

PRAGMATICS AT PLAY

A CARD TRADING GAME FOR
STRATEGIC COMMUNICATION



COMMUNICATE - COLLABORATE - CONNECT

This game invites you to engage with key questions to understand meaning making in cross-cultural and intercultural contexts.

Materials: 100 Cards

Players: Up to 10 per deck of cards

Setup: Distribute five cards to every person. Place extra cards in different areas around the room.

Play: Build words with your cards to earn points! To swap cards with someone, you must complete the tasks on BOTH cards that you swap. Cards around the room are free to use upon picking them up.

Scoring: As participants complete words, the facilitator documents their scores. If they create a word related to strategic communication, the facilitator should double the score.

Potential Terms for Double Points

- Co-Construct
- Collaborator
- Communicate
- Conversation
- Distance
- Face
- Force
- Greeting
- Illocutionary
- Imposition
- Intended
- Interlocutor
- Learner
- Leave-Taking
- Locutionary
- Maximizing
- Meaning
- Minimizing
- Minus
- Parent
- Perlocutionary
- Plus
- Politeness
- Power
- Pragmatics
- Social
- Solidarity
- Speaker
- Understand

Discussion Notes: Debrief

After gameplay, you may want to debrief with your fellow players. Here are some tips to facilitate that discussion.

Core Assumptions

- 1) All varieties of language are inherently equal. We use the terms +/-, or positive/negative to indicate where preferences lie on a spectrum, not to evaluate one manner of communication as superior to another.
- 2) Our communication preferences are not typically examined unless we discover the need to do so. It's okay if participants were unaware of the preferences that exist across people and people groups! The point of this game is to learn about these preferences so that participants are better able to negotiate communication.
- 3) Language use is dynamic. Any individual or group of individuals may not adhere to the preferences highlighted in the game.
- 4) All core pragmatic concepts (power, social distance, politeness, and rank of imposition) are at play all of the time. Though one might be the major contributing factor to miscommunication, they are interconnected.

Topic Notes:

Power: “Power and language are connected through the marking of certain encounters and contexts as requiring particular types of language use, the privileging of certain types of language, who may or may not speak in certain settings, which contexts are appropriate for which types of speech and which for silence, what types of talk are appropriate to persons of different statuses and roles, norms for requesting and giving information, and practices for alternating between speakers” (Keating, 2009, p. 996).

Examples and Explanations:

- “I have a learner who keeps interrupting me when I talk. It’s distracting.”: This educator likely encodes power in their communication by discouraging overlap and enforcing strict turn-taking.
- “My learners can respectfully disagree with me whenever!”: This educator is less likely to encode power differentials in their communication by allowing more flexible interaction and fewer restrictions on speaking roles for the people in a -power position.

Topic Notes:

Social Distance: “The concept, in its most simple form, is a measure of the degree of friendship/intimacy (or absence thereof) between interlocutors [speakers]. Social distance is one of the foremost factors that determines the way in which interlocutors converse precisely because it is an important determinant of the degree of comfort or...deference in a verbal exchange” (Boxer, 1993, p. 103).

Examples and Explanations:

- The use of titles and a last name is a distance-maximizing strategy. The use of first names is a distance-minimizing strategy.
- Sharing personal details can be a distance-minimizing strategy.
- Depending on context, people may perceive your strategies with varying degrees of comfort. For example, someone who expects a person in power to go by their last name may see the use of a first name as a delegitimizing force.

Topic Notes:

Politeness: “Politeness deals with considering whether your communication choices should privilege the autonomy of another person or privilege their wish to be appreciated/included in groups” (Kádár, 2017, n.p.).

Examples and Explanations:

- *Politeness* is not the same thing as formality. It manifests as matching one’s words to context.
- Insisting that someone come to a party after they have rejected your invitation is a +politeness-oriented strategy. Accepting their refusal is a -politeness-oriented strategy.
- Setting future plans with someone when saying goodbye is a +politeness-oriented strategy. Simply ducking out or issuing a simple goodbye is a -politeness-oriented strategy.

Topic Notes:

Imposition: “Rank of imposition refers to the importance or the degree of difficulty in a situation. For example, in requests, a large rank of imposition would occur if you were asking for a big favor, whereas a small rank of imposition would exist when the request is small” (Center for Advanced Research on Language Acquisition, 2024, n.p.).

Examples and Explanations:

- If time is very imposing, someone is likely to be annoyed if you take up a lot of it because you owe them a big apology.
- Also with respect to apologies, if time is relatively less imposing, a person is likely to expect an explanation about what happened and an offer for repair of the situation that involves spending time together.
- Like time, material objects carry various levels of imposition across individuals and people groups. This reality is wildly heterogeneous.

References

- Boxer, D. (1993). Social distance and speech behavior: The case of indirect complaints. *Journal of Pragmatics*, 19(2), 103-125.
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- Kádár, D. Z. (2017). Politeness, impoliteness and ritual. Cambridge University Press.
- Keating, E. (2009). Power and pragmatics. *Language and Linguistics Compass*, 3(4), 996-1009.<https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1749-818X.2009.00148.x>

- Social Distance Videos
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 - [Social Distance and Language for Specific Purposes](#)
- Power Videos
 - [Power](#)
 - [Exploring Language and Power](#)
 - [Power and Language for Specific Purposes](#)
- Politeness Video
 - [Politeness](#)
- Imposition Videos
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 - [Rank of Imposition-Language for Specific Purposes](#)

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