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Greek Students as Users of the Spanish Language

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ABSTRACT

A database in foreign language education can facilitate the educational community in distinguishing language levels and the degree of readability through the investigation of specific factors. For this purpose, 60 samples of written language production of Greek students of the Aristotle University of Thessaloniki, who study in different departments, were collected. These are texts from the last decade and concern the A1 language level. After the samples were collected by random drawing, they were digitized manually in word format. The results were manually exported to an Excel file, which was used to perform statistical analysis in the Tableau tool. The main purpose of this study is to highlight particular characteristics, difficulties or advantages of Greek students who use Spanish as an elective subject. Morphological, grammatical, syntactic or lexical variables shape the beginner profile of non-native speakers of the Spanish Language for level A1, while factors such as the number of features, words, sentences, the gender of the users and the degree of difficulty of the produced texts could create a significant database, useful for future research at a national and international level. The final product of this study results in the most accurate and perhaps most reliable distinction of language levels for a potentially more effective use of languages by non-native speakers if there is subsequent research at all levels of language proficiency and in more languages.

KEYWORDS

Gender; level; readability; non-native speaker.

INTRODUCTION

Nowadays, it is increasingly common to experiment with or invent innovative tools with which the teacher or user of a foreign language can distinguish the degree of difficulty of a produced text (Kapeta & Klonis, 2024) as well as the level of language proficiency in a more reliable and accurate manner. The discovery of modern formulas (Crossley et al., 2011) can lead to a common database for the benefit of the academic and educational community for the creation of new educational material specifically designed for non-native speakers of foreign languages (Klonis, 2019).

Therefore, on the occasion of the usefulness of similar data that relate above all to morphological, grammatical, syntactic or lexical peculiarities of foreign language users (Kapeta, 2024), the present postdoctoral research was initiated at the Aristotle University of Thessaloniki/Greece. It is noteworthy that the possibility of choosing foreign language courses within university units attracts Greek students, who are non-native users of the Spanish language (Kapeta, 2024), to participate in the Spanish course of their own free will (Archibald et al., 2006). Even more remarkable is the fact that these users come to the final semester exams with clearly positive results in most cases, as shown by the research in question. Thus, the response of Greek students during the production of written Spanish

language at language level A1 (López-Anguita et al., 2018), to whom the Spanish course (Bautista-Puig & Sanz-Casado, 2021) is offered by the Department of Italian Language and Literature of the same University, is studied (Mejía, 2016).

Subsequently, through a rich range of important variables (Bambini et al., 2014), such as the number of words per sample, the final grade/evaluation of the written text (Berninger et al., 2010), the degree of readability (Solnyshkina et al., 2017), the gender of the user, etc., useful answers are given to the objectives that are listed in detail below.

Research Subject and Objectives

1. When and in what way could a text targeted, for example, for the A1 language level be distinguished, i.e. with which variables can it be correlated if the sample is determined, for example, at the A1 level (Soriano-Ferrer & Alonso-Blanco, 2019)?
2. What are the main characteristics that differentiate male Greek students of high school as non-native speakers of the Spanish language from women when producing texts in Spanish (Kissau et al., 2010)?
3. Which variables can be correlated with the degree of readability of texts produced by Greek students of Spanish as an elective course offered by the university (Fajardo-Delgado et al., 2025)?
4. What are the elements that characterize Greek students who are non-native speakers of Spanish when producing written language (Pulido & López-Beltrán, 2023)?
5. What are the determining factors through which the difficulty or ease of composing sentences or texts can be highlighted when it comes to Greek students who choose the Spanish language, offered to all departments of the Aristotle University of Thessaloniki by the Department of Italian Language and Literature (Sparks et al., 2017)?

These hypotheses have been investigated in depth and statistically analyzed so that the final results contribute as best as possible to the academic and educational community in creating even more reliable future digital tools for measuring readability, but also to invent new approach strategies regarding the creation of educational material addressed to students who learn foreign languages as an elective subject and as non-native speakers.

Through the collection of authentic samples produced by Greek students as users and non-native speakers of the Spanish language, useful conclusions have been gathered which will be presented at the end of this article.

RESEARCH METHODS

For better data processing, reliable samples were collected from students of the Aristotle University of Thessaloniki. In other words, 60 texts from different examination periods from 2016 to February 2025 were available. The level chosen was A1 as currently only this language level is available in the Spanish language and students have the option to choose it as an elective course offered by the Department of Italian Language and Literature. The students who produced these texts are non-native speakers of the Spanish language, so there is a possibility that they have no knowledge of Spanish at all, therefore this possibility must be factored and taken into account regarding the final evaluation of the test in written production.

During the second stage of the research, the samples were digitized manually and carefully, converting them into word format, a process that was quite time-consuming and difficult as all the errors that appeared in the original texts had to be included in order to produce accurate and reliable final results.

After digitization, a readability tool for the Spanish language measuring the level of difficulty was used, from which the most basic data of this research were extracted and in

the fourth stage, this data was also carefully transferred to the Tableau tool in order to carry out the necessary statistical analysis through which we arrived at the final product of the present study, i.e. the conclusions (table 1).

Table 1. Table of research stages

Stage	Methodology
1st	Collection of A1 level samples from 2016-2025 regarding Greek students, non-native users of the Spanish language
2nd	Manually digitizing samples in word format
3rd	Transferring texts to the readability tool https://www.spanishreadability.com
4th	Transferring data to Tableau statistical analysis tool
5th	Export of final product/conclusions from Tableau tool

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

After extracting the statistical analysis data through the Tableau statistical analysis tool, the following very important results emerged:

In total, it should be mentioned again that 60 samples were collected, of which 11 were produced by male Greek students, non-native speakers of the Spanish language. Observing Figure 1, it can be seen that only one male student reached an average final readability score of 38.4% (readability level slightly difficult). Four male Greek students reached an average readability level of average/normal while the average final grade is 47.4%. The majority, i.e. 6 male students, wrote an average final readability score of 50.5%, i.e. slightly easy. This figure shows us that male Greek students seem to have a slight difficulty in producing written Spanish at the beginner level (A1), however, there is at least one student who produced a text with a high average readability. Let us recall that on this particular readability scale, the lower the percentage, the more difficult the text, i.e. the greater the degree of readability.

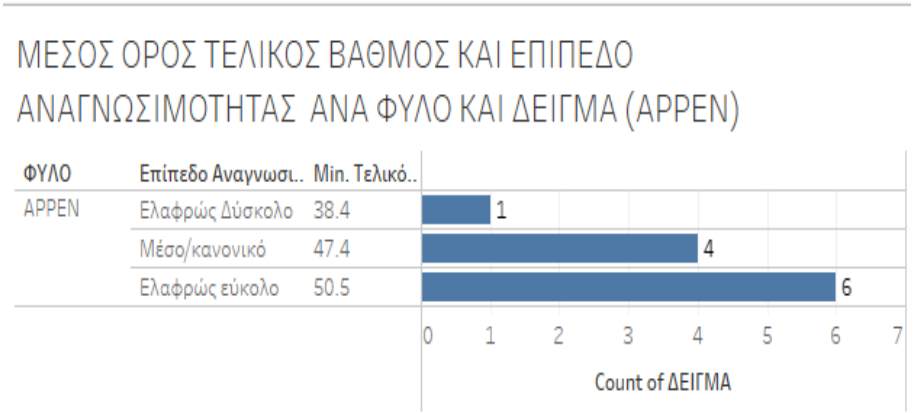

Figure 1. Average final grade and readability level by gender and sample (men)

The following figure (Figure 2) presents the same variables for Greek female students who are non-native speakers of Spanish. The presence of not a single female student who has produced a text with a higher degree of difficulty marks the difference from male Greek students. However, because the majority of the samples consist of 49 Greek female students compared to only 11 Greek male students, these results can be considered positive in their entirety. Thus, out of the total 49 samples of Greek female students, the majority, i.e. 34, produced slightly easy texts with an average final readability score of 50.3%, while 15 students reached 45.8%, i.e. the average to normal level. From this figure, one can

understand the possible difficulties that Greek female students faced when producing A1 level written language, which will be analyzed in subsequent figures.

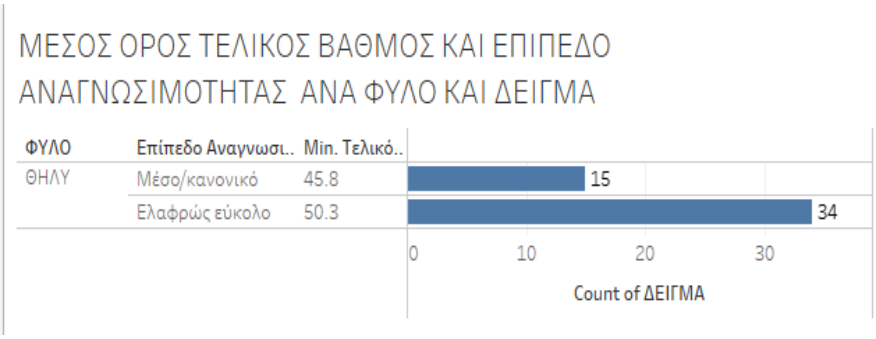

Figure 2. Average final grade and readability level by gender and sample (women)

Continuing the previous data analysis and explaining the possible difficulties of male and female Greek students as users of the Spanish language at language level A1, the following will be found: Figure 3 shows male Greek students in blue and female students in orange. The results of the two are compared from top to bottom in terms of the average number of words, average number of sentences and average number of characters used respectively by gender. Starting from the top line, i.e. the average number of words, the general majority of words used (average 129,00 words) are presented by men while 106,00 are presented by women. On both sides, both male and female students, there seems to be a relative ease in the use of words if it is also observed that female students in particular cover the largest range of average word counts from 41,00-106,00. This indicates a potential ease of understanding the instructions and producing texts with the required number of words for level A1 for both men and women.

In the second line of the figure, the majority of men produced an average of 10.00 sentences for male students and also 10.00 for women, while the minimum average of women used only 4.8 sentences and of men only 6.5. This specific result shows us the potential ease of producing sentences by both genders, but especially for men the result is very positive since the average number of minimum sentences is higher than that of women, even though there are fewer male than female students.

Finally, in the last alignment we see the average number of characters in which the majority of men and the entire sample of both genders scored 510.00 characters, a fairly high amount for the A1 level. In the case of women, a high average is also observed (445.00). In short, there seems to be ease among both genders of Greek students of Spanish as a foreign language in using a wide range of characters for this language level.

Regarding the final evaluation, we observe that the largest sample scale ranges at the final grade of 9 (when score 10 is the highest mark), which for the Greek evaluation system in higher education is an excellent grade. In these samples, we see a fairly high average score for both genders in all of the aforementioned parameters. This means that, in general, both genders managed to use the above elements adequately.

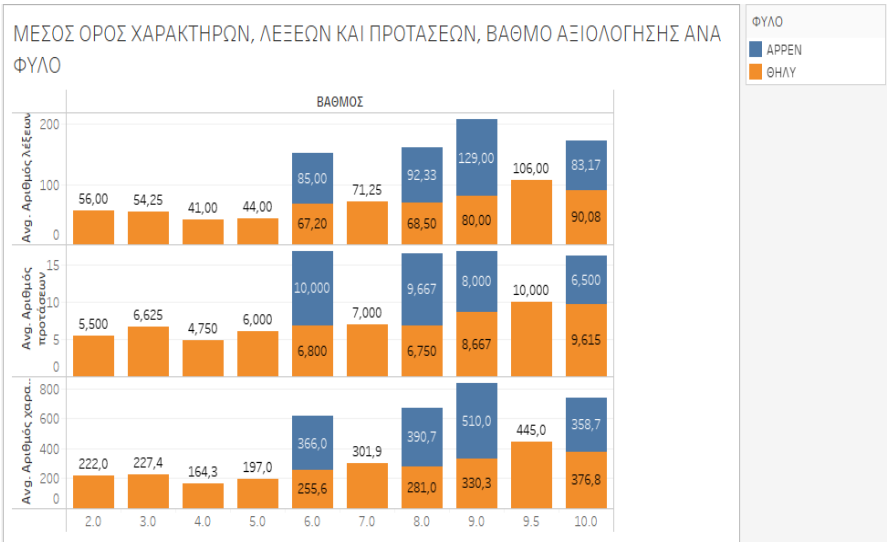

Figure 3. Average of characters, words and sentences & evaluation grade per gender (blue color for men and orange color for women)

The last two figures (4 and 5) are quite important as they show us the final grade per sample as mentioned already in the previous paragraph. At this point, it should be emphasized that the grade 10 for the Greek grading system in higher education is excellent while the grade 5 is the basis for the Greek student to pass the exams. Overall, the majority of the 60 students in the sample, i.e. 19, passed the written exam with an excellent grade (10), while only one student passed the basic grade (mark 5). Fifteen students scored below the baseline with only 2 students scoring only a grade of 2, while a large number of students scored grades 6-9.

The results seem to be satisfactory as we are talking about non-native speakers, Greek students, to whom the Spanish language course is offered as an elective course by the Department of Italian Language and Literature, in which students from other departments participate.

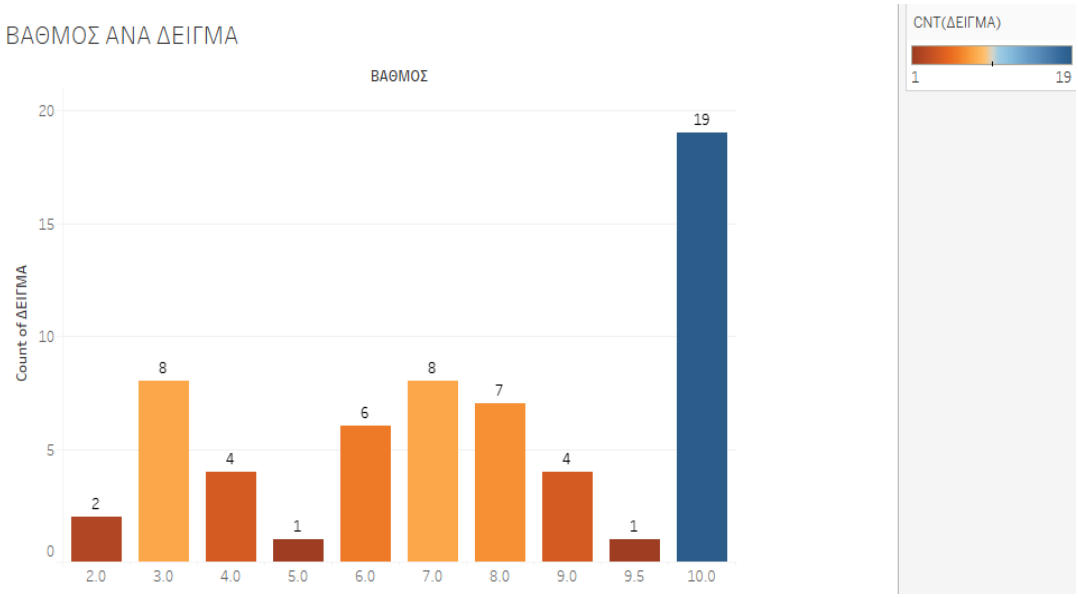

Figure 4. Evaluation per sample

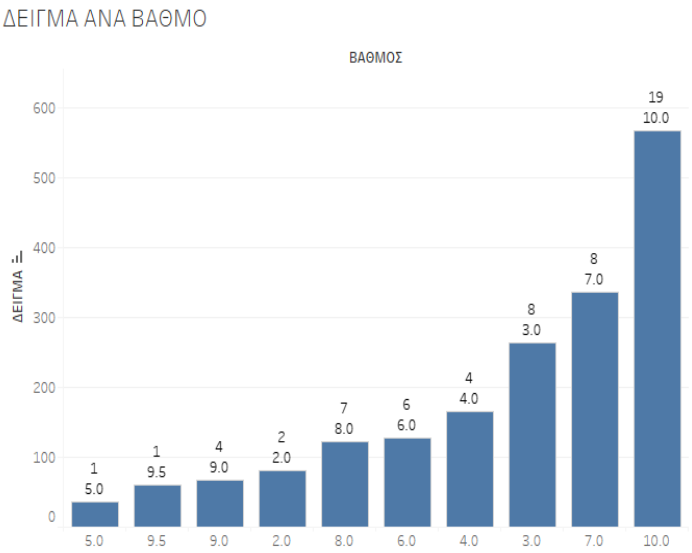

Figure 5. Sample per evaluation (from minimum to maximum)

CONCLUSION

From this rich collection of 60 samples spanning almost a decade, concerning texts produced by Greek students, users of Spanish as a foreign language at level A1, the conclusions emerge that:

1. Both male students as non-native speakers of Spanish and women do not seem to face particular difficulty in using the number of words, sentences and characters to produce simple texts at A1 language level.
2. Both male and female students appear to be approaching the average to normal level in terms of readability, specifically 47.7% for men and 45.8% for women, quite encouraging figures for this language level.
3. Through the final grade of the written exam (in this case, it should be emphasized that there is only one examiner/scorer), we see that the majority of Greek students, a total of 19 out of 60, reached the maximum grade of 10 (excellent mark/maximum in Greek high school), a fact that can be characterized as positive, while only two students were evaluated with a low grade of 2 (below the base). Only one student scored a grade of 5, i.e. the base. A fairly large range scored between grades 6 and 9, thus passing the base and the written examination of the A1 language level in written production.

In conclusion, these results show us a partially positive picture of the way Greek students deal with the production of A1 level written language as users of the Spanish language, although they are non-native speakers. The importance of choosing foreign languages in higher education is emphasized, since the participation of non-native speakers of foreign languages yields useful results regarding languages as elective courses at high school.

The investigation of other language levels for the Spanish language or a future study comparing it with other languages of the same language level (A1) or other levels (A2, B & C level) could perhaps lead to a broader database nationwide or even internationally. This, on the other hand, perhaps leads the academic community to increase the teaching hours of foreign languages within higher education, to promote different foreign languages and language levels, and finally to construct even innovative readability formulas, specifically designed for university language exams.

The collection and utilization of results from other researchers might help the academic community and the students themselves in the best possible preparation, while modernized digital test measurement tools would likely contribute to the construction of more reliable tests.

Finally, the free choice of learning foreign languages through university would perhaps lead to the upgrading of higher education as the need to learn more languages is increasing in the global context.

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