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## **DIFFERENT INTERPRETATIONS OF SPANISH AND ENGLISH REFERENTIAL DETERMINERS. A CASE STUDY BASED ON THE TRANSLATION OF NOUN PHRASES**

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## **ABSTRACT**

The semantic meaning of determiners present relevance in communication, as they provide lexical information in the formation of noun phrases. Each language has a different way of acknowledging these communicative elements. The present dissertation seeks to study how native Spanish (L1) learners understand the different referential scopes of given determiners in English, when they are studying it as a foreign language. Including references to the two languages, the study can help us analyse the existence of possible interferences of their native Spanish language. General and individuating expressions are compared to their respective translations in the English language: generic definite articles, indefinite articles compared with their numeral counterpart and, finally, the indefinites "some" and "any". For this purpose, a multiple-choice test based on the translation technique is proposed. The analysed results finally show little interferences from L1 to the L2.

**Keywords:** Referential system, generic and individuating determiners, translation, language learning, English, Spanish.

## **RESUMEN**

El significado semántico de los determinantes muestra relevancia en la comunicación, ya que proporcionan información léxica en la formación de sintagmas nominales. Estos elementos comunicativos se conocen de manera diferente en cada lengua. Esta tesis investiga como estudiantes nativos españoles (L1) entienden los diferentes ámbitos de los determinantes mencionados en inglés, cuando este idioma se estudia como lengua extranjera. Haciendo referencia a ambas lenguas, este estudio nos ayuda a analizar la existencia de posibles interferencias del español como lengua nativa. Expresiones generales e individuales se comparan con sus respectivas traducciones en la lengua inglesa: artículos definidos genéricos, artículos indefinidos comparados con el referente numeral y, por último, los indefinidos "algún" y "ningún". Para ello se propone un test de selección múltiple basado en la técnica de traducción. El análisis de resultados indica finalmente escasas interferencias de la L1 a la L2.

**Palabras clave:** sistema referencial, determinantes genéricos e individuales, traducción, aprendizaje de una lengua, español, inglés



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# 1. INTRODUCTION

When we come to think about the transmission of a message through language, it has to be connected to a mental process, hence the study of communication might bring engaging knowledge about how we come to use and understand the different perspectives of meaning. Communication is done by means of objective perceptions or, on the contrary, by means unconscious creation of different interpretations. Reality can be discursively construed in an objective or a subjective way, but it is important that there exists a reciprocal interaction between people in the appreciation of that reality.

Generally, the action of listening to conversations in movies, reading characters' speeches or paying attention to several details we are being given, makes us endeavour in this communicative responsibility so as not to lose information along the way. Every sentence involves different conceptual communicative elements. We differ between lexical words such as nouns, verbs or adjectives among others, which develop their own lexical meaning, and the grammatical ones which conform the linguistic structure of each language. However, determiners, in linguistics, do not work on their own because their lexical meaning suggests nothing in the communicative process. They actually come together with a noun (e.g. some fruit) and what is more, they ground the meaning into different contexts. Prado (1997) indicates that we are facing two stages in communication that differ one another. We are dealing with the application of linguistics which refers to those definite expressions; and pragmatics where the application of reference comes to be included.

Cognitive grammar (Langacker, 2008, 2013), Giovanelli & Harrison (2018) has tried to explain how we come to understand the linguistic role of determiners and their anchorage function in communication. They talk about the action of grounding which they define as “the process by which states and events are fixed in relation to the current speech event, providing information about what happened, when happened and who was involved” (p. 108). Salmon-Alt & Romary (2001) argue that “it is intended to save relevant contextual information for the attribution of referents to referring expressions” (p.2). Therefore, the use of referential determiners is linked to the understanding of a pragmatic context used by the speaker and interpreted by the hearer.

This dissertation focuses on the understanding of these communicative elements in the learning of a foreign language. A native language does not normally convey many

problems in its usage by native people. However, the dominance of a similar understanding in a foreign language sometimes leads learners to cope with difficulties in the process of communication. In this case, determiners show several characteristics that differ in the comparison of Spanish and English languages, being those languages researched in this dissertation.

Nevertheless, as I have mentioned before, determiners also work as referential words, and it is this referential function of determiners that will be discussed in this dissertation, considering the various interpretations speakers may encounter in the semantic process of two different languages. Probably, a person trying to make a talk understandable uses the right referential expressions, but the fact that we normally speak in our mother tongue language, we do not realize the importance the determiners as indexicals have, as we are entering into another language context. So, if we are Spanish native speakers learning English language as an L2, our attention would be focused on the correct semantic use of the determiners of that specific L2 language, as we do not use them instinctively.

This dissertation considers the idea of the referential use of determiners on the basis of the interpretation of native Spanish noun phrases translated into an L2 learning language -English. To this effect, it consists of five different sections. In the literature review a theoretical part explains both Spanish and English referential systems supporting the most outstanding differences regarding generic and individuating articles. It also overviews investigations covering similar ideas to this dissertation and other studies about the function of translation techniques. Then it attempts to show this theoretical part applied to an experimental research in regards of the different interpretations that an L1 may generate in the learning of an L2 by native Spanish participants. It focuses on the resolution of three hypotheses which includes most of the variations in the understanding both language pragmatics. Several Tables collect the results obtained after testing participants, followed by a further analysis of the different interpretations they had on the translation of Spanish noun phrases dealing with referential determiners. After the analysis of results, a conclusion of the experimental research is exposed to detect language translation variations of three types of determiners functioning as referents.

## 2. LITERATURE REVIEW

Linguistics allows us to understand the structure of a language. Cognitive grammar argues that grammar is not arbitrary and tries to explain what is the originating meaning of different grammatical structures, which in this dissertation are determiners, nouns, and noun phrases. According to Antonelli & May (2012) “a determiner is an expression such as “every,” “no,” “most,” “between 3 and 5,” etc., which combines with a predicate to form a noun phrase” (p. 347). Cognitive grammar was developed by Ronald W. Langacker. A clear point of departure in this theory is that linguistic structures in any language – English and Spanish in this dissertation- show particular types of conceptualizations. Thus, we can argue that all the determiners, as elements used for communication, make sense if we get to analyse them together. Langacker (2008) explains that he is proposing “a framework that offers a comprehensive yet coherent view of language structure, with the further advantages of being intuitively natural, psychologically plausible, and empirically viable” (p. 3). As we can observe the appropriate use of determiners is quite closely related the application of this linguistic theory, hence many researchers, such as González (2016) and Ionin, Montrul, Kim & Philippov (2011) later mentioned, have made use of it in their further investigations of semantic and linguistic aspects of the language. Regarding this dissertation, Cognitive Grammar covers this communicative function of determiners as referents. Prado (1997) understands the term reference as “generic” which assigns a virtual reality or the appointing class (in this case determiners); or as “specific” which relates to concrete simple or several utterances of that appointed class.

The function of determiners is described in this framework and as Salmon-Alt & Romary (2001) – cited from Langacker, (2008) – claim:

In Cognitive Grammar, determiners [...] specify the status of nominals in relation to the “ground”, comprising the speech event and its participants. [...] whether or to what degree the speech act participants can locate the thing referred to within the mass of objects populating their conceptual universe. (p. 14)

From an objective point of view, referential determiners behave in order to create communicative connection. Each language collects and provides further descriptions of the meaning of a noun phrase applying established semantic rules. According to Giovanelli & Harrison (2008, p. 134), “when a ‘discourse’ is broached, [...], we produce



a usage event, [...] an instance of language use that comprises both phonetic parts, and wider contextual information speakers/listeners need in order to understand expressions” (p. 134). In this dissertation, the study will be focused on both Spanish and English referential systems, explained below, to acknowledge the differences of certain referential determiners.

## **2. 1. REFERENTIAL SYSTEMS**

While the underlying indexical functioning of the English and Spanish referential systems could be arguably similar, the semantic and grammatical realisation in both languages differs. The use of determiners as referents can be sometimes confusing for a Spanish learner of the English language. Therefore, we have to observe whether a native Spanish student with Spanish as an L1 and English as an L2 applies the same semantic structure criterion while using both languages, or on the contrary, he or she acknowledges the natural use of these systems without dealing with linguistic inferences. Giovanelli & Harrison (2006) talk about the fact that languages are embodied, and they define that concept as “how our use and understanding of language is shaped by our physical experience in and with the world [...]. Consequently, we, as producers of a language, build and create meanings in our mind” (p. 6). Ibarretxe (2013) also supports this claiming saying that this idea of embodiment is originated by traditional means, and it asserts that linguistic elements are not abstract. They actually depend on human beings as they are created according to certain and specific experiences and limited by our own bodies.

### **2. 1. 1. English referential system**

Having a conversation with another person or writing an essay that is going to be later read by others makes the use of determiners essential not to lose the connection between the speaker and the hearer when referring to nouns or noun phrases and to make a fluent connected speech; especially when we are dealing with the acknowledgement of how the use of determiners in the English language (L2) can be altered by the natural influence that a native language (L1) produces. Radden & Dirven (2007) in their book *Cognitive English Grammar* explain the different types of referential meaning associated to each of the determiners in English. First, they explain that the utterance the speaker keeps in mind has to be accessible in the hearer’s one. The speech a person wants to project has to be done in an appropriate way, so that the speaker’s interpretation of the

message arises correctly to the mind of the hearer. That is why an expression alluding to particular instances would be better understood than the one including a generic reference. For communication to be successful, the speaker has to perform four main tasks when using determiners. Radden & Dirven (2007) first say that the speaker has to clarify which is the element or the thing he would later make reference to. Certainly, we could not understand anything if we do not know what that person is talking about. A referent always belongs to a thing and that thing would be formed by a noun or a noun phrase. Second, once we understand that, the speaker has to specify what he is referring to within that noun phrase; in other words, lead the hearer into a particular instance. Third, he has to take into account that the hearer is getting the semantic meaning of the message, so the linguistic information he is creating in his mind matches what he wants to communicate. Here we can see that if we are trying to say something, an understandable meaning is what we have to portray in the end. We are allowed to construct sentences systematically using the grammar rules of different languages, but then we have to focus on the semantic meaning to gather a correct communication. Finally, the speaker has to use or choose the referring expression that better suits the referential meaning intended.

Everything said above is applicable to both the Spanish and English referential systems, even if these differ. Determiners are widely used as they are an important component in the understanding of current conversations. We can find determiners as articles (both definite and indefinite), demonstratives, quantifiers, or possessives. Despite the fact that English and Spanish do not come from the same origin, there are some linguistic aspects that do not show complicated appreciations when learning English as an L2. This happens because both languages roughly apply the same linguistic development and understanding of the structure of determiners. For this reason, this project will approach the semantic learning of definite and indefinite English articles by native L1 Spanish speakers. Regarding the English language, Radden & Dirven (2007) classify determiners into two groups: those with a generic reference and those with an individuating reference. Both of them are subdivided then into indefinite reference and definite reference. In the explanation below, examples will be provided.

Radden & Dirven (2007, p. 106) explain that generic determiners function as follows:

The speaker thinks of a category, singles out an instance of the category [...] and grounds this instance on the current discourse by means of a referring expression so that speaker and hearer can establish mental contact to the same referent. (p. 106)

For instance, in the sentence “Birds are black” we see that the plural noun “birds” is given an indefinite generic value, meaning that all the birds are black. A bare noun phrase has been used as there is no explicit article. Unlike in the previous case, definite generic reference always relies on the article ‘the’ as in the sentence ‘The winter is cold’, where “we take ‘the’ to denote a function which takes a set of entities and returns the unique maximal entity in that set” (Dayal, 2006, p. 8). Lonin, Montrul, Kim and Philippov (2011) have divided the different non-generic references as:

In English, N[oun]P[hrase]s headed by count nouns can appear in four basic forms, depending on whether they take plural marking or not and on whether they occur with the definite article (the), the indefinite article (a), or no article (the so-called ‘bare’ N[oun]P[hrase]s). (p. 245)

Therefore, in the sentence “Some birds are black”, the meaning of the utterance changes into a particular instance and that would be an individuating reference. We are not talking about all the birds, but about some specific ones. This is marked by the referent “some”. In this last example, the determiner “some” has been used instead of “a”, which the English language recognizes as an indefinite determiner.

<b>Generic reference</b>			
<b>Indefinite</b> (A/an/ Ø)		<b>Definite</b> (The)	
Singular	Plural	Singular	Plural
-‘ <u>A</u> bird is dark.’	-‘Birds are black’	-‘ <u>The</u> grandmother is an important figure’	-‘The rich don’t want to pay’

Table 1. English generic referential determiners; based on Günter and Raden (2007, p. 111).

As mentioned above, a distinction between indefinite and definite references can also be made in individuating determiners, as the hearer also has to acknowledge a space in reality in which the referent is taking action. One of the main distinctions between these two terms is the reality in which they are presented. Montero (2017), who has applied Langacker's cognitive grammar to the study of determiners in Spanish, argues that the definite status of a noun phrase comes to be linked to "real" referents, while the indefinite status is attached to "virtual" ones. The use of definite and indefinite reference when talking about non-generic determiners always makes allusion to the fact that these expressions can be specific or non-specific. On the one hand we have the specific ones, which Radden & Dirven (2007) define as "typically used in introducing a new instance to single out a referent among the reference mass" (p. 94). On the other hand, non-specific reference is explained as "an imaginary, or virtual reality" (p. 94). The sentence "I want the apple. It is on the table", is specifying an instance and the hearer is acknowledging the definite referent. But, in the sentence, "I want an apple. It might be a red one" it is observed that the indefinite referent is making the hearer notice that the sentence is not presenting a real apple. Regarding this last example, this imaginary desire of the speaker can progressively turn into a specific reference if the conversation comes to provide more details about that red apple the speaker wants.

Individuating reference has to be described in two different contexts. First, we shall mention an affirmative one, as in the sentence "I want an/some apple". The sentence is stating something in an affirmative way, but as its own name "indeterminate" implies, there is not a clear definition of which concrete apple the speaker wants. The hearer knows that there are apples somewhere and depending on the determiner (singular, plural, mass noun) the hearer realizes that the speaker wants an apple without indicating a specific one. The same happens if the context of the sentence comes to be negative or interrogative. Nevertheless, the determiner changes into "any", as we can see in "Do you want any more food?" This is not a negative sentence, but the linguistic structure is done in an emphatic way without positive expectations.

Furthermore, Radden & Dirven (2007) explain the definite ones as "includ[ing] all the elements that form it set, i.e. it does not exclude any of them" (p. 96). They explain that these types of referents are placed in a specific space, moment, and time and all this has to make sense in the hearer's mind. Al-Saaidi (2011) agrees affirming that "a definite referent is one which the speaker assumes that the hearer will be able to identify, i.e. to

locate in his or her current mental representation” (p. 2). Radden & Dirven (2007) divide them into three groups which are deictic reference, discourse reference and finally unique reference. The deictic reference is used to assign a specific instance that appears in the situational contexts in which the speaker and the hearer are. According to Kachru (2003), “deixis refers to using a process by which a speaker focuses on an element of the situation within his/her perceptual space and transmits this focus to the hearer” (p. 498). Then, we have the discourse reference that appears in the continuation of a conversation, and which Radden & Dirven (2007) explain as: “once a space for a referent has been opened in the discourse, it becomes part of the set of referents shared by speaker and hearer” (p. 98). Finally, the unique reference which is different from the ones mentioned before as the referential instance that the speaker points at in a conversation is directly understood by the hearer. In this case misunderstandings in the conversation do not normally exist because the entity the speaker refers to is already in the mind of the hearer. For example, in the sentence “We went to the German fest last year”, the hearer knows which concert the speaker is talking about. Al-Saaidi (2011) explains that this is “because the referent is part of the interlocutors shared knowledge, or because there is enough descriptive content in the sentence to identify the referent” (p. 3).

<b>Individuative</b> reference				
<b>Indefinite</b> reference (A/An/some/any/∅)		<b>Definite</b> reference (the)		
<b>Specific</b>	<b>Non-specific</b>	<b>Deictic reference</b>	<b>Discourse reference</b>	<b>Unique reference</b>
-‘I want <u>an</u> apple. It is on the table’	-‘I want <u>an</u> apple’	-‘I sent you <u>the</u> review yesterday’	Anaphoric -‘The apples are all mixed. <u>The</u> green ones are on the top.’	-‘ <u>The</u> dog is ill since yesterday’

a. Affirmative	b. Non-affirmative (Negative)	c. Non-affirmative (affirmative)
‘A/An/Some/∅’, -‘I want a <u>some</u> fruit’ -‘Gold is quite valuable’ (mass noun)	‘Any’ -‘Do you want <u>any</u> apple?’	‘some’ -‘Do you want <u>some</u> more apples?’

Table 2. English individuating referential determiners; based on Günter and Raden (2007, p. 111)

In the following section, the Spanish referential system is explained, so that eventually we can reach a comparative view of these two different languages and how the fact that speaking Spanish as an L1 can affect on the learning of English as an L2.

### 2. 1. 2. Spanish referential system

The Spanish referential system is slightly different as it deals with another type of word formation in the structure of the language, but determiners still have the same semantic view. Leonetti (2016) argues that the Spanish language clearly differentiates the definite and indefinite determiners, and that this allows us a reliable base to classify these elements into two groups. Regarding definite determiners, he includes definite articles, demonstratives, and possessives. On the contrary, indefinite determiners cover most of the quantifiers. This language divides these determiners into two groups whose use contrasts from one another. On the one hand, we have definite determiners, which García (1989) describes as the ones determining the extension of the noun phrase removing, if possible, from the members defining the other constituents, the elements which do not accomplish with the referred property. On the other hand, we find indefinite referents in which García (1989) characterizes that there is no limitation of the extension in regards of the action of removing elements as possible referents.

Compared to the only existing definite article determiner (the) in the English language, the Spanish language provides four of them including singular and plural forms. Montero (2017) following Leonetti (1999), said that the definite feature of the articles “el/la/los/las” has always assigned that the noun phrase provides a subject/object already known by the person receiving the message. On the contrary, the indefinite determiner “un/a” conveys a “double meaning” using the same word. The interpretation comes from the combination of indefiniteness features and the numeral determiner functioning as a quantifier. Montero (2017), following Bello (1988), states that the indefinite determiner “uno/a” provides indefinite subjects/objects in the resulting meaning, which are not already known by the person the message is directed to. The determiner “un/a/os/as” mainly relates to an indefinite article, but there are many researchers who distinguish between these symbols as words with no lexical meaning –as it happens with the definite ones – or quantifiers understood as a cardinal number. Montero (2017), following Alarcos (1980) claims, that the determiner “un” can function without the necessity of any other element, so that indeed it differs from the function of the article “el”. Another relevant opinion Montero (2017) cited from Leonetti (1999) supports the idea that both cardinal features of the numeral determiner and the indefiniteness linked to this indefinite article may get importance in the communicative context. Here, Leonetti exposes that sometimes, “un/a” in the singular form may be referring to series of numbers resulting that the referent marks of indetermination would disappear, as in “una ventana abierta nos congelará”. This referential determiner may be doubly interpreted; understood as any window or implying the importance that there might be more than one.

Leonetti (1999) also talks about quantifiers and Montero (2017) includes the numerals “uno/a, dos, tres, etc.” and the indefinite quantifiers referring to “mucho/a/s, poco/a/s, bastante/s, algún(o)/a/os/as, ningún(o)/a/os/as, etc. However, for this dissertation, it is Santiago (2017) that will be followed, and her quote from Lapesa (1975). Santiago (2017) considers “un” as article without proper semantic meaning, whose properties involve the application of expression or the update of the entering understanding of the noun phrase within a speech. This function does not provide quantitative characteristics nor the type of noun phrase we are dealing with. Montero (2017), after Alarcos (1999), claims that the use of “una” makes an utterance unique, rather than the application of the determiner “alguna”, which might be interpreted as more than one. Finally, the Spanish referential system also considers the zero article to be an

indefinite determiner. Montero (2017, p. 406), after Langacker (2008), agrees that zero article ( $\emptyset$ ) is intended to mean indefiniteness as it does not ensure that the hearer interprets the referring expression the same way as the speaker. She also says that it provides indeterminate connotations and no limitations of utterances.

As in English, in Spanish a difference can be also found between the use of definite and indefinite determiners with generic or non-generic (individuating) meaning. Montero (2017) quotes this example, taken from Leonetti (1999): “Un conejo vive en una madriguera” and she argues that the first indefinite article assigns a generic reference talking about bunnies in general and the second one is concluding the meaning of the referential expression into a non-specific utterance of certain place. Alonso (2017), also after Leonetti (1999), provides another explanation of a generic reference regarding definite articles. He claims that the singular form of the definite article regarding genericity is intended to refer to a certain type of objects as a common and unique class or unit already known by the speakers. In regards to the difference between these definite and indefinite determiners, “definite and bare forms are grammatical in the sense that they denote generic meaning, whereas the indefinite singular article does not allow to illustrate ambiguity” (González, 2016, p. 15). These authors prove that, as it happens in English, both the definite and indefinite articles in Spanish could be used with generic referential meaning.

Generic expressions		
Definite determiners	Indefinite determiners	
<b>Articles:</b> El/ La/ Los/ Las: -‘Qué bonitas son <u>las</u> calles’	<b>Articles:</b> Un/ Una/ Unos/ as -‘ <u>Una</u> calle peatonal no permite vehículos’	$\emptyset$ -‘Hay calles iluminadas’

Table 3. Spanish generic referential determiners.



Non-generic expressions	
<b>Definite</b> determiners	<b>Indefinite</b> determiners
<b>Articles:</b> El/ La/ Los/ Las: - ‘¿Me puede decía <u>la</u> calle?’	<b>Articles:</b> Un/ Una/ Unos/ Unas -‘Vivo en <u>una</u> calle a las afueras de la ciudad’  <b>Quantifiers:</b> algún/a/os/as -‘Vivo en alguna calle a las afueras de la ciudad’

Table 4. Spanish individuating referential determiners

After reviewing the grammatical realization of reference in both English and Spanish separately, it is necessary to revise the similarities and differences between both languages. As we have observed, there is a variation in the number of determiners used in each referential system. English determiners present the same forms for both singular and plural referring expressions. Although they do not differ in relation to number and gender, they still concord with the noun or noun phrase they are making reference to. On the contrary, the Spanish language includes gender and number in its referential system, as we can see in this English noun phrase “The apples”, it applies the use of the article “the”, But in Spanish we encounter instances such as “Las manzanas/Los árboles” depending on the noun gender.

Spanish definite articles (el/la/los/las) may be the easiest ones to recognize and acknowledge in the English language with its equivalent representation through the article “the”. But, talking about the generic sense that these definite articles provide, we may encounter some mistakes in the process when native Spanish speakers are learning English as an L2. The generalization of a noun or a noun phrase in the Spanish language requires a definite article either in the plural or singular form whereas the English language uses zero article in the plural form ( $\emptyset$ ). “Las manzanas son rojas” → “Apples are red”. (The apples are red). “Thus, unlike English, in characterizing sentences, Spanish allows the use of the definite article with singular and plural N[oun] P[hrase]s. In addition,

Spanish requires the definite article with mass nouns, a property that is not present in English". (Snape, García and Gürel, 2006, p. 7).

However, when the sentence has an individuating definite or indefinite determiner, the acquisition of the English referential system may be more complicated as we encounter the determiners "a/an/some/any/Ø/" as equivalent to "un/a/os/as." There is no difference in Spanish between the indefinite article "un" and the quantifier "un". On the contrary, in English a difference can be seen between the indefinite article "a/an" and the quantifying determiner "one", which indicates an actual quantity.

Affirmative Spanish sentences covering the indefinite determiner "algún/a/os/as" relate to the English determiners "some" and "any". Depending on what they have already acknowledged and their level of English, Spanish native speakers, link "any" with negative sentences, and they would relate it with their L1 determiner "ningún/a/os/as". That argument is not valid when learning this second language as "any" may also be interpreted as a referent to an affirmative sentence. If I say "¿Queda alguna manzana en la caja?", we see how the expectative of the sentence may mean that the speaker notices that it is possible that there are no apples in the box (any) or that there might be more than one (some). These affirmative or question sentences are understood by the variability of interpretations in which "any" and "some" create positive and negative contexts.

Another issue that varies between these two languages is the use of determiners together with mass nouns, as it happens something similar to what we have seen with generic referents. Snape (2006) confirms that:

English is a language [...] which allows bare plural and mass nouns to function as arguments without the need for a licensing determiner, but count singular nouns require licensing otherwise they are ungrammatical [...], whereas Spanish is a language where all nouns need to be licensed by some kind of determiner. (p. 7)

For instance, generally speaking, the mass noun "gold" needs a determiner in Spanish, so that we would say "El oro es muy valioso". But when interpreting this sentence in the English language the referent "El" disappears and we have "Gold is quite valuable". Montero (2017) after White (2010), shows this example: "Bob likes wine - A Bob le gusta el vino" (p. 406). Following this observation, this dissertation is going to test native Spanish speakers learning English as an L2 in order to see their acknowledgement

that mass nouns in the English language omit their generic indefinite article functioning as a referent.

## 2. 2. TRANSLATION TECHNIQUE

This dissertation aims to observe if native Spanish students interpret different semantic inferences their language provides when learning a foreign language. These inferences might affect to the rendering of determiners in the English language referential system. Thus, it is important that a translation technique from Spanish into English is applied so that we will be able to analyze experimental information regarding the previous theory. Newmark (1988) defines this technique as “transference is the process of transferring a S[ource] L[anguage] word to a T[arget] L[anguage] text as a translation procedure” (p. 81). Then, Ghilzai (2014) affirms that “if the transfer facilitates in L2 learning that its positive transfer but if transfer causes interference or results in mistakes and errors than its negative transfer” (p. 3). In this dissertation, the translation technique will be applied to test which English translated sentence option suits students better for a sentence provided in their Spanish L1. This example below shows an instance of a type of sentence regarding genericity in which students will have to elect one of the four translations suggested which better interpret the meaning of the Spanish L1 sentence.

Example: -Las manzanas son dulces.

- a. The apples are sweet.
- b. Apples are sweet.
- c. Their apples are sweet.
- d. Some apples are sweet.

According to Artar (2017) after House (2009), “the term ‘translation’ is defined as a process of replacing a text in one language by a text in another” (p. 17). Munday (2009) covers the idea of *Translation as a Cognitive Activity*. He exposes that this process covers some difficulties related to the application of a cognitive development. Gathered from Sleskovitch and Lederer, Munday (2009) affirms that “the interpretive theory of translation (ITT) is pioneering in the cognitive approach to the study of translation. [...] ITT identifies three interrelated phases of the translation/interpreting process” (p. 54). He

classifies them as “Understanding”, which “highlights the role of memory [...] and distinguishes between immediate memory, which stores words for a short time, and cognitive memory, which stores the whole range of knowledge possessed by an individual” (Munday, 2009, p. 55); “Deverbalization” defined as “non-verbal synthesis resulting from the process of understanding” (Munday, 2009, p. 55); and “Re-expression” which “involves the whole cognitive apparatus of an individual and generates an association between linguistic and non-linguistic knowledge” (Munday, 2009, p. 55). Another type of translation in research studies is what Munday (2009) calls “a phase of justified analysis which [...] entails the process of interpreting the equivalence found in order to [...] express exactly the meaning conveyed by the source text” (p. 55-56). This translation technique based on different phases is going to be executed by means of a test as according to J. Marsh, L. Roediger, A. Bjork and L. Bjork (2007), they “are viewed as tools for measuring students’ mastery of skills and knowledge” (p. 194). This dissertation is using a multiple-choice test as Marsh, Roediger, Bjork and Bjork (2007) claim that “they may teach students new facts, because students use reasoning to eliminate lures, select the correct answer, and thereby learn it” (p. 195).

It is predicted that the participants tested should fulfill this multiple-choice translation technique accurately if their semantic knowledge of the English referential system is not inferred by their native language. Hambleton (1993) argues “that multiple item formats are used in the test and that analyses are conducted after the test administration to determine the extent of the problem associated with the use of unfamiliar item formats” (p. 8). Newmark (1988, p. 41) also explains that “communicative translation attempts to render the exact contextual meaning of the original in such a way that both content and language are readily acceptable and comprehensible to the readership”. For me this is one of the most valuable functions that the learning of the referential system might convey as determiners are used to ground what we have in our minds and come along with nouns or noun phrases. After Petrocchi (2006), Ferreira (2011) pointed that “when students translate, they unconsciously follow three steps: analysis, transfer, and restructuring” and that “a mental process takes place in their minds on an unconscious level, every time they speak the other language” (p. 184).

However, translation also triggers some problems. Newmark (1988) talks about how these problems arise: “The first sign of a translation problem is where these automatic procedures from language to language are not adequate. [...] The mental

struggle between the SL words and the TL thought then begins” (p. 31). As exposed by Artar (2017) “the term ‘translation’ is used both as a process (learners’ translating consciously or subconsciously while learning a language) and as a product (the translated texts produced by learners in the contexts where translation is used a technique)” (p. 17). This dissertation relies on the idea of translation as a L2 learning process, and participants will not be asked to produce their own written translation, but to judge four predetermined translated English sentences through a multiple-choice test.

### **2. 3. PREVIOUS STUDIES ON REFERENTIAL DETERMINERS AND TRANSLATION TECHNIQUES**

Some studies have focused on how English definite and indefinite determiners have been learnt by Spanish native speakers. For example, in her study *Generic Reference: A Comparison between English and Catalan Languages*, González (2016) compares the English and Catalan generic referential system. Taking into account underlying similarities between Catalan and Spanish, her work is of interest for this dissertation. She wanted to investigate “the patterns of how to use English and Catalan articles in generic reference with regard to mass and count nouns as well as taking into account whether the count noun is singular or plural” (p. 5). Her main objective was to prove how linguistic inferences may affect in the L2 language regarding different word positions of the determiners. After covering definite and indefinite determiners, she pointed out what uses of these referring expressions may vary from the Spanish speakers as L1 participants when learning English as an L2. Her participants were divided depending on their level of the English language, and they had to fulfill a multiple-choice task. In this case, she made a difference between the uses of determiners within three different positions at the sentence level. She concluded that:

The data shows that the beginner and intermediate subjects find it difficult the use of articles in subject position. [...] due to L1 transfer effects since sentences that required the zero article with mass or plural nouns were difficult as they selected *the* as the alternative option. (p. 43).

She also discussed that indefiniteness was also misunderstood and her participants also failed in the acquisition of referents as mass nouns in the L2. “The advanced subjects

show slight problems when dealing with articles in object position and it seems that mass nouns were the trickiest ones since they used the instead of  $\emptyset$ " (González, 2016, p. 43).

Ionin, Montrul, Kim & Philippov (2011) have also investigated on the use of referential determiners regarding English genericity, although in their study no conclusion was obtained about the role of Spanish L1. Instead, they focused on a group comparison of "L1-Russian and L1-Korean L2-English learners, whose article-less L1s do not morphologically encode the distinction between the two types of genericity" (p. 2). Their main purpose was to do some research on the different types of generic determiners interpretations understood by the English semantics usage. They had two predictions tested through an acceptability judgment task, which argued about the fact that:

L2-English learners who are target-like on the basic properties of English articles should be target-like in allowing indefinite singular N[oun]P[hrase]s in the context of sentence-level genericity, but not N[oun]P[hrase]-level genericity. [...] L2-English learners who are otherwise target-like on English articles may nevertheless disallow definite singular N[oun]P[hrase]s in the context of N[oun]P[hrase]-level genericity. (p. 20).

The conclusion they reached at the end of the project coincides with the one by González (2016) as they said, "the learners were more successful with indefinite singular than with definite singular generics" (p. 36).

Other studies researching linguistic inferences when learning a second language have made use of diverse translation procedures for testing participants, and they have observed how native languages can affect in the learning of another language as an L2. However, these procedures may vary depending on the research interests. Some of them used the multiple-choice test, similar to the one the participants in this dissertation have been asked to fill in; but we could also see other studies whose methodology was to make the participants provide an L2 translation resulting from what they have learnt or from their recent knowledge in that language. Artar (2017), for instance, made the participants apply written and oral translation techniques to evaluate their capacity of learning in the academic sphere. She collected data through writing and questionnaires, in which:

Learners in both groups wrote two pieces of writing to be assessed and graded. [...] In addition to the written work, the learners in the experiment group also provided another set of data by completing a questionnaire at the end of the module. (p, 65).

These methodologies have proved that the participants have improved their knowledge in their L2 because of the application of translation in written processes.

Ghilzai (2014) and Qadoury (2011) researched about how learning a language as an L2 deals with linguistic inferences produced by the transfer of communicative elements from the native speaking L1. And also to observe the way that process has positively contributed to a correct learning. The first one tested German participants whose expressions of possession differed from the ones used in the English language, as it depended on how they were applied in various linguistic structures. She tested some students by providing them some sentences they had to rate, mixed with some distractors. The hypotheses that this researcher proposed were confirmed by the participants and she finally argued that these tests could provide how an L1 language may infer in the acquisition of and L2 language. “The German speakers’ ratings were based on their L1 and hence indicate that German speakers transfer their L1 while processing L2 English possessive constructions”. (Ghilzai, 2014, p. 23). Then, Qadoury (2011) aimed to research on “the speech act of refusal” (p. 169). He collected data from Iraqi L1 students of English as an L2 compared to the way native English and Iraqi native speakers would react in such acts. They were provided a test which involved a questionnaire with different types of refusing strategies. They were given some sentences in the target language and they had to answer in a negative way. He finally showed that there “Iraqi EF learners were pragmatically aware of refusals since many evidences of pragmatic transfer existed” (Qadoury 2011 p. 174). Both researchers agree when they come to investigate that native languages may transfer their understanding of different semantic structures when learning a second language – in this case English.

### 3. RESEARCH QUESTIONS AND HYPOTHESES

My dissertation aims to observe whether native Spanish students (L1) learning a foreign language in an intermediate level –in this case English –as an L2, understand and have mastered the differences between the Spanish and English referential systems. On the contrary, opposite to that, their native L1 still is present and it affects in the learning of the linguistic structure of this L2 referential system due to semantic Spanish inferences.

This dissertation deals with an experimental task intended to analyze different understandings of specific determiners functioning as referents in the English language as an L2 by native Spanish students. This, it has tried to answer three research questions followed by three hypotheses predicting participants attitude towards their understanding of English determiners.

**RQ1.** Would native Spanish students learning English as an L2 acknowledge that the referential generic understanding of definite articles applies a zero article, despite the fact that their own language forces them to use the articles “El/La/Los/Las”?

**Hypothesis 1.** Regarding this first research question, it deals with the generic definite articles as referents differing in their understanding from Spanish into English. The percentage of generic determiners used in the Spanish language is higher than in English as the articles “El/la/los/las” are compulsory, and their referential use provides meaning to the sentence. Nevertheless, in English (L2) this is not the case, as this language does not require an article expressing definite genericity. The semantic rules from the L1 consider a mistake the fact that these determiners are not implicit. That is why, I think that the participants would elect the sentences translated with the definite article ‘the’ instead of zero article.

**RQ2.** Would native Spanish students learning English as an L2 make a semantic difference between the use of the determiners “one” and “a/an” both translated in Spanish with the same word “un”, which means either indefiniteness or quantity? My second hypothesis relates to the difference between the individuating indefinite article ‘un’ and the numeral determiner ‘un’ in the Spanish language (L1).

**Hypothesis 2.** It is predicted that participants will highly elect its L2 translation based on the individuating indefinite determiner “a/an” rather than the numeral ‘one’.



This stems from the lack of difference in form between the two meanings of “un”. They might not encounter the different meanings that “a/an” and “one” convey in this type of sentences, so that they would opt for the indefinite determiners, which are most frequently used.

**RQ3.** Would native Spanish students learning English as an L2 consider the referential individuating indefinite articles “some” and “any”, for affirmative and negative sentence respectively, the same way the Spanish understanding of these structures does (“algún/a/os/as” and “ningún/a/os/as”)?

**Hypothesis 3.** It relates to the use of the individuating indefinite determiners “some” and “any” within affirmative sentences, and questions. “Some”, translated in Spanish as “algún/a/os/as” always denotes an affirmative meaning, but “any” does not always follow a negative meaning the same way its Spanish equivalent translation “ningún/a/os/as” does. Apart from negative sentences with a non-affirmative meaning, it can also function as a referent in affirmative ones. On the contrary, the fact that native Spanish participants whose L1 uses specific determiners for affirmative (“algún/a/os/as”) and negative (“ningún/a/os/as”) sentences to conform referring expressions, might lead them not to interpret that “any” also functions as a referential determiner in affirmative contexts. I hypothesize that my participants will prefer using the indefinite determiner “some” when ‘any’ is required.

## 4. METHODOLOGY

This section explains the methodology used to compile the data and to analyse what it is provided. It covers two main sections: one related to the way the collection of data has been accomplished for a further analysis in the dissertation, and the other to the description of participants involved in the empirical test.

### 4. 1. PARTICIPANTS

This dissertation was intended to prove the difficulties that a native language may cause in the learning of a second language. For this purpose, 89 native Spanish people (L1), mainly students at university, and who have been in touch with the English language on an average of fourteen years, with an intermediate level of English (B2), were sent this

test. The test was done on Microsoft forms and participants were collected via a distribution of the link through social media, mainly WhatsApp and Twitter. No personal information was gathered on the test, but questions related to the academic background of participants were asked, particularly in relation to their level of English, academic English level certificates, recent studies or whether they keep in touch with English away from the university/school learning.

## **4. 2. TEST**

As mentioned throughout this dissertation, participants took part in an experiment aimed at testing their understanding of determiners as referents in the English language (L2). A translation technique was the option chosen for testing them, and data was collected through a multiple-choice questionnaire. Arbitrarily aligned, forty sentences in Spanish were provided, and each of them was accompanied by four different translations using sort of determiners with a certain implicit function.

These sentences were subdivided into four categories according to the raised research questions. First, ten of them dealt with the genericity applied to definite determiners. The main objective was to suggest L1 native Spanish sentences requiring a mandatory generic definite determiner “El/la/los/las” which was not compulsory in the L2. However, participants were given both options, one with an article (the) and other with zero article.

Second, the next ten sentences related to the interpretation of the Spanish article in the masculine singular form “un” used as an indefinite article and a numeral determiner in Spanish. This semantic difference is established in English by the distinction between the indefinite article “a/an” and the numeral “one”. Both determiners were provided in the multiple-choice English translations to observe whether the participants perceived their distinct semantic usage.

Third, the meaning conveyed by the indefinite determiners “algún” or “ningún” denote affirmative and negative meaning, respectively. On the contrary, as mentioned above, the indefinite determiner “any” in the English language also functions as a referent in an affirmative and question sentences. Ten sentences, both affirmative and questions were provided in which the participants had to interpret the semantic meaning that the

referential determiner “algún/a/os/as” dealt with in regards of both “some” and “any” possible translations.

These three types of sentences had four possible choices to elect, but only two of them were related to the differences between both languages. The two remaining translations were semantically meaningful, and they also dealt with the referential determiners, but they did not coincide with the SL previous sentence.

Finally, following common practice, ten other sentences functioning as distractors were incorporated in the test. They have been used to mislead the participants, so that they could not easily observe that they were being tested on referential determiners. These distractors involved a Spanish (L1) sentence with four different translations in the L2. These, determiners did not have a leading function.

The test was administered via Microsoft Forms, which allows us to elaborate academic questionnaires, which provides us with not only a collection of data but also a graphical representation of the number of answers within the multiple-choice translations for each Spanish sentence. The test was open for one week, and almost 90 results were obtained.

### **4. 3. ANALYSIS AND RESULTS**

Once participants were tested, the obtained results have been divided into three different sections which are aimed at answering the main research questions. The sentences provided in the experimental test are shown on the left side of the Tables. Their applicable percentages are shown on the right side. They differ between what the L2 semantic rules support for its referential system and what the native Spanish participants might have elected because of L1 semantic interferences.

The first research question refers to the use of generic definite determiners. It develops the gathered result of the usage of the definite determiner “the” and the use of zero determiner in the English translated sentences language. Results can be seen in Table 1. The second one (it can be seen in Table 2) shows the frequency the participants have acknowledged that the numeral “one” differs in meaning from the individuating indefinite determiner “a/an” and the percentage of inferences made by the Spanish referential system. The last two Tables (Table 3 and Table 3.1) are related to the same research

question and hypothesis, but they vary on the gathering of results. The first one shows the number of participants interpreting the translations of the sentences with a clear affirmative sense using the individuating indefinite determiner “some”. It also shows the percentage of usage of the determiner “any”, which normally conveys a negative understanding by native Spanish speakers. Then, the second Table shows the correct and incorrect understanding of the indefinite determiners ‘some’ and ‘any’ in affirmative sentences.

	<b>‘The’</b>	<b>Zero determiner</b>
Las manzanas son dulces	16 (17.9%)	73 (82%)
Los amigos siempre están ahí	12 (13.4%)	75 (84.2%)
Mi hermana teme a las arañas	25 (28%)	62 (69.6%)
La universidad ofrece cursos online	43 (48.3%)	44 (49.4%)
Mi madre dice que hay que disfrutar de la vida	40 (44.9%)	47 (52.8%)
El oro es muy valioso	26 (29.21%)	62 (69.6%)
El agua es importante para vivir	16 (17.9%)	71 (79.7%)
La felicidad no se compra con dinero	12 (13.4%)	75 (84.2%)
El dinero se consigue con esfuerzo	16 (17.9%)	69 (77.5%)
La gente debería tener personalidad	8 (8.9%)	77 (86.5%)
<b>RESULTS %</b>	<b>24%</b>	<b>73.5%</b>

Table 5. Generic reference.

Regarding genericity within the English referential system, we can see that the use of zero determiners has a higher percentage. This means that 73.5% out of the 89 participants who have been tested have understood the usage of this determiner in generic definite processes. However, 24% out of the total of participants have had problems in the interpretation of genericity of the English referential system because of their L1 Spanish inferences which demands the presence of the definite determiners ‘El/la/los/las’. Although these sentences (‘La universidad ofrece cursos online.’ & ‘Mi madre dice que hay que disfrutar de la vida’) display results which do not represent huge variations, there exist a predominance of the application of zero article with little inferences from their native speaking language (L1).

	<b>Indefinite article</b>	<b>Indefinite Numeral determiner</b>
Tengo un plátano, pero mañana traeré dos	6 (6.7%)	76 (85.39%)
Tengo una llave porque perdí las otras	37 (41.5%)	52 (58.4%)
Me ordenó abrir sólo una puerta	22 (24.7%)	62 (69.6%)
Tengo que comprar un lápiz y dos bolígrafos	43 (48.3%)	42 (47.1%)
Sólo guardo una botella de vino en casa	42 (47.1%)	43 (48.3%)
Mis padres han tenido un ordenador	72 (80%)	12 (13.4%)
Hemos perdido una hora y nos quedan tres para acabarlo	40 (44.9%)	47 (52.8%)
No sabemos si adoptar un gato o dos	27 (30.3%)	60 (67.4%)
Un niño tiene varicela en el colegio	56 (62.9%)	29 (32.5%)
Es más fácil convencer a un hombre que a quince	28 (31.4%)	55 (61.7%)
<b>RESULTS %</b>	<b>41.9%</b>	<b>53.7%</b>

Table 6. Indefinite article vs indefinite quantifier.

The predetermined Spanish use of “un” as an individuating indefinite determiner and a numeral show results with a lower percentage variability. There exists only a difference of a 11.8% of people who have preferred the use of “a/an” and the ones preferring the use of “one” within these provided sentences. As shown in Table 6, 41.9% of the students came to apply an indefinite determiner in the L2 translation, without being aware that an indefinite quantifier was the option required by the L1 sentences. They did not take into account that these determiners were making reference to a certain amount of the samples given in the sentences. Along with the indefinite determiner election, it is assumed that they have misunderstood the fact that “a/an” conveys a different meaning in which the importance does not lie on quantity, but on an indefinite reference. Even so, a majority of the participants (53.7%) interpreted that the English translated multiple-choice option regarding the indefinite numeral determiner “one” occupied a different meaning related to quantity.

	<b>Some</b>	<b>Any</b>
¿Hay alguna manzana?	11(12.3%)	70 (78.6%)
¿Tienes alguna duda?	9 (10.1%)	78 (87.6%)
¿Me das algún tenedor del cajón?	17 (19.1%)	48 53.9%)
¿Te han dado algún consejo para el examen?	31 (34.83%)	55 (61.7%)
¿Puedo comer alguna fruta?	57 (64%)	27 (30.3%)
¿Te gustaría hacer algún viaje?	13 (14.6%)	17 (19.1%)
Dime si necesitas algún bolígrafo	43 (48.3%)	26 (29.2%)
Si tuviese algún trabajo sería rica	21 (23.5%)	23 25.8%)
Si hay algún paciente que quiere hablar conmigo tendrá que esperar	26 (29.2%)	47 (52.8%)
¿Queda alguna galleta?	7 (7.8%)	76 (85.3)
<b>RESULTS %</b>	<b>26.4%</b>	<b>52.4%</b>

Table 7. Indefinite determiners “some” and “any” in affirmative and question sentences.

In this case, Spanish learners of English as an L2 show a higher percentage on the election of “any” as an individuating indefinite determiner regarding affirmative sentences. A 52.4% of the participants considered the referential meaning of “any” within the 10 affirmative sentences provided. However, only a 26.4% of the participants considered that the determiner “some” was applying a fully affirmative semantic meaning to the sentence. There are also some exceptions such as these sentences, (“Dime si necesitas algún bolígrafo” & “¿Puedo comer alguna fruta?”) where we can observe a remarked variability in the election of the L2 sentence regarding the indefinite “some” rather than “any”.

This only shows the frequency in which both indefinite determiners have been used in these the sentences. It shall be noted, however, that within the Spanish translation of “algún/a/os/as” predominates the use of “any” rather than the use of “some”. In the Table below we can see other characteristics regarding the same referential determiners.

	<b>Correct understanding</b>	<b>Incorrect understanding</b>
¿Hay alguna manzana?	11 (12.3%)	78 (87.6%)
¿Tienes alguna duda?	76 (85.3%)	11 (12.3%)
¿Me das algún tenedor del cajón?	17 (19.1%)	72 (80.8%)
¿Te han dado algún consejo para el examen?	31 (34.8%)	58 (65.1%)
¿Puedo comer alguna fruta?	57 (64%)	32 (35.9%)
¿Te gustaría hacer algún viaje?	13 (14.6%)	76 (85.3%)
Dime si necesitas algún bolígrafo	26 (29.2%)	63 (70.7%)
Si tuviese algún trabajo sería rica	23 (25.8%)	66 (74.1%)
Si hay algún paciente que quiere hablar conmigo tendrá que esperar	47 (52.8%)	42 (47.1%)
¿Queda alguna galleta?	76 (85.3%)	13 (14.06%)
<b>RESULTS %</b>	<b>42.3%</b>	<b>57.4%</b>

Table 7.1. Application of the indefinite determiners “some” and “any” in affirmative and question sentences.

This second Table 7.1 considers whether participants have translated the Spanish (L1) sentences with the required indefinite determiners. Valid answers, according to the different interpretations the participants had in regards of the different meanings the L1 sentences provided, varied between the use of “some” and “any”. Previously, although the use of “any” was mainly elected in most English translations of the multiple-choice test, the participants considered incorrect more than the half of the answers. Many sentences requiring the indefinite determiner “some” were translated electing the determiner “any” and the other way round. Even so, there is not much difference compared with the ones who elected the correct interpretation in the multiple-choice test. A 57.4% of the participants out of the total results elected a correct translation and a 42.3% chose the most suitable translation.

## 5. DISCUSSION

The present dissertation covers three research questions together with three hypotheses in the investigation of different semantic interpretations of L2 referential determiners. Finally, this has allowed us to analyse the multiple-choice test results represented in the tables above. The first research question was “would native Spanish students learning English as an L2 acknowledge that the referential generic understanding of definite articles applies a zero article, despite the fact that their own language forces them to use the articles “El/La/Los/Las”?” Considering possible linguistic interferences from the L1 into the L2, I hypothesized that my participants would interpret the English L2 definite genericity the same way it is done in their native L1 language. However, my hypothesis has been rejected, as they were apt to acknowledge that the Spanish required definite articles “el/la/los/las” are translated as a bare determiner. They were able to understand the referent function of zero articles in a second language without the presence of native L1 semantic interferences. Nevertheless, there are minimum instances in which the variability of election between the article “the” and bare nouns present important differences. This may indicate that although optimum results concerning L2 definiteness and mass nouns were obtained in Table 5, there were several instances in which Spanish L1 interference occur.

My second research question stated, “would native Spanish students learning English as an L2 make a semantic difference between the use of the determiners “one” and “a/an” both translated in Spanish with the same word “un”, which means either indefiniteness or quantity?” The hypothesis predicted that participants would base their translations on the individuating indefinite determiner “a/an” rather than the numeral ‘one’ due to the lack of difference in form between the two meanings of the Spanish determiner “un”. Nonetheless, it has also been rejected as the higher percentage of the total results indicated that participants in the test mostly interpreted the different lexical meanings that the indefinite determiner “a/an” and the numeral “one” conveyed. Despite this, looking at individual sentences (Table 6), the referential determiners in three of the sentences provided in the experimental test were interpreted as indefinite ones rather than numeral. For instance, in “mis padres han tenido un ordenador”, we could analyse that the lack of an existing numerical sequence (as in other examples provided, see Table 6), or the appearance of sentences as distractors, might have led them to interpret that



referential determiners as indefinites were the best translation for the Spanish determiner “un”. This means that sometimes, the fact that Spanish language only uses the determiner “un” with both the indefinite and the quantity meanings, influences them creating double interpretation whether to use “a/an” or “one”.

Finally, the third research question was “would native Spanish students learning English as an L2 consider the referential individuating indefinite articles “some” and “any”, for affirmative and negative sentence respectively, the same way the Spanish understanding of these structures does (“algún/a/os/as” and “ningún/a/os/as”)? It was hypothesized that participants would not be able to interpret “any” functioning as a referential determiner in affirmative contexts, because their L1 uses specific determiners for affirmative (“algún/a/os/as”) and negative (“ningún/a/os/as”) sentences when referring to these type of noun phrases. As observed in Table 7, participants have mainly interpreted the use of “any” in the translation of L1 affirmative contexts (in both affirmative and question sentences), so the third hypothesis is also rejected. Apart from the fact that “any” was not always the determiner required, they have acknowledged that the corresponding meaning of this word does not always relate to the Spanish negative referent “ningún/a/os/as”.

All the hypotheses proposed for this dissertation have been rejected. We encounter that the participants had the ability of interpreting and understanding the lexical meaning of English determiners functioning as referents with little interferences from their native Spanish language.

## **6. CONCLUSION**

This dissertation focused on different interpretations of Spanish and English referential determiners. After reviewing cognitive-based theories which explain the main characteristics of certain determiners -mainly articles- functioning as referents, a study based on the translation of L1 determiners into a foreign language -English- has experimented an L2 understanding of determiners as referents. The usage of a multiple-choice test as a translation technique has allowed us to reach a conclusion about the interpretation and the acknowledgement of English and Spanish referential systems. Although, the results were expected to cover higher interferences from the L1 into the L2, there are not many evidence that Spanish participants could not differ these determiners between both systems. The function of distractors in the test has not totally accomplished

their function of misleading their focus on determiners. The English level of participants was influential in the results obtained, as they proceed on the basis of an intermediate level. There has not been any noticeable interference from the native Spanish language regarding the interpretation of meaning in generic definiteness, indefinite articles and numeral determiners and the indefinites “some” and “any”. Participants have acknowledged in a positive way that the interpretation of a second language has to be differentiated from their native language.

Then, we conclude that each language performs different interpretation withing their corresponding linguistic structures that may affect the understanding of semantic constructions. It has been observed by the comparison of these two languages that it does not exist a single way of interpreting these elements of communication. For instance, one language uses fixed definite determiners and the other omits them conforming bare nouns. There exist variations in the usage of determiners that come along with nouns. Sometimes they change the structure together with the interpretation of meaning, and sometimes they ground meaning to different contexts.

On the one hand, regarding Spanish generic definite determiners, there is no need to revise the usage of the determiners “el/la/los/las”, as they are always applied in the semantic rendering of nominal phrases. Then, noun phrases indicating indefiniteness with the article “un” do not differ from the numeral determiner “un” in terms of word-formation, but on meaning. This means that even if the interpretation of the word differs in different contexts, the semantic structure will never change. The third referential determiners analysed were “algún/a/os/as” and “ningún/a/os/as” whose meaning denotes affirmative and negative connotations, respectively. We conclude that the Spanish language referential system does not offer many complications in the understanding of these determiners as referents. However, their representation in the English referential system observes several variations.

On the other hand, as it has been analysed, the English referential system differs between the use of “the” and bare noun phrases or zero article; it also applies separate words to convey different meanings in the understanding of the indefinite determiner, including “a/an” and the numeral “one”; and the indefinite determiner “any” can also appear in affirmative contexts the same way the determiner “some” does. All these variations were included as part of the written test to be done by participants. Although the three predicted hypotheses came to result rejected, the percentages obtained lead to

the conclusion that the L1 structures made little interferences, as they do not show a high variability between the gathered results of the translated sentences elected by participants and those interpretations which the participants were expected to choose in the hypotheses.

Finally, every communicative element involved in the production of a language in the everyday life is essential and the semantic function of determiners helps it to be produced in an optimum manner. This dissertation together with many others exiting studies have dealt with a semantic and pragmatic perspective of linguistics showing the importance of the semantic knowledge of a language when learning it as an L2.

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# APPENDIX

## 1. Generic reference

-Las manzanas son dulces.

- a. The Apples are sweet.
- b. Apples are sweet.
- c. Some apples are sweet
- d. These apples are sweet.

-Los amigos siempre están ahí.

- a. Those friends are always there.
- b. The friends are always there.
- c. Friends are always there.
- d. A friend is always there.

-Mi hermana teme a las arañas

- a. My sister fears of the spiders.
- b. My sister fears of some spiders.
- c. My sister fears spiders.
- d. My sister fears of a spider.

-La Universidad ofrece cursos online.

- a. University offers online courses.
- b. The university offers online courses.
- c. A university offers online courses.
- d. Universities offer online courses.

-Mi madre dice que hay que disfrutar de la vida.

- a. My mum says that we have to enjoy lives.
- b. My mum says that we have to enjoy the life.
- c. My mum says that we have to enjoy life.
- d. My mum says that we have to enjoy a life.

-El oro es muy valioso.

- a. Gold is quite valuable.
- b. The gold is quite valuable.
- c. A gold is quite valuable.
- d. Some gold is quite valuable.

-El agua es importante para vivir.

- a. The water is important for living.
- b. A water is important for living.
- c. Some water is important for living.
- d. Water is important for living.

-La felicidad no se compra con dinero.

- a. Some happiness cannot be bought
- b. Happiness cannot be bought.
- c. The happiness cannot be bought.
- d. A happiness cannot be bought.

-El dinero se consigue con esfuerzo.

- a. Money comes with effort.
- b. The money comes with effort.
- c. Some money comes with effort.
- d. A money comes with effort.

-La gente debería tener personalidad.

- a. Some people should have their personality.
- b. The people should have their personality.
- c. People should have their personality.
- d. A people should have their personality.

## 2. Indefinite article vs indefinite quantifier

-Tengo un plátano, pero mañana traeré dos.

- a. I have a banana, but tomorrow I will bring two.
- b. I have the banana, but tomorrow I will bring two.
- c. I have one banana, but tomorrow I will bring two
- d. I have some banana, but tomorrow I will bring two.

-Tengo una llave porque perdí las otras.

- a. I have a key because I lost the others.
- b. I have one key because I lost the others.
- c. I have the key because I lost the others.
- d. I have key because I lost the others.

-Me ordenó abrir solo una puerta.

- a. He ordered me to open just one door.
- b. He ordered me to open just some door.



- c. He ordered me to open just a door.
- d. He ordered me to open just the door.

-Tengo que comprar un lápiz y dos bolígrafos.

- a. I have to buy some pencil and two pens.
- b. I have to buy the pencil and two pens.
- c. I have to buy a pencil and two pens.
- d. I have to buy one pencil and two pens.

-Sólo guardo una botella de vino en casa.

- a. I only have one bottle of wine at home.
- b. I only have bottle of wine at home.
- c. I only have a bottle of wine at home.
- d. I only have the bottle of wine at home.

-Mis padres han tenido un ordenador.

- a. My parents have had a computer.
- b. My parents have had one computer.
- c. My parents have had computer.
- d. My parents just had some computer.

-Hemos perdido una hora y nos quedan tres para acabarlo.

- a. We have lost an hour and we have three hours left to finish it.
- b. We have lost the hour and we have three hours left to finish it.

c. We have lost one hour and we have three hours left to finish it.

d. We have lost hour and we have three hours left to finish it.

-No sabemos si adoptar un gato o dos.

- a. We do not know whether to adopt a cat or two.
- b. We do not know whether to adopt some cat or two.
- c. We do not know whether to adopt the cat or two.
- d. We do not know whether to adopt one cat or two.

-Un niño tiene varicela en el colegio.

- a. A child has chickenpox at school.
- b. One child has chickenpox at school.
- c. The child has chickenpox at school.
- d. Some child has chickenpox at school.

-Es más fácil convencer a un hombre que a quince.

- a. It is easier to persuade one man than fifteen.
- b. It is easier to convince a man than fifteen.
- c. It is easy to convince the man than fifteen.
- d. It is easier to convince some man than fifteen.

### 3. Differences between some and any in affirmative sentences.

-¿Hay alguna manzana?

- a. Is there any apple?
- b. Is there some apple?
- c. Are there apples?
- d. Are there the apples?

-¿Tienes alguna duda?

- a. Do you have some doubts?
- b. Do you have doubts?
- c. Do you have any doubts?
- d. Do you have no doubts?

-¿Me das algún tenedor del cajón?

- a. Can I have some fork from the drawer?
- b. Can I have fork from the drawer?
- c. Can I have any fork from the drawer?
- d. Can I have a fork from the drawer?

-¿Te han dado algún consejo para el examen?

- a. Were you given any advice for the exam?
- b. Were you given you advice for the exam?
- c. Were you given you some advice for the exam?
- d. Have they given you the advice for the exam?

-¿Puedo comer alguna fruta?

- a. Can I eat some fruit?
- b. Can I eat any fruit?
- c. Can I eat the fruit?
- d. Can I eat fruit?

- ¿Te gustaría hacer algún viaje?
- Would you like to go on a trip?
  - Would you like to go on some trip?
  - Would you like to go on any trip?
  - Would you like to go on trip?

- Dime si necesitas algún bolígrafo.
- Tell me if you need the pen.
  - Tell me if you need some pen.
  - Tell me if you need any pen.
  - Tell me if you need a pen.

- Si tuviese algún trabajo sería rica.
- If I had some job, I would be rich.
  - If I had a job I may be rich.
  - If I had any job, I may be rich
  - If I had job, I may be rich.

- Si hay algún paciente quiere hablar conmigo tendrá que esperar.
- If there is any patient who wants to talk to me, they will have to wait
  - If there is some patient who wants to talk with me, they may have to wait.
  - If there is a patient who wants to talk with me, they may have to wait.
  - If there is patient who want to talk with me, they may have to wait

- ¿Queda alguna galleta?
- Are there the cookies left?
  - Are there cookies left?
  - Are there any cookies left?
  - Are there some cookies left?

#### 4. Misleading sentences

- Tengo un coche naranja.
- I have a orange car
  - I have an orange car.
  - I have the car orange.
  - I own a orange car

- Mi hermano podría ser más alto.
- My brother may be taller.
  - My brother might be taller.
  - My brother could be taller.
  - My brother could have been taller.

- Tengo unos pantalones amarillos.
- I have some yellow trousers.
  - I have a yellow trousers.
  - I have the trousers yellow.
  - My trousers are yellow.

- No quiero ningún regalo.
- I want no present.
  - I do not want any present.

- I do not want some present.
- I want none present.

- Hay que beber mucha agua.
- We must drink a lot of water.
  - We have to drink much water.
  - We should drink water.
  - We may drink lots of water.

- Debería coger un taxi.
- I have to get a taxi.
  - I must get a taxi.
  - I might get a taxi.
  - I ought to get a taxi.

- No me acuerdo de lo que soñé.
- I cannot remember what I dreamed.
  - I cannot remind what I dreamed.
  - I cannot keep the dream.
  - I cannot memorize what I dreamed.

-Yo siempre como pasta.

- a. Always, I eat pasta.
- b. I always eat pasta.
- c. I eat pasta always.
- d. I eat always pasta.

-Conduzco desde los 18 años.

- a. I drive for 18 years old.
- b. I drive since I am 18 years.
- c. I drive since I am 18.
- d. I drive for 18 years.

-Mis padres están casados desde 1996.

- a. My parents are married for 1996.
- b. My parents are married since 1996.
- c. My parents got married in 1996.
- d. My parents married since 1996.