

Second language assessment in the Greek educational system: The case of Reception Classes

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ΠΕΡΙΛΗΨΗ

Στόχος του άρθρου είναι η επισκόπηση του επιπέδου επάρκειας της Ελληνικής ως δεύτερης γλώσσας (Γ2) των παιδιών μεταναστών και επαναπατρισθέντων που έχουν εγγραφεί σε τάξεις υποδοχής. Η γλωσσική επίδοση 765 παιδιών στη Γ2 μετρήθηκε με αξιολογήσεις που βασίζονται στο Κοινό Ευρωπαϊκό Πλαίσιο (Council of Europe 2001). Τα αποτελέσματα (συνολική επίδοση και ομοιότητες ή διαφορές σε διάφορες γλωσσικές δεξιότητες) συσχετίζονται με παράγοντες όπως η χώρα προέλευσης, η ηλικία, το φύλο και η διάρκεια παραμονής στη χώρα. Τα δημογραφικά δεδομένα αποκαλύπτουν ότι, αν και οι τάξεις υποδοχής απευθύνονται σε νεοεισερχόμενους, περιλαμβάνουν ουσιαστικά δύο κατηγορίες παιδιών: πραγματικούς νεοεισερχόμενους και μια μεγαλύτερη ομάδα παιδιών με μακρά παραμονή στην Ελλάδα. Τα ευρήματα της έρευνας υποδεικνύουν ότι τα παιδιά σε τάξεις υποδοχής επιδεικνύουν μέτρια καμπύλη ανάπτυξης στη διάρκεια της πρωτοβάθμιας εκπαίδευσης, με τα περισσότερα παιδιά να φθάνουν το επίπεδο B1 στο τέλος του Δημοτικού και στη διάρκεια του Γυμνασίου, ενώ μικρό ποσοστό φτάνουν στο επίπεδο B2. Επιπλέον, η κατανόηση προφορικού λόγου αποδείχθηκε η πιο ανεπτυγμένη δεξιότητα, ενώ η γραφή η πιο δύσκολη για όλες τις ομάδες. Τα ευρήματα αυτά υπογραμμίζουν ότι οι μαθητές φαίνεται να έχουν αναπτύξει τις βασικές επικοινωνιακές δεξιότητες, αλλά δεν έχουν αναπτύξει αρκετά προχωρημένες ακαδημαϊκές δεξιότητες. Επομένως, είναι απαραίτητη μια πιο εξειδικευμένη παιδαγωγική προσέγγιση για να επιτευχθεί η ενσωμάτωσή τους στο κανονικό σχολείο.

KEYWORDS: reception classes, second language assessment

1. Introduction*

The goal of this study is to report on an extensive survey aiming at assessing the proficiency level in L2 Greek of immigrant and repatriated children enrolled in Greek state schools. The study has been carried out within the large scale educational project "Education of Repatriate and Immigrant Students",¹ funded by the National Strategic Reference Framework 2007-2013 and the Ministry of Education, Lifelong Learning and Religious Affairs, and implemented by the Aristotle University of Thessaloniki. The present study is part of the Action "Linguistic and Educational Support for Reception Classes" (Action 1).² One of the objectives of this particular Action is to assess the proficiency in Greek of children who attend Reception Classes (henceforth RCs) by means of placement tests.

1.1. Official policy and research objectives

Remedial Class policy (Reception and Tutorial Classes) has been introduced, legislated and implemented in the Greek educational system in 1980, at first as a measure for assisting

* The tests have been administered and marked by the collaborators of Action 1 "Linguistic and Educational support for Reception Classes": Zoi Alexopoulou, Anastasia Ambati, Paraskevi Anthopoulou, Vasiliki Apostolouda, Dimitra Athanasopoulou, Sousana Chioti, Nikolaos Dalakis, Ioannis Frangiadakis, Jelena Ivanič, Konstantinos Kakarikos, Eirini Kanellopoulou, Christina Katsarou, Margarita Kapsali, Chrysa Kolitsa, Efrosini Kodokosta, Sofia Mantzanidou, Polina Marouki, Ourania Miliou, Eirini Nari, Michaela Nerantzini, Gioula Panagiotou, Maja Pejcič, Dora Psoma, Sevi Samara, Anna Samata, Evi Tamtelen, Marianna Tiliopoulou, Frideriki Tsiamouri, Titika Tsindoni & Giorgos Zombolas. It would not have been possible to write this paper without their meticulous and systematic work on the administration and marking of the tests. Special thanks also go to Sofia Anastasiadou for conducting the reliability analyses of the tests.

¹ The scientific coordinator of the project was Prof. Anna Anastasiadis-Symeonidis, Department of Linguistics, Aristotle University of Thessaloniki, Funding IDs: 85705, 86040, 86041, <http://www.diapolis.auth.gr>.

² The coordinator of Action 1 was Despina Papadopoulou, Department of Linguistics, Aristotle University of Thessaloniki. The coordinator of the Language Assessment sub-project was Maria Tzevelekou, Institute for Language and Speech Processing, "Athena" Research and Innovation Center.

repatriated students to integrate in the Greek educational and social environment (ministerial decision Φ 818.2/Ζ/41.59/4-11-80). In 1983, by virtue of the Law 1404/83 and its subsequent amendments, the scope of *Reception and Tutorial Classes* has been extended to include all students of families (members and non-members of the EU) living and working in Greece, in accordance with a European Union directive “about the schooling of children of transient workers” (Somarakis 2003, Mitakidou 2010). In 1996, a more encompassing institutional framework has been introduced in conformity with the principles of intercultural education, in order to include all groups of students (foreign and indigene) with educational, social, cultural, and instructional particularities (N. 2413/96). Accordingly, in 1999, Remedial Class policy has been redefined in more flexible terms (ministerial decision Φ10/20/Γ1/708/28-9-99). The number of Remedial Classes has been dramatically increased from the 1990s onwards, when Greece started receiving large inflows of immigrants from Central and Eastern Europe, in the aftermath of the dismantling of Soviet Union and the subsequent collapse of the communist regimes, and from Asia and Africa, an upshot of turmoil in various Asian and African countries, and of the increasing deterioration of the global economy (Kasimis and Kasimi 2004). This development has affected the composition of student population in the large majority of state schools. According to statistical data released by IPODE (Institute for the Education of Greek Repatriates and Cross-cultural Education), 10% of the student population at all educational levels of primary and secondary education in the 2006-2007 school year were children of immigrant and repatriate families (Mitakidou 2010).

Typically, RCs are addressed to newcomers, immigrant and repatriated children whose proficiency in Greek does not meet the requirements of mainstream classes. They usually provide a one-year intensive program in Greek in order to raise children’s proficiency to the level that would allow them to follow the school curriculum. Attendance at RCs may be extended, if needed, by one-two years.

Although RCs have been operating in the Greek educational system for over 30 years, studies on their implementation and their outcomes are scarce and focus mainly on educational policy issues, i.e. submersion/immersion method, lack of instruction in the mother tongue and its implications on children’s academic achievement, etc. (Gotovos & Markou 2004, Skourtou et al. 2004, Mitakidou et al. 2007, Mitakidou 2010). In parallel, a number of studies on immigrant/repatriated children have been issued focusing on language shift/first language attrition (Chatzidaki 2007, Gogonas 2009) and on the academic lag between immigrant/repatriated children and their monolingual peers (Skourtou et al. 2004, Mitakidou et al. 2008, Simos et al. in press). It is worth noting at this point that a systematic collection of primary data (total number of ethnic minority children, geographical distribution, ethno-linguistic background, socio-economic status, number of children attending remedial classes, number of schools implementing remedial class policy, number of children attending RCs, number of children relocated in mainstream classes, mean length of attendance in RCs, etc) has not been carried out on a regular basis, while statistical data from various institutional bodies, when provided, display significant discrepancies, as pointed out by Gotovos & Markou (2004), and Skourtou et al. (2004). In addition, there is no information to what extent valid screening procedures and criteria for getting in and out of RCs have been used, and, even if they are used, their results have never been processed or released.

The present study is an attempt to provide a broad, synchronic overview of RCs with respect to proficiency in L2 Greek. Its aim is twofold: a) to measure, with a widely used assessment methodology and battery, the proficiency level of Greek as L2 in RCs; b) to collect sufficient data of the children’s profile that are considered as key factors of language proficiency.

1.2. Previous research on second language assessment in Greece

Studies on young learners' language proficiency in Greek are rather limited and sporadic. During 1997-1999, Varlokosta & Triantafyllidou (2003) studied, on the basis of 80 interviews, the proficiency in Greek of adolescents of Albanian and Russian descent attending Greek state schools. The samples of speech were elicited from each participant using the criteria of "ACTFL Oral Proficiency Interview" and were rated in terms of the proficiency levels described in the "ACTFL Proficiency Guidelines",³ i.e. Superior, Advanced, Intermediate, and Novice. 44% of the participants were placed at the Novice level, while 41% met the criteria of the Intermediate level. Only 15% were placed at the Advanced level, but none at the Superior level. The variable "length of residence in Greece" combined with proficiency level yielded to the following results: novice learners had an average of 8 months, intermediate learners had an average of 2.25 years, and advanced learners had an average of 5 years length of residence in Greece at the time of the interviews. In parallel, the elicited interviews were studied from a developmental perspective. The grammatical and communicative features, characteristic of each proficiency level, were identified and a series of criteria for discriminating different levels were put into place.

During 2002-2004, within the Educational Reform Program "Education of the Muslim Minority", Tzevelekou et al. (2008), following a cross-sectional method, studied a representative sample of 252 children of Turkish, Pomak, and Rom descent attending primary Greek-Turkish bilingual minority schools in Western Thrace. The development of proficiency in Greek was assessed by a series of three placement tests. Tests were set up according to the prerequisites of the CEFR (see section 2.1). Results indicated an overall uneven rate of progress in language proficiency. Although children started primary school with very little knowledge of Greek, during their first years at school (from 7 to 10 years old), they showed a significant progress, reaching level A2. From 10 to 12 years, the language learning process seemed to slow down, with a relatively small number of children exceeding level B1 by the time they completed primary school.

The difficulties in written language experienced by L2 and/or bilingual students were studied by Vlachos & Papademetriou (2004). The experimental group comprised 2nd and 4th grade L2 and/or bilingual students with at least a five-year stay in Greece, whose parents were both immigrants or one of them was a non-native Greek speaker. The performance of the experimental group was compared to the performance of a control group consisting of their monolingual peers. Results showed that L2 and/or bilingual students presented significant differences in writing, spelling, and oral reading fluency compared to the control group.

2. Method

The current research adheres to the methods and findings of previous research studies on the assessment of Greek L2 young learners (Varlokosta & Triantafyllidou 2003, Tzevelekou et al. 2008, see section 1.2). The language proficiency of children attending RCs was assessed with a revised version of a series of three placement tests, initially developed for assessing language proficiency of the Muslim minority children in Western Thrace (Tzevelekou et al. 2008). The tests were part of a comprehensive method for assessing young learners' proficiency in Greek, which also includes: a) guidelines for test administration, b) a scoring system and scoring guidelines, and c) a questionnaire for collecting children's demographic data, such as gender, age, place of residence, native language, etc.

Test battery and methods were revised in order to be adapted to immigrant and repatriated children. The initial development and the revision procedure are described in

³ For more information see <http://www.actfltraining.org/index.cfm>.

section 2.1, while the procedure of the study and the children's profile are provided in sections 2.2 and 2.3, respectively.

2.1. Materials

As previously mentioned, tests were developed on the basis of the CEFR, which is built up in accordance with a functional-notional approach: the ability to use the language is linked to the ability to interact effectively within the social environment. Hence, it provides a practical tool for setting standards to be attained at successive stages of learning a second language and for evaluating outcomes in an internationally comparable manner (McNamara & Roever 2006, Martyniuk 2010). It contains a six-level proficiency scale, described in terms of "can do" statements. As the CEFR level descriptors pertain to adults and not to young learners, the scale was revised by taking into account the communicative activities and the cognitive development of children (Tzevelekou et al. 2008, Varlokosta et al. 2009): a) the scale was reduced to four levels, ranging from A1 to B2; b) levels C1 and C2 were left out on the grounds that they cannot be adapted to young learners' communicative needs and cognitive abilities; c) a preliminary level was established for younger children of the first grade who do not know how to read and write. The above modifications yielded to the following scale:

Preliminary Stage

A1

A2

B1

B2

The remaining descriptors were customized with respect to young learners. This has led to the adjustment of the relevant construct (Bachman 1990, 2002, Weir 1993, McNamara 2000). Two basic resources provided the background for these adjustments: the language curriculum of primary education and the syllabus of the UCLES tests for young learners (*Starters, Movers, Flyers*), with respect to topics, notions, and communicative functions.

On the basis of the aforementioned adapted scale, three tests of increasing difficulty were developed, one for every two grades of the six-grade primary school. The correspondence between the scale and school class is shown in Table 1.

Table 1. Tests, grades, and proficiency levels

<i>Test</i>	<i>Grades</i>	<i>Levels</i>
Test 1	1 – 2	Preliminary Stage – A2
Test 2	3 – 4	A1 – B1
Test 3	5 – 6	A2 – B2

In accordance with the functional-notional framework of CEFR, test development followed a task-based approach and addressed the three main principles of testing: validity, reliability, and practicality (Bachman 1990, Weir 1993, 2005, Bachman & Palmer 1996). Results were interpreted with reference to the levels of "can do" statements (criterion-referenced measurement) rather than to the performance of other test takers (norm-referenced measurement) (Bachman 1990, 2002). The tests comprised four sections: listening and reading comprehension, writing, and grammar. Writing contained two parts: an informal letter or diary entry and a narrative elicited by a series of pictures known as the "cat story" (Hickmann 2003). The grammar section was considered necessary for a highly inflectional language such as Greek. It should be noted, however, that the correlation between the CEFR levels, on one hand, and vocabulary and grammatical structure of individual languages, on the other hand, is not yet established on a sound basis. For Greek, this correlation has been developed only for level A1 (Centre for the Greek Language 2005). Thus, the grammar

section of the tests was mainly based on the study by Varlokosta & Triantafillidou (2003) and on the syllabus for teaching Greek as L2 (Kontos et al. 2002, Interdepartmental Program for Teaching Greek as a Foreign Language 1998). Criteria for evaluating the writing section in terms of cohesion and coherence were drawn from extensive studies on narrative development in L2 (Markantonatou & Tzevelekou 2008, Kantzou 2010, Stamouli 2010, Tzevelekou 2012).

Various task types were employed, such as multiple choice and short answer questions, gap filling, matching, responses to given information, and true/false questions. The linguistic input given to children of lower levels was supported by pictures. As the level increased, the input mainly consisted of texts, and became less dependent on pictures. Texts integrated in the tests were selected to reflect life at school and everyday interactions. At more advanced levels, academic skills were also included, such as reading comprehension of simple scientific texts. The largest part of texts was authentic or semi-authentic. Various text types, such as formal and informal conversations, instructions, news broadcasts, informal letters, narratives, and informational texts such as magazine articles, were included.

The test item writers were experienced teachers of Greek as L2 and/or highly specialized linguists in the field of Second Language Acquisition (SLA). They were all familiar with the CEFR levels. The items developed individually were checked and approved by the whole team of item writers. The scoring system was set up as follows: the maximum score for each test was 60, 15 for each section of the test (listening, reading comprehension, writing, and grammar). These marks were distributed across two or three tasks per section. Each student would be placed at a specific level, provided that s/he scored at least half out of the total score corresponding to this level. For instance, in the first test a student was placed at the Preliminary Stage if s/he scored between 11 and 30 marks, at the level A1 if s/he scored between 31 and 50 marks, and at the level A2 if s/he scored between 51 and 60 marks. For all tests, marks ranging from 0 to 10 placed the student outside the scale, since this score may have been due to random responses.

A preliminary version of the tests was administered on a pilot basis to a small representative sample of children. It was also administered to primary school children, native speakers of Greek, in the area of Western Thrace, in order to test out whether the cognitive load of the items was appropriate for children of that age. Piloting results were processed, yielding to the publication of the final version.

As mentioned before, the tests were developed in 2003 for the assessment of language proficiency of Muslim Minority children in Western Thrace, an indigene minority who receives instruction in two languages: Turkish and Greek. The cultural characteristics of this population determined certain aspects of the assessment tools. With a new target group at hand, the tests had to be revised: certain ingredients of the tasks were removed, while others were updated. Most importantly, data analysis from the test administration to the Muslim minority children in 2003 revealed that certain items were less appropriate than others for discriminating levels, while others were found to be inoperative with respect to validity or reliability, e.g. uncommon task type, excessive cognitive load, etc. Assuming that these items would have a similar impact on all young L2 learners of Greek, they were revised or deleted and replaced by others.

An elaborated administration and scoring manual was developed for the needs of the current research project. This manual also contained guidelines for scoring the writing tasks with detailed descriptions of the written production for all proficiency levels. Moreover, a new questionnaire was developed in order to collect data on individual and social factors (e.g. gender, place of residence, length of residence, native language, etc) that could influence learners' proficiency in Greek.

2.2. Procedure: Test administration and marking

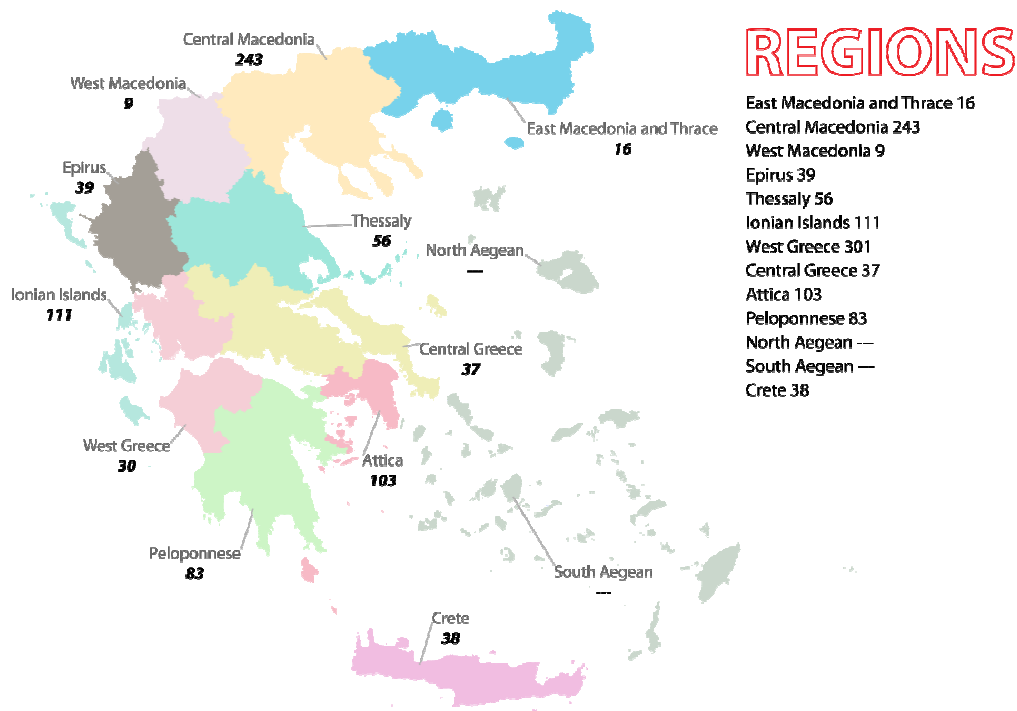
The three tests were administered from October 2011 to February 2012 during classroom hours. Test 1 was administered to students of Grades 1 and 2, Test 2 to Grades 3 and 4, while Test 3 was taken by students of Grades 5 and 6 (primary school) and 7 to 9 (secondary school). The tests were administered and marked by researchers experienced in educational field work and in teaching of Greek as L2. Moreover, they all attended training sessions on the CEFR levels and on the specific administration and scoring procedures (see 2.1). Additionally, special emphasis was placed on the written production marking. In particular, the test raters were initially familiarized with L2 learners' written production, then they were asked to define the CEFR level of given written samples, and at the final stage they marked the written samples in teams consisting of two raters. In cases of score discrepancy by 3 or more grades between two raters, the written production was marked by a third rater.

2.3. Participants

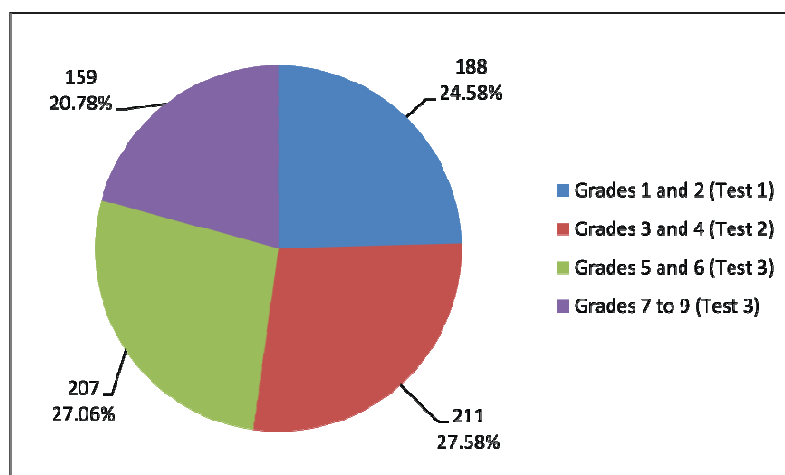
The tests were administered to 1224 learners of Greek as L2 who attended RCs, tutorial, and mainstream classes in primary and secondary schools in various regions of Greece.⁴ RC students investigated in this paper represent a sub-set of the initial number of participants.

The sample of RC students comprises 765 learners from 66 schools: 57 primary schools and 9 secondary schools (Grades 7-9), located in various regions of Greece, as shown on Map 1. Figure 1 demonstrates the number of children who undertook each test. The data from Test 3 are presented separately for primary (Grades 5 and 6) and secondary (Grades 7 to 9) education.

Map 1. Participants' geographical distribution



⁴ Test administration and data collection was coordinated by D. Papadopoulou. See Papadopoulou et al. (2012) for a preliminary data analysis of the entire sample.

Figure 1. Children's distribution per test

The majority of the children placed in RCs were boys, as displayed in Figure 2. This gender-driven difference needs to be further investigated along two parameters: a) whether male L2 learners outnumber female students in the entire population; b) whether boys tend to be directed to RCs more often than girls. It is worth mentioning at this point some analogous findings reported in several studies. Rouseas & Vretakou (2008) report that boys tend to withdraw from secondary education significantly more often than girls. In addition, Gotovos & Markou (2004) observed high percentage of dropout from secondary education in the male population of immigrants in Greek schools. Furthermore, Tourtouras et al. (2008) found correlations between gender and school performance, with girls scoring higher than boys in monolingual as well as in bilingual populations.

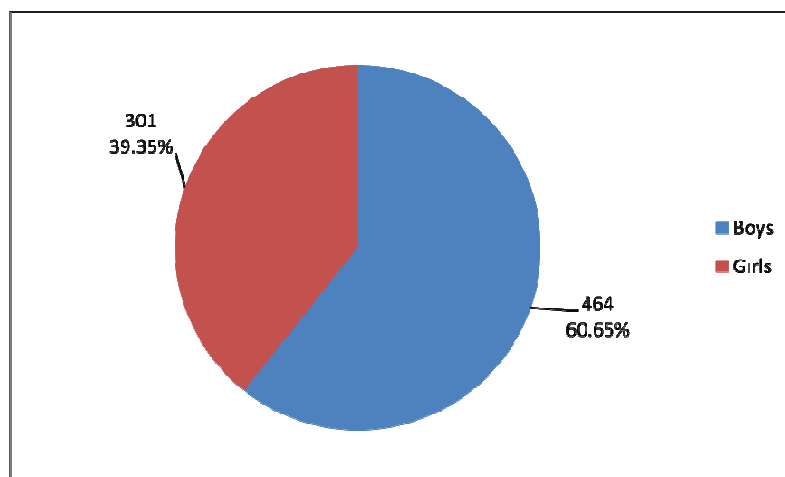
Figure 2. Participants' distribution according to gender

Table 2 shows statistical data on the children's length of residence in Greece.⁵ The array of values of this variable was quite broad, ranging from a few months to 16 years. The mean length was quite extended for all groups. In primary school, the length of residence was often equal to the age of students or close to it. Data indicate that the majority of students have either been born in Greece, being in fact, second generation immigrants, or they have been

⁵ Note that the total number of students in this table is lower than the total number of students in the sample. This is because this piece of information was not available for all students.

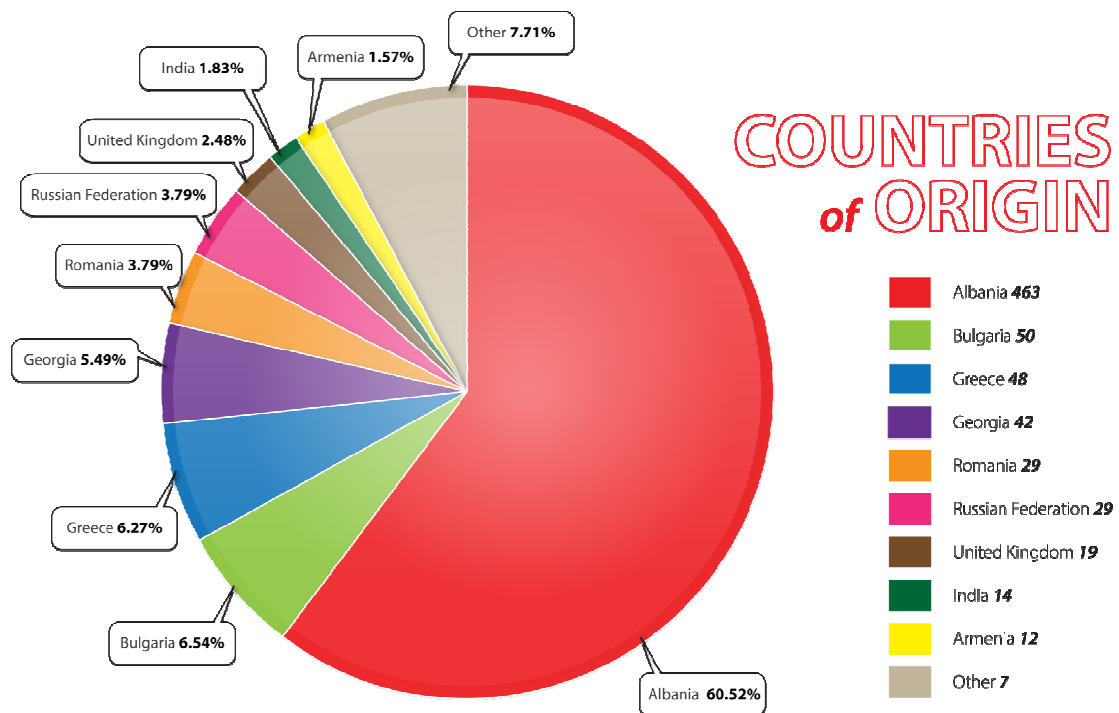
settled in Greece at a very early age. In secondary education, the situation was slightly different with an average length of residence of 5.8 years. As shown by the SD indication, the data demonstrate a greater disparity of L2 learners in secondary schools compared to primary schools with respect to length of residence.

Table 2. Participants' length of residence in Greece (years)

	Grades 1 and 2 length of residence (n=174)	Grades 3 and 4 length of residence (n=185)	Grades 5 and 6 length of residence (n=175)	Grades 7 to 9 length of residence (n=114)
mean	5.19	6.58	7.9	5.8
min	0.30	0.60	0.30	0.08
max	9.00	11.00	13.00	16.00
sd	2.35	2.74	3.58	4.93
median	6.00	8.00	10.00	4.00

Figure 3 shows the participants' countries of origin. More than half of the L2 learners (60.5%) came from Albania, while Bulgaria (6,5%), Georgia (5,5%), Romania (3,8%), the Russian Federation (3,8%), the United Kingdom (2,5%), India (1,8%), and Armenia (1,6%) were among the most frequent countries of origin. For 48 children (6.3%), Greece was noted down in the questionnaire as their country of origin. This unexpected finding can be explained by looking at more detailed information gathered for these particular children. All of them were either bilingual, with one parent being Greek, or they were repatriated from the United States, Germany, and the countries of the former Soviet Union.

Figure 3. Participants' most frequent countries of origin



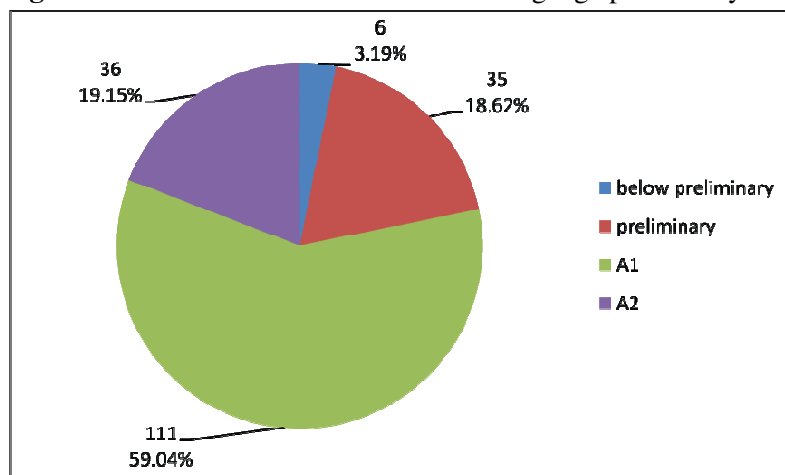
3. Results

This section presents the results of the analysis with respect to a) the overall proficiency level of L2 learners in RCs, b) their performance in different sections of the tests: listening, reading, writing, and grammar.⁶

3.1. Language proficiency level analysis

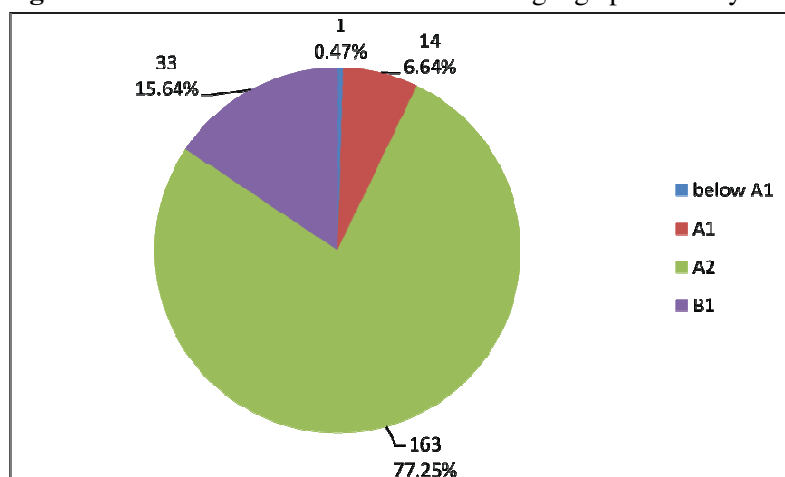
More than half of the children in Grades 1 and 2 (59%) were placed at level A1 (Figure 4). A relatively high percentage (21.8%) was at the preliminary and below the preliminary level. About one fifth of the learners (19.1%) reached level A2.

Figure 4. Grades 1 and 2: Distribution of language proficiency levels



For Grades 3 and 4 (Figure 5), the majority of children (77.25%) was placed at level A2, while only 7% of them were placed at A1 or below. In addition, 15.6% met the criteria of B1 level.

Figure 5. Grades 3 and 4: Distribution of language proficiency levels



Most of the children in Grades 5 and 6 of primary school (Figure 6) proved to be independent language users, since 76.8% of them were placed at level B1, while 8.2% of them were placed at level B2. Nevertheless, 15% of them were placed at A2 level or below.

⁶ Cronbach's alpha analyses showed that the reliability was above 90% for all tests.

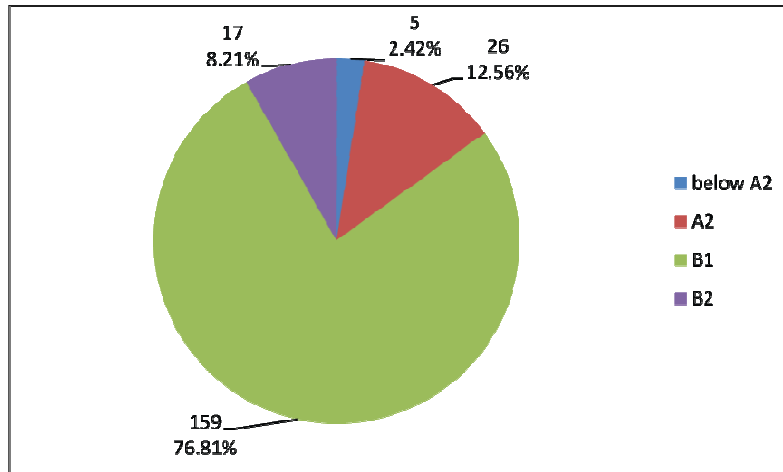
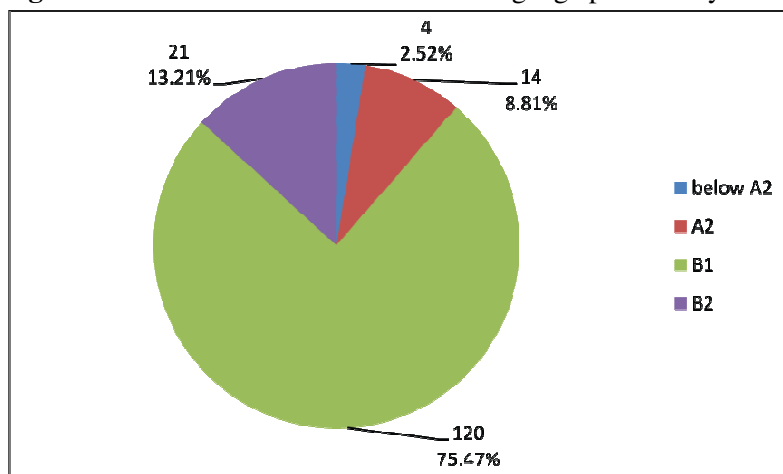
Figure 6. Grades 5 and 6: Distribution of language proficiency levels

Figure 7 presents the data from Test 3 administered in secondary schools. The picture is quite similar to that obtained from Test 3 in primary education: the majority of the students were independent language users, as their performance on the test placed them at level B1, while 13.2% of them were placed at level B2. 10.3% of them scored in the range of A2 level and below.

Figure 7. Grades 7 to 9: Distribution of language proficiency levels

A screening of the data across groups revealed a certain development in proficiency level during primary school: the dominant level was A1 in Grades 1 and 2, level A2 in Grades 3 and 4, and level B1 in Grades 5 and 6. This developmental parallelism between age and proficiency is somehow startling since RCs are mainly addressed to newcomers, irrespective of their age and grade. However, as previously shown, the mean length of residence steadily increased with grade through primary school (see Table 2). Therefore, the majority of children in RCs, when investigated from a cross-sectional point of view, follow the typical development of SLA.

In order to investigate whether length of residence can account for this developmental picture, the correlation coefficient between level and length of residence for primary school students was computed. Indeed, a moderate but statistically significant correlation was observed (*Spearman's rho*=0.358, *p*=.000). Therefore, length of residence is one factor that affects the observed development in language proficiency in primary school RCs.

3.2. Language skills analysis

In order to detect the specific needs of L2 learners attending RCs, the students' performance on the different skills of the language proficiency tests was analyzed. The means of performance (Table 3) showed that listening was the easiest and writing particularly difficult for all groups of learners. Reading and grammar were found to be in-between, with reading receiving higher scores than grammar. To statistically compare the performance of subjects in listening, reading, grammar, and writing, the Friedman test was employed.⁷ The results showed that the main effect was significant for all groups of learners (Grades 1 and 2: $\chi^2=276.077$, $p=.000$, $df=3$; Grades 3 and 4: $\chi^2=193.749$, $p=.000$, $df=3$; Grades 5 and 6: $\chi^2=142.700$, $p=.000$, $df=3$; Grades 7 to 9: $\chi^2=132.581$, $p=.000$, $df=3$). An additional statistical analysis was performed to test for comparisons among the four test parts. The results of Wilcoxon test indicated that indeed the performance of students was statistically different in all pairs of test parts, the only exception being the pair grammar-writing in Test 3 (Table 4).

Table 3. Means of performance at the four test parts for all groups of L2 learners

	<i>Listening</i>		<i>Reading</i>		<i>Grammar</i>		<i>Writing</i>	
	Mean	sd	Mean	sd	Mean	sd	Mean	sd
Grades 1 and 2 (Test 1)	12.44	3.73	10.73	4.09	9.71	4.48	6.48	4.02
Grades 3 and 4 (Test 2)	11.68	2.69	10.84	2.99	10.32	3.13	7.70	3.48
Grades 5 and 6 (Test 3)	10.99	2.56	9.03	3.18	8.43	3.25	7.94	3.88
Grades 7 to 9 (Test 3)	11.75	2.19	9.96	3.09	8.61	3.36	8.59	3.89

Table 3. Results of the Wilcoxon test for all pairs of language skills per test

		<i>Grades 1 and 2 (Test 1)</i>	<i>Grades 3 and 4 (Test 2)</i>	<i>Grades 5 and 6 (Test 3 p.e.)</i>	<i>Grades 7 to 9 (Test 3 s.e.)</i>
reading - listening	Z	-6.490	-4.172	-8.417	-7.059
	Asymp. Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.000	.000	.000
grammar - listening	Z	-7.862	-6.017	-10.037	-9.638
	Asymp. Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.000	.000	.000
writing - listening	Z	-10.257	-10.691	-9.582	-8.752
	Asymp. Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.000	.000	.000
grammar - reading	Z	-4.348	-3.425	-3.383	-5.991
	Asymp. Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.001	.001	.000
writing - reading	Z	-10.534	-10.194	-4.273	-4.519
	Asymp. Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.000	.000	.000
writing - grammar	Z	-9.322	-9.175	-1.790	-.383
	Asymp. Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.000	.073	.702

The difference between listening and writing was exceptionally notable in Grades 1 and 2, a finding that is not unexpected insofar as students in Grade 1 are at a very early stage of

⁷ Non-parametric tests were used on the grounds that the scores in different parts of the tests (listening, reading, grammar, and writing) were not normally distributed (Kolmogorov-Smirnov test: $p=.000$ for all skills in all the tests, with the exception of writing in Test 1 and Test 3 p.e.).

literacy. The findings also confirm that receptive skills (listening and reading) are more developed than productive skills (writing) and grammar in this population. This again can be accounted for by the L2 learners' long length of residence in Greece. These learners seem to have developed oral communicative skills, hence their high performance in listening comprehension. They have not, however, been adequately supported to develop advanced literacy skills, hence their low performance in writing. This point needs to be further investigated by taking into account the fact that mother tongue instruction is not provided in Greek schools. As pointed out by many researchers, the development of academic skills in SLA is partially a function of the type of competence developed in L1 (Cummins 1979).

4. Concluding remarks

Students attending RCs differ in the degree of their exposure to Greek. Demographic data reveal that these classes are not homogeneous with respect to the knowledge of Greek. They comprise, in fact, two groups of children: a) newcomers that have been in Greece for less than 2 years and are still developing their conversational proficiency (Cummins 1984, 2000); b) a much larger group of children who are either first generation immigrants with a lengthy stay in Greece, often more than six years, or second generation immigrants. Students of the second group had entered Greek state schools at an early stage or even at the beginning of their formal education.

In the analysis of the overall performance of children in RCs, a moderate slope of development was detected during primary education with most children reaching level B1 at the 6th grade, while a small percentage of children moved to the upper intermediate level, B2. The findings for secondary education were quite similar to those of primary school: the majority of the students were independent language users. It should be noted, however, that the students of secondary education have lower mean length of residence than the children of Grades 5 and 6 in primary education.

The differential analysis of children's performance on language skills indicates an uneven development across various competences: more difficulties are manifested with the written form of the language and particularly with skills that require academic abilities. These findings are similar to those reached by Varlokosta et al. (2001), Varlokosta & Triantafyllidou (2003), and Vlachos & Papademetriou (2004).

Both the slope of L2 development and low performance in tasks requiring academic skills that L2 students exhibit, despite their lengthy attendance to the Greek educational system and, thus, exposure to Greek language, point to the fact that the development of proficiency in a second language is a lengthy process, extending far beyond the time interval of 1 to 3 years that RCs usually operate. This finding is in line with previous research studies, which show that oral language skills and conversational fluency develop within 3 to 5 years, while academic proficiency, which is crucial for school achievement, can take 4 to 7 years to develop (Cummins 2000, Hakuta et al. 2000, Genesee et al. 2005).

Regarding assessment methods, apart from placing children to language proficiency levels and distinguishing those who need to develop basic communicative skills in Greek L2 from those who are able to cope with contextualized everyday communication, additional fine-grained assessment tools need to be developed. These should address skills required to carry out tasks in the academic environment. This course of action may serve as a basis for the extension of educational provisions for Greek L2 children and for further planning of efficient intervention methods according to the needs and abilities of different groups of students.

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