

Analysis of Grammatical and Lexical Errors in Writing Made by English-Speaking Learners of FL Swahili

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Abstract

This study applied the Error Analysis approach (Corder, 1967) to analyze written samples of 17 foreign language learners of Swahili who were enrolled in an intensive summer language program in one large university in the United States. Data was collected from quizzes and exams within a period of eight weeks. Overall results indicate that learners struggled with lexical and grammatical aspects of Swahili which varied across instruction levels. The most problematic grammatical features were the Swahili noun class agreement system and agglutinative verbs followed by L1-induced spelling errors and omission of connectors. Lexical errors included overgeneralized borrowing of English vocabulary into Swahili and misuse of near-synonyms whereby learners often used a wrong word which had a closer meaning and/or looked orthographically similar to the target word. Results indicate a relationship between error types and instruction levels. Implications for designing instructional materials and actual instruction are discussed.

Keywords: Error analysis; Grammatical; Lexical; L2 errors; Swahili

Introduction

Errors are a natural part of language learning and are regularly committed in both first and second language acquisition (Pinker, 2009; Tarone & Swierzbin, 2009). Language errors often occur in both reception and production and can include erroneous forms such as wrong vocabulary or incorrect morphosyntactic formations. According to Corder (1967), examining second language (L2) learners' errors is of significance in understanding their interlanguage system. That is, the language that L2 learners produce which has a structure different from both the first and the second language (Gass & Selinker, 2008). Gass and Selinker (2008) noted that the interlanguage is often filled with errors and is therefore worth examining to establish the process of L2 learning which can consequently inform language teaching.

Numerous studies have been conducted on error analysis in L2 acquisition, but English has been the target L2 in most of those studies (e.g. Barto-Sisamout, et al., 2009; Bataineh, 2005; Owu-Ewie & Williams, 2017). Few studies have adopted error analysis in Less Commonly Taught Languages (LCTLs) which are taught in the United States as foreign languages (FLs) (e.g. Gonulal, et al., 2016). Yet, most LCTLs have unique features such as agglutination in Turkish (Gonulal et al., 2016) and noun class agreement in Swahili (Spinner, 2013) which can complicate their acquisition by adult learners. Investigating the acquisition patterns of such features by L2 or FL learners can be useful in understanding the acquisition process which could consequently inform the development of instructional materials as well as pedagogy in these languages. The goal of the current study was to apply the error analysis approach to FL Swahili to provide a description of the types and frequencies of errors that English-speaking learners of Swahili make.

Error Analysis

Error analysis refers to the investigation of learners' interlanguage and the errors they make with the intent to establish the aspects of language which learners struggle with the most (Corder, 1967; James, 2013). The approach was first proposed by Corder (1967) as a means to understanding the language learning process. The assumption in error analysis is that "the frequency and types of errors are proportional to the degree of difficulty that language learners encounter when acquiring a second or foreign language" (Gunulal et al., 2016, p. 108). These researchers noted that since errors are a natural part of the language learning process, it is important to analyze and understand the errors that learners make because through those errors, teachers can infer how a learner interacts with the target language, the areas of difficulty for a learner, and how much a learner has learned. Additionally, learners can learn through their own errors and strive to correct them.

Significance of Error Analysis in LCTLs

Error analysis research is still limited among most LCTLs. L2 English errors have been widely investigated but the knowledge gained from those analyses cannot always be generalized to apply to LCTLs because, apart from the unique features most LCTLs have, LCTLs are taught in FL contexts which often differ from L2 contexts. Gonulal et.al., (2016) noted that as a result of limited research in LCTLs, "most of the LCTLs lack well designed textbooks, instructional materials, and other resources" (p. 110). They added that error analysis can contribute significantly to LCTL instruction because it "can shed light on the difficult or problematic areas of such languages" (p.110) and thus provide insight to language instructors on what areas require more attention. The current study attempts to fill part of the existing gap by performing error analysis on FL Swahili learner samples.

Steps in Error Analysis

Error analysis is one of the four approaches to the study of language errors. The other three approaches include Contrastive Analysis Hypothesis (CAH), Interlanguage Analysis (IA), and Contrastive Rhetoric (CR) (Latiff & Bakar, 2007). While the other three approaches mainly focus on the effects of learners' L1 (L1 structure, sounds, and culture), on acquisition of the L2, error analysis covers a wider scope as it argues that there are more factors which affect L2 acquisition beyond just L1 interference. These factors may include the organization of the L2 itself, learning strategies, and the context as well as quality of L2 instruction (Owu-Ewie & Williams, 2017). The current study applied the error analysis approach because it allows for a wider and more conclusive analysis. As Owu-Ewie and Williams (2017) wrote, "error analysis can be used to analyze any type of errors that students make in their writing irrespective of their sources" (p. 465).

The error analysis approach consists of five steps which must be followed in the specific order they occur (Corder, 1974). They include (a) collection of a sample of learner language, (b) identification of errors, (c) description of errors, (d) explanation of errors, and (e) evaluation of those errors. Thus, the first step a researcher must undertake is to decide on what sample of learner language to analyze. The sample can be "spontaneous or elicited speech, oral or written language production, classroom or naturalistic language" (Gonulal et al., 2016, p. 109).

After collecting the sample of learner language, the second step is to identify the errors in the sample. Identification of errors can be challenging to researchers because of the thin line between errors and mistakes (Owu-Ewie & Williams, 2017). Understanding the difference between errors and mistakes is a crucial part in error analysis studies. Corder (1971) defined an error as a deviant utterance which does not follow the norms of the target language while a

mistake is a deviation similar to a slip of the tongue. Ellis (1994) also added that while an error represents a lack of competence in that particular aspect, a mistake occurs due to performance failures. As such, errors often occur repeatedly and can be predictable while mistakes occur randomly and unsystematically. James (2013) argued that in error analysis, the focus should be solely on errors rather than mistakes because learners can often rectify the mistakes later.

The third step, the description of learner errors, involves assigning errors into categories. The most common error categories in error analysis literature include morphology (word forms), syntax (word order), and lexicon (vocabulary) (Gonulal et al., 2016). In the fourth step, these categories are further broken down into subcategories depending on the features of the language being studied (e.g. Gonulal et al., 2016; Owu-Ewie & Williams, 2017). For instance, the grammatical category could consist of tense errors, subject-verb agreement errors, etc.

The fifth step is to evaluate the sources of the errors. Previous literature on error analysis has identified the two main sources of learner errors as interlingual and intralingual errors. Interlingual errors which are also referred to as *interference errors* or *cross-linguistic errors* involve the transfer of rules or structures from learners' L1 to the L2. On the other hand, intralingual errors arise from the organization of the L2 itself. That is, these errors can be a result of learners struggling to acquire L2 features because of the organization of the L2 which is different from that of their L1. Interlingual and intralingual errors can easily overlap and this can make it difficult to distinguish them (Ellis, 1994). To solve this problem, Ellis (1994) recommends that researchers describe the sources of L2 errors adequately.

Previous Studies on L2 Errors

Previous studies on L2 errors have analyzed both spoken and written learner language samples. While the current study investigated written errors only, literature was reviewed on both written and oral samples as errors in syntax, morphology and the lexicon can occur in both types.

Ndiema, et al. (2018) investigated written errors made by Sabaot-speaking learners of Swahili in Mount Elgon, Kenya. They analyzed written essays of 200 high school students from ten different high schools and found that those learners transferred Sabaot syntax into their Swahili writing. “The Sabaot VSO (Verb, Subject, Object) structure was exhibited in learners’ Kiswahili language which is SVO” (p. 263). An example of an erroneous sentence was *hawana nidhamu hawa watoto*¹ ‘lack discipline these kids’ instead of *watoto hawa hawana nidhamu* ‘these kids lack discipline.’ Additionally, these researchers found that 50% of the errors made by these students were related to gender (noun class) agreement. They attributed the large percentage of errors to the fact that Sabaot lacks noun classes, and that therefore, Sabaot-speaking learners struggled with acquiring or producing noun class agreement in L2 Swahili.

Similarly, Ntawiyanga (2020) investigated grammatical agreement errors made by Kinyarwanda-speaking L2 Swahili learners in Muhanga district, Rwanda. Participants were senior high school students. The researcher found agreement errors between Swahili nouns and adjectives, locatives, and verbs in learners’ written samples. For instance, 61.1% of the participants marked agreement wrongly on the verb *-mefika* ‘has arrived’ as *kipofu kimefika* ‘the blind person has arrived’ instead of *kipofu amefika*. The *a-* affix in this case is the correct subject marker for the noun *kipofu* which refers to a human. According to the researcher, these learners made this error

¹ Note that this VSO sentence structure is usually allowed in other instances in Swahili such as in poetry.

as a result of transferring L1 agreement rules to L2. Other errors also arose from overgeneralization of L2 rules where learners were uncertain.

Besides syntax and morphosyntax errors, some studies have analyzed phonological errors. Ontieri (2016) investigated phonological errors made by Kenyan Swahili learners whose L1s were various Bantu languages. Data consisted of written samples from 100 high school students from 10 different schools in Nakuru district. Results showed that three phonological processes namely deletion, insertion, and phoneme conversion manifested these learners' L2 writing. An example of deletion was *u[^]gedhani* instead of *u^{ng}gedhani* 'you would think' (by a L1 Kikuyu speaker); insertion, *hili* instead of *ili* 'so that' (by a L1 Kikamba speaker); and phoneme conversion, *anayechin^{ch}ma* instead of *anayechin^jwa* 'that is being slaughtered' (by a L1 Kikisii speaker). Ontieri attributed these errors to L1 influence on L2 phonology.

Another study by Mtallo and Mwambula (2018) who looked at the spoken errors made by Kinyakyusa-speaking L2 learners of Swahili in Mbeya, Tanzania found a strong phonological influence of L1 on L2. They found that speech sounds which exist in both Kinyakyusa and Swahili such as /p/, /t/, /k/, /f/, /s/ were easily learned, but that learners struggled to pronounce those Swahili sounds which do not exist in Kinyakyusa e.g. the sound /r/ was pronounced as /l/, thus *ku^ra* 'vote' was pronounced as /ku^la/, and the sound /θ/ was pronounced as /s/, thus *thelathini* 'thirty' was pronounced as /selasini/. These findings shed light on the types of interlingual and intralingual errors that occur in the process of L2 Swahili learning.

Error analysis has been widely conducted with L2 English learners. Mahe and Oluseye (2017) investigated written errors made by Hausa-speaking L2 learners of English. Their data consisted of written essays from 120 high school students in Bauchi State, Nigeria.

The researchers found that these students struggled to use English prepositions which did not exist in Hausa. Similarly, Owu-Ewie and Williams (2017) investigated written lexical and grammatical errors made by Akan-speaking L2 learners of English. They collected data by means of written essays by 150 Senior High School students from three different schools in the Central Region of Ghana. Their results indicated frequent lexical errors in homophone use as well as word choice which resulted from transfer of L1 grammar structures and lexical knowledge to L2. Owu-Ewie and Williams (2017) noted that L2 writers can “adopt L1 composing strategies to compensate for possible deficiencies in their L2 proficiency and as a tool to facilitate their writing process” (p. 466). They found that the most frequent grammatical errors were tense errors followed by agreement errors, and others included singular-plural errors, preposition use, and article use.

The error analysis study by Gonulal et.al. (2016) largely informs the current study because both were conducted in FL contexts with English-speaking learners. Besides, Turkish is an agglutinative language like Swahili. To investigate which aspects of FL Turkish posed the greatest challenges for English-speaking learners, Gonulal et. al. (2016) collected speech samples over a period of three semesters. They found that Turkish case-marking system, subject-verb agreement, singularity/plurality, near-synonyms and lexical shifts were the common sources of errors for those learners. They concluded that one major source of those errors was the fact that while English is an isolating language, Turkish is an agglutinative language and thus, the agglutinative feature was problematic for these FL learners. That study analyzed spoken learner language, but the current study analyzed written learner language.

As indicated in the previous findings above, L2 errors can result not only from L1 transfer (interlingual errors) but also from the organization of the L2 itself (intralingual errors). Learners have

been found to struggle to acquire those L2 features which are either absent or that occur in a different format in their L1 (Spinner, 2013). The section that follows presents a brief summary of the unique Swahili features including its morphological, lexical, and syntactic structures which will be essential in understanding the results in later sections.

Swahili Language Background Morphology

One outstanding feature of Swahili is its agglutinative verbs. Swahili verbs can be formed by stringing together morphemes such as stems and affixes thus resulting in complex words. The morphemes which are strung together to form a word do not change in any aspect and each carries its separate meaning. A basic agglutinative Swahili verb consists of morphemes that mark the subject, tense and the verb ending or verb mood (Hackmack, 2015). The subject-marking morphemes are different for 1st, 2nd and 3rd person, and the tense marking morphemes are different in past, present, future and past participle. Upon change from singular to plural, or when the verb is negated, most of these morphemes change too as exemplified in Table 1.

Table 1

Examples of basic agglutinative Swahili verbs

Singular verb	Meaning	Plural verb	Meaning
<i>Nilisoma</i>	I read (past tense)	<i>Tulisoma</i>	We read (past tense)
<i>Ninasoma</i>	I am reading	<i>Tunasoma</i>	We are reading
<i>Nitasoma</i>	I will read	<i>Tutasoma</i>	We will read
<i>Nimesoma</i>	I have read	<i>Tumesoma</i>	We have read
Negation			
<i>Sikusoma</i>	I did not read	<i>Hatukusoma</i>	We did not read
<i>Sisomi</i>	I am not reading	<i>Hatusomi</i>	We are not reading
<i>Sitasoma</i>	I will not read	<i>Hatutasoma</i>	We will not read
<i>Sijasoma</i>	I have not read	<i>Hatujasoma</i>	We have not read

A more complex agglutinative Swahili verb consists of additional morphemes such as the relative pronoun marker, object marker and additional verb extensions e.g. in form of applicatives. The typical order of these affixes occurs in the formula “S-T-R-O-V-E” which stands for “Subject, Tense, Relative, Object, Verb, Ending.” Examples are given in 1 and 2.

1. **A- na- ye- ku- pend- a**
 SM TA RM OM V Mood
 3SG PRES SG 2SG love IND
 ‘he/she who loves you’

(SM: subject marker, TA: tense-aspect marker, RM: relative marker, OM: object marker, V: verb, SG: singular, PRES: present tense, IND: indicative)

2. **U- li- cho- wa- pelek- ea**
 SM TA RM OM V Extension
 2SG PAST SG 3PL take APP
 ‘the thing that you took to them’
 (PAST: past tense, PL: plural, APP: applicative)

Another outstanding feature of Swahili grammar is its noun class (gender) agreement system. Swahili nouns carry gender-marking information in the form of present or null affixes. These gender markers also appear in various forms in adjectives, verbs, demonstratives, locatives, connectors and pronouns to indicate agreement between the elements of a sentence (Contini-Morava, 2000, 2002). Eighteen Swahili noun classes are presented in Table 2 together with the gender markers of each noun class. In later sections, these classes will be referred to in pairs, that is, the singular and plural forms of each class.

Table 2

Swahili noun classes and their gender markers.

Noun class	Gender marker before consonant	Gender marker before vowel	Example of a noun	Meaning
1	m-/ Ø	Mw-/ Ø	Mwalimu	Teacher
2	Wa-	Wa-	Walimu	Teachers
3	m-	m-	Mkono	Hand
4	mi-	mi-	Mikono	Hands
5	Ji-/ Ø	J-/ Ø	Jino	Tooth
6	Ma-	Ma/me-	Meno	Teeth
7	Ki-	Ch-/ki-	Kikombe	Cup
8	vi-	Vy-/vi-	Vikombe	Cups
9	n-/ Ø	Ny-/ Ø	Kompyuta	Computer
10	n-/ Ø	Ny-/ Ø	Kompyuta	Computers

11, 14 ²	u-	U-/uw-/w-	Upendo	Love
15	Ku-	Ku-/kw-	Kula	Eating
16	Pa-	-	Mahali	Location (specific)
17	Ku-	-	Mahali	Location (general)
18	Mu-	-	Mahali	Location (inside)

² Classes 12 and 13 are not mentioned in the table because they are addressed within 11 and 14. Class 12 is the plural version of 11 whose nouns do not change in plural.

Class 13 should be the singular version of 14 but since that class is for uncountable nouns, it seems appropriate to mention the plural version only.

Swahili follows the subject-verb-object (SVO) word order just like English. However, one syntactic feature of Swahili makes it different from English and that is its placement of adjectives. While English adjectives can occur in both attributive and predicative positions, Swahili adjectives only occur in predicative positions just like in Spanish. Examples 3 and 4 below show gender agreement marking and word order in Swahili sentences.

3. *Mtoto mdogo anakula chungwa*
 1-child 1-small 1. 3rd -PRES-eat 1-orange
 ‘a small child is eating an orange’
 (PRES= present tense)
4. *Kiti kidogo kilivunjika*
 1-chair 1-small 1-3rd -PAST-break
 ‘a small chair broke’
 (PAST= past tense)

Agreement marking in Swahili is more regular in some classes than in others. While class 7/8 often consists of regular gender markers on all nouns and adjectives, class 1/2 consists of numerous morphophonologically irregular nouns that do not carry the gender marking affix for that particular class. Irregularity of gender markers has been found to be a source of difficulty for L2 Swahili learners in marking gender (e.g. Spinner, 2013). Examples 5 and 6 below are of irregular nouns from class 1/2 and their agreement marking.

5. *Kiongozi mzuri anaondoka*
 1-leader 1-good 1. 3rd -PRES-leave
 ‘a good leader is leaving’
6. *Viongozi wazuri wanaondoka*
 PL-leaders PL-good PL- 3rd -PRES-leave
 ‘good leaders are leaving’
 (PL= plural)

The noun *kiongozi* in example 5 and its plural version in example 6 take the gender markers for class 7/8 (KI/VI) instead of those for class 1/2 (M/WA) where they semantically belong.

Lexicon. Swahili has numerous borrowed English vocabulary, most of which have been modified to fit into Swahili morphology, phonetics, and phonology. For example, most technology-related terminology in Swahili is borrowed from English e.g. *kompyuta* for ‘computer’ and *televisheni* for ‘television’. Such proximity between L1 and L2 vocabulary can influence the acquisition of L2 both positively and negatively. The current study hypothesized that the unique features of Swahili as well as its proximity to English in certain aspects would both affect its acquisition by English-speaking learners.

The Current Study

Although numerous studies have been conducted on L2 error analysis, research in this area is still insufficient for many LCTLs. For instance, no previous studies were found on error analysis in FL Swahili with English-speaking learners in the context of the United States. The goal of the current study was to investigate the types and frequencies of written errors among a group of FL Swahili learners whose L1 is English. The research questions were:

1. What grammatical and lexical errors do English-speaking FL Swahili learners make in FL writing?
2. What are the most frequent error types that these learners make in FL writing?
3. What is the relationship between error types and instruction levels for these learners?

Methodology

Context and Participants

Seventeen FL Swahili learners who were enrolled in an intensive summer language program at a large University in the United States participated in this study. Twelve of them were in year 1 of studying Swahili (beginners), three were in year 2 (intermediate) and two were in year 3 (advanced). The terms ‘beginners,’ ‘intermediate,’ and ‘advanced’ as used in this study only refer to instruction levels and not tested proficiency levels. Also, years 1, 2, and 3 refer to the year of studying Swahili and not the period of university study. Each level was taught by a different teacher. Participants consisted of both graduate and undergraduate students of ages 18 to 30 years. These students came from various universities all over the United States. All were L1 English speakers. The intensive program was 8 weeks long and students spent 4 hours in class each weekday. Instruction mainly focused on developing oral proficiency. Instructors mainly used materials developed by themselves and supplemented those with various textbooks. This program prepared students for study abroad in a Swahili-speaking country.

Materials and Procedure

The learner language sample for this study was written weekly quizzes and end-of-semester exam papers. Consenting participants submitted their graded samples to the researcher who made copies and returned the originals to the students. A maximum of eight samples were to be collected from each participant, one for each week, but none of the participants submitted all eight samples. The highest submissions were 6 and the lowest were 2. Types of text in these written quizzes and exams ranged from short answers such as responses to comprehension questions, to lengthy essays. Exams for beginners consisted more of short answer texts while those for intermediate and advanced learners consisted more of lengthy essays.

The researcher kept a record of each participant's samples and the week when the quiz or exam was done. All identifying information was removed from the researcher's copies. Table 3 shows a summary of the number of participants in each level and the number of samples collected from them.

Table 3

Number of participants per instruction level and the number of samples collected from them

	1st year Swahili	2nd year Swahili	3rd year Swahili
Number of participants	12	3	2
Number of samples collected	47	18	12

Data Analysis

After all data was collected (step 1), the researcher, who is a native speaker of Swahili, identified all errors in the data sample (step 2). This step involved distinguishing errors from mistakes, following the procedure in Gonulal et.al. (2016) where “all utterances that were considered deviant from standard Turkish and were not acceptable to native speakers of Turkish were coded as errors” (p.115). Working with written learner language, all written forms that were deviant from standard Swahili were identified. In the third step, those errors were categorized into two main groups: grammatical and lexical.

The fourth step involved the further breakdown of grammatical and lexical errors into specific subcategories and tabulation of their frequencies. Again, following the procedure in Gonulal et al. (2016), in cases where a single learner made a similar error repeatedly e.g. by misspelling a particular word, that error was only counted once. For agglutinative Swahili verbs, if a learner made several errors in one verb e.g. person, tense and object marker errors, all three errors were counted separately, thus making up three different types of grammatical errors. After all errors were categorized, error percentages were calculated. Results are presented in the section that follows.

Results

The total number of errors which were identified in the written samples of the 17 FL Swahili learners were 1,318. Out of these, 71.24% were grammatical errors while 28.76% were lexical errors. Those results are presented in Table 4.

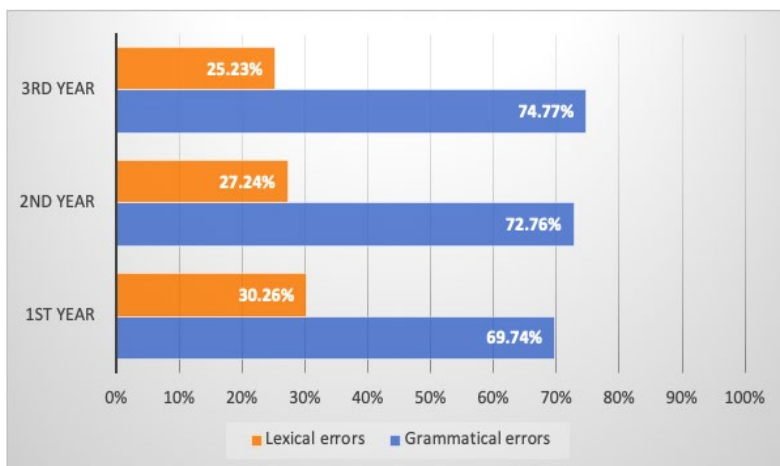
Table 4

Frequencies and percentages of grammatical and lexical errors

Error category	N	%
Grammatical errors	939	71.24
Lexical errors	379	28.76
Total	1,318	100

The errors were further divided along instruction levels. In all three levels, grammatical errors were more frequent than lexical errors. Also, first year students made more lexical errors overall compared to second year and third year students. Figure 1 shows the percentages of errors committed by learners in each instruction level. Figure 1

Grammatical and lexical errors per instruction level in FL Swahili writing



Descriptive statistics showed that in the grammatical category, third-year FL Swahili learners recorded the highest mean of errors ($M=80.00$, $SD= 15.56$, $n= 2$) followed by second-year students ($M= 73.00$, $SD= 27.73$, $n= 3$). First-year students recorded the lowest mean of errors overall in that category ($M= 46.66$, $SD=14.67$, $n= 12$). In the lexical category, second-year students recorded the highest number of errors ($M= 27.33$, $SD= 9.87$, $n= 3$), closely followed by third-year students ($M= 27.00$), $SD= 9.89$, $n= 2$). Again, first-year students recorded the lowest mean of lexical errors ($M=20. 25$, $SD= 7.45$, $n= 12$). Table 5 shows these results.

While interpreting these descriptive results, it is important to note that the length and complexity of the written quizzes and exams which participants submitted for analysis increased with the level of instruction. That is, first-year students' exams mostly required single-sentence answers while second-year and third-year students' exams required lengthy and more complex essays. Additionally, both third-year students submitted six samples each while some first-year students submitted only two assignments. These two factors explain why the mean numbers of errors increase with instruction levels.

Table 5

Descriptive statistics of errors in each instruction level

Error category	1 st year			2 nd year			3 rd year		
	<i>N</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>N</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>N</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
Grammar errors	560	46.66	14.67	219	73.00	27.73	160	80.00	15.56
Lexical errors	243	20.25	7.45	82	27.33	9.87	54	27.00	9.89
Total	803			301			214		

To address the first research question, grammatical and lexical errors were further broken down to subcategories to identify the specific types and frequencies of errors. In the grammatical category, identified error types included noun class agreement errors, verb formation errors, subject-verb agreement or singular/plural errors, errors on the use of locatives, spelling errors, omissions of connectors (the *-a* of association), and errors in the use of interrogatives, demonstrative pronouns, and infinitive forms. Lexical errors included word order errors, borrowing of words or structures from L1 or literal translation, and the use of near-synonyms or wrong vocabulary.

In the grammatical category, the most frequent error type overall was noun class agreement with 292/939 errors followed closely by verb formation errors, 284/939. In both subcategories, first-year students committed more than 50% of the errors while second- and third-year students committed close to a quarter of the errors in each case. The error types with the lowest frequencies in the grammatical category were demonstrative pronouns and interrogatives whose overall occurrences were both below 1% of the total number of errors. Notably, third-year students did not commit any errors on demonstrative pronouns, interrogatives, and infinitives. First-year students committed 79.56% of spelling errors and more than 60% of the errors on the use of locatives and connectors.

Note that spelling errors are not always classified as grammatical errors. In this study, these errors were placed under the grammatical category for the sake of simplifying data analysis and presentation. Readers can choose to view spelling errors as a subcategory of its own.

In the lexical category, the most frequent error type was the use of near-synonyms or wrong words (185/379) followed by borrowing from the L1 or literal translation (149/379). In both

subcategories, first-year students committed more than 50% of the errors followed by second-year students. The least amount of these errors was committed by third-year students. Included in the lexical category were word order errors (45/379) and of these, more than 90% were committed by first-year students. Second-year students committed 9% and third-year students did not commit any, indicating that word order problems reduced as mastery of the language increased. Table 6 presents a summary of those results.

Table 6

Error types and frequencies across instruction levels

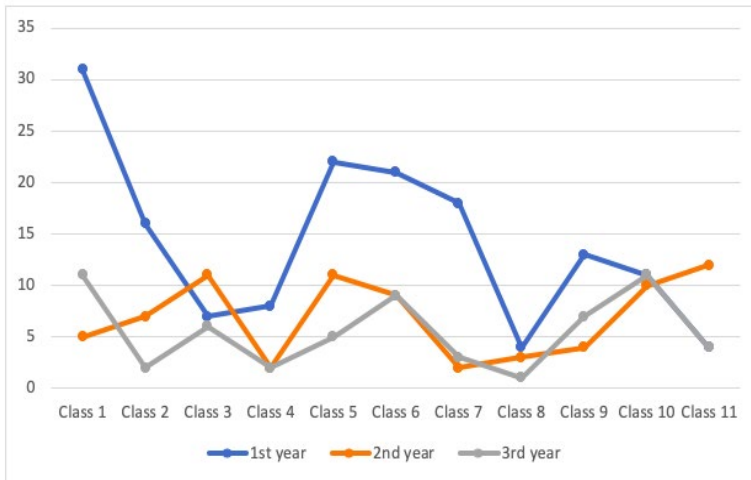
Error Category	1 st year		2 nd year		3 rd year		Total
	<i>N</i>	%	<i>N</i>	%	<i>N</i>	%	<i>N</i>
Grammatical errors							
1. Noun class agreement	155	53.08	76	26.08	61	20.89	292
2. Verb formation	148	52.11	75	26.41	61	21.48	284
3. S-V agreement (sing/plural)	13	52	5	20	7	28	25
4. Locatives	34	66.67	13	25.49	4	7.84	51
5. Spelling	109	79.56	19	13.87	9	6.57	137
6. Connector omissions	78	69.03	17	15.04	18	15.93	113
7. Interrogatives	4	57.14	3	42.86	0	0	7
8. Demonstrative pronouns	6	100	0	0	0	0	6
9. Infinitives	13	54.17	11	45.83	0	0	24
Lexical errors							
1. Word order	41	91.11	4	8.89	0	0	45

2. Borrowing/Literal translation	78	52.35	43	28.86	28	18.79	149
3. Near-synonym (wrong word)	124	67.03	35	18.92	26	14.05	185

The second research question sought to find out which error types were most frequent. In the grammatical category, they were noun class agreement errors and verb formation errors. Since each of these error types consisted of smaller subcategories, the errors were broken down further to analyze the frequencies in each subcategory. For instance, the noun class agreement errors were further grouped per noun class. In this study, the errors identified fit into the first eleven Swahili noun classes. Overall results showed class 1/2 singular to have the highest number of agreement errors (47/292) followed by class 5/6 plural (39/292) and then by class 5/6 singular (38/292). In both classes, more than 50% of the errors were committed by first-year students. Class 9/10 plural also recorded a relatively high number of errors with a total of 32/292 errors and students in each instruction level committed a third of those errors. On the other hand, class 7/8 plural recorded the lowest number of agreement errors (8/292) followed by class 3/4 plural (12/292). The results are presented in Figure 2.

Figure 2

Noun-class agreement errors across instruction levels

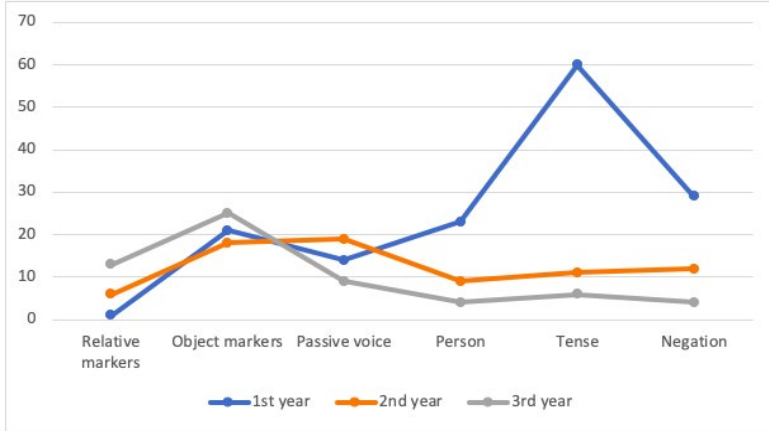


The subcategory with the second highest number of errors was verb formation. As mentioned earlier, Swahili is an agglutinative language in which the verb is formed by joining a series of morphemes. Errors in this section were therefore broken down to those specific morphemes i.e. errors to do with the subject marker, tense marker, relative marker, object marker, or verb ending. Also included in this category were the errors on negation and passive voice formation since those two also occur as affixes to the main verb. The highest number of errors on verb formation originated from tense marking (77/284). Of these, 60 errors were committed by first-year students. Errors on object markers followed with a total of 64/284, in which third-year students contributed most of those errors. Third-year students also committed the most errors on relative markers while first-year students had very limited errors in this category as they hardly used relative markers. However, first-year students committed more than 50% of the errors on negation and subject/person-marking. Lastly, second-year students committed the

most errors on passive voice formation. Results are presented in Figure 3.

Figure 3

Verb formation errors across instruction levels



The discussion section which follows below is the fifth and the last step of error analysis. It involves evaluation of the errors that were identified above, identifying the potential sources of those errors and giving examples from the learners' language samples.

Discussion

Overall results in this study indicate that the students struggled more with grammatical than lexical aspects of Swahili, a finding similar to that of Gonulal, et al. (2016) and Owu-Ewie and Williams (2017). In the grammatical category, noun-class (gender) agreement appeared to be the most difficult aspect for these learners to master. As mentioned earlier, Swahili has numerous noun classes, and each has its own set of agreement markers which must also occur on other elements of the sentence, e.g. adjectives. Example 7 is of a sentence with an agreement error. Note that all names of students used in this study are pseudonyms.

7. Ninampenda mama yangu kwa sababu yeye ni
*nzuri

I love mum my for reason she is
good (wrong NC marker)

‘I love my mum because she is good’

(Bahati, 1st year Swahili: week 2)

(NC: noun class)

In example 7, the learner failed to use the noun class marker *m-* on the adjective *-zuri* which modifies the class 1/2 singular noun *mama*. This could be a developmental error (anonymous reviewer 1) showing that the learner has not yet mastered noun class agreement in Swahili, especially for the morphophonologically noncanonical nouns—that is, nouns which do not take the designated noun class markers of their class (Spinner & Thomas, 2014). Errors in agreement marking were also frequent when learners attempted to write a sentence with a subject and an object which belonged to different noun classes. For example;

8. Dada yangu anapenda kuendesha gari *yake
*mpya

Sister my likes to drive car **hers**
new (wrong NC markers)

‘My sister likes to drive her new car’
(Tembo, 2nd year Swahili: week 3)

In example 8, the learner failed to use correct noun class markers on the possessive *yake* and the adjective *mpya* which refer to the car and not the sister. These two words should have taken the class 5/6 singular markers and thus be *lake jipya* since the noun *gari* belongs to class 5/6. It is possible that this learner overgeneralized the use of those wrong agreement markers because they were the ones that he had mastered better. Native Swahili speakers often make generalizations as well, such as using class 9/10 gender markers as the default for other classes. This could be because class 9/10 is more regular and thus easy to master.

The majority of noun class agreement errors occurred in those classes with a high number of morphophonologically noncanonical nouns. Such nouns often bear null or irregular gender markers and this phenomenon is common in classes 1/2 and 5/6. Example 9 is an erroneous sentence with a class 1/2 singular noun.

9. Nina	Ørafiki	*moja
I have	friend	one (missing <i>m</i> - NC marker)
‘I have one friend’		
(Zabibu, 2 nd year Swahili: week 2)		

In example 9, the learner failed to add the gender marker *m*- on the adjective *moja* that modifies the class 1/2 singular noun *rafiki*, most likely because the noun itself does not carry the noun class marker. Classes 1/2 and 5/6 singular contain the highest number of such irregular nouns and in this study the highest number of agreement errors originated from these classes. The classes with the most regular agreement markers such as 3/4 plural and 7/8 plural recorded the lowest numbers of agreement errors, a result that was similar to that in Spinner (2013). Presumably, students easily predicted which

agreement markers to attach on the adjectives based on those occurring on the nouns in both classes.

The absence of noun class agreement in English could also explain why these L2 learners struggled to master the feature in L2. Previous studies on acquisition of grammatical gender (e.g. Franceschina, 2001, 2005; Spinner, 2013) also found that adult L2 learners struggle to acquire those L2 features which are absent in their L1. One common explanation for this occurrence is that such learners are already attuned to the features of their L1 and are past the critical age of language acquisition, which would have allowed them to achieve full command of the new language. In the current study, agreement errors were mostly committed by first-year students while second- and third-year students only committed few errors, indicating that the mastery of Swahili gender agreement increased with language ability.

Verb formation was the second grammatical category with the highest number of errors. Among the morphemes of an agglutinative Swahili verb—subject, tense, relative pronoun marker, object marker, verb ending—tense errors were the most frequent. Swahili has four basic tenses: present *-na-*, past *-li-*, future *-ta-*, and past participle *-me-*, which are usually introduced right from novice levels of Swahili instruction. Tense errors ranged from the use of a wrong tense marker to omission of the tense marker or use of a wrong two-letter word that was not a tense-marker at all (e.g. *-la-*). Examples 10, 11, and 12 below show the three errors respectively.

- | | | | |
|-----------|---|---------|------|
| 10. Kesho | nilikula | chakula | |
| Tomorrow | I ate (wrong tense) | food | |
| | ‘Tomorrow I will eat food’ | | |
| | (Amina, 1 st year Swahili: week 4) | | |
| 11. Mimi | nienda | sokoni | jana |

- I go (missing tense) market
yesterday
“I went to the market yesterday”
(Zabibu, 1st year Swahili: week 4)
12. Mimi **nilakula** chakula
I **eat** (wrong word) food
‘I ate food’
(Musa, 1st year Swahili: week 3)

In example 10 above, the learner failed to use the future tense which should go with the word ‘tomorrow’ and instead used the past tense. In example 11, the learner omitted the tense marker altogether and in example 12, the learner used a wrong word which is not a tense marker at all. Each of these errors occurred more than once and cannot therefore be assumed to be typos. The use of wrong tense markers, e.g. the past tense in the place of the future tense, could mean that students had not mastered the several tense markers correctly. Also, Swahili tense is marked in the verb prefix while English regular verbs mark tense in the suffix. This could be another reason why FL Swahili learners struggled to mark Swahili tense, owing to the unique manner in which the feature occurs. More than 77% of the tense errors were committed by beginning students while third year students committed less than 10%, again indicating a developmental pattern whereby learners mastered the rule as their language ability increased.

First-year students also committed more than half of the errors on negation and subject marking. Negation-marking and subject-marking morphemes in Swahili both change with tense and number; that results in several different morphemes that learners need to master and produce within agglutinative verbs (refer to Table 1). It is possible that these learners struggled to keep track of the numerous different morphemes that marked different grammatical

features on the agglutinative verb, thus committing many errors in this category. Example 13 shows a negation error.

13. Jana jioni silienda kwa
 mazungumzo.
 Yesterday evening I **didn't*** go for
 conversation
 'Yesterday evening, I didn't go for conversation'
 (Binti, 1st year Swahili: week 4)

In example 13, the student successfully negated the 1st person subject marker *ni-* to *si-* but failed to use the correct negation morpheme for the past tense which is *-ku-* and instead used the affirmative morpheme *-li-*. The correct form should have been *sikuenda* (pronounced as '*sikwenda*'). Students in second and third years committed limited tense, negation, and subject errors as shown in Figure 3, indicating that they had mastered these grammar rules much better. On the other hand, they struggled to produce the passive voice, object markers, and relative markers on agglutinative Swahili verbs. Example 14 shows an object marker error.

14. Hakimu aliwazungumza kuhusu
 kesi yao
 Judge **spoke***(misplaced OM) about
 case theirs
 'The judge **spoke with them*** about their case'
 (Fahari, 3rd year Swahili: week 2)
 (OM: object marker)

The student in example 14 failed to write the correct form of the agglutinative intransitive verb by overgeneralizing the placement of the object marker. The verb *zungumza* which means 'speak' often occurs with *na*, which means 'with' in this context. Thus, the correct form should have been *alizungumza na wao* (in short, '*alizungumza nao*') – 'spoke with them,' where the preposition is added to complete the meaning of the verb. Swahili object markers and relative markers are

considerably more difficult grammatical features compared to tense or subject markers and are usually introduced to learners later. It was therefore quite expected that errors of this kind occurred among second- and third-year students. Presumably, first-year students still had limited exposure to these grammar features as they rarely occurred in their samples. Another possible explanation for the high number of errors on Swahili agglutinative verbs could be the uniqueness of this L2 feature. Swahili is an agglutinative language while English is an isolating language. Additionally, English uses suffixes to mark features such as tense and number while Swahili uses prefixes. Therefore, the organization of Swahili itself could have contributed to these intralingual errors.

Spelling errors, which formed the third largest number of errors in the grammatical category, were also mostly committed by first-year students. A large percentage of spelling errors were L1-induced and close to half of the misspelled words were the Swahili vocabulary which are borrowed from English. First-year students often wrote such words with a mix of English and Swahili spelling. For example, the Swahili word for ‘computer’ is *kompyuta* but one learner repeatedly misspelt it as *computa* (Furaha, 1st year Swahili, week 2). Similarly, the Swahili word for ‘shirt’ which is *shati* was misspelt as *shirti* (Almasi, 1st year Swahili, week 5). This is most likely a result of L1 interference, a phenomenon that has been found to be true in L2 acquisition especially when there is proximity between the L1 and the L2 (e.g. Gonzalez & Quintana Hernandez, 2018; Yeon, et al., 2017). It is possible that FL Swahili learners misspelled this borrowed vocabulary because it sounded like its English counterpart, which made L1 interference even stronger. Also, some learners confused the Swahili sound /o/ with the English sound /u:/ thus writing words like *mchozi** for *mchuzi* – ‘soup’ (Juma, 1st year Swahili, week 5).

Besides L1-induced spelling errors, there were also spelling errors on words that have unique letter combinations that exist in Swahili and are absent in English e.g. *wanaayama** for *wanyama* – ‘animals’ (Furaha, 1st year Swahili, week 4). First-year Swahili learners struggled the most to master the Swahili spelling system which explains the frequency of the errors among them. Second- and third-year students committed very few spelling errors, an indication that they had mostly mastered the spelling system in Swahili.

On the use of connectors, the errors identified mostly involved omissions of the connectors that indicate possession or association. This Swahili connector which is referred to as ‘the *-a* of association’ requires noun class agreement marking on it. For instance, class 1/2 plural often uses *wa* (e.g. *watoto wa Maria* – ‘Maria’s children’), class 3/4 singular uses *la* (e.g. *jimbo la Michigan* – ‘the state of Michigan’), class 7/8 singular uses *cha* (e.g. *kitabu cha Maria* – ‘Maria’s book’), and class 7/8 plural uses *vya* (e.g. *vitabu vya Maria* – ‘Maria’s books’). An example of an erroneous phrase is given in 15.

15. Nitasoma kitabu ? Kiswahili
 I will read book (**missing connector**) Swahili
 ‘I will read a book **of** Swahili’
 (Babu, 1st year Swahili: week 4)

In example 15, the learner meant to say ‘I will read a book **of** Swahili’ which should have been *nitasoma kitabu **cha** Kiswahili*. However, the connector *cha* is missing. It is possible that the majority of these omission errors resulted from learners avoiding adding the connectors because they felt unsure about how to mark agreement on the connectors (Heydari & Bagheri, 2012). Heydari and Bagheri (2012) noted that avoidance is one of the strategies that L2 learners use in communication, especially when they are not sure of how to use a particular linguistic item. Thus, recurring omissions are a sign of a lack of mastery of the rule. Gonulal et al. (2016) also found that L2 Turkish learners of L1 English background omitted the

accusative, dative, and genitive cases more than they omitted the nominative and ablative cases. These researchers concluded that learners probably omitted the former cases because they had not fully mastered how to use them, since those cases appeared differently in Turkish than they did in English. On the other hand, those learners made fewer errors on the latter cases because those had overt counterparts in English and were therefore easier to master (p. 121). It is possible that L2 Swahili learners also struggled to acquire Swahili connectors because of the gender-marking requirement on them which is unique to Swahili and is absent in English. Again, most of the connector omission errors were committed by first-year Swahili students indicating that the problem is more prevalent among beginning learners and that as language ability increased, learners mastered this feature as well as noun class agreement much better, thus reducing the occurrence of this type of errors.

The low number of errors on demonstrative pronouns and interrogatives was not surprising considering that the sample analyzed in this study was written and often did not require the use of these kinds of grammatical items. The error frequencies for these two subcategories would probably be higher in spoken learner samples.

Another error type which recorded a low frequency was the infinitive form. The Swahili infinitive marker *ku-* is attached to the main verb (e.g. *pika* – ‘cook’) such that it is the only affix on the verb. Thus, an example of a basic infinitive verb is *kupika* which means ‘to cook’. The verb carrying the infinitive marker occurs in its base form (e.g. *pika* above) unless it has extensions, e.g. in forms of applicatives. Therefore, the low number of errors on the infinitive use could mean that Swahili learners mastered the use of the infinitive form quite easily as it seems less complex compared to the normal agglutinative verb which carries more morphemes e.g. *aliyenipikia* – ‘the one who cooked for me’.

In the lexical category, the most frequent error type was the use of near-synonyms or wrong words. For example, the words *sema* which means ‘speak’ or ‘say’ and *ambia* which means ‘tell’ proved confusing for these learners. An example is given below.

16. Cheusi alim**sema** mamake kwamba
 Cheche ni mzuri
 Cheusi **said*** her mum that
 Cheche is good
 ‘Cheusi told her mum that Cheche is good’
 (Upendo, 3rd year Swahili: week 2)

In the above sentence, the learner meant to say ‘Cheusi told her mum...’ but instead of writing *alimwambia*, the learner used the wrong verb which is a near-synonym to the right one. The high frequency of this error type especially among beginning learners could be attributed to their limited vocabulary knowledge. Besides, Swahili has numerous words which are closely similar both semantically and orthographically and this seemed to facilitate the use of near-synonyms. For example, one learner used the word *katibu* – ‘secretary’ instead of *kitabu* – ‘book’ (Amani, 2nd year Swahili: week 2). Also included in this category were the wrong uses of connecting words, e.g. the conjunction *na* which means ‘and’ or ‘with’ and the prepositions *katika* and *kwa* which can mean ‘in’, ‘on’, ‘at’, ‘to’, ‘by’, and sometimes, ‘with’. In Swahili, these connecting words have overlapping meaning and are usually best interpreted in context. Learners made errors such as in example 17.

17. Nilizungumza **kwa*** wazazi
 wangu kwa simu.
 I spoke **to** (wrong P) parents mine
 on phone
 ‘I spoke to my parents on the phone’
 (Upendo, 3rd year Swahili: week 5)
 (P: preposition)

In example 17, the first use of the preposition *kwa* is incorrect because in Swahili, one can only say, ‘I spoke **with** my parents’ and not ‘**to** my parents’. Thus, the correct connector should have been *na*. The fact that these connectors have overlapping meaning proved very problematic to learners at all levels. Wrong uses of the ‘*a-* of association’ were also included in this category of wrong words. Because of the agreement-marking requirement, learners often committed errors on the use of this word. For example,

18. Vitu **wa** biashara
 Things **of** (wrong NC mkr) business
 ‘Things of business’
 (Upendo, 3rd year Swahili: week 1)
 (NC mkr: noun class marker)

The correct connector in the above phrase should be *vya* because of the class 7/8 plural noun *vitu* but instead, the learner used *wa* which applies to different noun classes.

The second most frequent error type in the lexical category was borrowing from the L1 or literal translation. Again, first-year students committed more than half of these errors. Swahili has a lot of borrowed vocabulary from English, e.g. terminology for technology, electrical appliances, clothing, etc. It seems that once FL Swahili learners become aware of this borrowed vocabulary, they overgeneralize the borrowing rule to words that have Swahili equivalents, especially when the learner does not know or remember the Swahili word for something. An example is given in 19.

19. Nita**amuru*** chakula katika **restoranti***
 I will **order** food at **restaurant**
 ‘I will order food at the restaurant.’
 (Jamila, 1st year Swahili: week 6)

Example 19 has two errors: the use of a wrong word and literal translation. First, instead of using the word *agiza* for ‘ordering food’, the learner used *amuru* which is used in contexts of giving a command

as in ordering someone to do something. Secondly, the Swahili word for ‘restaurant’ is *mkabawa/mgabawa* but the learner instead modified the English equivalent. As Owu-Ewie and Williams (2017) noted, “L2 writers can adopt L1 writing strategies to compensate for possible deficiencies in their L2 proficiency and as a tool to facilitate their writing process” (p. 466). Third-year students committed the least of these errors and that could be because their vocabulary knowledge is wider and their level of L1 transfer is significantly reduced.

Word-order errors with regard to nouns and adjectives seemed to be a problem for first year students only. English grammar allows for the use of attributive adjectives, that is, adjectives which appear before nouns in sentences. On the other hand, Swahili adjectives appear after the nouns they modify. FL Swahili learners in this study, especially first-year learners, transferred the English word order into Swahili and placed Swahili adjectives before the nouns they modified thus leading to interlingual errors as in example 20.

20. Nina mkubwa* mbwa*

V ADJ N

I have 1-big 1-dog

‘I have a big dog’

(Bahati, 1st year Swahili: week 3)

(V: verb, ADJ: adjective, N: noun)

In example 20, the learner put the adjective before the noun as in English but the correct version of the sentence should have been *nina mbwa mkubwa*.

In summary, both the grammatical and lexical errors committed by these learners varied in type and frequency across instruction levels. Interlingual errors mainly occurred among beginning learners while intralingual errors were common among all three instruction levels. The most problematic FL Swahili features were noun-class agreement and agglutination. Noun-classes with

irregular morphophonology recorded more errors than those with regular morphophonology. On agglutination, beginners struggled with the basic morphemes such as subject-markers and tense-markers while advanced learners struggled to produce the more complex morphemes such as relative-markers. Intermediate learners fell in between, sometimes committing errors which resembled those of beginners and sometimes those of the advanced learners.

Due to some unavoidable circumstances, data was not collected on the impacts of the context and classroom instruction on these learners' performance in FL Swahili. That is not to say that these factors did not influence learners' performance. First, the FL learning context meant that learners' exposure to Swahili outside of the classroom and the summer program was limited, which might have slowed down their progress in mastering the language. Secondly, it is possible that the variation of instructional materials and practices used in various classes could have influenced the types of errors that learners made. These could occur in the form of a teacher never pointing out certain FL features to learners or not effectively correcting their errors. Also, some instructional materials could emphasize certain language features more than others, thus leading to more errors in the less taught features.

Conclusion, Implications, and Limitations

Findings revealed that FL Swahili learners struggled with different grammatical and lexical features which varied across instruction levels. As the anonymous first reviewer noted, "language learning is a process and at each level, certain errors can be expected." The pedagogical implications are that beginning learners could benefit from instructional activities that target interlingual errors, while all instruction levels may require regular and meaningful grammar instruction that highlights to them the unique features of Swahili. It is evident that such features which are absent in learners' L1 can be

difficult to acquire. Therefore, FL Swahili specialists should design and select instructional materials, activities, and strategies that would be effective in addressing such issues.

Generalization of these results should be done in applicable contexts. Some of the findings in the current study are contrary to those of previous ones (e.g. Gonulal et al., 2016) who found that advanced students made more lexical errors while beginning students made more grammatical errors overall. Such contrasts may occur due to the differences in the learner language samples analyzed (oral vs written) or the uniqueness of features in each language. More studies on error analysis in different languages and learner samples would be essential in clarifying such nuances.

Finally, the current study faced some limitations. First, the learner samples analyzed were not similar in length or complexity across instruction levels, and neither did all learners submit an equal number of exam papers for analysis. This made it challenging to draw certain comparisons across groups which could affect the interpretation of results. Additionally, participating learners were taught by different teachers and that might have influenced their performance in the language. Future studies should develop better structured data collection plans to avoid such complications. Despite these limitations, the findings of this study could inform the instruction of FL Swahili and other applicable LCTLs to a great extent.

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