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## **Five Things about Game Mechanics to Level Up Your Language Teaching**

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Learning a new language can be a challenging task, but taking advantage of game mechanics can make the process more engaging and rewarding for students. In the rapidly evolving landscape of education, the integration of gamified elements into learning tasks has shown promising results in enhancing student engagement (Barata et al., 2017). By incorporating game mechanics such as leaderboards, points, badges, and rewards, language classrooms can foster friendly competition, celebrate progress, foster creativity, and collaboration, and keep learners motivated.

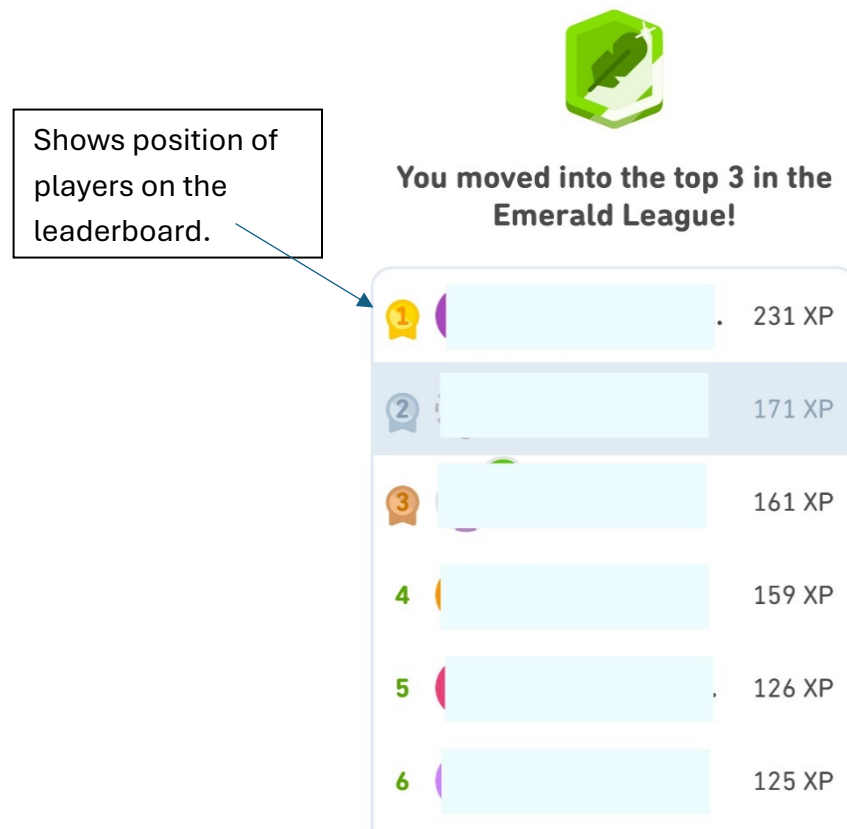
Here are five things to consider when integrating game mechanics into instruction:

### **1. The use of leaderboards to foster healthy competition.**

Leaderboards are game mechanics that can create a sense of friendly competition, allowing learners to track their progress and compare themselves to their peers. The primary goal of leaderboards is to promote desired behaviors by positively highlighting a user's points and leaderboard position. Leaderboards offer users of a gamified system of socially comparative feedback on their performance, conveyed through points and rankings. The ranking on a leaderboard is determined by a set of criteria that reflects users' behaviors toward desired actions within the system. These levels serve not only as a measure of achievement but also help in structuring the learning process into manageable milestones, enhancing the sense of accomplishment as each milestone is reached.

The use of leaderboards can encourage players to check their learning performance and establish their desired goals. This can be a powerful motivator for some students, encouraging users to practice more consistently and strive to improve their skills. The popularity and ease of implementation of leaderboards may explain why they are frequently utilized as a gamification strategy. Additionally, the competitive nature of leaderboards can encourage learners to push their limits and achieve higher proficiency levels by comparing their progress with peers'. Figure 1 is an example of the leaderboard interface of an online language-learning platform, Duolingo.

Figure 1  
*Leaderboard in the Duolingo App*



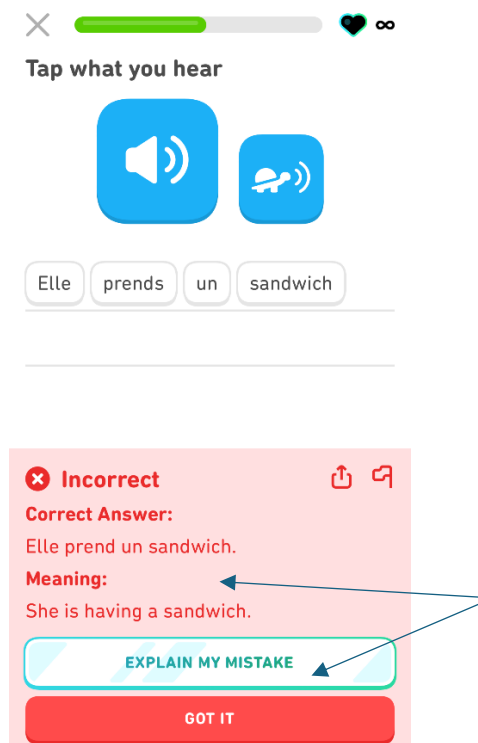
## 2. Language learning apps offer feedback.

Language learning apps can offer personalized feedback to players as a teacher or instructor might do when grading an activity to demonstrate performance through point awards or response to an activity. Game apps may offer real-time feedback to players and can create activities that players think carefully about before choosing their answers so they can gain more points. Integrating feedback mechanisms as a game mechanic not only allows for real-time adjustments but also can give learners personalized insights into their progress and areas needing improvement.

There is evidence to suggest that immediate feedback within gamified learning environments can significantly enhance language acquisition (Aldemir et al., 2018). For example, instant corrections and suggestions provided after each exercise may help learners quickly rectify mistakes and understand grammatical nuances in real time. This method can not only solidify learning but also potentially increase performance rates (Aldemir et., al (2018). Duolingo has an option to explain when an activity is done correctly or incorrectly (see Figure 2 for an annotated screen shot of Duolingo feedback). However, the option to explain the answer in detail is available only on the Duolingo MAX version (shown in Figure 3, where the app provides detailed feedback on an error). Duolingo also offers positive statements such as “Nice job!” “Awesome!” and “Great!” when an activity is done the feedback can serve as positive reinforcement to the players’ learning. Figure 4 shows an example of positive feedback given to the player on the Duolingo platform.

Figure 2

*Explanation of mistake made*



Gives the meaning of a sentence and explains incorrect answer.

Figure 3

Detailed explanation of an activity in the Duolingo MAX version

← **MAX**

Elle **prend** un sandwich.

You said  
Elle prends un sandwich

**Prend** is the correct form for **she takes** or **is having**.

**Prends** is used with **tu**, like in **tu prends**.

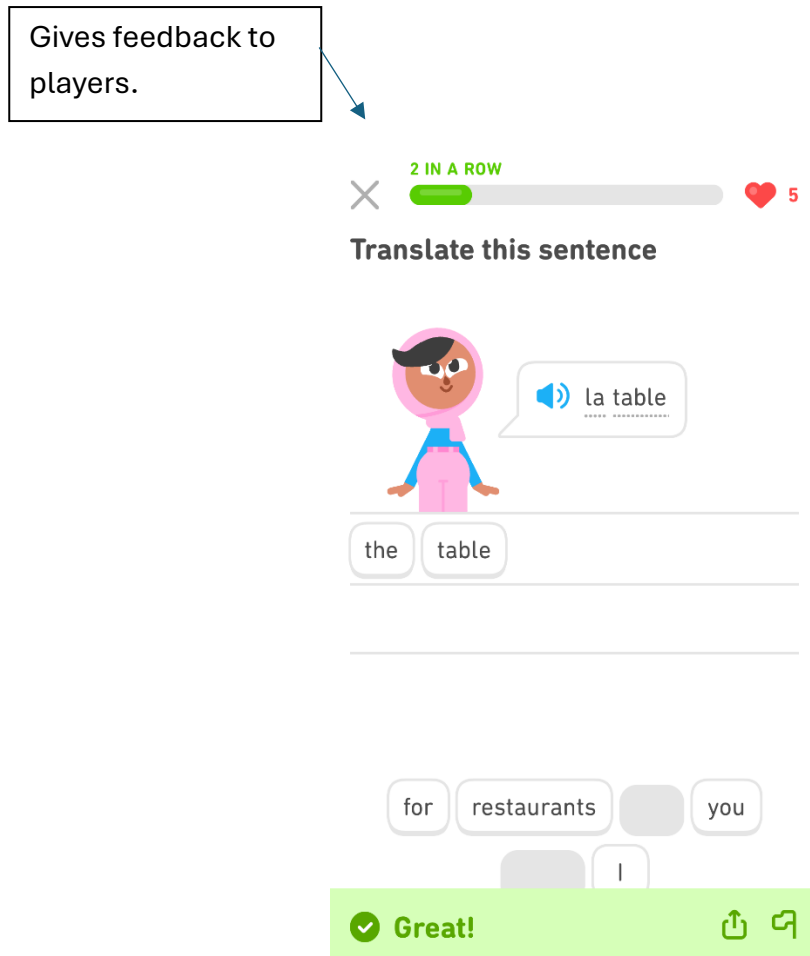
Since it's **she** having a sandwich, you use **prend** without the **s**.

- Elle **prend** un café.
- Tu **prends** un thé?

Gives detailed explanation of an incorrect activity.

Figure 4

*Feedback in the Duolingo app*



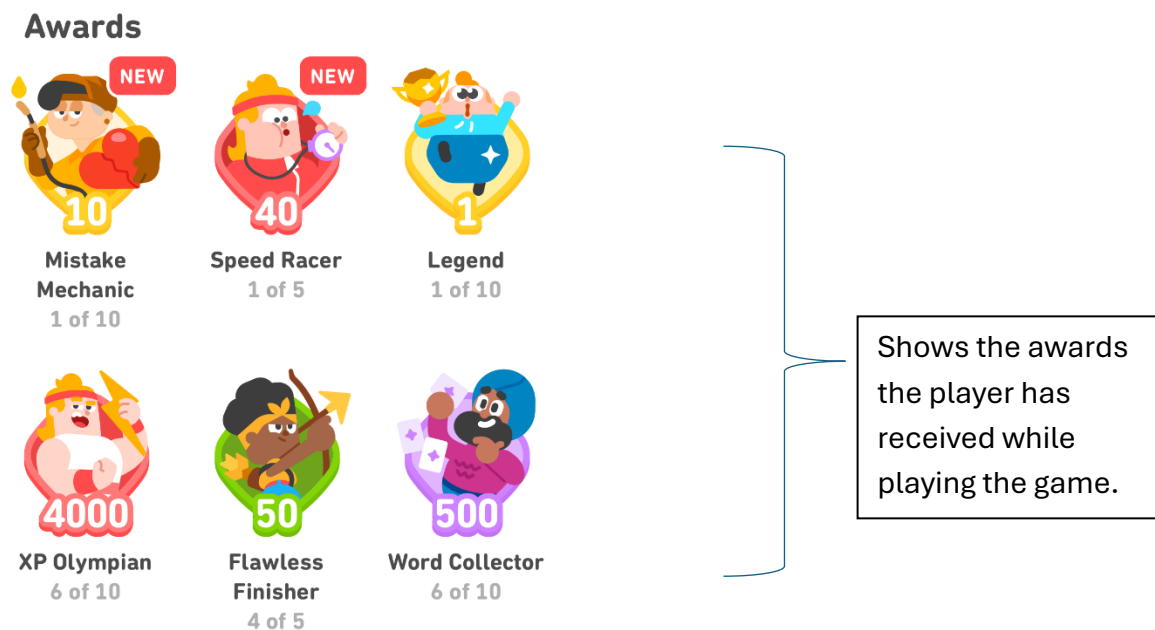
### 3. Rewards as a motivational tool.

The more players commit to daily engagement in language games, the more rewards they can get. This can be seen as a strategy to encourage players to stay with their tasks. The most realistic way to include this strategy is to ensure that the tasks offered on the language-learning app are structured in accordance with a lesson's objectives and acts as a means to scaffold purposeful learning. Players who dedicate additional time to the recommended activity can gain greater benefits in the form of badges and awards, which can be a very important motivational tool for player engagement. This strategy might not only boost the performance of the players but also encourage them to participate in class by answering questions and completing their activity both in the virtual space and in the physical classroom space.

Furthermore, Duolingo include personal records, where game mechanics are finely tuned to individual language achievements and awards. For instance, a learner struggling with vocabulary might receive more frequent and varied badges for smaller milestones, which can boost confidence and encourage continued effort. On the other hand, advanced learners could be challenged with rare rewards that require significant achievements, keeping them engaged and preventing plateauing in their language development. Figure 5 shows an example of awards as a game mechanic that includes personalized records of player achievements.

Figure 5

*Rewards in Duolingo app*

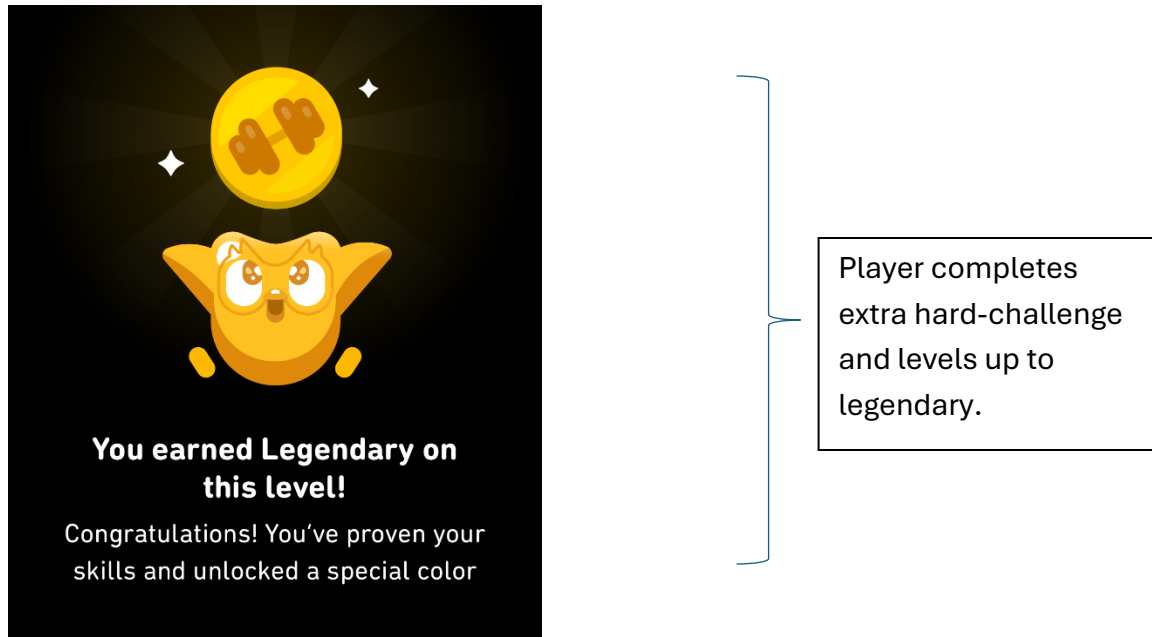


#### 4. Experience points to level up to legendary level.

A player who wants to challenge their learning level could opt to choose to prove they are a “legend” by attempting harder tasks. When this is done successfully, the player earns more experience points and moves to a legendary level (Figure 6 shows the Duolingo acknowledgement of the legendary achievement of a player). This can serve to adjust the difficulty level for players and motivate them to think for themselves while exploring difficult tasks. Furthermore, the ability to be legendary might encourage students to take charge of their learning process. The higher the performance of the player, the more they level up and access more engaging and fun tasks. Points received from an activity can prompt the player to try for more points or engage in more activities to keep earning higher levels.

Figure 6

*Legendary achievement in Duolingo app*



### **5. Test the game before engaging students.**

By trying out the game before bringing it into the class for the students to learn with, the teacher will be familiar with the content and will consider if it will be a good fit to achieve the objectives of the lesson. The teacher also would be able to model the game for the students. In addition, the students should be given the opportunity to express their opinions about the game mechanics noting what worked or did not work and making connections to course concepts. This would help the teacher make necessary adjustments to suit the needs of the students.

### **Conclusion**

The gaming environment can be employed to structure and require a sequence of learning activities, serving as a source of scaffolding that provides players with task-oriented educational material and support. Game-based language learning is an aspect of learning that should be considered when goals include, for example, learning vocabulary (Xu et al., 2020), fostering collaboration, and facilitating critical thinking skills. To make games a meaningful experience for players, the teacher should ensure that the game mechanics incorporated are tailored to meet the needs of individual players, as every player has their distinct needs and preferences. The social aspect of gaming, such as sharing badges and achievements on social media platforms, further extends the

learning environment beyond the app itself. This can not only increase learners' motivation through public acknowledgment but also promote language practice in more informal settings. Lastly, the teacher should ensure that they check-in with the students that the game apps being used are not fostering excessive competitiveness among students.

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