M.Ed. In TESL Program
Language Group Specific Informational Reports

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Greek Language History

- **Greek** is a unique Indo-European language, native to the southern Balkan peninsula; it has the longest documented history of Indo-European written records, spanning 34 centuries.

- In its ancient form, it is the language of classical Ancient Greek literature and the New Testament of the Christian Bible. Many modern scientific and technical words in English and other Western languages are derived from Greek, and it is estimated that 12 percent of English vocabulary is of Greek origin.

- **Proto-greek**: Mycenaean (C. 1600–1000 BC)

- **Ancient Greek** (C. 1000–330 BC)
  - **Dialects**: Aeolic, Arcadocypriot, Attic-ionic, Doric, Locrian, Pamphylian; Homeric Greek, possibly Macedonian.

- **Koine Greek** (C. 330 BC–330)

- **Medieval Greek** (330–1453)

- **Modern Greek** (From 1453)
  - **Dialects**: Cappadocian, Cretan, Cypriot, Demotic, Griko, Katharevousa, Pontic, Tsakonian, Yevanic.
In its modern form, it is the official language of Greece and Cyprus.

Greek is a language distinguished by an extraordinarily rich vocabulary.

It is written in the Greek alphabet, which has 24 letters:

A B Γ Δ Ε Ζ Η Θ Ι Κ Λ Μ Ν Ξ Ο Π Ρ Σ Τ Υ Φ Χ Ψ Ω
α β γ δ ε ζ η θ ι κ λ μ ν ξ ο π ρ σ τ υ ϕ χ ψ ω

It is spoken by a total of approximately 20 million people (first language for ca. 15 million), including minority and emigrant communities in numerous parts of the world including Albania, Armenia, Australia, Austria, Bahamas, Bulgaria, Canada, Congo, Djibouti, Egypt, France, Georgia, Germany, Hungary, Italy, Jordan, Kazakhstan and the United States.

In 2000, a total of 163,645 Greek-born immigrants took up residency in the U.S., predominantly in NY (35,980), NJ (18,360), IL (17,708), CA (13,820), FL (9,636), and PA (8,693.)
Phonology

- Greeks have difficulty **perceiving & pronouncing** correctly many **English sounds**. Greek has a few sounds that English doesn't possess, and vice versa. Greeks have trouble with the "ch" and "djuh" sounds, and, especially, with the short 'i' (as in 'thin').

To appreciate the phonological contrasts between Greek and English, please click on the this link ([http://www.xanthi.ilsp.gr/filog/ch2/dial/dial2.asp](http://www.xanthi.ilsp.gr/filog/ch2/dial/dial2.asp)) and listen attentively to the Greek pronunciation of the native speakers.

- **TRY TO NOTICE THE FOLLOWING CHARACTERISTIC DIFFERENCES:**

  - Stress & intonation patterns are very different.
  - Greek intonation (high fall) v. English intonation (low rise)—may sound abrupt and impolite.
  - Greeks tend to speak at higher volume & on more uniform pitch level than English.
  - Greek has less energetic articulation, w/lax vowels, less lip-rounding & less spreading.
  - Lack of contrast between weak and strong forms in natural speech as compared w/ English.
  - Greek tends to have 1 stressed syllable in each word, unlike English.
  - Greek has lack of elisions/assimilations-> sound slow, drawling, formal.
  - Dipthongs tend to be articulated as 2 separate vowels pronounced in 2 syllables.
  - Greek has syllable-timed rhythm—ea. syllable has same duration.
Idiosyncrasies of the Greek Alphabet (as related to English):

• Βητα, Bβ is pronounced V
• If you want to make a B sound you need to use μπ (m and p together)
• Where υψιλον Υυ follows α or ε it is pronounced ff (think of it as a soft v instead of as an English u.) υψιλον Υυ is said ee unless it is after a vowel when it becomes f

Actually, it is a bit more complicated than that. I suggest you link to this excellent interactive page on letter combinations at Filoglossia for help w/ this [http://tinyurl.com/385m5k](http://tinyurl.com/385m5k)

• Γαμμα Γγ is not a straight g – it’s gh – you need to listen to a Greek person say it.
• Δέλτα Δδ is more of a hard th than a d. A hard D is expressed with ντ
• Think of Ζήτα Ζζ as dz, not just z
• There are two forms of Σίγμα Σ when it is in the lower case:
  – σ is used anywhere inside the word
  – ζ is used at the end of a word. It is the same letter though.
• There are two O’s though – Ομικρον (Οο) and Ωμεγα (Ωω) (as in Rock and Rowl)
• Don’t be deluded by the fact that in English we say Sychology for Psychology.
• Psi Ψψ needs you to say the P in Psee
• Likewise Ksee Ξξ – say the K when it is at the beginning of a word
• For some obscure reason there are 5 ways of spelling the sound of English E:
  – ει (ΕΙ) (έψιλον + ιότα)
  – η (Η) (ήτα)
  – ι (Ι) (ιότα)
  – υ (Υ) (ύψιλον )
  – and slightly different for e as in “egg” -- ε (Ε) (έψιλον)
• Χι Χχ (Χ)Chi is Hchee as in Scottish “loch” – a bit of a monster I know - try not to spit....
More phonetic challenges for Greeks speaking English

- Greeks may say:

  - “v” for “b” (alphabet)
  - “ef” or “ev” for “eu” (eureka)
  - “af” or “av” for “au” (auto)
  - “hch” for “x” (xylophone)
  - “psee” for “psy” (psychology)
  - “zm” for “sm” (small)
  - “s” for “sh” (shirt)
  - “ee” for “i” (think, sit)
  - “th” for “d” (dinner)
  - “d” for “nt” (enter)
  - “rree” for “ph”
  - “dz” for “g” (George, geography)
  - “gh” for “g” (geography)
  - “e” for “I” (bird)

- Because Greeks roll their “r”, it usually sounds very strong in words (hair, card, reporter, etc.)

- Because the English vowel system makes more distinctions, long vowels are difficult for Greeks to pronounce: so it is hard to discern “nought/not/note”, “cord/cod/code”, “walk/woke”, “hop/hope”, “want/won’t”, “bat/but”, “lack/luck.”
Orthography and Punctuation

• Most Greek alphabetic symbols are different from English letters, so practice in English handwriting is needed.

• Greek spelling is phonetic; there is a 1:1 correspondence→sound:graphic symbol. Therefore, they read very literally (all letters.)

• Greeks may use one letter consistently for each sound, as in Greek, leading to mistakes like: *sistem, *Inglish, *kut, *taim, *trein

• Greek Punctuation→ semicolon = · question mark = ; quotation marks = << >>

• Questions→ The auxiliary do has no equivalent in Greek and inversion is not used to make questions; spoken yes/no questions differ from affirmatives by intonation only:
  – Ex.--You come back from school early every day? What she is doing tonight? How many cookies you want?

• Negatives→ Omitting the auxiliary and placing the word «δεν» (=not) before the main verb.
  – Ex.--They not come to the show tonight. What he not tell you yet? He not agree with the rest of the class.
• Parts of speech are similar in Greek & English, however....

• Like most Indo-European languages, **Greek is highly inflected**—articles, adjectives, nouns and pronouns have 4 cases, 3 genders, and 2 numbers.
  – Four **cases**: nominative, genitive, accusative and vocative
  – Three **genders**: masculine, feminine and neuter (but no systematic relationship between gender and meaning.)
  – Two **numbers**: singular and plural
  – **Articles, adjectives, & pronouns** agree in case, gender, & number w/ their respective nouns.

• The lack of an inflectional system in English makes Greeks feel that English has no grammar.

• **Word order** is freer in Greek and not as rigid as in English, where the **grammatical function of a word** is mostly **indicated by its position in the sentence.** This is **confusing** to Greek learners of English.
A Bit About Greek Verbs (there’s so much more)

- Greek verbs have **synthetic** inflectional forms for:
  - **mood** -- indicative and imperative (other modal functions are expressed by periphrastic constructions)
  - **number** — singular, plural
  - **voice** — active and medio-passive
  - **tense** — past and non-past (future is expressed by a periphrastic construction)
  - **person** — first, second, third, second person formal form
  - **aspect** — perfective and imperfective

- The **choice and structure of English verb forms** is **problematic** for Greeks.

- The present perfect is not used in same way; Greek has no present progressive or present perfect progressive (but they can be expressed differently.)
  - Look! Those two boys fight! She playing tennis.
  - I am eating breakfast after I am getting dressed. They running fast.
  - We are walk to school everyday. She has married long ago.
Differences in Phonology, Orthography, Grammar & Vocabulary make English difficult for Greeks to learn. Here's a smattering of common mistakes Greek-speaking ESL students make:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>MISTAKES</th>
<th>CORRECTIONS</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I was so tired after being out of sleep all night.</td>
<td>I was so tired after not sleeping all night that I missed the bus and then I couldn’t concentrate myself on my lessons at school.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I lost the bus and then I couldn’t concentrate myself in my lessons in school.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>We spent a good time at the beach.</td>
<td>We had a good time at the beach.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Technology has been changed world’s history.</td>
<td>Technology has been changed world’s history.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>With my friends I can discuss about everything.</td>
<td>With my friends I can discuss about everything.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Every country has her history. In Greece is it extremely fascinating.</td>
<td>Every country has its history. In Greece it is extremely interesting / absolutely fascinating.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>When I was young I did like so much football.</td>
<td>When I was young I did like football so much.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Almost no one of us had thought in what was most important: the ticket!</td>
<td>Almost none of us had thought of what was the most important thing; the ticket!</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Greek Communication Styles

- Greeks often talk with their eyebrows, facial expressions, heads, hands, and even their whole upper bodies.
- Greeks are often mistaken for arguing with each other, when they are simply conversing.
- Greeks are very physically expressive and they are a touchy/feely culture, not afraid to hug, kiss and stand in close proximity with others.
- Greek intonation (high fall) v. English intonation (low rise)—may sound abrupt and impolite.
- Greeks tend to speak at higher volume & on more uniform pitch level than English.
- In language as in so many other things, Greeks can be argumentative and apparently arrogant, believing that they already know everything, and so don't need any instruction. But, in fact, they are just passionate about life! Take the time to teach them English...they thirst for it!
References

Books


Internet Sites


References


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