New ways of independent language learning in study abroad:

How tech-savvy young people engage with language abroad

Levi Durbidge

PhD (Applied Linguistics) Candidate at Monash University

Language learning abroad

Table 2

Samples of the most frequently explored topics in each of the four groups.[a]

Topics	Normed-Freq 1970s&1980s	Normed-Freq 1990s&2000s	Normed-Freq 2010s	Chi Value	p.
Significantly increased					
study abroad	0.00	17.05	107.96	161.67	0.00
identity	0.00	13.95	102.65	159.51	0.00
EFL learner	2.64	46.51	130.97	141.73	0.00
ELF (English as a lingua franca)	0.00	1.55	70.80	135.59	0.00
self-efficacy	0.00	31.01	77.88	84.70	0.00

Adapted from Lei, L., & Liu, D. (2019). The research trends and contributions of System's publications over the past four decades (1973–2017): A bibliometric analysis. *System*, *80*, 1-13.

Key methodological weaknesses

- Focus on institutional/researcher-oriented outcomes (Coleman, 2013)

- Dimension of time not adequately considered (Coleman, 2013)

- Anglophone university students overrepresented (Kinginger, 2017)

- Focus on acquisition of a single TL

Learning Beyond the Classroom

"With more and more such learners/users connected to the internet inside and outside classrooms, the affordances for autonomous learning, […] need to be better understood." (The Douglas Fir Group, 2016, p. 31)

"...the issues of interest will be (a) the configuration of settings and resources that is available, (b) the affordances they offer and constraints on access to them, and (c) the uses learners make of them." (Reinders and Benson, 2017, p. 564)
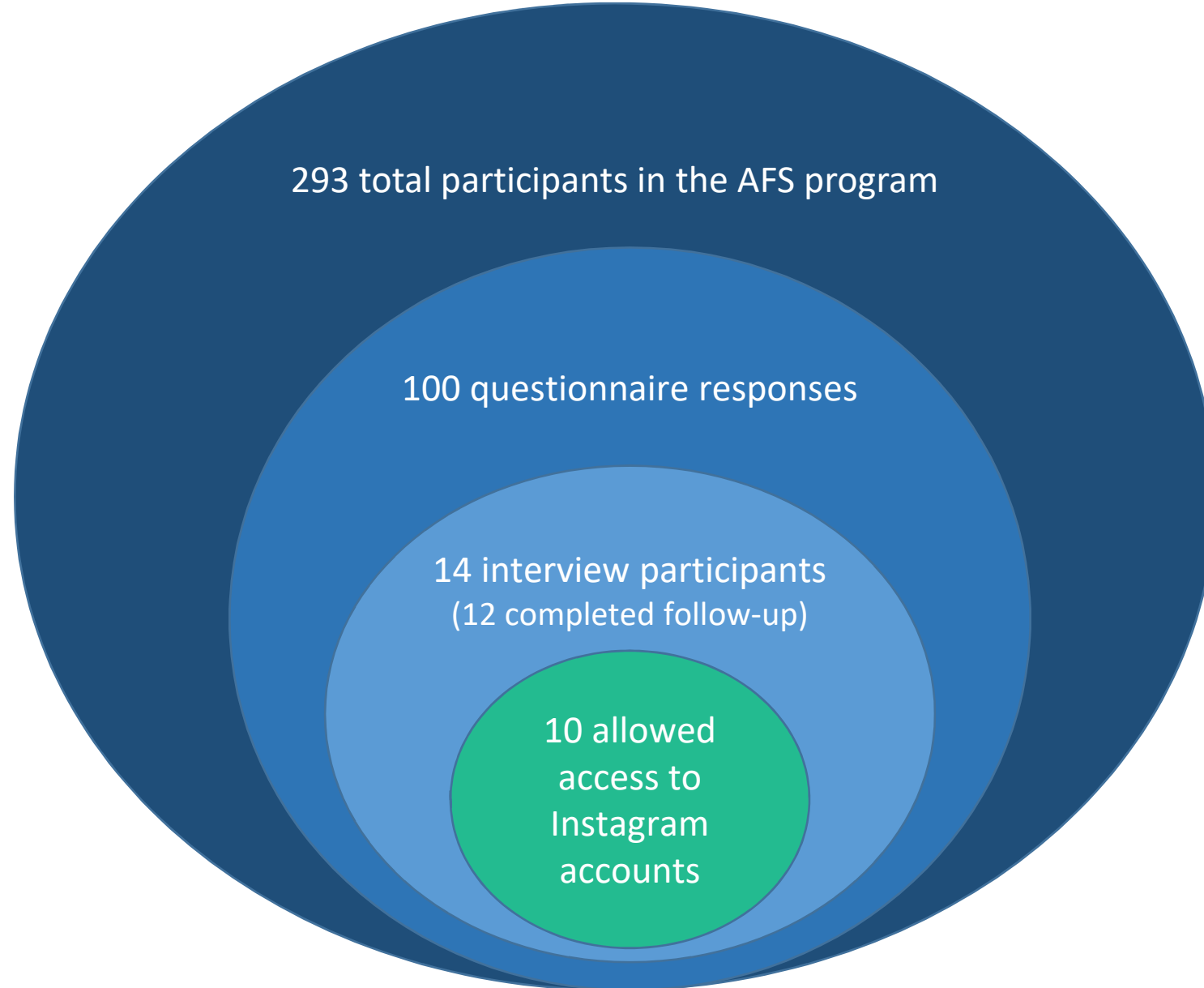
Project overview

Examining the learning and experiences of a group of Japanese high school students who studied abroad for a year.

Sojourns organised through an NGO called 'AFS'.

Homestays in 23 different countries between June 2016 and August 2017

Used 13 different languages in total.

Data collection: Mixed-methods

293 total participants in the AFS program

100 questionnaire responses

14 interview participants
(12 completed follow-up)

10 allowed access to Instagram accounts

Significance of approach

Non-Anglophone, high school population

Year-long homestays through NGO to a diverse range of locations

Looking at the learning and development processes which occur study abroad and the longer-term (one year) effects

Adopted a holistic, ecological perspective on participant experiences

Ecological perspective

"…see[ing] language and learning as relationships among learners and between learners and the environment" (van Lier, 2000, p. 258).

- Affordance (Gibson, 1979; van Lier 2000)

- Proximal process (Bronfenbrenner, 1995)

- Ecological Framework for SLA (Douglas Fir Group, 2016):
    - Micro - Individuals engaging with others
    - Meso - Sociocultural institutions and communities
    - Macro - Ideological structures

Key objectives

1. Briefly describe the environments that several of the participants encountered during study abroad

2. Highlight the affordances participants made use of in these environments in reference to their participation and learning

Environment: Manabu

Homestay in Quebec, Canada.
Used French and English. Interview conducted in Japanese.

"I had two groups [of friends at school]. A group that spoke a lot of English and, there were a lot of immigrants in that group as you'd expect [...] and a group that spoke French [...] those two groups I spent a lot of time with."

"...using applications like Facebook and snapchat, that's how we communicated[...] wherever you went at school there was internet, so we were communicating all the time"

Affordances: Manabu

Homestay in Quebec, Canada.
Used French and English. Interview conducted in Japanese.

"I was usually walking around with an electronic dictionary and then whenever there was some word I didn't know, in class or when I was listening to the teacher, I would just look it up, 'ah, that's what it means'"

"The way I improved the most was applications [...] I would use DUOLINGO to increase the words, vocab, I knew, then I would read books together with my little brothers on LINGQ, audiobooks, read and listen to them. It was like I was trying to spend as much time together with French as I could."

Environment: Nikko

Home stay in Hungary
Used both Hungarian and English. Interview conducted in English

"With my host mum I always have conversation in Hungarian. With my host sister, she speaks English and a little bit Japanese so we usually talk in English and then sometimes Hungarian or Japanese, but my host mum doesn't speak English so we only spoke in Hungarian"

"[my exchange friend and I] were always talking to our classmates in English then, but from the winter time we started to try to use our Hungarian skills. When we spoke Hungarian to them then, they were like, 'Oh my god, you're speaking in Hungarian' […] so we started to use Hungarian or improve our Hungarian skill."

"from wintertime […] [the exchange student group] got more time together [and] and everybody's English skill got improved so we could have more conversations. Then we were making fun of each other or just sometime have a deep conversations"

Affordances: Nikko

Home stay in Hungary
Used both Hungarian and English. Interview conducted in English

"...on November my host sister just went to Japan [...] so I was at home with only with my host Mum, then I had to speak with her in Hungarian [...] I started to write Diaries in Hungarian, then every night she checked it for me [and] we could have more conversation than before"

"I started to watch videos from YouTube in English and I was practicing my pronunciation and I was checking the words and even slangs[...] like I watched few YouTubers. They were telling their daily life [...] I was thinking maybe I should watch [...] how people in USA or Canada [have] daily conversations so [...] every night I prepared to watch their daily videos."

Environment: Raiken

Home stay in Finland
Used both Finnish and English. Interview in English.

"so first week [...] [exchange students] could use English or Finnish, but everybody use English"

"It was really hard, [my] English language was really different compared to other exchange students but Finnish skill is almost [the] same [...] so I have this advantage I couldn't speak English, but if I tried hard to learn Finnish I get I think I could keep up [with] them, [...] it was sorta like I have to learn like two language at the same time."

Affordances: Raiken

Home stay in Finland
Used both Finnish and English. Interview in English.

Raiken: *...[my school friends] meet like every morning and we also use the WhatsApp or Snapchat and maybe Instagram or SMS.*

Levi: *Right, and what languages were you using on those?*

Raiken: *Like Finnish or English. Sometimes it's English, but I was trying to use Finnish as much as I can[...] but like, sometimes I couldn't understand so like, sometimes [I] add [...] the Finnish and then like, the support sentence [...] in English*

"like maybe 10 minutes or 15 minutes [before class] we always talk in the corridors, and then we talked about [...] like Finnish culture and Japanese culture and [...] and sometimes we have the really funny T-shirts [in Japan] but [my school friends] don't know what it means...so like we found [it] in the Internet and then we talked about that"

Environment: Nagisa

Home stay in Brazil.
Used Portuguese. Interview conducted in Japanese.

Nagisa: *I couldn't use Wi-Fi at school, so when I was at school I usually just talked with my friends or read Brazilian books and so on. I couldn't do anything on my phone so […] 30 minutes before classes start, my teacher would say I don't feel well, I'm taking the day off.*

Levi: *Huh!*

Nagisa: *That would go around on social media, so because I didn't have Wi-Fi, I wouldn't get the message and would be just waiting there for an hour.*

Levi: *By yourself?*

Nagisa: *Yeah. It was horrible. After I had been there for about 6 months, there was a bakery in front of the school where I had become good friends with the older couple running it. They said, "It's tough for you Nagisa", and they let me use their Wi-Fi.*

Affordances: Narumi

Home stay in the US.
Used English, a heritage language due to her American father. Interview conducted in English.

Levi: *...you said Instagram, is that how you stayed in contact, or did you use other ways to stay in contact with your new friends?*

Narumi: *First tool was Instagram and then I started Snapchat (yep) but [...] mainly I used [short messages].*

[...]

Levi: *So was that like for you then [...] to be communicating with your friends?*

Narumi: *Yeah, they sometimes use a lot of slang or something not grammatical correct so I got really confused.*

[...]

Levi: *So how did it feel then then if you have that miscommunication?*

Narumi: *I thought I have to catch up with [...] all the slang and spend time with my friends to know all the common things that teenagers said.*

Affordances: Kumiko – Instagram

Home stay in France.
Used French and English.

Short video of Kumiko and her friend overlaid with a Santa filter.

Kumiko: Pour @s 🤍 merci beaucoup🎅 Je t'aime😘
Si je vais en Irlande, je vais aller chez toi😆
And you will always be my best friend until the end👭 🤍
Bonne vacances et bonne fête!
S: Awh kumiko!!! Je t'aime 🤍 🤍 🤍 merci beaucoup ma chéri xx
Kumiko: @s De rien😆 🤍 🤍
A: So cute 😘
Kumiko: @a thank you😘
H: Trop mignonne 🤍 🤍
As: 自撮り、どんどんあげてねっ♡
Kumiko: @h merci♡
Kumiko: @as 太った私でよければ😂😂

Kumiko: For @s 🤍 thank you very much🎅 I like you😘
If I go to Ireland, I will go to your place😆
And you will always be my best friend until the end👭 🤍
Have a nice holiday and happy birthday!
S: Awh kumiko !! I love you. thank you very much, my darling
Kumiko: You're welcome
A: So cute 😘
Kumiko: thank you😘
H: Too cute🤍 🤍
As: Keep on posting more selfies♡
Kumiko: Thanks♡
Kumiko: If you don't mind seeing the fat me 😂😂

In summary

- Many participants experienced the environments of study abroad as dynamic and multilingual, offering affordances for developing linguistic multi-competence (Cook, 2016)

- Technology was embedded into their experience of these multilingual environments, serving as an important mode for interaction and sharing

- Technology also provided key affordances as participants' constructed their own learning environments and performed multilingual identities online

In summary

- Technology complemented other affordances available, while allowing participants more control in constructing individualised learning environments

- These learning environments were reconstructed by the participants as their interactive needs or focuses in the host community evolved

- Bakhtin's (1981) understanding of language development as the appropriation of the voices of others is relevant in understanding some of their choices, e.g., watching Youtubers

…the concern [of bilingualism and multilingualism research] is not so much to explain or measure people's varying levels of competence in additional languages, but rather explore and understand their practices and experiences as they engage with two or more languages in particular social contexts and as they develop and deploy 'linguistic multi-competence.' (Ushioda, 2017, p.475-476)

References

Bronfenbrenner, U. (1995). Developmental ecology through space and time: A future perspective. In P. Moen, G. H. J. ; Elder, & K. ; Luscher (Eds.), *Examining lives in context: Perspectives on the ecology of human development* (pp. 619–647).

Bakhtin, M. M. 1981). *The dialogic imagination: Four essay*. University of Texas Press.

Coleman, J. A. (2013). Researching whole people and whole lives. In C. Kinginger (Ed.), Social and Cultural Aspects of Language Learning in Study Abroad (pp. 17–44). Amsterdam & Philadelphia: John Benjamins.

Cook, V. (2016). Premises of multi-competence. In V. Cook & Li Wei (Eds.),*The Cambridge handbook of linguistic multicompetence* (pp. 1–25). Cambridge:Cambridge University Press.

Gibson, J. J. (1979). *The ecological approach to visual perceptio*n. Boston, MA, US: Houghton, Mifflin and Company.

Kinginger, C. (2017). Language socialization in study abroad. In P. A. Duff & S. May (Eds.), Language Socialization (pp. 1–12). Cham: Springer International Publishing. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-02327-4_17-2

Lei, L., & Liu, D. (2019). The research trends and contributions of System's publications over the past four decades (1973–2017): A bibliometric analysis. System, 80, 1–13. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.system.2018.10.003

van Lier, L. (2004). The ecology and semiotics of language learning: a sociocultural perspective. Springer Science & Business Media.

Reinders, H., & Benson, P. (2017). Research agenda: language learning beyond the classroom. Language Teaching, 50(4), 561–578. https://doi.org/10.1017/S0261444817000192

The Douglas Fir Group. (2016). A transdisciplinary framework for SLA in a multilingual world. The Modern Language Journal, 100(S1), 19–47. https://doi.org/10.1111/modl.12301

Van Lier, L. (2000). From input to affordance: Social-interactive learning from an ecological perspective. In J. P. Lantolf (Ed.), *Sociocultural theory and second language learning* (pp. 245–259). Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press.

Ushioda, E. (2017). The impact of global english on motivation to learn other languages: toward an ideal multilingual self. The Modern Language Journal, 101(3), 469–482. https://doi.org/10.1111/modl.12413