Playing Board Games: A Case Study of Gender Differences in Language

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Abstract
This case study investigates the variables of language and communication, as well as gender, in the board gaming community of practice. The study provides an analysis of gender and language during ten board gaming videos from YouTube using methods of digital ethnography, conversation analysis, and the community of practice framework. The levels of verbosity and other aspects of language are also investigated. The findings suggest that the differences in members' behaviours are connected to core or peripheral memberships within the community of practice, rather than to the gender variable.

Keywords: board games; language and gender; community of practice; digital ethnography; YouTube; gender studies

1. Introduction

Board games present an exciting subject for studies in sociolinguistics, language, and gender due to the number of verbal and non-verbal interactions between players.

Not that long ago, D&D (Dungeons and Dragons) and other board games were used in television discourse to emphasize the geekiness of a specific character or a group (e.g., the episode 'Discos and Dragons' from *Freaks and Geeks*); now, instead, D&D is often popularised in movies and TV series and played by Hollywood celebrities (see e.g., Nerdist 2018). As a result of this normalization, one now sees more and more players from diverse ethnic, socioeconomic, and gender backgrounds engaging in such games.

It is a rather rare opportunity to study a hobby that unites women and men and is not exclusively male- or female-dominated. While there are still more men playing board games, the number of female players is steadily rising. According to the 2018 demographic poll on BoardGameGeek (2018; 2014), 11% of players identify themselves as female, which is a significant rise compared to just 7.7% in 2013.

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I use digital ethnography and the community of practice (CofP) approach to analyze gender patterns of behaviour in gaming group dynamics. This approach resulted in an exploration of variation based on its local significance. Since all the games were recorded and uploaded on YouTube, I had no influence or input over the repertoire of this group as a researcher.

My study does not treat gender and language from the so-called 'myth of Mars and Venus' (Cameron, 2007); rather than looking for language differences specifically, I analyze gender and language during interactions and conversations between female and male gamers by using conversation analysis (CA). Previous studies of games have focused on gender differences and traditional dichotomies such as 'girls like cooperation' and 'boys like confrontation', while often ignoring the in-game interactions between players (e.g., Lever 1976; Adler et al. 1992; Thorne 1993). In contrast, my study focuses on the gamers' contributions to the gameplay. Overall, this research aims to investigate language and communication in board games by expanding the term community of practice (CofP) from the digital world of online multiplayer games (Newon 2011, 2016) into the more physical, interaction-based world of hobbies such as board games.

I begin with an outline of previous studies in the field of gender and the CofP. A brief description of current statistical information about gender in the board gaming community of practice will be presented. I then conclude with a short case study about the language behaviour of men and women during ten board gaming sessions recorded for the show *GameNight!* on YouTube.

One key aspect of the investigation will be the levels of verbosity during the games. Section 4.2 will cover the aspect of gender in relation to asking questions in the CofP. Other differences in language and gender, such as proposals and politeness, will be investigated in more detail in sections 4.3 and 4.4.

2. Background

The majority of research papers about board gaming are closely connected with the fields of language teaching (e.g. Ghory 2004; Zagal et al. 2006; Treher 2011; Laski and Siegler 2014), early children's development (e.g. Matorin and McNamara 1996; Siegler and Ramani 2008), and healthcare (e.g. Cheng 2018; Dartigues et al. 2013; Gauthier et al. 2019). In terms of gender and gaming, more attention is given to online video games (Newon

2011, 2016) and gender representation of characters in games (e.g. Cassel and Jenkins 2000; Greenberg et al. 2010; Wohn 2011; Oliviander 2019) than to the gender balance and roles within the board gaming community itself.

Robin Lakoff (1972), a pioneer scholar of gender and language, suggested that women and men speak differently and that these differences are reflected in women's subordinate behaviour within society. Lakoff regarded women's language from the perspective of its deficit and aimed at achieving equality by lessening the importance of women's language. In contrast, liberal cultural feminism approached language and gender from a different perspective. Deborah Tannen, a prominent proponent of the difference theory, popularized the science of gender differences in speech. She argued that boys and girls belong to different subcultures and that their language differences are similar to those experienced by people from different ethnicities or class backgrounds. She argued further that these differences can even result in the equivalent of cross-cultural miscommunication (Tannen 1992).

Recent studies in language and gender have moved significantly forward from the predominantly sexist rhetoric of the twentieth century, and some researchers now believe that different identities of a person override gender identities (Wodak 2008). However, the dominant modern ideology regarding gender still includes research about gender differences. Thus, one should be constantly aware of the so-called 'gender oversensitivity' (Ehrlich et al. 1991: 180) that can occur when people disregard other identities in favor of assuming that gender identities play the crucial role.

Given this concern, some researchers have turned their attention from gender differences to social identities. For instance, Eckert and McConnell-Ginet (2013) focused their research on the functioning of language within the community of practice (CofP). After its introduction (Lave 1988; Wenger 1998), Eckert and McConnell-Ginet reinterpreted this term for use in sociolinguistics by challenging earlier approaches in language and gender in sociolinguistics. For example, groups that have developed specific ways of interacting and talking to each other can be described as the CofP, meaning 'the level of social organization at which people experience the social order on a personal and day-to-day basis' (Eckert and McConnell-Ginet 2013: 58). These groups are not usually created spontaneously but form around a common hobby, belief, or

situation. Communities of practice are three-dimensional and include *mutual engagement*, a *joint enterprise*, and a *shared repertoire* (Wenger 1998: 73). King (2019: 61–63) analyzed language and gender studies that used the CofP approach (e.g. Holmes and Meyerhoff 1999; Ehrlich 1999; Freed 1999) and concluded that women in these studies could not be considered communities of practice because they did not know each other and, thus, were not mutually engaged in a joint enterprise. According to King, only Bucholz's (1999) 'nerd girls' study managed to correctly identify a community of practice. This particular study focused on the girls in the 'nerdy' club and demonstrated their belonging to the CofP by providing ethnographic and discourse analysis.

Usually, it can be concluded that the CofP has been formed after applying the 14 indicators of a CofP, as developed by Wenger (1998: 130–131):

1) sustained mutual relationships – harmonious or conflictual
2) shared ways of engaging in doing things
3) the rapid flow of information and propagation of innovation
4) absence of introductory preambles, as if conversations and interactions were merely the continuation of an on-going process
5) very quick setup of a problem to be discussed
6) substantial overlap in participants' descriptions of who belongs
7) knowing what others know, what they can do, and how they can contribute to an enterprise
8) mutually defining identities
9) the ability to assess the appropriateness of actions and products
10) specific tools, representations, and other artefacts
11) local lore, shared stories, inside jokes, knowing laughter
12) jargon and shortcuts to communication as well as the ease of producing new ones
13) certain styles recognized as displayed membership
14) a shared discourse that reflects a certain perspective on the world.

Most of these features are present within a group of people who regularly play board games together; therefore it can be concluded that regular board gaming groups usually become CofPs.

Wenger (1998:149–164) also incorporated both CofPs and identity into his analysis, arguing that 'our identity is formed through participation as well as reification'; thus a person's membership constitutes their identity. I believe that a similar analysis of individual players' behaviour is possible when it comes to the board gaming CofP.

Even though Wenger does not directly connect the CofP to Goffman's (Goffman 1967) term 'face', both mutuality of engagement and negotiability of a repertoire, as well as the face-to-face interaction within the CofP, can be linked to the concept of 'face'.

The term 'face' is usually understood as a situation in which a person might present from their most desirable side, one that others might enjoy and appreciate. Eckert and McConnel-Ginet (2013: 59) consider it to be a 'social glue' that keeps people together in various social situations, pointing out (2013: 91) that human discourse is formed by contributions from speakers and the number of contributions from both male and female speakers mostly depends on their ability to be heard. Initially, the terms of 'positive' and 'negative face' were introduced through their connection to politeness by arguing that a person tries to promote 'positive face' by saying and doing things that other people would find appealing, thus painting a more positive image of oneself in the eyes of others (Brown and Levinson 1987). However, each person also cares about their own negative face, when actions and independent beliefs should receive support and respect without any influence from other people. Throughout my analysis of board gaming interactions, several examples of face-threatening or face-saving acts can be seen.

Another aspect of the board gaming community of practice that makes it attractive for sociolinguistic research is that it promotes healthy competitiveness, which is closely connected with Wenger's indicators of the CofP (1998: 130–131). Eckert and McConnell-Ginet (2013: 125) believe that female competition in the social marketplace goes against male cultural prerogative, while personal competition damages women's capital in the social marketplace. However, when both men and women form a board gaming group that meets frequently, one can argue that they, as members of a particular community of practice, have already managed to come to a mutual agreement about their behavioural norms and

therefore accept the levels of competitiveness within the group. Speaking from personal experience as a regular attendee of board gaming events, newcomers who violate the norms of competitiveness accepted by the group are often excluded if they fail to follow the community's behavioural guidelines, and they are then left outside of the inbound trajectories of the CofP (Wenger 1998: 154).

Many researchers describe male speech as competitive and female speech as cooperative, yet board games require both communicative and competitive speech styles from the gamers. The 'take that', cutthroat mechanics of some games often result in higher levels of competition from every player, while cooperative games (games where players unite their efforts and play against the game's mechanics) cannot be successful without cooperation from every single participant. In a way, board games present the perfect opportunity for gamers to change their communication styles, similar to pretend play among children.

Levels of verbosity are normally not tested in CofP studies; however, if one plans to analyze the roles of gender and language within a certain CofP, verbosity becomes an interesting feature to study. Prior research on verbosity in language and gender shows many contradictory results. James and Drakich (1993), in their overview of the literature on verbosity, calculated that 61% of their studies showed men doing most of the speaking in a variety of situations. In contrast, only 2 out of 56 studies showed women talking more. The remaining 20 studies showed no significant differences between male and female speakers. Their results also showed that 'experts' in a specific situation spoke more regardless of their gender (James and Drakich, 1993).

Following this, some researchers have tried to establish whether expertise is more important in speech and leads to the 'expert' doing the most talking (Leet-Pellegrini 1980). In a board gaming group, the player with the highest expertise usually assumes the role of the rules explainer. The role of the rule-explainer within the YouTube community of practice can be closely associated with Wenger's (1998: 109) concept of 'brokering': by explaining the rules of a new game to the group members, a broker also explains them to the wider YouTube audience, which in turn forms a larger 'constellation' (Wenger 1998: 127) of people who share the same hobby.

When it comes to gender statistics in the board gaming community, Nick Yee (2017) provides interesting data regarding gender preferences in

board gaming. He created a *Board Game Motivation Profile* questionnaire and after analyzing the results from more than 90,000 respondents (see Figure 1), concluded that for male players the highest-scoring motivations were the 'Need To Win' and 'Discovery' (learning new game mechanics) motivations. In contrast, the least popular motivations for men were 'Social Fun' (spending good time with other players) and 'Aesthetics' (quality game components and beautiful artwork).

Answers from female respondents showed that women's most popular motivations included 'Accessibility' (games that are easy to learn and have rules that are easy to explain) and 'Social Fun'. The least popular motivations were 'Conflict' (high conflict and backstabbing mechanics) and 'Discovery'. However, both male and female respondents mentioned the overall desire to win as a primary motivational factor. In total, the survey results make it possible to conclude that female players enjoy cooperative and party games more than male players and that women use board gaming events as social interactions more frequently than male players. Both genders also seem to enjoy games with elements of social manipulation, such as games where winning depends on the ability to bluff and deceive their opponents. These arguable gender differences within one hobby could be linked to the idea of a 'nexus of multimembership' (Wenger 1998: 158–163) of one's identity. Since our identities usually need to integrate various forms of memberships, a nexus of multimembership consists of multiple meanings (such as gender) that are shaped by our practices of mutual engagement in different communities of practice.

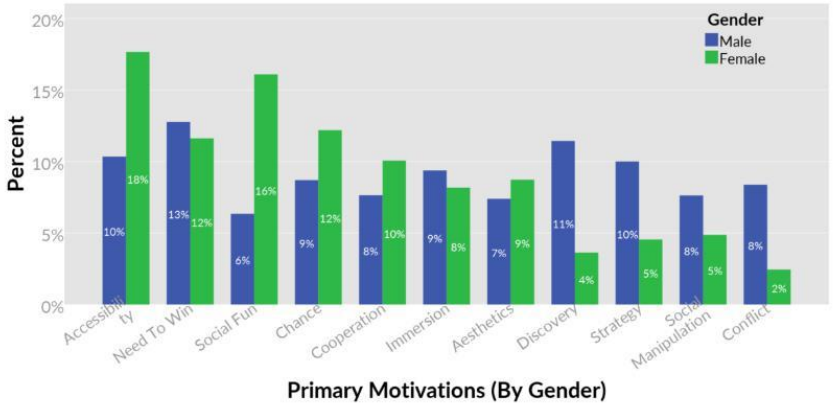

Figure 1. Motivations among female and male players (Yee 2017)

3. Aim, material and method

For this project, I decided to collect the material from videos of gameplays from *BoardGameGeek* (BGG) channel on YouTube (see *Primary Sources*). BoardGameGeek, which was founded in January 2000, is an online forum for board game players. It is also one of the biggest game databases in the world.

BGG launched its YouTube channel in 2011 and initially just posted videos from board game conventions. The *GameNight!* series was added to the channel in 2012 and usually included four people playing newly released board games.

The gaming group has not changed significantly from the beginning and still has three regular members, one of whom is female. The fourth member is usually an invited guest. Occasionally, the regular players are absent from the game, but one female player is present during every episode of the show. Thus, it can be argued that the group has sustained harmonious mutual relationships. One player always explains the rules of the game at the beginning of each video, which usually takes from 5 to 30 minutes. The game selected for an episode usually ranges from less than 30 minutes to more than 3 hours of active gameplay.

Since the aim of *GameNight!* was to introduce a new game on the market to a wider audience, a lot of effort was made to explain the rules of the game. However, this did not affect the gaming period itself in any noticeable manner. The only distinct difference was the lack of breaks

between the gaming rounds, when in real-life offline gaming sessions players would normally take a break to get something to drink/eat or go to the bathroom. Therefore, the YouTube episodes do not include any moments of casual talking between the rounds when players are absent for a short period of time. However, unlike most of the board gaming YouTube channels, the gameplay of the *GameNight!* series is unedited and similar to the real-life flow of a game. The propagation of innovation is shared via explanations about the game rules not only between the group members but with a larger community of YouTube board gamers.

In order to investigate some aspects of board gaming language among male and female gamers, I decided to use *VoxSort Auto Speaker Diarization Software* (Integrated Wave Technologies)—an open source software providing high accuracy diarization while using a lower amount of computing resources. It uses an alternative method to Gaussian Mixture Modelling and Hidden Markov Modelling; however, like most of the diarization software, it has its limitations. While comparing the results of VoxSort and the videos of male and female gamers explaining the rules, it became obvious that the software performs rather poorly when there is an overlap in speech and brief utterances. It also failed to identify a speaker if the combined duration of their speech was shorter than two minutes. Even though the error rate of the software claims to be 2%, it shows a limited performance during party games when there is a lot of noise and laughter. It also showed more inaccuracies during dexterity games, which can be attributed to some additional noise from throwing dice or other gaming components.

Given the above observations and statistics, I decided to investigate the actual speech during the game itself, thus the explanation of the rules and the game discussion at the end were omitted. For this project I decided to focus on games played by the equal number of male and female players, and ended up choosing ten games with four players (two males and two females). Two players (Lincoln (M) and Nikki (F)) participated in all ten games. I tried to include not only games based on gender and the number of players, but also games that were different in complexity and the theme of the games played. I also decided not to include games that were longer than 30 minutes (with rule explanation), since shorter games had more engagement between players. The following episodes were analyzed for the levels of verbosity: season 5, episodes 24, 29; season 6, episode 49; season 7, episodes 28, 33, 43, 46, 48, 50 and 51 (see *Primary Sources*).

All ten episodes were analyzed using CA, since it could provide an analysis of consecutive interactions between gamers and explain how gaming turns are organized in relation to each other and how each turn regulates interactions from gamers during another player's turn. CA examines talk within interaction and was introduced as a method to study actions such as inviting, giving advice, and apologizing or disagreeing (Sacks et al. 1978). My CA analysis was inspired by previous studies on children's games and interactions that used methodologies from CA (Evaldsson 2004; Harness Goodwin 2001). Extracts from episodes 29 and 28 are presented to illustrate my case study. The episodes were chosen based on the amount of verbal engagement between the players, including elements of shared stories, inside jokes, jargon, and shortcuts in their communication. The fragments from games for this study were transcribed manually using the Jefferson transcription notations (Jefferson 2004) and YouTube's timestamps.

4. Results and Discussion

Initially, I decided to study verbosity during the playing of board games. However, after watching ten videos, I noticed that people who had previously explained the rules of the game tended to do most of the talking. It also became apparent that male players presented the majority of rule explanations, which were usually done at the beginning of the videos. It could also be suggested that the person explaining the rules was in a privileged position since the other players had a lack of knowledge when it came to the rules of the game. Keeping this observation in mind, I focused my attention on the behaviour of gamers who explained the rules. It is also important to mention that most rule explanations were done by the same male player (Dave), who, according to another male player (Lincoln) 'is very quick at understanding a game' (Reddit 2015).

At the time of writing this article (4 October 2020), 274 episodes of *GameNight!* had been released, and among them only 11 games (4% of all games) had had rules explained by female players. Out of these eleven games, two were childrens' games: *Ringo-Flamimgo*, which had a complexity rating of 1.5 out of 5 according to BGG and *Karuba*, with a complexity rating of 1.47 out of 5 at BGG. Two other games were simple deduction games with a low complexity score.

While watching all seven seasons of GameNight! I noticed that Dave (M) often shows a performance of the so-called 'Alpha Player', a term

widely used by BGG community to refer to a certain behaviour during a game where one player takes the role of the leader and tells the other players what to do during their turns. This style becomes more visible during the cooperative games and the games where Dave had explained the rules to the other players. It is also noticeable that the 'Alpha Player' performance becomes more visible when it is Nikki's (F) turn. However, Dave shows signs of similar behaviour towards most of the invited guests, especially if it is their first time playing with the group. It is essential to mention, that being an 'Alpha Player' is not necessarily negative behaviour, and Dave, who undoubtedly, shows signs of being a leader, usually listens to the gaming group and guides rather than controls their moves.

I can also conclude that the group's overall behaviour towards new players is similar to Wenger's descriptions of the way newcomers are included into a community of practice as *peripherality* (1998: 100). This peripherality can be introduced in several ways, such as lessened intensity or risk (giving a new player the easiest role), close supervision and assistance (when a more experienced player supervises a less experienced one), and lessened cost of error and production pressures. The latter ones are especially characteristic for the board gaming CofP, since new players usually take longer to make a move during the game, while old members of the CofP often forgive their minor mistakes and are less frustrated with the 'downtime'—time spent waiting for the other player to complete their turn—as a result of new players' strategies.

Another role that is often presented during board game play is a 'rules lawyer'. This role is usually taken by a player who likes to question the rules of the game. The player will also often interrupt the game to clarify a certain rule and will occasionally look for loopholes in the rules. In *GameNight!* this role is usually taken by Lincoln (M).

All players show patterns of turn narration, which is a verbalized description of ones move during their turn. This is occasionally done in a noticeably softer tone. Lincoln (M) and some of the guest players usually narrate their turns more often than the rest of the group. This pattern tends to be reflected in the levels of verbosity during the game and is connected to thinking aloud during a turn. The latter is usually done when a player considers their next move. It is also often barely audible, since players usually block their mouths with their hands when thinking aloud.

The observed games did not show any typical behaviour that can be labeled as stereotypically 'feminine'. However, examples of stereotypical masculine behaviour were present. Overall, as was expected from a linguistic community of practice, players showed similar conversational patterns and used shared board gaming jargon.

4.1. Verbosity

After watching several videos, it initially seemed that the person who had explained the rules at the beginning of the game did most of the talking. However, after analyzing ten games with VoxSort (five with a male player explaining the rules, five with a female) a certain pattern arose: in only 50% of the games did the gamers who explained the rules talk the most. However, female players who explained the rules spoke the most only once and in other games spoke far less than men.

Table 1 shows how much time the players spoke in comparison to the mean talking time during the game. The verbosity time of the players who had explained the rules is highlighted in bold, and players who had higher levels of verbosity than the mean speaking time are highlighted in pink.

According to the collected data, Lincoln (M) and Nikki (F) showed the highest levels of verbosity. It is important to mention, that these players are married and predominantly host the gaming events in their home, forming a smaller community of practice within a larger one. Therefore, both factors can contribute to their verbosity. Another vital quality of the speech act can be the influence of ideas that enter the discourse. Here, the amount of speaking does not necessarily equal the quality of information or its value.

The most influential speakers within the group and the most talkative are sometimes not the same person. For instance, Dave (M), who is often the 'Alpha Player', did more talking in two out of the three games where he had to explain the rules. This, however, might be attributed to the fact that the player who did most of the talking during that game was the actress Deborah Ann Woll, who, as a celebrity guest player, might be granted more interactive speaking time.

Overall, the player who showed the highest levels of verbosity and was present during all ten games was Lincoln (M). However, the fact that it is problematic to establish who the leader of this group is when Dave is absent makes it possible to conclude that this CofP does not have a distributed leadership mode (King 2019).

Table 1. Verbosity during ten games

No	Mean time	Dave (M)	Deborah (F)	Lincoln (M)	Nikki (F)	Candice (F)	Ambie (F)	Tobie (M)	Rodney (M)	Rusty (M)	Tim (M)
1	0:14:01	**0:05:57**	0:00:44	0:03:08	0:02:06	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a
2	0:08:52	**0:03:02**	0:06:02	0:00:53	0:02:07	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a
3	0:07:30	**0:09:36**	n/a	0:06:27	0:02:19	0:00:51	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a
4	0:09:57	n/a	n/a	0:06:51	0:00:59	n/a	**0:02:31**	0:05:19	n/a	n/a	n/a
5	0:07:29	n/a	n/a	0:03:29	0:02:18	n/a	n/a	n/a	0:03:36	**0:09:23**	n/a
6	0:05:06	n/a	n/a	0:02:53	0:00:54	n/a	0:01:27	**0:05:13**	n/a	n/a	n/a
7	0:11:03	n/a	n/a	0:08:33	**0:18:00**	n/a	0:08:08	0:01:19	n/a	n/a	n/a
8	0:03:15	n/a	n/a	0:02:36	0:02:28	n/a	**0:03:15**	0:01:50	n/a	n/a	n/a
9	0:09:29	n/a	0:02:00	0:05:36	**0:05:44**	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	0:02:07	n/a
10	0:07:09	n/a	n/a	0:09:54	**0:02:22**	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	0:05:03	0:02:30

4.2. Asking Questions

To examine the data without a gender-biased approach, I counted how many questions were asked during the ten games. The data in Figure 2 shows that male players tended to ask more questions. It can be concluded that players with the highest levels of verbosity (Lincoln (M) and Nikki (F)) asked more questions during the game. These observations, however, can be explained by the roles within the CofP. The person who monitors the game and keeps track of the turns and turn taking usually asks more questions. Lincoln, who was present in every game, usually assumes the role of game moderator and asks questions more often than the other players.

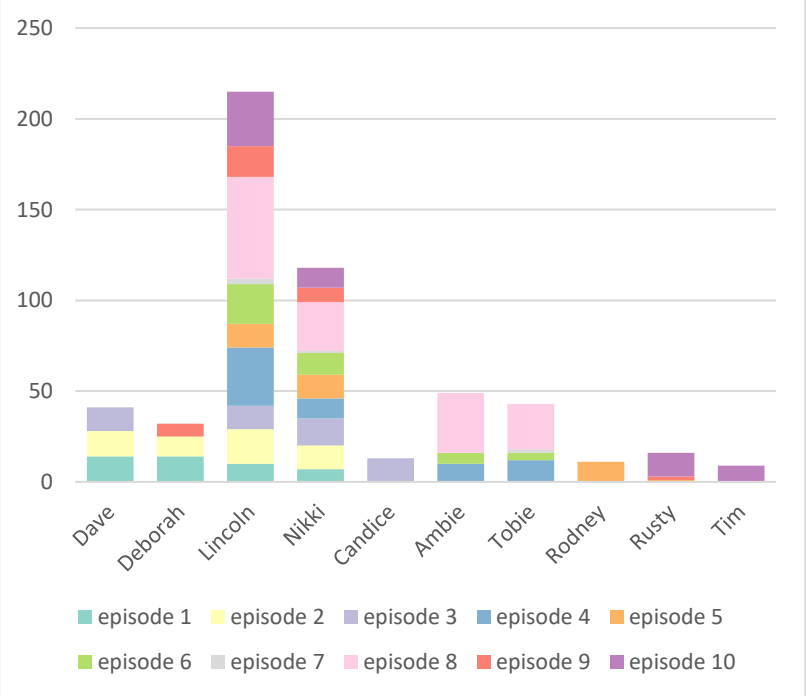

Figure 2. Questions asked during 10 games

This can be seen in Figure 3 which shows data collected from four episodes with the same players (two male and two female): Lincoln (M), Nikki (F), Ambie (F) and Tobie (M). During these episodes, Lincoln

produced almost twice as many questions as the other players (see Figure 3).

The ten episodes also included a significant amount of backchanneling, which can be divided into several categories: completion of speaker's sentences, requests for clarification, brief phrases or words, and non-verbal reactions. Most of the questions during the games were clarification requests about the rules of the game or turn-taking and could be classified as part of Wenger's CofP 'quick setup of a problem to discuss' indicator (1998: 130–131). However, this indicator is not stable, since a game setup mostly depends on the game's complexity and its length of gameplay.

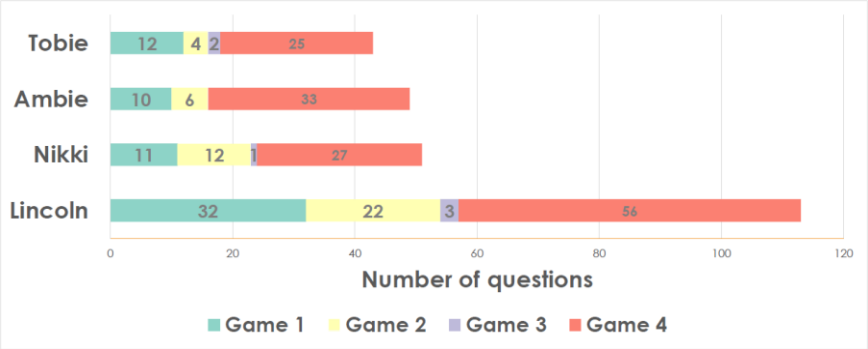

Figure 3. Questions asked between four players

4.3. Proposals

An interesting aspect that I often see during cooperative board games is the need to reach a group decision for the next turn against the game's mechanics. This process is usually accompanied by several proposals which come from different players. Tannen (1992: 153) states that girls and women do not issue commands, instead, they make proposals like '*Let's…*', '*Why don't we…*', '*Maybe we could…*' etc. Such forms of suggestions might be interpreted as an attempt to avoid confrontation and keep the players on equal terms. Since both male and female players make proposals in similar ways, I would connect this stereotypically feminine style of proposing the next game move to the established style of the CofP.

This style of proposals can be closely connected with the CofP ability to assess the future appropriateness of actions (Wenger 1998: 130–131).

It is often impossible to avoid confrontation during board game plays, even more so when some games are deliberately made to require cutthroat strategies from players. If women behave according to Tannen's suggested behavioural patterns, female players would always find themselves in a disadvantageous position, being forced to make many sacrifices for the sake of harmony and peace within the gaming group. However, observations from seven seasons of the *GameNight!* series showed that women are just as competitive as men. It seems that a person's competitiveness, dominance, and preference to specific confrontational techniques is mostly attributed to their behavioural traits.

In most conversational settings, compliance to the leader during the game does not demonstrate a form of submission to the leader of the turn or the game in general. Usually, most players follow the most competent player's advice or the person whose current turn it is. However, some games had one or two players who tried to dominate and impose their decisions on other players.

Board gaming turns always require some reasoning from a player during their turn, the explanation for the tactic of a turn is never 'just because I want to', as such emotional explanations are simply unacceptable within the board gaming discourse. In that way, interactions between the players do not differ significantly from the gender of a particular player. The knowledge about how every member of the CofP can contribute to the joint enterprise is usually observed in a player's decisions to share or withhold information as an essential part of their knowledge capital, as well as having information about every player's weak or strong sides.

Fragment 1 presents an interesting discussion from season 5, episode 29 (BoardGameGeek 2018b). The group (Lincoln (M), Nikki (F), Ambie (F), Tobie (M)) is playing *CrossTalk*, a party game where a group is divided into teams trying to guess the secret key words.

```
1   AMB:     my first clue i:::s…(1.79) mi:ghty.
2                (4.98)
3   NIK:     Power rangers?
4                (.)
5   AMB:     °dang (.hhh) ↓it°.
6   NIK:     [hohhh hohhh hohhh]
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7            ((Tobie raises his fist triumphantly
              and mouths 'yes'))
8   AMB:     [>CAN YOULSO dsame (also do the same)
              CLUE Z (with) ME?<]
9               (0.3)
10  TOB:     $yeah$=
11  LIN:     =[hhh]
12  NIK:     [hhhugh]
13              (.)
14  LIN:     $that is ridiculous, °[that's$°-
15  NIK:     [$morphing and morphing$=
16  LIN:     = .hhh
17              (.)
18  AMB:     >$i shoulda let you go FIRST$<
19              (.)
20  LIN:     ↓so,
21              (.)
22           Power Rangers¿ is that? that's
              we:ird, okay, [cool]
23  NIK:     [hhha-ha]
24  LIN:     interesting (.) that's actually
              kinda ea:sy I thi[nk-
25  NIK:     [↑ye:as
26              (.)
27  LIN:     specially he's morphing (.)
              right? (0.2)
28           Ohhh (.) I think we're gonna lose
              this [↑one-
29  TOB:     [i wanted to do the harder one (0.2)
              survival of the fittest.
```

Fragment 1: BoardGameGeek (2018b). 00:23:54–00:24:27

Ambie (F) and Lincoln (M) are in the same team, playing against Nikki (F) and Tobie (M). Ambie provides a clue for her team's secret word and Nikki proposes an answer in line 3. As it turns out, Nikki's guess is the correct answer and from line 5 we can witness the group's reactions to Nikki guessing correctly from her first attempt. Ambie's comment in line 18 is addressed to Lincoln and can be interpreted as an apology since their team has just lost points, as the aim of the clue-giver is to help their teammate guess the word first before the rival team. She believes that it

would have been more beneficial for the team if Lincoln had had an opportunity to take the first turn during this round.

Lincoln's reaction is also interesting, as he comments in line 24 that the secret word was an easy one to guess, downplaying his wife's (Nikki) victory and threatening her positive face. Tobie's reaction in line 29 is mirroring Lincoln's comment about the easiness of the secret word: by regretting that he had not used a more complex secret phrase 'Survival of the Fittest' in the previous turn; he also adds to the downplaying of Nikki's success even though they are team mates. In this short extract all the proposals are tightly linked to the players' regret for not taking a certain action during their turn and saving their positive faces. The implicit message of Fragment 1 thus shows that the participants of this community of practice find it appropriate to both praise and downplay other players' achievements, recognizing certain styles as displayed membership of the CofP (Wenger 1998: 130–131).

Fragment 1 shows that membership in a community of practice has a complex structure, with not every member having an equal opportunity to reach its core or legitimacy (King 2019: 35). Even though Nikki (F) is the only player who participated in every single game of *GameNight!*, she still has a peripheral membership in the group, except when she is the rules explainer.

Players also use proposals when they are thinking aloud about their turn. Fragment 2 illustrates the situation when Lincoln is deliberating whether he should make a certain move in the game of Dungeon Academy from season 7 episode 28 (BoardGameGeek 2019b).

In line 1 of Fragment 2, Lincoln is proposing his next move, even though he does not need to receive an approval from the other players to proceed. Many proposals are made by players in this form, occasionally with the rising questioning tone of voice. Many of these, unless done during the cooperative or team games, do not require any forms of approval, even though it is obvious that the players are looking for some form of endorsement or turn sanctioning from other players and from the player who monitors the rules.

```
1  LIN:     i think ↑that's.. that's what i
            gonna take,
2                (0.90)
3  TIM:     chicken ↓card ((smirks))
4                (1.45)
```

```
5  LIN:     °i ↑mean° (0.3).hhh what am i gonna
            do, I got ↑no health,
6           [i gotta,
7  TIM:     [↑and it's [↓o:ver
8  LIN:     [i know (.) i need to use it (.)
            for ↑sure.
```

Fragment 2: BoardGameGeek (2019b): 00:33:09–00:33:19

King (2019: 100) suggested that similar unwillingness to take risks and speak out indicates that a group has not established a perfect acceptance of one another.

4.4. Politeness and complimenting

With board gaming groups that have a long history of playing together, it is more difficult to assess levels of politeness. The players' positive and negative faces also switch their dominance levels depending on the type of game they are playing. While cooperative games often show a player's positive face, games that result in more direct confrontation or individualism force a player to show their negative face more often. Although cooperative games require mutual team strategy from the players, this gameplay makes it harder for a player to protect their own needs for independent actions.

When it comes to compliments, they are usually regarded as attempts to provide facework for the person addressed. In the context of board gaming, compliments are normally reserved for praising smart moves, strategy or help during the gameplay. It has been suggested that men and women compliment women more often (Eckert and McConnell-Ginet, 2013); however, this does not seem to hold in hobby settings.

In Fragment 2, immediately after Lincoln (M) has proposed his next move, another male player (Tim) makes a snarky remark about his chosen card in line 3, calling it a 'chicken card' and thus providing an indirect face-threatening act. Lincoln continues his monologue with an attempt to save his face by trying to reason that he did not have any other option for his move. Tim restates his support of Lincoln's action in line 7, noticing that the game is about to end soon and finally provides his approval for Lincoln's decision.

A different example of facework and politeness can be seen in Fragment 3 from the same game:

```
1   RUS:     a[nd then,
2   LIN:     [the chi[p?
3   RUS:     [and ↑then (.) the ↑chip,
              and i:: >gonna take
4            the two little guys< be:cause that's
              fi::ve (0.4)
5            for [↓that,
6   LIN:     [WOOhhh!
7   RUS:     [an' that's (should) have, three -
8   LIN:     [FANTA:STIC!]
9               (1.04)
10  NIK:     °ok[e::j°,
11  LIN:     that [is fa:nTA::STIC! =
12  RUS:     = that was just ↓lu::ck =
13  NIK:     = °nah°,
14  LIN:     = NAH, it's ↑fanta:-
15           >whadya mean ?< (.) that was ↑SKILL!
```

Fragment 3: BoardGameGeek (2019b): 00:24:50–00:25:01

In Fragment 3 we can see Lincoln complimenting Rusty (M) for his current move in lines 8 and 11. Rusty attempts to threaten his positive face by attributing the success to the sheer luck factor in line 12. Lincoln, however, proceeds to compliment Rusty in lines 14 and 15 by stating that Rusty's skillful tactics are the major factor of his success at the end of this turn.

Throughout the ten episodes, there were many similar examples of complimenting players for successful moves. The acceptance of a compliment did not correlate with the gender of the player but rather their peripheral or core membership in the CofP: players who could be identified as peripheral members tended not to accept the compliment and instead attributed their success to luck or other teammates. On the other hand, many players also accepted the compliment by a simple 'thank you'. Compliments almost never went unnoticed, indicating that such a form of praise is common attribute of the group's shared discourse.

5. Conclusion

I have attempted to present this case study without gender bias or a predisposition that certain behaviour is typically male or female. In the beginning, I assumed that there would be no significant difference in the language behaviour of male and female players who belonged to the same community of practice. Even though I tried to be as objective as possible, some points may be selective and expose my own interpretation or previously acquired stereotypes. The selected group is appropriate for this study since most players are known to each other, married or in a relationship, or have been playing together for some time. Thus, I had a chance to investigate not only the board gaming community of practice, but also smaller, tighter-knit communities of practice, such as Nikki and Lincoln, who have overlapping memberships in several communities of practice.

When it comes to future possibilities of or applications for this research, it would be beneficial to produce a similar study of offline board gaming groups to witness the early emergence of communities of practice. My data clearly shows that male gamers usually explain the rules of the board games, but since this study only used data from YouTube and the same board gaming group, it would be interesting to see if this pattern holds for offline board gaming groups, as well as whether there would be a certain or more frequent correlation between rule-explainers and gender.

My investigation into verbosity in language and gender within the board gaming community of practice shows that there are no apparent language and gender differences among board game players, suggesting that the verbosity differences within the board gaming CofP can be explained by a person's belonging to either peripheral or core memberships. Most language patterns that could be characterized as either 'masculine' or 'feminine' were connected to these types of memberships, rather than to gender. Many behavioural and language patterns could also be explained by the nature of the game the group was playing at the time. Thus, cooperative games required more stereotypical female communication features from all the players, while competitive games showed similar levels of competitiveness from both male and female players.

However, every female player within this group usually had a peripheral membership in the group, even despite the fact that some female players (e.g. Nikki) were the so-called 'old-timers' of the group. The only

exception was Deborah (F), who, although she was a newly invited guest player, showed a lot of behaviour characteristic for a core member of the group. This, of course, could be explained by her Hollywood celebrity status, which could immediately bring her into core membership status in every CofP.

Finally, I also suggest investigating language within all-female or all-male board gaming groups as a possible subject for future research. Currently, it is problematic to find this on YouTube, since most board gaming channels are trying to be inclusive and avoid hosting all-male gaming events in favor of mixed-gender settings. All-female board gaming groups are also rare to find offline, so finding and investigating language used by an all-female board gaming community of practice would be an interesting research task.

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