

How numbers in pictures help language learners

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Language tutors wonder how to excite students of all levels, ideally all of them at the same time. Imaglee² Fantastic cards, Czech cards with numbers and pictures, are a combination of [Pairs](#), classic cards, and dominoes. We tested them with more than one thousand children and adults and, also, with dozens of tutors. They often got so immersed in the game that they used vocabulary they were not supposed to know yet.

Let's have a look at nine simple ways to use cards for learning languages from the level A1 to C2. We will play with vocabulary and grammar and practice both speaking and writing. All the games (except for Pantomime) can be played as a game for one (solitaire).



I. Games for beginners

At the very beginning of the language journey we learn colors, numbers and common expressions (mainly nouns and verbs). Let's start with a visual memory game.

1. Kim's game – which card has disappeared?

** Duration: 3 – 5 minutes; 2 – 10 players; memory and vocabulary game **

Motivation: In the novel Kim (by Rudyard Kipling), the main character Kim undergoes a spy training. A perfect spy notices and remembers everything.

Aim of the game: be the first one to give the right answer to the question.

Game preparation: randomly select 5 cards and place them on the table with the pictures up.

Course of the game: count to five; then flip the cards, shuffle them and randomly remove one card.

The 1st question, which is posed: "What color had the card that disappeared?"

The first one to give the right answer to the question gets the card and keeps it; whoever says a wrong answer, loses the right to answer this question. Place the remaining cards on the table again, count to 4 (or 5 - if you place 5 cards on the table), flip the cards, shuffle them, randomly remove one.

Then, the 2nd question, which is posed: "What was in the middle picture on the card that disappeared?" Follow the same procedure as with the 1st question.

Finally, the 3rd question is posed: "Which number has disappeared?". Count, flip, shuffle, remove, ask the question and guess again.

In the following round, you will start with 6 cards; and you will add one more card in every round.

How to spice up the game? Remove (and then guess) more than one card.

2. Pantomime

** Duration: 3 – 5 minutes; 2 – 10 players; empathy and vocabulary game **

Pick one picture at random picture without looking at it and put it above your head. Let the others show in a pantomimic fashion what's in the big picture in the middle of the card.

Are you true beginners? You may enter the guessed expression in your mother tongue into an "electronic Babel fish" which tells you how to say it in the foreign language.

3. Wicked Transformers – Verbs training

** Duration: 2 – 3 minutes; 2 – 6 players; creativity game, you can include it whenever the room is full of emotions and it's high time to vent them out **

Aim of the game: to transform the previous card in a wicked way, with the large middle picture in the card you are putting on it. In this game, everyone is the winner.

Game preparation: place one card in the middle of the table with the picture up, give each player 6 cards.

Course of the game: only central pictures count. Players put their cards on the previous ones. Each player tries to transform the middle picture on the current top card. For example: if there is a plate of soup on the table and the player has a mouse in his hand, the mouse may like to touch the tablecloth with its claw and tear down the tablecloth, together with the plate.

Players do not take turns in this game: whoever knows, plays.



II. Intermediate-level games

Over time, we get familiar with more nuanced words and we wish to go deeper into the secrets of grammar. How to train the former and the latter?

4. Language ping-pong for two

** Duration: 2 – 15 minutes; 2 players; vocabulary training game **

Aim of the game: collect as many cards as possible.

Game Preparation: select one card from each number in the deck and place the shuffled deck with the cards facing up. Play with the top card.

Course of the game: players take turns saying what they name in the card (colors, numbers, pictures, and picture components). The younger player starts. Words must not be repeated throughout the whole game.

The card is awarded to the player who "hits the winning strike" (his opponent is unable to come up with another word).

The next round is started by the player who "was unable to return the winning strike" in the previous round.

You can play with a time limit (with a stopwatch, with an hourglass or with a referee who is counting down). The game ends when the deck of cards runs out.

5. The Journey to the "Land of Irregular Verbs" and Back

** Duration: 2 – 15 minutes; 2 – 6 players; the game helps develop imagination and narrative skills and helps to practice grammar **

Aim of the game: stay in the game as the last one.

Course of the game: the first player flips four top cards from the deck and starts telling a story. Primarily, he uses large pictures in the middle; he can also use small pictures near the card edges, numbers and colors. The next player takes additional four cards from the deck and makes a adds to the story. The third player continues in similar fashion, and so the story unfolds.

But there is a catch! The story is told in the past time and players constantly travel to the "Land of Irregular Verbs" and back. This means that regular and irregular verbs must alternate regularly in the narrative. Thus, for example, if an irregular verb "came" occurs, another irregular verb (e. g. "found") cannot follow, but a regular verb (e. g. "listened") should be said. Whoever makes a mistake, is out of the game. The winner is the one who stays as last one in the game.

How to spice up the game? No verb may be repeated during the game.

6. The Mythical Land of Utopia

** Duration: 2 – 10 minutes; 2 – 6 players; storytelling and grammar game **

Aim of the game: practice the conditional.

Game preparation: divide the cards into two stacks – put all the red cards (places) and all the animals in the stack A, put all the remaining cards (i. e. the the blue and green cards, those with accessories and activities) in the stack B.

Course of the game: players take turns. Players draw one card from the stack A and one from the stack B and form a sentence according to the following pattern: "If <card from the stack A and the corresponding form of the verb>, I would <card from the stack B and the corresponding form of the verb>".

Example: "If I were a rhino (*card from stack A*), I wouldn't use plates (*card from stack B*)."
Or "*If my neighbors were living in a cave, they would make bows and arrows.*"



Games for language enthusiasts

As you are heading to mastery in the language, why not to enjoy three titbits?

7. Word chain for centipedes - a yummy for polyglots

** Duration: 5 – 15 min; 4 – 12 players; vocabulary game **

Motivation: a centipede answers to all the letters from the instruction word.

Aim of the game: stay in the game as the last the word chain builder.

Game preparation: players split into teams; each team receives the same number of cards (e.g. 4 cards).

Course of game: teams play in a fixed order (e.g. clockwise around the table). The youngest player puts down one card (e. g. a number-three-card with a rock) and names anything on it, e.g. a rock.

The team to play take carefully selects one of the cards in their hand to complete the task. The task is to find in the card words which begin with all of the letters of the previous word; one can say words from any language one knows.

Example: How to respond to “rock”? For instance, with a number-seven-card and say "rhinoceros - oheň (Czech for “fire”)- cup – kafe (Czech for “coffee”)"

The next team plays one of their cards where he names words starting with all the letters from the previous word. The following team always respond the shortest word, so they would in this case respond to the word “cup”.

If the team is unable to find a card within a defined time frame (e.g. 1 minute), the team is out of the game. * For languages like Chinese, Russian, or Greek, it is a good idea to agree on a transcription method in advance.

How to adjust the game to incorporate less advanced players (e. g. children)? Let them respond like in classic Word chain, i.e. they respond with a word beginning with the last letter. Should this be too demanding, they may to say a word starting with any letter (from the shortest word)!

8. The Romance vs. The Germanic

** Duration: 3 – 5 minutes; 4 – 12 players; Etymology Training **

Game preparation: form two teams of etymologists: one team has expertise in Germanic languages, the other one in Romance languages. Each team receives 3 cards. The teams agree on the target language (e. g. Slovak language).

The course of the game: the team who writes down more words from their three cards, which originate in Germanic (or in Romance) languages, wins.

How to spice up the game? As a target language, the players can take e. g. English, and their task is to write words which originate in other pre-defined languages (e. g. Russian and Greek). In this case, teams would write words such as *tundra* and *beluga* (a kind of whale) and *planets* and *marathon*, respectively.

9. Fatal Misunderstanding: Words which sound the same

** Duration: 10 – 20 minutes; 4 – 12 players; homophones training **

Motivation: be the one who prevents a fatal misunderstandings between two empires! Spot all the words in your cards which have sound the same as another/other word/words in that language.

Game preparation: form teams. Each team gets 10 cards: one from each number (e. g. all blue cards from zero to nine).

The course of the game: within the time limit, the team write down as many pairs, trios and quads of words which sound the same, but are written differently. The correct pair is for the point, the trio for 5 points, the foursome for 10 points. The team which scores most points, wins.

How to spice up the game? Teams are allowed to say verbs that are associated with the symbols on the cards, too. E.g.: a cup can break: break (vs. brake), apple can be grated: grate (vs. great).

What to conclude? Do experiment with the rules – because with Imaglee. there is no limit to creativity!