Affordance Norms for 2825 Concrete Nouns

Nicholas P. Maxwell1, Mark J. Huff2, Alen Hajnal2, Jacob M. Namias2, Julia J. C. Blau3, Brian Day4, Kerry L. Marsh5, Benjamin R. Meagher6, John F. Shelley-Tremblay7, Gray F. Thomas5, & Jeffrey B. Wagman8

1Midwestern State University, 2The University of Southern Mississippi, 3Central Connecticut State University, 4Butler University, 5University of Connecticut, 6Hope College, 7University of South Alabama, 8Illinois State University

Word Count: 6347

**Author Note**

Correspondence regarding this article should be addressed to Nicholas P. Maxwell, Department of Psychology, Midwestern State University, 3410 Taft Blvd, Wichita Falls, TX, 76308, United States. Email: nicholas.maxwell@msutexas.edu. The final set of affordance norms is available for download via the Open Science Framework: <https://osf.io/68bkt/>. The normed dataset can also be accessed via our interactive Shiny application: <https://npm27.shinyapps.io/Affordance_Norms/>. The authors thank Morgan Ballesteros, Samantha Garcia, and Madisyn Metaxas for their assistance cleaning the final dataset.

Abstract

Objects are commonly described based on their relations to other objects (e.g., associations, semantic similarity, etc.) or their physical features (e.g., birds have wings, feathers, etc.). However, objects can also be described in terms of their actionable properties (i.e., affordances), which reflect interactive relations between actors and objects. While several normed datasets have been developed to categorize various aspects of meaning (e.g., semantic features, cue-target associations, etc.), to date, norms for affordances have not been generated. We address this limitation by developing a set of affordance norms for 2825 concrete nouns. Using an open-response format, we computed affordance strength (AFS; i.e., the probability of an item eliciting a particular action response), affordance proportion (AFP; i.e., the proportion of participants who provided a specific action response), and affordance set-size (AFSS; i.e., total number of unique action responses) for each item. Because our stimuli overlapped with Pexman et al.’s (2019) Body-Object Interaction norms (BOI), we tested whether AFS, AFP, and AFSS were related to BOI, as objects with more perceived action properties may be viewed as being more interactive. Additionally, we tested the relationship between AFS and AFP and two separate measures of relatedness: Cosine similarity (Buchanan, Valentine, & Maxwell; 2019a) and forward associative strength (Nelson, McEvoy, & Schreiber, 2004). All analyses, however, revealed weak relationships between affordance measures and existing semantic norms, suggesting that affordance properties reflect a separate construct.

Word Count: 229

*Keywords*: Affordances; Body-Object Interaction; Word Norms; Database; *R* Shiny

Affordance Norms for 2825 Highly Concrete Objects

Investigating questions surrounding memory, language, and perception requires a comprehensive understanding of what words mean, the context in which they are used, and the actionable properties of their referents. Empirically, a word’s meaning can be operationalized in a variety of ways. In practice, however, researchers commonly rely upon measures of *semantic similarity* and *cue-target associations* when assessing similarity, particularly when evaluating the degree to which two words are directly related (see Hutchison, 2003; Kumar, 2021, for reviews). First, semantic similarity can be readily assessed in terms of the shared features between two concepts, with a greater number of shared features indicating a stronger degree of relatedness. Second, cue-target associations reflect the likelihood that exposure to a particular concept will activate information for related concepts (e.g., *mouse* – *cheese*, *mouse* – *house*, etc.; see Nelson, McEvoy, & Dennis, 2000). As a result, associations often capture a broader variety of information versus semantic features, including semantic knowledge (e.g., *mice* eat *cheese*) and linguistic information (e.g., *mouse* and *house* rhyme). Thus, while semantic features describe meaning primarily in terms of similarity, associations place a greater emphasis upon the context in which words are used.

Given the focus on semantic and associative descriptions of meaning, sets of norms have been developed which aim to measure these types of relations accurately. To generate these norms, participants view a series of individual concepts (typically in written form) and list various properties of the stimuli, which vary based on the type of relatedness being assessed (e.g., a concept’s inherent features; Buchanan, Valentine, & Maxwell, 2019a; McRae, Seidenberg, Cree, & McNorgon, 2005; associated concepts; De Deyne, Navarro, Perfors, Brsybaert, & Storms, 2019; Nelson, McEvoy, & Schreiber, 2004). The past two decades have yielded several associative and semantic norm sets, with much of this growth driven by advances in computing power combined with the increased use of online data collection methods, which have increased the ease of large-scale data collection. As a result, large sets of feature production and free association norms are available for a variety of languages, with more recent work focusing on ensuring that sufficient overlap exists between databases of different measures (i.e., that concepts are measured on both semantic and associative variables; see Buchanan, Valentine, & Maxwell, 2019b).

While semantic and associative norms are important proxies for assessing meaning and relatedness between concepts, each measure alone is unlikely to capture all facets of a word’s meaning. Thus, having multiple measures reflecting separate dimensions of meaning is paramount for understanding how individuals process words. Indeed, a growing body of research has investigated the links between knowledge acquisition and sensorimotor processing (i.e., embodied cognition; see Barsalou, 1999; Glenberg, 2015; Glenberg & Gallese, 2012; for reviews). Because sensorimotor systems are active whenever individuals interact with their surroundings, the embodied approach posits that perceptual and motor experiences are inextricably linked to knowledge formation, regardless of whether these experiences occur physically (i.e., actively exploring one’s environment) or mentally (i.e., recollection of past experiences; see Barsalou, 2008). Thus, understanding an object’s interactive properties and range of perceived uses (i.e., its *affordances*; Gibson, 1977; see Wagman, 2020) is critical for understanding its meaning. Unlike semantic and associative-based measures, affordances depict the various interactive relations existing between actors and objects and may reflect a variety of common and less common actions (e.g., a chair affords sitting but also standing upon to reach an object). However, existing feature production and free association norms do not capture a range of object uses, as these norms instead emphasize an object’s constituent parts and related concepts, respectively, rather than focusing on its inherent, actionable properties.

Given the role of sensorimotor process in knowledge acquisition, Pexman and colleagues (Muraki, Siddiqui, & Pexman, 2022; Pexman, Muraki, Sidhu, Siakaluk, & Yap, 2019; Tillotson, Siakaluk, & Pexman, 2008) have developed measures quantifying the degree to which individuals perceive that they can interact with a variety of objects. Recently, Pexman et al. (2019) collected body-object interaction ratings (BOI) for over 9000 English words, which were elicited via a 1-7 scale such that objects receiving higher values were viewed by participants as having a greater degree of perceived interactivity. Consistent with an embodied cognition approach, BOI ratings have been shown to capture aspects of semantic knowledge. For example, BOI is a strong predictor of responses in semantic decision tasks and has been found to facilitate lexical decision responses derived from the English Lexicon Project (Balota et al., 2007) and responses from the Calgary Semantic Decision Project (Pexman, Heard, Lloyd, & Yap, 2017). Importantly, for lexical and semantic decision tasks, any benefits of BOI on responses were only apparent when pairs were sufficiently high in BOI (i.e., BOI ratings above the midpoint). Low BOI items, which reflected more abstract concepts, were associated with responses that were both less accurate and slower. Separately, Heard, Madan, Protzner, and Pexman (2019) demonstrated that when BOI ratings were combined with three additional ratings of motor dimensionality (graspability, ease of pantomime, and number of actions), the combined ratings explained a greater degree of variance in semantic processing tasks compared to when BOI was used alone. Thus, considered alongside findings from Pexman et al. (2019), sensorimotor information appears to play a critical role when processing a word’s meaning.

While BOI ratings provide researchers with a useful tool for quantifying the degree to which individuals can interact with their environment, we note three potential shortcomings which may limit their broader use. First, BOI ratings are highly correlated with concreteness, given that by nature they reflect the degree to which individuals can interact with an object. Consistent with this, Pexman et al. (2019) reported that performance on lexical tasks improved for high BOI items (e.g., *chair*). For low BOI items (e.g., *autumn*), performance decreased, as by nature, an object must be tangible and concrete for it to facilitate a high degree of interaction. Second, because BOI reflects a quantitative rating, qualitative information regarding specific object uses, action properties, or even the context in which an object may elicit certain actions, is unavailable. While quantifying the degree of interactivity is critical given the proposed connection between sensorimotor experience and knowledge (see Barsalou, Simmons, Barbey, & Wilson, 2003), understanding the various contexts which may facilitate or inhibit potential interactions is equally important. Finally, having participants rate an object’s general levels of interactivity may simply be too vague of a measure, as when individuals encounter an object, they generally have a specific use in mind which may facilitate or inhibit interactivity depending on specific environmental factors. Thus, relying solely upon BOI as a measure of interactivity omits important qualitative information which may influence an object’s perceived level of interactivity.

**The Present Study**

Given the link between sensorimotor experience and knowledge representation, the present study sought to develop a set of affordance norms for concrete objects. In doing so, we utilized an open-ended response format, which allowed participants to freely report affordances without experimenter-provided cues or prompts. We framed object use in terms of affordances, such that participants were instructed to list the specific ways a given object could potentially be used or interacted with. Potential object uses were recorded using a method akin to feature production and free association tasks (cf. McRae et al., 2005; Nelson et al., 2004). As a result, we were able to capture a range of responses, which maximized the potential number of affordances that could be generated for each object.

In the following sections, we detail the creation of the affordance norm dataset, including how our final sample size was determined, exclusion criteria, and all manipulations and measures. We then describe an interactive web-portal designed to facilitate exploration of the final set of norms. Finally, we discuss a series of analyses which compared the affordance measures generated from this dataset with two existing measures of meaning (e.g., Forward Association Strength (FAS) values derived from Nelson et al., 2004’s free association norms and cosine similarity (COS) taken from Buchanan et al.’s, 2019a, feature production norms), BOI ratings (Pexman et al., 2019), and several lexical variables which could potentially influence how participants processed each item (e.g., concreteness, age-of-acquisition, cue set size, etc.).

**Method**

**Participants**

We recruited 3189 participants from two general settings. First, 2432 undergraduate students were recruited from 9 universities and colleges located within the northeastern, midwestern, and southern United States and completed the study in exchange for partial course credit. The remaining 757 participants were recruited via Prolific ([www.Prolific.co](file:///C:\Users\nickm\OneDrive\Documents\GitHub\Affordance_Norms_OSF\3%20Manuscript\www.Prolific.co)) and were compensated at a rate of $3.00 per 20-minute session. We initially targeted 3000 participants, which ensured that object would be normed by 30 participants. However, data collection was extended as funding permitted. Table 1 displays final *n*s for each testing site following data cleaning. All participants completed the experiment online. To be eligible, participants were required to be native English speakers, and Prolific participants were additionally required to have obtained at least a high-school level degree or equivalent.

**Materials**

To generate the stimuli, we initially selected 3005 nouns from the MRC psycholinguistic database (Coltheart, 1981). Words were selected based on concreteness, such that only high concreteness words were included (*M* concreteness ≥ 4.25). Of the 3005 words we generated, five were randomly selected to serve as practice items. The remaining 3000 items were once randomized before being equally split into 100 separate, 30-item lists. Overall, the final set of 3000 words had a mean concreteness rating of 4.61 (*SD* = 0.33; Brysbaert, Warriner, & Kuperman, 2014), a mean SUBTLEX frequency rating of 2.01 (*SD* = 0.87; Brysbaert & New, 2009), and a mean BOI rating of 5.18 (*SD* = 0.60; Pexman et al., 2019).

**Procedure**

Across testing sites, data collection occurred online using Collector, an open-source platform for conducting web-based psychological experiments (Garcia & Kornell, 2015). Prior to beginning the norming task, participants were informed that they would view a series of object words and were asked to list as many uses for each object (i.e., affordances) as they could reasonably generate. Participants were reminded that a single object typically has multiple uses and were encouraged to list multiple object uses when possible. To illustrate this point, the word *ball* was provided as an example, with *throw*, *bounce*, and *step on* all provided as examples of potential affordances. The full task instructions can be viewed at https://osf.io/pavjh.

After receiving instructions, participants completed a set of five practice items, which familiarized them with the norming task. For each trial, a cue word was presented in the center of the screen, and participants were instructed to generate as many affordances as they reasonably could in response to cue. Participants typed each affordance response into a textbox which was located directly below the cue. To maximize potential affordances, participants were not given specific instructions on how to format their responses (i.e., tense, single words vs. phrases, etc.) with the exception that they were asked to separate each unique object use with a comma. Thus, participants were allowed to respond to the cue with individual words, phrases, or full sentences. Additionally, a prompt was located directly above the cue, which reminded participants of the task instructions. After completing the five initial practice trials, participants immediately began the full norming task, which randomly presented them with one of the 30-item lists. All items were presented in a randomized order, and participants’ responses were self-paced. Following completion of this task, participants were debriefed. The full study took approximately 20 minutes to complete.

**Data Processing**

All responses were initially screened to ensure that participants adhered to the norming task’s instructions. Data from 35 participants were omitted due to excessive blank responses or failure to list object uses (i.e., consistently responding with synonyms or associates), leading to 3154 participants being included in the final dataset. The remaining data were then processed in *R* following a cleaning procedure based on Buchanan, De Deyne, and Montefinese’s (2020) guidelines for processing lexical output from feature-production tasks. Below, we detail each step used to create the final dataset before describing the calculation of three affordance measures: Affordance Strength (AFS), Affordance Proportion (AFP), and Affordance Set Size (AFSS). Given the size of the final dataset and because data collection occurred in waves across multiple testing sites, the data processing steps listed below were conducted separately across several batches of data, which ranged from approximately 25 to 500 participants each. For completeness, an *R* script detailing the full cleaning procedure along with a sample dataset is available on our OSF page.

***Cleaning the Raw Data.*** We began by removing all blank responses along with any responses suggesting that participants were unfamiliar with a specific object (e.g., “I don’t know”, “unknown”, “unsure”, “?”, etc.). Second, because participants generally provided multiple affordances to each cue, each row in the initial dataset generally contained multiple affordances. The *tidytext* package was used to identify and separate individual affordance responses to each cue (Silge & Robinson, 2016). This parsing process assumed that unique affordances were comma-separated, though we additionally corrected for participants who did not follow instructions (i.e., separating unique uses with semicolons, periods, spaces, etc.). This resulted in a long-format dataset, with each individual affordance having its own row in the dataset (i.e., for the cue *cup*, the response “to drink from, throw it, pencil holder” would be separated as “to drink from”, “throw it”, and “pencil holder”).

After extracting individual affordances for each object, we next corrected for spelling errors using the *hunspell* package (Ooms, 2022). Because participants were primarily recruited from the United States, the spell check procedure utilized the American English dictionary. For British participants recruited via Prolific, British English spellings were changed to their corresponding American English counterpart (e.g., *colour* and *socialise* became *color* and *socialize*). After using *hunspell* to generate a list of spelling errors, all responses flagged as errors were visually inspected to confirm whether the word was indeed a misspelling or simply a word which was not available in this package’s dictionary. Following the inspection process, misspellings were corrected by replacing each misspelled word with its corresponding *hunspell* generated correction.

Once spelling errors were corrected, affordance responses were then tokenized via *tidytext*, which split each affordance phrase into individual words. This step was included to account for two potential issues. First, as noted in the Procedure, participants typed their responses into a textbox, which allowed them to list multiple affordances for each cue. However, although participants were instructed to separate each response with a comma, they often included extra spacing and tabs in their responses. Thus, the tokenization process removed any additional spacing and punctuation. Second, the affordance phrases isolated in the previous step often contained multiple actions, as well as other context specific words (e.g., nouns and adjectives) which may also contain important information regarding object use. As such, these phrases were further split into separate lines, particularly when they contained a mix of nouns and verbs (i.e., for the *cue* cup, the affordance phrase “pencil holder” would be separated as “pencil” and “hold”). By separating affordance phrases, we were able to compare unique affordances (typically represented by verb responses; e.g. “hold”) while also preserving the context in which the affordance occurs (“pencil”). Finally, following the tokenization process, we omitted all stopwords (e.g., *the*, *of*, *but*, etc.), which were dropped via the *stopwords* package (Benoit, Muhr, & Watanabe, 2021).

After tokenizing each affordance and omitting stopwords, the remaining responses were lemmatized and part of speech (POS) tagged. These steps were conducted in *R* with the *udpipe* package (Wijffels, 2023), which uses a trained language model to transform all tokens belonging to a particular set of lexemes (i.e., words with the same common meaning) into a shared lemma (i.e., *swim*, *swam,* and *swimming* become *swim*). We elected to use lemmatization rather than a stemming procedure since, as noted by Buchanan et al. (2020), a word’s stem may not always reflect a word existing within a particular language. Thus, our use of lemmatization ensured that all affordances in the final dataset were words existing in the English language. Finally, the model used for lemmatization was also trained to provide POS tags for a wide variety of American English lemmas. However, to ensure accuracy, all tags were manually inspected. For lemmas which could potentially hold more than one tag (i.e., *fish* may be tagged as noun when referring to an animal but as a verb when referencing the lemmatized form of *fishing*), the context in which the original word was produced was used to determine the appropriate tag.

Following the initial cleaning procedure, we inspected the dataset to ensure that all items had received responses from a sufficient number of participants. In doing so, we detected several low frequency cues which did not receive an appropriate number of responses (*n*s < 20). Eighty-five cues met this criterion and were dropped from the dataset. Additionally, we encountered several cue items that were spelling variations of the same object (e.g., *ax* and *axe*) or singular and plural forms of the same concept (e.g., *noodle* and *noodles*). We combined responses across singular and plural items such that only the singular form was used, so long as changing an object’s plurality did not substantially alter its use. After dropping low frequency cues and correcting for plurals and alternate spellings, the final affordance dataset contained 2825 cues.

After applying the cleaning procedure and dropping low response items, the dataset at this stage contained 325211 unique tokenized items. Because participants were not limited in the number of responses they could provide or in the ways they could format their responses, each response often contained multiple words. However, because affordances reflect actions, we were primarily interested in tokens which were tagged as verbs. As such, we initially filtered the dataset to remove all adjectives, adverbs, interjections, and uncategorized tokens, which removed 5.93% percent of all tokens. Next, nouns were divided into two categories: Nouns which reflected a specific object use (e.g., responding to the cue item *bowl* with *hat*, *book* with *doorstop*, etc.) and those which provided contextual information as part of a phrase (i.e., for the cue *bowl*, participants might respond *fill with cereal*. In this case, only the verb *fill* would be considered an affordance). Non-affordance noun responses were eliminated from the affordance dataset, which removed 90303 tokens. Finally, an additional 18642 verbs were recoded as auxiliary verbs and subsequently excluded from analysis. Auxiliary verbs typically appeared as part of an action phrase. For example, when responding to the cue *door*, a participant might respond *close to keep you safe*. In this example, *close* would be coded as a verb, *keep* would be coded as auxiliary, and *safe* would be coded as a noun reflecting a specific use. Thus, *close* and *safe* would be included in the final affordance set. As such, the affordance measures described below were calculated from 196201 tokenized action responses. For completeness, a full dataset containing all participant responses, including contextual nouns, adjectives, and adverbs is available for download on our OSF page.

***Calculating the Affordance Measures.*** After removing all non-affordance responses, we computed three affordance measures. First, for each cue-affordance pair, we computed AFS as the frequency of each unique affordance divided by the summed frequency of all affordances that the cue received. In doing so, our process for generating AFS values mirrored how FAS values are computed as measures of free association (e.g., Nelson et al., 2004). For example, if the cue *chair* received a total of 30 responses, with 15 responses being *sit*, 10 responses being *push*, and five responses being *stand on*, the corresponding AFS values for *chair* – *sit*, *chair* – *push*, and *chair – stand on* would be .50, .33, and .17, respectively. Thus, AFS reflects the probability that a specific affordance would be generated in response to a cue, with higher AFS values denoting a stronger cue-affordance relation.

While AFS provides one method of quantifying object-affordance dynamics (related to the concept of *canonical affordances*; see Costall, 2012), we note that due to the open-ended nature of our response task, AFS is likely to become negatively skewed when each participant provides multiple responses to a single cue, particularly when responses are a series of low probability affordances. To account for this, we separately computed AFP, which reflects the proportion of participants who responded to the cue with a specific affordance, rather than the frequency with which an action was listed relative to other affordances (i.e., AFS). To compute this measure, we again began by computing the frequency of each unique affordance response. However, instead of dividing by the total number of affordances, we instead divided by the number of participants who responded to the cue. Based on the previous example, if all 15 participants *responded* to chair with *sit*, then the AFP for this pair would be 1.00, even though the AFS value would equal 0.50. Thus, AFP values provide an additional measure of affordance strength while also correcting for limited AFS range due to multiple cue responses per participant.

Finally, we calculated AFSS for each cue, which reflects the total number of unique affordance responses for each cue item. In the example from above AFSS = 3 because *chair* received three unique responses (*sit*, *push*, *stand*). Unlike AFS and AFP, which each measure the probability of objects eliciting specific actions, AFSS provides a quantitative measure of the potential range of action properties which are inherent to a given item. Thus, higher AFSS values reflect a greater number of perceived uses for an object.

**Shiny Application**

While the final dataset has been made available for download as a .csv file on our OSF page, we have also developed an interactive *R* shiny application, which can be accessed at: <https://npm27.shinyapps.io/Affordance_Norms/>. This application provides users with two sets of information. First, the top table displays information regarding each cue word, including mean BOI Rating (Pexman et al., 2019), Concreteness (Brysbaert et al., 2014), SUBLTEX frequency (Brysbaert & New, 2009), age of acquisition (AoA; Kuperman, Stadthagen-Gonzalez, & Brysbaert, 2012), length, cue set size (QSS; Nelson et al., 2004), AFSS, and the number of participants who responded to each cue. Next, the bottom table displays AFS ratings for all cue – affordance pairs. In addition to providing mean AFS values, we also report mean forward associative strength values (FAS; Nelson et al., 2004) and cosine similarities (COS; Buchanan et al., 2019a) when available. For both tables, users can search and filter the dataset based on overlapping items and semantic/lexical values, and options are provided for downloading each table as an Excel file or .csv, including any filters which may have been applied.

**Results**

**Research Questions**

We now turn to a set of analyses designed to explore our affordance norms. We begin by providing descriptive statistics for the new AFS, AFP, and AFSS measures before detailing the degree of overlap between the affordance norm set and existing measures of meaning. Next, we report a series of analyses assessing the validity of this dataset. First, because our stimuli fully overlapped with items included in Pexman et al.’s (2019) BOI ratings, we assessed the relationship between BOI and our affordance measures. Specifically, we anticipated a positive correlation between BOI and AFSS, such that higher BOI ratings would be associated with a larger set of potential object uses. Additionally, we tested for correlations between our affordance measures and concreteness, AoA, SUBLTEX frequency, and QSS, given that these measures likely also influence a concept’s perceived use. Like BOI, we anticipated a positive correlation between concreteness and set-size, given that higher concreteness would likely result in greater interactivity. We additionally anticipated a positive relationship between QSS and AFSS, as cues with a greater number of associates would likely reflect broader concepts and, as a result, lend themselves to more uses. As such, we also expected negative correlations between AFSS and AFS. However, because AFP was designed to mitigate the effects of set size on affordance strength, this negative effect was expected to be greatly reduced when assessing the relationship between AFSS and AFP. Finally, we additionally anticipated negative correlations with frequency and age-of-acquisition. We reasoned that words which are less common or are acquired later in life would have fewer total uses, given that these words often have referents that are highly specific, which would potentially result in fewer perceived uses.

Additionally, given potential concerns that affordance responses might simply mimic free association norms (i.e., participants were simply responding with the first word that came to mind, regardless of whether it constituted a use), we additionally assessed the relationship between AFS, AFP, and FAS values taken from Nelson et al. (2004) and COS similarity taken from Buchanan et al. (2019a). These analyses were conducted separately, using subsets of cue-affordance pairs which overlapped with these existing databases. Because affordances reflect a distinct type of meaning compared to cue-target associations and feature similarity, we anticipated that there would be little overlap between our affordance dataset and these norms, and furthermore, that for any overlapping pairs, only a weak relationship would be detected between affordance measures and other semantic measures. However, some overlap was anticipated, given that the measures used to represent various types of meaning may overlap, even though each type of meaning likely assesses separate constructs (see Maki & Buchanan, 2008).

**Descriptive Statistics**

Table 2 displays descriptive statistics for the AFS, AFP, and AFSS measures of affordances. Overall, the mean AFS value for a given cue-affordance pair was .03 (*SD* = .04). Next, the mean AFP was .07 (*SD* = .09). Importantly, as displayed in Table 2, AFP values provided a greater range compared to AFS, which was largely restricted to weak values. Additionally, each cue item averaged approximately 36 affordance responses (*M* = 35.65, *SD* = 9.12), with set sizes ranging from 12 to 88 items. Finally, an animacy effect emerged, such that words related to living creatures were more likely to have higher set-sizes versus nouns denoting non-living things. Thus, living creatures are perceived by participants as conduits for more diverse uses relative to static objects.

**Comparison to BOI and Lexical Variables**

Next, we assessed the relationship between each affordance measure (AFS, AFP, and AFSS) and BOI, concreteness, SUBLTEX frequency, AoA, and QSS (Table 3). Because the AFS and AFP measures reflect cue-affordance relations (rather than single item properties), the following analysis only assessed AFS and AFP values for each cue’s strongest affordance pairing. Overall, affordance measures were weakly-to-moderately correlated with BOI (*r*s ≤ .33;  *p*s ≤ .001), suggesting that our affordance measures were assessing a separate construct with only partial overlap with BOI. Similarly, AFS and AFP were weakly correlated with concreteness (*r*s ≥ .13, *p*s ≤ .001, and no correlation was detected between AFSS and concreteness, *r* = .01; *p* =.611). AFSS was most strongly correlated with SUBTLEX (*r* = .33; *p* < .001), such that cues with greater frequencies were more likely to have larger sets of uses. Next, AoA was negatively related to both AFSS and AFP (*r*s = -.21; *p*s≤ .001), suggesting that cues acquired at later ages were more likely to have a reduced range of uses. Finally, QSS was weakly correlated with AFSS (*r* = .13, *p* < .001), suggesting that cues with more associative neighbors were additionally more likely to have larger sets of potential actions. However, a weak negative correlation emerged between QSS and AFS (*r* = -.09, *p* < .001). Thus, increased set-sizes were related to an overall decrease in AFS.

Regarding our affordance measures, a strong correlation emerged between AFS and AFP (*r* = .81; *p* < .001), which indicated strong convergent validity between both affordance measures. However, a medium negative correlation was detected between AFS and AFSS (*r* = -.47, *p* < .001), such that as set-size increased, the mean AFS of each cue decreased. Because our AFP measure controlled for this by assessing affordances at the participant level rather than the item-level, the magnitude of this relationship was greatly reduced when affordances were measured via AFP (*r* = -.09; *p* < .001).

**Comparison to Semantic Word Norms**

Finally, we assessed the relationship between AFS and AFP and two other similarity measures: FAS values taken from Nelson et al. (2004), which measure the probability of a word being generated for a given cue via free association, and COS values derived from Buchanan et al. (2019a), which provides a measure of semantic feature overlap between two concepts. We began by computing the percentage of cue-affordance pairs in our dataset which overlapped with each dataset. Because affordances reflect a separate dimension of meaning compared to cue-target association and semantic features, we reasoned that the overlap between datasets would be low, as participants in the present study were instructed to focus specifically on object interactions, rather than its constituent features or related concepts. Consistent with this notion, overlap between datasets was low, as less than 5% of cue-affordance pairs were available in the associative or semantic datasets (2.86% and 3.35%, respectively). Thus, the lack of overlap between the affordance dataset and existing semantic datasets provides further evidence that our norm set was assessing meaning specifically in terms of object use.

Finally, we assessed the correlations between our affordance measures and FAS and COS for pairs that were shared between each dataset (Tables 4 and 5). Prior to conducting these analyses, we computed subsets of the affordance dataset which only contained pairs that appeared in each dataset. As such, we identified 2702 cue-affordance pairs which were present in the Nelson et al. free association norms and 3163 pairs which were present in the Buchanan et al. (2019a) semantic feature norms. Overall, weak correlations were detected between the two affordance measures and FAS (*r*s ≤ .18; *p*s ≤ .001 and COS (*r*s ≤ .11; *p*s ≤ .001), further suggesting that our affordance norms provide a distinct measure of meaning versus associative and semantic measures.

**General Discussion**

The present study sought to expand upon existing measures of word meaning by generating a set of affordance norms for highly concrete nouns. Unlike existing semantic word norms, which operationalize meaning in terms of shared features or free associations, affordances ascribe meaning based on an objects’ actionable properties (Gibson, 1977). Thus, affordances describe complex actor-object interactions, which are less likely to be captured by semantic feature production or free-association tasks. To generate these norms, we presented participants with a series of object words and had participants complete an open-ended response task in which they listed the various ways in which each object could be used. In doing so, we were able to capture a variety of affordance information for each object, including common/uncommon affordances (represented by AFS and AFP) and set-sizes for each object (AFSS). Finally, we developed an interactive *R* Shiny application, which provides easy access to the final dataset and contains several options for exploring these norms.

To test the validity of our affordance norms, we began by comparing our three affordance measures with several lexical/semantic variables, including BOI, concreteness, SUBTLEX frequency, and AoA. Because BOI ratings capture information regarding an object’s perceived interactivity, we anticipated that affordance measures would correlate with BOI. However, mostly weak correlations emerged between BOI and affordances, suggesting that each measure likely assesses separate constructs. Additionally, all affordance measures were moderately correlated with concreteness, though we note that given the restricted range of this value (i.e., all cues were highly concrete nouns), caution is needed when interpreting affordance-concreteness relations. Separately, a weak positive correlation was detected between AFS and SUBTLEX, while a weak negative correlation emerged between AFSS and AoA. The presence of these correlations suggests two important insights. First, higher frequency cues generally lend themselves to a greater number of uses, likely because high frequency nouns often provide more general depictions of objects, rather than being highly specific. Second, cue objects that are acquired later in life are likely to have more limited use sets, as these items tend to be less frequently occurring and lend themselves to a more specific set of uses. Additionally, our finding that frequency correlates with AFS is consistent with a behavioral ecology account of affordances, as objects which occur more frequently in one’s environment are more likely to lend themselves to multiple uses. Finally, our finding that QSS is positively related to affordance set size but negatively related to AFS is consistent with our prediction that affordances with larger overall set-sizes would have weaker overall cue-affordance relations.

We then tested the degree of overlap between our two cue-affordance measures (AFS and AFP) and semantic/associative measures. First, we assessed the degree to which cue-affordance pairs overlapped with cue-target pairs in the Nelson et al. (2004) free-association norms and Buchanan et al.’s (2019a) semantic feature production norms. For both datasets, overlap was low, with less than 5% of pairs appearing in both the affordance norms and either the free-association or feature production norms. The lack of overlapping pairs suggests that responses in our affordance norming task were successfully reflecting actionable properties, rather than related associates or features of cue-items. To confirm this, we assessed the correlations between AFS, AFP, FAS and COS. Consistent with our predictions, affordance measures were weakly correlated with associative/semantic measures of meaning, demonstrating divergent validity.

Overall, our affordance norms provide a useful starting point for investigating common versus uncommon affordances, which future research can leverage to further investigate the links between object perception and object use. Additionally, these norms may be particularly useful for investigating the connection between perceived use and semantic processing. For example, Surber, Huff, & Hajnal (2023) recently demonstrated that object priming is facilitated by both semantic and affordance primes, suggesting that semantic and affordance properties are similarly processed. However, given the low degree of overlap between our affordance measures and semantic norms, it is likely that affordances denote a type of meaning separate from semantic features. Moreover, previous research suggests that various associative/semantic measures likely assess different domains of meaning, such that specific types of meaning may operate separately from others (e.g., Maki & Buchanan, 2008; Patterson & Ralph, 2016). Based on this account, action specific knowledge would constitute a separate type of meaning compared to associations and semantic features, though some overlap would be expected between measures, given that based on affordance theory, an object’s most salient features drive its perceived uses (Gibson, 1977; see Wagman, 2019, for review). Thus, more work is needed to fully understand the degree to which affordances carry unique information that is separate from other measures of meaning.

While the present study is the first to utilize an open-ended approach to measuring object interactions, we note that Pexman et al. (2019) provided some quantification of object interactivity. As such, the low correlations between affordance measures and BOI are somewhat surprising, given that both datasets measure perceived interactivity. However, we note that differences in response format between the two studies may partially explain this discrepancy. Unlike the present study which utilized an open-ended response format, Pexman et al. had participants rate each object’s perceived interactivity via a Likert scale, rather than having them list specific potential uses. However, the increased response variability due to our open-ended response format may have limited potential correlations between affordances and BOI. Additionally, although Likert scale ratings provide useful information regarding the strength of potential interactivity, this response format cannot reveal information regarding the specific affordances being activated when participants rate their interactions. Therefore, an additional benefit of our open response format was that it provided additional context regarding potential object interactivity. Thus, the present study complements existing measures of interactivity while also attempting to qualitatively investigate the degree to which specific affordances are linked to specific cues.

Although our open response format was designed to capture a greater variability in responses, we note that this general design is also consistent with previous associative/semantic norming studies which have similarly allowed participants to make multiple responses to a single cue (e.g., De Deyne et al., 2019). Furthermore, like previous studies, participants provided their responses after reading each cue word. We elected to use this approach, as we wanted to avoid inadvertently priming participants to respond with specific object uses based on a certain type of object. However, this may have inflated AFSS values, particularly for objects which may have been vague or objects which participants may have been unfamiliar with. Thus, follow-up studies may consider having participants respond to picture cues rather than lexical cues. Additionally, individual differences in how participants interact with their environment may also influence the probability of specific affordances being elicited. As such, future studies may wish to explore the effects of height, age, and disability status on affordances.

Finally, while the present study provides an important starting point for investigating cue-affordance relations, a complete understanding of how individuals process an object’s affordances also requires knowledge of which objects are most likely to be used to achieve a desired goal or action. As such, future work may wish to answer this question by presenting participants with a list of affordances and having them respond with the specific objects that could be used to successfully accomplish the action. Additionally, because semantic variables are often associated with the speed of lexical access in visual word recognition studies, future research may additionally wish to assess the degree to which affordance variables account for variance within this paradigm after accounting for other lexical/semantic variables. Ultimately, however, the present study provides an important starting point for measuring the link between affordances and action.

**Conclusion**

Previous studies have commonly assessed meaning in terms of semantic features or cue-target associations. In the current study, we present the first set of affordance norms along with a corresponding *R* shiny application, which provides researchers with two measures of perceived object use (AFS and AFP) and AFSS values. Importantly, we utilized an open-ended response format when developing this norm set, which allowed us to capture a wide range of potential object uses. Overall, we demonstrate that affordance properties are independent from other semantic measures (e.g., FAS and COS) while also showing weak correlations with BOI values, which quantify object interactivity. As such, affordance information appears to reflect a construct that is separate from other measures of meaning, though more work is needed to fully explore the relationship between affordances and other semantic measures.

**Declarations**

**Compliance with Ethical Principles**

All participants provided informed consent prior to their participation. The materials and procedures for this study were approved by the Institutional Review Boards at The University of Southern Mississippi (#IRB-20-318) and Midwestern State University (#22092201). The authors declare no conflicts of interest.

**Open Practices Statement**

Data and *R* code for all analyses have been made available at https://osf.io/68bkt/. A .csv containing the final affordance norm dataset can be directly accessed at https://osf.io/jb45e. This study was not preregistered.

**Funding Information**

Funding for this project was provided in part by the Aubrey Lucas and Ella Ginn Lucas Foundation at The University of Southern Mississippi to MJ Huff and A Hajnal.

**References**

Balota, D. A., Yap, M. J., Hutchison, K. A., Cortese, M. J., Kessler, B., Loftis, B., Neely, J. H., Nelson, D. L., Simpson, G. B, & Treiman, R. (2007). The English lexicon project. *Behavior Research Methods, 39* (3), 445-459.

Barsalou, L. W. (1999). Perceptual symbol systems. *Behavioral and Brain Sciences*, 22, 577–660.

Barsalou, L. W. (2008). Grounded Cognition. *Annual Review of Psychology, 59*, 617-645.

Barsalou, L. W., Simmons, W. K., Barbey, A. K., & Wilson, C. D. (2003). Grounding conceptual knowledge in modality-specific systems. *Trends in Cognitive Sciences, 7*(2), 84-91.

Benoit, K., Muhr, D., & Watanabe, K. (2021). stopwords: Multilingual stopword lists. (2.3.0) [Computer software]. https://CRAN.R-project.org/package=stopwords.

Brysbaert, M., & New, B. (2009). Moving beyond Kučera and Francis: A critical evaluation of current word frequency norms and the introduction of a new and improved word frequency measure for American English. *Behavior Research Methods, 41*, 977–990.

Brysbaert, M., Warriner, A. B., & Kuperman, V. (2014). Concreteness ratings for 40 thousand generally known English word lemmas. *Behavior Research Methods, 46*, 904-911.

Buchanan, E. M. De Deyne, S. & Montefinese, M. (2020). A practical primer on processing semantic property norm data. *Cognitive Processing, 21*, 587-599.

Buchanan, E. M., Valentine, K. D., & Maxwell, N. P. (2019a). English semantic feature production norms: An extended database of 4433 concepts. *Behavior Research Methods, 51*, 1849-1863.

Buchanan, E. M., Valentine, K. D., & Maxwell, N. P. (2019b) LAB: Linguistic Annotated Bibliography – a searchable portal for normed database information. *Behavior Research Methods, 51*, 1878-1888.

Coltheart, M. (1981). The MRC Psycholinguistic Database. *The Quarterly Journal of Experimental Psychology Section A, 33*(4), 497-505.

Costall, A. (2012). Canonical affordances in context. *AVANT*, *2*, 85-93.

De Deyne, S., Navarro, D. J., Perfors, A., Brysbaert, M., & Storms, G. (2019). The “Small World of Words” English word association norms for over 12,000 cue words. *Behavior Research Methods, 51*, 987-1006.

Garcia, M. & Kornell, N. (2015). Collector [Computer software]. Retrieved April 3rd, 2020 from https://github.com/gikeymarica/Collector.

Gibson, J. J. (1977). The theory of affordances. In R. Shaw, J. Bransford (Eds.), Perceiving, Acting, and Knowing: Toward an Ecological *Psychology*, Lawrence Erlbaum, Hillsdale, NJ, pp. 67-82.

Glenberg, A. M. (2015). Few believe the world is flat: How embodiment is changing the scientific understanding of cognition. *Canadian Journal of Experimental Psychology, 69*(2), 165–171

Glenberg, A. M. & Gallese, V. (2012). Action-based language: A theory of language acquisition, comprehension, and production. *Cortex, 48*(7), 905-922.

Heard, A., Madan, C. R., Protzner, A. B., & Pexman, P. M. (2019). Getting a grip on sensorimotor effects in lexical-semantic processing. *Behavior Research Methods, 51*, 1-13.

Hutchison, K. A. (2003). Is semantic priming due to association strength or feature overlap? A microanalytic review. *Psychonomic Bulletin & Review, 10*, 785-813.

Kumar, A. A. (2021). Semantic memory: A review of methods, models, and current challenges. *Psychonomic Bulletin & Review*, 28, 40-80.

Kuperman, V., Stadthagen-Gonzalez, H., & Brysbaert, M. (2012). Age-of-acquisition ratings for 30,000 English words. *Behavior Research Methods, 44,* 978-990.

Maki, W. S., & Buchanan, E. M. (2008). Latent structure in measures of associative, semantic, and thematic knowledge. *Psychonomic Bulletin & Review, 15*, 598-603.

McRae, K., Cree, G. S., Seidenberg, M. S., & McNorgan, C. (2005). Semantic feature production norms for a large set of living and nonliving things. *Behavior Research Methods, 37*(4), 547–559.

Muraki, E. J., Siddiqui, I. A., & Pexman, P. M. (2022). Quantifying children’s sensorimotor experience: Child body-object interaction ratings for 3359 English words. *Behavior Research Methods, 54*, 2864-2877.

Nelson, D. L., McEvoy, C. L., & Dennis, S. (2000). What is free association and what does it measure? *Memory & Cognition, 28*, 887-899.

Nelson, D. L., McEvoy, C. L., & Schreiber, T. A. (2004). The University of South Florida free association, rhyme, and word fragment norms. *Behavior Research Methods, Instruments, & Computers, 36*(3), 402–407.

Ooms, J. (2022). hunspell: High-performance stemmer, tokenizer, and spell checker. (3.0.2) [Computer software]. https://CRAN.R-project.org/package=hunspell.

Patterson, K. & Ralph, M. A. L. (2016). The hub-and-spoke hypothesis of semantic memory. In *Neurobiology of Language* (pp. 765-775). Academic Press.

Pexman, P. M., Heard, A., Lloyd, E., & Yap, M. J. (2017). The Calgary semantic decision project: Concrete/abstract decision data for 10,000 English words. *Behavior Research Methods, 49*, 407-417.

Pexman, P. M., Muraki, E., Sidhu, D. M., Siakaluk, P. D., & Yap, M. J. (2019). Quantifying sensorimotor experience: Body-object interaction ratings for more than 9,000 English words. *Behavior Research Methods, 51*, 453-466.

Silge, J. & Robinson, D. (2016). tidytext: Text mining and analysis using tidy data principles in R. *Journal of Open Source Software*, 1-3.

Surber, T., Huff, M. J., & Hajnal., A. (in press). The affordance directive: Affordance priming facilitates object detection similar to semantic priming. *Psychological Reports*, 1-34.

Tillotson, S. M., Siakaluk, P. D., & Pexman, P. M. (2008). Body-object interaction ratings for 1,618 monosyllabic nouns. *Behavior Research Methods, 40*, 1075-1078.

Wagman, J. B. (2020). A guided tour of Gibson’s theory of affordances. In: *Perception as Information Detection. Reflections on Gibson’s Ecological Approach to Visual Perception*, eds J. B. Wagman and J. J. C. Blau (pp. 130-148). New York: Routledge.

Wijffels, J. (2023). udpipe: Tokenization, parts of speech tagging, lemmatization, and dependency parsing with the ‘UDPipe’ ‘NLP’ toolkit. (0.8.11) [Computer software]. https://CRAN.R-project.org/package=udpipe.

Table 1. *Final Sample Sizes for Each Testing Site.*

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| Institution | Total *n* |
| University of Southern Mississippi | 1161 |
| Prolific (United Kingdom) | 575 |
| University of South Alabama | 365 |
| Midwestern State University | 254 |
| Hope College | 215 |
| Prolific (United States and Canada) | 181 |
| University of Connecticut | 152 |
| Central Connecticut State University | 115 |
| Illinois State University | 73 |
| Clemson University | 41 |
| Butler University | 22 |

*Note*: For completeness, Prolific participants are split by country of origin

Table 2. *Descriptive Statistics for Affordance Strength and Affordance Set Size.*

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Measure | *M* (*sd*) | Min. | Max. |
| AFS | .03(.04) | .01 | .61 |
| AFP | .07 (.09) | .01 | 1.00 |
| AFSS | 35.65 (9.12) | 12 | 88 |

*Note*: AFS = Affordance Strength; AFP = Affordance Proportion; AFSS = Affordance Set Size.

Table 3. *Correlations between Affordance Measures and Lexical/Semantic Variables.*

|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Measure | AFSS | AFS | AFP | CON | BOI | SUBTLEX | AoA |
| AFS | -.47\* | -- |  |  |  |  |  |
| AFP | -.09\* | .81\* | -- |  |  |  |  |
| CON | .01 | .13\* | .25\* | -- |  |  |  |
| BOI | .11\* | .17\* | .33\* | .43\* | -- |  |  |
| SUBTLEX | .33\* | .09\* | .08\* | .12\* | .23\* | -- |  |
| AoA | -.21\* | .01 | -.21\* | -.37\* | -.38\* | -.58\* | -- |
| QSS | .13\* | -.09\* | -.03 | -.04 | .02 | .22\* | -.10\* |

*Notes*: AFSS = Affordance Set Size; AFS = Affordance Strength of strongest cue-affordance pair; AFP = Affordance Proportion for highest probability cue-affordance pair; CON = Concreteness (Brysbaert et al., 2014); BOI = Body-Object Interaction (Pexman et al., 2019); SUBTLEX = Frequency (Brysbaert & New, 2009); AoA = Age of Acquisition (Kuperman et al., 2012); QSS = Cue Set Size (Nelson et al., 2004); \* = *p* < .05.

Table 4. *Correlations between AFS, AFP, and FAS.*

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| Measure | AFS | AFP |
| AFP | .94\* | -- |
| FAS | .18\* | .16\* |

*Notes:* AFS = Affordance Strength; AFP = Affordance Percentage; FAS = Forward Associative Strength derived from Nelson et al. (2004). \* = *p* <.05.

Table 5. *Correlations between AFS, AFP, and COS.*

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| Measure | AFS | AFP |
| AFP | .95\* | -- |
| COS | .11\* | .08\* |

*Notes:* AFS = Affordance Strength; AFP = Affordance Percentage; COS = Cosine Similarity derived from Buchanan et al. (2019a). \* = *p* <.05.