as boss battles (33). It is worth noting that, rather conveniently, the superlatives *coolest*, *greatest* and *most kick-ass* used in the following examples have a similar connotation, all three denoting something with unique quality and appeal:

- 31. one of the coolest games ever made. good childhood memories. thank you for uploading this video **(B153)**
- 32. Ah, Banjo-Kazooie, the most kick-ass game of all freaking time! Banjo-Tooie is awesome, but B-K owns any other game ever! (But that's my opinion) **(B201)**
- 33. This is easily one of the greatest final boss battles ever. **(B64)**

After praising the game, commenter 31 makes a reference to his/her good childhood memories, which creates an additional nostalgic dimension for the utterance. As will become clear later on in this thesis, childhood memories play an important part in the nostalgic constructions under analysis, and they are often intertwined with other nostalgic repertoires. Messages 32 and 33, on the other hand, serve as further examples of certain linguistic features used in reinforcing the affective tone of the comments: interjections (*ah*, 32), intensifiers (*freaking*, 32, *easily*, 33) and exclamation marks (32). It is also interesting that, such as the word *best*, the superlatives used always occur in connection with a time

reference such as *ever* or *all time*, emphasizing the exceptional value and quality of the games despite the fact that they are no longer “the thing”.

Comment 34 below provides an example of a nostalgic construction with particularly rich content, listing several enjoyable features of the game in question. It starts by praising *Spyro the Dragon* and another beloved game of the same era, *Crash Bandicoot* (1996), as the *kings* of their time, constructing the games as nostalgic by describing them with the adjective *joyous* while using the past tense. The commenter goes on to define the music, gameplay, and characters of the two games with different positive adjectives contributing to a nostalgic tone, promoting an image of both *Spyro* and *Crash* as esteemed products with entertaining characteristics:

- 34.** Hands down, Spyro and Crash were the undivided **KINGS** of the PS1 days. Their games were absolutely a joyous treat to play, back then and even now! The music: addictive The gameplay: enjoyable The characters: lovable They were just so right, it might as well have been a crime X3 **(S161)**

Furthermore, the message includes features of affective CMC and emotional language in general. In addition to the use of capitalization and exclamation marks, the commenter adds a happy, mischievous emoticon (‘ X3 ’) at the end of the message. The intensifier *hands down*, meaning “without a doubt” (*OED* s.v. *adv1b*) establishes an affective tone for the comment right from the beginning, whereas two other intensifiers, *absolutely* and *even*, add emphasis to the positive description of *Spyro* and *Crash* as joyous.

Another prominent means of expressing nostalgia towards a game was to emphasize its role as the commenter’s *favourite*, either of all time or in relation to the person’s childhood:

- 35.** My favourite game of all time. **(B185)**
- 36.** Easily my favourite game of all time. => **(B191)**
- 37.** Damn, this was my favorite game when i was little... **(S278)**
- 38.** awww, this is my favourite dragon, I played it, when I was small :) **(S284)**

Apart from number 35, the comments above begin with a linguistic feature reinforcing their emotional intensity: the intensifier *easily* (36) and the interjections *damn* (37) and *aww* (38, with repeated letters). While the intensifier serves to underline the overall message of the utterance, the two interjections in particular suggest that the matter in question is sentimental or bittersweet. In messages 36 and 38, the writers seal their words with a happy emoticon, while commenter 37 concludes the nostalgic utterance with ellipsis signaling lingering thoughts.

Finally, commenters construct the games as enjoyable by expressing affection for them through the emotion word *love*. Although there is no doubt that love is an inherently personal affective experience, I found it more befitting to include these comments in the category of cultural nostalgia, since their primary function appears to be to underline the games' enjoyable nature. Indeed, these messages promote a nostalgic image of *SD* and *BK* as something of great value – cultural artefacts with a lovable quality. Again, it is crucial that the writers speak in the past tense, which reveals that the beloved games are a part of history instead of a current or newly found interest:

- 39. Wow I loved this game! (B157)
- 40. omg i loved this game so much (S274)
- 41. Loved this game as well (S275)

Comments 39 and 40 both begin with and end in a linguistic feature catering for a nostalgic tone. Conveying surprise and excitement, interjections *wow* (39) and *omg* (40, an acronym for “oh my God”) inform the reader about the writers' emotional response to the nostalgic video material. Secondly, while comment 39 ends in an exclamation mark underlining the statement's affective tone, the commenter in the subsequent example emphasizes his/her affection for the game with the intensifier *so much*.

All in all, *the game as enjoyable* -subrepertoire is comprised of culturally nostalgic comments combining favourable adjectives, the word *favourite*, or the emotion word *love* with a past

time reference, constructing *BK* and *SD* as enjoyable products of the nostalgic past. The examples picked up from the repertoire feature interjections, intensifiers, emoticons and creative punctuation contributing to the nostalgic essence of the messages.

#### 4.2.2 Retro versus new

The second most common subrepertoire of cultural nostalgia represents a *retro versus new* type of discourse. It constructs *BK* and *SD* as culturally valuable retro games, the nostalgic impact of which is largely based on their superiority over newer games. The category includes a total number of 75 comments, and although being significantly less prominent, it is inextricably connected to the *game as enjoyable* -repertoire by portraying the two games as beloved products of the past in a similar manner. However, the *retro versus new* -repertoire differs from *the game as enjoyable* one by also involving negative evaluations of today's games. It is exactly this contrast between favourable evaluations of *BK* and *SD* and unfavourable evaluations of newer video games that constitutes the core of this nostalgic theme.

First of all, the interpretive repertoire of *retro versus new* manifests through overall comments implying that games today are not as good as games used to be. By using *SD* and *BK* as a reference point, the commenters construct arguments distinguishing retro games from newer games in terms of quality and enjoyability. In other words, an opposition is created between the “good old” nostalgic games and newer games that are presented as lacking the characteristics of these bittersweet classics. This comparison is accomplished through talking about video games in relation to the past and the present, using time references such as *childhood* (42), *today* (42), *anymore* (43) and *nowadays* (44). The preposition *like* (42, 43) often functions as a linguistic tool in drawing a dividing line between games back then and games now:

- 42. The game that defined my childhood. I wish games today were more like this. (S50)
- 43. Man they don't make games like this anymore nintendo your our only hope (S47)
- 44. Replaying this for the first time in 15 years or so. Still remember everything, without seeing any gameplay of it within those fifteen years. This is a great game. Great games are too few and far between nowadays. (S48)

Although the examples above might seem relatively different on the surface level, their shared nostalgic comparison of retro games and newer games becomes evident upon closer inspection. Commenter 42 explicitly states his/her wish for *games today* to be more *like* the retro game featured in the video, while commenter 43 dismays about how *games like* the one in the video are not developed *anymore*. The writer of message 44, in turn, praises the retro game as *great* before stating that *nowadays* such games are too hard to find. The interjection *man* at the very beginning of example 43 adds extra emotional emphasis to the nostalgic comment.

In addition to constructing a general image of retro games as superior to newer ones, the commenters elaborate on the claim in more detail. One of the most common arguments arising from the repertoire criticizes the newer versions and developers of *SD* and *BK* for “ruining” the original series. In the following example, for instance, the writer creates a comparison between the original *Spyro the Dragon* and its late modern counterpart, the *Skylanders* series, by first expressing *love* for the original game and then condemning *Spyro's* appearance in the spin off as *horrible*:

- 45. Oh my god. I loved playing this game :D. The grotesque way he looks in the Skylanders series is just horrible. (S175)

By contrasting positive gaming experiences from the past with a negative evaluation of the new *Spyro* character, the commenter promotes an image of the original game as a nostalgic classic with quality features that should not have been altered in *Skylanders*. The nostalgic comment is further emphasized by the interjection *oh my god* and the use of a happy emoticon signaling laughter. Example 46 below addresses the issue of former versus newer game developers in a similar manner:

- 46.** God so much nostalgia just from watching the beginning of this video. Why it took me so long to get to watching this I do not know. On another note, Microsoft ruined Rare forever. DENY IT ALL YOU WANT, YOU KNOW THAT IT IS TRUE! **(B206)**

The comment begins with a straightforward reference to nostalgic affect – the emotion word *nostalgia* – emphasized with the interjection *god* and the intensifier *so much*. After addressing his/her bittersweet sentiments, the writer goes on to argue that *Rare*, the company behind *Banjo-Kazooie*, was irreversibly ruined after *Microsoft* took charge of it. The argument is followed by a provocative, emotionally laden statement written in capital letters and ending in an exclamation mark.

One of the reasons why today's games are represented as inferior to older ones appears to be their perceived lack of nostalgic feeling or passion. Comparing *SD* and *BK* to newer games, writers point out how games today are missing the unique feeling or atmosphere of our beloved retro favourites. In the following example, commenter 47 makes a straightforward reference to nostalgic longing elicited by the gameplay material in question, using the emotion word *nostalgia* itself and employing the intensifier *so much* when thanking the person who uploaded the video. He/she then goes on to argue that, despite their improved qualities, games *nowadays* are not characterized by the same level of passion as *SD* and other classics were. The interjection *dude* serves to emphasize the commenter's emotional engagement, while ellipsis is used to convey a sentimental, contemplating pause in the message:

- 47.** Dude, thank you so much for making this walkthrough...if nothing else just for the sheer nostalgia of it. Games nowadays have improved movement and graphics, but they have no passion like the classic PS1 games. **(S257)**

Some commenters maintain that, besides lacking the nostalgic quality of their predecessors, games today are often poor in their playability. Comment 48 below includes a straightforward reference to missing the days when gaming was simpler and easier, praising the 'good old' consoles from previous generations. The intensifiers *really* and *very* add emotional emphasis to

the condemning evaluation of today's games as unplayable, while the expression 'such a shame' works as a way of intensifying the commenter's overall disappointment towards the matter:

- 48.** not to say games today are bad, but they don't seem to have that nostalgic feeling anymore. That and some games are released being really unplayable and unfinished and very buggy and take a lot of updates to fix. Such a shame. im playing my older game systems more than the new ones. I miss the days where i could buy a game for the good old xbox or ps2 and play, not wait for the game to get updates or be mad that it's too broken to play and wait for them to fix it **(S52)**

The superiority of retro games over newer games is sometimes approached in an even more critical and judgemental tone. By addressing the issue of late modern commercialism and game developers' greediness, several commenters construct games today as been made for the wrong reasons. An opposition is established between newer games as products of cold-hearted capitalism and older games as creations crafted with care and passion. This is done by representing *SD* and *BK* as enjoyable products of the past while describing today's games and their developers with condemning expressions:

- 49.** Its sad to see what was so good has become so terrible and is now only marketing item so people would buy their product **(S304)**
- 50.** I miss games like this... When they weren't made to just try and make money, they actually put love into their games... Probably gonna go buy it again on ebay or something! :) **(S318)**
- 51.** How about I revise Nintendo fan's answer (because he's probably like 10). Mainly old games bosses were better because game developers weren't as greedy and stupid as developers today (for example, Activision nowadays). The greed and stupidity of people today takes away so much available creativity of making games. **(B69)**

By using the emotion word *sad*, commenter 49 provides an explicit account of how he/she feels about *good* games becoming *terrible*. Message 50, in turn, addresses the commenter's longing for *SD* and other games made with *love* as opposed to being produced out of greediness, the intensifier *actually* further underlining the emotional vigor of the entry. In addition, the nostalgic tone of the comment is reinforced by ellipsis sectioning the message, while an exclamation mark and a happy emoticon serve to conclude the account on a positive note. As a response to a non-nostalgic comment from another

user, message 51 characterizes older games' bosses as *better* than those of games today, justifying the argument by criticizing the developers of newer games for being *greedy* and *stupid*. The intensifier *so much* is used for affective emphasis.

Finally, an opposition between retro games and newer games is established by simply addressing specific dissatisfactory features of today's games. Indeed, the data includes several comments in which newer games are represented as being too violent (52), too easy (52, 53), or too long and complex (54). First of all, commenter 52 describes 'games these days' as *garbage*, arguing that children today have no idea about what constitutes a challenging game. On the same note, commenter 53 characterizes today's games as 'too easy' and therefore boring, bolstering the argument by referring to his/her memories of playing the old *Nintendo 64* and 'never getting bored'. Message 54, in turn, involves a straightforward reference to missing the era of *BK*, 'back when' games were simpler and more down-to-earth:

- 52. seriously games these days are such garbage see how many people you can drop in 30 seconds... now spyro was on the easier side but kids these days have 0 clue what a hard game is. im talking spending 3 weeks on one boss fight lmao (**S311**)
- 53. they should make games like this were its hard to beat and take a long time not like todays games were they are to freakin easy and can pass in one freakin day!! i swear no wonder i got bored of games. i still remember i would play the 64 for days and never get bored (**B70**)
- 54. I miss this era of gaming. back when everything wasn't some 500 hour megagame and beyond serious about itself. (**B203**)

The intensifiers *seriously* and *such* add affective emphasis to comment 52 ending in the interjection *lmao* (an abbreviation for "laughing my ass off") further reinforcing the emotional tone of the message. In comment 53, exclamation marks along with the repetition of the intensifier *freaking* serve as vehicles for affective emphasis. Furthermore, the expressions *I swear* and *no wonder* cater for intensifying the commenter's frustration towards today's games, underlining the emotional ferocity of what is being said.

To sum up, the *retro versus new* -subrepertoire consists of culturally nostalgic comments combining favourable evaluations of older games with condemning characterizations of their late modern successors. This is achieved linguistically through talking about the games in contrasting time references and characterizing older games with positive adjectives while labeling newer games in more negative terms. The examples examined feature interjections, intensifiers, emotion words, emoticons and forms of creative punctuation as items of affective emphasis.

### 4.2.3 Connection to other nostalgic games

While the comments in the previous section serve to draw a dividing line between retro games and newer games, the third culturally nostalgic repertoire consists of messages connecting *BK* and *SD* to other nostalgic games. Indeed, a total of 62 comments found in the data situate the games among the wider retro game subculture by establishing a link between them and similar games from the same era. Through straightforward references to memories, past times playing the games, or positive evaluations of the games as products of the past, *BK* and *SD* are represented as culturally nostalgic commodities along with other nostalgically valuable retro games.

First of all, commenters connect *BK* and *SD* to the wider retro game subculture by representing them as nostalgic reminders of other games. The verb *remind* is used to address the memories evoked by the video material, portraying the games as nostalgic products associated with similar interactive retro adventures. In examples 55 and 56 below, *BK* is discursively connected to two other popular 3D platformers of the *Nintendo 64* console: *Conker's Bad Fur Day* (2001) and *Donkey Kong 64* (1999), respectively. When it comes to the use of affective features, comment 55 follows a pattern characteristic of emotional language, beginning with and ending in an interjection (the words *man* and *lol*, the latter an abbreviation for the Internet slang expression “laughing out loud”):

- 55. man this reminds me of conker's bad fur day lol (B213)
- 56. this game reminds me of donkey kong 64 the music the way they fight the feathers etc (B84)

Secondly, *BK* and *SD* are discursively connected to other retro games by means of addressing their nostalgic value as enjoyable products. Indeed, many messages overlap with the *game as enjoyable* -repertoire by evaluating the two games in positive terms while simultaneously situating them among other enjoyable games of the time. These messages are linguistically constructed through the use of past tense combined with a favourable description of the games in question:

- 57. this game and Metal Gear Solid 1 were the BOM back in the day !!! (S56)
- 58. For me the best nintendo 64 games were yoshis story mario kart 007 banjo and kazooie (B159)
- 59. Spyro and Crash Bandicoot were the best playstation 1 characters ever. (S270)

In comment 57, *SD* is discursively connected to *Metal Gear Solid 1*, another *PlayStation 1* game released in the year 1998. The two games are described as the *BOM*, i.e. “the bomb”, a colloquial expression for something excellent or superior, “a success” (*OED* s.v. *n2e*). The capitalization of the word together with multiple exclamation marks concluding the sentence add affective emphasis to the appraisal, while the time expression ‘back in the day’ serves to associate the games with the good old days. Comment 58, on the other hand, describes several *Nintendo 64* retro games as *the best* of the platform, juxtaposing games such as *Yoshi's Story* (1998), *Mario Kart 64* (1996), and *GoldenEye 007* (1997) with *BK*. Similarly, commenter 59 describes *SD* and *Crash Bandicoot* as ‘the best *PlayStation 1* characters ever’, employing the *best ever* -construction familiar from section 4.2.1 as a means of portraying the nostalgic games in a positive light.

Not only do commenters situate *BK* and *SD* among other retro games through portraying them as enjoyable reminders of similar nostalgic classics, but they also discuss the games in relation to one's subjective life history. Indeed, on several occasions, the writers associate *BK* and *SD* with

other nostalgic games through emphasizing their value as retro treasures one used to play in the past. Such comments are often intertwined with personally nostalgic repertoires that will be discussed in chapter 4.3, involving references to several games that served as building blocks in constituting the writer's nostalgic past as a gamer. Most of the messages involve a reference to the commenter's youth and are built around the noun *childhood* (examples 60-62). Moreover, the comments revealed an interesting pattern: whenever *Spyro the Dragon* was discursively connected to other games from the writers' past, *Crash Bandicoot* (hereafter *CB*) was mentioned. Indeed, *CB* is present in the vast majority of messages in which *SD* is talked about in relation to other games – a phenomenon that becomes evident in the following *SD*-related comments:

- 60. omggggg my childhood game. this and crash bandicoot. (S327)
- 61. crash bandicoot, super mario sunshine, legend of zelda windwaker, and this game. that is a description of my childhood (S271)
- 62. This game made up such an important part of my childhood. Ohh the adventures I had in PSX games like Spyro, Legend of Legaia, Crash Bandicoot 3, Final Fantasy 7(... and yes, even Harry Potter 1), and on N64 Zelda:OoT, Super Smash Bros and Super Mario 64. Together with Unreal (which I used to find scary as hell as a kid lol) These games defined who I am today. It's something more recent games haven't managed to do. Thanks for these videos. Thumb up from me! (S312)

In example 60, emotional emphasis is established through the interjection *omg* with repeated letters at the beginning of the message. Comment 62, on the other hand, involves several interjections (*lol* and *oh*, the latter with repeated letters), intensifiers (*such, as hell*) and forms of creative punctuation (ellipsis and exclamation marks) underlining the intensity of the constructed nostalgia.

Lastly, commenters situate *BK* and *SD* in the past among other retro classics by simply talking about the games in the past tense, without connecting them to childhood or another specific point in time. Again, the following examples shed light on the frequency of *CB* references in *SD*-related messages, suggesting a unique cultural connection between the two games. The data seems to indicate that, within the family tree of late 1990's 3D platformers, these two *PlayStation 1* heroes are

situated next to one another on the same branch – providing an example of a strong linkage between different retro games of the same era. The affective tone of comment 63 is reinforced through the emotion word *nostalgic* concluding the sentence along with a happy emoticon signaling laughter:

**63.** i played crash bandicoot 1, 2 and 3 with this game :D nostalgic (**S319**)

**64.** Classic game and used to play it all the time along with crash and jet Moto (**S27**)

In conclusion, *BK* and *SD* are connected to similar culturally nostalgic retro games through straightforward references to memories, past times playing the games, or positive evaluations of the games as products of the past. Commenters connect *BK* and *SD* to other games of the same era by using the verb *remind*, evaluating similar games in favourable terms, and situating related retro games in the past by addressing one's nostalgic gaming experiences. The examples picked up from the data are given emotional emphasis through accompanying interjections, intensifiers, emotion words, emoticons and creative punctuation.

#### 4.2.4 The game as a classic

The fourth and final subrepertoire of cultural nostalgia represents *BK* and *SD* as unique, one of a kind classics of the video game world – enjoyable products of the past intrinsically valuable because of their reputation as old-school platformers. 58 comments in total portray the games as authentic retro products by labeling them with nouns and adjectives denoting a classic status. The comments in this category are notably straightforward in their linguistic content, and they manage to situate *BK* and *SD* in the good old days without the use of past tense, since addressing the games' classic essence serves to convey their past already.

As one might expect, the noun *classic* was frequently used in constructing *SD* and *BK* as nostalgic products. At times the noun occurred solely by itself, such as in message 65, where the accompanying exclamation mark serves to underline the comment's emotional impact:

**65. Classic! (S21)**

In some cases, however, the games' reputation as retro classics was further explained or justified. After first evaluating the music of *SD* in positive terms, commenter 66 goes on to acknowledge the game's classic status, thus implying that the nostalgic appeal of the retro game in question can partly be explained by its good qualities:

**66. good music in a video game can turn it into a classic (S20)**

Commenter 67, in turn, starts by characterizing the game as a 'fine classic' and after that shares a problematic experience about its controls. However, the message ends on a positive note, the writer describing the game as being *great* after all. A total of three happy emoticons scattered around the message serve to establish an air of cheerfulness contributing to a heartwarming nostalgic tone:

**67. Fine classic, right here :3 though I do remember the controls being a bit awkward, but not to the point of annoyance. Just took me a while to get used to them xD Overall great game with awesome sequels :3 (S158)**

In addition to the noun *classic*, the adjective *epic* – a colloquial expression for something “particularly impressive or remarkable” (*OED* s.v. *adj*) – frequently contributes to an image of *SD* and *BK* as nostalgic classics. Some comments (e.g. examples 68 and 69 below) consisted merely of the word *epic* itself, concisely representing the video material as footage from a legendary game. In comment 69, three subsequent exclamation marks are used to emphasize the writer's emotional state:

**68. Epic (B30)****69. epic !!!! (S261)**

Another straightforward description of the game as *epic*, comment 70 involves the taboo word *fucking* as an intensifier for the favourable definition. In addition, the already familiar interjection *lol* at the end of the sentence serves to reinforce the affective vigor of the comment:

**70. this game was fuckin epic lol (B31)**

In message 71, the commenter not only characterizes *SD* as epic, but also expresses nostalgia towards the game in a direct manner. By referring to the *nostalgia tears* caused by *SD*'s soundtrack, the writer establishes a strongly nostalgic image of the game, the affective impact of which is given further emphasis through the intensifier *too many*. Moreover, the comment is sealed with an emoticon signaling laughter, which both reinforces the affective tone and simultaneously establishes a light atmosphere despite the emotional depth of the message:

**71.** Game is epic and soundtrack causes too many nostalgia tears :D (S25)

Thirdly, the games' reputation as retro classics is acknowledged in the comments also through the use of adjectives *old* and *old-school*. In message 72, both adjectives are adopted as a means of constructing the game as a cult status product. Moreover, the nostalgic message is topped with the interjection *haha* mimicking the FtF qualities of laughter:

**72.** old school my old game haha (S259)

In examples 73 and 74 below, *SD* is represented as a nostalgic classic through the use of the word *old* combined with a positively toned adjective (*gold* and *good*, respectively). These combinations establish an image of the game as a retro classic that, despite its old age, is to be appreciated as a valuable one of a kind commodity:

**73.** Old is Gold<3 (S28)

**74.** This Gnorc turned all adult dragons into crystals...and was defeated by a mere baby dragon. Good old games. (S265)

When it comes to affective language, the heart symbol (<3) used at the end of message 73 represents a creative form of punctuation commonly encountered in online environments. The symbol is often used in CMC to denote love and appreciation, and in this context it serves as an affective linguistic tool underlining the nostalgic words preceding it. In comment 74, in turn, the use of ellipsis in the middle of the sentence establishes a contemplating tone contributing to the nostalgic construction.

Finally, some commenters represented the games as retro classics in more unexpected word choices. The writer of message 75 does this by describing *SD* with the affective demonstrative ‘that game back then’, situating the game at a point in history while emphasizing its unique cultural role. Example 76 serves a similar function, characterizing *SD* as ‘the real *Spyro the Dragon*’, thus implying that the newer sequels of *SD* do not compare to the original game. As such, both of the comments can be regarded as closely overlapping with the *retro versus new* repertoire discussed earlier.

**75.** Spyro was that game back then. (S24)

**76.** the real spyro the dragon (S22)

All in all, the game as a classic -subrepertoire is comprised of culturally nostalgic comments labeling *BK* and *SD* as uniquely valuable 1990s platformers. This is achieved linguistically through the use of the noun *classic* and the adjectives *epic*, *old(-school)* and *real*. The affective tone of the messages analyzed is given prominence by accompanying interjections, intensifiers, emotion words, symbols, emoticons, and forms of creative punctuation.

#### **4.2.5 Cultural retro game nostalgia: a summary**

369 comments analyzed – a total of 39.3% of the corpus – represent an interpretive repertoire that emphasizes the nature of *BK* and *SD* as culturally nostalgic retro games, enjoyable classics superior to today’s games. The group of culturally nostalgic comments was categorized into four subrepertoires, of which *the game as enjoyable* -repertoire was clearly the most common theme with 175 instances. The three remaining repertoires – *retro versus new* (75 inst.), *connection to other nostalgic games* (62 inst.), and *the game as a classic* (58 inst.) – differed only slightly in terms of frequency. All in all, commenters construct *BK* and *SD* as culturally nostalgic by referring to...

- nostalgia, memories, or longing
  - emotion words *nostalgia*, *nostalgic*, and *miss*
  - verb *remind*
- positive characteristics of the game as a product of the past
  - favourable adjectives, the word *favourite*, or the verb *love* + past time reference
  - noun *classic*
  - adjectives *epic*, *real* and *old(-school)*
  - affective demonstrative
- past times playing the game
  - reference to the game + reference to past time

The 53 culturally nostalgic comments examined feature a total of 9 different emotion words, 13 interjections, and 18 intensifiers. The word *love* was clearly the most frequently used emotion word, occurring in 5 messages. In the case of interjections and intensifiers, in turn, two affective items were equally common: the interjections *lol* and *man* with three occurrences and the intensifiers *freaking* and *so much* with four instances. Creative punctuation was particularly common in the form of exclamation marks and repetition, while the use of emoticons was restricted solely to happy faces. Table 4 summarizes the affective linguistic items used in culturally nostalgic comments:

**Table 4.** Features of affective language contributing to the culturally nostalgic examples examined.

Emotion words	Interjections	Intensifiers	Punctuation	Emoticons
<i>love</i> (5) <i>nostalgia</i> (2) <i>nostalgic</i> (2) <i>miss</i> (2) <i>enjoyable</i> (1) <i>joyous</i> (1) <i>lovable</i> (1) <i>passion</i> (1) <i>sad</i> (1)	<i>lol</i> (3) <i>man</i> (3) <i>ah</i> (2) <i>dude</i> (2) <i>omg</i> (2) <i>aww</i> (1) <i>damn</i> (1) <i>God</i> (1) <i>haha</i> (1) <i>lmao</i> (1) <i>oh</i> (1) <i>oh my God</i> (1) <i>wow</i> (1)	<i>freaking</i> (4) <i>so much</i> (4) <i>easily</i> (2) <i>such</i> (2) <i>absolutely</i> (1) <i>actually</i> (1) <i>as hell</i> (1) <i>even</i> (1) <i>fucking</i> (1) <i>hands down</i> (1) <i>I swear</i> (1) <i>no wonder</i> (1) <i>really</i> (1) <i>seriously</i> (1) <i>so many</i> (1) <i>such a shame</i> (1) <i>too many</i> (1) <i>very</i> (1)	<i>excl. marks</i> (12) <i>repetition</i> (11) <i>capitalization</i> (4) <i>heart symbol</i> (1)	<i>happy</i> (8)

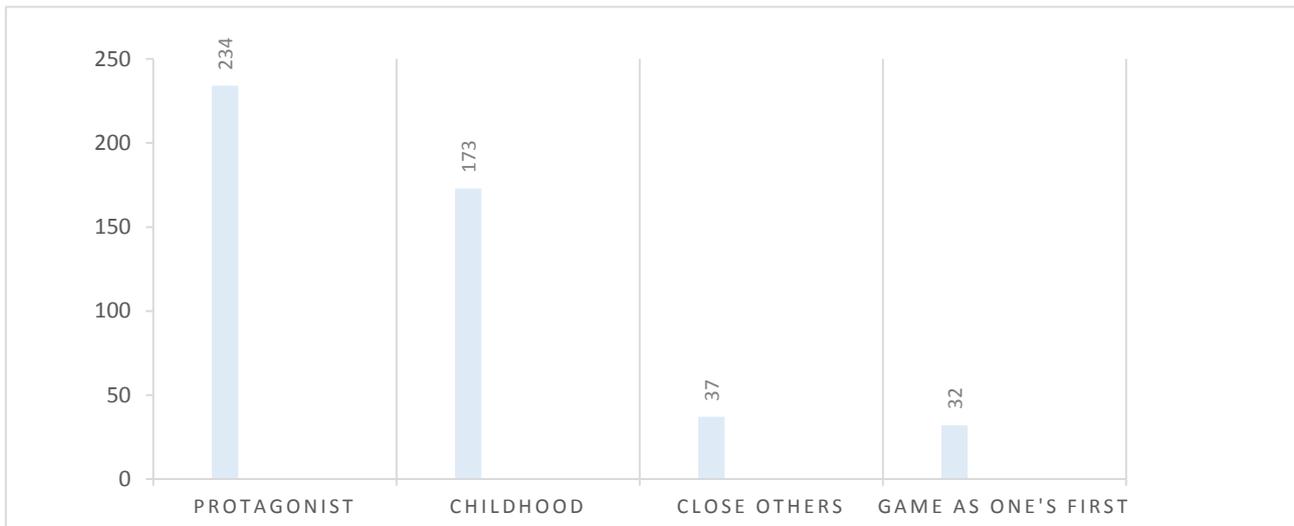
### 4.3 Personal retro game nostalgia

The third main interpretive repertoire, personal retro game nostalgia, covers a total of 477 comments and constitutes 50.9 percent of the corpus. It is the most prominent discursive theme emerging from the data, representing the most common means of constructing nostalgia towards the two retro games under analysis. Similarly to the culturally nostalgic comments examined in the previous chapter, messages constructing personal nostalgia provide further justification for the nostalgic essence of *Spyro the Dragon* and *Banjo-Kazooie*. In other words, as opposed to generally nostalgic messages, comments representing personal nostalgia are linked to broader distinguishable themes underlining the games' nostalgic impact such as in the case of cultural nostalgia.

Whereas cultural nostalgia emphasizes the nostalgic potential of the games as representatives of a retro game culture, personally nostalgic comments are focused on the games' affective significance for *their players* – that is, the commenters themselves. Messages categorized as personally nostalgic approach the concept of retro game nostalgia from an inherently personal perspective, recounting the commenters' subjective nostalgic memories concerning the games. Instead of focusing on the games' role in the cultural history of video gaming, personally nostalgic comments dig deeper into their writers' *own* life histories and living rooms. Accordingly, they are all linguistically constructed through references to past gaming experiences.

I was able to distinguish four types of personally nostalgic subrepertoires, all of which emphasize the games' nostalgic value for the commenters from a different perspective. Of these, one repertoire – *commenter as protagonist* – stood out as significantly more common than the others. The prominence of each personally nostalgic interpretive repertoire is illustrated in figure 2 below, after which the four discursive themes are examined in more detail in order of frequency.

**Figure 2.** Personally nostalgic subrepertoires and their number of occurrences in the data.



#### 4.3.1 Commenter as protagonist

By far the most common subrepertoire emerging from the nostalgic accounts is focused on the commenter's role as a protagonist. With a total of 234 occurrences, the repertoire is the most common when taking into account all nostalgic themes found in the data, outnumbering the most prominent culturally nostalgic repertoire by 59 comments. The *commenter as protagonist* theme is centered on the games' nostalgic value as a personally significant challenge and a meaningful gaming experience for the player. It represents the games as nostalgic because of the vivid adventures they provide, their longed-for imaginary worlds and challenging – yet rewarding – in-game tasks. Indeed, the repertoire appears to be inextricably rooted in the nostalgic potential behind the adventure, exploration and problem-solving qualities of *SD* and *BK*, underlining the importance of gameplay for building and maintaining a coherent identity. In practice, the repertoire is constructed by referring to the games in the past tense while representing the self as an active and central player.

The following comments serve as adequate examples of the type of discourse characterizing the *commenter as protagonist* -repertoire. Firstly, commenter 78 shares anecdotal

information about playing *BK* after schooldays, also referring to his/her own year of birth and thus situating the gaming experience within a subjective lifespan on a more general scale. Message 79, on the other hand, concisely addresses how the writer *used to* play the game daily in the past. In comment 80, in turn, the role of the player as a protagonist is established through the word *replay* – a verb indicating that the commenter has played the game more or less actively before.

78. FANTASTIC!!!!!!!!!!!!!! I was born in '88 and I remember rushing home from school just to play this all night LOL :) (B15)
79. banjo kazooie god i used to play this game every day (B411)
80. I WANT TO REPLAY THIS GAME!!!!!! (S473)

The use of capitalization and repeated exclamation marks adds notable emotional emphasis to comments 78 and 80. By capitalizing the positively evaluative adjective *fantastic* at the beginning of the message, commenter 78 establishes a vividly nostalgic tone that is further reinforced by a total of 15 subsequent exclamation marks. Furthermore, the comment is concluded with the interjection *lol* (also capitalized) and a smiling emoticon representing the expressed longing as heartwarming. Whereas commenter 78 only capitalizes single words from the message, the writer of comment 80 takes affective emphasis to another level by capitalizing the nostalgic account in its entirety. In comment 79, on the other hand, the recounted gaming experience is given affective prominence through the use of the interjection *god*.

Interestingly, the vast majority of comments in the *commenter as protagonist* -repertoire address the issue of game difficulty, focusing on the gamers' ability or inability to overcome the in-game tasks and challenges of *BK* and *SD*. Indeed, most commenters appear to have something to say about how they used to manage the games' various difficulties – surprisingly many of them admitting to not have been able to solve certain tasks or problems. This is intriguing, since the fact that the players have not succeeded in completing certain parts of the game contradicts with the conventional view of a protagonist as someone who triumphantly overcomes challenges. Despite the recounted

difficulties, however, the gaming experiences in question are always presented in a positive light through the use of linguistic devices such as favourable adjectives (*great*, 83), the verb *love* (81, 84), or happy emoticons (82):

- 81. i first played this game when i was 5 and i loved it but never beat it (B430)
- 82. wow i remember this game!! :D used to play it alot but never completed it :( (B488)
- 83. this was a great game. Nice job on beating that wicked witch. I never did. (B501)
- 84. I loved spyro soo much but I could never get past the third level but I was like four (S399)

With their positively toned characterization of the games, the comments above can be regarded as overlapping with *the game as enjoyable* -repertoire. By situating the games in the past and using the word *never* in describing their difficulties, commenters recollect challenging gameplay experiences from their past – simultaneously painting a heartwarming picture of those experiences as personally meaningful. In addition to featuring the emotion word *love* (comments 81 and 84), the examples above are given emotional emphasis through the use of the interjection *wow* (82), the intensifier *so much* (84), repeated exclamation marks (82), and happy and sad emoticons (82).

The discursive pattern of recollecting gameplay difficulties while characterizing the challenging game positively repeats itself in numerous comments. This pattern becomes particularly apparent in the five messages presented below, all of which begin by addressing a specific hardship encountered in the game yet end in a favourable characterization of the nostalgic gameplay experiences in question. While comment 85 is concluded with a positive description of the game as *epic* and *best ever* – an appraisal already familiar from *the game as enjoyable* -repertoire, commenters 86 and 88 end their nostalgic messages in a description of their challenging gaming days as *good times*. In comment 87, in turn, the experience of gameplay difficulty is juxtaposed with positive nostalgic affect through the use of the interjection *ah* (with repeated letters) combined with a reference to memories. Lastly, by stating how he/she ‘does not regret one second’ of gameplay, the writer of

message 89 establishes an image of the game as a meaningful subjective experience despite all the effort required in order to complete it.

- 85. First time I played it, it took me a long time to get all jiggies to open that fucking door... but it was totally worth it, this boss-fight is the most epic, difficult and best ever!!! (B320)
- 86. I remember those metal chests and hitting them at the wrong angle and getting juttet off the side into a chasm haha good times (S600)
- 87. really was a pain in the ass to kill her took me like 17x literally..ahhhh memories! (B25)
- 88. I remember when i played this game on the demo disk that came with the system, i didnt understand that you couldn't beat games on the demo disk and played the same level for months trying to figure out how to progress... Good times (S580)
- 89. this really was the first game that took me months to finish it and i dont regret one second (B76)

When it comes to affective language features, intensifiers are used to underline the nostalgic tone of three of the examples above: *fucking* and *totally* in comment 85, *really* in 87 and 89, and *literally* in 87. The interjections *haha* (86) and *ah* (87, with repeated letters) – already familiar from several comments examined previously – continue to occur in the writers' nostalgic reminiscences. Exclamation marks are used in examples 85 and 87 as a way of concluding a nostalgic comment on a triumphant note, while ellipsis in comments 85, 87 and 88 functions as a contemplating pause that paves the way for subsequent words.

Although numerous commenters' nostalgic experiences as a protagonist are overshadowed by their inability to overcome certain in-game challenges, some messages indicate that, despite struggles and hardships, the player had eventually been able to complete the game. Indeed, several comments constructing the commenter as a protagonist acknowledge the hard work that finally led to gratifying accomplishments and a sense of personal achievement for the player. These comments are constructed through references to past gaming experiences, not only addressing

the writer's ability to overcome the game's difficulties, but also illuminating the efforts needed in order for that to happen:

90. This game of bear and bird was great, I always played it staying up late. Gruntilda's traps were cunningly planned, But I outwitted her with the upper hand (B752)
91. Loved this game, couldn't beat it when I was like seven, but after a while, bam, beat it like a champ. I freaking loved it. (B756)
92. i was so proud of myself when i finally figured out how to beat spyro (S209)
93. dude you make this battle look easy! It took me like 20 tries before I finally beat her! I was starting to get really pissed! but then I fought her again, and I won, I freakin jumped for joy! and I am not joking either lol (B37)
94. I remember that I tried to beat this 3492304923042 times, and finally I did it. (B804)
95. i remember this game, damn it was so hard but im glad i beat it (B616)

In addition to the intensifier *finally* (92-94), other features of affective language occur in the examples above. First of all, the emotion word *love* is used repeatedly in comment 91, and combined with the intensifier *freaking* it helps to establish an air of bittersweet sentimentality for the nostalgic comment. The word *freaking* also appears in comment 93, emphasizing the writer's experience of *joy* after completing the game. In addition to the noun *joy*, message 93 features another emotion word used in constructing the commenter's feelings – the verb *pissed*, meaning “angry, irritated” (OED s.v. *adj3*), further emphasized with the intensifier *really*. Commenter 93 also uses multiple exclamation marks and the interjection *lol* in constructing his/her message as a piece of affective CMC. In message 95, the interjection *damn* and the intensifier *so* are used as potent linguistic tools in underlining the nature of *BK* as a difficult game, while commenter 92 uses the emotion word *proud* when describing how he/she felt upon completing *SD*.

During the process of examining comments constructing the games as difficult, a distinguishable pattern concerning the two games emerged. When inspecting messages addressing the issue of in-game difficulty, the prominence of *BK*-related comments became evident. Indeed, a

significantly large number of comments could be regarded as representing *Banjo-Kazooie* as a challenging video game, whereas *Spyro the Dragon* -related messages rarely constructed the game as difficult. In other words, out of the two nostalgic games under analysis, *BK* was more likely to be characterized as a tricky one in the comments examined, which might serve as an explanation for why *SD* elicited 14% more nostalgia than *BK*. As a less challenging game – particularly for children – *SD* is likely to make its players feel more successful and thus bolster their role as a triumphant protagonist in a more distinct manner.

Lastly, not only do the commenters address their hardships concerning the games, but they also recount overall good memories of playing *BK* and *SD*. Some individuals construct themselves as a protagonist by sharing delightful gameplay experiences from their past and representing the games in a positive light through such reminiscences. In the examples below, two commenters share a similar nostalgic experience about the central gameplay task in *SD*: rescuing dragons trapped in crystal. Commenter 96 describes finding dragons as ‘the coolest thing ever’, while the writer of message 97 discursively connects the task of unfreezing the dragons with a nostalgic description of the good old times:

- 96. i just remember when i first played the game all the way through, i always thought finding the dragons was the coolest thing ever. The statues looked sweet and the color of em was awesome! (S901)
- 97. this game is so nostalgic still have this game i remember unfreezing all the dragons ahhh good times (S726)

The exclamation mark concluding comment 96 serves to effectively underline the positive description of the recounted gameplay experience. In the latter example, the emotion word *nostalgia* – further emphasized with the intensifier *so* – is used to address the writer’s feeling state in a concise manner, while the interjection *ah* with repeated letters adds to the comment’s heartwarming sentimentality.

To sum up, the commenter as protagonist -subrepertoire is comprised of personally nostalgic comments representing *BK* and *SD* as challenging adventures in which the writer remembers

having the role of a protagonist. This is achieved linguistically through talking about the games in the past tense or using the verb *replay* while representing the self as an active player. The affective tone of the messages analyzed is given prominence by accompanying interjections, intensifiers, emotion words, emoticons, and forms of creative punctuation.

### 4.3.2 Childhood nostalgia

When examining the discursive and thematic components of personal retro game nostalgia, the concept of childhood is one that naturally surfaces because of its widely acknowledged connection to video gaming in our society. Indeed, as in nostalgic experience on a general scale, childhood as a longed-for life stage plays an important part in *BK* and *SD* -related retro game nostalgia. The type of bittersweet discourse elicited by the two games under discussion appears to be inextricably linked to childhood as a particularly nostalgic era, childhood nostalgia constituting the third most common interpretive repertoire in the whole data. The 173 comments in the childhood repertoire underline the personal relevance of *BK* and *SD* for the commenters as beloved pastimes from their formative years, and they are constructed in two main ways: either through addressing the concept of childhood in a direct manner, or through talking about the games while referring to a young age more indirectly.

First of all, the most straightforward way in which childhood nostalgia manifests in the comments is through the noun *childhood* itself. The noun is frequently encountered in the data analyzed, and the comments featuring it tend to be characterized by several linguistic items conveying emotional upheaval. Examples 98-102 below illustrate the potential affective intensity of the nostalgic childhood references elicited by the material, starting with a relatively standard form of referring to one's childhood and gradually evolving to more explicitly sentimental nostalgic descriptions. The examples in question are concise references to the commenters' formative years of playing the games, not involving any further details about the nostalgic era under discussion:

- 98. my childhood (B16)
- 99. My favourite childhood game <3 (S58)
- 100. OH...MMYGGODD. Childhood..... (S59)
- 101. CHILDDDDDDDDHHOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOODDDD (S234)
- 102. THIS IS THE GAME OF MY CHILDHOOD!!!! (S506)

The messages above illustrate how even the most concise accounts of childhood nostalgia are laden with features of affective language reinforcing their sentimental tone. In expressing their nostalgic feeling states online, the commenters in question seem to draw from creative CMC in particular as a way of compensating for the auditory and gestural cues of FtF interaction. The forms of creative CMC present in the previous examples include the use of ellipsis (100), capitalization (100-102), multiple exclamation marks (102), and repeated letters (100-101). In addition, the heart symbol concluding message 99 has an affective function as a linguistic item underlining the fondness of the preceding nostalgic sentence. Furthermore, the interjection *oh my god* commonly encountered in the nostalgic constructions analyzed in this thesis adds affective emphasis to comment number 100.

Numerous direct references to childhood found in the comments follow an intriguing pattern. The writers often represent the gameplay video in question as *comprising their childhood*, thus awarding extra emphasis to the role of *SD* and *BK* in their youth. These commenters address their nostalgic memories of the games by referring to the duration of the gameplay video, stating how it serves to encapsulate their whole childhood or at least a significant part of it. Messages 103-105 below exemplify this decidedly nostalgic discursive pattern:

- 103. My childhood in 2:00:14 .. (S669)
- 104. My whole childhood... in just 4 hours and 23 minutes... 0\_0 (S90)
- 105. well...you just wrapped up about 2 years of my childhood into 2 hours...impressive (B20)

Ellipsis is used in each of the examples above as a way of reinforcing the wistful and bittersweet atmosphere of the comments. Similarly, the emoticon at the end of message 104 conveys amazement and astonishment, which serves to underline the affective intensity of the entire nostalgic message.

In addition, the repertoire of childhood nostalgia is constructed in the comments through general accounts about the video material eliciting heartwarming childhood memories. Several messages in the comment sections feature an expression such as *bring back* (examples 106-108 below) or *come back* (example 109) in connection with the noun *childhood* or *memories*, thus addressing the nostalgic effect of the audiovisual gameplay material:

**106.** Brings back the childhood :') (S455)

**107.** This brings back some fond childhood memories. (S456)

**108.** OMG this totally brings back memories from when i was about 4-5!!!!!!! :) (S171)

**109.** omg so much memories coming back to me! Its so overwhelming lmao! MY CHILDHOOD :) (S220)

The previous comments are characterized by notable features of affective language contributing to their sentimental nature. Firstly, the bittersweet (106) and happy (108-109) emoticons at the end of three of the above messages establish a particularly fond atmosphere for the expressed nostalgia. Secondly, comment 107 – while lacking the emoticons used in the other examples – underlines the conveyed nostalgic affect with the emotion word *fond* itself. In addition, the use of exclamation marks and the capitalization of specific words with nostalgic relevance in messages 108 and 109 illustrate the nostalgic potential of creative punctuation. The latter two comments are also accompanied by the word *omg*, an interjection already encountered several times in this thesis, as well as by the intensifiers *totally* (108), *so much* and *so* (109). Furthermore, by constructing his/her affective state as *overwhelming* and concluding the characterization with the interjection *lmao*, commenter 109 calls for extra emotional emphasis to the positively toned nostalgic account.

The following comment stands out as an exceptionally comprehensive description of childhood nostalgia elicited by the video material. The writer in question not only addresses the type of nostalgia evoked in a particularly straightforward manner, but also draws attention to the soothing effect of nostalgic gameplay videos in general. The interjection *man* establishes a sentimental tone for the comment right from the beginning, whereas the emotion word *nostalgic* provides a concise discursive categorization for the emotional experience in question. Moreover, the message is concluded with a description of such childhood nostalgia as *awesome*, which further emphasizes the delightful sentimentality of the construction:

- 110.** Man, somehow watching these perfect speed runs of games i played as a child relaxes me. Reminds me of my childhood and makes me nostalgic. It's awesome. (B560)

Besides generally reminiscing about playing *SD* and *BK* in their youth, the commenters often establish a discursive timespan between their nostalgic childhood experiences and the present moment. Indeed, some messages analyzed involve a reference to a certain age when the commenters used to play the game, connecting the nostalgic childhood memory from that point in time with their current self. Talking about the game in the past tense and bridging their nostalgic memories to the present with the time reference *still*, the commenters in the following examples emphasize the profound impact of *SD* on their lives. The writers construct their identities as retro gamers by stating how, after all these years, they still *play* (111) the game and are *in love with* it (112):

- 111.** Dude I still have my original disc I got when I was like 6 and still play it lol, mostly for nostalgia though haha :) (S111)
- 112.** OMG I played this game when I was 6 years old or something and I'm still in love with it... childhood (S306)

In comment 111, the interjections *dude*, *lol*, and *haha* combined with the use of a happy emoticon serve to compose a particularly alluring nostalgic construction. Similarly, the capitalized interjection

*omg* at the beginning of message 112 provides affective emphasis for the subsequent nostalgic reminiscence, whereas ellipsis gives further prominence to the word *childhood* concluding the utterance.

The commenters construct childhood-related retro game nostalgia in their comments also by expressing a willingness to return to their youth. The following examples illustrate how *SD* and *BK*-related video material elicits nostalgic messages directly stating how much the writers wish to relive their childhood gaming experiences. While comments 114 and 115 can be regarded as relatively straightforward ways of expressing the commenters' nostalgic longing, message 113 begins with the commenter sharing a specific memory concerning the game, only after which the bittersweet yearning is directly verbalized. Once again, the interjection *damn* paves the way for an emotionally laden sentence (113), while capital letters and repeated exclamation marks are used to add an aggressively affective tone for a nostalgic account (115):

**113.** I remember playing this till it got scratched all to hell. Then I bought another copy and then played that till it got scratched all to hell also. Damn, I wish I was 6 years old again. (S307)

**114.** i miss my childhood (S68)

**115.** I WANT MY CHILDHOOD BACK!!!! (B622)

It is worth noting that the latter of the above examples is strikingly similar to one of the generally nostalgic messages analyzed in section 4.1. Indeed, example number 23, "I NEED MY PSX'S BACK!!!!", follows a similar discursive pattern to that of comment 115 – the object of nostalgia being a gaming platform in the former, childhood as a life stage in the latter. Furthermore, the writers of the two comments use the same forms of creative punctuation (capitalizing the whole sentence and concluding it with multiple exclamation marks) in underlining the affective tone of their messages. This similarity exemplifies the uniform features of the nostalgic language use of different individuals.

Similarly to the previous examples, the writers of the following two comments express their yearning to play the games again. Indeed, comments 116 and 117 below construct childhood

nostalgia by addressing the writers' past gaming experiences as well as their intention to relive those nostalgic experiences in practice. Reminiscing his/her elementary school days playing the game, commenter 116 refers to the act of crying by using the emotion verb *tear up*, which further reinforces the expressed sentimentality. Commenter 117, in turn, confesses *feeling old* while stating how 'it's been ages' since he/she played the game – thus situating the gameplay experiences in the good old childhood days without actually referring to the exact life phase:

**116.** Watching this actually made me tear up. I remember I used to play it every day after school in elementary school :) Just hearing the sound track makes me tear up. I think I'm gonna play it now<3 (S795)

**117.** oh my lord, its been ages dude. i feel so old lol. im going to be playing this stuff again. (S907)

The sentimentality of commenter 116 becomes particularly evident in the form of affective language: the intensifier *actually*, the bittersweet emoticon at the end of the second sentence, and the heart symbol concluding the message. Similarly, through the use of affective intensifiers *oh my Lord, dude* and *lol*, example 117 underlines the commenter's state of nostalgic bewilderment.

Finally, before moving on to the next interpretive repertoire to be discussed in this thesis, an especially intriguing example of childhood nostalgia needs to be presented. During the process of close reading, I was able to detect a particularly notable linguistic pattern within the childhood repertoire – one that conceptualizes the commenters' lifespan in a cleverly constructive fashion. These comments involve a reference to two specific points in time: the time of writing the nostalgic message (i.e. the present moment) *and* the time when the commenters used to play the game in question. Instead of vaguely alluding to the past and the present, the commenters mention both their current age and the age they were when playing the game in their childhood. By juxtaposing these two life phases, the commenters establish a discursive timespan underlining their identity as gamers:

- 118.** When I was 4 years old (as I am now 14) I used to play this game for hours and hours on end. Ahh, the memories. Sweet, sweet memories. (S227)
- 119.** this is soooo nostalgic for me. I played this when i was like 4 but i still remember every single thing in the game. I'm 17 now (S654)
- 120.** wow for a spyro game that's 16 years old, the graphics has aged well. i remember when i was around 6 or 7 loving the spyro trilogy ( year of the dragon remains my ultimate favorite ) now im 20 years of age remembering the nostalgic times of the 90's to 2000's (S19)

The comments above are characterized by linguistic items further enhancing their glorified portrayal of childhood gaming experiences. First of all, message 118 involves repetition of several nostalgically relevant words: the noun *hours* (emphasizing the amount of time spent playing the game as a child), the noun *memories* (drawing attention to the nostalgic reminiscences about childhood gaming experiences), and the adjective *sweet* (underlining the delightful nature of those gameplay memories). Moreover, the affective interjection *ah* with repeated letters adds extra emphasis to the expression of longing. In comment 119, in turn, the emotion word *nostalgia* is used as a way of concisely verbalizing the felt sentiment and emphasized with the preceding intensifier *so* (with repeated letters as well). Finally, message 120 begins with the already very familiar interjection *wow*, also featuring the emotion words *love* and *nostalgic* encountered several times thus far in this thesis.

All in all, the commenters construct *BK* and *SD* as personally nostalgic through discursively situating the games in their childhood. Through recounting gameplay experiences from their formative years, the writers incorporate the games in their subjective lifespan as essential and beloved constituents of their identity. In practice, this is done by addressing the concept of childhood directly or indirectly in connection with the nostalgic games. The affective tone of the messages is emphasized through the use of interjections, intensifiers, emotion words, emoticons, symbols, and forms of creative punctuation.

### 4.3.3 Close others

After discussing the two notably most prominent repertoires of personal nostalgia, it is time to move on to the subrepertoires with less exposure in the material. This section examines a discursive theme generally acknowledged as a significant component of nostalgic experience: the presence of close others in nostalgic reminiscences. A total of 37 comments found in the data incorporate other people in the writers' nostalgic accounts, representing loved ones as having a meaningful role in specific moments of gaming. The comments are linguistically constructed through references to past times playing the game, simultaneously involving other people in the shared nostalgic anecdotes.

First of all, a vast majority of the messages in this repertoire feature immediate family members – fathers, mothers and siblings – and recount events of playing *with* them as an active protagonist, as a part of a family team. Involving valued others with whom to pass the controller back and forth, the messages emphasize the essence of gaming as a shared task or challenge – in Madigan's (2013) terms, a “couch co-op experience”. Such family-related gameplay memories are at the heart of the following nostalgic examples:

- 133.** When I was little my mom and I would play this game back and forth for hours!! T\_T Good times!!! (B232)
- 134.** I remember we used to play this game as a family; my dad was amazing at chasing Gnasty, and I was the best at the little platforms. (S360)
- 135.** Spyro was the first PS1 game of my brother, Christmas present of 1996... We completed the game together... (S335)
- 136.** lol it took me and my dad 4eva to beat her in the first game, now u beat her so easy it puts my video gaming family to shame XD (B103)

CMC-specific affective features can be regarded as playing a significant part in the messages above. In comment 133, multiple exclamation marks serve to emphasize the emotional anecdote as a whole, while the crying emoticon at the end of the first sentence reinforces the established sentimental effect. In message 135, ellipsis creates an air of contemplativeness in the nostalgic account by imitating

pauses characteristic of FtF communication, while comment 136 begins with the affective interjection *lol* and ends in a laughing emoticon.

In addition to reminiscing about playing with family members as a team, commenters remember *observing* the gameplay of close others. Indeed, perhaps surprisingly, members of immediate family feature in the nostalgic accounts also as main protagonists who are in charge of the nostalgic gameplay situation. However, these comments include an additional nostalgic dimension by overlapping with the *commenter as protagonist* -repertoire in an extraordinary manner: while each of the messages start by representing the commenter as a casual observer, they all end in a description of him/her as *stepping into the role of the protagonist* – gradually being socialized into the culture of gaming. The three strikingly similar comments below exemplify this unique discursive pattern of personal retro game nostalgia, featuring the commenter’s brother as the active party:

- 137.** this brings back memories! I used to love watching my brother play it when I was a toddler, then played it myself when I was older :D and crash bash (**S329**)
- 138.** I can’t believe I actually watched this whole thing. I used to love watching my brother play spyro and another fighting game which I don't remember, but after he’d beat all the big guys he’d let me go around and collect the left over Jewels (**S330**)
- 139.** I remember sitting in my brother’s room, watching him play Spyro the dragon and another game called Tomb Raider. He would always let me hold the controller when we free a dragon because the controller would always vibrate. They were wonderful memories (**S81**)

When it comes to affective vocabulary, both commenters 137 and 138 use the “I used to love” - construction in recounting their nostalgic gameplay experiences of watching a brother play. Such as in numerous comments examined previously in this thesis, the emotion word *love* establishes a heartwarming sentimental tone, emphasized by the use of an exclamation mark and a happy emoticon in comment 137. In addition, the writer of message 138 uses the intensifier *actually* as a way of underlining his/her emotional disbelief about watching the entire video, simultaneously contributing to the nostalgic nature of the comment as a whole.

Rather ironically, close family members feature in commenters' nostalgic accounts not only as gameplay companions but also as actors prohibiting one from playing. Indeed, the data includes several comments constructing *SD* and *BK* as nostalgic games that one can no longer play due to certain intentional or unintentional activities of family members. Providing an effective example of this, the writer of the following nostalgic message expresses intense frustration over being deprived of *SD*:

**140.** I MISS THIS GAME SO MUCH. IT WAS MY CHILD HOOD OK??? I'M PISSED. MY BROTHER SOLD ALL MY GAMES WITH OUT TELLING ME, AND ONLY GOT THREE FUCKING DOLLARS. THATS THE DEFINITION OF PAIN (S63)

Written entirely in capital letters, featuring multiple question marks and the intensifier  *fucking*, the above comment serves to convey emotional upheaval in a distinct manner. Moreover, the message includes two straightforward references to affective states – being *pissed* (i.e. angry or irritated) and experiencing emotional *pain* – while the intensifier *so much* further underlines the writer's longing towards the nostalgic game.

Sharing similar scenarios about a family member selling the game without one's consent, the writers of the following messages serve to construct a nostalgic subconversation within the data. In other words, messages 142 and 143 are direct responses to the nostalgic accounts preceding them, establishing a linear affective discussion in the comment section:

**141.** Everytime I watch this, it makes me sad that dad sold my N64 and games without telling me ): (B240)

**142.** that happened to me too! i was like 7 and i told him not to sell it, my VERY FIRST GAMING SYSTEM (B241)

**143.** Omg dude, you have it easy, my mom gave away all my N64 AND Gamecube games D: (B242)

The emotion word *sad* combined with the use of an unhappy emoticon emphasizes the bittersweet tone of comment 141. Similarly, the nostalgic state of the latter two commenters manifests in affective

language features such as capitalization and exclamation marks (142), interjections *omg* and *dude* (143), the intensifier *very* (142), and an unhappy emoticon (143). It is important to note that, although the above examined accounts involve a seemingly unfortunate event in which the beloved game is lost, they are nevertheless to be considered as personally meaningful and nostalgic. While the recounted events may not have been pleasant in nature, they contribute to the writers' identity as gamers by constituting a significant point in their gameplay history – a fact that becomes particularly evident in the commenters' decision to share these experiences online.

Although being present in the vast majority of comments in this repertoire, parents and siblings are not the only kin to be found in the messages posted. Other relatives feature in the writers' nostalgic reminiscences as well, often in contexts similar to those discussed previously in this section. In the messages below, relatives outside the immediate family (cousin, grandmother and aunt, respectively) are depicted as people whom the commenter observes playing (145), from whom the game is received (146), or whom are responsible for the commenter being deprived of the game (147):

- 144.** I had so much fun watching my cousin play this when he would come over in the summers.. **(B105)**
- 145.** I use to love this game as a kid!!!! I was so amazed by this. I remember this was my First Playstation Game Ever. My Grandma brought it for me along with the raging Playstation Console that came out the year of 1998 **(S38)**
- 146.** I have the PS1 but my aunt took all of the games back when I was 6. Including this game. I miss it so much. (( I'm 15 now btw )) It was my favorite game. :') **(S357)**

Similarly to the intensifier *so much* in comments 144 and 146, ellipsis (144) and a bittersweet emoticon (146) emphasize the writers' nostalgic sentimentality. The affective tone of message 145, in turn, is given prominence by the emotion words *love* and *amazed (by)*, the intensifier *so*, and the use of multiple exclamation marks.

Surprisingly perhaps, only a single nostalgic comment in the data includes a reference to the writer's friends, also being the only message featuring a person outside the commenter's kin.

Moreover, it is worth noting that the comment in question does not exclusively acknowledge the friend's presence in the gaming experience, but instead implies it by referring to the friend's console as the gaming platform used. This rare nostalgic account incorporating a friend – concluded on a positive note through the use of ellipsis and a happy, playful emoticon – is presented below:

**147.** I still remember how I played this, Crash 3, and some other games on my friends PS1. Those times... ;) (**S85**)

To conclude, close others feature in *BK* and *SD* -related personally nostalgic comments and meaningful gameplay memories, most often in the form of immediate family members. The comments within the repertoire tend to be personal anecdotes about playing the games in the past, involving other people as agents that affect or contribute to the act of gaming in one way or another. The nostalgic accounts examined are given affective emphasis through the use of interjections, intensifiers, emotion words, emoticons, and forms of creative punctuation.

#### **4.3.4 The game as one's first**

The fourth subrepertoire of personal nostalgia and the final theme to be discussed in this thesis constructs the games as nostalgic because of their status as the commenter's first. A total of 32 messages represent *BK* and *SD* as the commenters' very first gameplay experiences, thus marking a significant point in the writers' subjective life history as adventures that introduced them to the world of video games. Despite being the least prominent found in the data, the repertoire is to be considered as nostalgically relevant, ostensibly stemming from the generally acknowledged nostalgic importance of first experiences. Through the use of the adjective *first* combined with a reference to the games, the comments examined in this section are profoundly saturated by a heartwarming atmosphere that underlines the games' role as meaningful milestones in the commenters' lives.

The following messages serve as examples of different types of comments constructing the games as the commenter's first. The writer of message 148 expresses *love* for *SD* as the first video game he/she played, drawing attention to the unforgettable nature of the experiences related to it. Commenter 149, on the other hand, acknowledges the passing of time by conveying disbelief about the fact that it has been 15 years since he/she played the game. In message 150, in turn, the writer not only addresses the game's significance as the first, but also refers to the exact setting where the first gaming experience took place – thus constructing a nostalgic account about a personally meaningful momentous event:

- 148.** This was the first video game I ever played and I loved it!!!! I never will forget spyro! (S350)
- 149.** one of the first games i've played in my childhood can't believe it's 15 years ago (S352)
- 150.** Damn dude, this was the first game I ever played! It was in a hotel room down in St. Augustine, FL. We were on vacation. Ahh, nostalgia. (S100)

Besides employing the emotion word *love*, commenter 148 emphasizes his/her sentimental state through the use of multiple exclamation marks. Comment 150, on the other hand, is accompanied by several features of affective language including the interjections *ah* (with repeated letters), *damn* and *dude*, the emotion word *nostalgia*, and an exclamation mark concluding the first sentence.

One comment representing the game as the first stands out because of its poetic arrangement. In the message in question, the game's role as the commenter's first is closely intertwined with the commenter's wish to return to childhood on a more general level, which serves as a sentimental example of the possible overlap between different nostalgic repertoires. Moreover, the comment begins with the affective interjection *oh* and ends in a bittersweet emoticon further reinforcing the expressed nostalgic longing:

- 151.** Oh, Spyro, my first game play.  
I spend hours in my childhood with its game  
I wish I could return to that age :') (S101)

In addition to addressing the games' role as the first more generally, it was common for the commenters to represent them as their first on a particular console, especially regarding *PlayStation 1*. Indeed, a reasonable number of commenters mentioned *PlayStation 1* while constructing *SD* as their first game, thus connecting the game to the *PlayStation* family on a general level. *Nintendo 64* rarely occurred in such constructions, which might be explained by the fact *PlayStation* is still actively used as a gaming platform under the same name (having only changed from *PS1* to *PS4*), while *Nintendo 64* has become obsolete as it once existed. Thus, by representing *SD* as their first *PlayStation* game, the commenters imply that *PlayStation* as a console continues to be a personally meaningful form of entertainment in their lives – a product that they became acquainted to through playing *SD*:

- 152.** I'm from CZ and i love this! My first PSX Game :-)  
(S169)
- 153.** thank you so much. This is amazing, my first game ever ;-)  
on ps1 ... <3 (S170)
- 154.** hell yeah! spyro was my first playstation game i've ever played.  
i am so gonna download this. awesome vid man. this brings back memories.  
i just hope there's no viruses in this download (S208)
- 155.** Genuine nostalgia, I remember this game so vividly. Crash bandicoot  
and this were practically the first games I ever played on the PS1. (S344)

The nostalgic tone of the above comments is emphasized through the emotion words *love* (152) and *nostalgia* (155), the interjection *hell yeah* (155), and the intensifiers *so much* (154) and *practically* (156). In addition, exclamation marks (153, 155), happy and bittersweet emoticons (153 and 154, respectively), and the use of ellipsis and a heart symbol (154) contribute to the sentimental accounts.

Finally, *SD* and *BK* are represented as the first games that sparked the commenter's passion for gaming (message 156). They are also depicted as the first games completed (157) or bought (158), thus symbolizing a meaningful event and contributing to the commenters' subjective identity as gamers. Indeed, each of the comments below address the personal significance of the games as artefacts that, in one way or another, played a memorable part in the writer's past. The

affective accounts are emphasized through the use of exclamation marks (157-158), intensifiers *so* (157), *such*, and *very* (158), emotion words *love* (156) and *proud* (157), and a happy emoticon (157):

- 156.** i remember playing this game as a kid and it being my first love in gaming... i am still missing one dragon (**S353**)
- 157.** First game i ever completed. I was around 7 at the time. Was so proud! :D (**S356**)
- 158.** This was the very first game I saved my allowance up for on the N64! Such good times! (**B238**)

To sum up, *BK* and *SD* are constructed as personally nostalgic games through messages representing them as the writers' first. The comments within the subrepertoire emphasize the significance of the games as among the first that introduced the commenters to the world of gaming, thus marking a momentous event in the players' life. The examples examined are given affective prominence through the use of interjections, intensifiers, emotion words, emoticons, and forms of creative punctuation.

#### **4.3.5 Personal retro game nostalgia: a summary**

A total of 477 comments in the data – comprising 50.9% of the corpus – represent *BK* and *SD* as retro games with notable personal significance for the commenter. Personally nostalgic messages express sentiment towards the games as inherently meaningful experiences for the player, emphasizing their importance within an individual's subjective life history. The interpretive repertoire of personal nostalgia was categorized into four subrepertoires, of which the *commenter as protagonist* -repertoire dominated with 234 instances and thus constituted the most prominent discursive theme in the whole data. The second most common personally nostalgic subrepertoire was that of *childhood* (173 instances), while the two remaining repertoires – *close others* and *the game as one's first* – were relatively scarce with 37 and 32 occurrences, respectively. All in all, commenters construct *BK* and *SD* as culturally nostalgic by referring to...

- Past times playing the game
  - reference to the game + reference to past time
  - verb *replay*
  - adjective *first*

The 82 personally nostalgic examples examined are accompanied by a total of 16 different emotion words, 13 interjections, and 12 intensifiers. Again, *love* was the most frequently used emotion word, occurring in 10 messages, while *dude* and *lol* overshadowed other interjections. Similarly to generally and culturally nostalgic categories, the expression *so much* continued to be the most prominent intensifier used. Creative punctuation was most common in the form of repeated letters and punctuation marks, while happy emoticons outnumbered their bittersweet and unhappy counterparts. Table 5 summarizes the affective features found in personally nostalgic comments:

**Table 5.** Features of affective language contributing to the personally nostalgic examples examined.

Emotion words	Interjections	Intensifiers	Punctuation	Emoticons
<i>love</i> (10)	<i>dude</i> (5)	<i>so much</i> (6)	<i>repetition</i> (28)	<i>happy</i> (10)
<i>nostalgic</i> (4)	<i>lol</i> (5)	<i>so</i> (5)	<i>excl. marks</i> (21)	<i>bittersweet</i> (5)
<i>miss</i> (3)	<i>ah</i> (4)	<i>finally</i> (3)	<i>capitalization</i> (12)	<i>unhappy</i> (4)
<i>nostalgia</i> (3)	<i>omg</i> (4)	<i>actually</i> (2)	<i>heart symbols</i> (3)	<i>other</i> (1)
<i>pissed</i> (2)	<i>damn</i> (3)	<i>freaking</i> (2)		
<i>proud</i> (2)	<i>haha</i> (2)	<i>fucking</i> (2)		
<i>amazed</i> (1)	<i>wow</i> (2)	<i>really</i> (2)		
<i>feel old</i> (1)	<i>God</i> (1)	<i>totally</i> (2)		
<i>fond</i> (1)	<i>hell yeah</i> (1)	<i>very</i> (2)		
<i>glad</i> (1)	<i>man</i> (1)	<i>literally</i> (1)		
<i>in love with</i> (1)	<i>oh</i> (1)	<i>practically</i> (1)		
<i>joy</i> (1)	<i>oh my God</i> (1)	<i>such</i> (1)		
<i>overwhelming</i> (1)	<i>oh my Lord</i> (1)			
<i>pain</i> (1)				
<i>sad</i> (1)				
<i>tear up</i> (1)				

#### 4.4 A special case of retro game nostalgia

Before moving on to the discussion of findings, one comment found in the material deserves special attention. It stands out from the rest of the data for two reasons: for a YouTube comment, it is

exceptionally long (737 words), and it features *all the interpretive repertoires* discussed in this thesis. Because of its extraordinary length and rich content, it serves as a remarkable example of the discursive construction of retro game nostalgia and sums up the arsenal of related cultural and personal aspects. The comment includes the emotion words *passion*, *passionate*, *miss*, *love*, and *blown away*, the interjections *ah*, *oh*, *God bless*, and *oh my goodness*, the intensifiers *very* and *even*, and creative punctuation in the form of capitalization, repeated letters and exclamation marks.

Not only does the message encapsulate various nostalgic themes and linguistic expressions found in my analysis, it also serves as an example of how those micro and macro levels of affective discourse can be fundamentally intertwined, illustrating the potential intensity of retro game nostalgia. The bittersweet yet undeniably humorous message is presented below in its entirety.

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**159.** ahh my very first video game from when I was five. Oh god bless childhood memories this game here is what started my passion for gaming. This particular game and later on mario, is why I'm VERY!!! Passionate about gaming. Because of mario and banjo I'm a very die hard gamer. Pokemon got me in to RPG's goldeneye got me in to shooters smash bros got me in to fighting, oh my goodness this is what it was like to be a 90's kid. Oh how I miss those days, today gaming has took a turn for the worst gaming today has gotten worse for drm policies, patches, dlc, micro transactions, day one DLC, and on disc dlc, games being released incomplete and being fixed on day one. And these games, were released 100% complete no patches or dlc NOTHING LIKE!!!! This this is what I call a video game. This is where gaming was at. A GOLDEN AGE!!!!

My friends, I'll never forget the time I first got this. My uncle friend came over and showed us this game and the N64. And then one day me, my uncle, sister, cousin, mother, and grandmother, (moms mother) drove all the way to southside mall to a store called BIG K-mart. And we got this game along with banjo tooie, and I still have this cartridge even to this day. And I will never part with it until the end or when my time comes to leave this world. This is a jewel for all gamers. And a very valuable treasure. This was a holy grail during a GOLDEN AGE!!!! Of gaming. If we can get developers to understand that this is where

gaming was at we can back to these days because this is where true gaming is at. And I really want to see rare go back to nintendo, because they were king back then.

This is my childhood game. My very first video game EVER!!!!!! And it will go down in History and I plan to pass it down to my children. And they can pass it down to theirs let this be a game to treasure and to show our children of future generations that's this is where gaming was at and will FOREVER!!!! Be at. God bless you gamers this was a game that will for ever be loved for generations.

Gamers hear me NOW!!! When you have children. And when they want to become gamers. Please show them these games first, don't let them start with today's gaming or next gens gaming. We are only 7 or 8 years away from the 9th gen. If there's any 90's kid reading this please do me a favor. Now I can't tell you what to do for your life or future. But if you ever have kids, please show them these games. Kids today are growing up with the new Wii u, PS4, and Xbox one, and are mainly playing shooters and the wii u needs more love. But everybody only cares about Xbox, playstation, shooting, and graphics. The Xbox is not a bad console, the playstation is not a bad console, shooters aren't bad games, and sometimes graphics can make a game look cool and amazing. But remember we never had Xbox back then and we never had playstation until the 90s theres more to gaming than just shooters and remember one important lesson, "graphics" "DONT" "make" "the game" remember. While it's ok to be blown away by seeing amazing graphics, it's not ok to play games for graphics THATS!!! Not what makes gaming. If you want to show your kids 80s gaming that's fine too. But it's not right for them to grow up on today's games show them the past first. So the children of today can understand were gaming was at. This is where gaming was at.

There is more to gaming than just banjo and mario. But banjo and mario will forever be my FIRST!!! Gaming heroes EVER!!!!!! And I'll NEVER!!!! Forget them ever, and I will NEVER!!!! Forget what made gaming great in the first place. And the question is. What are you going to do for a gamer? What does this mean for our future children's interest in gaming? What will you show them? And more importantly. Are you gamer enough, to show them where gaming was REALLY!!! At? Are you gamer enough to MAKE!!!!!! A..... Difference? **(B23)**

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## 5 Summary and discussion of findings

This section discusses the findings of my study against the theoretical framework surrounding nostalgia, retro gaming, YouTube as a nostalgic platform, and the discursive construction of emotion. In examining the results, I will start from the macro level of nostalgic retro game discourse – the broader nostalgic themes arising from the data – and after that move on to discuss the micro level linguistic construction of the repertoires found.

According to the data-driven analytic procedure adopted in this study, nostalgic affect constitutes a noticeable presence in the YouTube comments of the ten *Spyro the Dragon* and *Banjo-Kazooie* -related gameplay videos analyzed. With a prevalence of 35.5% of the overall comments posted under the videos, nostalgic retro game discourse comprises a fair share of the communication taking place in the comment sections, which has important implications concerning late modern nostalgic experience and the discursive practices contributing to a universal retro game culture.

First of all, the results are in line with Robbins' (2015) notion that retro game community is an inherently nostalgic one, most gamers wishing to revisit their childhood favourites. The fact that nostalgic language is present in a significant number of *Spyro the Dragon* and *Banjo-Kazooie* -related comments supports the general conception about retro game culture being inextricably connected to nostalgic experience. Indeed, on the basis of the comments analyzed, the widely recognized appeal of video game classics appears to be tightly rooted in the nostalgic affect they elicit, which fits Suominen's (2008) view of retro gaming as a form of returning to the past and reliving an enjoyable experience. Furthermore, the prevalence of nostalgic discourse in the data might be seen as evidence of the unique nostalgic potential of 3D platform games. Similarly to the delightful spirit of *Super Mario 64* described by Sykes (2006, 81), *SD* and *BK*'s brightly colored, fairy tale-like worlds may hold extra potential in terms of nostalgia. In order to test the accuracy of this hypothesis,

however, one would need to conduct a study comparing the nostalgic responses elicited by video games from different genres.

The prominence of nostalgic language in the comment sections also has implications concerning YouTube as a late modern online platform. As the Internet both contributes to and helps to alleviate late modern individuals' experience of fragmentation (Estévez, 2009, 407), it is not surprising that nostalgia as a complex emotion connected to time and space continuity is experienced and talked about in a social medium such as YouTube. Indeed, in the light of the results, it is likely that the convergence and divergence of YouTube contribute to the experience of retro game nostalgia in our time, maintaining a universal retro game community in the manner Suominen (2008) wrote. Considering the prevalence of nostalgic accounts in the comment sections analyzed, it is easy to believe that Swalwell (2007, 262) was on the right track when emphasizing the internationally recognized fascination with retro games in the 21st century.

The broader discursive themes emerging from the comments indicate that retro game nostalgia is connected to specific cultural and personal matters, thus implying that nostalgic experience elicited by classic games tends to be characterized by certain key components. The nostalgic comments were categorized into three main interpretive repertoires – generally, culturally and personally nostalgic – of which the two latter ones were further divided into subrepertoires of their own. While general expressions of nostalgia towards *BK* and *SD* did not include references to any specific nostalgic aspects of retro gaming, culturally and personally nostalgic comments did, discursively justifying and further explaining the games' heartwarming appeal. All in all, generally nostalgic comments comprised a total of 9.8 percent of the data, culturally and personally nostalgic messages representing 39.3 percent and 50.9 percent of the comments, respectively.

The most frequent subrepertoire found in the nostalgic comments represents the commenter as an active protagonist, supporting the notion of Vess et al. (2012, 274) about the self

being a central player in nostalgic reveries. As Wildschut et al. (2006, 988) state, events featuring the self as a salient protagonist tend to be particularly effective triggers of nostalgia, which appears to be true in the case of the comments analyzed in this study. The messages in the *protagonist* repertoire represent the nostalgic individual as an enthusiastic explorer of the game world, expressing a sentimental longing for past gaming experiences and simultaneously constructing the commenters' identity as gamers. Thus, nostalgic comments representing one as a protagonist can be regarded as serving an important function, building and maintaining identity coherence in the manner described by Van Tilburg et al. (2013, 450). It is worth noting that, as games predominantly revolving around a single protagonist, 3D platformers are likely to promote the prevalence of this nostalgic repertoire.

The second most common interpretive repertoire represents the games as culturally nostalgic products with good qualities, observing them through rose-tinted glasses as inherently enjoyable artefacts of the past. Similarly to other culturally nostalgic repertoires – *retro vs new*, *similar games*, and *the game as a classic* – it idealizes the nostalgic games as unique in quality and appeal. In fact, all culturally nostalgic repertoires found in the data promote a type of discourse that functions as a “uniting and separating form of action” in Suominen’s (2008) terms. By emphasizing the close-knit nature of the retro game subculture and establishing a boundary between retro games and newer games, the commenters romanticize older games in a nostalgic manner, which is in keeping with Howard’s (2012, 643) notion that the nostalgic past is often perceived as superior to the present.

The prominence of *childhood nostalgia* as the third most common repertoire does not appear surprising when considering the generally acknowledged nostalgic potential of childhood experiences. Probyn’s (1995, 439) account of childhood nostalgia as a longing for an irretrievable, innocent era seems to ring true also in the case of commenters posting nostalgic messages under *BK* and *SD* -related gameplay videos. By reminiscing their good old childhood days playing the two games, the commenters can be seen as mourning their “felt deprivation of the older self” in Howard’s (2012, 643) words: that is, longing for their carefree days of youth filled with play and joy.

Considering that video games in the 1990s were likely to constitute a more or less noticeable part of children's free time, it can be thought of as natural that childhood memories have a marked role in the commenters' nostalgic accounts.

While the implications of other nostalgic repertoires might be regarded as expected, the *close others* -repertoire partly contradicts the general view of video gaming as a socially nostalgic activity. As proposed by Madigan (2013), nostalgia is closely tied to social connections, which is why video gaming as a social pastime has the potential to evoke particularly strong nostalgic responses. While other people do feature in the commenters' nostalgic messages, the interpretive repertoire of *close others* can still be regarded as relatively infrequent. Furthermore, contrary to what one might expect, friends only appeared in one account, while the vast majority of messages involving close others included members of the commenter's immediate family. It is important to bear in mind, however, that the 3D platform game genre might have an effect on the prominence of the category, since – as already established – the games of the genre tend to revolve around a single protagonist. This is further reflected in the fact that nostalgic comments featuring other people often involved the role of the protagonist shifting to the commenter. Nevertheless, despite the relative infrequency of other people in the commenters' nostalgic accounts, close others *were* present in a number of messages in which the writer shared a personally meaningful gameplay experience. Similarly to *the game as the first* -repertoire, such comments recounted a momentous event constituting a significant point in the writer's subjective life history.

The prominence of personal nostalgia, particularly in the forms of childhood nostalgia and the player as a protagonist, might partly be explained by the relative newness of *Banjo-Kazooie* and *Spyro the Dragon* as retro games. Although the games are both old enough to be considered as 'retro', they are nevertheless so recent that the memories attached to them tend to be relatively fresh and therefore quite emotional. Indeed, it would be intriguing to see whether older retro game classics (from the 1980s, for example) are likely to elicit culturally nostalgic rather than personally nostalgic

discourse, having already established a cult status and being generally considered as significant cultural artefacts rather than personally meaningful pastimes. The nature of retro game nostalgia evolving from personal to cultural with time is a hypothesis that would provide a fruitful topic for further research.

Moving towards a more explicitly linguistic level, the above described interpretive repertoires of general, cultural and personal nostalgia were seen as derived from a certain type of language use. My analytical procedure of identifying nostalgic discourse followed a particular pattern that was based on data-driven close reading of the material, formulating criteria for what nostalgic language is comprised of. All in all, the comments considered as nostalgic expressed a sentimental longing for the game, emphasized the game's value as a nostalgic product, or represented the game as a part of a nostalgic retro game culture. This was achieved linguistically by referring to 1) nostalgia, memories, or longing, 2) sentimentality triggered by the videos, 3) past times playing the game, or 4) the game as an enjoyable product of the past.

In addition to detecting the linguistic choices behind generally, culturally and personally nostalgic interpretive repertoires, I inspected how certain features of affective language further *contribute to* the comments within those repertoires. I took a look at the emotion words, interjections and intensifiers emphasizing the nostalgic tone of the examples analyzed, also scanning the nostalgic accounts for CMC-specific affective features – namely the use of emoticons and different forms of creative punctuation. The results show that retro game discourse on YouTube exhibits numerous items of affective language, and that CMC-specific features notably contribute to the commenters' nostalgic accounts.

It was common – especially in the case of emotion words – that a handful of linguistic items stood out as the most frequently used, while the majority of emotion words, interjections and intensifiers occurred only once or twice in the examples analyzed. The noun *love* was clearly the most

prominent of all nostalgically relevant emotion words found, occurring in 17 out of 159 examples. The second and third most common emotion words were the noun *nostalgia* and the verb *miss* (12 and 9 occurrences, respectively), two terms that can be regarded as having a fairly straightforward discursive connection to the general conception of nostalgic experience. When it comes to interjections, *ah* was the most frequently used, which is not surprising considering that the word is generally regarded as one of the most common interjections in the English language (Aijmer, 2004, 100). In addition, the interjections *lol* and *dude* were used in a number of occasions. The expression *so much* was clearly the most prominent intensifier found in the comments, the second and third most common intensifiers being the words *freaking* and *so*. In the case of affective CMC, creative punctuation – particularly in the form of exclamation marks, repeated letters and punctuation marks – was quite frequently used throughout the data, whereas happy emoticons surpassed unhappy and bittersweet ones.

While my main objective concerning the affective linguistic features used was simply to identify them, there is an intriguing pattern to be found among the affective items in question. When inspecting the most commonly used features of emotional language, it is possible to see how retro game nostalgia is constructed at the subtlest linguistic level – in other words, to connect the tiniest pieces of the puzzle that nostalgic retro game discourse is built of. First of all, when juxtaposed, the most prominent emotion word, interjection and intensifier found in the comments (*love*, *ah*, and *so much*, respectively) serve to paint a surprisingly conspicuous picture of retro game nostalgia as an emotional experience. The emerging image is profoundly heartwarming and affectionate, and its intense sentimentality is further supported by the second and third most common emotion words *nostalgia* and *miss*. Moreover, there is something noteworthy about the fact that the word *love* outnumbers the noun *nostalgia* itself, thus overriding the single most explicit linguistic reference to nostalgic affect. Indeed, when approaching the constructed retro game nostalgia from the viewpoint

of unambiguous emotion words, love as a feeling state – be it passionate affection or strong liking – seems to play a crucial part in nostalgic longing.

Moreover, when it comes to CMC-specific affective features, the fact that happy emoticons outnumber their bittersweet and unhappy counterparts supports the conception of nostalgia as a positively toned emotional experience. While the commenters did use unhappy emoticons as well, the difference between the frequency of happy and unhappy faces can nevertheless be regarded as considerable. Although the prominence of happy emoticons is not particularly surprising from a nostalgic point of view, one might have expected the number of happy, unhappy and bittersweet smileys to be more even – considering that nostalgia as a feeling state is generally seen as a complex combination of pleasure and sadness.

In fact, in the light of these findings, it is possible to reconsider the three dictionary definitions for nostalgic affect presented on page 7. Firstly, *Cambridge Dictionaries Online* described *nostalgia* (s.v. *n*) as “a feeling of pleasure and also slight sadness when you think about things that happened in the past”, while *Merriam-Webster Online Dictionary* characterized it as “pleasure and sadness that is caused by remembering something from the past and wishing that you could experience it again”. These definitions are in line with the type of retro game nostalgia emerging from the comments analyzed, recognizing the nature of nostalgic affect as a mixture of pleasure and sadness. Furthermore, the former definition emphasizes the pleasurable aspect as the most essential one, which correlates with my conclusion about the predominantly positive tone of nostalgia as an emotion. *Oxford Learner’s Dictionary*, on the other hand, characterized *nostalgia* (s.v. *n*) as “a feeling of sadness mixed with pleasure and affection when you think of happy times in the past”, juxtaposing the happy and unhappy sentimentality involved in nostalgic experience with main emphasis on the sad qualities of the emotion. However, by including the word *affection*, the definition recognizes the heartfelt nature of nostalgia as a love-like emotion in the same sense as it manifests in the comments.

## 6 Conclusion

This thesis has examined the discursive construction of retro game nostalgia on YouTube, applying a multidisciplinary data-driven perspective to studying affective computer-mediated communication. By analyzing comments posted under ten gameplay videos on YouTube, I aimed at establishing a basic picture of how retro game nostalgia towards two 1998 3D platform games – *Spyro the Dragon* and *Banjo-Kazooie* – manifests discursively in a late modern online environment. My goal was to detect the overall prevalence of nostalgic discourse elicited by the videos, identify the main nostalgic themes emerging from the constructed discourse, and point out some of the most relevant linguistic characteristics contributing to and comprising the nostalgic comments. With a focus on the interplay of these micro and macro level discursive aspects, I took a peek behind the veil of mystery associated with nostalgic affect, namely regarding its linguistic manifestation and connection to retro gaming.

According to my findings, retro game nostalgia constitutes a common discursive presence in the ten comment sections analyzed, over a third of all comments featuring nostalgic language. A total of 35.5% of the comments posted under the videos express sentimental longing for the games, emphasize the games' value as nostalgic products, or represent the games as being part of a nostalgic retro game culture. That is to say, nostalgic discourse – as it adheres to the criteria formulated in this thesis – occurs frequently in the comment sections of the *Banjo-Kazooie* and *Spyro the Dragon* -related gameplay videos, which is not surprising when taking into account the generally acknowledged connection between retro games and nostalgia. YouTube as an online platform characterized by convergence and divergence creates a fruitful environment for communicating nostalgia in our late modern era, and the results of this study indicate that people utilize the medium effectively for expressive purposes. Moreover, frequent use of nostalgic language in the comment sections is likely to contribute to the maintenance of a universal retro game culture, thus having a vital collective function.

The broader interpretive repertoires identified in the analysis support the image of nostalgia as a multi-layered emotion that – despite its complexity – seems to be connected to certain generally recognizable cultural and personal aspects. The generally, culturally and personally nostalgic themes identified in the comments illustrate the macro level point of contact between the concept of nostalgia and its linguistic representation, shedding light on what retro game nostalgia as an emotional experience is comprised of. The most prominent interpretive repertoires (*commenter as protagonist*, *game as enjoyable*, and *childhood nostalgia*) represent retro game nostalgia as a longing for pleasant gameplay experiences from one’s formative years, underlining the nostalgic appeal of in-game challenges and adventures, enjoyable qualities of the games themselves, and childhood as a life stage. The culturally nostalgic repertoires *retro versus new*, *connection to other games*, and *game as a classic*, in turn, situate the games within the wider retro game culture and emphasize their nostalgic role as classic products superior to their more technologically advanced successors. The connection between retro game nostalgia and subjectively meaningful momentous events forms the basis for the personally nostalgic repertoires *close others* and *game as the first*, which focus on specific gameplay-related nostalgic moments. All in all, however, the most important factor behind the nostalgic accounts appears to be the commenter’s own role as a central player, which is in keeping with the exceptional nostalgic quality of video games as an interactive medium.

The emotion words, interjections and intensifiers used in the nostalgic comments provide a more in-depth linguistic perspective to the discursive construction of retro game nostalgia. By tracing the micro level linguistic foundation of the nostalgic themes identified, the boundaries between our conception of emotions and their linguistic construction begin to crumble, illuminating how the everyday concepts of our reality are essentially brought into being through the use of language. Together with the use of emoticons and creative punctuation, the intensifiers, interjections and emotion words employed promote an image of retro game nostalgia as a yearning for meaningful gaming experiences that is predominantly characterized by positively toned, heartwarming affection.

Despite its reasonable newness value, the methodology applied in this thesis has its restrictions. First of all, as with qualitative discourse analysis in general, there is room for interpretation regarding the analytical choices made by the researcher. In other words, in a qualitative study, the results are always in some part based on the researcher's own conceptions and preoccupations. This means – within the context of the present study – that another person might have categorized some or all of the nostalgic features differently, focused on different linguistic features, or interpreted the data in a different way. In fact, as a data-driven discourse analytical method based on my own formulation of nostalgic language use, the approach applied in this thesis is inevitably characterized by a level of uncertainty. Secondly, the unfortunate lack of previous research concerning my topic has arguably affected the theoretical basis for my analysis. The fact that there was no literature to be found concerning nostalgic language meant that the theoretical foundation of this study had to be constructed using a fair amount of creativity. This, in turn, resulted in a further increase in the uncertainty of the methodology. However, I believe that the use of creativity in defining applicable methods of analysis is ultimately more of an advantage rather than a drawback.

As a topic, the discursive construction of retro game nostalgia opens up a range of possibilities for further research, most of which relate to comparably uncharted areas of study concerning nostalgia, (retro) gaming, and the linguistic essence of emotional experience. First of all, the present study has merely taken a small step towards understanding retro game nostalgia, its affective content, and the cultural and personal aspects underlying the sentiment. A discourse analytical approach holds unique potential when it comes to analyzing retro game nostalgia and similar affective experiences commonly regarded as existing outside the linguistic realm, and more attention should be devoted to the discursive construction of nostalgia and other emotional states.

Using methods similar to those applied in this thesis, it is possible to take the analysis of retro game nostalgia much further as video game culture is constantly evolving and covers a range of different genres. For example, it would be interesting to conduct a longitudinal study about changes

in people's nostalgic responses towards certain games. In this way one would be able to see how nostalgia towards different games changes with time – and also whether personal nostalgia does indeed evolve into cultural nostalgia in the manner I hypothesized. Secondly, it would be possible to compare the discursive content of nostalgic affect elicited by games from different genres. Video game experience in the 21st century differs drastically from that of the 1990s and before, as online networking has generated a whole new social dimension to gaming as an activity. In fact, games' increasingly social nature might not only add to their future nostalgic potential (as proposed by Madigan, 2013) but also affect the content of the elicited nostalgia, underlining the role of other people in the players' bittersweet gameplay reminisces. While gaming as a social activity in the time of *Banjo-Kazooie* and *Spyro the Dragon* used to involve close others gathered under the same roof, today's video game culture is dominated by *online multiplayer games* that are played on the Internet with strangers all over the globe. This notable shift within the culture of gaming might have a marked impact on the nature of retro game nostalgia in the future.

In addition to the abovementioned possibilities for studying retro game nostalgia, nostalgic experience in general lends itself splendidly for several types of further research as a complex and under-researched affective state. Indeed, despite comprising an undeniably nostalgic medium, video games are only one of countless pop culture products with ample nostalgic potential. Television shows, films, advertisements and music, for instance, are likely to serve as nostalgic media for people in late modern Western societies. A discourse analytical approach could be applied to studying people's nostalgic responses towards specific songs from their past or nostalgic television series from their youth, and the linguistic content of those responses could be compared or inspected more thoroughly. Comparing the type of nostalgic discourse elicited by different media might provide fruitful information about the emotional potential of different forms of entertainment which, in turn, could prove useful from a psychological perspective. Moreover, it is important to note that the

discursive construction of nostalgia can be studied using a variety of methods, data-driven analysis of online discourse and its specific affective features representing one of many possibilities.

In the 21st century – an era profoundly saturated by commercialism and breakneck technological development – the latest tends to be automatically mistaken the greatest. Video game medium is no exception, which is why it is increasingly important to remember and appreciate older games that laid the foundation for their technologically advanced successors (Robbins, 2015). Embracing our nostalgic longing towards classic games constitutes one means of appreciating the cultural heritage of video gaming, and it is only through language that we can share these bittersweet feelings with others and truly bring them to life. Fortunately, as the results of this thesis indicate, a culture promoting the emotional significance of retro games appears to be alive and well.

To conclude, the somewhat condemning popular conception of video games does not begin to give enough credit to the heartwarming sentimentality that gaming can elicit in a player. Retro game nostalgia stands out as an unparalleled example of the potentially everlasting impact of a beloved game, and by scratching the discursive surface of this unique emotion it is possible to learn much about both video games and ourselves. Composed of personal and cultural aspects embroidering our relationship to video game classics, retro game nostalgia is to be seen as an extraordinary affective state contributing to our ever-changing sense of self – an experience wonderfully described in the following nostalgic account by Boren (2013):

“Nostalgia can be beautiful, even transcendent. It can be an expression of joy for life lived. This is my experience of it. Sometimes I feel a tickle, an itch I want scratched. I wish to feel as I had done when I was younger when things were simple and new. I turn on this song (The Sims signature tune) and for a moment I return to a ritual from my childhood, playing the first ‘The Sims’ on my archaic Packard Bell... I remember joy, less inhibited and more unadulterated. I don’t remember a moment;

I remember *a state of being.*”

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