

Chef de Cuisine is a strategy card game themed around two Parisian restaurants. France's gastronomy is integral to the nation, connecting with French Studies as a key element of its cultural identity. *Chef de Cuisine* is a serious game in its characterising goal (Dörner et al. 2016) of language acquisition as well as fast-paced evaluation skills and complex problem solving. The game allows players to familiarise themselves with common French ingredients and their names and can be used in an educational setting with the objective of introducing French culture to language lessons or expanding vocabulary. Following Bloom's Taxonomy, *Chef de Cuisine* relies on evaluation skills of players in both the 'shopping' and 'cooking' phase, requiring players to '[make] judgements about the value' (1956: 185) of their component cards (see Appendix, Figures 1, 2, 3) in order to choose an action to take and decide which ingredients to use in their final dishes, whilst keeping within cost and time constraints. This essay will discuss all facets of the game design and how these facilitate the learning outcomes of language recall and development of evaluation skills.

Mechanics and Rules

The mechanics of this game seek to combine an 'action point' style of play with concealed set collection. Player autonomy is prioritised to maintain engagement with this 'serious' game (Routledge 2016: 31). Through presenting French language in 'bite-sized, easily digestible units' (Yasmeen and Salah 2024: 3), this game promotes retention and recall of vocabulary. Whilst *Chef de Cuisine* mainly challenges the skill of evaluation, its low-risk nature as a game also fosters an environment where French learners can casually engage with the language (Dressman and Sadler 2019: 105). In order to maximise the game's scope of demographic, English translations of French terms are provided on the component cards. For more advanced speakers, additional rules could be implemented in the classroom to have students read out the ingredients' French names when presenting their dishes. As a card game, *Chef de Cuisine* is simple to learn but still has room for strategy once a player becomes more experienced. Salen and Zimmerman (2004) support that 'card systems emphasise dynamic rule interactions', specifically visible in this game within the 'shopping phase' where players may discard, obtain and offer cards. These rule interactions allow for more player autonomy despite the material simplicity of the game. In the latter phase of play where players combine component cards to create meals, *Chef de Cuisine* includes mechanics of budgeting time and money, encouraging both mental mathematics and cost-benefit analysis

among players. The inclusion of 'versatility' as a scored attribute on the component cards introduces another cost-benefit consideration; players weigh the benefit of saving money against the sacrifice of 'impression', the key resource of the game. If an ingredient has a higher 'versatility' than 1, players may reuse the component card in another meal without repeating its cost, but this may decrease the ingredient's 'impression' score.

Visual Design and Table Layout

The aesthetic design of the game and its assets keep to a scheme of colours individually distinguishable for those with tritanopia, protanopia, deuteranopia or achromatopsia (see Appendix, Figure 5). No part of *Chef de Cuisine* relies on colour cues alone. On the game's logo and in its rulebook, elements of the French tricolour are present both to reinforce the French cultural theme of the game, and to emphasise the game's nature as 'serious', strengthening amongst players the cognitive connection between the game and the real world. Similarly, the game's name uses widely used French words to make a direct reference to the country and be understood by a wide demographic. Physical tokens are used to represent the actions players may take on their turn (see Appendix, Figure 4), both serving as visual reminders of the actions available to facilitate ease of play and providing tangible interaction that maintains engagement with the game. Furthermore, preliminary prototype testing suggested that using the physical tokens in order to track which actions had already been chosen was more reliable than memory. As for the component cards, care is taken to consistently feature rounded edges to convey a more welcoming, positive feeling (Westerman et al. 2012) to ensure comfort and engagement from newer players. The component cards also utilise secondary colours (which are desaturated and mixed versions of the French tricolour) to separate the different types of ingredients on the front whilst keeping the same design on the back. These cards must be identical from your opponent's point of view to retain the hidden aspect of the game's set collection and the game's output randomness whenever a new card is added to the hand (Burgun 2014). This resulting randomness improves replayability as two consecutive games with the same starting hands could vary greatly depending on which cards are chosen. Furthermore, the element of randomness fosters adaptability among the players as their strategy may be disrupted by the randomness of which card they could pick up. Early iterations had all three component cards in the same central pile on the table, however, players were unable to reliably collect enough

ingredients to make three full meals. Instead of forcing players to pick up from each pile in a certain order, individual choice was retained to account for players possibly choosing to reuse a 'versatile' ingredient. In this case, this player would only need eight cards, allowing the final card they pick up to be able to replace a particular card in their hand, for example. Aside from a timer, all elements of the game are designed to be made from cardboard (as for the box, packaging and action tokens) or paper and card (component cards and rule book) to keep production costs low and remain sustainably conscious.

Narrative and Player Roles

In *Chef de Cuisine*, players act as Parisian chefs. This construction of a secondary identity as chefs is a tool to improve language-learners' adaptability in a variety of situations (Knight et al. 2019: 105). Players can learn new terms from component cards with a different perspective, encouraging manipulation of language to apply to their role as a chef. The game's narrative also involves your opponent, or your 'rival' chef. This competitive aspect to the game would particularly appeal to players with Bartle's (1996) killer archetype. Players can choose how to interact with their opponent's cards to both better their chances of winning and sabotage their opponent's. For these killer players especially, this interaction spurs internal motivation to engage with the serious game as an educational tool (Pink, 2010), in turn improving retention of developing evaluation skills as well as new vocabulary presented on the component cards. Due to the relative complexity of evaluation as a cognitive process (Bloom 1956: 185) and the level of vocabulary in English and French the game is suggested for 12 and up. *Chef de Cuisine* is a two-player game in order to encourage universal engagement with the game; in classroom games with large numbers of players, it is possible that some students will take more of an active role than others and not be able to fully benefit from playing. Focusing on just one other player allows the game to remain low-risk and controlled in order to maximise retention of language and development of evaluation skills.

Future Improvements

To improve accessibility, *Chef de Cuisine* could create a digital version with text-to-speech capability to allow for blind or visually impaired people to be able to play without assistance. Development into an app could also benefit the language acquisition learning objectives by implementing clickable audio files to accurately hear how the French words are

pronounced. However, in a classroom setting, this role can be fulfilled by the teacher. Additionally, early versions of the game featured physical tokens to represent players' funds. While this was altered to avoid confusion with the similarly sized action tokens, it is possible that some players could struggle with mental arithmetic. A digital adaptation of *Chef de Cuisine* could benefit its scope by automatically adding up cost and time values, removing the barrier to entry for perhaps younger players.

Chef de Cuisine mainly aims to develop players' language and evaluation skills by allowing them to occupy a secondary identity as a chef with the task of weighing up a wide range of options. References to France also broaden students' perceptions of the nation's culture and creates a foundation for an understanding of French cooking. More broadly, players learn how to analyse costs and benefits, developing adaptability and allowing for a richer understanding of compromise and realistic constraints like money and time. Future developments of the game could improve its accessibility, for example among the visually impaired with an app adaptation with text-to-speech. Overall, both phases of *Chef de Cuisine* directly reward evaluation of options whilst incorporating a style of language learning which improves both active recall and manipulation of language.

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