

## **Linguistics in Social Networks**

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### **Abstract**

*The purpose of this study was to investigate language use in the multimedia social network website Youtube.com. In particular, we wanted to investigate the extent of the use of Greeklish (Greek Language written in Latin characters instead of the Greek alphabet) in our society today. Greeklish began when SMS services became available on mobile phones and the initial reasoning was that most of the phones came already setup in English, the Greek language option was not always available, and/or the switch between the languages took too many steps. Using computers however, the languages can be switched with a 2-button keyboard shortcut. The data collection included the analysis of 1000 user comments on Greek videos in Youtube. The results show that 84% of the messages were written in Greeklish. Our conclusions indicate that in addition to the technology, the informal nature of Greeklish itself also contributes to its widespread use.*

**Keywords:** Social Networks, Communication, Linguistics, Youtube, Multimedia

### **1. Introduction**

This study explores Language use in the Multimedia Social Network website Youtube.com. Since the globalization and popularization of the Internet, people have increasingly been using computers to communicate with each other. These communication activities, known as Computer-Mediated Communication (CMC), happen mainly through written communication (e.g. forums, emails, online chats and instant messaging) and through audio and video (e.g. video-conferencing). Youtube is one of the most popular multimedia social networking sites where users can view videos and communicate with each through written messages and comments. CMC can be defined as “the process by which people create, exchange, and perceive information using networked telecommunications systems (or non-networked computers) that facilitate encoding, transmitting, and decoding messages. (December, 2004, pp.1). A characteristic of CMC is that the time lapse between messages allows for reflection (Scotcit, 2003). CMC also stimulates linguistic interactions in a way which produces similar benefits to the ones generated by face-to-face collaborations. (Blake, 2005). Through the use of CMC, online communities emerge (Laghos and Laghos, 2008). Preece (2002) states that an online community consists of people, a shared purpose, policies and computer systems. However, very little attention has been given to culture and communication in relation to CMC (Koutsogiannis and Mitsikopoulou, 2003)

### **2. Greek and Greeklish**

For a better understanding of the subject matter, we provide some characteristics of the Greek language. *Greek* is the language spoken in Greece and Cyprus as a mother language and uses the Greek Alphabet. As can be seen in Figure 1, some letters look similar to the letters in the Latin Alphabet. However, even though they look the same, some of these letters have different sounds in Greek. For example, Greek A is pronounced like English A, whereas Greek B is pronounced like English V. In addition, as can be seen in Figure 2, the Greek language makes use of accents, some letters produce the same sounds as others, and the character of a letter may depend on where the letter located is in a particular word.

*Greeklish* (also referred to as Greenglish) comes from the words *Greek* and *English*, and is basically **Greek** written with **English** letters (Latin Alphabet). Words written in Greeklish may sometimes also include numbers to resemble Greek letters, such as the number “8” for the letter “θ”. Greeklish began mostly when SMS services became available on mobile phones. The initial reasoning was that most of the phones came already setup in English, the Greek language option was not always available, and/or the switch between the languages took too many steps. Figure 3 depicts how the expression “I want” translates into Greek, and examples of the variety of ways it can be written in Greeklish.

In 2001, as a result of the increased use of Greeklish on the Internet, the Academy of Athens issued a statement which was released to the press. It concerned the rise of Greeklish and the possible substitution of the Greek by the Latin alphabet. This gave rise to a heated debate where TV time was devoted to discussions and extensive coverage of the topic appeared in the press (Koutsogiannis and Mitsikopoulou, 2003). Following this, a study by Koutsogiannis and Mitsikopoulou (2003) explored social attitudes towards Greeklish as they were represented in the Greek press and indentified three main trends: “The first, a retrospective trend, views Greeklish as a serious threat to the Greek language; the second, prospective trend, approaches Greeklish as a transitory phenomenon which will soon become negligible due to technological advances; the third, resistive trend, points to the negative effects of globalization and relates Greeklish to other communication and sociocultural practices” (Koutsogiannis and Mitsikopoulou, 2003, p.1).

### **3. Methods and Results**

The aim of this investigation was to find out the extent of the use of Greeklish in our society today. Several discussion boards on Greek websites require their users to type in Greek. Therefore Youtube was chosen as is this was not a requirement, and also its massive pool of data allowed us to focus our analysis to our target population. The data collection included the analysis of 1000 user comments on Greek videos in Youtube. More precisely, the videos were selected randomly, but their audio had to be in Greek, and the people posting the comments had to be Greek-speakers living in Greece or Cyprus. This was done in order to limit the comments to people whose first language is Greek and are more likely to communicate in Greek, as our aim was to see what percentage of these people type in Greeklish instead of Greek when they communicate online in social networks. It should also be noted that English is widely spoken in Cyprus and Greece as a foreign language.

The messages were sorted in the following categories: (i) Greeklish, (ii) Greek, (iii) English, (iv) other languages.

The results show that the vast majority of the messages (84%) were written in Greeklish (Figure 4). More specifically, there were:

- 838 messages written in Greeklish
- 93 messages written in Greek
- 69 messages written in English
- 0 messages written in other languages

The messages were also broken down into further categories based on which typing language was selected on the users’ keyboards at the time of posting their message in Youtube. In this case there were two options: (i) keyboard language set to English (which included the English and Greeklish messages), and (ii) keyboard language set to Greek (which only included messages typed in Greek).

The results (Figure 5) show that over 9/10 of the messages were written with English being the language selected on the keyboard. More specifically:

- 91% of the messages were written with the English keyboard language selected
- 9% of the messages were written with Greek keyboard language selected

Furthermore, the communication language was examined. By communication language we mean which language a reader/poster should know to understand a posted message. For instance, someone must know Greek in order to be able to understand a message written in Greeklish. This is because Greeklish is actually Greek, just written with Latin characters. Non-Greek speakers may be able to read most Greeklish, however what they read will make no sense. This automatically included Greeklish messages in the Greek category. The other category was English.

Figure 6 shows the results of the communication language. 931 of the messages (93%) were communicated in Greek whereas only 69 messages were communicated in English.

Analyzing only the messages communicated in Greek, it was established that

- 90% were written in Greeklish (English language selected for typing)
- 10% were written in Greek (Greek language selected for typing)

#### **4. Discussion**

One might raise the question whether Greeklish is endangering the Greek language. First impressions might indicate no, since 93% of the messages were communicated in Greek (using Greek and Greeklish), which indicates that the people prefer to communicate in Greek. On the other hand however, the vast majority of the messages (84%) were written in Greeklish, which shows that the people prefer to type having the English language selected for the keyboard.

Unlike the mobile phones' reasons of language unavailability or difficulty to change languages, the switch between English and Greek on computers is done with a simple 2-button keyboard shortcut. Therefore, likely reasons for this study's results and the high use of Greeklish include:

- Speed and flexibility (many ways to write the same words)
- Informal nature (spelling, syntax and grammar are not important as long as the message can be understood)
- Can include English words (e.g. references to English films) without having to switch keyboard languages back and forth

The above can be considered advantages of Greeklish, therefore, it seems that it is not just the social networks or technology that encourage the use of Greeklish, it's also Greeklish itself.

#### **5. Conclusions**

In this study we analyzed users' comments in Youtube in relation to the language they used to write their messages. The results showed that Greeklish was widely used as 84% of the messages were written in Greeklish. As Youtube is just one of the many examples of social networking applications that people can use to communicate with each other, more research in the area of Greeklish is necessary. For instance, similar studies can be carried out to investigate the use of Greeklish in other social network sites and different settings, to see whether the websites or environment also play a role in how much Greeklish will be used.

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Figures

Α	Β	Γ	Δ	Ε	Ζ	Η	Θ	...
α	β	γ	δ	ε	ζ	η	θ	...

Figure 1 – Beginning of the Greek Alphabet

σοκολάτες  
ρύζι

Figure 2 – Accents in Greek

English - I want  
Greek - θέλω  
Greeklish - thelo, thelw, 8elo, 8elw, ...

Figure 3 – Example of Greeklish

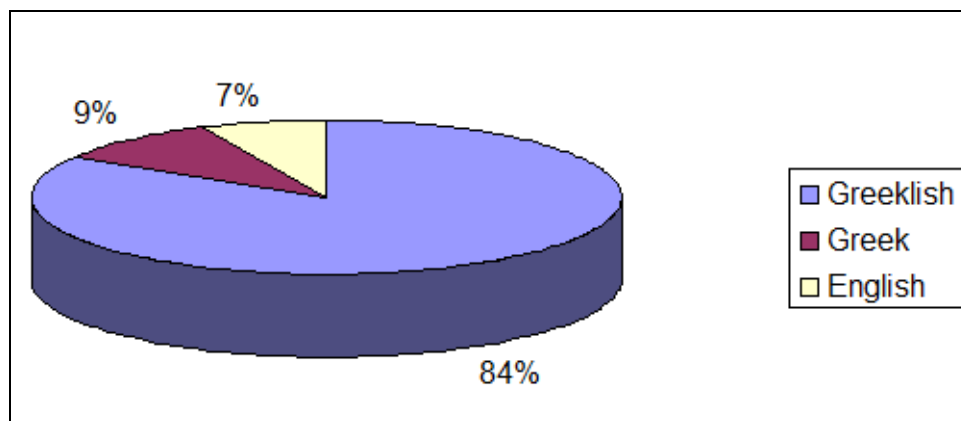


Figure 4 - Results

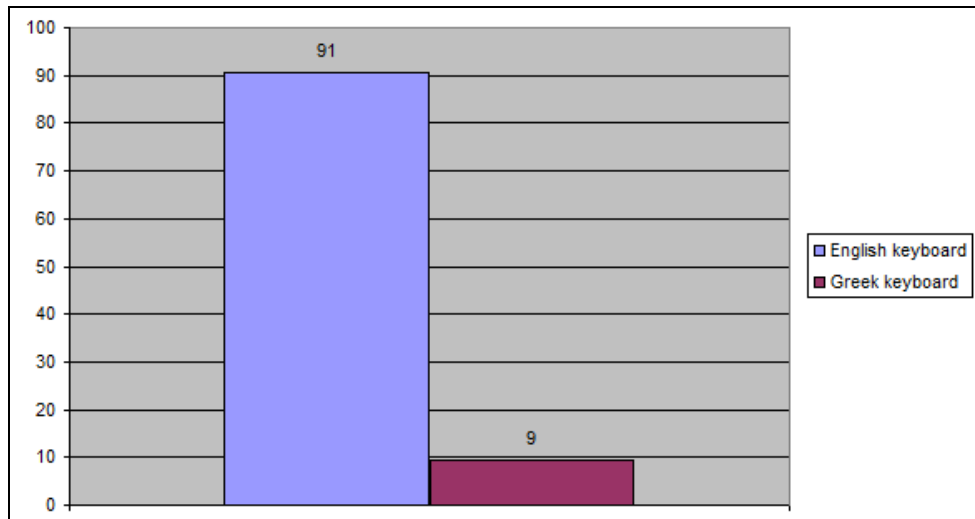


Figure 5 – Keyboard language used for posted messages

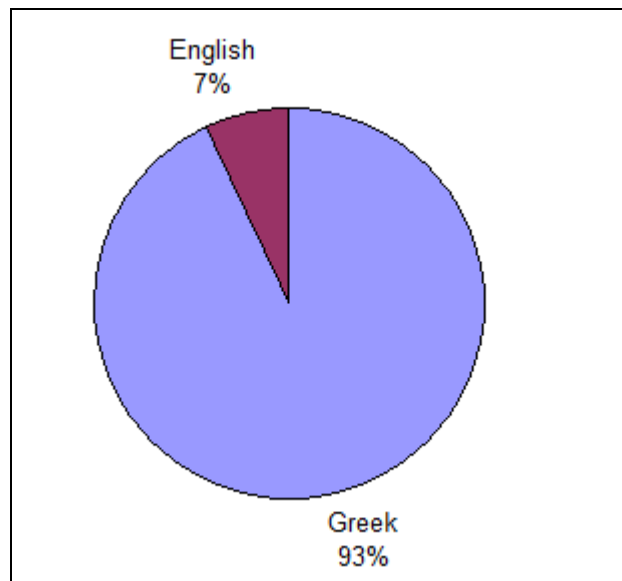


Figure 6 – Communication Language