

The Specific Characteristics of Greek Students as Users of Spanish AFL

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ABSTRACT: The construction of systematic corpora comprising written production by non-native speakers enables a more precise and reliable assessment of language proficiency levels and text readability, thereby contributing to the enhancement of foreign language education. The present study is based on the compilation of a corpus of written texts produced over ten years by Greek undergraduate students from various departments of the Aristotle University of Thessaloniki who attended the elective course “Spanish Language A1.” All collected texts were digitised as Word files and subsequently analysed using readability assessment tools in combination with *Tableau* statistical analysis software. The research examines morphological, grammatical, lexical, and syntactic features, analysed alongside quantitative and demographic variables, with the aim of identifying factors that influence written language production by non-native learners. The present research constitutes a pilot phase of a broader investigative framework, laying the groundwork for future studies and for the potential development of assessment tests targeting additional levels of language proficiency. Moreover, the findings of this study contribute to the refinement of more accurate language proficiency and readability assessment instruments and to the development of a new learner corpus.

KEYWORDS: readability, A1 language level, university, non-native, Spanish.

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Introduction

Text readability refers to the ease with which readers can read, comprehend, and process written text and constitutes a critical parameter in the analysis and evaluation of linguistic material (Crossley et al., 2008). Readability is influenced by a range of linguistic and structural factors, including lexical and morphological complexity, syntactic structure and word orthography, sentence and word length, and the coherence and organisation of the text (Kapeta, 2024a).

In recent years, increasing attention has been devoted to the impact of linguistic, morphological, lexical, and syntactic parameters on text readability, particularly when texts are produced by non-native speakers of a language (Dmitrieva et al., 2021).

The study of readability contributes substantially to the evaluation of educational materials, the analysis of texts produced by non-native speakers, and the development of reliable language assessment tools (Graesser et al., 2011).

Highlighting distinctions in language proficiency levels and text readability (Kapeta, 2024) can be regarded as a fundamental incentive for creating databases in foreign language education, as they facilitate the identification of both the strengths and potential weaknesses of non-native speakers of a foreign language (Wardak, 2014). The utilisation of such data may further lead, in the future, to the development of innovative educational materials, contributing to the improvement of foreign language teaching within the educational and academic community, as well as to the more effective learning of these languages by learners themselves as non-native speakers (Sanchez-Gordon & Luján-Mora, 2015).

In conclusion, the present study examines the performance of Greek undergraduate students in written production in Spanish through end-of-semester examinations conducted from 2016–2025. The analysis of data spanning nearly a decade enables reliable results and substantiated conclusions regarding the specific characteristics of these language users.

Research Aim and Research Questions

1. Concurrently, the study examines the factors that determine the degree of difficulty or ease in constructing sentences and longer texts for Greek users of Spanish as a foreign language (Kapeta & Klonis, 2024). Furthermore, it explores how a text can be classified as representative of the A1 language proficiency level through its association with specific linguistic and quantitative variables (Kapeta, 2020a).
2. The present study focuses on identifying and analysing the core characteristics that define Greek undergraduate students as non-native speakers of the Spanish language in written production (Kapeta, 2020b). In particular, it investigates the relationship between specific variables and the readability levels of texts produced within the context of Spanish as an elective course (Hubert, 2008).

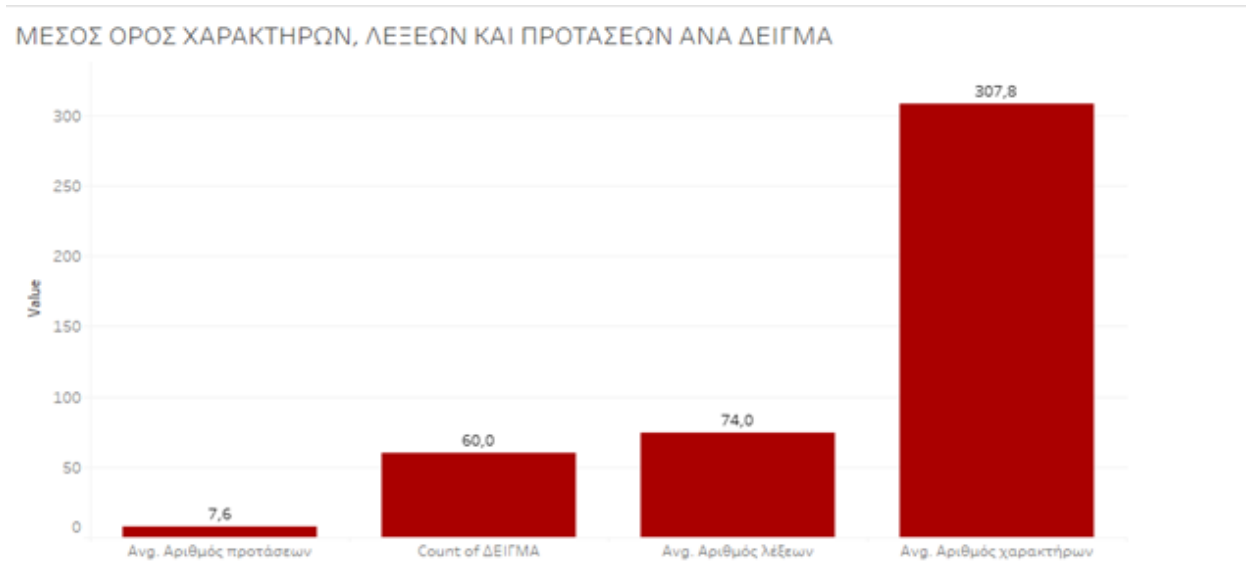
- Finally, the research investigates the primary characteristics that differentiate male and female Greek students as users of Spanish in written production, aiming to highlight potential differences in performance and text readability (Hou-Keat, Hassan & Ramli, 2017).

Research Results

In the following figure [Figure 5], the mean values of characters, words, and sentences per sample are presented. Specifically, an average of 307.8 characters, 74 words, and 7.6 sentences per sample was recorded. Across all parameters, students achieved relatively high values, indicating their ability to produce A1-level texts with ease, with vocabulary, morphological, and syntactic features consistent with this proficiency level (Khushik, 2025). Furthermore, Figure 5 suggests that students were generally capable of employing an adequate number of words, characters, and sentences for the given language proficiency level (Kapeta, 2024b), as only a minimal number of texts received a score of zero or fell below the passing threshold, which in the Greek higher education system corresponds to a grade of 5.

Figure 1

Average Number of Characters, Words, and Sentences per Sample



Building on previous data analysis and examining the potential challenges faced by male and female Greek students using Spanish at the A1 proficiency level, the following observations emerge. Figure 2 presents male students in blue and female students in orange. The results are compared sequentially by gender in terms of the average number of words, sentences, and characters produced. At the top of the figure, corresponding to the average number of words, male students produced a general majority of 129.00 words on average, compared to 106.00 words for female students. Both genders appear to use words with relative ease, particularly females, who exhibit the widest range of

average word counts, from 41.00 to 106.00. This suggests that both male and female students can comprehend instructions and generate texts containing the required word counts for the A1 level with relative ease.

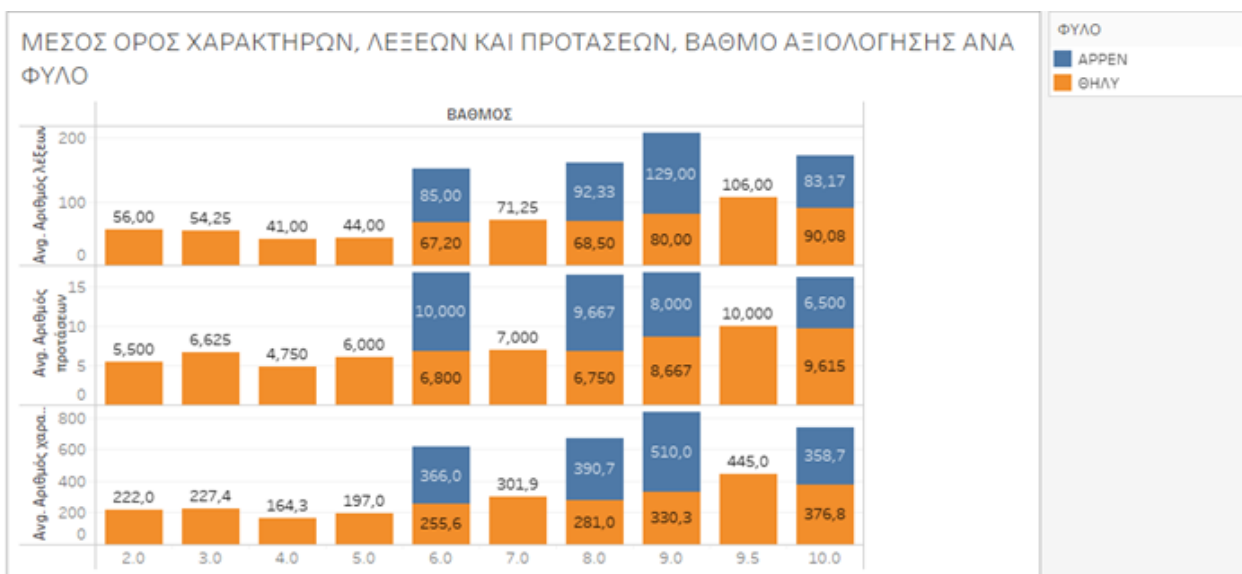
In the second segment, the majority of both male and female students produced an average of 10.00 sentences, while the minimum averages were 6.5 for men and 4.8 for women. These findings indicate a general ease in sentence production across both genders, with male students displaying slightly higher minimum sentence counts despite their smaller sample size, reflecting positive performance.

Finally, regarding character counts, the majority of male students and the overall sample averaged 510.00 characters, which is notably high for the A1 level. Female students also demonstrated a substantial average of 445.00 characters. Overall, these results indicate that both genders of Greek students exhibit facility in producing texts with an adequate range of characters for this proficiency level.

Regarding the final evaluation, the largest portion of the sample received a final grade of 9 out of 10, corresponding to an excellent score in the Greek higher education system. Across all analysed parameters, both male and female students maintained high average scores, indicating that they were generally able to utilise these linguistic elements effectively.

Figure 2

Average numbers of characters, words, and sentences, along with final evaluation grades, broken down by gender (male students represented in blue and female students in orange)



Conclusions

From this extensive collection of 60 samples, covering nearly a decade and produced by Greek students using Spanish as a foreign language at the A1 level, several conclusions can be drawn. First, both male and female students, as non-native speakers of Spanish, appear to handle the production of simple texts at the A1 level with relative ease, showing no significant difficulty in using the expected number of words, sentences, and characters. Second, in terms of readability, both genders achieve averages close to normal levels, with 47.7% for men and 45.8% for women, results that are encouraging for this proficiency level. Third, analysis of the final grades of the written examinations—bearing in mind that a single examiner assessed all—reveals that the majority of students, 19 out of 60, attained the maximum grade of 10, considered an excellent mark within the Greek higher education grading system. Only two students received a low score of 2, while a single student achieved the passing grade of 5. The remaining students scored between 6 and 9, successfully passing the written examination for A1-level production.

The creation of a nationwide, or even international, database containing analogous results for each language and proficiency level would provide a broader understanding of the profile of non-native speakers in higher education (Gutierrez-Sigut et al., 2016).

In conclusion, the present study constitutes a pilot phase of a larger research initiative, examining the potential use of statistical analysis tools such as Tableau, alongside instruments for measuring readability and text difficulty in Spanish, including the Spanish Readability Tool (<https://www.spanishreadability.com/>), to support the development of assessment tests and to explore additional levels of language proficiency.

In conclusion, these findings present a largely positive picture of how Greek students, despite being non-native speakers, manage the production of written texts at the A1 Spanish level. They also underscore the value of offering foreign language courses in higher education, as participation by non-native speakers provides meaningful insights into language learning outcomes in elective courses.

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