

梅花女子大学短期大学部研究紀要
第63号（2015年3月20日刊）抜刷

A Comprehensive Approach to Designing
Language Learning Games
< Part One >

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Introduction

This paper presents a mechanistic approach to the construction of language learning games. This approach systematically combines targeted linguistic content with appropriate teaching resources to facilitate language acquisition. This paper will appear in two parts. In Part One, the first section begins by explaining language games in terms of the four key components: *mechanisms, cues, actions and resources*. Mechanisms are fixed procedures for assembling the other three components into language learning games. This section also explains how to create game resources so they better meet the linguistic needs of the players.

The second section explores the subject of game dynamics, including the flow of cues and actions between players and how verbal and nonverbal actions can elicit language items from other players. Interactions between players are examined in terms of collaboration, competition and communication. This section also provides various rationales for using games in a language classroom. A key element of this paper is how common game procedures and equipment are used to facilitate language practice in a manner consistent with the preferences, expectations and prior knowledge of the players.

The third section deals with the five basic types of resources required for this approach to work. The discussion begins with some tips about how to produce the resources and then explains some uses and features of each type. A clear understanding of how these resources work is essential for employing this teaching method.

The final section is a summary of Part One of this essay. Appendix 1 and Appendix 2 present some common mechanisms that better illustrate the flow of cues and actions. Appendix 3 shows the most common verbal and nonverbal actions required to construct language game mechanisms. This paper will continue in Part Two with emphasis on the practical application of specific mechanisms.

Rationale

The rationale for using games in the language classroom has long been established both at the theoretical and the empirical levels. A Google search of “using games in language classes” results in hundreds of links to websites devoted to this topic. For instance, the Game Group

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website (2012) gives ten reasons and explains each one in a short paragraph. These reasons include giving a sense of purpose, providing feedback to the learners and instructors, providing experiential learning, motivating, improving teamwork, reducing stress in learning environments, providing real-world relevance, accelerating learning and giving the instructor a variety of choices in instruction methods. Additional reading may be found at Johnson, Johnson & Stanne (2000), Chen (2005), McDonough (2009), Simpson (2011), and Talak-Kiryk (2010).

Game Components

Mechanisms

A *mechanism* in a language game is a series of connected cues and actions resulting in targeted language production. The purpose of every mechanism is to initiate a cue to which players respond with the targeted language items. Since most mechanisms start with a cue, the content of that cue comes from the language items being learned. Types of cues and where they originate from will be discussed below. Generally speaking, responding properly to a cue leads to a reward specified by the game. Rewards typically involve keeping cards, shedding cards, making progress on a game board, and winning control of a game board space, just to name a few. A simple game mechanism is a series of behaviors, such as this: Player 1 rolls the dice, moves his or her token on the game board, reads a language cue and gives a verbal reply that satisfies the rules of the game. This completes the player's turn and ends the mechanism. See Appendices 1 and 2 for examples of some basic card and board game mechanisms.

Mechanisms are classified as sequential or simultaneous, depending on the number of players acting on a given cue. A sequential mechanism means that players take turns in a set order or by earning that right as a reward for a prior successful attempt. Sequential turn-taking allows every player to practice language skills more equally despite differences in language abilities among the group.

Some simultaneous mechanisms make players race to respond to a cue with the correct answer. In order to win the point, players need speed when acting on the cues. Higher-level players tend to do best in this kind of game. When used in moderation, the competitive aspect tends to boost the players' engagement and language use in a game. Another type of simultaneous mechanism makes the players each reveal a card. In this case, the cards have rank values so the player with the strongest card wins the round. Both sequential and simultaneous actions are valuable procedures in language games.

Levels of Language Games

Language learning games are categorized into three levels depending on the mechanisms that they use. These are Introductory, Mastery, and Expansion mechanisms. Each category addresses the needs of players at different levels of language ability. The type of game you choose will depend on the proficiency level of your students and the purpose of the activity. Some examples of mechanisms are given in Part Two of this paper. Introductory games are suitable for low-level

language learners who need a controlled learning environment. Introductory games, however, are also good for presenting new vocabulary and target language for higher levels of proficiency.

Mastery games involve mechanisms designed for repetition of functional expressions. At this level of language ability, players practice not only basic expressions but also three or four alternative ways to say the same thing. When designing a game for practicing functions, such as *giving advice*, additional language content may be presented gradually to the class. The idea of gradually expanding the content associated with a series of mechanisms will be discussed later in the paper.

At the higher levels of ability, Expansion games often begin with some standard mechanisms to teach target language items, but later, the requirement for player-generated input increases. Players are encouraged to volunteer more information or pose follow-up questions. Expansion games are much more open-ended and usually demand spontaneous language use. At this stage, creativity becomes an essential part of the game. Players enjoy not only stretching their English skills but also their imaginations. They must supply extra details in their responses, including their reasons and opinions for particular actions. Naturally, even players at this level of ability should look up new vocabulary items and write them down on their worksheets. Expansion games elicit target expressions as well as activate previously acquired language knowledge.

Cues

Cues are designed to elicit a valid action by another player. The form and content of the cue system must be decided for each mechanism to be used. Cues, either verbal or nonverbal, come from game resources. Verbal cues (e.g., spoken, written) are usually read out loud from resources, such as cards or game boards. For nonverbal cues (e.g., image, dice roll), images that are printed on cards are the most common resources. Player 1 receives a cue either directly from a resource or from an external source, such as player-generated content. Player 1 then interprets and acts on the cue.

Players need precise cues in order to play any game smoothly. By selecting cues that are familiar to everyone, it is easier to prompt the production of the desired language items. To achieve this, you first need to present the cues, or at least new vocabulary items, with identification and comprehension exercises. This introductory step in teaching a new game should be done using a worksheet containing all the target language items. Introductory mechanisms, such as identification, translation, and transformation exercises, become excellent scaffolding for mastering language necessary in advanced games.

Game resources using nonverbal cues consist of picture cards, dice and tokens. When using picture cards, a single image may correspond to many different language items across a variety of games. When the cards do not contain any words, the image alone represents whatever particular language items the teacher decides. It is the teacher who assigns the actual correspondence of meanings between images and the language items, and this correspondence is flexible. Worksheets are the best way to attach specific meanings to the images displayed on cards. The

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purpose of setting up the game with a worksheet is to save class time for actually playing the game.

Dice are an excellent resource to stimulate actions in games. First, they introduce luck and a random element into a mechanism. Second, dice can regulate the flow of the game by determining the movement of tokens around a game board. Third, the numbers on the dice can represent six words or topic categories from the syllabus. Player 1 acts on the language cue indicated by the number rolled with the dice. Similarly, the numbers on the dice can correspond to six selected language items that must be used in a target sentence (e.g., *if, when, after, before, unless, until.*) All sorts of correlations between the numbers and linguistic items are possible.

Actions

An action is either a verbal or nonverbal response to a cue received directly from a resource or from another player. In some mechanisms, the player who is to act is fixed by the mechanism. That player must act in a valid way according to the rules of the game. If there is no designated action-taker, any player in the group may attempt to respond. This often occurs in simultaneous mechanisms. Once a valid action happens, the game resumes with the next player starting a new turn, or in some cases, with the same player continuing to play. When a player is required to act nonverbally, it will usually be one of these actions: slap a card, play a card, make a gesture, sort cards, choose something, or roll dice.

Not all nonverbal actions in a game are the result of cue-action mechanisms. In many cases, these actions, such as rolling dice, dealing cards, moving tokens, and shedding cards are simply part of the game aspect. They support the flow of the game by giving it some structure. Another function of these nonverbal actions is to build group solidarity. Players who collectively understand how these actions work feel more comfortable using them in language games. The players have previous gaming schemata that help compensate for any deficiencies in their language abilities. The nonverbal actions, such as rolling dice, serve to distract the players from the cue-action repetition that is occurring during the game. As shown in Appendix 3, "Types of Player Actions in Language Games," there are many standard verbal and nonverbal actions from which to choose in order to build a mechanism. Fortunately, many different mechanisms can be assembled from just a few cue-action combinations.

Resources

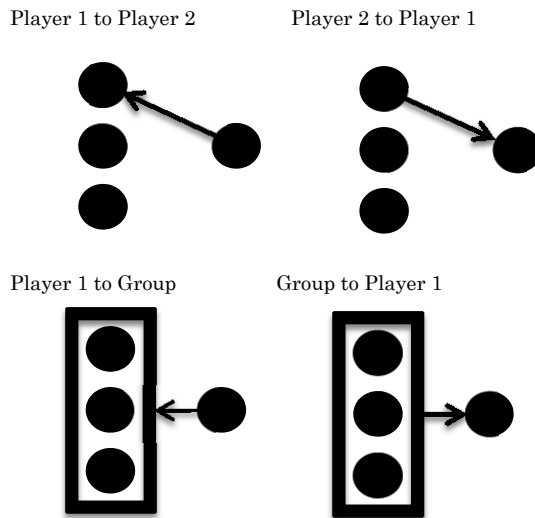
Clearly, the most important elements of this approach are the resources that are utilized. There are five basic resources discussed in this paper. These are cards, game boards, dice, tokens and worksheets. Once these have been created, you can reuse the same cards, worksheets, and game boards in various activities to teach a wide range of functions and vocabulary items. Dice and tokens are also easy and fun to employ. Language teachers will quickly realize the usefulness of having a large collection of gaming resources on hand.

Game Dynamics

The word *dynamic* in this context refers to the interactions between players as they execute a game mechanism. To better understand the flow of cues and actions in a game, we can look at Diagram 1, “Player Dynamics.” Shown here are the four basic flow patterns for cueing in language games. The design of a language learning game, whether simple or complex, begins with some basic decisions about how players will interact. These include how players are grouped and what actions the players will engage in. An efficient combination of these features results in maximizing the all of following: learner participation and collaboration, repetition of target language items, and player enjoyment.

In every mechanism, Player 1 either gets a cue and responds, thus ending the turn, or gets a cue and gives a new cue to someone else who finishes the turn. In whole-class games, the teacher cues the team or a single member of one team.

Diagram 1. Player Dynamics



Looking at the game from the perspective of Player 1, we can better understand the all-important concept of cueing. The most basic mechanism has Player 1 responding verbally to a resource cue: $(R \Rightarrow P1)$. This kind of reply can be short or long, depending on the mechanism. For example, Player 1 could read a cue out loud and then use the requisite target language item to complete his or her turn. The next type of mechanism has Player 2 using a resource to give a cue to Player 1: $(R \Rightarrow P2 \Rightarrow P1)$. The cue could be verbal or nonverbal, such as a gesture. In the next scenario, the group gets a cue from a resource and gives it to Player 1: $(R \Rightarrow G \Rightarrow P1)$. Conversely, some mechanisms involve the whole group responding to a cue from Player 1, usually in competition: $(P1 \Rightarrow G)$. Finally, some mechanisms involve group members competing to give a cue to Player 1: $(G \Rightarrow P1)$.

Pairs

Games between just two players are usually not as enjoyable as those played in a group. Two-player games, however, work well for rapid practice that uses set cues and responses. The tasks require both verbal actions and nonverbal actions. Verbal actions typically involve translating a language item, guessing an answer, transforming a phrase, answering a question, and talking for a specified time. Please see Appendix 3 for a list of these. Nonverbal actions between two players typically involve identifying a card by pointing or slapping, playing an action card, matching language items, landing in a square on a board, successfully acquiring a necessary card, scoring points, and so forth.

Groups

Games between groups include three or more players. Sometimes, the players act independently. At other times, they may act as a team. Generally speaking, this pattern stays constant throughout a game. The number of players in a group will depend on the mechanisms of the game but in most cases three to four people work best. The most important determinant of group size is how many players are able to participate during each turn. The mechanisms should enable maximum player participation. As the number of players in a game increases, their chances for practicing the target language will decrease.

Interactions between more than two players fall into one of three categories: one player vs. another, several players vs. one player, and all players vs. each other. An important difference between these three patterns is how turn-taking is decided. Turn-taking mechanisms control the flow of the game and reduce the chances of players with stronger language skills to win every game. In two-player games, players should alternate roles of giving and getting cues by taking turns. In multi-player games, rotating the role of action-doer will open up opportunities for every player to participate even more. The aim of the game is to allow even the weakest player to win.

The obvious merits of such competitive play are increased motivation among players and satisfaction after a successful turn. Caution should be exercised, however, when employing mechanisms where success is awarded with another turn. Highly competitive games work best when the players are all equally able to manipulate the linguistic aspects of the game.

Collaboration

Arranging the players into teams is the best way to encourage collaboration in language learning games. Teams work well because all players identify with a common goal. When designing a language learning game, it is important to use some social dynamics that the players already know well and value in games. In cultures where collaboration is more highly valued than competition, teamwork can be a powerful motivating force. In collaborative classrooms, games give players a way to strengthen their bonds with each other. As a result, even when one member is briefly playing against the other players, the game exploits his or her need to belong. The group, therefore, will usually give encouraging hints to help the Player 1 succeed in his or her

task. The reward for success is reintegration within the group while another player rotates out.

Some mechanisms work better when groups are split into two teams whose members collaborate with each other. Players on the same team will collaborate when they share the same information and goals. This can be easily manipulated by providing resources to some players while withholding that information from others. When such a gap in information exists, players take sides and exhibit a powerful cultural tendency to collaborate. Participation, when structured carefully with game mechanisms, helps players learn the target language more quickly.

You can instill a sense of identity among a group of players with several techniques. Simply giving the team a name to which they can relate or asking the players to provide their own team name will impart a common identity. When using tokens, you can require multiple players to share the same token as they move around the board to stimulate a group approach to whatever task they must accomplish.

In some games, the teams have an equal number of players. This is usually one pair playing against another pair. These two sides alternate as cue-givers and action-doers. The number of players on each team may also be uneven with one side only having one player. Thus, two or more players start the turn as the cue-givers while the remaining player acts alone as the action-doer. See Diagram 1 for this example. Team membership may be static or fluid depending on the mechanisms being employed. In a group of four players, three can collaborate to give the fourth player a cue to which that player must respond with the appropriate verbal action. Membership in the larger team changes with each turn taken, as the next player rotates outside the main group to become the action-doer. Interestingly, players engage in both collaboration and competition as group members try to help the lone challenger succeed in the task. Some game designers use the term “*collapetition*” to describe this combination of collaboration and competition.

Competition

Competition promotes personal involvement in language learning and motivates players to construct and use new language. Games, with their well-defined goals and rules, contribute to both intrinsic and extrinsic motivation in players. Competitive mechanics also bring out extrinsic motivation in players. For example, when cards are assigned a rank or a suit value, mechanisms that call for accumulation of related cards serve to motivate the players. In other games, players try to shed all their cards the as quickly as possible in order to win the game.

The effort required to gain rewards and avoid penalties in a game results in higher motivation to play. Players strive for rewards, including gaining points or getting higher status, by acquiring game resources, such as cards. Some games reward in increments, as is the case when the goal is to compile tricks. Other games delay reward until the end when scores for all the players are added up. Likewise, games using race boards keep players engaged and delay satisfaction until one player reaches the goal before the others, thus winning the game.

Mechanisms that rely on competition, however, can also have an anti-social effect in some cultures where learners are more sensitive about making a classmate feel bad. In Japan, for

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example, overzealous reasons for playing a certain way, such as revenge or punishment, are not conducive to group harmony. Camaraderie is a more prized aspect of interpersonal relations than outdoing an opponent.

Whole class

There are several mechanisms suitable for playing games at the whole-class level. In this scenario, dividing the class into two teams works well. The larger the group is, the greater the players' sense of group identity will be. This is essential for teamwork and collaboration. Split the list of cues in half and give one half to each team. A player from one side gives a cue to the other side, either to an individual player or to the team as a whole. This is repeated back and forth. Some mechanisms involve two players facing each other at the front of the room. Both players compete to answer a cue provided by the teacher. This allows the teacher to select a cue that matches the language abilities of each pair. An alternate system is for the teacher to give the cues to single players on each team or to a whole team to answer. This reduces the stress associated with racing to beat out the other team. At other times it works best to play in small groups before switching to a whole-class mode and playing again with a slightly different mechanism.

A worksheet, when properly designed and presented by the teacher is an essential resource in most cases. This worksheet will present requisite language items and example phrases. Pre-teaching any new language items is important. By providing a worksheet and going over it carefully, you can reduce the anxiety of solo players being in the spotlight when given a cue by the teacher. The teacher must also explain the rules of the game, such as turn-taking. For example, if a player answers successfully, his or her team can get a point and continue playing. In a related mechanism, the team gets the point, but their turn finishes. The teams earn a point for each successful response by their members. A running tally of points is written on the blackboard for everyone to see.

Types of Resources in Language Games

The following section describes the types and uses of five resources for language games. These resources can be either verbal or nonverbal or both. For example, a card with a language item and an image is both. If it only has an image, it would be a nonverbal resource. It would still be a cue, but without an obvious verbal component. The actual associated meaning will have to be taught. There are all kinds of other resources that you could bring to your game such as spinners, screens and score pads. This paper, however, will limit its discussion to the use of five resources to better illustrate the process of incorporating them into mechanisms.

Language game resources have both physical and communicative qualities. The five physical resources, as mentioned previously, are cards, boards, worksheets, tokens and dice. The communicative aspect comes from any language items associated with them. The cues associated with a resource should be designated by the teacher or decided by the players spontaneously during the course of the game. Corresponding meanings provided by the teacher should be

printed on a worksheet. Language cues provided by the players are commonly verbal but also include written cues or gestures. Players can produce cues by drawing simple pictures without any text. This would be an example of player-originated nonverbal content to cue a verbal action by Player 1.

Producing Resources

There are simple ways and more advanced ways to produce game resources. The games listed in this paper are all made with cards, game boards, worksheets or dice. Each of these resources is discussed in more detail below. An internet-connected computer, a printer and a laminator make creating material significantly easier. Realistically speaking, the effort involved in using this approach without the first two tools would dissuade most teachers from adopting it.

Production of game resources is the first step. Begin the process with a search in *Google Images* to find pictures of the targeted vocabulary items. It is always a good idea to choose images that resonate with the specific students that you teach. So, for example, with young players you would choose pictures that resonate with youngsters. If the players were all female, you could choose pictures connected with or depicting women. The idea is to make the image content easy for those playing the game to identify with.

In order to find suitable images to use, first expand your search terms to include any related words that come to mind. If you find a term that matches your criteria, narrow that search by choosing the tool selection category “Clip Art.” Finally, narrow the search parameters even further by choosing clip art that is only “Black and White” to give uniformity to all the pictures in a set. Black and white clip art has an abundance of suitable pictures for eliciting language items.

Dice

The term *dice* here refers to one die or two, although one is usually enough. Dice introduce an element of randomness to language games. Randomness adds fairness to the game because all players can see the result and all players face the same task when rolling the dice. The random outcome of a dice roll also adds an element of luck when receiving rewards and penalties. Their importance, however, does not end there. They give the game a tangible form through a simple physical process. Dice serve to hold together the process of getting a cue and acting out a mechanism. Dice have a binding power in the dynamic nature of the game. The act of rolling the dice heightens somatic sensations during play, which captivate the player’s attention and increases overall motivation.

There are many kinds of dice. The most common type has numbers from one to six. There are also dice with many more sides and various numbering schemes. Other types have letters, pictures, and colors on the surfaces. Online game supply stores sell blank dice to which you attach stickers that you have printed out in sheets. This makes it possible to attach all kinds of icons and verbal cues to the dice faces. There are also websites with virtual dice rolling that allow you to create online dice and roll them. This is great if each group has their own tablet computer

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connected to the Internet. Whatever type of dice you decide to use, they are easily incorporated into a vast array of mechanisms.

The usefulness of dice is optimized when they are used in combination with other resources, such as game boards and cards. For example, players roll dice to determine their positions and proceed around a printed game board, such as in *Snakes and Ladders*. The object of this genre is to race to the goal while avoiding squares containing a snake's head. Landing on one of these will send the player backwards to the square at the end of the snake's tail. On the other hand, landing on the bottom rung of a ladder sends the player to the top. The number of mechanisms using dice and game boards is limited only by your imagination but most games are played with a few standard formats.

Cards

Cards are by far the most useful resources for language games. Some cards may be bought but making them with a computer has many advantages. You can create your own cards after determining the language items that you want the players to practice. Since you are designing them based on what you want to teach, the cards will be custom-tailored to fit the needs of both the students and the teacher. Once you have made a collection of cards, your job as a language teacher will be much easier.

Cards can be produced on a computer with an Internet connection and a printer. After printing on card stock paper, the sheets are cut up into individual cards. You should standardize your card collection into a few set sizes. Page layout software, such as Apple's *Pages*, allows you to set a uniform size for your cards so they are easier to cut. The next step is to laminate the cards, which makes them last longer and stay cleaner. They can be bound by rubber bands and stored in plastic bags.

When it comes to producing cards, simplicity and uniformity in their content are best. The simplest content is a single picture or word that is precise enough to prompt the desired response but vague enough for other meanings to be attached later if necessary. For example, a card depicting a girl riding a bicycle is open to interpretation. It could represent, "I have a bicycle," "I often ride my bike," "I don't like to ride bikes," or "Do you like riding bikes?" That card could stand for all sorts of language items. Ideally, the images you choose should appeal to the players' sense of identity, such as male or female, child or adult. In other words, cue cards in an all-female class should portray females doing the actions. You want to increase player interest in the content of the cards so that they can remember them better.

Cards are easily designed to include hierarchical information for use in ranking and suit matching mechanisms. The use of ranks and suits is a good way to increase competition among players. For ranking purposes, you can add values to the cards, such as numbers printed in the corner, so that players can use superior and inferior relationships in the game. Mechanisms that award points and impose penalties can be applied to these relationships. Since ranking and matching suits are common in ordinary card games, players easily comprehend and adapt to

the structure of the game and workings of the mechanisms involved. A typical ranking structure could be in increments of 5 points, such as 5, 10, 15, 20 and 25.

You can double the number of cues on the cards by dividing each card into top and bottom halves with a different cue on each half. Then, if a player rolls a one, two, or three, the cue on the top half of the card applies. If the die comes up four, five or six, the cue on the bottom of the card applies. This adds a second layer of randomness to the dice roll. You could even make the top cues easier and the bottom cues harder to increase the challenge of the game.

There are many mechanisms for using cards having suit values. The object of the game is to accumulate matching suit cards to form tricks. Tricks can consist of all one suit or one card from each suit, depending on the game design. You can easily create cards with suits based on categories of lexical meaning. If you have a group of related lexical items, such as *travel experiences*, you can group them into categories, such as *food*, *outdoor activities*, *meeting people*, *sightseeing*, *hotels*, and *shopping*. Then, by making each card match a category, players can sort and group their cards according to the suits. There are several mechanisms for teaching the meanings of picture cards. These will be listed in Part Two of this paper.

Action Card Sets

You can create separate sets of cards to show a range of many notions such as preferences, frequency, time, likeness, and so on. Notional degrees can be symbolized on cards and players quickly comprehend the symbols as long as there is a logical range of meanings. For example, you can show preferences, ranging from less to more, by putting a large symbol in the center of each card, such as $\sqrt{\quad}$, $\sqrt{\sqrt{\quad}}$, and $\sqrt{\sqrt{\sqrt{\quad}}}$ to indicate *like*, *really like*, and *love*. Conversely, the symbols \times , $\times \times$, $\times \times \times$ can depict *don't like*, *really don't like* and *hate*. Likewise, you could make cards based on frequency adverbs, such as *never*, *hardly ever*, *sometimes*, *often*, *usually*, and *always* by adding \times , ∇ , \triangle , \circ , \odot and \star . Another notional set of action cards has a large 0 or X in the center to represent *agree* or *disagree*. These icons could also denote *true* and *false*. An action card having a question mark indicates the player should ask a question to another player. Other types of action cards are easily created according to the notional, functional and grammatical aims of the game. Simple icons can express a range of notions concerning time, such as *older to newer*, *before* and *after*, *since* and *for*, *yet* and *already*, and so on. Cards printed with $<$, $>$, $=$, and \neq are useful for practicing comparative and superlative forms. These action cards are played in conjunction with other printed resources such as picture cards and game boards. A typical mechanism calls for one cue card and one action card to cue a target language item.

Symbols may also be printed in the corner of picture cards to elicit verbal actions required by the mechanism, such as *request*, *agree*, *refuse*, or *invite*, *accept*, and *decline*. For example, a request card that includes a question mark (?) in the corner prompts Player 1 to make a request to another player concerning the picture. If the other player is holding a card with the matching picture and a check symbol (\checkmark), a positive response is made and the card is surrendered, forming a trick.

Translation with Cards

Cards that contain utterances in the players' native language are useful for translation games. It is important to teach the target phrases before playing a game such as this. One simple mechanism uses cue cards containing phrases printed in the two languages. Player 1 listens to the native language cue and must translate the phrase correctly. The other players can all see the correct translation printed at the bottom of the card so they enjoy the predicament of their classmate. In many cases, they try to help their struggling classmate translate correctly by providing hints and nods of acknowledgment. This becomes a form of collaborative learning that helps all the players learn the material. The card mechanism mentioned above uses a draw pile of cards with printed utterances to serve as cues to which the player whose turn it is must respond. This common mechanism is easily employed in various games by simply changing the contents of the draw pile cards.

Error Correction Cards

Error correction games utilize this same group dynamic. Player 1 is a target for the cue, which is supplied by the group as a whole. Each cue card in the draw pile contains a phrase that includes the content being learned. Errors in grammar are intentionally inserted into about fifty percent of the cue cards. Player 1 must judge if the cue has an error or not. If it contains an error, Player 1 must correct the error. The other players know what the error is because the correct version is printed at the bottom of the card. Mechanisms such as this resemble a puzzle and this makes them more interesting to the players.

Story Telling with Cards

Story telling is an advanced skill that is easily inspired with image cards. One game uses a deck of picture cards that the players use to tell a communal story. Each player, in turn, puts down a picture card and continues the story based on what was said by the other players until all the cards have been played. This activity is also collaborative and highly motivating. Another story telling mechanism requires Player 1 to hide three secret words within a story and the other players must deduce those three words by asking questions. A popular game called *Camouflaged Words* uses this mechanism.

Cards, to summarize, provide certain physical immediacy to the process of language learning. There is a synergy between the language patterns and the physical attributes of the cards. The physical act of holding the cards helps crystalize the attention and focus the efforts of the players. This is one rationale for using games and especially card games in language learning. A good software product for making cards on Mac computers is called *iFlash* (McGavern, 2014). It takes only a few minutes to create a deck of cards and print them out, making this time and effort well spent.

Game Boards

Game boards are very useful resources in language learning games, both for serving cues and for giving feedback. Game boards manage to stimulate actions, focus attention on the activity and reinforce player identity. A race board is a powerful way to add an element of competition to a game. The physical act of moving one's token at each turn is a small but powerful incentive to the players.

The most common game boards are *Race Boards* that contain a path along which players move their tokens towards the goal. A board can provide cues directly to the players if they are printed in each square. Players roll the dice and move that many squares on the board. They read the cue and answer with a valid verbal response. The cues can also come from cards in a draw pile, which the players take from the top after moving their token. If players are given a race board with blank squares, groups can write in their own cues and then exchange their boards with another group who then play that game.

Race Boards with tokens add another layer of feedback to a game. First, they show the relative progress of each player. This visually tangible format adds some base structure to the interactions, thus motivating players to win. The effort spent to get to the goal provides a concrete framework for the verbal and nonverbal actions that take place in the game.

Another type of game board does not use tokens but some other resource, such as cards. One example of this type is the *Sorting Board*. These are some of the easiest boards to make. The teacher could choose this type of board for practicing a single grammatical category. To make the board, a grid of squares is printed on a large sheet of paper. Each square contains a word or phrase, such as an adverbial phrase of time: *always, usually, often, once in a while, and never*. In this board game, a draw pile of cards is used to supply the cues. Each card has a cue that is combined with one word from the board. Player 1 combines one card with one square on the board to create an original sentence.

Some mechanisms require the players to place the cards directly on a board and others simply require players to use both a card cue and a board cue during their turns. In the first case, the mechanism requires Player 1 to draw a card and place it on an appropriate square on the board. Two tasks are possible here. The easier task is to simply match the card cue to a board cue in a way that makes sense. For example, cards having adjectives and nouns could be combined with suffixes printed on the board, such as *-ly, -ous, -ity, -ness, -ful, and -al*. A more demanding task requires the players to combine the card cue with a correct board cue to create an original statement or a question. All sorts of functional and grammatical categories may be practiced using this matching mechanism. An example of this type of board is presented in the "Making a Language Game Step by Step" section in Part Two.

Another type of board that does not use tokens is the *Hint Board*. This is just a large print with target phrases or words scattered around it. Players sit around the board and use the phrases as a kind of "cheat sheet" when necessary. This works well as a secondary resource or reference device. Having a large printed sheet in the middle of the table contributes to a game-

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like atmosphere, and it provides the players with a central focus for their group's activity. Hint boards are also useful in identification games such as "Slap!" in which players race to touch and say something printed on the board when cued.

Another useful board game employs a *tic-tac-toe* style mechanism where markers are placed on areas of the board to claim them. By placing their markers in a designated pattern, usually an alignment, players strive to capture areas and block other players from using them. Upon successfully using the language item associated with an area on the board, the space is no longer available to the other players. Whenever possible, adding an element of strategy to a game in this way is always preferable.

Tokens

Many board mechanisms require the use of tokens, which add a motivational element to the game. Players have a concrete object with which to emotionally identify. Any small objects may serve as tokens; even colored paper clips will work. The tokens on the board show the relative positions of all the players on the board. The path to the goal may be fixed or open depending on the mechanism. In the first instance, players move their tokens depending on how they roll the dice. In other games, they are allowed to move a token to a spot contingent upon successfully responding to a cue of some kind. Tokens add one more layer of attachment to language games. The progress of one's token on the board heightens the motivation and engagement of every player in the game.

By supplying tokens for a game rather than asking the players to provide their own, the teacher has some opportunities to interact with each student. For example, you can ask players what color, shape, or type of token they want. Such predictable and simple interactions with the teacher certainly help build confidence in lower-level players.

Another type of useful resource, called a *chit*, can be used along with card games. Poker chips or small round magnets make good chits. In the following example for countable noun and uncountable noun practice, one deck of about fifty picture cards showing count and uncountable nouns is dealt out to all the players in the group. The object of the game is to accumulate a hand composed of only countable nouns or uncountable nouns. To begin, all players simultaneously pass one unwanted card to the player on their right. As play proceeds, they check their cards to see if they have a complete hand and discard any unwanted ones. The first player that manages to collect a full trick suddenly grabs a chit off the table. This is a signal for all the other players to grab for the remaining chits. The number of chits in the center of the table, however, is one less than the number of players in the group so one player comes up empty. As a result, this player is the loser of that round. The player who makes the trick gets one point and the player who fails to grab a chit loses one point. This kind of sudden grab game is a lot of fun for everyone.

Worksheets

Worksheets are supplementary resources that help players in many ways if they are properly constructed. Worksheets are designed to introduce unfamiliar target vocabulary and example dialogs that are required for play. Some language items are already presented in the textbook so there is no need to include an explanation of these. Likewise, actual grammar and vocabulary exercises should not be included on the game worksheet. New phrases should be printed on a worksheet and gradually introduced and required as part of the game. You should only introduce new expressions when it comes time to use them in a game to avoid overwhelming the players with too many choices. It is better to increase the level of difficulty and complexity in stages as you add mechanisms.

The guiding principle for game worksheets is to keep them simple and focused on what is necessary for playing the game. They need to be created from scratch for each set of cues to be used. Worksheets that introduce new vocabulary should be organized in the same order that the material will be needed in the game. New language items should be placed first so players can practice pronunciation and take notes. It may be necessary to explain which picture cards correspond to which cues. The next section should offer sample expressions and target language items for playing the game. If directions or rules are to be printed, they can go next on the worksheet. The final section should provide some space for writing new words that players look up in their dictionaries. This consists of an area at the bottom for making notes.

Summary of Part One

This paper is the first half of a thesis arguing for a systematic approach to language learning game design. This approach divides games into resources and procedures for analysis and then seeks to recombine these components back into generic mechanisms for use in the classroom. As a precursor to listing specific game mechanisms in Part Two, this portion of the thesis lays out the key interactions between players and examines how these serve to motivate language acquisition. Central to this approach is the idea that players use cues derived from the five resources to elicit targeted language items in a structured, yet enjoyable, process. Language teachers, with access to an Internet-connected computer and printer, can customize games to improve the current instructional content of their syllabus. This part includes some useful guidelines for actual implementation of games in the classroom. Part Two will continue this discussion with actual examples of how to combine mechanisms for the maximum effect. Part Two can be found in Vol. 11, Faculty of Cultural and Expression Studies Report of Baika Women's University.

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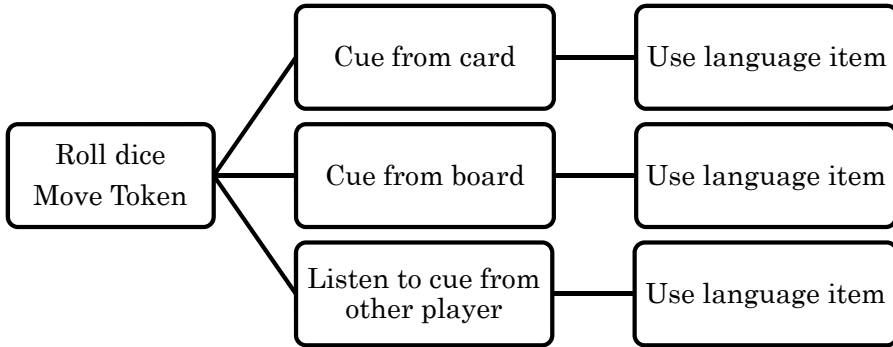
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Appendix 1
Example Mechanisms

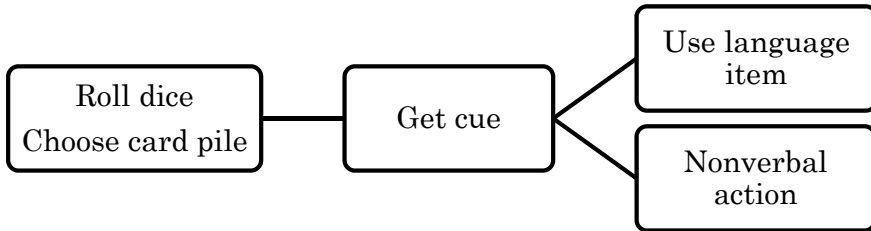
**Board Game
with Tokens**

Player 1 rolls the dice and moves the token on the board. Three different mechanisms are possible here.



**Card Game
with Dice**

Six piles of cue cards are arranged. Player 1 rolls dice and gets cue from the card pile numbered the same as the dice roll.



**Action Card
game**

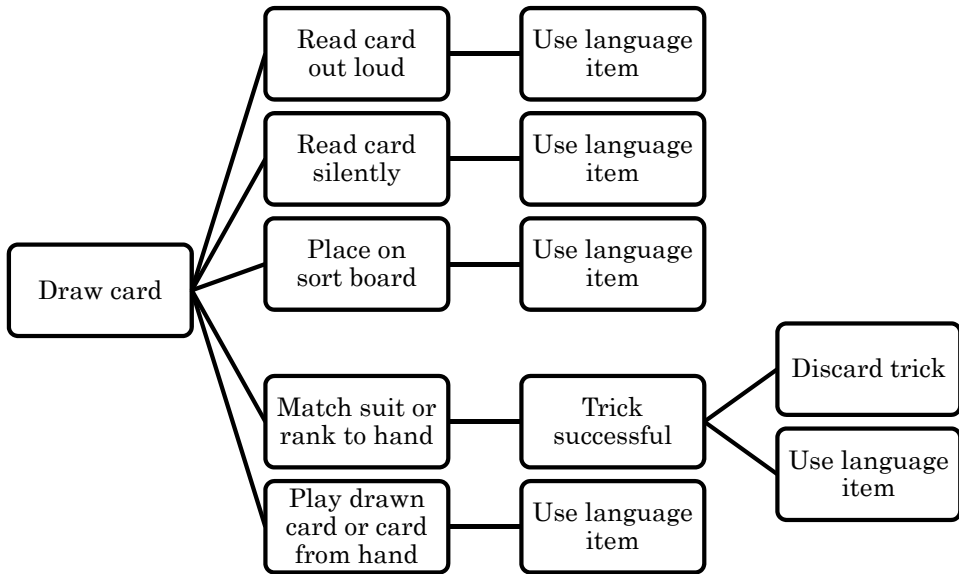
A verbal cue or a nonverbal cue (image card) requires Player 1 to draw an action card and respond according to the action card drawn.



Appendix 2
Example Mechanisms

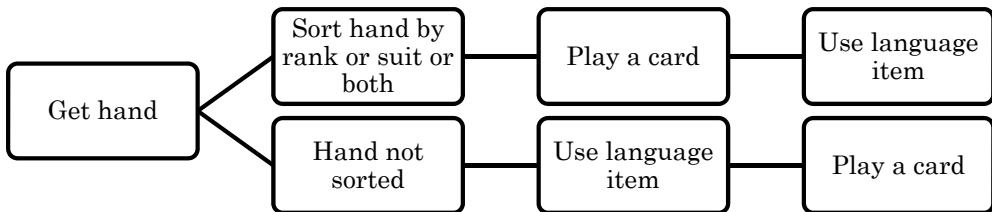
**Draw pile
Combinations**

Various mechanisms for draw card games. Cards contain cues to elicit language items. Rules for play depend on the need to create matching suits or not.



Dealt Hand

Player 1 gets a hand and either sorts it or does not. One card is chosen and played and serves as a cue for language use.



Appendix 3

Types of Player Actions in Language Game

Verbal Actions for Language Items
Request a card
Write a memo
Ask a question
Give a hint
Give information
Narrate a story
Justify a choice / action
Translate a language item
Transform a language item
Unscramble a language item
Make a guess
Compare language items
Group choral response
Talk for a specified time
Tell a lie
Judge truthfulness
Role play
Shout out language item
Identify a language item
Read a language item out loud
Read a language item silently
Memorize resource

Nonverbal Actions for Language Items
Sort language item card
Match language item card
Choose / pick up language item card
Turn over language item card
Slap language item resource
Gesture language item

Nonverbal Actions for Gaming
Move token
Roll dice
Shed card
Turn over card
Deal cards
Pass card
Do <i>Paper, Scissors, Rock</i>
Score points
Bet
Keep time with timer
Exchange places on board