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Which or what book do you prefer? An empirical study on Spanish students' learning of English interrogative determiners

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ABSTRACT

The teaching of English interrogative determiners to L2 English learners in Spain is usually lacking as most learners do not know how to use it. To substantiate the foregoing, this dissertation aims to provide an empirical approach to how Spanish students learn English interrogative determiners and if the grammatical features associated to these determiners affect the way these students understand them. In the experiment, L1 Spanish students of English are tested to choose the correct interrogative determiner to prove if they understand the difference between *what* and *which* as interrogative determiners. The results show that the way these structures [*What* + *N* / *Which* + *N*] are taught is not successful as the students' do not distinguish when to use one determiner or the other, which leads to conclude that more attention should be paid to the teaching of these structures.

Key words: Interrogative determiners, grammatical features, Spanish students, English teaching

RESUMEN.

La enseñanza de los determinantes interrogativos ingleses en España suele ser escasa, ya que la mayoría de estudiantes L1 español L2 inglés no saben utilizarlos. Con el fin de corroborar lo anterior, este trabajo pretende aportar una aproximación empírica de cómo los estudiantes españoles que están estudiando inglés aprenden dichos determinantes ingleses y si los rasgos gramaticales asociados a estos determinantes afectan a la forma de entenderlos. En el experimento, se somete a los estudiantes L1 de español L2 inglés a elegir el determinante interrogativo correcto para comprobar si entienden la diferencia entre *Which* y *What*. Los resultados muestran que la forma de enseñar estas estructuras [*What+N/ Which+N*] no tiene éxito, ya que los estudiantes no distinguen cuándo utilizar un determinante u otro, lo que lleva a concluir que se debe prestar más atención a la enseñanza de estas estructuras.

Palabras clave: Determinantes interrogativos, características gramaticales, estudiantes de español, enseñanza del inglés.

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1.INTRODUCTION

In English grammar, interrogative determiners like *which* and *what* are known to be words that are used to formulate direct and indirect questions. Determiners are always followed by the noun which they are asking about resulting in this case in structures such as *What+Noun* and *Which+Noun*. As with some other English grammatical structures, these interrogative determiners are part of the general knowledge acquired by Spanish students of English in primary schools.

This dissertation covers the comparison of the interrogative determiners *which* and *what* followed by a noun, with the goal of finding out if L1 Spanish learners of English attending a Spanish primary school are able to differentiate one from the other given the material provided by their English textbooks.

In order to show how this aim was fulfilled, this study is organized in different sections: Section 2 provides a theoretical background on the two interrogative determiners under study. Section 3 offers the empirical framework: how *which* and *what* are explained in the field of English teaching. Section 4 includes the main research objectives of this work. Section 5 describes the methodology followed and based on a multiple-choice test. Section 6 shows the main results derived from the analysis and finally, section 7 lays out the final conclusion of the present research paper. The last sections include a list of the works cited in the study and an appendix with the template of the test designed to measure the participants' knowledge of English interrogative determiners.

2. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK: WH-PHRASES IN ENGLISH GRAMMAR

In English grammar, there are Wh-words defined as function words that can appear in both direct and indirect questions: *what*, *who*, *which*, *when*, *why*, and *how*. The target Wh-words in this dissertation are *which* and *what*, which can form Wh-phrases (i.e. the combination of Wh-words + noun) like those in (1) and (2), respectively.

(1) **Which dog** do you like the most?

(2) **What dog** do you want?

Broadly speaking, these Wh-phrases are characterized as found in interrogative structures and typically assuming the role of objects, as in examples (1) and (2), and subjects, as in (3) and (4).

(3) What happened next?

(4) Which door opened?

As mentioned in Section 1, this study is focused on the production of *which* and *what* phrases by English students in these two different syntactic contexts. To this end and as a brief introduction to the theoretical viewpoint of Wh-phrases, Section 2.1 captures the labels that Wh-phrases have been referred to over the last decades and how experts denominate these structures nowadays.

2.1 TERMINOLOGICAL ISSUES

The great variety in the terminology used to refer to Wh-phrases reflects the interest it has received from different theoretical perspectives and fields: i.e. mostly grammar and teaching research perspectives. Table 1 conveys a sample representation of the different terms that some experts have given to this grammatical construction over the last two decades.

Table.1: Target structure: Terminology

AUTHOR	NAME OF THE STRUCTURE	SOURCE G(rammar book) / A(rticle) / T(extbook)
Sargeant (2007) Van Gelderen (2010) Aarts (2011) Strazny (2013)	Interrogative Determiners	Basic English Grammar for English Language Learners (T); An Introduction to the Grammar of English (G); Oxford Modern English Grammar (G); Encyclopedia of Linguistics (G)
Aarts, Chalker & Weiner (1994)	Interrogative Structures	Oxford Dictionary of English Grammar (G)
Eastwood (1994)	Question Words	Oxford Guide to English Grammar (G)
Beermann (1997)	WQs	Syntactic Discontinuity and Predicate Formation (A)
Brinton (2000)	Wh-Questions	The Structure of Modern English (G)
Aarts (2001)	Wh-Interrogatives / Wh-words	English Syntax and Argumentation (G)
Ferenčik (2002)	Wh-words / Determiners	The Structure of English (T)
Huddleston & Pullum (2002)	Interrogative Determinatives	The Cambridge Grammar of the English Language (G)
Lewandowska (1997) Lai-Shen Cheng (2003)	Wh-words	Some Remarks on Interrogative and Relative Pronouns in English (A); Wh-in-situ (A)
Koopman, Sportiche & Stabler (2013)	Wh-phrases / Wh- questions	An Introduction to Syntactic Analysis on Theory (G)
DeCapua (2017)	Interrogative Words	Grammar for Teachers (G)
Kant & Postal (1964)	Interrogatives	An Integrated Theory of Linguistic Description (A)

Looking at Table 1, and contrasting the different labels that Wh-phrases have been given over the last 27 years, it seems that the most appropriate term to be adopted in this dissertation is *Interrogative Determiners* because other terms, such as *Interrogative Structures* or *Questions / Wh-words*, seem to imply more general structures. As the present work is focused only on two determiners (i.e., *which* and *what*) we have considered that the most appropriate term should include the word *determiner* although when referring to the structure where they are followed by a noun, we will refer to *wh-phrases*.

In the next section, we will examine the structure and the meaning of *which* and *what* when used as interrogative determiners before a noun to form questions. We have to take into account the existence of null nouns (e.g. Which / What do you want?), but this dissertation is focused on interrogative determiners followed by explicit nouns, as examples (1)-(4) show. The grammatical properties related to these interrogative determiners will also be explained.

2.2. INTERROGATIVE DETERMINERS: GRAMMATICAL FEATURES OF *WHAT+N VS. WHICH+N*

The form of *which* and *what* as interrogative determiners in Wh-phrases will be examined by taking into account different grammatical aspects, such as [+/- definite], [+/- human], [+/- specific], and [+/-singular], which are essential grammatical features (closely linked to semantics) to bear in mind when using each of them.

2.2.1. DEFINITENESS

According to Katz and Postal (1964) and Lewandoska (1997), among others, the difference between the [+/-Def] feature of *which*-phrases and *what*-phrases is that the determiner *what* adds indefinite properties to the phrase, as opposed to *which* that adds definite properties. In other words, the determiner *what* is marked for [-Def], as in example (5), which means that the phrase refers to a range of non-identified referents (i.e., what things that I do not know of are you referring to?). On the contrary, in example (6) the *which*-phrase hosts an identified referent (i.e., the car identified as yours is...?).

(5) WH + (some + thing) *What*: ➡ **What things** are you referring to? [-definite]

(6) WH + (the + thing) *Which*: ➡ **Which car** is yours? [+definite]

Along the same lines, Eastwood (1994) establishes that there is also a difference between the meaning of *what* and *which* in terms of definiteness. He claims that English speakers use *what* when there is an indefinite (large) number of possible answers (i.e. *What things...?.*, choosing among all existing things), and they use *which* when there is a definite (small) number of possible answers (i.e.: *Which car...?.*, choosing out of a set of cars).

The next section, 2.2.2, it will be explained how the interrogative determiners *which* and *what* also differ in terms of animacy.

2.2.2. ANIMACY

Animacy is a grammatical feature that expresses how alive the reference of a noun is. In the case of question words, Eastwood (1994) claims that depending on the noun they are combined with, the phrases with the interrogative determiners *which* and *what* can refer to either animate or human referents (as in (7a) and (8a)) or something non-animated or non-human (as in (7b) and (8b)).

(7)

(a) **Which singer** do you like the most? [+animate]

(b) **Which gas-station** is cheaper? [-animate]

(8)

(a) **What idiot** wrote this? [+animate]

(b) **What book** do you like to read? [-animate]

As shown in the examples above, both determiners can be combined with [+animate] or with [-animate] nouns so they show no differences in this respect.

However, both interrogative determiners seem to differ in terms of other grammatical features like specificity, as proven in the following section.

2.2.3. SPECIFICITY

According to both the Cambridge Dictionary (2020) and the British Council (2013), *what* is used when English speakers ask for specific information from a general range of possible answers, as example (9) shows, where the speaker should choose an appropriate and specific answer or item among all the possible foods that exist (and are known) in that context.

(9) **What food** do you prefer?

Additionally, according to both sources mentioned above, *which* is used when English speakers ask for specific information from a restricted range of possible answers, as examples (10)-(12) illustrate, being all of them [+specific].

(10): [Context: There are four books on a table]

- **Which book** do you like the most?

- This one.

(11) **Which airport** do we leave from, Barcelona or Madrid?

(12) [Context: Looking at six girls]

- **Which girl** is the oldest?

- The one with the green jumper.

In example (10) the interlocutor should choose one book among the four specific books that are available and in (11) the interlocutor must choose between Barcelona or Madrid to answer. In the case of (12), the oldest must be identified out of the six girls. In all these cases, the possibility of choosing the specific referent is reduced to a small group, in contrast to the interrogative determiner *what*, which allows non-specific but general possibilities of choosing an answer as in (13).

(13) [Context: in a pub] **What drink** do you like? [-specific]

Therefore, as happens with definiteness, in interrogative phrases there is a semantic difference implied in terms of specificity between *which* or *what* as interrogative determiners. Examples (9)-(13) also show how the grammatical number in the Wh-phrases is not a conditional factor when using one determiner or the other, as discussed further in the following section.

2.2.4. NUMBER

As generally known, in English, number is a grammatical category split into two categories: singular and plural. These categories deal with nouns, pronouns, determiners, and verbs. In the concrete case of determiners, there is not an explicit agreement with number, as *which* and *what* may appear together with [-singular] or [+singular] nouns, as examples (14) and (15) show, respectively.

(14)

(a) **Which colors** of the palette do you prefer? [-singular]

(b) **What fruits** do you prefer for dinner? [-singular]

(15)

(a) **Which apple** do you prefer? [+singular]

(b) **What hat** is the best? [+singular]

Having analyzed the main grammatical features of *what* and *which* as English interrogative determiners, the determiner *what* in terms of all the above grammatical features is marked for [-definite] and [-specific]. Animacy depends on the context but *what* can work with both [-/+animate] entities. The number category will depend on the context as well and it can be [-/+ singular] depending on the noun it is combined with. On the other hand, the interrogative determiner *which* is marked for [+specific] and [+definite] features, although for number and animacy it follows the same patterns as those of *what*.

After having reviewed briefly all the grammatical features of the interrogative determiners under study, Section 3 will deal with how interrogative determiners are taught in Spanish primary schools.

3. EMPIRICAL FRAMEWORK: *WHAT* VS. *WHICH* DISTINCTION IN ENGLISH LANGUAGE TEACHING

Under this section, some primary school English textbooks for children between 3^o grade to 6^o grade (9-12 years old) who are learning English as a foreign language will be examined. The effectiveness of these pedagogical materials in explaining the difference between the interrogative determiners under analysis is checked and, if it proves to be effective, in which grammatical terms (i.e. if any of the grammatical features illustrated under Section 2 are taken into account – indirectly in terms of primary levels - or they are not).

The books chosen to carry out the research work in this dissertation are the following (all of them written by Read and Ormerod (2018)).

-*New Tiger 3* Pupil's Book (3rd grade)

-*New Tiger 4* Pupil's Book (4th grade)

-*New Tiger 5* Pupil's Book (5th grade)

-*New Tiger 6* Pupil's Book (6th grade)

Focusing on the books above, and having reviewed them, it is apparent that, in all the books from 3rd to 6th grade, the structure *What* + N and *Which* + N is mentioned but just as part of practice exercises; that is, they are included in a short text with a reading exercise, and then a series of questions about that reading using the structure Wh+N, taken from the 6th grade textbook, where the highest amount of exercises (i.e. tables 2-4) including the target structures were found.¹

Table 2: *Exercise 1 from 6th grade (Read and Ormerod 2018)*

¹ Due to copyright restrictions, the images corresponding to the textbook's exercises could not be included in the present study. However, we have copied them verbatim in form of tables 1, 2, and 3.

There is a text about “working dogs” and the students have to answer the following questions:

- 1: **Which dog** has got a very good sense of smell?
- 2: **Which dog** works with a team of people?
- 3: **Which dogs** wears a harness?
- 4: **Which dogs** works with animals?

Table 3: Exercise 2 from 6th grade (Read and Ormerod 2018)

There is a test about 4 different tours and the students have to answer the following questions:

- 1: **What famous sport** do you watch on the sports tour?
- 2: **What famous building** do you visit in the city tour?
- 3: **What animals** do you discovered on the rainforest tour?
- 4: Who do you learn about on the outback tour?

Table 4: Exercise 3 from 6th grade (Read and Ormerod 2018)

There is a reading about “arboreal animals and plants” and the students have to answer the following questions:

- 1: **Which photos** show a mammal, a fungus, a bird, an insect and a plant?
- 2: **Which animals** eats insects?
- 3: Where do some mushrooms grow?
- 4: **Which animals** eat dead wood?
- 5: Why is mistletoe important
- 6: **Which animals** eat nuts?

Although the target structures are found in some practical exercises in the above-mentioned Primary School textbooks, no theoretical explanation on the use of these target structures was found, nor any explanation about the grammatical characteristics discussed in Section 2 either. The only evidence of this distinction were practical exercises such as the ones in tables 2-4 included in the 6th grade textbook, where [+definite] and [+specific]

entities (referred to in the text that the students have to read previously) with [+/-animate] and [+/-singular] nouns combinations are found. Therefore, only some of the possible grammatical features of the target structures are instanced in these textbooks.

As very few examples were found in these primary school textbooks, one secondary school textbook, *New Opportunities Education for Life* (Harris, Mower and Sikorzynska 2013), was browsed in order to check if *which/what*-phrases were included for older students' learning material, but the search was unsuccessful: there was no information about the use of these structures in the English teaching material targeted to higher levels, which seems to indicate that these structures are not usually part of the English subject curriculum in primary or secondary school levels. However, we consider that *what/which*-phrases should be crucial structures in English language teaching, especially the differences between *what* and *which* as interrogative determiners, and this distinction should be taught from the beginning of primary school programs. For this reason, as part of the main aim of this research, we would like to confirm whether the scarce information on interrogative English determiners provided to Spanish primary school students learning English is enough for them to understand their use or, if on the contrary, it would be convenient to reinforce the teaching of these structures to avoid future problems with their distinction. With this purpose in mind, Section 5 will present a description of the main objectives of this study.

4. MAIN RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

The major aim of the present empirical study is to observe whether the scarce information about the differences between *which* and *what* described in certain English textbooks used in some Spanish primary schools' programs (see Section 3) is sufficient aid for Spanish students to learn and understand them. In order to do so, the production of these two interrogative determiners will be taken into consideration to examine a) if Spanish students that use these textbooks are able to recognize the *what- versus which*-phrases differential features (see Section 2) as only some of these (i.e., [+def], [+spec], [+/- anim] and [+/- sing] but not [-def] or [-spec]) have been showed indirectly in their practical exercises; and b) if both determiners can be used under certain conditions (i.e.,

animacy and number), the students prefer to use one over the other (interpreting the phrase as referring to a more or less definite or specific referent).

The main concern of this work is then to shed some light on English interrogative determiners use by Spanish students who are learning elementary characteristics of the English language at school. In Section 5, the methodology of this research will be explained, as well as the profile of the participants who took the task designed for this study.

5. METHODOLOGY

A group of participants carried out the specific task that was designed to elicit data and fulfill the aims of this empirical study in terms of understanding and differentiating the English interrogative determiners *which* and *what*.

5.1 PARTICIPANTS

Eighteen L1 Spanish students —aged between 11 and 12 years old— who were studying English in 6th grade in a Primary School in Cabanillas (Navarre) were chosen as participants. Only students of this age were selected as it was expected that they had already gone through all the previous teaching material (i.e., the *New Tiger Pupil's Book* series) and, therefore, they would be more capable of identifying the *which-what* contrast. Table 2 shows additional information about the amount of English input they received in English every week.

Table 5: Participants of the study.

# of participants	Academic formation	Input in English	Grade
18	Primary school	3 hours/week	6 th

These 18 participants were 11-12 years old and they carried out the task designed for the present study and described in the following section 6.2.

5.2. TASKS AND PROCEDURE

A fill-in the blanks task that was designed according to the elementary level of the participants (see Appendix 1). However, vocabulary was provided if the participant did not know any of the words that appeared in the sentences.

In this task, the participants were asked to fill in the blanks with one of the six different words provided on the top part of the test (i.e., *have, which, do, what, can, are*), two of them were the determiners under study and the rest were distracting words to draw their attention away from the targeted ones. The task included a total of 36 questions which included 16 (50%) interrogative determiner phrases and 16 (50%) fillers in order to divert the attention of the participants from the real aim of the task. Regarding the 16 questions that included the target interrogative determiner phrases, two different interrogative sentences were selected for each grammatical condition according to the classification illustrated in Section 2 (i.e., +/-definiteness/specificity, +/-animacy, and +/-number).

The features of definiteness and specificity have been grouped together under the same condition as it is very difficult to describe an appropriate context in only one short sentence that should serve as valid only for definiteness regardless of specificity (both features are closely connected according to Frawley (1992)).

The functions of the *what/which*-phrases within each sentence were not taken as conditions although most of them are objects or subjects, and the following examples used in the test illustrate the number of sentences for each condition (the word that the participants were expected to write correctly is underlined in each case):

[WHICH: +definite/specific, -animate, +sing]

- 1: Peter, I have two books on my table. Which book is yours?
2. I have two skirts, one green and one blue. Which skirt should I wear?

[WHICH: +definite/specific, +animate, -singular]

3. Look at your eight classmates. Which classmates do you want to work with?
4. You have four friends, two of them are blond. Which friends are blond?

[WHICH: +definite/specific, +animate, +singular]

5. Your brother is a Real Madrid fan. Which football player is his favorite?

6. María, the actors of *La que se avecina* are great, aren't they? Which actor is your favorite?

[WHICH: + definite/specific, -animate, -singular]

7. Look at all the posters of *One Direction* I have. Which posters do you like?

8. Daniel, you know all of Rihanna's songs. Which songs are the most famous?

[WHAT: -definite/specific, +animate, -singular]

9. Anne, you love pets. What pets would you like to have at home?

10. Jack, I heard that you love music. What singers are your favorite ones?

[WHAT: -definite/specific, -animate, +singular]

11. Juan, you really like cars. What car is the worst for you?

12. You should always eat fruit with your breakfast. What fruit do you like the most?

[WHAT: -definite/specific, -animate, -singular]

13. Mike, you have traveled a lot. What countries will you visit this year?

14. Sarah loves flowers. What flowers would you buy for her birthday?

[WHAT: -definite/specific, +animate, +singular]

15. Julio, you are an expert on birds. What **bird** would be a nice present for my mum?

16. Megan, you told me that you love reading. What writer do you recommend me?

As for the 16 fillers used in the test, these are some of the interrogative sentences used which were mixed with the target structures. The participants were expected to use one of the possible verbs (i.e., *can, do, have, are*) instead of one of the target interrogative determiners (the rest of the fillers appear in Appendix 1):

- Your dad speaks French. **Can** you speak French?

- Let's have some dinner. We can order some pizza. What do you think? **Do** you like pizza?
- Mark, I need a pencil. **Have** you got one?
- You know a lot about Great Britain, you really have a great mark in the exam. **Have** you been to London?
- Sorry, I'm looking for a doctor, my mother is sick, and she needs help. **Are** you a doctor?

All these sentences, the target structures and the fillers, were included in a randomized order in a sheet of paper that the students were handed by the English teacher as part of the practice of the English class. They were given a total of one hour to complete the test. In section 7 the results derived from the test are presented.

6. ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION OF RESULTS

In this section, the results obtained from the test described in the previous part of the study are presented and analyzed by dividing into two different tables (see tables 3 and 4) the two different interrogative determiners that we have analyzed in previous parts. To perform the analysis, each table is divided by the category of each sentence (see Section 6.2). Each category has eight sentences. In total, the test consists of 32 sentences (see Appendix 1), as mentioned above, 16 (50%) sentences corresponding to the interrogative determiners (see section 6.2) and 16 (50%) filler. That is why each table has eight sentences, since the test has eight sentences directed at the interrogative determiner *which* and another eight sentences directed at the interrogative determiner *what*.

In each table we can see the percentages of correct, incorrect and unanswered answers by the participants and the corresponding percentage over the total number of sentences (eight sentences per interrogative determiner.)

Below each table we can see the total percentages of correct, incorrect and unanswered responses for each interrogative determiner, which will help us see which interrogative determiner is easier for the student to understand.

Table 6: Results of *what*-phrases

Features	Sentence#	Wrong answers	Right answers	No answers
-def, -spec,	9	10 (55,6%)	7 (38,9%)	1 (5,6%)
+an, -sing	10	7 (38,9 %)	11 (61,1%)	-
-def, -spec,	11	7 (38,9%)	11 (61,1%)	-
-an, +sing	12	12 (66,7%)	6 (33,3%)	-
-def, -spec,	13	13 (72,22%)	5 (27,8%)	-
-an, -sing	14	8 (44,4%)	10 (55,6%)	-
-def, -spec,	15	10 (55,6%)	6 (33,3%)	2 (11,1%)
+an, +sing	16	14 (77,8%)	4 (22,2%)	-
Totals	8	81 (45%)	60 (33,3%)	3 (16,7%)

Paying attention to Table 6, it is evident that the results obtained in most of the different patterns are very similar. This may be because the participants are not very clear about the difference between the different patterns. That is, except for the last combination of conditions (-def, -spec, +an, +sing, sentences 15 and 16) where most of the answers in both sentences are wrong (55,6% and 77,8%, respectively), in the case of the rest of conditions there is indetermination on the part of the participants as whether *what*- phrases are right (as in sentences 10, 11 and 14) or wrong (sentences 9, 12 and 13). These results lead to a total of wrong answers much higher than the right ones (45% vs. 33,3%), and a low percentage of non-responses (16,7%).

As for the results of *which*-phrases, table 7 illustrates the participants' answers.

Table 7: Results of which-phrases

Features	Sentence#	Wrong answers	Right answers	No answers
+def, +spec, -an, +sing	1	6 (33,3%)	12 (66,7%)	-
	2	12 (66,7%)	5 (27,8%)	1 (5,6%)
+def, +spec +an, -sing	3	13 (72,2%)	5 (27,8%)	-
	4	13 (72,2%)	4 (22,2%)	1 (5,6%)
+def, +spec, +an, +sing	5	10 (55,6%)	8 (44,4%)	-
	6	11 (61,1%)	7 (38,9%)	-
+def, +spec, -an, -sing	7	13 (72,2%)	5 (27,8%)	-
	8	11 (61,1%)	7 (38,9%)	-
Totals	8	89 (49,4%)	53 (29,4%)	2 (11,2%)

Looking at Table 4, a high percentage of incorrect answers is observed in all the combinations of the different conditions except for the first one (+def, +spec, -an, +sing) which leads us to conclude more categorically than in the *what*-phrases that the students did not know how to use *which* as an interrogative determiner and so they use *what* instead.

As mentioned above, the percentage of correct answers obtained with the interrogative determiner *which* (29,4%) is lower than the results obtained with the interrogative determiner *what* (33,3%). Therefore, although a high percentage of wrong answers was expected due to the lack of explicit feedback on English interrogative determiners in primary textbooks, the students' performance resulted in too high percentages of incorrect use of *which* and *what*. Nevertheless, these results, as in the case of those derived from the *what*-phrases, point out then a poor learning of interrogative determiners by the participants.

In conclusion, based on the results and the analysis of the performance of the participants in the test, the primary students were not able to differentiate between the interrogative determiners *which* / *what* (regardless of all the grammatical aspects covered in section 2), which seems to point to the necessity of providing them at least a minimum and elementary theoretical and/or practical feedback so that they can understand and learn how to distinguish them.

7. CONCLUSION

This dissertation was aimed at studying the understanding of interrogative determiners and their use in Spanish primary learners of English, inquiring if they would be able to discern the difference between *which* +*N* / *what* + *N*. For this, we created a multiple-choice test and analyzed and compared the results of the performance of 18 students with that profile.

The classification of each interrogative determiner according to four categories in one test were expected to give us detailed results about which features were problematic to these students but the results indicated that both interrogative determiners were difficult for them to be chosen. As an apparent consequence of this, both interrogative determiners were used wrongly in most cases although *which* posed them more problems than *what*.

Different possibilities to interpret these results like the following could be taken into consideration:

- i) English interrogative structures are difficult for primary students to learn and more specifically those that include the interrogative determiners *which* and *what*, which seem to be used interchangeably;
- ii) either of these structures may be not well or enough explained in class or the level of English in primary schools is not the most desirable and should be higher, which brings to one of the many limitations of the present study: students from higher school levels' (i.e., secondary schools) performance should have been taken into consideration.

As for further research then, as the data collected may not representative enough since the number of participants is very low, and their English proficiency is rather elementary, other more proficiency students or even different types of tasks may be helpful to look into the understanding of these structures.

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9 .APPENDIX 1

Completa las siguientes frases eligiendo **SOLO UNA PALABRA** de la tabla para cada frase. Puedes repetir las palabras las veces que necesites.

have	which	do	what	can	are
------	-------	----	------	-----	-----

1. Your dad speaks French and English. _____ you speak French?
2. I need to take some notes because tomorrow I have an exam. _____ you got a piece of paper, please?
3. Peter, I have two books on my table. _____ book is yours?
4. Daniel, you know all of Rihanna's songs. _____ songs are the most famous?
5. I have some ice-cream and the weather is perfect to take one, isn't it? _____ you like ice-cream?
6. Mike, you have traveled a lot. _____ countries will you visit this year?
7. Look at all the posters of *One Direction* I have. _____ posters do you like?
8. Let's have some dinner. We can order some pizza. What do you think? _____ you like pizza?
9. Jack, I heard that you love music. _____ singers are your favorite ones?
10. I have two skirts, one green and one blue. _____ skirt should I wear?
11. I am very busy because I am in class right now. _____ you call me later?
12. Let's buy some food. We could try something new, what do you think? _____ you ever tasted Chinese food?
13. I am going to Mark's party tonight. Our entire class is coming. _____ you coming?
14. You have four friends, two of them are blond. _____ friends are blond?
15. Sarah loves flowers. _____ flowers would you buy for her birthday?
16. I am very hungry. Let's order some food. _____ I have a burger, please?
17. I saw on TV last night that it will rain tomorrow. _____ you like rainy weather?
18. Your English is quite good since you started the course you have improved a lot. _____ you practicing a lot?
19. Juan, you really like cars. _____ car is the worst in your opinion?
20. Look at your eight classmates. _____ classmates do you want to work with?
21. Sorry, I am looking for a doctor, my mother is sick, and she needs help. _____ you a doctor?

22. Mark, I need a pencil because I have forgotten my pencil case at home. _____
you got one?

23. Megan, you told me that you love reading. _____ writer do you recommend me?

24. Your brother is a Real Madrid fan. _____ football player is his favorite?

25. Yesterday when I saw you in the supermarket you looked stressed. _____ you
in trouble?

26. I need you to help me finish my homework, Elisa. _____ you come here, please?

27. Anne, you love pets. _____ pets would you like to have at home?

28. Julio, you are an expert on birds. _____ bird would be a nice present for my
mum?

29. You know a lot about Great Britain; you really have a great mark in the exam.
_____ you been to London?

30. María, the actors of *La que se avecina* are great, aren't they? _____ actor is your
favorite?

31. You look lost, are you new in this town or are you just here for vacation?
_____ you need some help?

32. You should always eat fruit with your breakfast. _____ fruit do you like the most?