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“Take your heart”: Why Persona 5 Royal may be the best JRPG for language learning.

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Item Details

Keywords:

Roleplaying Game
Video Game
RPG
Digital Game-based Learning

Key points

- **Name of ludic object:** Persona 5 Royal
- **Type/genre/theme:** Roleplaying Game (Video Game)
- **Intended audience age** 🧑: 15-17 and up (Rated CERO-C in Japan; M for Mature in NA, MA15+ in Australia, 16 by PEGI in Europe)
- **Intended audience proficiency** 💬: CEFR B2 and up
- **Typical time to play** ⏳: 120+ hours
- **Number of players** 👤: 1
- **Available platforms:** PlayStation 5, PlayStation 4, Xbox Series X|S, Xbox One, Nintendo Switch, Windows, Steam

Microblog synopsis

Persona 5 Royal is one of the most iconic JRPGs of all time, and its calendar-based system may also set it apart from its peers for use in language learning. Let it “take your heart!”

#Persona5 #Persona5Royal #P5R #RPG #DGBLL

View at the LLP Site: <https://www.llpjournal.org/2026/07/01/llp-special-edition-the-ludic-you-love.html>



Introduction

Persona 5 Royal (*P5R*; Atlus, 2019) is considered by many to be one of the best Japanese role-playing games (JRPGs), a sub-genre of RPG video games with an increased focus on story and characters, and it might just be the best when it comes to providing meaningful input for language learning. *P5R* is a narrative-driven single-player RPG in which the player controls *Joker*, a codename for a high school student who teams up with his friends to battle adults with distorted desires in order to “take their heart” and have them change for the better. The player has to balance this with the daily responsibilities and activities of a high school student in modern Japan. Gameplay involves reading large amounts of dialogue, making choices in conversations, managing time through an in-game calendar system, exploring story-based dungeons, and engaging in turn-based combat. Story progression depends heavily on understanding and interacting with written dialogue, so the game provides sustained exposure to contextualized language input. These features work in combination to provide language learning opportunities for advanced students, which may take the form of collaborative classroom play, individual gameplay supported by follow-up activities such as reading circles, or independent self-study, depending on the learning context.

P5R is the most recent mainline entry in the *Persona* series, which itself started as a spinoff of Atlus’ *Shin Megami Tensei* (*SMT*) franchise. The *Persona* series maintains several elements of *SMT*’s gameplay, including recruitment and fusion of mythologically inspired beings known as *personas*, but increases the focus on characters and social relationships (Kalata, 2021). *P5R* itself was released for the PlayStation 4 in 2019 in Japan and 2020 worldwide as an enhanced re-release of 2016’s *Persona 5* (*Persona 5 Royal*, n.d.). It received another re-release in 2022, and is now available on PlayStation 5, Xbox Series X|S, Xbox One, Nintendo Switch, Windows, and Steam (*Persona 5 Royal*, n.d.). Its text is available in a wide range of languages, including English, Japanese, French, German, Italian, Spanish, Korean, and Traditional Chinese. However, these language options vary by region and platform, and voice acting is only available in English and Japanese.

P5R is one of the most critically acclaimed JRPGs ever, with a Metacritic score of 95 (*Persona 5 Royal Reviews*, n.d.), including perfect scores from industry stalwarts GameSpot (Higham, 2020), RPGSite (Black, 2020) and IGN (Hafer, 2024). Reviews are mostly full of praise for its characters, style, music, combat, and story. While these elements are all excellent, one aspect separates it from other titles in the genre: its calendar system for game progression.

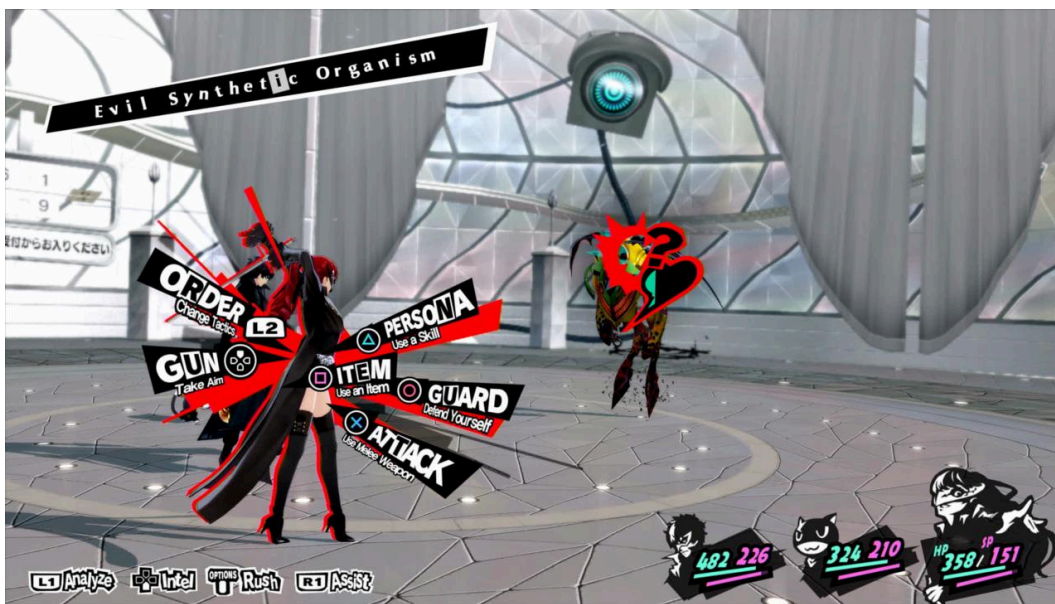


Figure 1 *Persona 5 Royal*’s characters in action, showing off the stylish battle system interface. © ATLUS/SEGA (Higham, 2020)

P5R's calendar system breaks the game events down into dates, largely based on the Japanese school year. Furthermore, each day is divided into daytime and nighttime slots, each typically allowing the player to choose one (and only one) action to take during each timeslot. Players can participate in a variety of activities that offer corresponding boosts to their character's abilities, such as studying to improve their *knowledge*, working part-time at a flower shop to increase their *kindness* and *charm*, playing darts to improve their *proficiency*, or undertaking a burger eating challenge to improve their *guts*. Alternatively, the *confidant* system allows players to interact with other playable and non-playable characters through dialogue and shared activities to advance their relationships in order to unlock story events and gameplay abilities. The trick here is that sometimes players will need to have reached a certain level in a given stat to advance these side stories. Finally, it wouldn't be a JRPG without some grinding, which is the act of repeating certain gameplay actions, usually fighting enemies, in order to gain experience or other resources that allow the player's character to become stronger. In *P5R*, this is mainly achieved by taking your party into *Mementos*, the game's procedurally-generated dungeon to grind for experience, money, and loot, occasionally advancing side quests in the process. Being procedurally-generated means it is algorithmically created, making it different every time, increasing replayability. This is in contrast to the story-based *palaces*, which are manually designed by the game's developers to maximize narrative impact. While all of this is going on, players also have to meet deadlines by completing these *palaces* and defeating bosses to advance the main story. If this does not sound complicated enough, certain activities or *confidants* may only be available on specific days of the week or under certain weather conditions. Players must prioritize and strategize in order to get the most out of this system. This game within the game adds another ludic layer to the gameplay experience and is fairly unique to the *Persona* series. It is also very relatable. After all, for many of us, there are not enough hours in the day or days in the week to do everything we want. While there's a certain irony to spending many of those precious hours dealing with another oppressive time and date system, it is another puzzle to be solved, and it can give players a greater sense of achievement when they are able to manage it successfully. Creating a sense of urgency at all times in a 100+ hour JRPG is no small feat, but Atlus has done it with *P5R*.



Figure 2 Just some of the options available to the player on a given day in *Persona 5 Royal*. © ATLUS/SEGA (Bae, 2022)

The sense of urgency that makes *P5R* a great game is also why it may be great for language learning. While most RPGs have plenty of text, *P5R* has enough and is presented in such a way that many consider it to be a visual novel (Molloy, 2023). What sets *P5R*'s text apart, however, is the degree to which players are rewarded for paying

attention to it. Paying attention to your *confidants* and giving optimal responses can help you advance your relationship in fewer interactions. Paying attention to lectures in school can help you get higher scores on your exams, boosting your stats and earning you other in-game rewards. Paying attention to what *shadows*, the enemy beings representing distorted human desires, are saying during post-battle negotiations can help you recruit them as *personas* to summon in future battles. There are several other types of interactions where players are rewarded for paying attention to what is being said, and selecting the most suitable response option for the situation. These are not just side quests or extra dialogue that can be ignored, but interactions that give you real in-game advantages like special attacks. Where other games may allow a disinterested player to skip through the dialogue, just catching the gist to keep up with the story, *P5R* encourages the player to focus on the text. All of this is reinforced by the calendar system. In other games you may have unlimited opportunities to interact with an NPC, but in *P5R*, you're limited by the calendar system, so if you can advance a relationship in two events instead of three, you're rewarded with time to spend on something else.

The calendar system in *Persona 5 Royal* creates a sense of urgency at all times - no small feat for a 100+ hour JRPG!

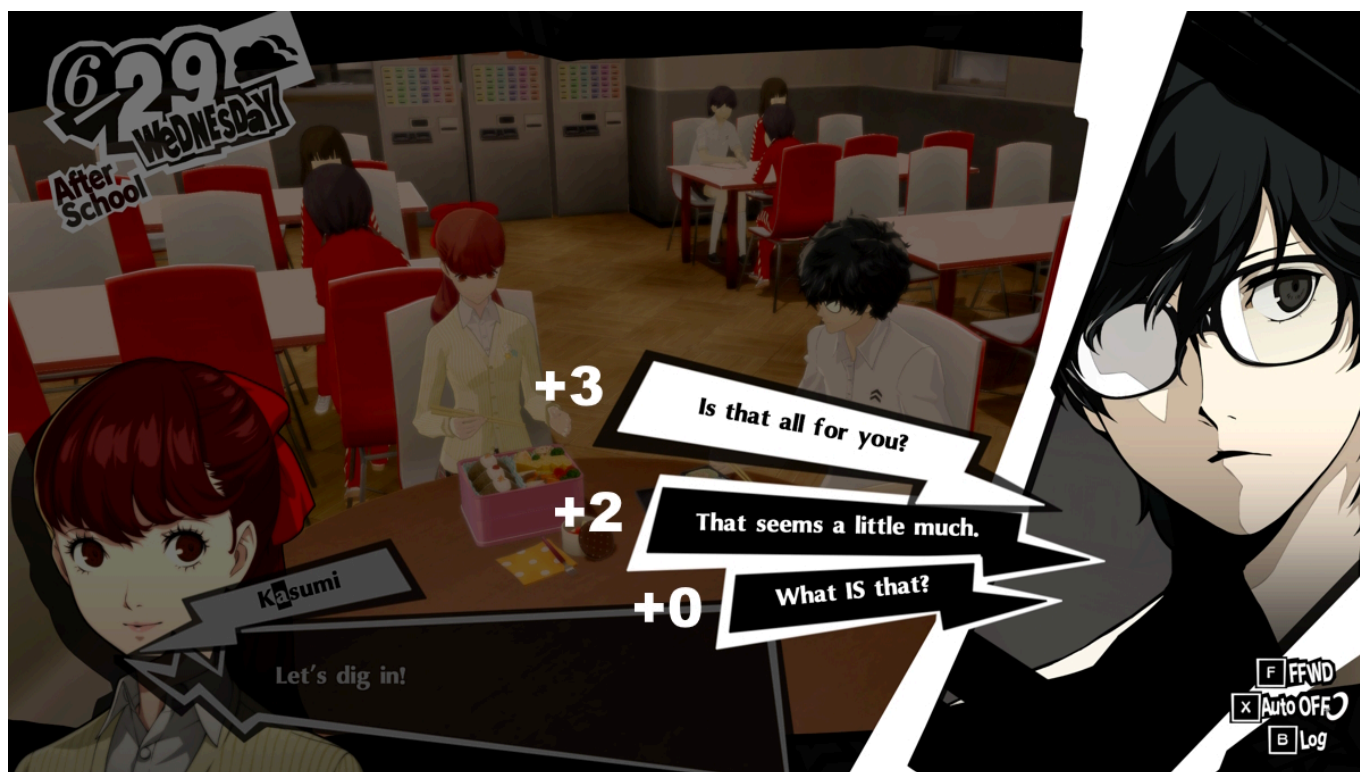


Figure 3 Dialogue choices and corresponding bonuses (not displayed in-game) for advancing a relationship with a confidant. © ATLUS/SEGA (Perry, 2023).

The calendar system not only provides motivation to pay attention to the language in the game, it provides a common framework for classroom or homework use. When using other games, it may be hard to keep everyone “on the same page,” but *P5R* could allow an instructor to assign specific dates, as in “everyone play June 8 through June 12 for homework.” The great thing about this is while everyone is doing the same thing on a macro level, on a micro level everyone can be making their own choices of what to do on each day. Students can compare experiences through a variety of speaking and writing activities, as in the hypothetical example below, where students “pair and share” what they did on a specific date and how it affected their progress:

Student A: "On June 9th I hung out with Ryuji after school and worked at the convenience store in the evening. What about you?"

Student B: "Really? I studied in the library after school. It was raining, so I got a bonus for my knowledge. Then I took the Big Bang Burger Challenge to boost my guts. What do you get for working at the convenience store?"

TEACHING TIP

The calendar system opens up a variety of choices for language activities. Writing a diary for the main character on a specific date could produce a classroom full of different answers, and discussions about how and why they spent the day that way.

As suggested in a previous article on the possibility of using RPGs for extensive reading (Compton, 2025), I've always thought *Persona* lent itself particularly well to extension activities because of the combination of life-sim gameplay and the calendar system. A daily or weekly diary from the character's perspective could be very effective. Of course, these are not the only activities available when using *P5R* for language learning. These activities are in addition to those that may work with any video game, RPG or otherwise, such as literature analysis and debate (Cruz, 2007) or multimedia creations like podcasts or gameplay videos (McFadyen, 2020). It can also be argued that engaging with guides (see Bae, 2022; Perry, 2023) and online communities is closer to a requirement than an option when playing *P5R*, and this beyond-game culture can enhance language learning (Ryu, 2013).

While *P5R* has a lot of potential for use in language learning, it would not be without its challenges. Somewhat ironically, most are related to our own real-life calendar and deadline system. HowLongToBeat (n.d.) lists the average playthrough of all play styles at 125h49m, which is longer than most university courses, even if you were to include homework. This may mean it would have to be introduced in a class and left for students to finish (or not) independently. Another time-related barrier is the tutorial. Coming in at around 10-20 hours depending on how it is defined, it could be seen as a hindrance. However, it does not always feel like a tutorial, and does a good job scaffolding some of the game's more complicated systems (Levy, 2022). The game opens up gradually over the course of the tutorial, finally leaving the player fully prepared to go out on their own, make their own decisions, and deal with the consequences.

A further area of criticism that should be mentioned is the game's clumsy or dated handling of some social issues. Ostensibly a progressive game with "rallying against corruption" progressive messaging, there are some inconsistencies or outright missteps when handling issues related to sexism (Kalata, 2021) and homophobia (Dale, 2020). These are unfortunate, but not reasons to throw out the game entirely. Dale (2020) concludes her article detailing these problems by saying "Persona 5 Royal is a fantastic game... These few missteps stand out so much because they take place in a game that gets just about everything else right." With appropriate content warnings, they could be used as opportunities for discussion, or just for learners to evaluate on their own through further engagement with the text and related outside sources.



Figure 4 *Persona 5 Royal's* story and style on display in the Korean version. Screenshot captured by the author on Nintendo Switch 2. © ATLUS/SEGA

In preparation for this article, I started a playthrough of *P5R* in Korean, which I speak and understand at around the B1-B2 CEFR level. Unfortunately for me, the voice acting is in Japanese, where my competency is much lower, so I do not receive the full multimodal experience available to learners of English. It has been tough at times, but manageable. More importantly, it has been enjoyable. The personable characters, stylish interface, fantastic soundtrack, challenging combat, and engrossing narrative have kept me playing for longer than planned each session. Trying to solve the game-within-the-game of the calendar system has been what has kept me coming back day after day. While individual experiences may differ, in the appropriate environment, if you and your students give *Persona 5 Royal* a try, you just might find that it “takes your heart.”

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