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Affordances for Learning and Maintenance of Bilingual Children's Home-Language through Service-Learning

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ABSTRACT

In the United States, 9.4% of public school students speak a language other than English; of those children, 77% speak Spanish (National Center for Education Statistics, 2017). While there is widespread concern for these children to learn English, maintaining the home language and encouraging bilingualism are given little regard (Ovando, 2003). This investigation reports on a service-learning project carried out by university students that aimed to support Spanish learning and maintenance in young bilinguals. The project consisted of bi-weekly one-hour lessons for children ages 4-8, which included reading, conversation, and games in the target language. The analysis of participants' interactions, reflections, and observations revealed the emergence of linguistic and social affordances (van Lier, 2000). Linguistic affordances were identified as knowledge-building exchanges in which children explored mostly vocabulary. Social affordances referred to the construction of information (e.g., appreciation for one's current skills in the language). Both linguistic and social affordances arose and intertwined during, and as a result of, participation in the service-learning project.

Keywords: bilingual children, affordances, service-learning, Spanish

INTRODUCTION

The National Center for Education Statistics reported that in the school-year 2014–15, 9.4% of public school students in the U.S. spoke a first language[1] (L1) other than English; of those children, 77% spoke Spanish (National Center for Education Statistics, 2017). While children have an innate ability to learn multiple languages (Baker, 2006; Montrul, 2007), language-minority children often experience a gradual shift from the home-language to the community's dominant language (Oller, Jarmulowicz, Gibson, & Toff, 2007). A common profile to this phenomenon is that of children whose caretakers speak a language other than English but once children start preschool, the majority language begins to dominate most contexts in the children's life such as school and play, thus prompting the shift (Bhatia & Ritchie, 2013).

As Kagan (2014) has argued, bilingual education could aid in promoting the languages that language-minority children already know and thereby increase the number of Americans

comfortable with another language, an essential asset in the globalized economies of the 21st century (Kramsch, 2006). Yet, the U.S. has gone through periods in which prevailing policies have promoted, tolerated, and even restricted bilingual education (Ovando, 2003). These fluctuations result from political, economic, and sociocultural struggles where dominant groups seek to maintain power and control rather than to preserve minority-languages (Flores & Baetens Beardsmore, 2015; García, 2009; Wright, 2013). Currently in the U.S., numerous programs exist under the bilingual education umbrella; however, a predominant ideology in their application is promoting proficiency only in English (Baker, 2006; Flores & Baetens Beardsmore, 2015).

The absence of bilingual programs that promote heteroglossic views of language learning that value bi/multilingualism warrants the exploration of alternative programs that support minority-languages. This study reports on just such an initiative designed to promote the minority-language beyond the home and school settings traditionally reported in the education literature (e.g., Fitts, 2006; Martin-Beltrán, 2010; Potowski, 2004): in a non-profit after-school program facilitated by university students (UNs). Such domains, that surround and relate to schools but do not engage them directly, illuminate practices in the broader community that may play an important, yet largely overlooked, role in the maintenance of heritage-languages.

In this study, whose inquiry was framed primarily through the perspective of experiential education as applied to issues of bilingual education, UNs carried out a reading-program aimed to foster the Spanish language in Spanish-English bilingual children. Through their participation, UNs met a service-learning (SL) component of their own Spanish language coursework; SL being a type of experiential learning that combines academic objectives with community service (Furco, 1996). This investigation aimed to identify *affordances* (van Lier, 2000), or language learning opportunities, and processes of language learning co-created by children and UNs in a dynamic and supportive environment, or safe space (García, 2005; Vygotsky, 1978), made possible through SL. The next section describes SL, the affordance construct, and issues relevant to L1 maintenance and loss, which serve to frame this study's findings and discussion.

Experiential Education: Service-Learning

Experiential education is built on Dewey's (1938) philosophy calling for connections between education and the community. This approach includes various modalities, such as internships, teaching practicums, and volunteering. Each modality changes the balance between learning and community service where, for example, internships make learners' needs and gains central as they provide training and career development opportunities, while volunteerism emphasizes meeting a community need (Furco, 1996; Wurr, 2017). SL, the modality employed in this investigation, strives for a middle way: students meet learning objectives while simultaneously addressing a need expressed by a community partner (Barreneche, 2011). In this study, the community partner requested assistance in organizing a program promoting the Spanish language in young bilinguals.

Linguistic and social benefits for participants support SL's implementation in language courses, as seen in this research. For instance, second language (L2) learners can experience active learning as they interact with community members who speak the target language. This can result in increased language proficiency and cultural awareness as well as skills that prepare them for their professional lives (Abbott & Lear, 2010; Barreneche, 2011; Caldwell, 2007; Zapata, 2011). Heritage language learners (i.e., individuals who learned the target language in the home, Valdés [2000, 2005]) can experience validation of their linguistic skills (Kim & Sohn,

2016; Leeman, Rabin, & Román-Mendoza, 2011; Pascual y Cabo, Prada, & Lowther Pereira, 2017), develop valuable skills necessary to succeed in college (King de Ramírez, 2016; Uehara & Raatior, 2016), and increase their awareness of sociolinguistic and sociopolitical issues affecting their local community (Lowther-Pereira, 2015).

Key tenets of SL include an in-depth pursuit of knowledge, reflection, and reciprocity of benefits, which are fundamental to the ethical implementation of SL in higher-education (Palpacuer Lee, Curtis, & Curran, 2018). When the experience lacks processes that increase students' knowledge of those they are working with or acknowledges mutual benefits (Langseth, 2000), SL activities are no more than charity work. This magnifies the givers' contributions thus promoting a patronizing view of those they serve, which has the potential to deepen prejudice and replicate social differentials between the parties giving the service and those receiving it (King, 2004; Marquez, 2014). On the other hand, an understanding of the topics that are relevant to the community can translate into further participation in promoting social change and advocacy (Faszer-McMahon, 2013; Isabelli & Muse, 2016). In this regard, findings of Pascual y Cabo et al. (2017) are relevant to this research; the authors report on a study where Spanish heritage speakers taught lessons in Spanish at two elementary schools. The analysis of participants' post-program data demonstrated their increased support of bilingualism, bilingual practices, and heritage language maintenance. Indeed, an SL experience that is well-contextualized will not only inform students but move them to actively identify, seek, and advocate for solutions for and with the community (Abbott, 2017; Varona & Hellebrandt, 1999).

Affordances in Language Learning

Based on sociocultural theory, van Lier (2000) suggested an ecological approach to learning. From this perspective, the environment is of the essence as it provides a 'semiotic budget;' that is, an array of meanings that are available to participants as they engage in meaning-making activities. In this sense, the semiotic budget does not refer to available 'input,' rather, to opportunities for meaningful action that the environment affords the individual (van Lier, 2000, p. 252). Thus, within the ecological approach, the term *affordance* refers to the relationship between an organism and the environment. In language learning, affordances promote learning; they can be naturally occurring or they can be cultivated based on participants' contributions. They are shaped by participants' individual features, for example, their language(s) and culture(s) (Ahn, 2016). Moreover, affordances assume an active learner that establishes dynamic relationships with and within the environment. The extent to which learners, depending on their abilities, intuitively or consciously understand and leverage these dynamics, ultimately determines their further action and degree of success in interaction (van Lier, 2004). Through the analysis of affordances, an understanding can be gained of predispositions and possibilities of how learners engage in a learning context (Forrester, 1999).

To illustrate the affordance construct, van Lier (2004) described an imaginary context in which he is in France and does not speak French. Upon visiting someone in her office, she says '*asseyez-vous*.' He does not know what the phrase means but there is a chair and the interlocutor is pointing to it. Initially, the social context does not automatically afford sitting. It is through gestures and the act of uttering words, even if incomprehensible to the listener at that moment, that sitting is afforded. As seen in this relatively basic illustration, various interactions between the subject and the context come together in affording sitting. Similarly, in language learning, multiple nuanced features of the environment can simultaneously interact with the learner in

affording learning. Thus, during a dynamic exchange, learners may encounter *linguistic* and *social affordances*. Linguistic affordances describe negotiations that are conducive to building linguistic knowledge. Social affordances point to the development of information that results from the exchange, even if unspoken, which promotes learning, such as perceiving support though no specific words are uttered that signify that message (Gibson, 1966).

Previous research has demonstrated how language exchanges provide linguistic and social affordances that support language learning. For instance, Ahn (2016) identified moments of interaction in which linguistic and cultural knowledge were built. Exchanges between Korean L2 learners and English L2 learners were recorded and analyzed by means of conversation analysis techniques. Participants were also interviewed and prompted to identify affordances. It was concluded that affordances were unique to the learning environment, the participants, and their language and culture. Thoms (2014) examined the emergence of language learning affordances in a Spanish L2 class. The author carried out a thematic analysis of in-class interactions between the students and the instructor, learners' responses to a questionnaire in which they discussed their perspective on class discussion, and results from a stimulated recall session. Findings described how teacher reformulations built on learners' contributions cultivated a language learning environment rich in language learning affordances. The author noted that although the ultimate goal of affordances is student learning, his investigation was descriptive and aimed to define affordances that the participants might turn into opportunities for learning.

Lastly, and most relevant to this study's methodology, Martin-Beltrán (2010) investigated students' bilingual interactions in a dual immersion school. Her objective was to analyze affordances and constraints for bilingual language learning. Participants were Spanish native speakers, Spanish heritage children, and Spanish L2 children. Data included recordings of classroom discourse that were analyzed through the identification of language-related episodes (LREs). In LREs, students reflected on their language usage, asked questions, or played with new language forms. In her analysis, the researcher concluded that children created an interactive setting in which both L1 and L2 learning affordances emerged and mixed.

In taking an ecological approach to language learning, the current study investigated how linguistic and social affordances were generated during the SL program. Specifically, the analysis did not seek to describe the effects of affordances on learning per se; rather, it served to illustrate how affordances that promote the home-language might emerge in this context.

L1 Maintenance and Loss

This study is built on the notion that bilingual children in the U.S. lack the support they need to preserve the home-language. This section provides an overview of the multiple factors that encourage and discourage L1 maintenance.

Factors that promote home-language preservation include L1 literacy (Reese & Goldenberg, 2006), encouragement, and optimism to speak the language, and a community beyond the home that supports and encourages the L1 (Guardado, 2002; Mora, Villa, & Dávila, 2006). Indeed, in societies in which multilingualism is valued, and thus bolstered through education policy, children more naturally become bilingual (Bhatia & Ritchie, 1999). In those contexts, bilingual programs seek to promote competencies in both majority and minority languages (Montrul & Potowski, 2007). Conversely, variables that contribute to L1 loss or diminished L1 abilities (Anderson, 2012) include policies and processes that value majority-

language acquisition for acculturation, exposure to the L2 at an early age (Baker, 2014; Scheffner Hammer, Lawrence, & Miccio, 2008), and speaking the majority-language in the home (Anderson, 2012). Thus, the community broadly speaking— representing a nuanced network of home, family, school dynamics, but also extending to civic, cultural, business, and postsecondary contexts—is salient to the question of L1 learning, maintenance, and loss.

In the U.S., monolingualism is understood as the norm and a necessary sign of assimilation. Indeed, the assimilationist argument implies that speaking only English equals good citizenship, while multilingualism rejects American values and the American way of life, and disturbs nationalist notions that legitimatize collective identity and rights (Hoffman, 2016). In the dominant view, multilingualism is valued, if at all, for instrumental purposes such as increased employment opportunities (Valdés, 1997; Valdez, Freire, & Delavan, 2016), not as a personally meaningful asset that benefits and enriches individuals and communities. These ideologies affect language-minority children as they are exposed to views that discourage language preservation (Scheffner Hammer & Rodríguez, 2012) and make them targets of xenophobic and racist acts in various life spheres, including school (Bale, 2016).

Because of the prevailing attitudes regarding monolingualism vs. multilingualism, schools have been the primary site of attention among policymakers and researchers alike in understanding language issues for bilingual children. The focus on schools makes sense since it is here where children spend most of their time and which yield powerful influence in shaping assumptions and aspirations, including rejection and discrimination of non-majority home-languages (Portes & Rumbaut, 2001). This is most apparent in the top-down application of language policies that completely exclude the L1 or use it with the purpose of bridging L2 acquisition (Flores & Baetens Beardsmore, 2015; Wright, 2013). This practice has proven to have dire consequences for bilingual students, including nonparticipation, dropping out, and the inability to develop L1 skills that are then transferrable to the L2 (Valdés, 2001). Truly, a rejection of the L1 contributes to its loss and makes for ineffective schooling where children miss out on the knowledge and skills that the institution is meant to provide, thus curtailing their potential to make a life in the U.S. and contribute to society (Valdés, 2001).

Therefore, in light of the multiple factors that constrain the L1 preservation, including the dearth of bilingual programs that promote competence in minority-languages, the current study investigated how an after-school reading program implemented as university-based SL fostered the home-language in Spanish-English bilingual children. With the intent to capture and describe a wide range of elements that shaped the environment built surrounding the participating children, the research questions that guided this investigation were: (1) What were the linguistic affordances that emerged during interaction between bilingual children and UNs during the reading program (if any)? (2) What were the social affordances that resulted from their exchanges (if any)?

Thus, with these questions, this qualitative and descriptive investigation sought to contribute to the study of language-learning from an ecological perspective by means of the analysis of linguistic and social affordances (which, to this author's knowledge, have not been previously explored in comparable studies). Particularly, the study identified how affordances emerged and created opportunities for learning and growth among young bilinguals in a learning environment made possible through SL.

METHOD

Participants

This project was carried out at AG, a non-profit organization located in an urban area of the Great Plains in the U.S. AG serves close to 2,000 children. Seventy-two percent of the children that attend AG's after-school programs are Hispanic and 82% are younger than 12 years of age. Participants in this study were: UNs (mentors), bilingual children (mentees), children's parents, and the AG program organizer. Twenty-two UNs, 18 females and four males, including 13 Spanish L2 learners; five Spanish native speakers; and four Spanish heritage speakers participated in this project. UNs' ages varied from 19 to 45 years. They consisted of an intact Spanish class taught by the researcher (RE). This was an SL course, so SL was a required component (as suggested in Sánchez-López, 2013). Their participation in the reading program was worth 10% of the final grade.

AG identified ten bilingual children, five males and five females, ages 4 to 8 that could benefit from the reading program. Their rationale was that they were relatively fluent in Spanish but appeared to be following after the steps of older AG attendees who had much difficulty with their home-language. AG invited parents to sign-up their children for the program, which they did. Children had been born in the U.S. All had older siblings and one had a younger sibling. Because this research aims to describe affordances rather than learning outcomes (as seen in Thoms, 2014), there were no additional linguistic skill measures. The youngest five children were not enrolled in any formal schooling; the remaining five attended either preschool, kindergarten, first or second grades in local public schools.

Parents were between 26 and 44 years old and were all employed in service industries. Half of them were single mothers. Three of them had finished high school in Mexico. Two families had been in the U.S. for fewer than 10 years; the others had been in the country between 12 and 20 years. All reported that they wished for their children to learn both English and Spanish. They indicated that they spoke in Spanish at home, although they had difficulty motivating children to do so. Moreover, they observed that since they worked long hours, including weekends, they often spent little time with their children. Parents emphasized their Latino identity; they explained that they remind their children regularly that despite having been born in the U.S., they are first and foremost Latinos with Mexican roots.

The AG program organizer was 25 years old with a degree in social work. She grew up speaking Spanish; her mother was Guatemalan and her father Mexican. She learned English at school. She identified as Mexican-Guatemalan, American, Latina, and Jewish.

The RE is originally from Argentina. She is bilingual, identifies as Latina, and is a mother to a bilingual child. Thus, in this study, she considers herself not necessarily a detached observer but rather an insider, in part, to the immigrant Latino community considered in this study. Yet she is also an outsider in terms of differences of her education and employment, and in terms of cultural and linguistic differences that characterize Mexican and Argentinean heritages. She attended the SL program weekly and actively participated in UNs' lessons. In addition, the SL program occurred while parents participated in activities of their own interest offered at AG (e.g., Zumba, English L2 classes). Often, after concluding their activities, parents sat in the kitchen and visited, and the researcher joined them for conversation, which promoted rapport with the families participating in this research.

Procedure

The SL project was conceived as a reading program in which UNs read children's books and performed interactive activities. It consisted of one-hour sessions, twice a week, over three months for a total of 22 sessions. Two to five children attended each session and were systematically rotated by AG staff. Meetings were held at AG facilities.

Prior to starting work with the children, UNs performed the following tasks: they visited AG and learned about it through a presentation given by the program director; they had a lecture on the status of Spanish in the U.S. taught by the RE; and they participated in a workshop in which an early childhood education specialist, a colleague of the RE, taught students how to interact with children and prepare lesson plans.

UNs prepared their own lesson plans based on samples provided by AG and a lesson-plan template from Kostelnik, Soderman, Whiren, and Rupiper (2015), which they read and discussed in class. A typical lesson involved reading a book or two (depending on their length and complexity), selecting a main theme from the story to draw upon, teaching related vocabulary, formulating questions about the story's content, and connecting the story to the children's own lives through conversation. Other activities included coloring, drawing, games, and crafts. Reading materials were assigned by the RE. They included translations such as *La Oruga Muy Hambrienta* (The Very Hungry Caterpillar) by Eric Carle and original Spanish titles such as *Malku y los Cabritos* (Malku and the Little Goats) by Margarita Mainé. Books were selected based on difficulty, topic, and cultural relevance (e.g., *Los Tamales de Ana* [Growing Up With Tamales] by Gwendolyn Zepeda and *La Manta de Maya* [Maya's Blanket] by Monica Brown. As the program progressed, more complex books were introduced.

Instruments for Data Collection

Early in the semester, parents completed a questionnaire in which they supplied demographic data for their children and themselves and commented on language-related goals. These data were briefed in the Participants section.

UNs' lessons were audio-recorded; 18 audio files were transcribed for analysis and four were discarded because of poor audio quality. Moreover, throughout the semester, UNs completed reflections—an essential component in SL (Jacoby, 2003)—in journal entries logged in the course's online platform. For this investigation, reflections completed within three days of their teaching activities (n=20) were analyzed. Here, UNs were prompted to consider their recent interactions with the children, report on linguistic features that had been discussed, and share anecdotes to exemplify opportunities for potential language learning. UNs received a grade for their lesson preparation and delivery, for which a rubric was built from elements drawn from Kostelnik et al., (2015). Reflections received a grade for completion and not for content. In addition, the RE observed one lesson a week and took field notes, including photographs.

As the program concluded, the RE held unstructured interviews with parents and the AG program organizer. They were prompted to discuss factors that had promoted the home-language as well as elements that needed revision and improvement for a future implementation of the program. Interviews were audio-recorded and transcribed. Table 1 provides a timeline for data collection and analysis.

Table 1. Data Collection and Analysis

Timing	Data Collection Activities	Analysis
January 2016	Parents complete demographic data questionnaire. UNs teach lessons, which are audio-recorded. UNs complete reflections. The researcher observes lessons and takes field notes.	Demographic data are compiled. Researcher transcribes field notes. Researcher analyses lessons and reflections for Month 1. First impressions on the data are gathered.
February 2016	UNs teach lessons, which are audio-recorded. UNs complete reflections. The researcher observes lessons and takes field notes	Researcher transcribes field notes. Researcher analyses lessons and reflections for Month 2. The researcher continues to observe patterns and collects impressions on the data.
March 2016	UNs teach lessons, which are audio-recorded. UNs complete reflections. The researcher observes lessons and takes field notes.	Researcher transcribes field notes. Researcher analyses lessons and reflections for Month 3. The researcher continues to observe patterns and collects impressions on the data.
April 2016	UNs teach lessons, which are audio-recorded. UNs complete reflections. The researcher observes lessons and takes field notes.	Researcher transcribes field notes. Researcher analyses lessons and reflections for Month 4. The researcher continues to observe patterns and collects impressions on the data. Researcher starts transcribing lesson audio-recordings.
May 2016	Meetings with parents and AG program organizer.	Researcher transcribes lesson audio-recordings. Researcher transcribes meetings with parents and AG program organizer. Researcher revisits reflections and field notes.
June 2016		Researcher continues to transcribe lesson audio-recordings. Researcher analyzes lesson transcriptions (LRE counts). Researcher revisits reflections, field notes, and transcriptions from meetings with parents and AG program organizer.
July 2016		Researcher draws conclusions on data.

The recruiting, data collection, and other research activities had approval and oversight from the institutional review board of the RE's employing university to protect human research subjects. During the first week of the semester, UNs and the RE discussed the SL program in class. As UNs were invited to participate in the study, the following information was presented:

the purpose of the investigation; an explanation of how data gathering would occur in the background of the SL experience and no additional tasks would be required for research purposes; full disclosure on their ability to change their mind at any time and end their participation in the study; and an explanation of how their decision to (not) participate in the study would not impact their grade through the use of a rubric for their lessons and a completion grade for reflections. The RE also visited AG to discuss the SL program and research with the parents. Here, the RE also followed all criteria regarding the consent process: full disclosure of the study and its objectives, comprehension on the part of the subjects, and voluntary participation without coercion or undue pressure (Mackey & Gass, 2005).

Data Analysis

This qualitative analysis focused on the emergence of opportunities for cultural and linguistic knowledge (Ahn, 2016). As seen in Martin-Beltrán (2010), the language-related episode (LRE) constituted the unit of analysis for linguistic affordances. An LRE is an exchange in which speakers talk about the language they are producing, question their language use, and correct themselves and others. In an LRE, learners verbally pay explicit attention to language (Storch, 2008). Categories for analysis of LRE content consisted of lexical (e.g., checking word meaning); grammatical (e.g., discussing verb forms); orthographic (discussing spelling); and discourse (e.g. checking for cohesion) (Fortune & Thorp, 2001).

Social affordances pointed to the development of information that resulted from the exchange, even if unspoken, and that related to promoting the home-language in the young learners. A thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006) was carried out in which social affordances were identified. This analysis was grounded on the RE's field notes and AG program organizer's, UNs', and parents' reflections and commentary. Additional evidence of themes reflecting the emergence of social affordances was sought in the interactive data. The thematic and cyclical approach to the analysis allowed for triangulation of findings. As seen in Table 1, data were segmented and analyzed over seven months in order to foster trustworthiness in the analytical process and conclusion.

RESULTS

Linguistic Affordances

Linguistic affordances were delimited to dialogic exchanges, or LREs, between children and UNs that represented opportunities for linguistic knowledge building. Eighteen hour-long lessons were analyzed. It was found that in 12 lessons, children and UNs engaged in exchanges targeting linguistic questions. However, in six lessons, UNs did not encourage children's participation (e.g., they formulated questions that they answered themselves).

The identification of LREs in the 12 interactive lessons showed that a total of 126 LREs were produced with an average of 10.25 LREs per lesson. The lesson with the highest occurrence included 22 episodes, the one with the fewest comprised four. There were three grammatical LREs targeting gender agreement and word order. These LREs occurred as covert other-repairs. The remaining 123 LREs were lexical, in which participants built meaning and sought words.

Thus, based on dialogic data, linguistic affordances referred to exchanges in which children and mentors engaged in vocabulary related questions.

In the remainder of this section on linguistic affordances, LREs that exemplify typical interaction patterns are introduced with the purpose of providing a more nuanced analysis of how linguistic affordances unfolded. Excerpt 1 exemplifies how lexical LREs developed. In this particular instance, the UN (RP) was reading a book titled *Pedazo de Nube* (Piece of Cloud) by M. Blanco and S. Esplugas. She paused her reading to engage with the children about the color of clouds depicted in the book. RP initiated the episode through a *wh*-question. A 4-year old child answered in English and RP provided the Spanish translation, which the child repeated and acknowledged. Beyond this point in the interaction, and as the lesson progressed, the target term *gris* (gray) was discussed two more times by the UN and the children. English translations are provided in brackets.

Excerpt 1. Lexical LRE: Word Search

RP	*Las nubes cuando llueve, ¿de qué color se ponen?* [The clouds when it rains, what color do they turn?]
MALE CHILD	Gray.
RP	*Grises. El color gris. Gris es 'gray.' Cuando tú veas el color gris vas a saber qué color es.* [Gray. The color gray. Gray is 'gray.' When you see the color gray, you are going to know what color it is.]
MALE CHILD	*El color gris.* [The color gray.]
RP	*Sí. Muy bien.* [Yes. Very good.]

Lexical LREs were initiated by UNs through prompts in the form of *wh*-questions, often including demonstrative pronouns. Prompts were further supported by gestures and visual aids. Additionally, incomplete statements encouraged learners to respond with the correct answer. As seen in excerpt 1, children often responded in English and mentors provided the Spanish translation. Occasionally, children replied with a deviant form of the target word. Their responses were then addressed by the UN in the next turn through other-repairs.

Children also contributed to creating linguistic affordances. In excerpt 2, a 5-year old child recounted that his aunt broke her foot. He referred to the broken foot as '*pata*,' which is more appropriate for describing animal paws, although it is commonly used in colloquial Spanish to refer informally to any kind of *foot*. A peer proposed, in the form of a question, the term *pie* (foot). Children were amused by this correction, possibly because of their understanding of what each lexical choice implied or simply because it was a peer who was taking the expert role. The child continued with his story and used the word *pie* (foot), thus including the repair in his speech.

Excerpt 2. Lexical LRE: Peer Repair

MALE CHILD	*Mi tía se rompió su pata.* [My aunt broke her paw.]
FEM CHILD	*¿Su pie?* [Her foot?]

MALE CHILD *¡Le cortaron el pie!*
[They cut off her foot!]

Once an LRE was initiated, children's engagement in the exchange varied. Often, they did not verbally acknowledge UNs' feedback or build on their responses. Excerpt 3 presents an exchange in which all participants were highly engaged and worked together in creating meaning. In this instance, CC (UN) inquired about the meaning of *saludable* (healthy). Over several turns, children engaged with CC in defining the item and building understanding by asking questions and providing examples of the term in context.

Excerpt 3. Lexical LRE: Children's Engagement

CC	*Saludable. ¿Sabes qué es saludable?* [Healthy. Do you know what healthy is?]
FEM CHILD	*¿Algo que te ayuda?* [Something that helps you?]
MALE CHILD	*¿Medicina?* [Medicine?]
CC	*Como medicina, pero en alimentos. En comida.* [Like medicine, but in nourishment. In food.]
MALE CHILD	Ah. [Oh]
FEM CHILD	*Como es manzanas. Manzanas son saludables.* [Like it is apples. Apples are healthy.]
MALE CHILD	*Frutas son bien.* [Fruit is good.]
CC	*¡Sí! ¡Frutas! Sí, frutas.* '*Sano' es como* '*healthy' en inglés. Bien para la salud.* [Yes! Fruit! Yes, fruit. 'Wholesome' is like 'healthy' in English. Good for your health.]

In sum, the analysis of interactive data demonstrated that linguistic affordances occurred as vocabulary learning opportunities. Lexical LREs were characterized by searching words, defining meaning, and creating links between the English and Spanish lexicons. Episodes were mostly initiated by UNs, though children also contributed to building linguistic affordances for themselves and their peers. However, children's participation varied; often, they were not overtly active in contributing to the elaboration of lexical exchanges prompted by UNs.

Social Affordances

Social affordances pointed to the development of information that encouraged Spanish maintenance and learning. A thematic analysis of UNs' reflections and commentary by the AG program organizer and parents revealed three prevalent and frequent themes: encouraging children to realize the importance of speaking Spanish, showing them that there are non-Hispanic people who wish to learn the language, and building confidence in their skills. Table 2 exemplifies the analysis with quotations from participants.

Table 2. Social affordances

	Promoting Spanish	Non-Hispanics learn Spanish	Confidence
AG	"Learning Spanish is good because you can meet other people, or you can talk to your family members, or staff, or whatever. When you get older, you are going to be proud of this culture, this heritage, Latino culture. And part of our culture is our language."	"They can see that other people want to learn their language, and that other people can learn their language."	"[Children] speak really good Spanish, kind of good Spanish, or they don't really speak Spanish. And so having adults in the same spectrum is, was startling to them. But once they spoke Spanish to each other, I think they see you as being on the level with them. "I don't speak very good Spanish, and you don't either, but I'm glad you are here to teach me and have fun with me."
Parents	*"Una persona con dos idiomas vale por dos. Pero nosotros, somos latinos, y eso es lo que tenemos que inculcarles: el español."* (PB) [A person who speaks two languages is worth twice as much. But we are Latinos, and that is what we need to instill in them: Spanish.]	*"Ellos se van a motivar porque van a decir 'si ellos son norteamericanos y lo hablan, entonces nosotros tenemos el deber de aprender.'"* (PL) [They are going to feel motivated because they are going to say 'if they are Americans and they speak it, then we have the duty to learn it.']	
UNs	*"Pasar rato juntos con los niños es algo que ayuda a ellos saber que su lenguaje maternal es empleado por personas de culturas diferentes, que es una idioma que puede unir a la gente. También, que es 'cool', que es algo que varias personas quieren que aprender."* (OJ) [Spending some time with the children is	*"En sus vidas, como en escuela, los niños no hablan español y sin embargo los niños hispanohablantes piensen que inglés es el lengua "guay", pero cuando ellos me ven hablar español en vez de inglés, posiblemente ellos piensen 'oh, español es guay también.'"* (DH) [In their lives, as in school, the children do not speak Spanish, and, nevertheless	*"Por preguntando: ¿Qué es esto? ¿Cómo se dice eso? Les deja contestar con sus propios conocimientos y mostrarles que saben."* (AG) By asking "what is this?" "How do you say this? You let them answer with their own knowledge and show them that they know

	something that helps them to know that their maternal language is used by people from different cultures, that it is a language that can bring people together. Also, that it is "cool," that it is something that several people want to learn.]	Spanish-speaking children think that English is the 'cool' language, but when they see me speak Spanish instead of English, possibly, they think 'Oh, Spanish is cool too.'"]

Note: English Translations are provided in parentheses. Comments have not been edited.

The mere presence of the reading program appeared to trigger conversations between the children and their parents, the AG program organizer, and UNs that encouraged the preservation of Spanish. Adults presented children with various reasons to continue to speak the language such as being able to communicate with others, future employment and economic advantage over monolinguals, and preserving their identity and Latino culture. Comments also highlighted how UNs, half of them L2 Spanish learners, were role models because they also were in the process of learning Spanish. Moreover, the fact that they were English L1 speakers may have created a sense that the language was validated by those who speak the majority language.

Although parents described their children's current abilities in the language with disappointment, saying that they speak '*español mocho'* or 'broken Spanish,' UNs and the AG program organizer emphasized skills over limitations with the purpose of promoting confidence. This was accomplished through intentional encouragement by UNs during lessons and through children's exposure to Spanish speakers of various linguistic abilities who made them feel at ease regardless of their limitations.

Social affordances were also identified in interaction during the lessons. Excerpt 4 unfolded during a lesson while the children were engaged in a coloring activity and a seven-year-old child spoke of the difficulty she experienced speaking Spanish. KS and SG (UNs) and the RE, interacted with the child in reassuring her in her abilities. During the exchange, KS, who was a Spanish L2 learner, sympathized with the child stating that she often forgets words in Spanish. By the end of this extended exchange, the child confided that even though she did not know the language well, she was learning it.

Excerpt 4. Promoting Spanish

FEM CHILD	*Mi papito sabe español pero no sabe inglés pero yo no sabo mucho.* [My daddy knows Spanish but he doesn't know English. But I don't know much.]
KS	*¡Está bien!* [It's OK!]
RE:	*¿Y cuál te gusta más, español o inglés?* [And which one do you like best? English or Spanish?]
FEM CHILD	*Inglés.* [English]

KS	*¿Por qué?*
	[Why?]
FEM CHILD	*Porque, porque, no sepa decir bien las cosas. A veces, a más, di-fi-cil. Cuando la haces en español, es bien duro.*
	[Because, because, I don't know how to say things well. Sometimes, a more, di-ffi-cult. When you do it in Spanish, it's very hard.]
	[…]
FEM CHILD	Yes. *Es duro, porque yo no sabo como hablar mucho.*
	[It's hard. Because I don't know how to speak very much.]
RE + SG + KS	*No.*
SG	¡*Pero si hablas muy bien!*
	[But you speak very well!]
FEM CHILD	S*ólo sabo un poquito, pero, 'abeja' como cosas.*
	[I only know a little, but, 'bee,' like, things]
RE	*¡Está bien!*
	[It's OK!]
KS	*A veces yo no recuerdo las palabras en español. Está bien.*
	[Sometimes I don't remember words in Spanish. It's OK.]
	[…]
FEM CHILD	*Es difícil para mí. Pero ya sabo un poquito más.*
	[It's difficult for me. But I already know a bit more.]
RE	*¡Estás aprendiendo!*
	[You're learning!]
FEM CHILD	Aha.

This exchange demonstrates how children might struggle with their own perceptions of how well they speak the language. The SL program created a space in which the language was valued and encouraged, regardless of participants' (be it mentors' or mentees') linguistic skills.

Besides the social affordances discussed before that were integral to the SL program, additional comments by parents and UNs also shed light on other factors that they believed can afford or constrain Spanish maintenance in bilingual children. As illustrated below, parents regretted spending little time with their families due to the many obligations they must meet in order to keep their families afloat (excerpt 5). They also felt inadequate in their own literacy skills (excerpt 6), which they viewed as a limitation in preserving the language.

Excerpt 5: Spanish constraints, parental involvement

A veces es difícil dedicarles tiempo. El tiempo, el cansancio del trabajo, el abrumamiento de todo. A veces nos desentendemos de nuestros hijos cuando ellos quisieran que les leyéramos los libros o así. (PG)

[Sometimes it is difficult to devote time to them. Having little time, being tired from work, being overwhelmed with everything. Sometimes we neglect our children when they would like us to read book or things like that]

Excerpt 6: Spanish constraints, parental involvement

Ayer estábamos hablando y me decía "ma, a mí me da vergüenza leer," yo le digo, "a mí también me da vergüenza leer," le digo, "yo no sé respetar los signos de exclamación, como suena, los acentos, ni yo lo pronuncio correctamente; sé lo básico." (PL)
[Yesterday we were talking and he said "mom, I'm ashamed to read." I tell him "I'm ashamed to read, too. I say "I don't know how to follow exclamation marks, how it sounds, accents, I don't even pronounce it correctly; I know the basics]

Because parents felt limited in their ability to support their children's language maintenance, they observed that the SL program did something they were unable to do themselves for their children. Nevertheless, they also expressed a desire to be more involved by learning how to play games, access books through the public library, and continue to encourage Spanish at home. As PB expressed, although the program was helpful, parents need to be involved as well.

Excerpt 7: Parental involvement
Es bueno que los norteamericanos vengan, pero también es bueno que ellos vean que uno se está integrando a las actividades. Que tú también seas parte de su motivación. (PB)
[It is good that Americans come, but it is also good that (the children) see that you are taking part in the activities. That you become part of their motivation.]

Lastly, a common thread in UNs' reflections was that their contact with the children had been framed by fun, which they believed afforded learning. Despite their inexperience in working with children, UNs attempted to create a relaxed setting in which they mixed learning with play. As seen in excerpt 8, games were useful in exciting children and teaching vocabulary. This also demonstrates how linguistic affordances converged with social ones in a supportive language learning environment.

Excerpt 8: Spanish affordances, playing and learning
Conversé con los niños de temas diferentes como fruta, ropa, y animales. Los niños a veces utilizaban palabras en inglés que no sabían en español, y yo les ayudé averiguar la palabra. Jugamos unos juegos y los niños se veían muy entusiasmados al jugar el juego y recordar palabras en español de que se habían olvidado. (MG)
[I spoke with the children about different topics such as fruit, clothes, and animals. The children sometimes utilized words in English that they didn't know in Spanish and I helped them find the word. We played some games and the children seemed very enthusiastic playing the game and remembering words in Spanish that they had forgotten]

In summary, the evidence indicates various social affordances promoting the home-language. These included the importance of maintaining the language for cultural and economic reasons, viewing Spanish L2 individuals as role models, and increasing children's confidence in their current abilities in the language. Other factors related to the maintenance of the minority language were parental involvement and creating a learning experience framed by play and fun.

DISCUSSION

In light of the various factors that constrain L1 maintenance, this study reported on an SL initiative at a non-profit organization designed to promote the Spanish language in bilingual children. With the intent to capture a wide range of elements that shaped the environment built surrounding the participating children, language promoting affordances were classified as linguistic and social.

In answering the first research question, findings indicated that linguistic affordances largely consisted of vocabulary learning opportunities. This is in agreement with research on reading and vocabulary learning in contexts in which children interact with a language facilitator and peers, and together they scaffold lexical knowledge through talk and with the aid of additional contextual clues provided by reading materials (Massey, 2013). UNs afforded vocabulary learning, despite their limited training, by means of recruiting children's interest in a variety of language-centered tasks through the use of natural, spontaneous, and simple talk. They initiated lexical exchanges through questions and incomplete statements, and simplified activities that maintained a single goal of promoting the heritage language at the center of the experience, thus scaffolding learning (Donato, 1994; McQuillan & Ediger, 2018). Moreover, UNs strived to create a comfortable and playful environment in which Spanish was more than a language to learn but a language for play (Sullivan, 2000).

Children, although participative with their tutors and each other, did not always reciprocate linguistic feedback in a way that would signal comprehension or acknowledgment. This might question if they did pick up on the linguistic affordances that were built for them. As it has been noted in child development research, at different stages during a child's development, affordances present in the environment can be relevant to the child or not. Their relevance depends upon the child's maturational levels, prior learning experiences, and conversational abilities (Miller, 2002). Children in this study may or may not have been prepared to fully benefit from all linguistic affordances introduced in the program. Yet, it is through exposure, overhearing, and observation that children learn how to create relationships between language and social cognition prior to becoming fully participative (Forrester, 1993). Therefore, although the affordance construct assumes an active learner, more passive children may have benefited from preliminary actions in the social exchanges that were part of the program and that are nonetheless essential for full participation development and engagement with available affordances (Forrester, 1992).

Social affordances that promoted the home-language, the focus of the second research question, emerged during children's meetings with UNs and separately with parents and the AG program organizer. They occurred naturally, were spontaneous, often unspoken, and interacted with language learning affordances in creating a supportive environment that promoted the home-language. Social affordances validated children's current skills and encouraged perseverance in Spanish use and learning within an interactive, non-judgmental, and playful environment. Indeed, the context and its participants co-created a space where children found a validation for their L1 they do not often experience in other settings of their lives, such as school or the community at large.

With the emergence of social affordances, the program addressed factors that have been found to promote the home-language, including encouragement and optimism to speak and develop the L1, and a supportive community beyond the home (Guardado, 2002; Mora, Villa, & Dávila, 2006). The latter was indeed possible through the establishment of relationships between

the children, their parents, and UNs who reside in the vicinity and are members of the extended community. Furthermore, with the participation of a majority of Spanish L2 UNs whose L1 was English, the minority language was validated and acknowledged as important by members of the community who speak the majority language but who value multilingualism.

With these findings, this investigation contributes, firstly, to the study of language-learning from an ecological perspective and furthers our understanding of how affordances emerge and create opportunities for learning and growth among young bilinguals in a community-based learning environment. Secondly, this study differs from most language-focused SL investigations (e.g., Barreneche, 2011; Zapata, 2011) that often direct their analysis to gains for the student population only and assume that community needs have been met. By making the community need a focus of the analysis, this study contributes an unexamined aspect of SL studies. Thirdly, this study has demonstrated how SL can be instrumental in promoting the preservation of minority-languages in a setting where both children and UNs benefit. Lastly, the description of social affordances sheds light on ways in which mentors (e.g., classroom teachers or parents) can create a supportive setting where children's home-language is encouraged and validated.

An aspect of the program that limited children's participation, thus curtailing learning opportunities, was the book selection for the last month of the program. Longer and more complex books had been purposefully planned; however, children appeared to lack the experience or training necessary for such readings and/or the program had not been long or involved enough to help them develop the abilities necessary to read longer and more challenging texts. A program that lasts one school year, which is something that parents requested in this study, might help this situation. Moreover, although mentors and mentees appeared to enjoy each other's company during the lessons, additional opportunities for rapport building such as a greet-and-meet activity could have encouraged greater participation in the children. Lastly, providing a more explicit and rigorous training to UNs in terms of how to create language learning affordances and pre-determining more specific learning goals for each lesson could have increased the frequency of these learning opportunities.

A future implementation of this project might also consider including parents in its design. Specifically, parents in this study proposed a program where they could attend the lessons with their children, observe how UNs read and carry out activities, and, over time, start leading some activities themselves with UNs' support. Parental involvement can impact learners' attitude and motivation toward the program's linguistic goals (Daniel, Halimi, & AhShammari, 2018). Moreover, while SL cannot replace a solid bilingual program where both the L1 and L2 are fully supported, findings from this research should encourage college faculty members in Spanish and other minority-languages to consider comparable programs that offer an informal language-learning setting where children's L1 is actively used, valued, and encouraged.

A future study might consider how parents' participation might change the emergence of linguistic and social affordances in the SL setting. Moreover, the descriptive analysis of affordances in this study can serve as the foundation for an investigation in which language learning outcomes within an SL program or similar context are measured. A study of that nature calls for a systematic design to assess learning outcomes afforded through the program. Based on findings in this investigation, a follow-up study on vocabulary is warranted. Lastly, while the scope of this study has been language-minority children and matters of language maintenance and bilingualism relevant to them, a future investigation needs to explore the effect that the SL

experience has on UNs regarding these very same topics, in particular from the perspective of praxis, or student action, following SL.

CONCLUSIONS

In the United States, bilingual children experience little support from schools and the community at large in learning and maintaining the home-language. The purpose of this investigation was to explore how a language program designed as an SL project carried by a university class could promote the home-language. Taking an ecological view to language learning, the affordance construct was considered from two perspectives: linguistic and social. Linguistic affordances pointed to specific linguistic exchanges in which mostly vocabulary questions were addressed. Social affordances validated and promoted the language. Both linguistic and social affordances emerged and intertwined in building a non-traditional language learning setting for young bilinguals. These findings suggest that programs rooted in SL can contribute to the preservation of the heritage language in a partnership where both UNs and children interact and benefit from the exchange.

Note

1 The use of such labels as first (L1) and second language (L2) can be controversial in early childhood bilingualism because they can imply separate L1 and L2 competencies. While I acknowledge this issue, I have chosen to utilize these terms to reflect current publications on language maintenance and loss.

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