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The acquisition of English articles as discourse-internal linguistic devices by Grade 1 isiXhosa L1 learners with English as LOLT

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Abstract
Texture in narratives is important and grows with an increase in age of a child (Tolchinsky 2004: 237). Furthermore, the development of discourse-internal linguistic devices takes place between the ages of four and nine as part of later developing child language skills (Tolchinsky 2004: 237). These devices are maintained by the development of, amongst others, constructions containing articles. Articles aid the introduction of an object or character in a narrative and with the unambiguous referral to this object or character (by means of definite, indefinite, endophoric and exophoric reference) further on in the discourse or narrative. This study aimed to ascertain how well Grade 1 isiXhosa mother tongue speakers from a low socio-economic status (SES) background with English as their language of learning and teaching (LOLT) perform at the beginning and the end of Grade 1 on article comprehension and production tasks. The isiXhosa first language speakers (n = 30) with English as the LOLT were tested twice (at the start of their Grade 1 year, when the youngest participant was 6 years 0 months and at the end of the year, when the oldest participant was 8 years 2 months) on the comprehension and production of articles by means of the *Receptive and Expressive Activities for Language Therapy (REALt)* (Southwood & van Dulm 2012a). The study found that the learners had a better grasp of the comprehension of articles in terms of Rule 1 (the general-general subtype) and Rule 1b (the general-specific subtype) at the end of Grade 1 than at the beginning of Grade 1. However, only the development for the general-specific subtype was significant ($p = 0.0001$), and comprehension of neither of the two subtypes had been mastered by the group as a whole by the end of Grade 1. In terms of the production of articles for Rule 1, there was no growth and no mastery, while for Rule 2, neither the decrease in scores for the part-whole subtype nor the increase for the whole-part subtype was statistically significant, with no mastery by the end of Grade 1. Thus, the learners mastered neither the comprehension nor the production of all subtypes of article distinctions. Such low levels of comprehension and production of articles could negatively affect their comprehension of curriculum material and their ability to express themselves clearly in their LOLT, which could indicate that additional assistance with the acquisition of articles by non-first language (L1) learners of English with English as LOLT would be beneficial.

Keywords: articles, part-whole, general-specific, English L2, isiXhosa L1, texture

1. Introduction

This study focused on the acquisition of articles by children learning through the medium of their second language (L2)[1] in a low socio-economic status (SES) context. Articles are discourse-internal linguistic devices which play a role in texture formation in discourses. These devices form part of the language skills that children who speak a language which has articles need to develop in order to understand texts and to express themselves clearly. The literature review (Section 2) of this paper provides an overview of the reasons for discourses and texture in larger units being important aspects of child language development and indicates how the use of articles plays a role in the growth of such texture. Because this study was situated in the field of L2 acquisition within the educational sphere and in a low-SES context, a section of the literature review also provides an overview of the use of an L2 as LOLT within the South African school system. The last two subsections of the literature review provide an overview of important aspects relating to the description and use of articles in English and the development of articles in child language. Section 3 of the paper outlines the objectives and research questions of the study, and Section 4 provides an overview of the methodology used. In Section 5, the results are presented, and Section 6 contains a discussion thereof, followed by the conclusions drawn from the study, in Section 7.

This study specifically focused on the development of one type of micro-linguistic and discourse-internal structure, namely articles, in order to ascertain if L2 learners of English had mastered the cognitive and psycholinguistic load of articles in the broader context of texture and structure development in discourse comprehension and production at the start of their Grade 1 year. This is a period when the school curriculum requires of them not only to engage with texts but also to produce texts. If articles have not been mastered upon entering Grade 1, the next question to be answered will be whether mastery occurred by the end of their Grade 1 year after several months of exposure to English in the classroom.

2. Literature review

As stated above, the literature will address the importance of the growth of texture in later language development; contextualise articles as discourse-internal linguistic devices and the role articles play in texture growth; describe the language use of children in the South African education system; and outline the relevant properties of articles in English. It will also summarise the rules for the use of articles and the exceptions to these rules, indicating how articles are used to express meaning and how their use contributes to texture growth. Lastly, this section reviews the literature available on first language (L1) and L2 acquisition of articles.

2.1 Later language development and the growth of texture

Children are exposed to language from before birth (Gervain 2018) in the form of language produced by those around them. Such exposure to language has implications not only for initial and early language acquisition but also for later language development which, for the purposes of this study, is seen as language development that takes place between the ages of 4 and 9 years. During this age period, exposure to language, and especially to specific types of language constructions and discourses, provide models on which the development of different aspects of

[1] In this paper, *L2* refers to any language other than the first language.

language – such as vocabulary, grammar, episodic structure, propositional content, and cohesive devices – can be based (Ukrainetz, Justice, Kaderavek, Eisenberg, Gilliam & Harm 2005).

Tolchinsky (2004: 237) discusses four main aspects of language use which are later developing, namely (i) texture, (ii) meaning beyond conventional senses, (iii) dialogue beyond interchange, and (iv) the semantics of alternative worlds. Tolchinsky (2004: 237) indicates not only the importance of texture but also how linguistic texture grows with an increase in age. Texture has been defined differently in various fields of study: definitions include that texture is the process by which meaning is channelled into a digestible current of discourse "instead of spilling out formlessly in every possible direction" (Halliday 1994: 311), and that texture pertains to the interaction of cohesion with other aspects of text organization (Martin 2015). Martin (2015) further states that texture pertains to the patterns of interaction between discourse, semantic, lexico-grammatical, and phonological systems. Texture therefore plays a functional role in communication and part of language development entails acquiring the skill to create texture in discourse. Texture is derived from three fundamental functions for which one uses language, namely to tell stories, to provide descriptions, and to express thoughts (opinions, beliefs, and wishes, for instance).

2.2 Articles as discourse-internal linguistic devices

According to Hegsted (2013), the structure of a discourse, specifically a narrative, and its related texture include the macro- and microstructure of the discourse which in turn includes discourse-internal linguistic devices. Such discourse-internal linguistic devices, which play an important role in texture, pertain to later-developing language structures such as ellipsis, *wh*-questions, passives, and conjunctions, all of which form part of the macro- and microstructures of narratives, descriptions, or arguments – in essence, the language to which a child is exposed and is later expected to produce. Furthermore, and importantly given the focus of this study, other structures such as articles play equally important roles in the comprehension and production of discourses and especially narratives and aid the formation of texture. Articles form part of the discourse-internal linguistic devices that children need to construct narratives and add texture to these narratives (and other descriptions or arguments used later in text creation which forms part of literacy development). Articles are used in this agent-focused manner to introduce an object or character in a narrative and to refer to this object or character in an unambiguous manner (in terms of definite and indefinite reference) in narratives, descriptions, or arguments.

2.3 The Language of Learning and Teaching in the South African education system

That narratives are important in the South African education system is evident from the requirement in the Home Language National Curriculum and Assessment Policy Statement (CAPS) (Department of Basic Education (DBE) 2012) that learners produce narratives in Grade 1 but also from other academic texts (involving descriptions and arguments) that learners will encounter and be required to produce in the course of their schooling. In the Foundation Phase of schooling, the Home Language curriculum focuses on the development of skills in terms of listening and speaking, reading and phonics, writing and handwriting, thinking and reasoning, and language structure and use, which are integrated into all four language skills (listening, speaking, reading, and writing). The CAPS (DBE 2012) outlines the specific activities which should be completed for each of these five components. Relevant to this study is that, for the

listening and speaking component, learners should constantly be developing their listening and speaking skills, not only for the purposes of the subject Home Language but also when studying other subjects. In this regard, the CAPS (DBE 2012) states that "because listening and speaking are crucial to all learning, it is important that these skills are effectively developed early in a child's academic life". Towards this end, and because listening and speaking are precursors to reading and writing, classroom time is allocated specifically to comprehension and production development in the Foundation Phase.

For isiXhosa-speaking learners who receive their education in isiXhosa, the CAPS (DBE 2012) provides time for the development of listening and speaking skills in the L1 as well as the opportunity to learn English as a First Additional Language. Instructional time allocated to languages in the CAPS are 10 hours per week for Grades R to 2, whereas a maximum of 8 hours and a minimum of 7 hours per week are allocated for Home Language and a minimum of 2 hours and a maximum of 3 hours for Additional Languages in Grade 1 and Grade 2 (DBE 2012: 8). The DBE (2012) does not prescribe how to break down the minimum and maximum time into the different components, although the CAPS does provide a proposed breakdown, as shown in Table 1.

Table 1. Proposed instructional time allocations for Grade 1 for Home Language and Additional Language subjects according to the DBE (2012).

Language components		**Grade 1 Home Language minimum hours breakdown (7 hours)**	**Grade 1 Home Language maximum hours breakdown (8 hours)**	**Grade 1 Additional language minimum hours breakdown (2 hours)**	**Grade 1 Additional language maximum hours breakdown (3 hours)**
Listening and speaking		15 minutes per day for 3 days (Total: 45 minutes)	15 minutes per day for 4 days (Total: 1 hour)	1 hour 30 minutes	
Phonics		15 minutes per day for 5 days (Total: 1 hour 15 minutes)	15 minutes per day for 5 days (Total: 1 hour 15 minutes)	30 minutes	1 hour 15 minutes
Reading	Shared reading	15 minutes per day for 3 days (Total: 45 minutes)	15 minutes per day for 5 days (Total: 1 hour 15 minutes)		
	Group reading	30 minutes per day (2 groups each for 15 minutes) for 5 days (Total: 2 hour 30 minutes)	30 minutes per day (2 groups each for 15 minutes) for 5 days (Total: 2 hour 30 minutes)		

Handwriting	15 minutes per day for 4 days (Total: 1 hour)	15 minutes per day for 4 days (Total: 1 hour)	n.a	n.a
Writing	15 minutes per day for 3 days (45 minutes)	20 minutes per day for 3 days (1 hour)	n.a	15 minutes

However, parents of children who speak an African language often enrol their children in schools with English as the LOLT (sometimes the L2 or third language of the child and at other times a language with which the child is not familiar at all). This is done in an attempt to increase their children's social mobility. It is a common belief amongst South African parents that children will be better equipped for their future if they receive their education through the medium of English (Venketsamy & Miller 2021). These parents choose schools with English as LOLT because they regard an education in English as essential for nurturing the necessary "aspirant dispositions" that will allow entry into higher-SES employment and lifestyles (see Fataar 2007). Potgieter and Southwood (2016: 88, 89) provide an overview of the literature on the effects of SES on child language development, these effects being specifically relevant to the South African context in which large discrepancies are apparent in material and other resources available to different populations (see Nel (2015, 2023) and Nel and Southwood (2016) for studies in the South African context, but also see Southwood, White, Brookes, Pascoe, Ndhambi, Yalala, Mahura, Mössmer, Oosthuizen, Brink, and Alcock (2021) for a South African study which found no SES effect on early language skills). Furthermore, Potgieter and Southwood (2016) state that the majority of studies that indicate a distinct connection between SES and language development have been conducted with monolingual children and that studies with bilingual children do not shed an equally clear light on this connection. Nel and Southwood (2016) further specify that children from low-SES backgrounds who have their L2 as LOLT may be at an even greater disadvantage than children in low-SES contexts who have their L1 as their LOLT. Poverty-situated children with a non-L1 as LOLT receive language input which often lacks certain complex language structures but which is also limited in terms of quantity (Huttenlocher, Vasilyeva, Waterfall, Vevea & Hedges 2007). This study thus addresses this specific knowledge gap by investigating the acquisition of articles by L2 learners from low-SES contexts who have their L2 as LOLT.

2.4 Aspects of articles in English

Although articles can be seen as marginal surface markers and are non-essential in some languages (such as Russian and American Sign Language; see Karmiloff-Smith 1979: 22) and specifically in isiXhosa, where determinedness is derived from the context, articles do fulfil important functions in other languages such as English. Articles, as defined by Richards and Schmidt (2002: 32), are function words used in conjunction with a noun, indicating whether the noun refers to something definite or indefinite as well as to something specific or general.

Articles have been studied in formal linguistics since at least 1957 (see, amongst others, Chomsky 1957, Gleason 1961, Thomas 1965, Dubois & Dubois-Charlier 1970, Spangler 1975). In generative grammar, articles (as one type of determiner) are seen to limit the number or to make definite. Here it is important to mention the occurrence, or rather non-occurrence, of articles in isiXhosa (isiXhosa only has demonstratives (Du Plessis & Visser 1992: 280)) as the participants in this study are L1 isiXhosa speakers.

In English, independent words are used for expressing (in)determinedness (see Krámsy 1972). The two types of articles used in English to express determinedness versus indeterminedness are the definite article *the* and the indefinite article *a(n)*, respectively. According to Greenbaum (1996: 164), "the definite article is used when a speaker (or writer) assumes that the hearer (or reader) can identify the reference of a noun phrase [NP]". The concept of definiteness is expressed in English where the reference of the NP is clear. The article *the* in Examples (1) and (2) below refers to a specific girl or specific girls and a specific boy or specific boys.

(1) *The girl likes the boy.*
(2) *The girls like the boys.*

Greenbaum (1996: 165) states that when indefinite articles are used, "an assumption [about the reference of an NP] cannot be made". Indefiniteness in English is indicated by the use of the indefinite article *a(n)*, as illustrated in *A girl likes a boy / an apple.* Here, *a girl* refers to any girl, *a boy* to any boy, and *an apple* to any apple.

Although only two types of articles are used in English to refer to entities in the real world, Greenbaum (1996: 243) identifies three sets of contrasts for NP reference, namely (i) definite versus indefinite, (ii) specific versus non-specific (the latter also referred to as "general"), and (iii) generic versus non-generic. The items of the assessment instrument used in this study (the *REALt*) (Southwood & van Dulm 2012b) only assess definite versus non-definite and specific versus general, and therefore only these two distinctions will be discussed below.

In the case of definite versus indefinite, one main rule applies, which is that the use of a definite or indefinite article is dependent on the identification of the referent of an NP. In (3), for example, reference is made to a book.

(3) *I want to buy a book about flowers. The book has wonderful illustrations and helpful hints.*

In the first sentence of this example, the referent of the book is unknown or indefinite,[2] and thus an indefinite article is used. However, in the second sentence, a definite article is used because the second mention refers back to the first mention. The reference to the book is thus no longer indefinite, as the book was already mentioned, and now the article *the* is used to indicate that reference is being made to a specific book, the same one referred to directly prior. Here the link with the function of articles as texture formation devices is visible as reference occurs extrasententially.

The second set of contrasts, specific versus general, occurs in conjunction with the distinction of definite versus indefinite. When reference is made in terms of specific or general references, the use of definite or indefinite articles, as mentioned above, is incorporated. Accordingly, Rule 1 states that the indefinite *a* refers to any object in a series whereas the definite *the* refers to a specific object, namely the object which was previously mentioned. Roeper (2007: 69) summarises the contrast between the use of definite and non-definite articles as Rule 1a:

[2] Note that although *a book* is an indefinite reference, it is also a specific reference (the general versus specific contrast is to be discussed below) as the speaker is not looking for any book about flowers but specifically to one known to the speaker.

(4) Rule 1a:
General *a* becomes specific *the* once the item has been introduced.

However, this rule does not apply in all cases. An NP has specific reference when it, for example, refers to a particular person, place, or thing. Thus, in Example (5), specific reference is made by means of a definite article despite not having first used an indefinite article.

(5) *Lucy was tired and decided to sit on the couch and just listen to the radio.*

In the case of (5), there is no need to state that there was a room with a couch and a radio in it. The semantic and pragmatic rules applied by means of linguistic and situational reference, respectively, thus also play a role in the contrast between specific and non-specific reference (Quirk, Greenbaum, Leech & Svartvik 1972: 154-155).

Different contexts also exist in which the general *a* can follow a previously introduced item if the reference is made to another separate object. Here Rule 1b applies:

(6) Rule 1b:
General *a* (referring to object B) can follow a previously introduced item (object A) when objects A and B have different references.

There are thus two sets of references for two separate objects, as illustrated in Example (7) below.

(7) *Lucy ordered a book* (object A), *and a book* (object B) *has just arrived.*

Thus, there is a difference between (i) the reference to one object which moves from general to specific in Rule 1 (general-specific) and (ii) two separate references to two distinct objects in Rule 1b (general-general).

A second exception to Rule 1 involves that some definite articles may appear before they have been introduced by an indefinite article. For this reason, Roeper (2007: 75-76) proposed a second rule (Rule 2):

(8) Rule 2:
If an item is part of a larger whole, the specific *the* is used for the item once general *a* has been used to introduce the whole.

In Example (9), the sentence is grammatical because the item following the definite article (*dial*) is part of an item that was previously introduced with an indefinite article (*a heater*).

(9) *If a heater is too hot, turn down the dial.*

Roeper (2007: 75) states that although the part-whole relation seems more complex than simply referring back to the whole object, the process of acquiring Rule 2 may be much easier than the rule itself sounds. By looking at the distinction between general-specific and part-whole, it seems that some children indicate knowledge of the use of the definite article *the* in the part-whole relationships more readily than knowledge of the use of *the* in the general-specific

relationships. Ultimately, this distinction between the general-specific and part-whole relations shows how the acquisition path may not simply progress from simple to complex, since in the general-specific relationship *a* introduces or creates the need for the use of *the,* whereas in the part-whole relationship *the* is often used without the prior use of *a*.

Lastly, despite the fact that articles are defined as function words used in conjunction with a noun, nouns and NPs can also occur on their own, i.e., with no article or a zero article, as bare nouns. According to Greenbaum (1996: 474), zero articles have been hypothesised for plural nouns (e.g., *boys*) and for non-count nouns (e.g., *sugar*). This distinction is important to bear in mind, as the participants in the present study at times produced plural and non-count nouns as responses instead of the targeted NPs containing articles.

Roeper (2007: 70) states that the abstract intricacies associated with article comprehension and production include "a mental transformation [in which] language expresses a major mental shift with tiny words. A child may have the concepts, but when learning to speak and understand, [they] must connect [these concepts] to the tiny indicator words too". Although English has a small set of articles, certain constructions containing these "tiny indicator words" are classified as later developing constructions because children must make this "major mental shift" (i.e., they need to acquire abovementioned Rules 1 and 2) before their use of articles can be adult-like. It is also important to note that with the application of the abovementioned rules, articles may involve intra- and extrasentential reference, thus aiding with the formation of texture in a discourse or narrative.

2.4 The development of articles in child language

The literature available on the development of comprehension and production of articles among typically developing L1 children is limited. Early studies by Maratsos (1976) and Warden (1973, 1976) focused on the acquisition of English definite and indefinite articles – in the case of the latter author, specifically amongst older children. These studies as well as that of Bresson, Bouvier, Damequin, Depreux, Hardy and Platone (1970) will be reviewed below, followed by more recent studies.

Bresson et al. (1970) studied French-speaking 4- and 5-year-olds to determine the difference between (i) using definite and indefinite articles for naming objects, (ii) making anaphoric reference to the objects named, and (iii) making a second anaphoric reference to all or part of the collection (Karmiloff-Smith 1979: 34). Bresson et al. (1970, in Karmiloff-Smith 1979: 37) found that their participants did not have any difficulty naming objects and that they were successful in using definite articles to refer to one person or to a whole group. The use of indefinite articles to name a subclass of these groups, however, proved to be more difficult, with participants continuing to use the definite article rather than the required indefinite article (Karmiloff-Smith 1979: 38). Results for single indefinite reference were slightly better than for plural indefinite reference, and it was concluded that 4- to 5-year-old French-speaking children predominantly use definite referring expressions.

Maratsos (1976) studied the comprehension and production of articles by English-speaking 2- and 4-year-olds, making use of tasks such as storytelling, acting out with dolls, as well as imitation and expansion of the experimenter's story with a missing determiner. The tasks were designed to narrow the child's responses down to only those including the articles *the* and *a* as

specific and general referential devices. Even though methodological challenges in the elicitation of the articles arose – such as children pointing rather than answering verbally (see Karmiloff-Smith 1979: 38-39) – Maratsos (1976) could draw conclusions from these and other experimental tasks. The first conclusion is that competence is established very early as concerns specific and non-specific reference. Secondly, while children produce indefinite NPs to refer generically or to refer to any member of a class, minimally contrastive situations (where a certain referent had been established for them) also lead to the production of definite NPs. A period thus exists, particularly before the age of 4 years, where the definite *the* is overused by children in contexts that require the use of the indefinite *a* (Zdorenko & Paradis 2007: 483). Brown (1973), however, along with Maratsos (1976) and Schaeffer and Matthewson (2005), adds that the child does not factor in the listener's knowledge in terms of the pragmatics associated with the specific reference but merely the syntactic and semantic knowledge of the speaker. (The study entailed grouping two articles according to their correct use in context rather than considering the difference between definite and indefinite articles.) This exclusion of pragmatics occurs despite the child having early productive control over article contrasts, i.e., over the specific versus non-specific distinction (Karmiloff-Smith 1979: 41).

Warden (1973, 1976) studied English-speaking children's ability to incorporate definite and indefinite articles in their expressions of reference. His participants included 3- to 9-year-olds and adults in some experiments, and 4-year-olds in other, separate experiments. He studied the use of the indefinite article to introduce a new referent to the context, as well as the use of the definite article to refer to an already identified referent (so-called "anaphoric definite reference") (Karmiloff-Smith 1979: 39). Two important results from the Warden studies contribute to our knowledge about articles in child language acquisition: firstly, children tend to use the definite reference whether the referent of their expression has been identified or not. It is only at the age of 9 years that children can reliably identify their referents for their listener (Karmiloff-Smith 1979: 40). Secondly, despite the fact that only 9-year-olds could reliably identify their referents, almost every child also used some indefinite expressions of identification. Accordingly, Warden argues that the context in which children hear these expressions does not provide the ideal environment to discriminate the apparent rules for article usage. There are thus indications of inadequate learning of a rule of article usage because children between the ages of 5 and 9 years inconsistently introduce referents with indefinite expressions (Karmiloff-Smith 1979: 40). Garton (1983) specified after a survey of the studies by Brown (1973), Maratsos (1976) and Warden (1976) that most functions of articles are present by age 7 or 8 years, but that the use of the indefinite article for introducing new matter into the discourse only appears at approximately 9 years.

More recently, Abu-Akel, Bailey and Thum (2004) found that in spontaneous speech, typically developing English-speaking children begin to use articles at the start of the two-word stage (thus around 1 year 6 months to 2 years 0 months), where the indefinite *a* is used rather than the definite *the* in the early stages (up to about 3 years 0 months). The opposite is generally found in elicited data, as was the case in the studies mentioned above (see Karmiloff-Smith 1985). However, Abu-Akel et al. (2004) found, in accordance with Brown (1973), Maratsos (1976), and Schaeffer and Matthewson (2005), that the omission of articles from obligatory syntactic positions is common before 3 years 0 months, after which it is uncommon.

Southwood and van Dulm (2012b: 13) assessed 57 English-speaking 4- to 8-year-olds and 31 Afrikaans-speaking 4- to 9-year-olds with the *REALt*. These children were all typically

developing and middle class. They found that the comprehension of general versus specific articles was largely successful among the participants from both language groups, with almost a 100% correct response to follow-ups across all the age groups (with the possible exception of the Afrikaans-speaking 4-year-olds). For the production of articles, they assessed part-whole and general-specific relationships (see section 3.1 for an exposition of these two types of relationships). For part-whole, all age groups in both language groups were successful at producing the target articles. The results for general-specific articles indicated that the items assessing this relationship were more challenging than the items assessing part-whole relationships. Target responses to the general-specific items were only achieved after incorrect responses were followed up by the experimenters. Southwood and van Dulm (2012b: 14) attribute this to the relatively open nature of the production task, where a range of responses could be valid. Conclusions from this study include that the definite (specific) article *the* (and its Afrikaans counterpart *die*) proved to be decidedly more taxing for all age groups in comparison to the indefinite article *a* (and its Afrikaans counterpart *'n*), a result that concurred, to an extent, with that of Abu-Akel et al. (2004) who found that *a* is preferred over *the* by very young children. Southwood and van Dulm (2012b: 15) also found that non-target responses such as the use of bare nouns, pronoun combinations, quantifier combinations, adjective-noun combinations, and no responses instead of the use of targeted articles were more common than completely incorrect responses (such as the use of the incorrect article – for example, the indefinite *a bike* instead of the definite *the bike*, or the definite *the mop* instead of the indefinite *a mop*).

In a more recent study, Southwood and White (2021) investigated the use of articles, with a focus on the development of part-whole and general-specific distinctions in Afrikaans- and English-speaking L1 children using the Afrikaans and South African English versions of the *Diagnostic Evaluation of Language Variation*. They state that previous studies that compared the development of these distinctions yielded conflicting results but that their results correspond with the results of Garton (1983), Karmiloff-Smith (1979), and Warden (1976), which indicated that articles do not develop at the same rate. Southwood and White (2021) showed that even 9-year-old children could not master all items. Specifically, they found that the children struggled more with the part-whole distinction across the age groups of 4 to 9 years than with the general-specific distinction, indicating that part-whole distinctions are mastered later than general-specific distinctions.

Furthermore, Meylan, Frank, Roy, and Levy (2017) as well as Valian, Solt, and Stewart (2009) concluded that English article production appears early in child language development, as early as from the onset of language production onwards, and similar findings are available for other languages, including for Swedish (see Bohnacker 1997).

Zdorenko and Paradis (2007: 483) point out that, generally, the same kinds of errors made during L1 acquisition of English – as described in the studies of Brown (1973), Maratsos (1976), Schaeffer and Matthewson (2005), and Southwood and van Dulm (2012b) above, amongst others – have been documented for L2 learners of English. Huebner (1985), Lu (2001), Ionin and Wexler (2003), and Ionin, Ko, and Wexler (2004) have found that L2 learners use bare nouns in inappropriate contexts, as well as substitute or overuse the definite *the* in contexts where the indefinite *a* is required (Zdorenko & Paradis 2007: 483). L2 learners of English also consistently have trouble with the use of articles until late stages of acquisition and often do not ever attain a native-like level of performance. The types of errors made with reference to articles

have been consistent in the sense that (i) different L2 learners struggle with the same types of article usage, such as the use of bare nouns or the overuse/substitution of definite articles, and (ii) these same types of article usage are problematic for L1 learners. Zdorenko and Paradis (2007: 483) thus point out that "while there is agreement that all English language learners have difficulty in using articles (at least initially), there is no consensus as to what the reasons for this difficulty are, and whether some reasons could be the same in L1 and L2 acquisition".

Most of the studies on the L2 acquisition of English have been performed amongst adult learners and/or L1 speakers of languages that do not contain articles. There is thus a dearth of research on the acquisition of articles by child L2 learners (Zdorenko & Paradis 2007: 483). Zdorenko and Paradis (2007: 483) studied the use of articles in 16 English L2 children, from a variety of L1s, with a mean age of 5 years 4 months, by means of elicited narratives. The children were divided into two groups according to whether their L1 makes use of articles ([+article]) or not ([-article]). The study was aimed at (i) determining if the initial state in child L2 acquisition shows L1 transfer in terms of article use, (ii) determining whether articles are acquired in the same sequence regardless of whether the L1 is a [+ article] or [- article] language, and (iii) comparing the rate of article overuse in the two groups. They reported that, for both groups, the accuracy rates of the use of the definite *the* in obligatory contexts was consistently elevated in comparison to the use of the indefinite *a* in obligatory contexts. The learners thus achieved more accuracy with definite article usage than with indefinite article usage. It was also found that L1 background did not have a significant influence on the accuracy of article choices (Zdorenko & Paradis 2007: 487). The types of errors found by Zdorenko and Paradis (2007: 488-489) include (i) the overuse of the definite *the* by both [+article] and [-article] groups; (ii) the use of null articles, specifically by the [-article] group, in both definite and indefinite contexts; and (iii) the correct use of articles where children stop using null articles and start inserting an article in obligatory contexts, which occurs even for the [-article] group after the age of 6 years 4 months. The types of errors found and the ages at which these errors were eliminated indicate that these errors (i) are more frequent during the early stages of English L2 acquisition (between the ages of 5 years 4 months and 6 years 4 months) and (ii) are eliminated after Round 3 of exposure in the study (where children received between 9 to 22 months of exposure) (Zdorenko & Paradis 2007: 485-486).

3. Objectives

This study aimed to ascertain how well Grade 1 isiXhosa mother tongue speakers from a low-SES context who have English as their LOLT performed at the beginning and the end of Grade 1 on article comprehension and production tasks.

4. Methodology

This section provides an overview of the methodology used during the study by providing information on the assessment materials, the procedures used to collect data, and the data analysed. The last subsection provides a detailed overview of the participants who took part in the study.

4.1 Materials

A group of isiXhosa L1 children with English as the LOLT were tested twice (once at the start and once at the end of their Grade 1 year) on the comprehension and production of articles. The comprehension and production of articles were measured by means of the *Receptive and Expressive Activities for Language Therapy* created by Southwood and van Dulm (2012b). This assessment material for articles is contained in a booklet (Southwood & van Dulm 2012a), and tasks in the booklet include a 10-item picture selection task for comprehension that focuses on the general-specific distinction, including general-specific and general-general subtypes (with five items for each subtype) as well as a 10-item question answering picture task for production, including general-specific and general-general subtypes (with five items for each subtype), with a total of 20 items for the general-specific distinction. A further 10-item question answering picture task assesses the part-whole distinction in terms of part-whole and whole-part distinctions for production (again with five items for each subtype). In total, there were 10 comprehension and 20 production items.

4.2 Data collection site

The study was conducted in one primary school with English as LOLT. The selection criteria for the study school included that it be situated in a community with low SES, be a non-fee-paying schools, and have isiXhosa L1 speakers learning in English as an L2. The school is situated in a rural area 10km from the nearest town centre, Stellenbosch. At the time of data collection, its 923 learners lived in several neighbouring informal settlements or on adjacent farms. The school had a National Quintile of 1 and one teacher per 34 learners.

4.3 Data collection procedure

Data were collected from each learner individually in his/her LOLT by two fieldworkers. The article booklet of the *REALt* was administered to the participants at the beginning of the first school term and they were reassessed in the same manner in the fourth term. Responses were documented on paper scoresheets. Where spontaneous amendments occurred, the participant's last response was documented. If a targeted response was given, the fieldworker made generic encouraging comments such as "Good job!" or "Well done". In the case of an incorrect or non-target response, the fieldworker followed up with a supplementary and more detailed version of the initial stimulus. Correct responses to the supplementary follow-up were scored as correct. Responses were read in from the scoresheets to custom-designed Excel sheets, after which all data entry was checked for accuracy.

4.4 Data analysis procedure

The following were calculated separately for comprehension and production of each article type, with a score of 90% or more taken as an indication of mastery (see Zdorenko and Paradis (2007) for a similar level of mastery):

(i) the percentage of responses correct for each subtype per learner,
(ii) the average of these percentages for each subtype, and
(iii) the average percentage of all comprehension and production subtypes jointly.

The Wilcoxon Matched Pairs Test was used to compare the data collected in the first and in the fourth term, with $p < 0.05$ as significance level. The direction of significance (whether scores were better at the beginning or the end of the year) was determined by means of inspecting Box and Whiskers plots. The software programme used for statistical analyses was Statistica 12.

4.5 Participant information

Of the 30 participants (age range 6 years 0 months to 7 years 6 months at the time of first data collection, and 6 years 9 months to 8 years 2 months at the time of second data collection, with a mean age of 6 years 6 months over the entire data collection time; 16 female, 14 male), 21 had been exposed to only isiXhosa in their homes, one to isiXhosa and isiZulu, seven to isiXhosa and English, and one to isiXhosa, English, and Afrikaans. Thirteen of the participants were born in Stellenbosch and had never moved away. The geographic region in which they had received input and in which language acquisition had taken place had thus been constant and homogenous in contrast to what was the case for the other nine participants. Of these nine, four were born in Cape Town, three in Johannesburg and two in the Eastern Cape. The ninth participant originally lived elsewhere in the Western Cape but the town or city was not specified. No data on place of birth were available for the remaining eight participants. The exposure to local languages and language varieties are heterogeneous in the participant group which might have affected their L2 acquisition. The study design did not however allow for division of participants into smaller groups to compare how (if at all) their different language backgrounds affected the results. Given the small number of participants per language combination, such a comparison could deliver unreliable results. Furthermore, many parents who enrol their children in schools with English as LOLT are eager to portray their children as proficient speakers of English for fear of having their child moved to a school that has their child's L1 instead of English as LOLT. Those seven children who were reported to be exposed to English in their homes did not fare better than their peers reportedly exposed to English at home. Reasons for this should be investigated but fall outside of the scope of this study. A decision was thus made to treat the 30 participants as one group in the analysis and presentation of results and when drawing conclusions, despite these participants' purportedly heterogeneous language backgrounds.

In terms of the exposure to languages outside of the home, the participants formed a heterogeneous group: 18 attended a playschool or pre-Grade 1 educational facility (21 facilities in total) during their early childhood years; no data on pre-Grade 1 education were available for the remaining 12 participants. For seven of these 18 participants, isiXhosa was the language of instruction during their preschool years, for two English, for one Afrikaans, for another one a combination of English and isiXhosa, for three a combination of Afrikaans, English, and isiXhosa, and for one a combination of Afrikaans and English. No data on the pre-Grade 1 language of instruction were available for the remaining three.

5. Results

5.1 Comprehension of articles in English

The mean percentage of correct responses for all comprehension items increased from 45% to 77% from the start to the end of Grade 1. This increase was statistically significant ($p = 0.0002$) and Box and Whiskers plots showed the change to be in a positive direction, indicating

significant development in the comprehension of articles. These results are summarised in Table 2, with the ceiling for mastery set at 90% correct responses for the participant group as a whole.

Table 2. Comparison of English article comprehension scores at the beginning and end of Grade 1: Descriptive statistics

	Beginning of Gr 1				**End of Gr 1**				**Beginning versus End of Gr 1***	
Type	Mean %	Min %	Max %	Std. Dev.	Mean %	Min %	Max %	Std. Dev.	p-value for comparison beginning vs. end Gr 1	% difference between mean scores
General-general	67	0	100	0.304	82	0	100	0.336	0.1500	+15
General-specific	23	0	80	0.226	72	0	100	0.386	**0.0001**	+49
Comprehension TOTAL score	45	0	70	0.167	77	10	100	0.320	**0.0002**	+32

*Wilcoxon Matched Pairs Test; direction as indicated by Box and Whiskers plots.

The percentage correct score at the beginning of the year for the general-general items was 67%, and for the general-specific items 23%, indicating that the learners fared better with the former than with the latter at the start of Grade 1. At the end of the year, the percentage correct responses for the comprehension of the general-general distinction was similar to that of the general-specific distinction: Although the mean percentage correct score was still higher for the general-general (82%) than for the general-specific distinction (72%), the difference between mean percentage correct for the two subtypes decreased from 44% at the beginning of the year to 10% at the end of the year. The fact that both subtypes of distinctions showed an increase in correct responses from the beginning to the end of the year (with a 15% increase for the general-general and 49% for the general-specific distinction) indicates that both underwent some development during the Grade 1 year. It thus appears that the learners had a better grasp of Rule 1 and Rule 1b at the end of Grade 1 than at the beginning of Grade 1. However, only the development for the general-specific subtype was significant ($p = 0.0001$) and comprehension of neither of the two subtypes had been mastered by the group as a whole by the end of Grade 1.

5.2 Production of articles in English

In terms of total production score for the general-general and part-whole types combined, no significant change ($p = 0.471$) occurred from the beginning of Grade 1 (mean score of 20%) to the end of Grade 1 (mean score of 18%). When analysing the production of articles in terms of Rule 1 (for the general-general subtype) and Rule 2 (for the part-whole subtype) separately, more subtle differences and developmental patterns become apparent, not visible from the overall production score, as discussed in the sections below.

5.2.1 Production of Rule 1 (general-general and general-specific subtypes)

In terms of production of the general-general subtype, the mean score was the same at both times of testing, namely 28% correct responses. The mean percentage correct for the general-specific subtype was 22% at the beginning of the year, compared to 12% at the end of the year. Despite this change being significant (p = 0.036), it does not indicate development but rather regression because participants fared better at the beginning than the end of the year. Results for the production of Rule 1 are provided in Table 3.

Table 3. Comparison of English article production scores at the beginning and end of Grade 1: Descriptive statistics for Rule 1 (in percentages)

	Beginning of Gr 1				**End of Gr 1**				**Beginning versus End of Gr 1***	
Type	Mean %	Min %	Max %	Std. dev.	Mean %	Min %	Max %	Std. dev.	p-value for comparison between beginning & end Gr 1	% difference between mean scores
General-general	28	0	80	0.267	28	0	80	0.252	0.8202	0
General-specific	22	0	80	0.227	12	0	100	0.224	**0.0364**	-10

*Wilcoxon Matched Pairs Test; direction as indicated by Box and Whiskers plots.

As the percentage of correct responses is very low, the types of errors made by the learners in terms of the production of Rule 1 were analysed (see Table 4).

Table 4. Average group percentage for English article production: Rule 1 error types

Type	**Beginning of Gr 1 group average (%)**	**End of Gr 1 group average (%)**
General-general item response types		
Percentage of no responses	30	8
Percentage of wrong article	22	60
Percentage of no article (bare noun)	14	24
Percentage of inappropriate/irrelevant responses	34	8
General-specific item response type		
Percentage of no responses	20	3
Percentage of wrong article	22	73
Percentage of no article (bare noun)	43	24
Percentage of inappropriate/irrelevant responses	15	0

Four different error types were identified, namely (i) no response given, (ii) the use of the wrong article, (iii) the use of no article (bare noun), and (iv) inappropriate/irrelevant responses. Whereas the percentage of inappropriate/irrelevant responses and no responses decreased from the beginning to the end of Grade 1 for both subtypes, the percentage of wrong article responses

increased for both. Furthermore, whereas no-article responses increased by 10% for the general-general subtype, it decreased by 19% for the general-general subtype.

The accuracy in applying Rule 1b in article production decreased significantly from the start to the end of Grade 1 for the general-specific subtype. The manner in which these items were responded to also changed over the course of the year. Note that for both the general-general and general-specific subtypes, the substantial variation between error types decreased from the beginning to the end of Grade 1, with the use of wrong articles for both subtypes becoming the prominent error type by the end of the school year.

In conclusion, no noteworthy development occurred for the production of either article subtypes over the course of Grade 1 but the participants fared better with the general-general subtype at both data collection times. Neither subtype had a percentage of 90 or more correct responses and thus neither was fully acquired by the end of Grade 1. However, the change in the types of errors made indicates that learners' knowledge of articles did not remain stagnant.

5.2.2 Production of Rule 2 (part-whole and whole-part subtypes)

An average of 14% of the production items of the part-whole subtype of articles were responded to correctly at the beginning of the year. At the end of the year, this decreased to 8%. For the whole-part subtype, the average percentage correct responses increased from 16 to 23%. However, neither of these two changes (the decrease for part-whole or the increase for whole-part) was statistically significant (see Table 5).

Table 5. Comparison of English article production scores at the beginning and end of Grade 1: Descriptive statistics for Rule 2 (in percentages)

	Beginning of Gr 1				**End of Gr 1**				**Beginning versus End of Gr 1***	
Type	Mean %	Min %	Max %	Std. dev.	Mean %	Min %	Max %	Std. dev.	p-value for comparison between beginning & end of Gr 1	% difference between mean scores
Part-whole	14	0	100	0.239	8	0	60	0.177	0.5383	-6
Whole-part	16	0	60	0.189	23	0	80	0.248	0.4080	+7

*Wilcoxon Matched Pairs Test; direction as indicated by Box and Whiskers plots.

When considering the types of errors made (see Table 6), it becomes apparent that the percentage of inappropriate/irrelevant responses decreased for both subtypes, whereas the percentage of no responses decreased only for the part-whole subtype and remained relatively stable for the whole-part subtype. Furthermore, the wrong-article response increased for both subtypes. Whereas no-article responses increased for the whole-part subtype, it decreased for the part-whole subtype.

Table 6. Average group percentage for English article production Rule 2 error types

Type	Beginning of Gr 1 group average (%)	End of Gr 1 group average (%)
Part-whole item response types		
Percentage of no responses	19	9
Percentage of wrong article	24	72
Percentage of no article (bare noun)	32	16
Percentage of inappropriate/irrelevant responses	25	3
Whole-part item response types		
Percentage of no responses	34	30
Percentage of wrong article	5	51
Percentage of no article (bare noun)	4	11
Percentage of inappropriate/irrelevant responses	37	8

In conclusion, (i) some development occurred for the production of the whole-part subtype of articles, as the average percentage of correct responses increased slightly from the beginning to the end of the year, but (ii) no development occurred for the part-whole subtype, as there was a slight decrease in the average percentage of correct responses. The average percentage is however higher for whole-part than for the part-whole at both data collection times. Therefore, learners fared better with the whole-part subtype at both the start and at the end of Grade 1. The percentage of correct responses of the participants as a group was not 90% or more for any of the two subtypes, and thus neither was fully acquired by the end of Grade 1. From the change in the distribution of types of errors made, it is again clear that even though the participants' knowledge of articles, as indicated by their production, was not yet fully developed, it did not remain stagnant either.

6. Discussion

From the literature reviewed on the development of articles in child language, there is no agreed-upon age at which articles are fully acquired. General points of consensus from the studies reviewed however appear to be the following:

(i) There is still incomplete mastery of article usage between the ages of 5 and 9 years (Karmiloff-Smith 1979: 40).
(ii) Omission of articles from obligatory syntactic positions commonly occurs before 3 years 0 months, after which it is uncommon (Brown 1973, Maratsos 1976, Abu-Akel et al. 2004, Schaeffer & Matthewson 2005).
(iii) With previous *REALt* testing, all age groups (the youngest being 4 years) successfully produced part-whole relations (Southwood & van Dulm 2012b).
(iv) The production of Rule 1 and 1b relations (general-general and general-specific) is to some extent more challenging than the production of Rule 2 relations (part-whole and whole-part) (Southwood & van Dulm 2012b).
(v) L1 learners achieve more accuracy with the definite than the indefinite article (Zdorenko & Paradis 2007: 483). Note however that for English-speaking participants of all age

groups in the Southwood and van Dulm (2012b) study, the definite article was decidedly more taxing.

(vi) Error types such as the use of bare nouns, pronoun combinations, quantifier combinations, adjective-noun combinations, and no responses are more common than completely or outrightly incorrect or inappropriate responses (Southwood & van Dulm 2012b).

(vii) L2 learners of English consistently have trouble with the use of articles until very late stages of acquisition (Zdorenko & Paradis 2007: 483).

(viii) L2 learners of English use bare nouns in inappropriate contexts and substitute or overuse the definite *the* in contexts where *a(n)* is required (Huebner 1985, Lu 2001, Ionin & Wexler 2003, Ionin et al. 2004).

(ix) The use of null articles occurs in both definite and indefinite contexts (Zdorenko & Paradis (2007: 488-489).

Regarding point (i) above, the results of the present study show that the learners of English as L2 (aged 6 years 9 months to 8 years 2 months) had not yet mastered articles completely. Their use of bare nouns was still fairly common and therefore the second point of consensus was not supported by this study. Whereas with previous *REALt* testing (Southwood and van Dulm 2012a) all age groups successfully produced the part-whole relation, in this study the opposite was found: the L2 speakers of English (in contrast to Southwood and van Dulm's (2012b) L1 speakers) showed no mastery of the part-whole.

The literature also pointed to the fact that the production of Rule 1 relations is to some extent more challenging than the production of Rule 2 relations (see general consensus point (iv)). In this study, the contrary was found in that the production data indicated that at the end of Grade 1 where Rule 1 was better applied than Rule 2, as Rule 1 showed higher scores.

Regarding the fifth general point of consensus, the results of this study also indicated that definite articles were challenging for the learners. The learners also showed difficulties in terms of comprehending the general-specific relations where they had to identify the definite object. This was also the case with the production types, as learners fared slightly better with the production of the general-general subtype at the beginning and end of Grade 1 than with the general-specific subtype. Overall, the learners found the indefinite article easier to use than the definite article, based on their scores for the comprehension and production of Rule 1. This points to the second part of general consensus point (vi), where the use of the definite article proved to be decidedly more taxing for participants.

The opposite was found for Rule 2 relations in this study. Here, the learners had more difficulty with the indefinite article. Note however that Rule 2 has fewer items in the *REALt* than Rule 1 because the former is only tested in the production sets and not in both the production and comprehension sets (as is the case for Rule 1). Overall, the data indicated that the definite article proved more taxing. It further also became clear that the context and the applicable rules contribute to whether definite or indefinite articles seem easier to use correctly, as was illustrated by the converse results associated with Rules 1 and 2.

Regarding the sixth point of general consensus, the use of bare nouns in inappropriate contexts by L2 learners was also found in this study, in both production subsets. Results from the beginning and the end of Grade 1 showed that bare nouns were rarely used in some cases and quite frequently in others. The percentages for the general-general subtype were 14% and 24% at the beginning and

end of the year, respectively, whereas percentages for the general-specific subtype were 43% and 24% at the beginning and end of the year, respectively. The part-whole subtype showed percentage correct scores of 4% and 11% for the beginning and end of the year, respectively, whereas the whole-part subtype showed 32% and 16%. The use of bare nouns in inappropriate contexts thus clearly occurred, especially with the general-specific subtype at the beginning of the year. That said, production data at the beginning of the year indicated that inappropriate or irrelevant responses occurred more frequently than other non-target response types.

Regarding general consensus point (ix), there is evidence of L2 speakers in the present study using null articles in both definite and indefinite contexts – firstly, those where null articles can refer to the use of bare nouns explicated in the paragraph above, but also with the use of plural and non-count nouns as responses in the production types. Null articles did indeed occur with plural and non-count nouns but this was a rare occurrence. Out of the 20 production items, only two were constructed in such a way that the context could validate such responses. For these two items, a maximum of only five learners used plural or non-count nouns. It was thus also, contrary to the conclusions from the literature reviewed for L1 speakers, not uncommon for the omission of articles from obligatory syntactic positions to occur after the age of 3 years 0 months.

Returning to general consensus point (i), the results of the present study indicated that L2 learners of English had trouble with the use of articles, even after several months of consistent exposure, as they had not fully mastered any of the production types by the end of their Grade 1 year.

To summarise the results of this study: despite obtaining relatively high scores, the L2 English learners had not mastered article comprehension neither at the start nor at the end of Grade 1 despite the high level of skill they showed at the start of Grade 1 for the general-general subtype. Generally, both subtypes underwent development over time (significant development in the case of the general-specific distinction) to render more advanced comprehension of both subtypes at the end of Grade 1 but not complete mastery.

Regarding article production, the learners had not mastered the general-general distinctions neither at the start nor at the end of Grade 1, with very low levels of skill being observed. Only slight development occurred over time for both subtypes. However, the learners fared better with the general-general subtype than with the general-specific subtype.

For the part-whole relation, the whole-part subtype underwent slight development over time but a low level of skill was observed at both data collection times, with no mastery occurring at the end of the year. Development occurred for the part-whole subtype over the course of the school year but, again, no mastery occurred at the end of Grade 1, with low scores obtained in the fourth school term. In terms of errors made, the L2 English learners showed a tendency to give fewer no responses or responses containing no article and more responses containing incorrect articles at the end of the year than at the beginning of the year, which shows that they were more frequently attempting to produce an article of sorts at the end of the year.

7. Conclusions

The use of articles by children has been reported to occur early on in their language development but the presence of articles early on does not equate to mastery at an early age (Southwood and White 2021). For a child to use an article correctly, s/he must be able to make use of previous discourse information successfully and to determine what the hearer already knows (Seymour, Roeper and De Villiers 2005). The mastery of articles requires an awareness of pragmatic information as well as the involvement of reference in terms of texture growth associated with the discourse-internal linguistic devices which are used for specific and/or non-specific reference both extralinguistically and intralinguistically, the latter in terms of (i) definite versus indefinite, (ii) specific versus general, and (iii) generic versus non-generic distinctions. These distinctions were further described with reference to general-general, general-specific, part-whole, and the whole-part article subtypes and Rule 1, Rule 1b, and Rule 2.

According to the reviewed literature, there is still incomplete mastery of article usage between the ages of 5 and 9 (Karmiloff-Smith 1979: 40). Southwood and van Dulm (2012b) however found that middle-class English L1 speakers master both the general-general as well as part-whole distinctions tested by the *REALt* by the age of 4 years. Compared to the L1 Southwood and van Dulm (2012b) participants, this study's L2 learners with a low SES are delayed in regard to the comprehension and production of articles.

The results of the present study indicate that L2 learners of English have some difficulty with the use of articles even after several months of consistent exposure to English at school, as the L2 English learners had not mastered any of the comprehension and production types by the end of Grade 1. These L2 English learners also omit articles (although the literature reports that such omission ceases in L1 English children around the age of 3) as they use bare nouns in inappropriate contexts in the study. As the group had not mastered the assessed article types, they may subsequently still find problematic the incorporation of previous discourse information, pragmatic information, and the involvement of reference in terms of texture growth associated with the discourse-internal linguistic devices.

This study addressed some of the limitations outlined in Southwood and White (2021), namely that children who have an L1 that differs from their LOLT where the child's L1 does not contain articles and the LOLT does, need to be included in studies on article acquisition. According to Cummins (2000), learners who are learning through the medium of their additional language take about two years to acquire basic communicative skills in that language and between four and nine years to acquire language skills specifically related to academic activities, depending on the type of instruction these learners receive (Meirim, Jordaan, Kallenbach & Rijhumal 2010: 43). Oller and Eilers (2002), Saunders and O'Brien (2006) as well as Southwood and White (2021) state that the developmental gap between L1 and L2 learners can take three to seven years to breach, after which the L2 learners will be able to perform on par with their L1 peers both in terms of comprehension and production abilities.

Related to the time it takes learners whose LOLT is not their L1 to develop language skills specifically related to academic activities, the time currently allocated to establishing English language skills for the learners in this study is insufficient for English additional language learners. L2 low-SES learners will be delayed in comparison to the L1 high-SES peers (assessed in other studies) and will continue to struggle with the comprehension and use of articles and

the subsequent comprehension and production of longer, more complex (and thus more textured) discourses that are associated with article usage in classroom contexts. Discourse-internal linguistic devices such as articles, which aid patterns of interaction between discourse semantic, lexico-grammatical, and other aspects of text organisation, are vital in the development of narratives and subsequent literacy, an aspect of their education that the L2 learners studied here may still find troublesome.

Southwood and White (2021: 87) state that "[i]n the case of articles, given that their monolingual peers at age nine appear to still be developing articles, children who are not first-language speakers of the language of teaching and learning will be burdened to an even greater extent". Southwood and White (2021) frame the need, firstly, for studies in South Africa to focus on a context where Bantu languages are being spoken alongside English and, secondly, to focus on how the speakers of articleless Bantu languages acquire, understand, and use the general-specific and part-whole distinctions in article comprehension and production when they learn English as an additional language, given that English expresses these distinctions by means of articles.

While this study attempted to provide more data on this topic, a limitation of the study is that it focused on only a small population in one educational context, only one grade and only one age cohort with a variety of language backgrounds. A second limitation of the study is that no English L1 low-SES or high-SES data could be collected and that no one-to-one comparison between L1 and L2 English learners from the same SES could thus be drawn. Despite these limitations, the results indicate that development in terms of the comprehension, and more limited development in terms of the production, of some subtypes of English articles takes place over the course of the Grade 1 year in children who do not have English as L1 but who receive their schooling through the medium of English. Follow-up studies are needed to ascertain at which age these learners' article system would be sufficiently developed to allow them to add the required texture to their discourses and narratives.

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