This study investigates at what point in acquisition learners reset the article choice parameter in L2 Italian by examining learners’ acceptance of the omission/presence of the definite article in preverbal subject and postverbal object positions in [+/-specific] contexts, and how this changes across different stages of acquisition. Article use in L2 Italian poses a learnability issue for L1 English speakers because they have to learn new syntactic rules for article use by adding to their current grammar, and they have to reset the article choice parameter because Italian and English use articles differently to express specificity.

The study examined seven native speakers and 87 L1 English/L2 Italian learners from a major Midwestern university at varying levels of proficiency (low-intermediate, intermediate, high-intermediate, and advanced). Participants completed a timed context-based acceptability judgment task followed by an untimed correction task in order to determine if they accept article omission in Italian and in what contexts. Including participants from a variety of proficiency levels is intended to help identify at what point learners stop or reduce their acceptance of article omission in Italian, particularly in contexts in which English omits articles. The tasks are designed to determine in what contexts learners accept the presence of articles, and if those are also contexts in which English omits an article. The goal of this study is to identify the stage in acquisition when the article choice parameter starts to reset, and give a clearer picture of the trajectory of the acquisition of article use in L2 Italian.