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**University of El Salvador**  
**School of Arts and Sciences**  
**Foreign Language Department**



**Topic:**

**“The Spanish Definite Article Interference upon the English Definite Article usage on Students of Intermediate Intensive English II, Group 04 , of the Bachelor of Arts in English Language Teaching at the University of El Salvador, Semester I-2018”**

**Advisor:**

**Pedro Antonio Salazar Murcia, MEd**

**Students' names:**

<b>Martínez Lemus, Monica Stefanie</b>	<b>ML13024</b>
<b>Rivas Aquino, Kiriam Jasmin</b>	<b>RA08001</b>
<b>Zamora Vásquez, Mayra Lissette</b>	<b>ZV09004</b>

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**AUTHORITIES OF THE UNIVERSITY OF EL SALVADOR**

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**HEAD**

**Ms.D MAURICIO SALVADOR CONTRERAS CÁRCAMO**

**COORDINATOR OF THE GRADUATION PROCESS**

**M.A PEDRO ANTONIO SALAZAR MURCIA**

**RESEARCH ADVISOR**

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## INTRODUCTION

The present research is about the interference of the Spanish definite article upon the English definite article usage on Students of Intermediate Intensive English II, Group 04, of the Bachelor of Arts in English Language Teaching at the University of El Salvador, Semester I-2018.

The definite article is a unique and complex feature in the English language. It is also one of the most used words in English (Harb, 2014). Many studies have approached the difficulties of acquiring the English definite article when it is studied as a second or foreign language. These studies have concluded that Spanish language has an impact on this process. Students who have a L1 that does not use definite articles find it more difficult to acquire them than students that have an L2 that has articles (Zdorenko & Paradis 2011).

Nevertheless, students whose native language contains article systems might find other problems. Many linguists have examined the acquisition process of English articles by learners whose L1 contains articles. Some authors have concluded that “language transfer” is the responsible why students misuse the English definite article (Nitschke, S. et al. 2010). However, there is not much information in order to know for sure that this is the case of students of the Foreign Language Department at University of El Salvador (UES). In order to expand the amount of knowledge regarding the complexity of the topic, it is necessary to determine what theories have to be studied and what particular aspects have to be taken into account in the case of intermediate students of English.

This contains some aspects that can help to explain the research topic such as, measuring the influence from Spanish language, showing the hypotheses and the results. First, the statement of the problem leads the way to the whole process of the research. Then, some hypotheses are used to state the problem. Third, the theoretical framework considers some linguistic theories like: Interlanguage, Language Transfer, etc, in order to have a clear idea about the aspects that can lead to a better understanding of the problem.

After that, the methodology describes: the type of focus, research method, technique and instruments. The next part is, the population, sampling frame, and sample. Then, the findings are described, containing the data analysis and interpretations of the results. After that the conclusions are presented. And finally, a list of recommendations.

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## STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

A grammatical article is a word used to modify a noun, which is a person, place, object, or idea. Technically, an article is an adjective, which is any word that modifies a noun. Usually adjectives modify nouns through description, but articles are used instead to point out or refer to nouns.

In English language, there are two different types of articles that we use in writing and conversation to point out or refer to a noun or group of nouns: definite article, the, and indefinite article, a/ an. The major function of the English definite article is to emphasize the noun which is placed before. It specifies a noun that could be an object, a person, a place, or a thing. It comes before a noun or a noun phrase, and also before a superlative adjective, to point out the noun. It implies that a thing mentioned has already been pointed out or redefined. In other words, it clarifies the meaning of a noun. It helps the reader to understand the noun and its role in the sentence.

On the other hand, in Spanish language there are nine articles that can be divided into three different categories: number, gender, definite and indefinite. The Spanish definite articles are: el, la, los, las, and lo, and indefinite articles are: un, una, unos, y unas. A noun has gender, and the gender of the noun determines the article to be used. Therefore, the article agrees in gender and number. Also, in Spanish language exists zero article, nouns that need no articles.

However, the students at the Foreign Language Department at University of El Salvador misuse the English definite article. The use of the Spanish and the English definite articles are completely different. Nevertheless, some English learners do not find the differences. It occurs because the Spanish definite article interferes in the acquisition of the English definite article. In addition, the explanation for this topic occurs in a very short time, and there is not enough time to learn it because it is taught in basic levels.

For these reasons, the research question for this investigation is:

How much does the Spanish definite article interfere in the use of the English definite article on students of Intermediate Intensive English II, Group 04, of the Bachelor of Arts in English Language Teaching at the University of El Salvador, semester I-2018?

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## **RESEARCH QUESTION**

How much does the Spanish definite article interfere in the use of the English definite article on students of Intermediate Intensive English II, Group 04, of the Bachelor of Arts in English Language Teaching at the University of El Salvador, semester I-2018?

## **SUBSIDIARY QUESTIONS**

- ✓ What are the real transfer effects in bilingual learners at the Foreign Language Department at the University of El Salvador?
- ✓ What kinds of mistakes do the students make when using the English definite article?
- ✓ Why is the use of the English definite article considered one of the most difficult aspects of English grammar for Intermediate Intensive English learners?
- ✓ What are the reasons why the students misuse the English definite article?

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## OBJECTIVES

### General Objective

- ✓ To study the Spanish definite article interference upon the English definitive article in the English speaking learners of Intermediate Intensive English II, Group 04, of the Bachelor of Arts in English Language Teaching at the University of El Salvador, semester I-2018.

### Specific Objectives

- ✓ To identify the difficulties that the students of Intermediate Intensive English II at the Department of Foreign Languages at the University of El Salvador have in the use of the English definite article.
- ✓ To find out the influence of Spanish language in students of Intermediate Intensive English over the acquisition of the Second language.
- ✓ To determine the drawbacks that the students have on the use of the English definite article.

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## **RATIONALE/ JUSTIFICATION**

The notion of ‘interlanguage’ has been central to the development of the field of research on Second Language Acquisition (SLA) and continues to exert a strong influence on both the development of Second Language Acquisition theory and the nature of the central issues in that field.

The interference of First Language (L1) in the learning of Second Language (L2) has witnessed an intense debate during the past years, resulting in the prevalence of Error Analysis (EA) over Contrastive Analysis (CA). And, that is why it is important to investigate more about this information.

The topic of this investigation “the Spanish Definite Article Interference upon the English Definite Article usage on Students of Intermediate Intensive English II, group 04, of the Bachelor of Arts on English Language Teaching at the University of El Salvador, semester I-2018” and its aim is to measure the influence of the Spanish language in the Second language learning process, English. Another reason to study this topic is to describe and explain how the Spanish definite article interferes in the acquisition of the English definite article. Moreover, there is a necessity to raise awareness among English learners about the misuse of the English definite article in order to not interrupt or stop progressing on the acquisition of the target language.

Lastly, this study is carried out to provide a handout with grammar rules in order to improve students’ use of the English definite article.

To conclude, this study measures the correct use of the English definite article in Intermediate level students at the Foreign Department at UES for improving students’ success and theoretical foundations, limitations and significance of this theory are discussed in detail.



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## HYPOTHESES

- ✓ The more practice of the English definite article, the less interference the Spanish definite article will have.
  
- ✓ The less feedback students receive, the more interference in English definite article students will have.
  
- ✓ The more students are exposed to material with grammar rules about the English definite article, the less students make mistakes.
  
- ✓ The more explanation students receive, the more students understand the use of the English definite article.

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## OPERATIONALIZATION OF VARIABLES

Variable	Observable/behavior	Instrument
<b>Practice about the use of the English definite article</b>	If students do more practice about the English Definite Article, the less interference the Spanish definite article students will have.	Grammar Materials
<b>Feedback</b>	When students receive feedback, they create the idea how much they have learned.	The treatment process
<b>Materials with grammar rules</b>	If more materials with grammar rules are given to the students, they will not make mistakes by using the English definite article.	Grammar exercises
<b>Invest time in explanation</b>	The more explanation students receive, the less students make mistakes in the use of the English definite article.	Syllabus

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## THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

### **History**

Since early 1970 (Brown, 1973; Bresson, 1974; Maratsos, 1974, 2009; Warden, 1976), the acquisition of English grammatical articles has been of considerable concern. For English as second language learners, the use of articles is considered as one of the most difficult aspects of English grammar and the last to be fully acquired according to Master P., 1987. However, for native speakers, the proper use of the English articles is acquired unconsciously and at an early stage (Brown, 1973; Maratsos, 1974.) The following section, the study will provide a concise historical background regarding the influence of use the Spanish article system in Second Language Acquisition.

### **Historical origin of the English definite article**

The article is used with a noun to indicate the kind of reference made by the noun. To the historical development of English articles, the English definite article was originated from the Old English demonstrative *that, this, these, those*, while the English indefinite article *a/an* came from the numeral *one*.

### **Evolution of the English definite article**

- ✓ In old English, the English article was originated. It shows gender, and it classified in 5 cases: nominative, accusative, genitive, dative and instrumental.
- ✓ In Middle English, the English definite article was invariable in terms of gender and number.
- ✓ In Modern English, the showed that a substantive is a particular noun that the listener should recognized.

Therefore, in modern English, nowadays, gender is battle that English-speakers do not fight. In English, a noun became neutral, not gender. On the other hand, in Spanish, a noun has a gender, and the gender of the noun determines the article that we are going to use. Therefore, the article agrees in gender and number.

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## Demonstrative Pronouns Paradigms

### Singular Demonstrative Pronouns: "The" or "That"

<u>Nominative Case</u>	<b>Se</b>	<b>þæt</b>	<b>Seo</b>
<u>Genitive Case</u>	<b>þæs</b>	<b>þæs</b>	<b>þære</b>
<u>Accusative Case</u>	<b>þone</b>	<b>þæt</b>	<b>þa</b>
<u>Dative Case</u>	<b>þam</b> or <b>þæm</b>	<b>þam</b> or <b>þæm</b>	<b>þære</b>
<u>Instrumental Case</u>	<b>þy</b> or <b>þe</b> or <b>þone</b>	<b>þy</b> or <b>þe</b> or <b>þone</b>	<b>þære</b>

### Plural Demonstrative Pronouns: "The" or "That"

<u>Nominative</u>	<b>þa</b>
<u>Genitive</u>	<b>þara</b> or <b>þæra</b>
<u>Accusative</u>	<b>þa</b>
<u>Dative and Instrumental</u>	<b>þam</b> or <b>þæm</b>

### Brief history of the origin of the Spanish definite article

As we all know, Spanish is a language derived from Latin, which is a member of the Italic branch of the Indo-European language family. The most widely spoken Indo-European languages by native speakers are: Spanish, English, Portuguese and more.

According to some linguistics, the Spanish definite article is an innovation of the Romance languages from a demonstrative ille, illa that meant "el, la."

"The story of the article began linked to that of the pronoun" (Sarmiento, 1996: 211). Some linguistics said that this is an innovation of the Romance languages from a demonstrative ille, illa that meant 'that':

- Illem hominem 'aqueel hombre' > el hombre
- Illam civitatem 'aquella ciudad' > la ciudad

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In English language, gender is not a battle that English speakers fight. The English definite article does not determine a specific gender, and most of nouns are not divided by gender either. However, in Spanish language, nouns have gender, and the gender of the noun determines the article we are going to use. Therefore, the article agrees in gender and number.

### **Origin of the Interlanguage**

The term interlanguage was first introduced into the literature by Selinker, in an influential paper published in the *International Review of Applied Linguistics* in 1972, although it was actually written in 1969 while he was on sabbatical leave at Edinburgh University, working closely with Corder. Since then, various terms have been used synonymously with interlanguage, although there are some subtle differences between them: approximative systems, Nemser (1969); idiosyncratic dialects, Corder (1971); learner language systems, Richards and Sampson (1973). However, these descriptions have one thing in common:

Corder (1967) pointed out the new interest led naturally to comparison between first language and second language learning. Corder went out to hypothesize that some of the strategies employed by second language learners are essentially the same as those used by children learning their first language.

Various terms have been synonymously with interlanguage, however, all these descriptions have one thing in common: the fact that second language learning is seen to be moving in the direction of the target, with the learner constructing successive systems of phonological, grammatical and semantic usage rules.

The fact that second language learning is seen to be moving in the direction of the target language, with the learner constructing successive systems of phonological, grammatical, and semantic usage rules. However, these theories have so far received only limited support from empirical studies.

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## **Theory**

### **Interlanguage**

The term interlanguage was first used by Larry Selinker, an American professor of applied linguistics on January 1972 in the journal *International Review of Applied Linguistics in Language Teaching*. The term *Interlanguage* is defined as a type of language or linguistic system used by second- and foreign-language learners who are in the process of learning a target language.

Corder (1967) pointed out the new interest led naturally to comparison between first language and second language learning. Corder went out to hypothesize that some of the strategies employed by second language learners are essentially the same as those used by children learning their first language. In other words, Corder believed that learners acquire the Second or Foreign language through the universal grammar.

Interlanguage reflects the learner's evolving system of rules, and results from a variety of processes, including the influence of the first language ('transfer), contrastive interference from the target language, and the overgeneralization of newly encountered rules.

### **Interlanguage Theory and Psycholinguistics**

The significance of interlanguage theory lies in the fact that it is the first attempt to take into account the possibility of learner conscious attempts to control their learning. It was this view that initiated an expansion of research into psychological processes in interlanguage development whose aim was to determine what learners do in order to help facilitate their own learning, i.e. which learning strategies they employ (Griffiths & Parr, 2001).

It seems, however, that the research of Selinker's learning strategies, with the exception of transfer, has not been taken up by other researchers.

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## **Branches of Interlanguage**

In Selinker's view, interlanguage is "a separate linguistic system resulting from learner's attempted production of the target language norm." Selinker believed that interlanguage was "the product of five central cognitive processes involved in second-language learning", which were: language transfer, transfer of training, strategies of second-language learning, strategies of second-language communication and overgeneralization.

### **The role of Language Transfer**

The term transfer has numerous definitions in the area of research. For instances: Odlin (1989, p. 27) defined *transfer* as, "the influence resulting from similarity and differences between the target language and any other language that has been previously (and perhaps imperfectly) acquired." Ellis (1997, p. 51) describes transfer as, "the influence that the learner's L1 exerts over the acquisition of an L2." The term transfer has been interpreted by Gass and Selinker (2001) as the use of L1 knowledge in the SLA process. Therefore, the article system that students as a second language have, will be greatly influenced by his or her linguistic background due to language transfer.

### **Type of Language Transfer: Positive transfer (facilitation) and Negative transfer (Interference)**

The term transfer and Interference are not synonymous: The term *transfer* may help learners recognize and retain words with similar or identical pronunciation and/or spelling in both languages, whereas *interference* is usually used in negative sense, so it occurs when L1 knowledge influences L2 understanding and results are presented as errors; Interference affects word choice, word order, pronunciation, and any other aspect of L2.

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## **What is the difference between an Error and a Mistake?**

Interlanguage theory helps us realize that students' errors are an important step for learning and also a precious resource for the teacher. Learners' errors inform teachers about learners' Interlanguage development, what learners are capable of producing and what they are not. Similarly, to Pit Corder, Selinker also recognizes learners' errors from a more positive perspective.

According to Gass and Selinker (2001), "Mistakes occur generally one-time-only events. The speaker who makes a mistake is able to recognize it as a mistake and correct it if necessary. An error, on the other hand, is systematic. That is, it is likely to occur repeatedly and is not recognized by the learner as an error".

For example, a student who has not studied the negative form in English, may say "I no like you, I no have money". It is not considered as an "error" because the student does not know how to use the negative form, yet. Therefore, the student is not aware that it is wrong, and he is not able to correct it. On the other hand, a student that has learned the negative form in simple present, third person singular may forget and say repetitively, "She do not like you." It is consider as an "error." But, if a student says, She do not like you, and perceives it as an incorrect sentence, and her purpose is to try to correct it. It says that it is a "mistake."

## **General rules of the English definite article and the Spanish definite article**

### **The English definite article**

The word "the" is one of the most common words in English. Nouns in English language are preceded by the definite article when the speaker believes that the listener already knows what he is referring to.



Use <i>the</i> , to refer to something which has already been mentioned.	<b>Example:</b> On Monday, an unarmed man stole \$1,000 from the bank. <u>The thief</u> hasn't been caught yet.
Use <i>the</i> , when you assume there is just one of something in that place, even if it has not been mentioned before.	<b>Example:</b> Where is <u>the bathroom</u> ?
Use <i>the</i> , in sentences or clauses where you define or identify a particular person or object.	<b>Example:</b> <u>The man</u> who wrote this book is famous.
Use <i>the</i> , to refer to people or objects that are unique.	<b>Example:</b> <u>The sun</u> rose at 6:17 this morning.
Use <i>the</i> , before superlatives and ordinal numbers.	<b>Examples:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• This is <u>the highest building</u> in New York.</li> <li>• This is <u>the third time</u> I have called you today.</li> </ul>
Use <i>the</i> , with adjectives, to refer to a whole group of people.	Examples: <u>The French</u> enjoy cheese.
Use <i>the</i> , with decades.	<b>Examples:</b> This is a painting from <u>the 1820's</u> .
Use <i>the</i> , with clauses introduced by <i>only</i>	<b>Examples:</b> This is <u>the only day</u> we've had sunshine all week.
Use <i>the</i> , with names of geographical areas, rivers, mountain ranges, groups of islands, canals, and oceans.	<b>Examples:</b> Our ship crossed <u>the Atlantic</u> in 7 days.
Use <i>the</i> , with countries that have plural	<b>Examples:</b> have never been to <u>the</u>

names.	<u>Netherlands.</u>
Use <i>the</i> , with countries that include the words "republic", "kingdom", or "states" in their names.	<b>Examples:</b> She is visiting <u>the United States.</u>
Use <i>the</i> , with newspaper names.	<b>Examples:</b> She works for <u>the New York Times.</u>
Use <i>the</i> , with the names of famous buildings, works of art, museums, or monuments.	<b>Examples:</b> I would like to visit <u>the Eiffel Tower.</u>
Use <i>the</i> , with the names of hotels & restaurants, unless these are named after a person.	<b>Examples:</b> They are staying at <u>the Hilton</u> on 6th street.  <b>Examples:</b> We're having dinner with <u>the Smiths</u> tonight.

### When not to use "the"

- Do not use *the*, with names of countries (except for the special cases above).
- Do not use *the*, with the names of languages.
- Do not use *the*, with the names of meals.
- Do not use *the*, with people's names.
- Do not use *the*, with titles when combined with names.
- Do not use *the*, after the 's possessive case
- Do not use *the*, with professions
- Do not use *the*, with names of shops
- Do not use *the*, with years
- Do not use *the*, with uncountable nouns
- Do not use *the*, with the names of individual mountains, lakes and islands
- Do not use *the*, with most names of towns, streets, stations and airports

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## The Spanish definite article

The Spanish definite article introduces the noun, it precedes and agrees with gender and number. In Spanish, there are nine articles that can be divided into three different categories: Number, gender, definite and indefinite. In number, this is divided in singular and plural; singular la, el, lo, una, y un, and plural las, los, unas, y unos. In gender, there are two categories: the feminine, and the masculine; a, las, una, y unas, and in masculine, we have el, los, un, y unos. Also, the neutral form is another category within the gender that is less used. For instance, lo de Alejandro es caso perdido.

Also, in Spanish language exists indefinite article, zero article and nouns that do not need articles. For instance:

- When we do not refer to a specific object: Tenemos carro.
- When we refer to an undetermined quantity of object: Mi tía arregla máquinas

## Examples of the Spanish definite article

Las manzanas están maduras.

Los coches.

Lo bueno de la obra.

El piloto del avión.

	<b>Feminine</b>	<b>Masculine</b>	<b>Neutral</b>
<b>Singular</b>	Feminine la (la casa)	Masculine: el (el estudiante)	Neutro: lo (lo malo) el (el arma)
<b>Plural</b>	Feminine: las (las casas)	Masculine: los (los estudiantes)	



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## **Expertise**

Theorists and expertise of the scientific field of linguistics had based their work on the primary aim to optimize the level of understanding of languages and their relationship within them. This effort can help learners and teachers of languages to better comprehend how people learn languages. As Corder (1967) explains, the major contribution of linguistics in the teaching of languages is to identify the contrasting areas of the languages, in other to determine what points can be found as a difficulty for the learner, so teachers can identify these problems and overcome them with special attention. This important function was also a matter of interest for Larry Selinker, who came with the theory of Interlanguage in 1972. In his work he points that learners of a language use an intermediate stage “interlanguage” between their first language and their target language that helps them to communicate in the target language. This explains why learners often communicate with errors that are related to their mother tongue.

Rosa Luna (2010) concluded that learners’ interlanguage provides an opportunity for teachers to work and potentially improve students’ areas of weakness. With that in mind, it is important to gain more specific information about phenomena happening within the mind of learners that can be crucial in their goal of becoming proficient in L2. Alhaisoni. E et al. (2016) indicated that the interference of the L1 is strong, and it influences the process of second language acquisition of the articles in a negative way, having an impact in the Pedagogical practices. However, it was stated that including comparisons of article use in learners’ both language systems may improve learners’ ability to use the articles correctly in writing and the other language skills.

Sixia Gao (2009) pointed out, by analyzing the learner’s errors, we can better understand their interlanguage and their learning process. It is necessary to understand the roots of errors before they are eliminated. Students’ misuse in vocabulary and grammar demonstrates that teachers should pay more attention to the reinforcement of knowledge delivered to the students. Only in this way students’ abilities can be improved effectively. Other authors had mentioned how this theory can serve and guide more studies in the teaching field. It indicates the different linguistic stages the learner has. Interlanguage is the transitory and always changing linguistic state of second language users. It evolves towards

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the best second language state possible for that learner, and it is directly influenced by individual cognitive skills and contextual factors (Williams and Burder. 1997).

In other study Snape N. et al. (2012) made an experiment by comparing tree types of learners of English as L2 with different L1. These were Spanish, Turkish and Japanese learners that were tested via forced choice elimination task. The results revealed that there are different patterns of article selection between the three different groups, and it corresponded with L1 transfer effect. The study shows that the L1 of the learner has an actual impact in the use of the article in L2 by relating the two language systems. All these findings provide a strong base of the influences of the first language of the learner in their process of learning the second language. In another research in 2010 T. Ionin, S. Montrul hypothesized that Spanish-speaking learners of English transfer the interpretation of definite plurals from their native language. Results of a truth value judgment task provide support for this hypothesis: Spanish speakers overaccepted the generic interpretation of English definite plurals to a greater extent than proficiency similar speakers of Korean, an articleless language. Results of a follow-up study further show that with advanced proficiency and increased immersion in the target language, Spanish-speaking learners of English were as target like as Korean-speaking learners of English on the interpretation of definite plurals, which suggests that recovery from first language transfer is possible.

One interesting way of approaching the transfer of the definite article system of L1 as Spanish to English as L2, which is the concern of this study, is explained and presented in F. Ciordia's (2016) paper, that analyzed the acquisition of the generic and non-generic definite article. The participants in this study were 47 university students of the University of the Basque Country studying the English Studies Degree, half of them being freshmen year students, and the other half third year students. Moreover, 31 of the participants had Spanish as their native language, while the remaining 16 were bilingual (Spanish/Basque). A Cambridge English Language Assessment was given to them in order to test their level of English proficiency more accurately. The instrument was based on 17 English sentences, in which students were asked to place the definite article whenever they thought appropriate. The study did not show L1 transfer, as the major rate of errors

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occurred in non-generic contexts, mostly in structural positions. However, the number of errors among the participants seemed to decrease as their level of proficiency increased.

To conclude, some authors considered that the previous knowledge of any language, it can be seen as a set of strategies for leaning a new language. Consequently, the final role of language transfer phenomenon is not limited be exclusively negative. This phenomenon can be positive in the students's learning process.

## **RESEARCH METHODOLOGY**

### **Type of method**

This investigation was carried out with Quasi-Experimental method. The quasi-experimental method is designed to explore the causal effects of an intervention, treatment or stimulus on a unit of study. Researchers who use this method typically conduct tests in one of two ways: over time (pre-test, post-test) or over space (one-time comparisons), by establishing near-equivalence in factors that influence primary outcomes across treatment and control groups. The researchers in this investigation administrated a pre-test and a post-test. According to Arnau (1995) defines the quasi-experimental method as a work plan which it is intended to studying the impact of treatments and/ or change processes, in situations where subjects or observation units have not been assigned in accordance with a random criterion. However, in this study the sampling frame was chosen by using random method.

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## **Characteristics of the Quasi-Experimental method**

- Manipulation of the independent variable.
- No randomization in the selection of the groups
- Quasi-experimental designs are usually used in applied research, so they will be developed mainly in natural contexts far from the laboratory

### **Paradigm:**

To understand the phenomenon of interference at the Foreign Language Department, the methodology was based on a “quantitative” approach. The objective was to measure the influence of the mother tongue in the Second Language Learning students’ process. The quantitative study allowed to have real results based on mathematic fields. The way to measure this event was through an instrument designed with specific purpose and getting numerical results to obtain a frequency of the times that phenomenon happens, and then, to try to establish a tendency or a pattern.

### **Design of study:**

The type of design of this study was Experimental. It is experimental when the researcher manipulates the subjects of the investigation. In other words, experimental research is when a researcher is able to manipulate the predictor variable and subjects to identify a relationship.

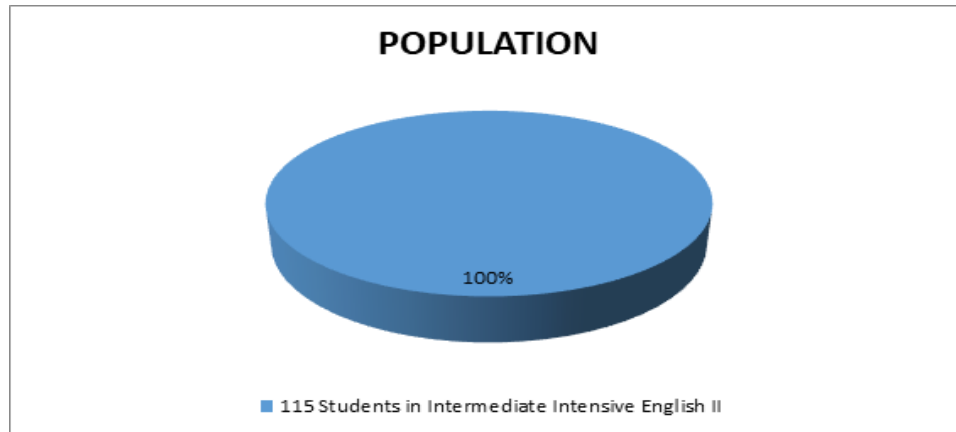
### **Population**

Since the aim for this study is to identify the difficulties in the use of the definite article in English by Intermediate Intensive English II students at the University of El Salvador, our population consisted of the body of students who were currently taking the Intermediate Intensive English II courses at the Foreign Language Department at UES in English



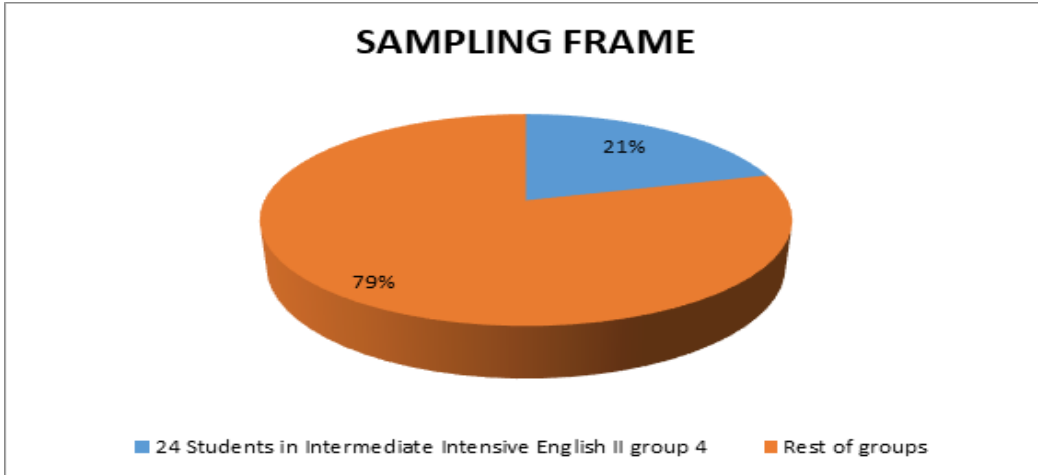
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Teaching Major. The number of students in the subject was 115 in 2018, according to the Head of the Department. And it was composed of 5 groups with a media of approximate 27 students in each. (See pie below)



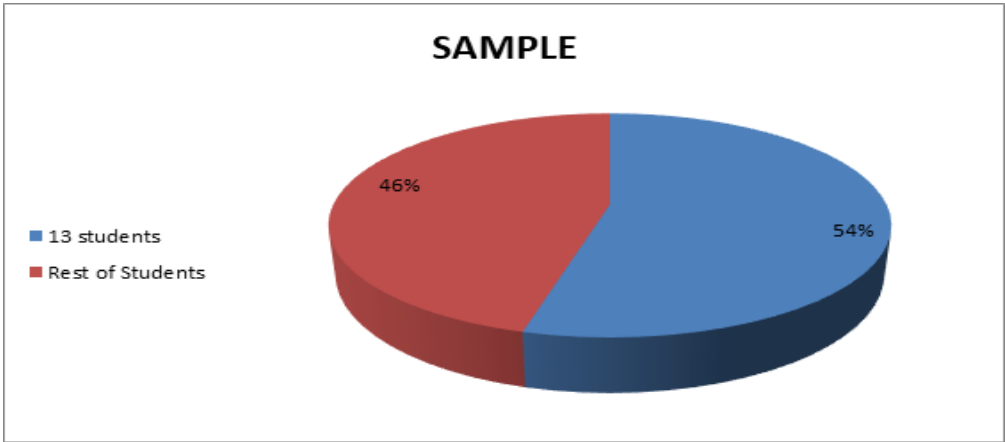
### **Sampling Frame**

One of the objectives previously presented in this research was to gain more information about the definite article errors in the English Teaching field. That is why the sampling frame consisted of students currently registered the Intermediate Intensive English II courses, but taking into account only the ones from the English Teaching major in the afternoon (group 4). The sampling frame was Intermediate English Students of the Bachelor of Arts in English Teaching at the Foreign Language Department at UES, with a number of students of 24 out of the total 115. The percentage of this sampling frame is 21% of the population. (See pie below)



**Sample**

The sample consisted of 13 students of Bachelor of Arts in English Teaching at the Foreign Language Department at UES who were currently registered in the group 04 of Intermediate Intensive English II. The criterion was to be the first 13 students in the attendance list. This group had a number of students of 13 out of the 115. The percentage of this sample is 54 % of the sampling frame. (See pie below)



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## **Research Technique**

The researchers decided to use an interview ( see annex B) and a test (see annex A) for the purpose of gathering information from the students. The interview had open questions, where the students gave their opinions. Also, this was an unstructured interview, it is sometimes referred as ‘discovery interviews’ and it is more like a ‘guided conversation’ than a strict structured interview. On the other hand, in the test, the researchers gave the students a list of 20 sentences with spaces for answers. The students used The English Definite Article *the* where it was necessary. This test required less time for test takers to answer, it was easy to score and grade, and the researchers could easily diagnose a test taker's difficulty with certain concepts in order to measure the students’ knowledge.

## **Research Instrument**

The researchers chose the questionnaire and the interview as instruments (see annexes A and B). The questionnaire was administrated as pre-test and post-test. The pre-test was administrated on paper and the post-test online. The questionnaire had close-ended questions, where the students filled out with The English Definitive Article or Zero Article. However, the interview consisted of a series of pre-determined open questions that all interviewees answered in the same order. The interview was administrated online with the post-test. Data analysis usually tends to be straighter forward because researcher can compare and contrast different answers given to the same questions open questions allow people to express what they think in their own words.

## **Intervention**

Since this investigation was quasi-experimental, the researchers applied an intervention. The intervention consisted of grammar rules for using the English definite article “The”, examples for each rule and feedback with exercises. This intervention was administrated online one week later than the pre-test. The idea was to observe if the students have better results in the post- test in the use of English definite article.

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## ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATION OF DATA COLLECTED

- **Interview**

This report summarizes the project of a quantitative research analyzing, interpreting and presenting data obtained from an interview. The analysis of quantitative data was to measure how much the Spanish Definite Article Interference upon the English Definite Article usage, and the students' experiences about studying it. To know that, the researchers carried out an interview on line with the aid of students from Intermediate Intensive English II, Group 04, of the Bachelor of Arts in English Language Teaching at the University of El Salvador, Semester I-2018.

First of all, the interviewees mentioned that they had some problems identifying the difference in the use of grammar rules because they did not remember very well some of them, so that, the grammar rules given to them were truly helpful to increase their knowledge a lot. Almost ninety percent of the students said that the test was not difficult, it had some clues to be answered; however, some sentences were a little confusing for them due to they did not have the grammar rules clear.

Also, the interviewees said that they had studied the topic recently but they did not study all the grammar rules only the basic ones, and some of them had problem to memorize all of them. Most of the fifty percent of the students think the Spanish Definitive Article usage affects the English Definitive Article usage because they tried to translate the sentences from Spanish language into English language, and they think it is confusing for students that are in the process of learning English language. But if they learn all the grammar rules, it would be easier for them to use and apply them.

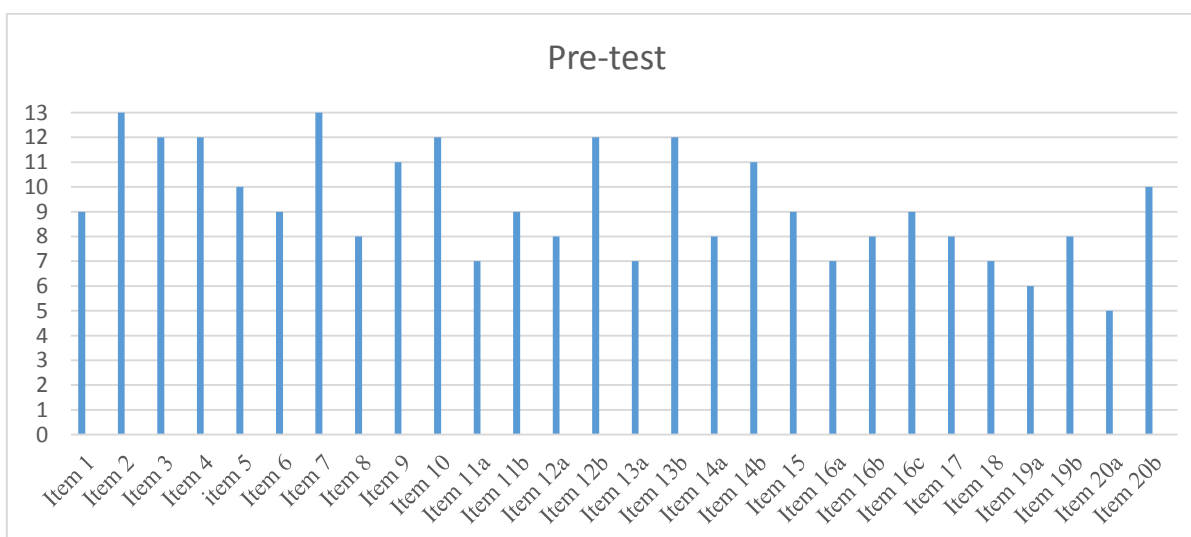
Then, almost the majority of interviewees pointed out that the material can definitely improve the use of the English Definitve Article, according to learning styles of some students, also consulting different sources on the web, books, read articles, writing, practicing a lot grammar exercises could help. However, some of students told us that the material provided in the class tended to be confusing because it contained a lot of rules and

there is not enough time to learn and practice it; so that they forgot or not understand what is the correct grammar rule that they need to use. Finally, the majority of interviewees had such a nice experience taking the test, and they believed that having taken the test was necessary in order to know the difficulties of acquiring the English definite article and the influence of the Spanish definite article.

- **Pre-test and Post-test**

This investigation was carried out with 13 students of Intermediate Intensive English II, Group 04, of the Bachelor of Arts in English Language Teaching at the University of El Salvador, Semester I-2018. In this investigation, the aim was to involve a statistical analysis to measure the correct use of the English definite article and the difficulties that the students had. In order to gather information from students, the researchers decided to use the technique of the test. This test consisted of 20 questions in which students had to write the best choice in the blank space. Moreover, the administration of this test consisted of two ways: pre-test and post-test; both showed different results. Pre-test was administrated before the treatment or intervention (grammar rules for using the English definite article “The”) and, the post-test was after the treatment or intervention. The treatment was given one week later than the pre-test. Then, two weeks later the post-test was administrated.

### Pre-test



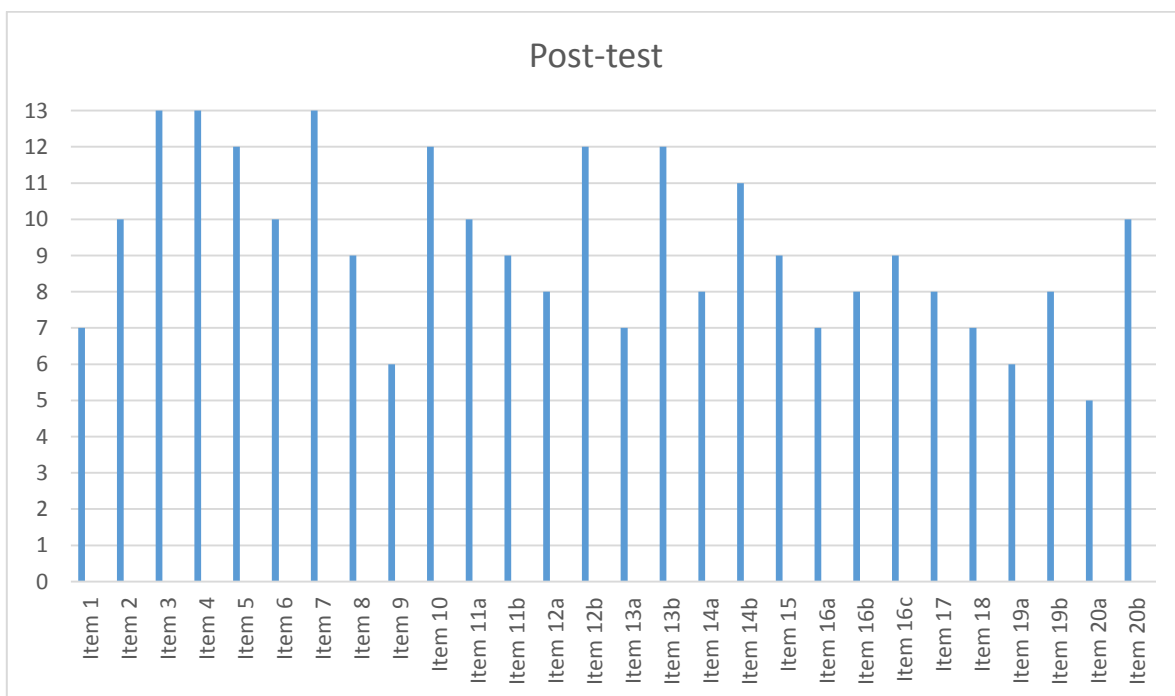
In the pre-test, the results of the right answers were of 71.4 percent. That means that from 364 items included in all the instruments, students committed 104 errors. Each student had an average of 20 correct answers out of 28 items per test.

The results indicated that students were more proficient to use the English definite article in the following grammar rules: first, “*the* used in sentences or clauses when talking about specific person or object,” like in item number 2 “*I love the flowers in your garden*”, number 4 “*I always listen to the radio in the morning*”; and number 7, “*Listen, Dennis is playing the trumpet*”.

Then, “*the* used before superlatives” like in item number 12b “*Mount Everest is the highest mountain in the earth*” and number 13b “*Loch Ness is the most famous lake in Scotland*”

However, the students showed that they have difficulties in the item number 20a “*Our children go to \_\_\_ school by bus*”; number 19a “*The Smog is a problem in \_\_\_ big cities*” in which the English Definitive Article is not needed.

## Post-test



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In the post-test the researchers could observe that 74.5 percent of the answers were right in the use of the English Definite Article, *The*. In other words, from 364 items included in all the instruments, students in general committed a total of 93 errors. This means that each student has an average of 20.8 correct answers per test.

The results showed that most of the students use the English Definitive Article correctly before the superlatives (items 12b “*Mount Everest is the highest mountain on earth*” and 13b “*Loch Ness is the most famous lake in Scotland*”), when they talk about a particular person or object (items 4 “*I always listen to the radio*” and 7 “*Listen! Dennis is playing the trumpet*”). Also, they know that it is not necessary before a month, week, year or a day (item 3 “*See you on \_\_\_\_\_ Wednesday*”).

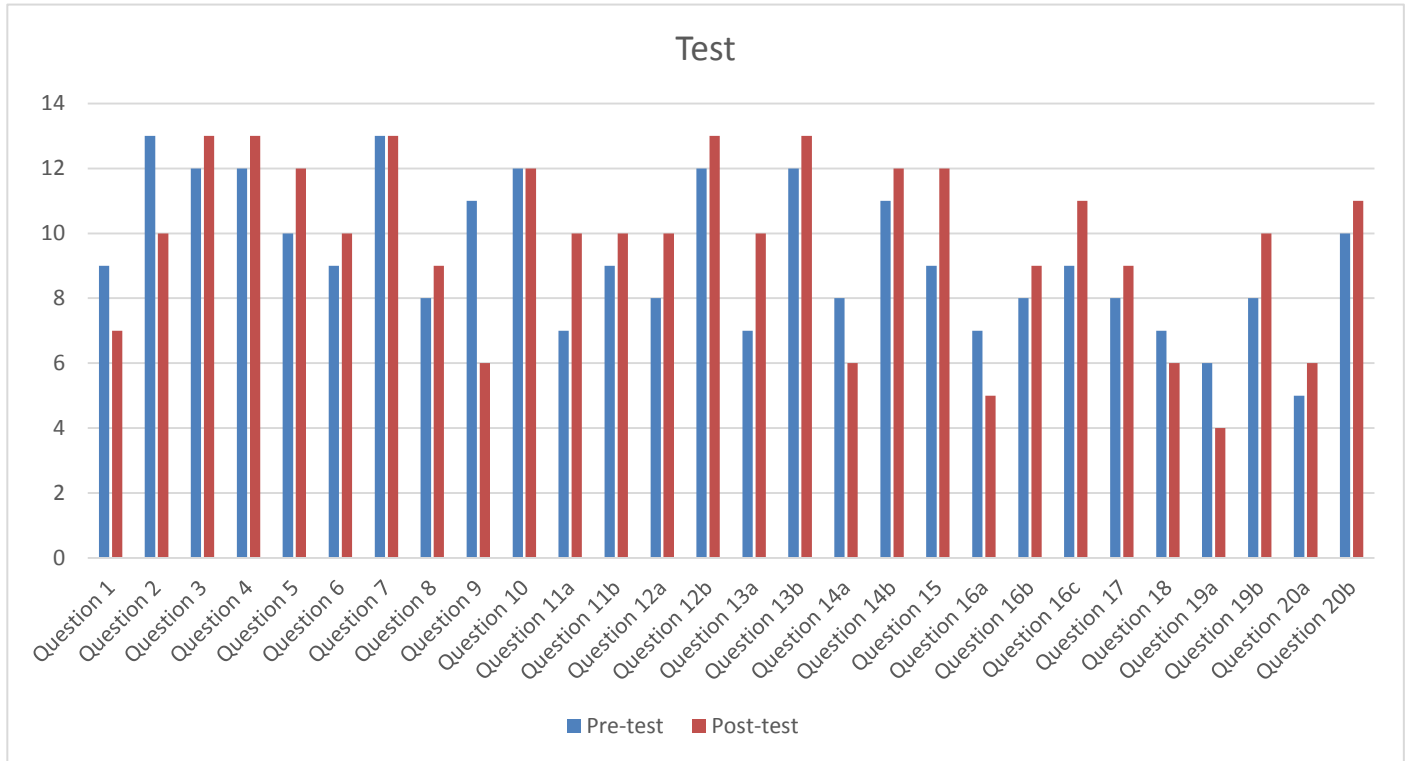
Nevertheless, the students presented problems in the item 19a “*\_\_\_Smog is a problem in the big cities*”, item 14a “*\_\_\_Most children like sweet*” and 20a “*Our children go to \_\_\_ school by bus*” in which the English Definitive Article is not needed. Moreover, in the following rule “when you assume there is just one of something in that place, even if it has not been mentioned before” (item 16a “*The Plaza Hotel is on the corner of 59<sup>th</sup> street and 5<sup>th</sup> avenue*”). Also, “*the*” with the names of families, but not with the names of individuals (item 18 “*Our friends the Millers moved to Florida last August*”). Finally, “*the*” with names of geographical areas, rivers, mountain ranges, groups of islands, canals, and oceans, etc. (item 9 “*She has never been to the Alps before*”)

To conclude, the pre-test and post-test showed two kinds of results (see graphic). First, the results were significant. Students achieved a little proficient in the usage of the English definite article. For example, in item 4 “*I always listen to the radio in the morning.*” Item 7 “*Listen! Dennis is playing the trumpet.*” And, item 13a-b “*The Loch Ness is the most famous lake in Scotland.*” Lastly the item 15 “*The summer of 2003 was hot and dry.*”

Secondly, results were negative. Students did not use properly the English definite article. In the pre-test, some of the answers were correct but in the post test they were incorrect. For example, item 2 “*I love the flowers in your garden.*” Item 9 “*She has never been to the Alps before.*” And, item 18 “*Our friends the Millers moved to Florida last August.*” The

use of the article *the* was properly used in the pre-test but in the same items, the article *the* was misused in the post test.

It was evident that the previous knowledge of any language has a role in the learning of a new language. According with the result previously presented, the interference issues was experience by the students.



Based on the collected data by the instrument, pre-test and post-test, showed us the occurrence gotten in the pre-test was higher than the occurrence gotten in the post-test; since the occurrence in the Pre-Test appeared 7 and the occurrence of the Post-Test appeared 19. Therefore, if the mode occurred from the lower to higher, it means that the intervention or the treatment applied by researchers improved significantly in the student's learning.



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## CONCLUSION

The general objective of this research was to study how much the Spanish definite article interferes upon the English definitive article in the Spanish speaking learners of Intermediate Intensive English II, Group 04, of the Bachelor of Arts in English Language Teaching at the University of El Salvador, semester I-2018, identifying the difficulties that the students have in the use of the English definite article.

The results of the data gathered in the post test show that 74.5 percent of the answer were right in the use of the English definite article “*the*” from 364 items included in all the instruments, students in general committed a total of 93 errors. This means that each student had an average of 20.8 correct answers out of 28 items per test. the graphic showed that the data obtained was higher in the post- test than in the pre- test, this means that the intervention was significant.

The second objective of this research was to identify the difficulties that the students have in the use of the English definite article, to know that the researchers carried out an interview on line and a test with the aid of students. However, the students showed that they have difficulties in writing the English definitive article when it is not needed and they had some problems identifying the differences of the use of the grammar rules because they did not remember very well some of them and they needed more practice to have less interference.

At the beginning of this research, it was stated a number of hypotheses in order to be proven. First of all, it was proved that when students have more practice using the English definite article, they have less interference in the use. Also, if they received more feedback and materials with grammar rules, they make less mistakes. Another hypothesis was that students’ errors in Second language are the result of interference from the mother tongue, generated by the differences between the structures of the two language systems. This was also proven; since it was clear in the results that some students mix up the two article systems: Spanish language and English language. It was also stated that interlanguage is not a simple process of restructuring from mother language, but dynamic and creative system. In this case it was found that interlanguage is not just a matter of cupping L1 to L2,

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but rather a complex process in which both languages are interacting within each other. The property of Language Transfer occurs when the student combines the systematic use of the definite article in the First Language and applies it to the Second Language. Even though, this is true, it was found that language transfer is not the only reason why students have problems with the definite article, as previously explained and the interpretation of results, overgeneralization of some rules in English language is another aspect found in the data. And in the final hypothesis, it was stated that the misuse of the English definite article happens when students translate the meaning of the definite article from Spanish language into English language. This is correct, however, it is not the only reason affecting the problems in the use of the English definite article, since in many cases the errors found were not related with the use of it in Spanish language, but rather with the wrong use of grammatical rules in English language.

In this research, it has existed different extraneous variables which the researcher could not control and those variables affect the result at the end of the research. One of them was the lack of time to teach the topic; according to the syllabus the explanation for this topic occurred in a very short time; it was around thirty minutes and it was not enough time to learn it. Another extraneous variable in this process was the continuity of the teacher, the teachers were different, in basic level students had different teacher than in the intermediate intensive English II. The students did not have the continuity in the learning process and for these reason students were affected in this process.

Finally, in relation to research question, the study concludes that language transfers can affect students in the written use of the definite article, and it can lead to fossilization. Fossilization is the reason why students stop progressing in the acquisition of the target language and why some kind of errors tend to be persistent in students' interlanguage.

To conclude, the students, at the Foreign Language Department, presented a significant capacity to identify mistakes and to correct them. The role of interference affects at the moment of learning English or learning another language. However, if the students are more exposed to the topic, they can improve in the use of this part of the speech. In other words, in the future, students will be able to use the English definite article correctly if they could practice it more.

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## **Recommendations**

### **A. To the Foreign Language Department**

- Implement academic reinforcements, focused on students with language deficiencies.
- Create events, workshops or other types of events that promote academic exchange and stimulate the training of professors and students.
- It is suggested to specialize teachers in each area established by the study plan.
- It is also essential to invest in teaching programs that are adapted to each social and cultural context, and creating adaptable and inclusive content.
- The University must have early detection devices for the learning challenges of the students, to implement the support intervention provided and not necessarily at the end of each semester.
- Design and test academic support programs in specific disciplines for lagging students.

### **B. To the English Teacher**

It is a fact that Interference issues exist in the classroom. It has been evident that the Interference impact in the grammar areas.

- Teacher should help students to identify what are the aspects in which students have to focus on their learning.
- Encourage students to learn the rules they violated in making the errors. (Instruction.)
- Teacher, as a guide in the learning process, should have a very active role in the use of some strategies to allow students to realize the English structures.
- The education should be permanent and oriented to covering the needs of the student.
- Incorporate active and innovative teaching methods that help train professionals according to the demands of society.

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### **C. To the students at the Foreign Language Department**

- Students must be aware that every language has a very particular system, even though there could be similarities among the mother tongue and English language. The recognition of the differences and similarities between languages could lead to facilitation for the English learning.
- Every student is responsible of their own learning therefore the identification and implementation of efficient strategies that could let them to improve their learning.
- Students should find efficient ways to learn, specially the grammar rules that could cause misunderstanding.
- Become an active student who investigates and develops knowledge by himself before, during and after each class.
- Read a lot and understand the importance of everyday reading, and the link between reading and writing.
- A lot of practice equal better performance. Every human skill gets better with constant, repetitive practice.
- Students need to understand themselves as learners: their unique strengths, weaknesses and style of learning so that to know what works to improve themselves.

### **D. To the future research students**

The interference phenomenon is a dynamic situation and it is related with the English level of the students. Consequently, there is a vast territory to explore and to study the phenomenon at the different level: Basic, Intermediate and Advanced. This will provide a precise scenario to delineate when the interference appears, stop to appear and how it develops along the entire process of learning language.

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# Annexes

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## Annex A



**University of El Salvador**  
**Foreign Languages Department**  
**Licenciatura en Idioma Inglés Opción Enseñanza**  
**“The Spanish Definitive Article Interference upon the**  
**English Definitive Article usage on the Students of Intermediate English II, group 04,**  
**of English language Teaching at the University of El Salvador, semester I-2018”**



**Direction:** Read the sentences and write the English Definitive Article where it is needed.

1. My grandmother likes \_\_\_\_\_ flowers very much.
2. I love \_\_\_\_\_ flowers in your garden.
3. See you on \_\_\_\_\_ Wednesday.
4. I always listen to \_\_\_\_\_ radio in the morning.
5. Alex goes to work by \_\_\_\_\_ bus
6. Don't be late for \_\_\_\_\_ school
7. Listen! Dennis is playing \_\_\_\_\_ trumpet.
8. We often see our cousins over \_\_\_\_\_ Easter.
9. She has never been to \_\_\_\_\_ Alps before.
10. What about going to Australia in \_\_\_\_\_ February?
11. Last year we visited \_\_\_\_\_ St. Paul's Cathedral and \_\_\_\_\_ Tower.
12. \_\_\_\_\_ Mount Everest is \_\_\_\_\_ highest mountain on earth.
13. \_\_\_\_\_ Loch Ness is \_\_\_\_\_ most famous lake in Scotland.
14. \_\_\_\_\_ most children like \_\_\_\_\_ sweets.
15. \_\_\_\_\_ summer of 2003 was hot and dry.
16. \_\_\_\_\_ Plaza Hotel is on the corner of \_\_\_\_\_ 59th Street and \_\_\_\_\_ 5th Avenue.
17. My sister often stays at \_\_\_\_\_ Uncle Tim's in Detroit.
18. Our friends \_\_\_\_\_ Millers moved to Florida last August.
19. \_\_\_\_\_ smog is a problem in \_\_\_\_\_ big cities.
20. Our children go to \_\_\_\_\_ school by \_\_\_\_\_ bus.

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## Annex B



**University of El Salvador**  
**Foreign Languages Department**  
**Licenciatura en Idioma Inglés Opción Enseñanza**



**“The Spanish Definitive Article Interference upon the English Definitive Article usage on the Students of Intermediate English II, group 04, of English language Teaching at the University of El Salvador, semester I-2018”**

1) Do you think that you have troubles using the English definite article?

Yes/ no why?

2) Do you think that the test was difficult?

Yes/no why?

3) Have you previously studied the use of the English definite article?

Yes/ no. Did you know the grammar rules about the English definite article? When was the last time you studied it?

4) Do you think that the Spanish definite article interferes the use of the English definite article? Yes/no What do you think?

5) Do you believe that grammar materials can help you improve the usage of the English definite article? Yes/no why? How do you think you can improve the use of the English definite article?

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## Annex C

### Materials

#### General rules

Use <i>the</i> to refer to something which has already been mentioned.	<b>Example:</b> On Monday, an unarmed man stole \$1,000 from the bank. <u>The thief</u> hasn't been caught yet.
Use <i>the</i> when you assume there is just one of something in that place, even if it has not been mentioned before.	<b>Example:</b> Where is <u>the bathroom</u> ?
Use <i>the</i> in sentences or clauses where you define or identify a particular person or object.	<b>Example:</b> <u>The man</u> who wrote this book is famous.
Use <i>the</i> to refer to people or objects that are unique.	<b>Example:</b> <u>The sun</u> rose at 6:17 this morning.
Use <i>the</i> before superlatives and ordinal numbers.	<b>Examples:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• This is <u>the highest building</u> in New York.</li><li>• This is <u>the third time</u> I have called you today.</li></ul>
Use <i>the</i> with adjectives, to refer to a whole group of people.	Examples: <u>The French</u> enjoy cheese.
Use <i>the</i> with decades.	<b>Examples:</b> This is a painting from <u>the 1820's</u> .
Use <i>the</i> with clauses introduced by <i>only</i>	<b>Examples:</b> This is <u>the only day</u> we've had sunshine all week.
Use <i>the</i> with names of geographical areas,	<b>Examples:</b> Our ship crossed <u>the Atlantic</u> in 7



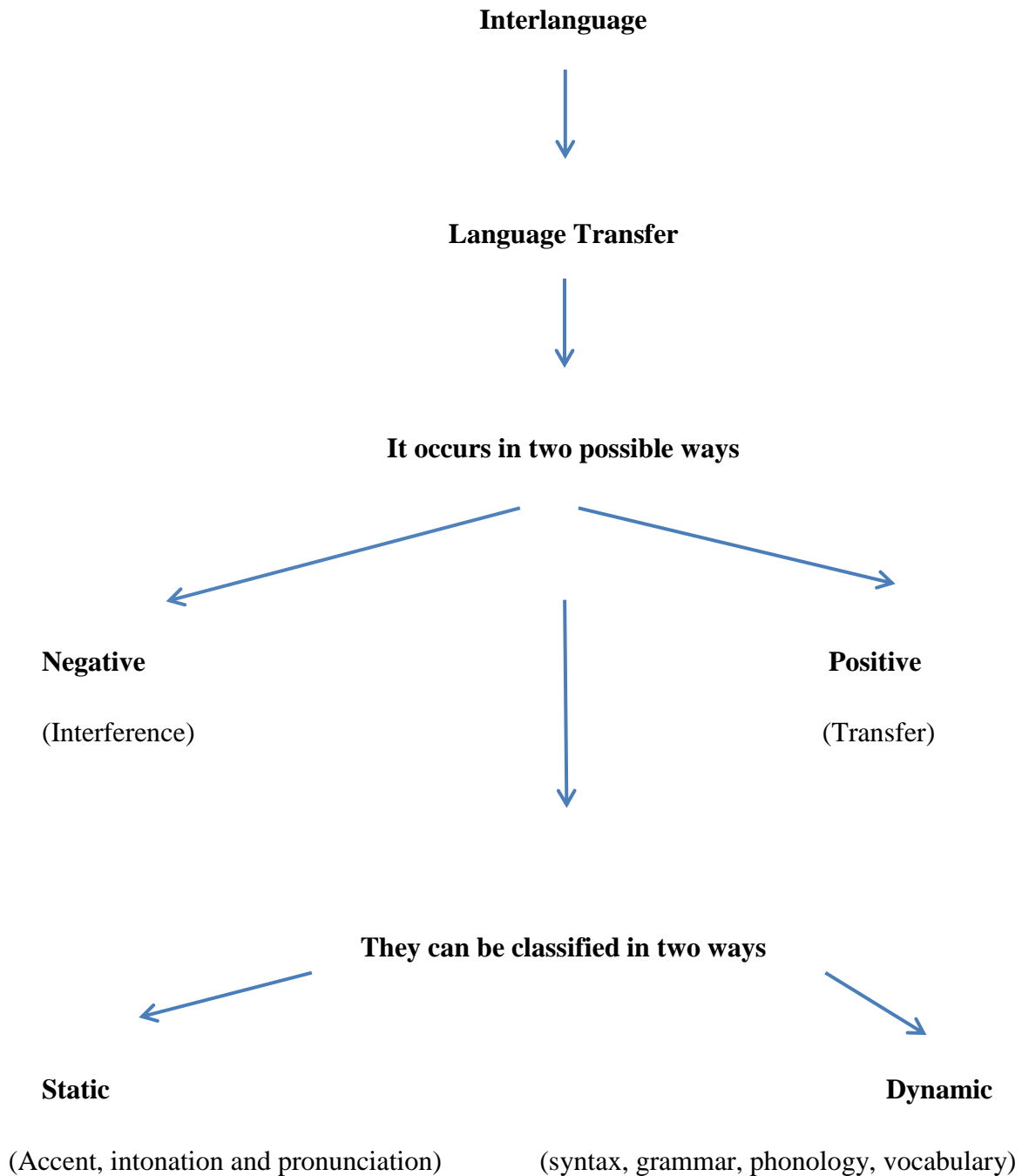
rivers, mountain ranges, groups of islands, canals, and oceans.	days.
Use <i>the</i> with countries that have plural names.	<b>Examples:</b> have never been to <u>the Netherlands</u> .
Use <i>the</i> with countries that include the words "republic", "kingdom", or "states" in their names.	<b>Examples:</b> She is visiting <u>the United States</u> .
Use <i>the</i> with newspaper names.	<b>Examples:</b> She works for <u>the New York Times</u> .
Use <i>the</i> with the names of famous buildings, works of art, museums, or monuments.	<b>Examples:</b> I would like to visit <u>the Eiffel Tower</u> .
Use <i>the</i> with the names of hotels & restaurants, unless these are named after a person.	<b>Examples:</b> They are staying at <u>the Hilton</u> on 6th street.  <b>Examples:</b> We're having dinner with <u>the Smiths</u> tonight.

### When not to use "the"

- Do not use *the* with names of countries (except for the special cases above).
- Do not use *the* with the names of languages.
- Do not use *the* with the names of meals.
- Do not use *the* with people's names.
- Do not use *the* with titles when combined with names.
- Do not use *the* after the 's possessive case
- Do not use *the* with professions
- Do not use *the* with names of shops
- Do not use *the* with years

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- Do not use *the* with uncountable nouns
  - Do not use *the* with the names of individual mountains, lakes and islands
  - Do not use *the* with most names of towns, streets, stations and airports

## Annex D



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