The Challenges in Acquiring and Using French Articles by L1-Swahili-L2-English-L3 -French Learners in Tanzania

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Abstract
This study has examined the challenges encountered by Tanzanian learners whose first language is Swahili (L1) and second language is English (L2) in acquiring and using French articles as a third language (L3). It specifically explored how learners' knowledge of articles in Swahili and English influenced their acquisition of French articles. Data were collected through an elicitation task administered to 90 secondary school students. The findings revealed persistent difficulties in the use of both definite and indefinite articles, including frequent omissions and the use of incorrect forms. Developmental errors were observed across all proficiency levels, indicating that the acquisition of French articles, particularly definite articles, is both challenging and prone to fossilization. The influence of bare noun phrases in Swahili and zero-article constructions in English contributed to negative transfer, further complicating accurate article usage in French. The study highlights three main challenges: learners' difficulty in distinguishing between definite and indefinite articles, the negative transfer effects from both L1 and L2, and the failure to fully internalize the complex structure of the French article system.

Keywords: *Acquisition of articles, Third language acquisition, L1/L2 influence on L3, interlanguage, acquisition of French, language transfer*

Introduction
The use of articles in a second or third language poses significant challenges for language learners. Research in second language acquisition (SLA) has consistently documented cases in which learners incorrectly substitute indefinite articles for definite ones, and vice versa (see García-Mayo & Hawkins, 2009). These difficulties are often worsened when the grammatical structures of the target language differ substantially from those of the learner's first language. In this study, I anticipated specific challenges among Tanzanian students learning French as a third language (L3), given that their first language (L1), Swahili, lacks an article system entirely, and their second language (L2), English, differs from French in its parametric settings related to article use.

French, a Romance language, possesses a complex article system that includes definite, indefinite, and partitive forms (e.g., *du*, *de la*, *des* for uncountable nouns). These articles must agree in gender and number with the noun they modify, making their correct use essential for grammatical accuracy. Unlike English, French generally prohibits the use of bare noun phrases. For instance, *le* is used to refer to specific, known entities, while *un* indicates indefinite or unknown referents. Moreover, articles mark both gender and number: *le* (masculine) and *la* (feminine) are singular definite articles, while *les* serves as the plural definite form. Similarly, *un* (masculine) and *une* (feminine) function as singular indefinite articles, with *des* used for plural indefinites. This system contrasts markedly with that of English.

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Although English features a simpler article system compared to French, it still distinguishes between definite and indefinite reference in ways that do not always align with French usage. Morphologically, English has three types of articles: *the*, *a/an*, and the zero article (∅). These forms signal whether the noun they accompany refers to a known (definite) or unknown (indefinite) entity, often depending on the hearer's assumed knowledge (Lyons, 1999). The definite article *the* is used with both singular and plural nouns to indicate specificity. The indefinite articles *a* and *an* are used with singular countable nouns, with *a* preceding words beginning with consonant sounds and *an* preceding vowel sounds. The zero article (∅) typically marks plural or uncountable nouns in indefinite contexts. See examples below.

(1) *I saw the rabbit (def. sing.)*
(2) *I saw the rabbits (def. pl.)*
(3) *She presented the evidence (def. mass noun)*
(4) *I saw a rabbit (indef. sing.)*
(5) *They reached an understanding (indef. abstract noun)*
(6) *I saw Ө rabbits in the garden (indef. pl.)*
(7) *She presented Ө evidence for her claim (indef. mass noun)*

Swahili, a Bantu language, lacks an equivalent article system. Instead, it uses noun class markers to indicate specificity, with various elements fulfilling the function of Definiteness (D), such as demonstratives ('*huyu*,' '*hawa*', *'hiki', 'hivi'*), possessives ('*wangu*,' '*wetu*'), numerals ('*mmoja*,' '*wawili*'), and quantifiers ('*kila*', '*wote*') (Rugemalira, 2007). See the examples below:

(8) *Huyu mtoto ana akili*
     (This child is intelligent)

(9) *Hivi viatu nilivinunua PnP*
     (I bought these shoes at PnP)

In generic reference, Swahili allows bare NPs as in the following examples, where a bare NP is represented by the symbol '*Ө*'.

(10) *Simba ni wanyama hatari*
     (Lions are dangerous animals)

(11) *Lucia alinunua shati*
     (Lucia bought a shirt)

Therefore, in this study, I assumed a threefold challenge for Swahili-speaking learners of French who are already navigating English as a second language. Firstly, the lack of an article system in Swahili makes it difficult for students to grasp the concept of articles in general. Secondly, interference from English, which they have acquired as a second language, may lead to the overgeneralization of English article rules when learning French. Finally, the complex grammatical rules surrounding French articles, particularly regarding gender, number, and partitive use, add another layer of difficulty for learners. These three challenges are explained with some empirical data of the French interlanguage produced by these learners. Through examining these difficulties, this study sought to shed light on the linguistic and pedagogical factors that influence article acquisition in multilingual learners.

Third Language Acquisition and Article Usage Theories
Third language acquisition is taken as more complicated than second language acquisition, particularly in adulthood (Garcia-Mayo & Rothman, 2012) because it involves the acquisition of more than two languages either consecutively (L→L2→L3) or concurrently (L1→L2/L3) (Cenoz, 2000; Herdina & Jessner, 2000). In studies of the acquisition of functional categories such as articles, the complexity lies in determining the source of transfer. In the context of Second Language Acquisition (SLA), transfer predominantly arises from the L1, whereas in an L3, it is postulated that transfer can stem from either the L1, L2, or both. Various models have been devised to account for this complexity.

Firstly, the Cumulative Enhancement Model (CEM), proposed based on empirical findings by Flynn, Foley, and Vinnitskaya (2004), assumes that transfer in L3 acquisition can originate from either L1, L2, or both, given that the transfer is positive. Secondly, the L1 absolute transfer model privileges the L1 as the primary source of transfer in L3 due to its ability to filter all types of transfer from previously learned languages (Rothman, Cabrelli & De Bote, 2013). Thirdly, the absolute L2 transfer or L2 status factor model hypothesizes that during the acquisition of an additional language, transfer solely occurs from the L2 if its structure aligns with that subsequent language (Bardel & Falk, 2007; Falk & Bardel, 2011). Lastly, the typological primacy model suggests transfer in L3 acquisition may stem from any previous language (L1 or L2) if it exhibits typological or psychological similarities to the L3 (Rothman, 2010; Rothman, 2011).

Concerning the type of transfer (negative or positive) and potential influencing factors, Flynn et al. (2004) suggest that any language (L1 or L2) can predominantly transfer its structure positively to a subsequent learned language. However, Kulundary and Gabriele (2012) found both negative and positive transfers in multilingual acquisition, particularly in the context of relative clauses in L3 English by native Tuvan speakers. The occurrence of positive or negative transfer seems related to the typological relationship between the languages involved, as hypothesized by Rothman (2010, 2011) and confirmed by Mykhaylyk et al. (2015) and Westergaard et al. (2017). When structures align across languages, the positive transfer is likely, while dissimilarities may lead to negative transfer, originating from the L1 and/or L2. See also related conclusion on relative clause and word order (Rothman, 2011), on object structures (Montrul, Dias and Santos, 2011), on differential object marking (Giancaspro, Halloran and Iverson, 2015), on verb raising in dative forms (Cabrelli, Amaro and Rothman 2015) and on mood features (Child, 2017). Apart from typological relation, other reported factors for language transfer on L3 acquisition include the foreign language effect (Wrembel, 2010), cognitive processing (Hermas, 2015), the language of communication (Fallah, Jabbari, and Fazilatfar, 2016), and educational factors (Stadt, 2019). For instance, Hermas (2015) noted a negative transfer from L1 Arabic and a positive transfer from L2 French to L3 English relative clauses at an intermediate stage, showing an interplay of psycho-typological similarity and cognitive processing.

The current study does not aim to test the above L3 acquisition models or to replicate the previous studies, but to discern how these transfer facts shape the L3 French acquisition and article usage in the context of the L1 Swahili→L2 English→L3 French acquisition.

According to Ionin (2003) and Ionin, Ko, and Wexler (2004), the initial state of L2 article usage stems from the UG principles and parameters influencing learners' choice of articles. They call this situation the Article Choice Parameter (ACP), which is defined in two settings: definiteness [±definite] and specificity [± specific]. Definiteness implies that both the speaker and the hearer have some knowledge about the nominal referent, which is referred to in that context, and specificity refers to the speaker's intent to refer to a unique referent with some noteworthy property (Zabor, 2011). Therefore, learners with an L1 featuring different article parameter settings than their L2 may experience challenges resetting these parameters in their L2 Interlanguage. This leads to fluctuation between article usages, particularly in the L2 initial state. This hypothesis is called the Fluctuation Hypothesis (FH). It states that learners fluctuate between different parameter settings until input leads them to set the parameter to the appropriate value (Ionin, 2003; Ionin et al., 2004).

The FH has received considerable attention, especially in L2 research. While some studies confirm the FH (for example, Goad and White, 2004; Hawkins, 2005; Ghisseh, 2009; and Kimambo, 2016), other studies (for example, Deprez, Sleeman, and Gruella, 2011) show that even L2 learners whose L1 has articles tend to fluctuate while using articles in the L2. They agree that the L2 article Interlanguage is characterized by errors of omission and substitution, where learners tend to use indefinite articles in the context of definite ones, and vice versa, and definite and indefinite articles in the context where a zero article should be used.

On the acquisition of L3 articles, studies found mixed results. Leung (2007) argued against L1 transfer to L3, suggesting processing constraints as a barrier in L3 acquisition. Jaensch (2008) found fluctuations in L3 German articles among L1 Japanese-L2 English speakers, indicating issues with definiteness and specificity. Additionally, studies by Jaensch (2009), Gutiérrez-Magando, and Martínez-Adrián (2018) highlighted challenges in L3 article usage despite L2 proficiency. Nyakana (2020) found that despite the semantic level (LF) of the definiteness in Swahili DP being determined via other D-categories or contexts

of use (Rugemalira, 2007; Carsteins, 1991), the L1 Swahili speakers learning L2 English and L3 French concurrently, used the definite article in place of the indefinite and vice versa in both subsequent languages and, the evidence of the negative transfer was from L1 Swahili.

The ACP and the FH assumptions provide good grounds for this study, although my focus is not to revisit the two frameworks. However, the current analysis of article usage is based on the ideas constructed in the ACP and FH. This is the use of a definite article in a place where an indefinite was to be used and vice versa. Therefore, I analysed article usage according to Bickerton's (1981)' article usage characterization. Bickerton (1981) describes four binary semantic contexts of article usage. Firstly, an indefinite article will be used when an entity referred to is known to the speaker but not the hearer. This context is described as [+*SR -HK*]. Secondly, when an entity referred to is known to both the speaker and the hearer, the definite article is used, and this context is described as [+*SR +HK*]. Thirdly, when an entity is not known to the speaker but creates a generic referential knowledge to the hearer, its function can be picked out by the definite or the indefinite article, respectively, with the morphological properties of a noun. This context is described in terms of binary features as [-*SR +HK*]. The fourth context is described as [-*SR -HK]* when the speaker or the hearer does not know an entity. Thus, I limited the current analysis to Specific-Hearer Knowledge [+*SPEC +HK*] situations, which involve the use of the definite article, and the non-specific minus Hearer Knowledge [-SPEC - HK] situation, which involves the use of the indefinite article form. Examples of the sentences that fall under the two article use contexts are provided below.

> In French:
(12) *Il y avait **des motos***
    (There were **some motorbikes**)

(13) *Il travaille avec **une copine***
    (He works with **a female friend**)

(14) *J'ai pris **le lait** qui était dans le frigo.*
    (I took **the milk** that was in the fridge)

> In English:
(15) *Peter always carries a book in his bag*

(16) *I am looking for a manager, any manager*

(17) *I am looking for the teacher, Ms. Mwakipesile*

Research Questions and Methods
This paper answers the following research questions:

1. What are the challenges L1 Swahili-L2 English learners in Tanzania face in acquiring and correctly using French (L3) articles?
2. How do Swahili (L1) and English (L2) influence Tanzanian learners' acquisition and use of French articles as a third language (L3)?

A purposive sample of 90 secondary school students in Tanzania, all native Swahili speakers, was selected for this study. Since gender was not an independent variable, equal representation of males and females was not required, as there are generally more female students, particularly in French classes. The participants included 30 students each from Form Two, Form Three, and Form Five, all teenagers with prior English instruction from primary school and continued exposure to English and French in secondary school. Form Two students had approximately eight years of English learning and 1.5 years of French, Form Three

students had ten years of English and 2.5 years of French, and Form Five students had 12 years of English and 3.5 years of French. This distribution allowed for varying levels of exposure to formal instruction in both target languages and L3 French Interlanguage characteristics.

Given the nature of the target population, careful control of sampling factors was necessary to minimize errors. Factors such as participants' native languages (other than Swahili), previously learned languages, proficiency in the target languages, and years of formal language instruction were considered. Participants completed a biographical questionnaire and grammar placement tests in both English and French, focusing on article usage. Minimum passing grades for the placement tests were set at D for Form Two, C for Form Three, and B for Form Five, with lower-scoring participants excluded.

Data collection involved four tasks: a cloze test with 20 blanks for article forms, a narrative discourse cloze test with 20 blanks, a Truth Value Judgment Task (TVJT) involving 20 sentences in English or French, and a story-writing task based on sequential pictures, requiring appropriate article use. Tests were adapted from online resources and language textbooks and piloted at the University of Dar es Salaam with three near-native French speakers to check for design errors and ambiguities.

To ensure optimal testing conditions, potential distractors were assessed beforehand, and the tests were administered in the morning to minimize fatigue. Participants were assured the test would not affect their academic records, reducing the Hawthorne and halo effects. Afterward, a follow-up questionnaire gauged their attitudes toward the test, revealing no significant concerns or panic, and indicating that the test was perceived as moderately challenging.

Data were analyzed quantitatively using SPSS (version 20), with a coding system for responses: definite articles were coded as 1, indefinite as 2, zero articles as 3, incorrect gender or number as 4, and omissions as 5. The sample of qualitative utterances that are produced by the learners was presented to support the quantitative data.

Results
The Challenges L1 Swahili –L2 English Learners Face in Acquiring and Correctly Using L3 French Articles

The Inability to Distinguish Definite versus Indefinite Articles
The current respondents faced challenges in distinguishing between the definite and indefinite uses of French article forms. Firstly, results revealed that they used definite articles in places where an indefinite article was obligatory. It should be noted that there were 18 obligatory contexts for indefinite article use. Therefore, the incorrect use of the definite article was analysed from 540 written raw tokens produced by each (form two, three, and five). Results regarding the above analysis are presented below in Table 1.

Table 1: The Use of the Definite Article in Place of Indefinite Articles

	Indefinite /540	Definite /540
Form Two N=30	271 /50.1%	213 /39.4%
Form Three N=30	263 /48.7%	225 /41.6%
Form Five N=30	291 /53%	243 /45%
Kruskal-Wallis Test		(χ^2(2) =3.17, p=.205, Mean ranks=40.1, 44.4,51.9

The results in Table 1 reveal that all levels of L3 French classes used, to some extent, the definite article incorrectly against the correct use of the indefinite article. These results also show at first glance that the higher level was, to a certain extent, more incorrect than the lower levels in the use of the definite article in place of the indefinite one (39.4% versus 41.6% versus 45%). However, the statistical test has shown that there were no significant differences in the incorrect performance of the definite article between the higher and the lower levels ($\chi^2(2)$ =3.17, p=.205, Mean ranks=40.1, 44.4,51.9, respectively for forms two, three, and five). However, the persistent inaccuracy observed across both lower and higher proficiency levels in the use of indefinite articles suggests that difficulties in accurately mapping article forms to their intended meanings or functions remain even in advanced stages of acquisition. In addition, the definite article seems to be the last article form to be acquired and/or the form that can be prone to fossilization because it continues to be used incorrectly even in the higher stages. In the following paragraphs, the presentation turns to the incorrect use of the indefinite article.

The incorrect use of the indefinite article was analysed out of 38 obligatory contexts for a definite article. This makes a total of 1140 raw count tokens for each class group.

Table 2: The Use of Indefinite Articles in Place of the Definite Articles

	Definite /1140	Indefinite /1140
Form Two N=30	384 /33.6%	535 /46.9%
Form Three N=30	574 /50.3%	393 /34.4%
Form Five N=30	744 /65.2%	356 /31.3%
Kruskal-Wallis Test		($\chi^2(2)$ =23.8, p=.000, Mean ranks=64.03, 39.6, 32.8

Table 2 reveals that the incorrect use of the indefinite article was mostly found in the interlanguage of the lower classes ($\chi^2(2)$ =23.8, p=.000, Mean ranks=64.03, 39.6, 32.8; respectively for form two three, and five). Form two incorrectly used the indefinite article 46.9% of the time over that of the definite article which was 33.6%. Unlike the use of the incorrect definite form which increased with an increase in the year of instruction, the use of the indefinite article in places of the definite article seems to decrease as the year of instruction increases (34.4% by form three and 31.3% by form five). It is revealed in the current data that whenever the use of articles activates in their L3 system, the article which came as a default option, was an indefinite article form.

The utterances below are some examples where these learners used indefinite article forms more often whereas the definite article forms were obligatory. The second sentence for each interlanguage utterance contains the correct form of an article that the learner was supposed to produce and its translation in English. The incorrect and the correct forms of articles in the first and the second sentences are respectively bolded and italicized.

(18) *Il y avait des motos dans* **un parking**
      Correct: 'Il y avait des motos dans **le parking**
      (There were motorcycles in the parking)

(19) *J'ai vu un chien dehors;* **un chien a fui***.*
      Correct: 'J'ai vu un chien dehors; **le chien** *a fui*

(I saw a dog outside; the dog ran away)

(20) *Passez-moi **un tasse** qui est sur la table.*
     *Correct: Passez-moi **la tasse** qui est sur la table*
     (Give me the cup which is on the table)

(21) ***Une voiture** de mon frère est garée en face dela maison*
      *Correct: **la voiture** de mon frère est garée en face de la maison*
      (*My brother's car is parked in front of the house*)

(22) *Alors, une voiture de mon frère est garée en face de   **un maison***
      *Correct: 'Alors, la voiture de mon frère est garée en face **de la maison***
      (Therefore, my brother's car is parked in front of the house)

(23) *Beaucoup d'ingrédients utilisés dans **des cuisine** africaine*
      *Correct: Beaucoup d'ingrédients sont utilisés dans **la cuisine** africaine*
      (*Many ingredients are used in African cuisine*)

(24) *Passez-moi **des tasse** qui est sur la table*
      *Correct: Passez-moi **la tasse** qui est sur la table*
      (Give me the cup that is on the table)

(25) *J'ai pris **un lait** et un pain qui étaient dans le frigo*
     *Correct: J'ai pris **le lait** et le pain qui étaient dans le frigo*
     (I took the milk and the bread which were in the fridge)

(26) *J'ai pris le lait et le pain qui étaient dans **un frigo***
     *Correct: J'ai pris le lait et le pain qui étaient dans **le frigo***
     (I took the milk and the bread that were in the fridge)

(27) *J'ai vu un chien dehors; **des chien** a fui*
     *Correct: J'ai vu un chien dehors; **le chien** a fui*
     (*I saw a dog outside; the dog ran away*)

The Influence of Swahili and English Structures
Another challenge revealed in the current data was the influence of L1 Swahili and L2 English, particularly on the use of bare NPs which is rarely in French. Firstly, the fact that Swahili allows bare NPs (a noun phrase without any determiner word of any kind) created a suspicion that the current respondents would have negatively transferred this structure and produced the French structures below:

(28) ***Fille et garçon** cueillir **fruits***
      *Correct: **Une fille** et **un garçon** cueillent **des fruits***
      (*A girl and a boy are picking fruits)

(29) *la fille mettre ***fruits** dans ***panier***
     Correct: La fille a mis **les fruits** dans **le panier**
     (The girl put the fruits in the basket)

(30) ***Enfants** jouent football*
     *Correct: **les enfants** jouent **au football***
     (The children are playing football)

(31) ***Garçons** jouent football*
     *Correct: '**les garçons** jouent au football*
     (The boys are playing football)

(32) **Garçon** *monte* **arbre**
    Correct: **Le garçon** *est monté sur* **l'arbre**
    (The boy climbed the tree)

Secondly, the fact that English features an article system differently from French creates a conviction that the current learners would also have transferred negatively the L2 English zero article to L3 French. In this regard, while L1 Swahili might have transferred the bare NP structure, L2 English might have transferred the zero-article form. The examples below are the L3 French Interlanguage concerning the above arguments. These examples indicate that the incorrect bare NP, which was used by the current respondents in their L3 French interlanguage looks also similar to the L2 English zero article form. It should be noted that, in English, indefinite plural nouns occur with a zero-article form. But the same structure when used in French leads to non-target forms (incorrect forms).

French interlanguage zero-article structures

(33) **Cigarettes**   *ne sont pas bonnes pour la*   *santé*
    NP-PL   NEG *are not good for*   def.   life
    Correct: **des cigarettes** *ne sont pas bonnes pour la santé*
    (Cigarette smoking is dangerous to one's life)

(34) *Il y avait*   **motos**   *dans*   *le*   *parking*
    there were NP-PL   *in*   def.   parking
    Correct: Il y avait **des motos** *dans le parking*
    (There were motorcycles in the parking lot)

English zero-article structures (Ө)

(35) *Cigarettes are not good for health*
    Ө NP-PL are not good for health

(36) *There were motorcycles in the parking*
    there were Ө NP-PL in the parking

A quantitative summary of the use of bare NPs by the current learners is presented below in Table 3.

Table 3: Incorrect Use of Zero Article (Ө) as an Influence of Swahili and English

	In Def Article Context /1140	In Indef Article Context /540
Form Two N=30	83 /7.2%	13 /2.4%
Form Three N=30	94 /8.2%	13 /2.2%
Form Five N=30	30 /2.8%	3 / 0.5%
Kruskal-Wallis Test	($\chi^2(2)$ =30.2, p=.000, Mean ranks=52.9, 58.7, 24.8	($\chi^2(2)$ =4.8, p=.090, Mean ranks=48.9, 48.3, 39.2

Table 3 shows that the incorrect use of the zero articles is a tendency or an interlanguage characteristic at all levels, although it decreases with an increase in the level of instruction (mean ranks= 52.9, 58.7, 24.8 respectively for form two, three and five; p=.000; in definite article contexts) and (mean ranks=48.9, 48.3,

39.2 respectively for form two, three and five; p= .090; in indefinite article contexts). Secondly, the results in the above table also show that the zero article was mostly used where the definite article was obligatory, as opposed to where the indefinite article was to be used. These results might imply that the current learners face difficulties in mapping a definite article form to its meaning or use more often than mapping the indefinite article form. In addition, these results indicate that the structures of both the L1 Swahili and L2 English complicate the influence on the acquisition of French articles.

Inability to Internalize the Complex Nature of French Article Forms
This study's results indicated that the learners resorted to omission, substitution with quantifiers or prepositions, or code-mixing, reflecting their struggle to internalize and accurately apply the nuanced rules of article forms and use in French. In French (as indicated in the introduction section), articles encode distinctions not only of definiteness (definite vs. indefinite) but also of number (singular vs. plural), gender (masculine vs. feminine), and specificity Furthermore, the overlap in form between partitive articles (*du, de la, des*) and prepositional constructions (*de, du, des*) often leads to confusion. Thus, making correct usage it is cognitively demanding for non-native speakers.

Omission in this study was analyzed in all places where the learners did not use any form of an article. Moreover, the other forms that these learners mostly used were the prepositions, *de* (of), *du* (of the), and *des* (of the) which take the same form as partitive article (which were not the focus of the current study) or the plural indefinite article, *des* (some), the number quantifiers such as *un*, *deux*, *trois* (one, two, three) and the code-mixing of some English utterances.

The analysis regarding the use of other forms and omission was done against the obligatory contexts where the respondents were required to supply the definite or indefinite article forms as indicated in Table 4 and supported by some interlanguage utterances below.

Table 4: Raw Counts and Percentages for the Use of Other Forms and Omission

	In Def Contexts /1140		In Indef Contexts /540	
	Other Forms	**Omission**	**Other Forms**	**Omission**
Form Two N=30	134/11.7%	4 / 0.3%	47 /7.5%	0
Form Three N=30	52/4.5%	24 / 2.1%	17 /3.1%	23 /4.2%
Form Five N=30	0	8 / 0.7%	0	3 /0.5%
Kruskal Wallis Test	$(\chi^2(2)=57$ p=.000, ranks=69.7, 45.3, 21.5	$(\chi^2(2)=5.05,$ p=.080, ranks=41.4, 51.6, 43.4	$(\chi^2(2)=27.8,$ p=.000, ranks=60,44,31	$(\chi^2(2)=14.2,$ p=.001, ranks=40,53,42

These results reveal two main things. Firstly, omission and the use of other forms are the interlanguage characteristics of the lower levels. Form two used much more other forms (11.7%, mean rank 69.7; p=.000; in definite article context and 7.5%, mean rank 60, p=.000; in indefinite article context) while form three tended to omit more often than form five by 2.1%, mean rank 51.6, p=.080; in definite article context and by 4.2%, mean rank=53, p=.001; in indefinite article contexts.

These results might suggest that French articles can be fully acquired in a certain higher-level stage of L3 French acquisition than in lower levels. In addition, the use of the partitive article *du* 'some' with the mass noun *lait* 'milk' in the definite context might suggest that the learners learn that partitive articles have to be

used with the mass nouns. Below are some interlanguage examples of the use of other forms by the current learners. The use of other forms led to the production of non-target-like sentences.

(37) *Voici **deux enfants**, garçon et fille*
       *Correct: Voici **les enfants**, le garçon et la fille*
       (Here are the children, the boy and the girl)

(38) *J'ai vu **de chien** dehors*
       *Correct: J'ai vu **un chien** dehors*
        (I saw a dog outside)

(39) *J'ai pris **du lait** qui était dans le frigo*
       *Correct: J'ai pris **le lait** qui était dans le frigo*
       (I took the milk which was in the fridge)

(40) *L'Anglais est parlée dans **du monde** entire*
       *Correct: L'Anglais est parlée dans **le monde** entier*
       (English is spoken around the world)

(41) *J'ai pris le lait qui était dans **de frigo***
       *Correct: J'ai pris le lait qui était dans **le frigo***
       (I took the milk which was in the fridge)

(42) *J'ai pris **de lait** qui était dans le frigo*
       *Correct: J'ai pris **le lait** qui était dans le frigo*
       (I took the milk which was in the fridge)

(43) *Le garçon monte **à arbre***
       *Correct**:** Le garçon monte **à l'arbre***
       (The boy climbed the tree)

(44) *La fille **take some** fruits*
       Correct: La fille a pris les fruits
       (The girl took the fruits)

How do L1 Swahili and L2 English Influence the Acquisition of French Articles as an L3 by Tanzanian Learners?

In the previous subsection, I presented that learners experienced negative transfer from both L1 Swahili and L2 English in their acquisition of French articles as a third language (L3). Swahili, being a language that lacks an article system, provides no foundational framework for learners to transfer positive knowledge about article use. As a result, Swahili speakers tend to omit articles in French altogether, even in contexts where they are grammatically required. Similarly, while English does have a system of definite and indefinite articles, its structure differs from French in terms of gender, number agreement, and the presence of partitive forms. Learners often misapplied English article rules to French, such as overusing the definite article *le* or omitting partitive articles (*du, de la, des*), demonstrating a mismatch in cross-linguistic transfer.

These findings diverge from the assumptions of several L3 acquisition models. For instance, the Cumulative Enhancement Model (Flynn, Foley, and Vinnitskaya 2004) posits that prior languages (L1 and L2) contribute positively to L3 acquisition unless there is structural conflict. In contrast, the Typological Primacy Model (Rothman, 2010; Rothman, 2011) assumes that the language structurally closest to the L3 will serve as the primary source of transfer. However, the current study's results suggest that both prior languages led to non-facilitative transfer, contradicting the notion that earlier-acquired languages necessarily provide scaffolding for L3 development. Instead, the learners drew from both L1 and L2 in ways that complicated

their acquisition of the French article system, illustrating that proximity in form or function does not guarantee positive influence.

In general, I argue that negative transfer can occur simultaneously from both L1 and L2, especially when L2 and L3 are concurrently acquired (Nyakana 2020, 2024) and when neither L1 or L2 offers a close structural match to the target language. This highlights the need for pedagogical approaches that directly address the specific contrasts between French and the learners' prior linguistic systems, rather than assuming automatic benefit from multilingual backgrounds. It also calls for a re-evaluation of L3 acquisition models to better account for multilingual learners whose earlier languages may interact in complex, sometimes competing ways during the acquisition of new grammatical structures

Conclusion and Recommendations

This study examined the challenges faced by Swahili L1 and English L2 learners in Tanzania in acquiring and correctly using articles in French (L3). The study underscored three significant challenges: the inability to distinguish definite versus indefinite articles, the influence of learners' L1 (Swahili) and L2 (English) and the challenge to internalize the complex nature of the French language article system. These challenges triggered the article usage of the learners. Firstly, the findings revealed that learners struggle with the accurate use of both definite and indefinite articles, displaying developmental errors throughout different levels of proficiency. The incorrect use of definite articles where indefinite articles were required, and vice versa, was prevalent across all class levels. Despite increased exposure to French, learners' inaccuracies persisted, suggesting that acquiring French articles is challenging and prone to fossilization, especially with definite articles. Moreover, the learners frequently omitted articles (zero articles) or used alternative forms in contexts where definite or indefinite articles were obligatory. These omissions were more common with definite articles, indicating greater difficulty in mastering the definite article system. The use of inappropriate forms, such as partitive articles or quantifiers, and the code-switching from English, also reflected developmental challenges. The absence of an article system in Swahili and the different article usage patterns in English likely led to negative transfer in French article acquisition. Learners often transferred bare noun phrases (NPs) from Swahili and zero-article structures from English, leading to non-target usage in French.

Thus, I recommend teachers to focus on explicitly teaching the distinctions between definite, indefinite, and zero articles in French. Emphasis should be placed on contrasting these systems with both English and Swahili to mitigate negative transfer effects. Activities that isolate the use of articles in different linguistic contexts may help learners internalize the rules of article use in French. Moreover, language teachers should address the influence of L1 and L2 early in the learning process by drawing attention to how the lack of articles in Swahili and the zero-article forms in English contrast with French. By raising learners' awareness of these structural differences, teachers can prevent the negative transfer that leads to errors in French.

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