POQUERE: AN ONLINE GAME BLENDING WORD SKILLS WITH PSYCHOLOGY AND STRATEGY

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ABSTRACT
Poquere is a unique game that blends word creation and scoring with the competitive and psychological aspects of Texas Holdem style Poker, making it engaging and addictive. Several innovations are defined that make the game exciting in an online social gaming context and allow unique monetization capabilities.
Figure 1: Several typical Poquere Cards and Associated Point Values

YB104 Card Deck Distribution Based on Standard English

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Card</th>
<th>Count</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>NG</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AT</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IN</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>O</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>S</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>G</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 2: Shows the Card String, its Count (frequency), and its Point Score
POQUERE: AN ONLINE GAME BLENDING WORD SKILLS WITH PSYCHOLOGY AND STRATEGY

BACKGROUND OF THE INVENTION

1. Technical Field

This invention relates generally to multiplayer word games, particularly, to forming words from a dealt set of cards, each bearing one or more letter of the alphabet, and a point score thereof; thereafter, following a given set of betting and word-making rules, providing psychological challenges and entertainment related to the players' vocabulary adeptness. The goal is for the players to place bets which can be won by making the highest-scoring word in each round of play.

2. Description of the Prior Art

A number of word games are marketed that challenge the skill, imagination and vocabulary of opposing players. Most word games are either board games such as Scrabble played with tiles, or their online equivalents. Some games like Quiddler, utilize a deck of cards each having one or more letters. Such games are challenging with an educational aspect while providing fun for a group of friends coming together for an evening of enjoyment and socializing. Many variations of decks are possible, for example, as disclosed in U.S. Pat. No. 4,333,656 involving 104 cards with a combination of letters and traditional card markings such as the Ace of Spades.

Other games, such as Texas Holdem Poker emphasize the psychological aspect of betting and challenging other players. Such games, and their online equivalents, provide the ability for players to bluff, and outwit their opponents to win even when the cards they are dealt are weak.

A word card game disclosed in U.S. Pat. No. 4,877,255 describes playing cards with letter designations in the upper left-hand corner in each of two different invertible positions of the card. There is provided an "information center" giving the letter designation of the card should the card be inverted. Cards are selected and a word must be formed with the cards being able to be positioned in either of their two inverted positions. After the word is formed, the word is then used as an acronym in the formation of a sentence, with the sentence preferable being associated with the word itself.

Another word game disclosed in U.S. Pat. No. 7,344,137 describes a game with 72 cards but with special wild-cards and function cards. The game, however, does not involve the aspect of betting.

Many of these card games have similar online equivalents, played over network connections. U.S. Pat. No. 6,964,608 discloses several games of skill played over a network.

BRIEF SUMMARY OF THE INVENTION

Poquere is a unique game that combines word creation and scoring with the competitive and psychological aspects of Texas Holdem style Poker, making it engaging and addictive. Several innovations are defined that make the game exciting in an online social gaming context and allow unique monetization capabilities. Unlike Scrabble, it allows psychologically exciting betting, and unlike Poker, it exercises word making and vocabulary skills. While the preferred embodiment is an online multiplayer game, the teaching of this invention can be applied to physical game play with real cards as well.

BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE DRAWINGS

FIG. 1 shows several typical Poquere cards and their associated point values

FIG. 2 shows a typical distribution of 104 cards for English

DETAILED DESCRIPTION OF THE INVENTION

Fundamentals of the Game: the Card Deck

The game is played with a card deck consisting of a fixed number of cards, where each card has on its face, a string of one or two alphabetic characters, called digraphs (for example, 'O' or 'IN') and a point score (for example, '3', or '7'). For the purposes of this description we will use letters from the Latin script (suitable for English), but the invention does not restrict letters from other writing systems and languages. In general, the game could be extended to include trigraphs, or other constructs without changing the invention. For example, an equivalent card deck could be constructed for other Latin-based scripts such as French or German, or Cyrillic scripts such as Russian, or indeed any other. Further, based on extensive simulations, we have determined that the card point scores need to range between 1 and 20. FIG. 1 shows typical Poquere card faces for a few sample cards.

The exact composition of the card deck is changeable (including the strings used, the number of replications of each card, and the point scores), as needed to suit the game play, and this invention covers all variations of the deck. Further, as described below, the deck can be generated to enhance game play for groups of individuals or communities.

Fundamentals of the Game: Dealing and Playing

The game is played in a manner similar to Texas Holdem Poker. A table consists of a number of players and one designated dealer. The dealer deals two cards face down to each player, and then arrays 5 cards face down in the center of the table. These cards are referred to as Community Cards.

Betting proceeds in the usual manner, moving clockwise around the table from the dealer's position. Various terms such as blind, double blind, check, call, raise, fold, etc. apply (and have the same meaning as in Texas Holdem style poker), with each player attempting to determine if his or her hand will score high enough to win. Each player can, through judicious application of psychological tactics, attempt to convince other players that they have a better hand. Players bet using poker chips with predetermined face values such as 1, 10, 50, etc.

After 2 rounds of betting or after every player has called or folded, the dealer turns the first 3 of the community cards face up. These cards are called the Flop. Again, betting ensues exactly along the lines of poker. The dealer then turns up the fourth community card, called the Turn, followed by rounds of betting. Finally the last card, the River card is revealed.

At any time in the various betting rounds, if only one player remains (the rest having folded), that person wins the collected bets (called the Pot).
In Poquere, dealer may choose to pre-open 2 of the 3 Flop cards at the outset, before any betting begins. This allows players to better gauge the strength of their pocket cards and bet accordingly.

Fundamentals of the Game: Scoring and Winning

Each player attempts to create the highest scoring word using a minimum of 3 and a maximum of 5 cards from the available seven—five community and two in hand. Each set of 7 cards can therefore lead to the possibility of creating multiple words, each having a different point score. A significant variation between Poquere and classical poker is precisely this aspect of the game. In poker, the best five card set out of the seven is never in doubt. In Poquere, the player has to exercise his or her word-making skill to identify the best set of five cards to construct the highest scoring word.

For example, with the seven cards shown in FIG. 1, the player can make multiple words such as CATS, COIN, COINS, SING, SONG, etc. The word CAT is not legal because it only uses 2 cards out of the seven. The point score for a word is computed by adding the point values for each card used to make the word. For example, the player makes the word COINS using cards 'C', 'O', 'I', 'N', and 'S', the points for each of the cards 'C', 'O', 'I', 'N', and 'S' are summed. Further, if the word uses 4 cards, a bonus of 5 points is awarded. A word using 5 cards results in a bonus of 15 points. In this example, COINS scores 22 points.

With the cards shown in FIG. 1, there are actually 20 possible words, ranging from a low point score of 14 for COIN, and a high score of 48 with COATING. With experience, users can gauge the range of points they could accumulate in any hand, and the relative ability of a hand with a certain number of points to win. This can and should be factored into the betting strategy. The online version displays the word score as soon as the player keys in or drags cards into designated word scoring quads. Players can optimize by checking various words for best score. One modification also includes displaying player-specific best possible score, but leaving it to the player to come up with the correct word. This feature keeps the player engaged even after folding or running out of money during the game. Depending on the highest possible score for his/her hand, this feature also allows players to bet ahead, small or big, in anticipation of making the best scoring word by the time the game ends.

In the preferred embodiment, Poquere scoring is automatic and real-time, and is displayed as soon as the word is typed in, even without hitting enter. In this embodiment, Poquere automatically registers player’s highest scoring word. However, other embodiments are possible without deviating from the teaching of this invention. To challenge the word-making skills further, words that are palindromes (such as MADAM) result in the total score being tripled. And similarly, strings that create valid words in either direction (such as TOOL which becomes LOOT when reversed), result in the score being doubled. Such words are also called semordnilap (palindromes spelled backward) or half-palindrone. The bonus values (e.g., 5 and 15 points for 4 and 5 card words, and double points for palindromes and semordnilaps can be easily changed without affecting the core innovation of this disclosure. For example, we can increase the bonus for palindromes to 3x instead of 2x given the rarity of such words.)

This aspect of the scoring heavily emphasizes word-making skills, especially under time pressure.

At the end of a round, players who have not folded, compare their cards as in Texas Holdem Poker, and the player who makes the highest scoring legal word (i.e. a word present in the official game dictionary) wins. If any players tie (i.e., have identical point scores) then the pot is split. If no remaining player has a legal 3 card word that they can make, then the highest single card score is compared, followed by the next, and so on until the best five cards are compared. At the end, if the result is still a tie, the pot is split.

The objective of the game is for each player to attempt to maximize the value of the chips they hold over time.

In the preferred embodiment, each player’s top 5 scoring words are displayed at the end of every round, allowing learning via post-mortem. This can significantly help enhance vocabulary.

Specific Inventions: Creating the Card Deck

As described above, the winning words must reside in the official Poquere dictionary. For typical online play, we would use the American English Dictionary or the Websters Collegiate dictionary, or an equivalent compendium of fifty thousand words or so. For advanced play, the Scrabble dictionary could be used.

One key part of our invention is the ability to take a dictionary and from it, algorithmically generate a card deck with some interesting properties. With considerable simulation effort, we have determined that the best card distribution includes every individual character in almost direct proportion to its scaled frequency in the dictionary (with all words less than 3 letters removed), and with a point score scaled between 1 and 10 in inverse proportion to its frequency. Further, we add the top 10 two-letter combinations called digraphs, with a similar relationship to the frequency of these two-letter combinations. One such card deck, called the YB104 deck because it has 104 cards, is our preferred starting point for game play, and is shown in FIG. 2. Extensive simulations and game play has shown that this set of cards generates enough interesting words when cards are randomly dealt to make the game play entertaining and engaging.

Specific Inventions: Controlled Random Card Deals

To further improve the odds of dealing hands with interesting words, we can seed the cards. In this mode of operation, the cards are not dealt in a purely random fashion. Instead, words are selected at random from the dictionary, and then augmented with other cards selected at random. The words themselves can be randomly selected from a subset of the words in the dictionary and restricted to interesting words.

Specific Inventions: Tailored Word Lists for Online Communities

The two previous innovations taken together, allow us to tailor the game for specialized online communities. For example, to appeal to lawyers, we can substitute the standard dictionary, or augment it with a dictionary of legal terms. Further, in the Controlled Random Cards Deals, the seed words could be restricted to legal terms in the augmented dictionary. This will allow at least one legal word to be created in every deal.

This key innovation holds the highest promise for our ability to monetize the game. By appealing to multiple
specialized communities, we can engage and draw in groups who will then get bonded to the game and become long-time repeat players.

Preferred Embodiments

Online Facebook Based Gaming

[0032] In our preferred embodiment, we see the game of Poquere as a Facebook application. The user interface will allow users to ask their friends to join the game and play in real time. The psychological aspects of betting work best when there is a long-term, stable group of players who understand each other’s betting styles and who can figure out how to manipulate them through bluffing, or strategically folding hands. This behavior is the obvious challenge that all poker players enjoy. The preferred embodiment of the online game is as a client-server architecture.

[0033] Coupled with the betting and winning, is the demonstration of word-making skills. This aspect also lends itself to a Facebook like social gaming dimension, where players can advertise their high scoring words, keep track of the best words they have ever made, and share these lists with friends, and thereby challenge them to beat their own high scores. This aspect lends itself to tournaments, possibly with prizes, challenge ladders, and other mechanisms to increase the affinity and long term repeat game play.

[0034] The automatic tailoring of the card deck to specialized communities also fits the Facebook social gaming model. Communities of interest are common on Facebook, and can be easily inferred from the groups and interests provided by players in their Facebook profiles.

[0035] The game can be augmented by computer-generated players (commonly called bots) who can participate with the real players to provide additional challenge to the game. The behavior of the bots can be tailored using Artificial Intelligence (AI) techniques to control their betting behavior and word-making skills, and can further be modified in real-time depending on the skill level of the human players.

[0036] Our innovation also includes the possibility of creating a physical card deck (or multiple decks) that can either be given away as inducements, or sold for revenue. These decks would mirror the decks used for online play, but allow users to play the game offline (e.g., while traveling). Online and physical cards could both be branded (e.g., with a corporate logo) for additional revenue opportunities. Further, the branding for online play can be different for each player (even within the same hand), with the brands matched to a player’s interest as determined by the words made by the player.

[0037] Over time, we see the creation of championship ladders with players gaining points through challenging better players. Players can gain experience points determined by their skills. For example, the higher the points one scores, the closer one gets the best word that can be made in a given hand, the number of times a player wins despite having a low-scoring word (evidence of betting skills), and the number of hands won against a player with higher experience points, all these factors will be integrated into the computation of a player’s ranking. We anticipate sharing these experience points, rankings, ladder standings, best words made, and such, with each player’s online friends as a mechanism to attract new players to the game.

[0038] We anticipate that our innovation of coupling word-making skills with the attraction of competitive psychological attributes of betting, will provide significant benefits to players (beyond just the entertainment and enjoyment). The skill building aspect would make it interesting as a vocabulary learning activity for young children. The dictionaries would be tuned to word-lists that grade-school children have to learn each week, or that high-school students memorize for SATs and other competitive examinations. Recollection and memory will also be enhanced, and the social aspect of the game (playing with the same community over time) will make it ideal as an antidote to Alzheimer disease and dementia in the older populations. It could provide an ideal team-building mechanism for professional groups with tailored word-lists as the common bond. For news junkies, the word lists could be tuned to produce names or events that are topical and relevant even to a single geography. The combinations are large and the innovation described here comprehends the entire gamut.

REFERENCES

U.S. Patents

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Patent Number</th>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Inventor</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>7,344,137</td>
<td>March 2008</td>
<td>Loke</td>
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<tr>
<td>6,964,608</td>
<td>November 2005</td>
<td>Koza</td>
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<tr>
<td>4,333,656</td>
<td>June 1982</td>
<td>Sommer</td>
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<tr>
<td>4,877,255</td>
<td>October 1989</td>
<td>von Braunhut</td>
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Others


What is claimed is:

1. A method of playing a multiplayer word making and betting card game for 2 to 8 players; where each player is randomly dealt two cards not visible to the other players and five community cards that are dealt face-down and shared amongst all players; where betting proceeds in rounds and community cards are opened sequentially after each round; where the winner is the player with the highest-scoring legal word made using between 3-5 cards out of the 7 possible cards (2 in hand and 5 community cards)

2. The method of claim 1 where the cards are drawn from a deck consisting of between 52 to 104 cards each having one to three letters and a point-score.

3. The method of claim 1 where the game is played on line amongst multiple players who may be synchronously or asynchronously connected to a server via computers, mobile phones, tablets, or any other graphical computing device.

4. The method of claim 1 where the game is played with physical cards and all players are physically present in the same location.

5. The method of claim 1 where the letters on the cards are in any alphabetic script such as the Latin alphabet, Cyrillic alphabet, or Devanagari alphabet.

6. The method of claim 1 where special bonus points are awarded for words made with 4 or 5 cards.

7. The method of claim 1 where special bonus points are awarded for palindromes (words reading the same backwards), or semordnilaps (words which form different but still legal words when read backwards.
8. The method of claim 1 where the dictionaries defining the legal word is in any language suitable to the alphabet in claim 5.

9. The method of claim 1 where the dictionaries defining the legal words are drawn from specialized words used by specific groups such as legal words, or medical terms.

10. The method of claim 1 where the reverse side of the cards have graphics or logos placed on them for the purpose of generating advertising revenue.

11. The method of claim 3 where one or more of the players are replaced by computer-generated players (bots) whose actions simulate those of a real player.

The method of claim 1 where cards are dealt on a non-random basis to improve the odds of each player making at least one word.