Study Abroad in the time of Covid: (Re)Shaping Language Learning Affordances

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Abstract in Italian
Lo studio analizza, in maniera qualitativa e longitudinale, l'esperienza di studio all'estero di dieci studenti universitari in un periodo di restrizioni sulla mobilità e interazione interpersonale. Prima del Covid-19, studiare all'estero era considerato un modo per poter acquisire o migliorare una lingua straniera. Tuttavia, le misure per il contenimento dell'epidemia e la necessità della didattica a distanza hanno influito sul potenziale utilizzo della lingua straniera. In particolare, lo studio analizza l'effetto delle misure Covid sulle possibilità di contatto con la lingua straniera e sulla creazione di opportunità d'apprendimento linguistico (*language learning affordances*).

Gli informatori sono studenti universitari di diversa provenienza e durante un periodo di mobilità in diverse destinazioni: Irlanda, Germania, Francia, Cina, Romania, Corea del Sud, Arabia Saudita. I dati sono stati raccolti con interviste semi-strutturate. Ciascun partecipante è stato intervistato due volte, verso la metà dell'esperienza e alla fine. L'analisi è stata condotta

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considerando il modello di livelli di *affordance* proposto da Kyttä (2002) e rivisto da Devlin & Tyne (2021).

I risultati della ricerca mostrano che l'accesso a contesti di apprendimento è stato variabile e determinato da misure di distanziamento sociale in continuo cambiamento. Essendo tali contesti essenzialmente caratterizzati da restrizioni, le *language learning affordances* che hanno contraddistinto precedenti esperienze di mobilità studentesca sono notevolmente diminuite in numero e tipologia.

Abstract in English
This paper is a longitudinal qualitative study exploring the experiences of ten students who embarked on Study Abroad (SA) programmes at a time when restrictions were placed on movement; and access to spaces and people were curtailed. Pre-Covid, SA had often been positioned as the optimal means of ensuring linguistic gains. However, social and spatial restrictions impacted the where, who, why and how of language learning affordances (LLAs). This study aims to analyse the extent to which Covid measures impacted on access to the target language (TL) within the educational environment and how this affected students' ability to co-construct LLAs.

The participants are university students from a range of home and host countries: Ireland, Germany, France, Spain, China, Romania, South Korea and Saudi Arabia. Data were generated via narrative interviews. Each participant was interviewed twice, at the mid-way point of the sojourn and at the end. Data were analysed using the affordance framework proposed by Kyttä (2002) and adapted by Devlin & Tyne (2021).

Findings show that access to TL environments fluctuated and was dependent on the ever-changing restrictions in the host country. Being essentially a field of prohibited action, the environment was not conducive in producing potential LLAs and reshaped the type and number of affordances during SA.

1. Introduction
Sojourning in another country has always been seen as an enriching experience. The idea of the 'journey' for educational purposes permeates literature (Bacon, 1625) and provides elite stories of young men touring Europe. Today, student mobility (SM) has become more inclusive. University agreements and exchange programmes facilitate SM resulting in an exponential increase in the number of students and the range of countries. However, at the beginning of 2020 a global pandemic struck. As the virus spread, societal restrictions, bans on travel and curfews were introduced. Many international students were denied the possibility to travel home or return to their host institutes.

However, the impact of Covid-19 on SM was more tangible in the academic year 2020-2021, when the data for this study were collected. Many programmes were cancelled or postponed. Students were reluctant to embark on mobility, fearing new viral waves and uncertainty of teaching modality (de Wit & Marinoni, 2021). As a result, numbers dropped and those who engaged faced unprecedented challenges. This study provides a snapshot of the lived experiences of ten university students on SM programmes during this time. Data were collected longitudinally via narrative interviews to capture the complexity and the nuances of each experience with regards access to the target language (TL) over time. Following an ecological perspective on Second Language Acquisition (SLA) (van Lier, 2000), we analyse the extent to which students were able to co-construct language learning affordances (LLAs) within the educational context when access to space was curtailed.

2.Language learning affordances

Affordance is a term from perceptual psychology used to describe the relationship between organisms, objects and other organisms in their environment (van Lier, 2000: 252). Experience with the environment may generate further action on the part of the organism. If this happens, the environment offers an affordance to the organism. Affordances do not trigger or cause action, rather they hold the potential for further action opportunities. Not all experience of the environment can become affordances and what does, or does not, depends on the needs, wishes, actions of the organism in the specific circumstance and environment. Van Lier (2000: 252) explicates with an example from biology. In a forest, a leaf can offer varied affordances to its inhabitants: shade to a spider, food for a caterpillar. It can be useful for some organisms, or of little use to others. However, the properties of the leaf do not change. It is the same leaf, in the same environment, at the same specific time.

In language learning, the concept of affordance allows researchers to "shed new light […] on second and multiple language acquisition" (Aronin & Singleton, 2012: 238). Traditional SLA theories (Krashen, 1985) view input, the amount of processable language to which learners are exposed, as key to language learning. While input undoubtedly aids SLA, this view promotes the belief that more input equals more language gains. This in turn both reduces learners to agentless empty containers to be filled. Taking an ecological perspective, Larsen-Freeman (2015: 231) proposes that the concept of affordance replace input. This is apposite to SA contexts which offer *potential* rich input to sojourners. However, language gains do not always emerge as expected (Isabelli-García et al., 2018). An ecological perspective explicates this by positing that the "perceptual and social activity of the learner" (van Lier, 2000: 246) while engaging with the environment is pivotal to understanding the learning that takes place.

Against this background, the study addresses the research questions:

1- To what extent did Covid measures impact students' ability to co-construct LLAs?

2- How did this impact their TL contact and agency?

The analysis will focus on the educational contact, i.e. language contact in the (virtual) classroom and on campus. Research on language contact during SA tends to focus on learning opportunities outside the classroom. For example, social circles (Dewey et al., 2014) and participants' engagement in recreational activities (Mitchell et al., 2017). However, language development during SA is "blended into the routine mobilities of everyday life" (Benson, 2021: 113) and the educational context is a core component of daily routines which gained more relevance as opportunities for social contact in the wild were curtailed during the pandemic.

3. Methodology

Data were collected via semi-structured interviews on Microsoft Teams. Each interview lasted about one hour. Participants were interviewed twice. Once transcribed, data were coded according to the levels of affordances discussed in §3.2.

3.1 Narrative enquiry

A narrative enquiry approach was followed. It facilitated detailed accounts of individual interactions with people, places and things allowing us to "listen to the participants and build an understanding based on what is heard" (Creswell, 2013: 29). Moreover, it permitted an analysis of what was true for our participants at that specific time. Perception is a key aspect of LLAs and what participants lived was pivotal to understanding why some LLAs emerged and some did not or why some LLAs emerged for some participants not for others. As Coleman (2013: 25) opines, language learners are not units with static features. Their stories, needs, feelings and interests are crucial to understand what evolves during the sojourn. In the case of our participants, a key element that changed over time, albeit at different degrees and times, was the type and level of restrictions. Therefore, a one-size-fits-all approach would inevitably leave out key information which could help understand language development.

3.2 Analytical Tool

The data are analysed according to levels of affordances. As stressed by Kyttä (2002: 109), Gibson viewed affordances as graded properties which do not fit in an either-or categorisation. Rather than different types, they identified levels of affordances. At the macro-level, affordances can be potential and actualised. Potential affordances are qualities of the environment that are not acknowledged by the individual, while actualised affordances represent the relationships that emerge between the individual and their environment. Actualised affordances can be sub-divided into perceived, utilised and shaped. Perceived affordances are characteristics of the environment that are noted by the individual who decides not to use them. Utilised affordances represent "the successful convergence of the individual and the environment" (Devlin & Tyne, 2021: 67) which leads to the effectuation of the affordance. 'Shaped' affordances occur when individuals use their agency to change the properties of the environment around them. Devlin & Tyne (2021) added two levels: rejected and denied. Rejected affordances emerge when the individual dismisses the characteristics of the environment as illegitimate. Denied affordances occur "when the individual recognises a possible affordance but is denied the opportunity to utilise or shape it by the environment or fellow participants" (Devlin & Tyne, 2021: 67).

3.3 Participants

Purposive sampling was employed to identify potential participants. As Table 1 shows, five participants were undergraduate students who travelled from Ireland to Spain, South Korea, France and Germany. The remaining five were students at an Irish university from a variety of countries: one was a German student on a year abroad; three were Chinese students attending a Master's degree; and the final participant was a PhD student from Saudi Arabia.

Table 1: Overview of Participants

Pseudonym	Nationality	Host country	Degree
Monica	German	Ireland	
Sinead	Irish	Spain	
Orla	Irish	South Korea	BA
Pauline	Hungarian	France	
Gina	Irish	Germany	
Cait	Irish	Spain	
Vivienne	Romanian		
Yann	Chinese		MA
Elena	Chinese	Ireland	
Hanna	Saudi		PhD

While diversity in the characteristics of participants has often been a concern in study designs, the different backgrounds of our participants allowed us to gain rich insights into each experience. Attempts for generalisations were not possible as the type and the level of societal restrictions differed across the countries and over time and this resulted in inevitably different LLAs during the mobility.

Participants joined the study voluntarily. A call for participants was emailed to students on a SM programme in the Irish institution involved in the study. Students interested in participating contacted the researchers. Each participant was interviewed twice. The first interview took place at the mid-way point of their sojourn and the second at the end. Interviews were loosely structured to encourage a more personal telling. To allow consistency in data collection, overarching themes guided the interviews. Examples included use of the TL, interaction with locals, living arrangements, creation of social bonds, and teaching methods.

4. Findings

Although the educational context is a primary context that SA students have access to, it has received scant attention as a space for language contact and development. Traditionally, the focus has been on what happens outside educational contexts – in homestays (Knight & Schmidt-Rinehart, 2010), around the dinner table (Kinginger & Carnine, 2019) or more generally making social networks 'in the wild' (Mitchell et al., 2017). Due to societal constraints, the educational context acquired greater importance as a site for language contact. Like all other contexts, it was limited; however, governments ensured instruction remained accessible. Throughout the timeframe of the study, for most of the participants, this resulted in online experiences. It is important to note that the educational context is also a site for social interaction. With this in mind, LLAs will be explored in two separate settings within the educational context: formal instruction and campus life.

4.1 Instructional setting

All participants experienced online classes to varying degrees throughout the year. Seven participants were engaged primarily in online classes and three experienced mainly in person (Table 2).

Table 2: Medium of Instruction

Participant	Host country	Primary medium of instruction
Cait	Spain	In person
Elena	Ireland	Online
Gina	Germany	
Hanna	Ireland	
Monica		
Orla	South Korea	In person
Pauline	France	Online
Sinead	Spain	In person
Vivienne	Ireland	Online
Yann		

Formal instruction was mostly provided in the TL and constituted the setting where opportunities to co-construct LLAs could potentially occur. We explore the participants' experiences following the level of affordances identified in the data. Three levels emerged: utilised, denied and perceived.

4.1.1 Utilised Affordances
Utilised affordances emerge from a harmonious interaction between the individual and the environment. In terms of the instructional setting, this primarily constitutes an online environment. Even though our participants had chosen to study abroad to experience "real language and culture" (Elena), experiencing the instructional setting online was not necessarily considered a barrier. Gina notes: "I really like online university […] I really don't feel like I'm at a disadvantage". In contrast, it frees her up so "that time can be spent doing other things". In addition to convenience (Yann & Pauline also highlight this), it proves to be a conducive environment for the emergence of utilised affordances. However, it must be noted that this depends on the preferences and tenacity of the individual. We start by considering Yann. As a MA student, Yann prioritises study:

master's student's life is more about - you have to study by yourself unlike undergraduate student's life (Yann)

He is older than the others and no longer needs to experience student life. His only contact with the TL is through online lessons and he believes that online education is "the future". Thus, he utilises the affordances facilitated by the environment and does not believe that he needs anything extra. On the other hand, Elena & Pauline both note that engaging with the online environment requires "extra effort" (Elena). Nevertheless, they are able to transform this into an advantage. In particular, the recording of online lectures allows both participants the time and space to negotiate the content in a beneficial manner.

on online lesson maybe I can choose to see the recording and maybe when I find some unfamiliar words or something I can check the Internet quickly (Elena)

I need to work hard to take all the notes and relisten to the lectures and note down and everything to actually be able to benefit from it (Pauline)

Although highlighting gaps in their linguistic knowledge, they draw on their strong desire to be in the TL country ("it's my dream to know the real culture and language" [Elena]) to improve their linguistic skills. They successfully construct a utilised affordance facilitating their growth as independent learners.

Going beyond environments that focus on providing input which can be conveniently accessed, Gina and Monica note how utilised affordances emerge in synchronous online classes where breakout rooms are employed.

for languages it's all like really small groups for the whole. Yeah and like you always have your microphone and camera on so it is really interactive and stuff. (Gina)

I think in language teaching they try - or they're trying to be a bit more interactive than with content teaching (Monica)

In contrast to the recorded classes which result in the development of autonomous learning, breakout rooms gave rise to utilised affordances where interactive learning is facilitated. Furthermore, both participants highlight the importance not only of their fellow students and their willingness to engage in online learning, but also the role of the teachers. Therefore, for utilised affordances to emerge from a negotiated online environment, it is necessary that the technology can facilitate it and that the individual learner and other participants are enablers.

4.1.2 Denied Affordances
As noted, the online medium can give rise to utilised affordances; however, this is not the full story. Further data illuminate that constraints inherent in the environments result in denied affordances despite the participants' willingness to utilise or shape them. To explore this, we need to consider the instructional setting also as a setting for social interaction in the TL. In contrast to how Elena and Patricia managed to draw on what Allen (2010: 19) labels "social histories" to make an "informed decision on the value" (Aronin & Singleton, 2012: 324) of the interaction and construct utilised affordances, in many cases the constricted nature of the environment proved overwhelming leading to denied affordances. This was mainly when interaction was necessary.

Despite Elena's earlier description of utilising affordances to become an independent learner, she recognised how the same environment denied affordances for negotiated synchronous learning.

with online course we don't want to speak more because we may need more time to think and don't have close contacts with the teachers. But for the offline course we can have some more connection with our lecturers, and we can talk more and have more discussions in class. (Elena)

The online environment seemed to present a deterrent to engaging in oral interaction and forming relationships with lecturers. While no one else discussed relationships with lecturers, the role of the online environment in denying social interaction with peers was a major theme for everyone, even those who were enthusiastic about online learning. Gina states:

the only thing I would say is like obviously for making friends wise in the classes specifically. Like if I have a question about something in class normally you could say to someone next to you, like oh, can I take your phone number or something and could you help me with it a small bit. I suppose that in like an online class it is quite hard to kind of reach out. (Gina)

This highlights how, despite a strong desire, the online environment proves too restrictive to facilitate peer-to-peer learning and the formation of relationships. Even Yann who had

previously stated that he did not need peer relationships noted that he could not build relationships with his classmates because meeting in person was 'forbidden' foregrounding that social interaction is not facilitated within the online environment.

Although breakout rooms were noted by Gina and Monica as being facilitators of interactive learning, limitations on their capacity to enable affordances in terms of building relationships arose. Some learners are reticent about engaging in social interaction in online classes. As a result, their rejection of the affordance creates a denied affordance for learners who would like to engage at a social level:

in breakout rooms - it's very common not to turn their camera on and I find that very disturbing actually - now I'm used to it - but like because of this I didn't have any chance to actually see the people I'm talking to and maybe - get more in contact with them or maybe I would have felt more encouraged to ask them - like for having a coffee with me or something like this - but it's like this there was no contact at all (Monica)

Orla, who encountered only short periods of online teaching, was able to draw on her in-person experiences to further elucidate shortcomings of the online breakout rooms which lead to denied social LLAs.

so we go into breakout rooms and we do our little conversation drills and stuff. But because it's so hard to judge how long the conversation drill will take, we always had two or three minutes to spare at the end. And two or three minutes sitting with someone is staring at a screen, isn't it? (Orla)

In some instances, the online environment inhibits learners from speaking more than is necessary thus rendering the online instructional environment non-conducive to social affordances. However, that does not mean that the in-person instructional environment necessarily facilitates affordances that can be utilised or shaped as social interaction. As highlighted by Cait, mandated social distancing regulations can likewise lead to denied affordances.

it was hard to get to know anybody as well, because I wouldn't say really with the language. I mean, that was a little bit more difficult, but more just because obviously we were supposed to be social distancing and can't really interact much anyway. (Cait)

4.1.3 Perceived Affordances

Perceived affordances emerge "when the individual notes the affordance yet decides not to engage" (Devlin & Tyne, 2021: 67). There was one example of this from Vivienne. While acknowledging that "academic staff [were] absolutely wonderful and as accommodating as everyone could possibly be", she nevertheless notes that "online is not for me":

I feel embarrassed towards my teachers because - I can't focus for two hours straight - so at some point my mind just wanders off - not to mention the constant distraction of possibly having multiple tabs open and looking at something else while you're supposed to be paying attention in class … I constantly feel like there's an interruption waiting at every moment (Vivienne)

Vivienne's social history and internal factors meant that she was unable or unwilling to engage despite being aware of the possible benefits.

In brief, Covid regulations gave rise to limitations in the levels of affordances facilitated by the instructional setting. On the one hand, the participants were able to engage with an environment

which provided TL input. This was often viewed as convenient and generated utilised affordances enabling independent learning. However, it was dependent on the individual capacities of the learner to engage online. Considering learning as a social process, a different picture emerges. Despite efforts from teaching staff to facilitate small groups in breakout rooms, the environment of a computer-mediated class, or even an in-person class where social distancing regulations are implemented, denied participants interactional affordances in the TL. The participants perceived the potentialities, but the rigidity of the environment and the actions of other participants denied them the agency to shape an affordance which would give rise to social interaction in the TL.

4.2 Campus Life

In this section we examine the levels of affordances facilitated in campus life beyond the classroom. For many participants, this was an aspect of SA that they were looking forward to. Vivienne identifies the rich on-campus experience as one of her reasons for choosing that university and Elena alluded to dreams being dashed, noting feeling "really sad" about its absence. For SA students, campus life is particularly important as they do not have an established network of family and friends in the vicinity. Three levels of affordances were identified and again they were: utilised, denied and perceived.

4.2.1 Utilised Affordances

We will start by considering the library. For Orla, the university campus was primarily open. Like Hanna in her pre-Covid experiences, Orla singled out the library as an environment conducive to LLAs – and not just as a space where she could access academic material, but where she encountered the TL in a social manner. She highlights the importance of utilising the affordance presented by the fact that you can chat to people there:

Just running into people in library and bits and pieces like that. They all add up (Orla)

In the case of Pauline, the only place open on campus was the canteen. Not only did she use the canteen because it provided meals, but also to utilise the affordances that could be constructed for TL contact.

Over there you have to talk to people. Obviously not that much. You have to tell them what you want. Got some like awkward moments where I'm like trying to ask how many points this is. Overall trying to figure out something. (Pauline)

Although she often found the linguistic element challenging, she persevered as the educational context presented very few opportunities outside formal instruction.

In addition to on-campus facilities, interaction with institutional bodies such as university International Offices and the Erasmus Student Network also created utilised affordances. For Gina, this consisted of a weekly newsletter in the TL from the International Office. Monica, on the other hand, arrived just before lockdown and was able to participate in activities organised by the international office

we actually we had one international student meeting outside where I got to know some people and I'm still in in contact to them and starting from them I met other international students - so this was really helpful (Monica)

This constituted an important utilised language contact affordance for Monica. It proved long-lasting allowing her to keep in contact with other students throughout the lockdowns. Monica

stressed the value of this and was disappointed when facilitated meetings stopped due to lockdown.

after that they didn't get in contact with us to provide socializing opportunities - that's - yeah - maybe there could have been more initiative from them (Monica)

The situation was similar for Hanna. Before restrictions the International Office provided services which could be utilised as LLAs. When lockdowns happened, they ceased and denied the affordances they once facilitated. As Hanna notes:

it would be better if they, for example, made a day for international student online on Teams. I remember the other day I've talked to another student who told me that I can't be isolated. I'm feeling like it's not me. I need some people to talk to. I want to communicate. I want to do some activities, but I can't. (Hanna)

In the cases of Sinead and Cait the European Student Network (ESN) was active in their areas.

I do know a few people from here from around here because of the ESN (Sinead)

The ESN connected the SA students with local people with whom they could communicate in the TL. The affordance was utilised and like the introduction from the International Office, had long-lasting consequences.

4.2.2 Denied Affordances
While the closure of the physical campus resulted in an over-representation of denied affordances, it is important to explore how it (re)shaped students' contact with LLAs. We will start with how campus life was experienced pre-Covid. As a PhD student, Hanna had experienced life on campus pre-Covid. She details how she had previously organised her day around being on campus for both academic and social reasons.

I used to wake up early, go into university. After I finish working, I go with my friends to the gym, do some activities and sometimes we meet outside go to a restaurant or just walk around (Hanna)

She stresses the importance of the social interaction affordances in the TL that she utilised when on campus.

We need to meet our people. You know you exchange information not only about your research, but about your life (Hanna)

The fact that affordances to chat informally in the TL were denied by the regulations had a negative impact on Hanna who notes that "nowadays I'm completely isolated". Monica had experienced a brief period when the campus was open and likewise emphasises the importance of campus facilities for socialising in the TL. She describes:

at some point the gym was still open and there we could also like - go into the gym and meet there just like to do some exercises together (Monica)

Like Hanna, Monica's experience indicates how she previously had the agency to shape the affordances presented by the gym so that they also became affordances for socialising in the TL. Furthermore, clubs and societies closure also manifested as denied affordances. For example, Sinead had hoped to join the environmental society at her host university to interact with like-minded people in the TL.

I was just a bit disappointed about it because it was one of the things I was like quite looking forward to. Yeah, like making other friends who have like very similar interests to me and nothing (Sinead)

The frustration and disappointment of having such affordances denied is best summed up by Vivienne:

I can see all these facilities - I can see all the things that I could take advantage of - and - yet it feels like somebody's flaunting them in my face - Oh look at all this cool stuff you could have at college - but you're not going to (Vivienne)

In short, the denied affordances were most impactful on the potentiality of socialising in the TL.

4.2.3 Perceived Affordances
Universities seemed aware of the impact of closed campuses on taking part in university life, thus many societies continued their activities online. These could be difficult for SA students to access as they were newcomers to the university. For example, Sinead admits that an environmental society may exist but that she does not know how to locate it. Conversely, Vivienne was aware of online societies; however, chose not to engage as "taking dance classes online is not exactly fun" thus rendering it a perceived affordance. Vivienne also chose not to engage in the affordances presented by the library which was the only facility open on her campus.

I mean the library is open but it depends on everybody's study habits. I can't sit still for two hours looking at a screen or at a piece of paper (Vivienne)

Likewise, for Hanna who had previously enjoyed going to the library, the restrictions on socialising including having to book in advance and wear a mask had transformed it from a previously utilised affordance for TL contact to a perceived affordance. It is possible to engage with the TL in the library, but not in a way that promotes social interaction. As a result, she too chose not to engage.

To conclude, campus life is highly significant for SA students and has the potential to facilitate numerous, varied and long-lasting affordances. Due to Covid restrictions, the participants experienced mainly denied affordances. SA students generally did not engage with affordances offered by online activities. This seemed to be either due to the lack of knowledge about them (Sinead) or the conscious decision not to engage with them (Vivienne). Other students (Hanna) would have liked the university to organise social events online. Additionally, the data foreground the importance of institutional structures in facilitating environments whereby affordances can be utilised especially in terms of social and interactive elements of language.

5. Discussion
Unlike previous studies into affordances for language development where a range of affordances played out through unique interactions between a dynamic environment and the agentive learner/actor (Allen, 2010; Devlin & Tyne, 2021; Murray & Fujishima, 2013), during the Covid 19 pandemic, environments at best manifested as constraining and at worst legally prohibitive to the co-construction of language development affordances. As a result, a loss of learner agency could be expected. In this section, we explore 1. the extent to which learners

were able to co-construct affordances in the educational environment and 2. the impact of this on the type of language they interacted with and their agency to shape this.

It is worth reiterating that our participants constitute a unique cohort of students. One of their rationales for studying abroad was TL development. Although much of the world had closed down and crossing borders was considered a transgression, their desire and motivation to continue their studies in a TL context were so strong that they moved to the TL country or, in the case of Hanna, returned to it. To do so, they invested heavily. Many had to quarantine, undergo multiple testing, obtain special visas and pay inflated prices for flights. Therefore, we can conclude that they are highly motivated to engage with all environments to utilise and shape affordances. Additionally, it must be stressed that the purpose of this study is not necessarily to present findings which can be generalized to all mobile students during this time. In contrast, our aim is to explore the interaction between complex individuals and the complex, dynamic environments in which their experiences unfold. The sample size of ten participants interviewed twice allows for a rich and deep understanding of the co-construction of affordances at various times of the pandemic. Nevertheless, when analysed through the lens of LLAs, commonalities do indeed emerge despite the variations in purpose of sojourn, country of origin and destination. These will be explored below.

Turning to question 1, the answer is perhaps obvious. Within both the instructional and the campus-life settings, the participants experienced a curtailment in the number of levels of affordances they could co-construct. It fell from the six identified by Devlin & Tyne (2021) to three: denied, utilised and perceived. Denied affordances dominated and perceived were minimal. This can be attributed to the pivot to online interaction and the closure of physical spaces on campus. The reduction in the number and the types of levels that remained are both significant. As noted by Kordt (2018: 140), "learning environments [...] should lead to the emergence of additional affordances for learners, enabling them to actively seek out new affordances in future". However, in a time when learning environments are legally restricted, we see the inability of the participants to seek out additional affordances. They utilised the affordances which could be facilitated by the settings to the best of their abilities and where they failed, this was due to other actors in the environment and their inability or unwillingness to engage. Both Orla and Monica highlighted examples of this with regards to the use of breakout rooms.

Just as the number of affordances was severely restricted by the circumstances, so was the type. According to Devlin & Tyne (2021), pre-Covid, when learners succeeded in co-constructing shaped or utilised affordances, they sought out additional affordances and enhanced their language contact. Shaped affordances emerge when learners are "able to exert agency in such a way that the environment accommodates them" (Devlin & Tyne, 2021: 74). In this study, we had no examples of shaped affordance which undoubtedly limited TL interaction. Furthermore, we argue that it was the environment alone which determined the level of affordance that could be constructed. This represents a significant reshaping of how affordances were traditionally conceptualised – i.e. as agentive interactions between the learner and the environment. Kyttä (2002: 109) refers to fields of constrained action meaning environments which restrict the range of affordances that can be co-constructed. In this particular case, we go a step further and propose that the educational environment had become a field of prohibited action as it precluded the learners' ability to shape affordances.

In terms of the instructional setting, the impact of this was immense. The pivot to online and in-person classes where social distancing measures were enforced witnessed the return to a

"one-way transmission mode" (Sonnleitner, 2016: 1) of teaching whereby a specialist transmits content. However, for most participants, this did not initially present as a negative. Gina did not feel at a disadvantage; and recorded lectures allowed Elena and Patricia to utilise the affordance to consolidate learning. However, classrooms can be spaces where learners shape and create affordances through interaction to reflect their needs at that time. Kocatepe (2018) compellingly argues that learners can appropriate the discourse of the classroom to have their voices heard. In this study, the environments where instruction occurs essentially prohibit the learners' ability to have their voices heard.

Moreover, the impacts go beyond the instructional setting into campus life. For language students in particular - it is important to remember that the participants in this study chose to study abroad as much for language purposes as for contents - gains arise from social interaction and the affordances constructed. Murray and Fujishima explore the importance of an on-campus "social learning space" (2013: 140) and detail how learner interactions outside the formal instructional setting can generate a "variety of affordances in addition to those directly related to the […] classes" (2013: 150). Specifically, these relate to peer-to-peer social interaction in terms of language and also of co-participating in everyday social activities. While Murray & Fujishima (2013) focus on an 'English café', our data show that any space can become a social learning space. For example, both Monica and Hanna mention the gym; Monica, Cait and Gina note that spaces provided by the international offices and the ESN fulfilled that role. In addition, Orla highlighted that even the classroom could be shaped into a social learning space when she noted that "the only way we could talk to each other and build up relationships was through Korean". However, when these spaces went into lockdown, social learning disappeared. Despite the resumption of some activities online, the participants were unable or unwilling to construct social learning spaces online.

In conclusion, the exploration of a small, yet exceptional cohort of SA students sheds light on how the restrictions and the pivot to an online educational environment reshaped not only the range of affordances that could be facilitated, but also our conceptualisation of affordances during this period. Devlin & Tyne had previously contested that "learner internal factors and agency" (2021: 74) played a greater role in the co-construction of affordances than any barriers presented by the environment arguing against construing the environment as inflexible. However, during this time, the environment became rigid, and we describe it as a field of prohibited action. Consequently, our participants lost their ability to have their voices heard within the instructional setting. In addition, they were denied the possibility to shape affordances to their needs. In short, they were prohibited from interacting as social agents in social learning spaces.

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