Profiling Greek Heritage Speakers of Chicago

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Outline

- Aim
- Definitions: Heritage Language (HL), Heritage Speaker (HS), Heritage Language Learner (HLL)
- HL, HS and HLL characteristics
- Methods
- Results
- Discussion
- Conclusions

Aim

- This presentation reports results from the MIS 5006199 project on Heritage Greek funded by European and national funds.

- The project aimed at initial profiling of Greek heritage language speakers who live in the USA (Chicago) and Russia (Moscow and Saint Petersburg), in order to gain a clearer understanding of their characteristics.

- Deliverables: Data collecting methodology, A corpus of heritage speakers(70 interviews) http://synmorphose.gr/index.php/el/projects-gr/ghlv-gr/corpus-gr

- 92 questionaires

- In this presentation we focus on data collected from 54 questionnaires filled in by Greek HS living in Chicago

- The study of heritage languages is a relatively new field of linguistics. Researchers involved in the field raise two central issues: (a) a definition of characteristics of HLSs in relation to those learning their first (L1), second (SL), or foreign language (FL) and (b) the development of language learning curricula tailored to suit the needs of the particular learners (HLL) (Gavriilidou & Mitits 2019).

- Recent interest in the HL research is evident particularly in the USA. The studies mainly focus on heritage languages such as Spanish, Russian, Chinese, Polish, Lithuanian (Golebiowski 2004; Li 2006; Macevičiūtė 2000; Mah 2005; Norvilas 1990; Potowsky 2002, 2003; Tomaszczyk 1980; Tamošiūnaitė 2008).
- **WHY?**
- 2000-2001: 844,671 students in California spoke another language and 1,511,299 students were designated "Limited-English-Proficient"
- Other studies investigate heritage language speaker characteristics and needs (Campbell & Rosenthal 2000; Polinsky & Kagan 2007) as well as characteristics of particular linguistic varieties.

Definitions

- **Heritage languages**: languages of diasporic communities, especially ones with a history of migration. They are spoken by simultaneous or sequential early bilinguals.

- **Heritage Speakers**: (first introduced in Canada since '70s) typically the children of immigrants. Students who are raised in a home where a non-English language is spoken, who speak or merely understand the heritage language, and who are to some degree bilingual in English and the heritage language.

- They grow up acquiring the language of their parents' country of origin at home until they start attending school at which time, they begin to acquire the language of their host country. Gradually, they become dominant and more fluent in the majority language, limiting the use of the heritage language to the interaction with family and friends from the same ethnolinguistic background (Karatsareas 2018).

- **Heritage Language Learners**: speakers of ethnolinguistically minority languages who were exposed to the language in the family since childhood and as adults wish to learn, relearn, or improve their current level of linguistic proficiency in their family language (Montrul 2016).

- HS # monolingual native language speakers
- HS # second language learners.
- Particular type of speaker
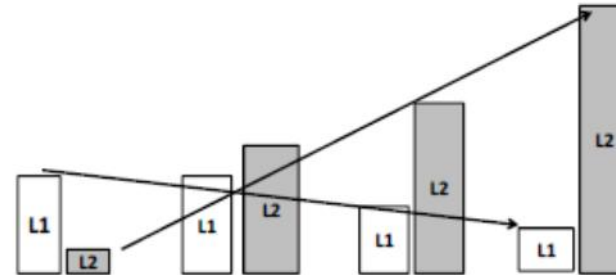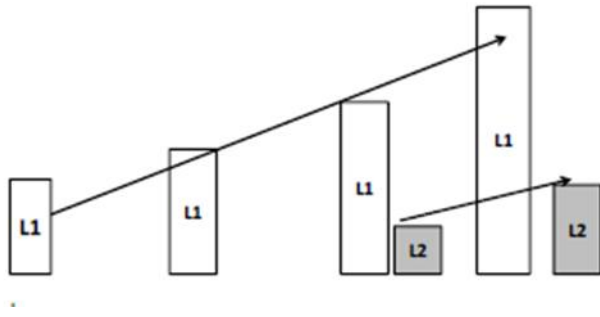
Comparison between HS and SL/FL learners' characteristics

| Linguistic input	HL	SL/FL
Acquisition age	Early age	Older age
Context	Natural (home environment)	Formal education
Exposure	Oral, natural	Written/oral (literacy)
Linguistic community	Within a linguistic community	Limited linguistic community
Quantity and frequency	Variable	Variable
Quality	Dependent on the context and degree of parental involvement	Dependent on the context

- Attrition in the areas like phonetics/phonology, morphology, syntax (Au et al. 2002; Keating et al 2011; Laleko 2010; Montrul & Bowles 2009; Polinsky 2008; Rothman 2007), vocabulary (Montrul & Foote 2014), semantics and pragmatics (Montrul & Ionin 2012).

- The incomplete acquisition of the heritage language, possible subsequent attrition, and interference from the majority language gradually lead to the formation of new, heritage grammars characterised by innovations on all levels, from phonology and morphology to syntax and semantics (Karatsareas 2018).

- See for instance το φέντσι (fench), το σκουρίλι (squirrel), το μπλόκι (block), το κάρο (car), ο μπόσης (boss), το φλόρι (floor), η μπασκέτα (basket)

- The result of this process across time is a shift in dominance from the heritage language to the majority language in the transition from the first to the second generation of speakers and a possible loss of the heritage language by the third generation

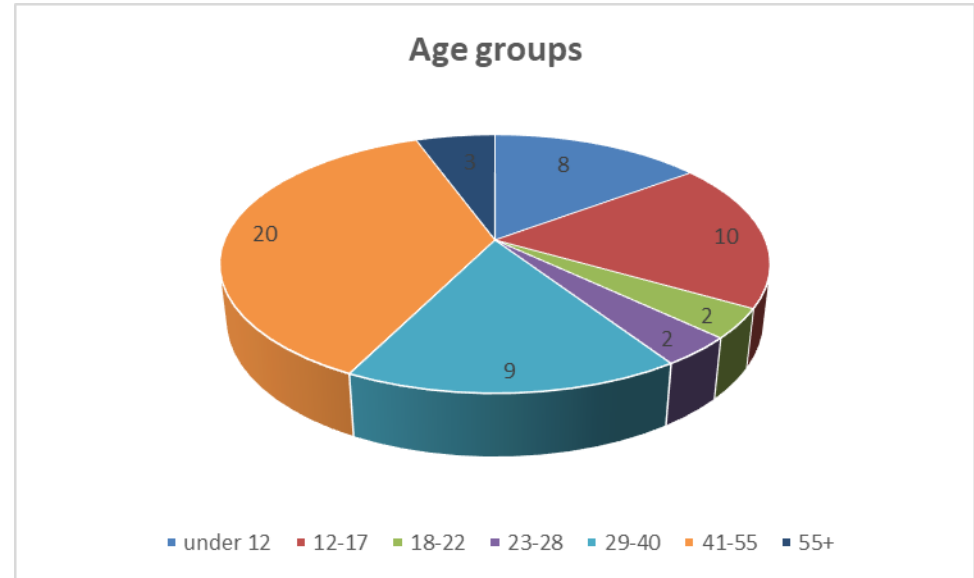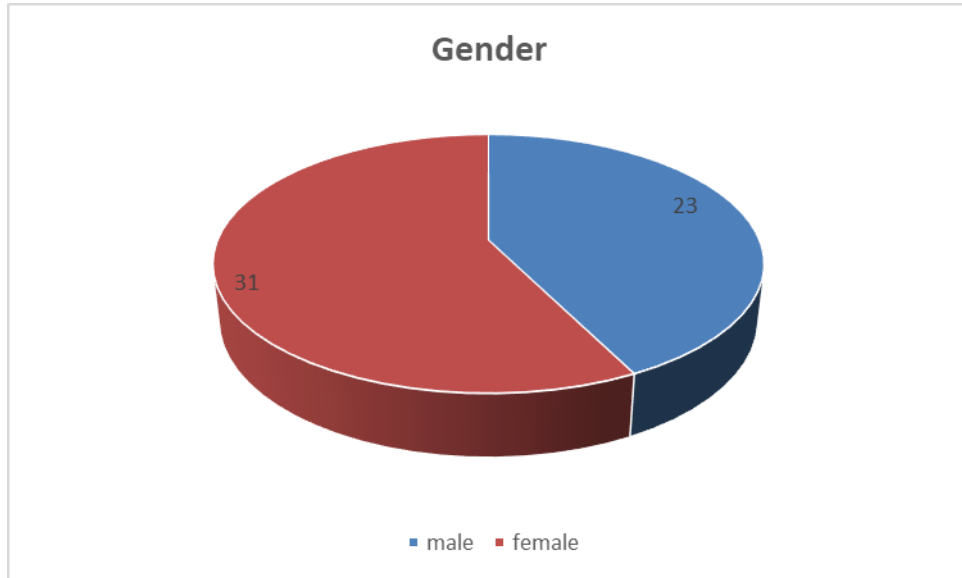| GENERATION	LANGUAGE DOMINATION	CHARACTERISTICS
1RST	Dominant in L1	Non-native proficiency in the majority language
2ND	Dominant in L2	Low to high proficiency in the heritage language
3RD	Dominant in L2	Ranges from intermediate-low proficiency in the heritage language to monolingual in the majority language

Methods

- Online survey, including 33 questions (Consortium of LL and teaching, University of California
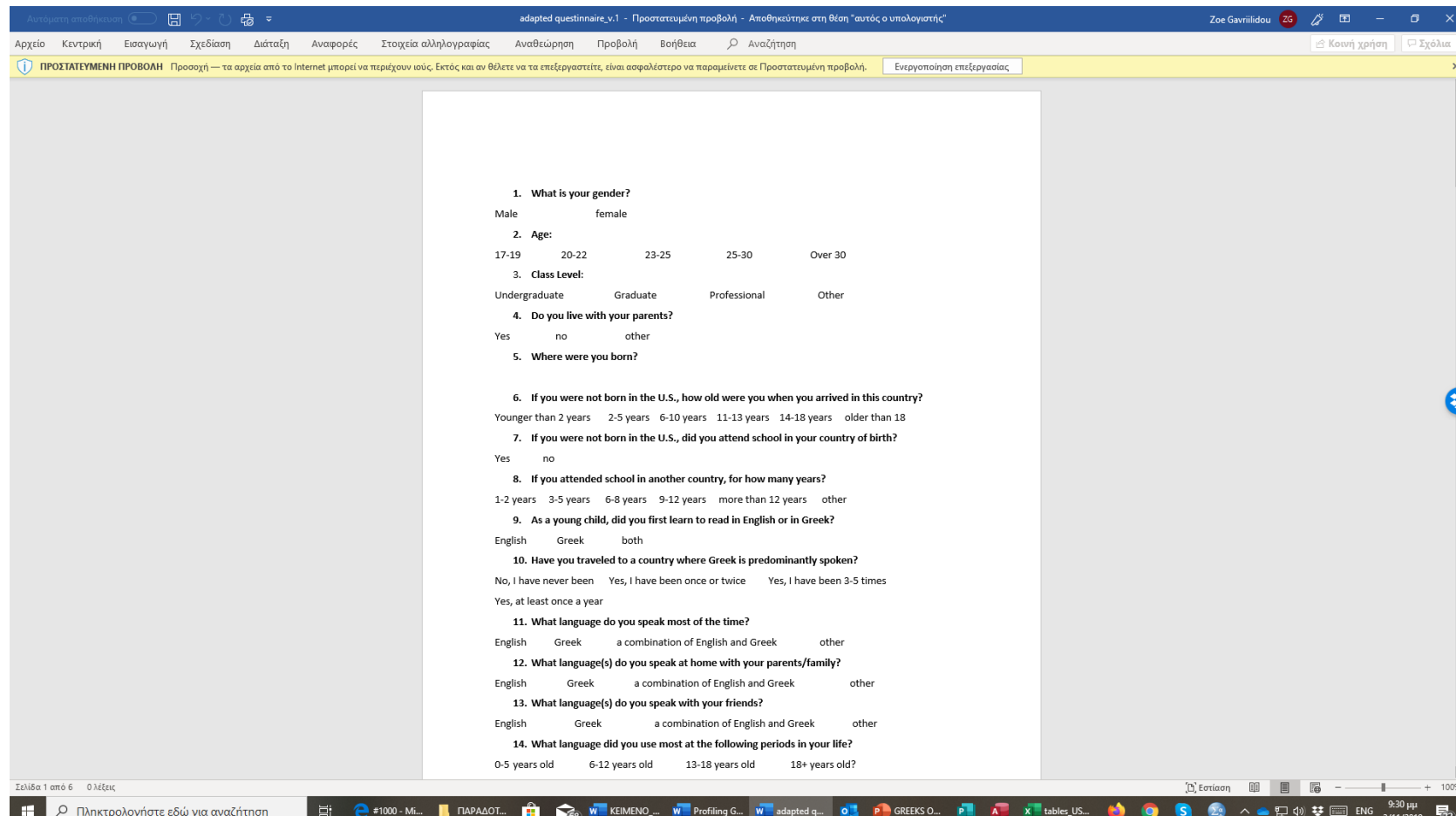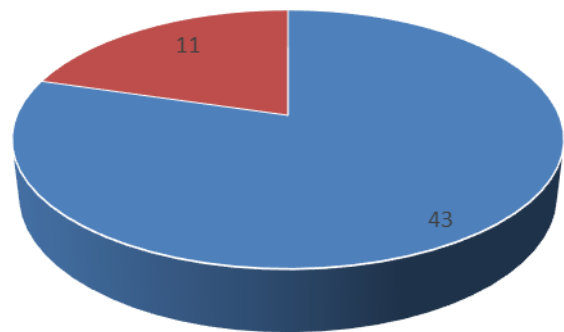
- **Biographical background**
- **Language use** (The particular questions focus on determining which language(s) they prefer to use and with whom as well as whether those preferences change in different periods of life)
- **HL study**
- **Previous exposure to written/spoken language**
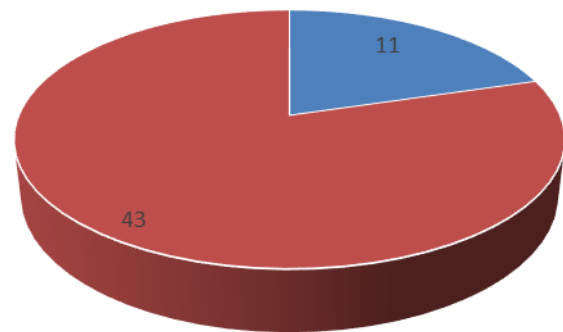- **Self-assessment of language skills**
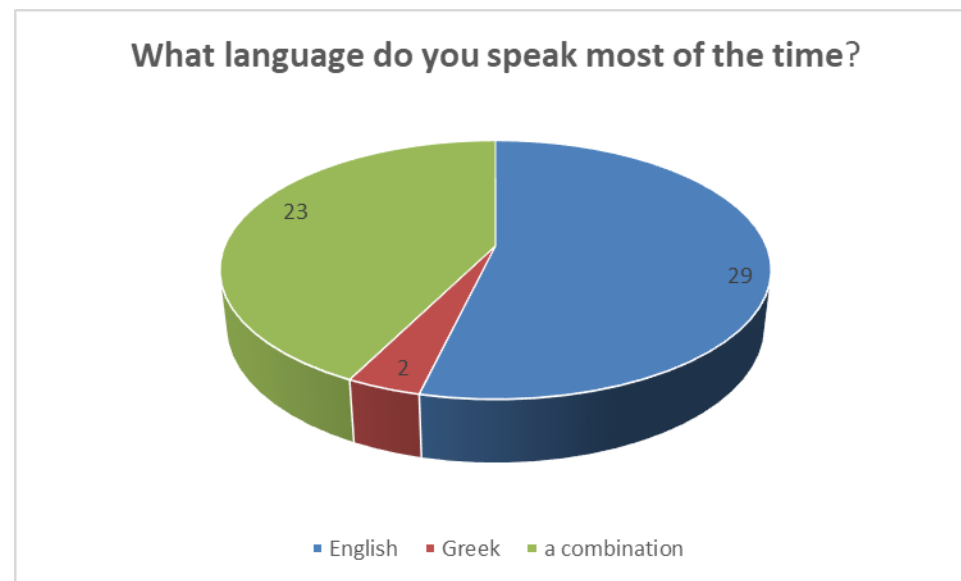- **Attitudes towards Greek**

Sample

Gender

23 — male
31 — female

Age groups

8 — under 12
10 — 12-17
2 — 18-22
2 — 23-28
9 — 29-40
20 — 41-55
3 — 55+

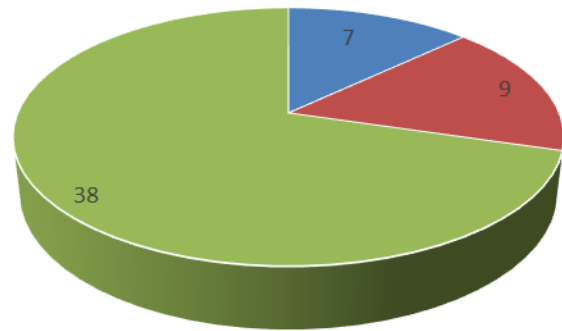**Place of birth**

11
43

■ USA   ■ other

Schooling in Greece

11
43

■ yes   ■ no

As a young child, did you first learn to read in English or in Greek?

Reading language

- English 16
- Greek 19
- both 19

What language do you speak most of the time?

- English 29
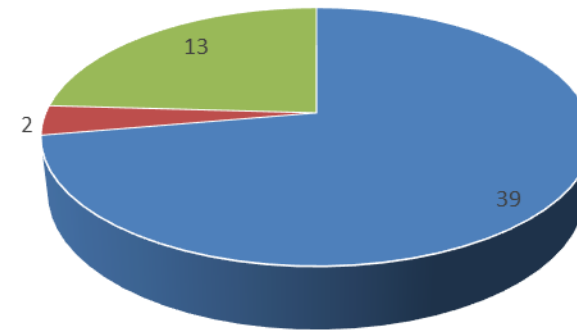- Greek 2
- a combination 23

What language do you speak at home?

7
9
38

■ English ■ Greek ■ A combination

What language do you speak with friends?

13
2
39

■ English ■ Greek ■ A combination

What language did you use most at the following periods in your life?
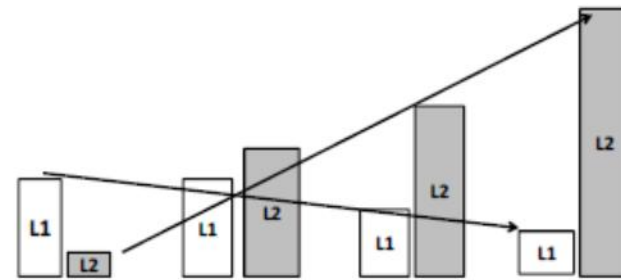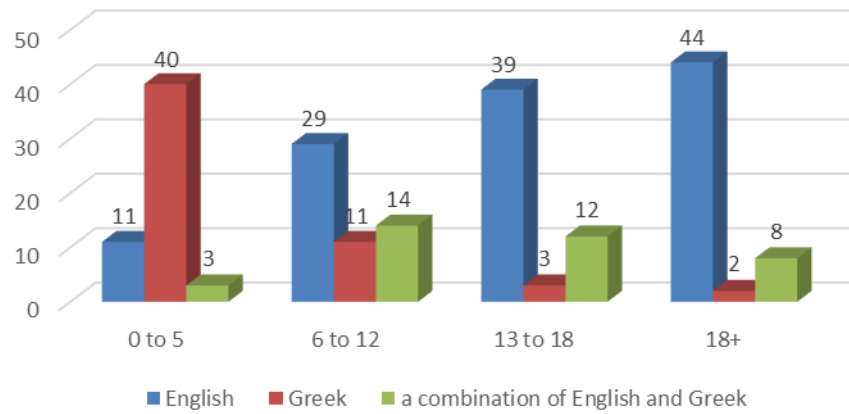
Have you studied Greek at a community/church school?

What language do you prefer to speak?

Greek	3
English	31
a mix of Greek and English	17
no preference	3

Σειρά1

Does your family want you to maintain Greek?

yes	53
no	1
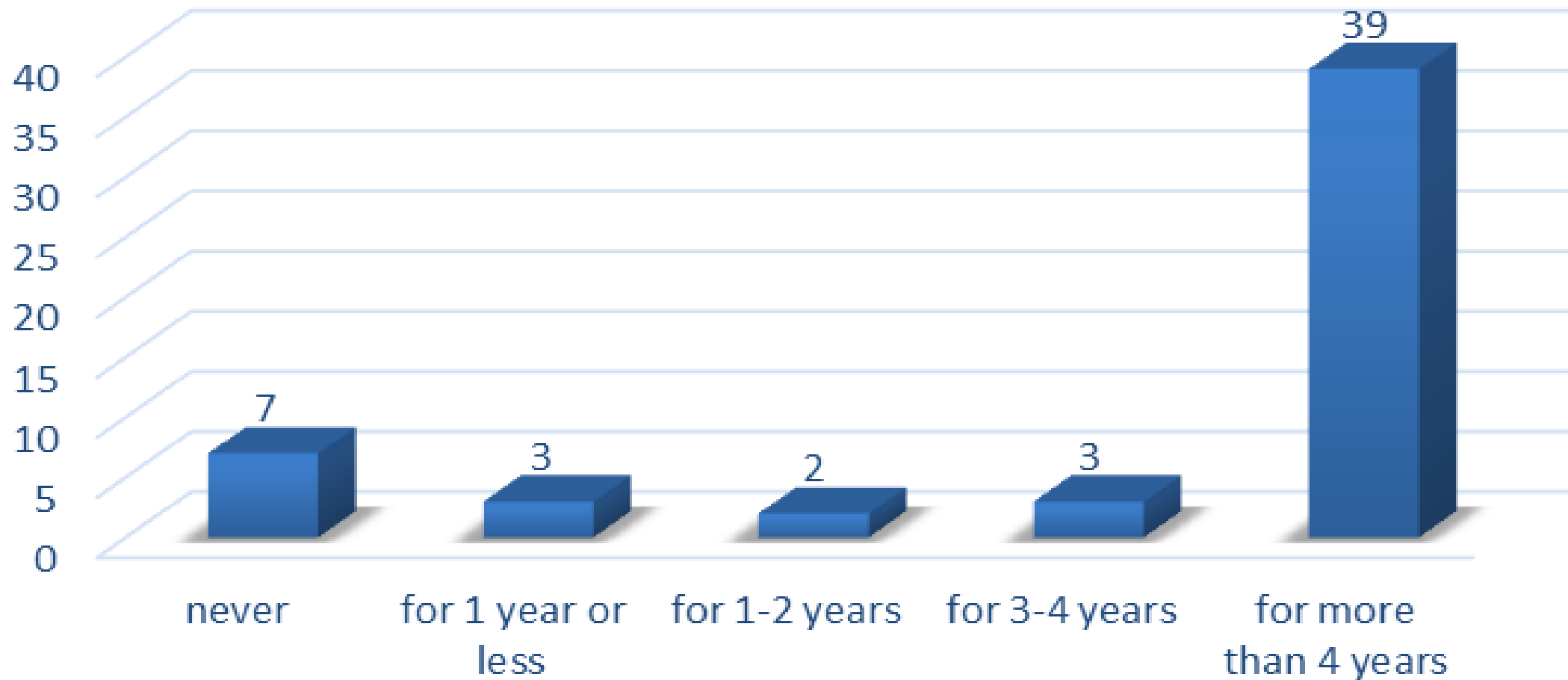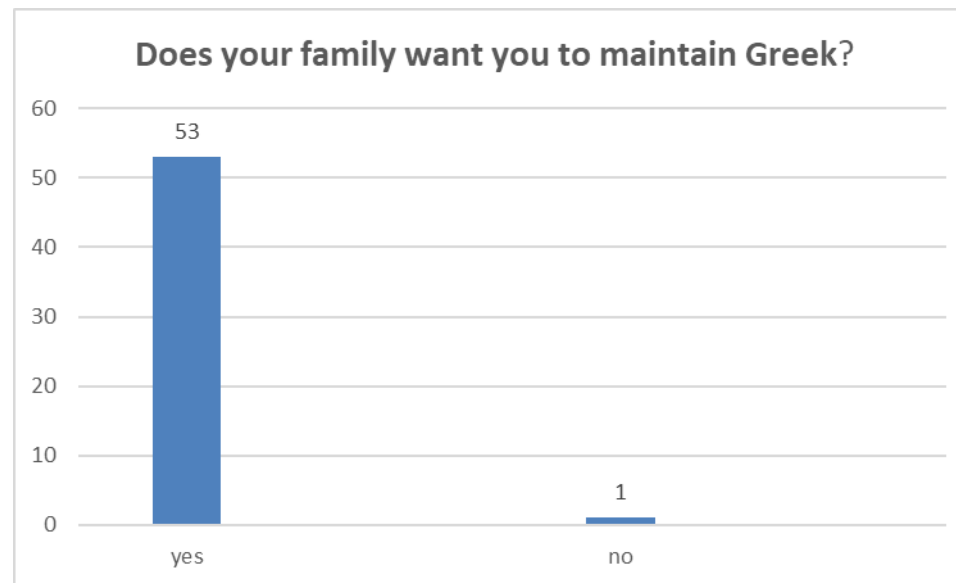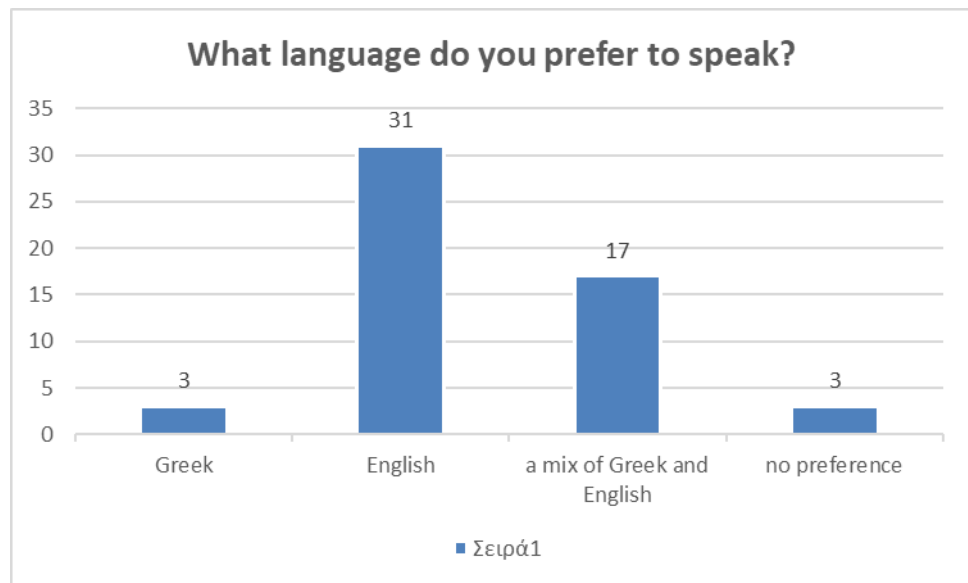
Did your parents/family read to you in Greek when you were a young child?

Books: 29
Newspapers: 7
Dictionaries: 3
Children's books: 46
Calendar: 5
Magazines: 5
Religious literature: 17
Newsletters: 4
Flyers: 5
Comic books: 10
Digital media: 6
We had no Greek print...: 2
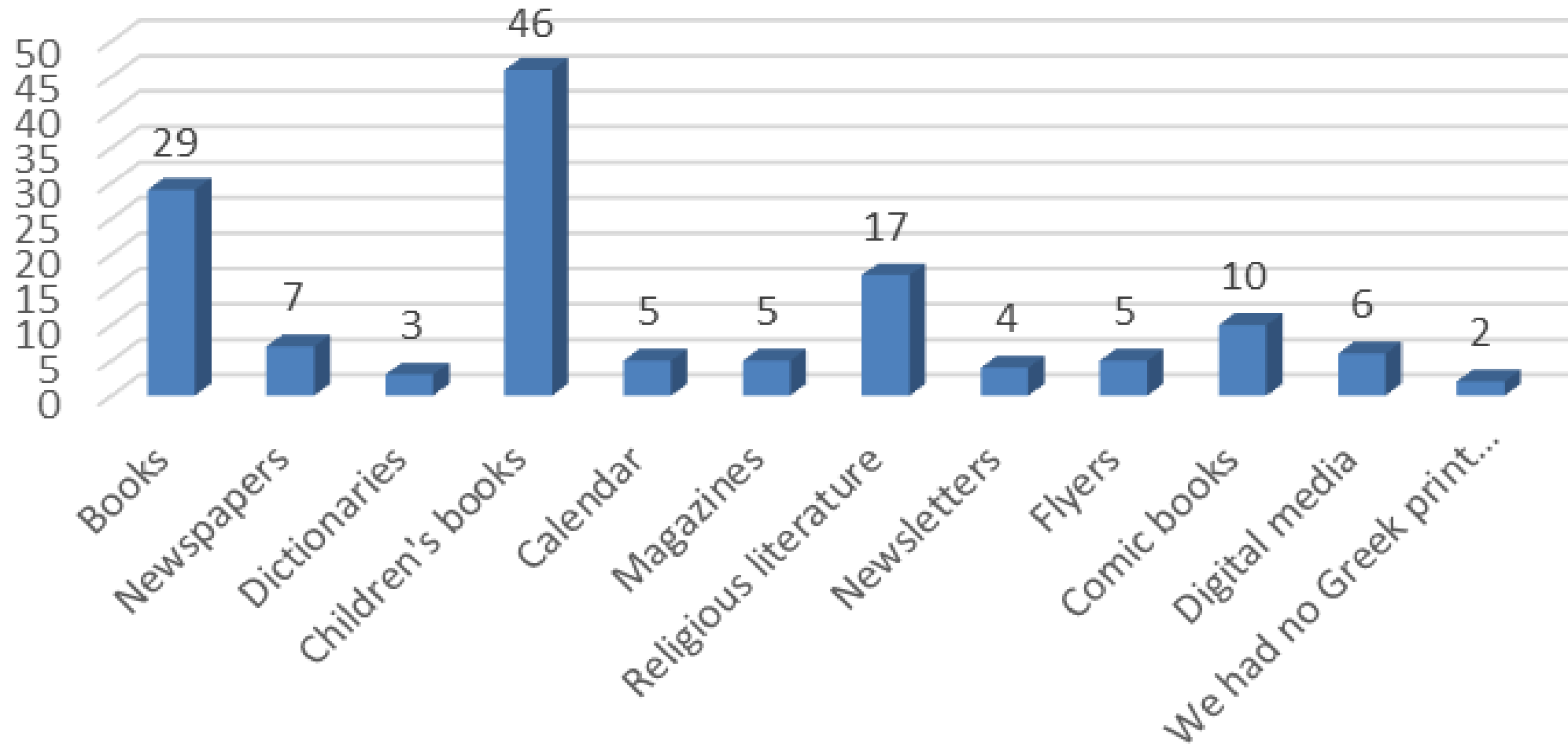
In the past six months, which of the following activities have you done in Greek?

Activity	Value
Spoken on the phone	51
Watched a movie	15
Written an email or a...	27
Attended a community...	45
Listened to music	49
Listened to radio	30
Tweeted, chatted or...	14
Read a newspaper	8
Watched TV	34
Visited a website	27
Used Facebook	19
Read a book or a short...	17
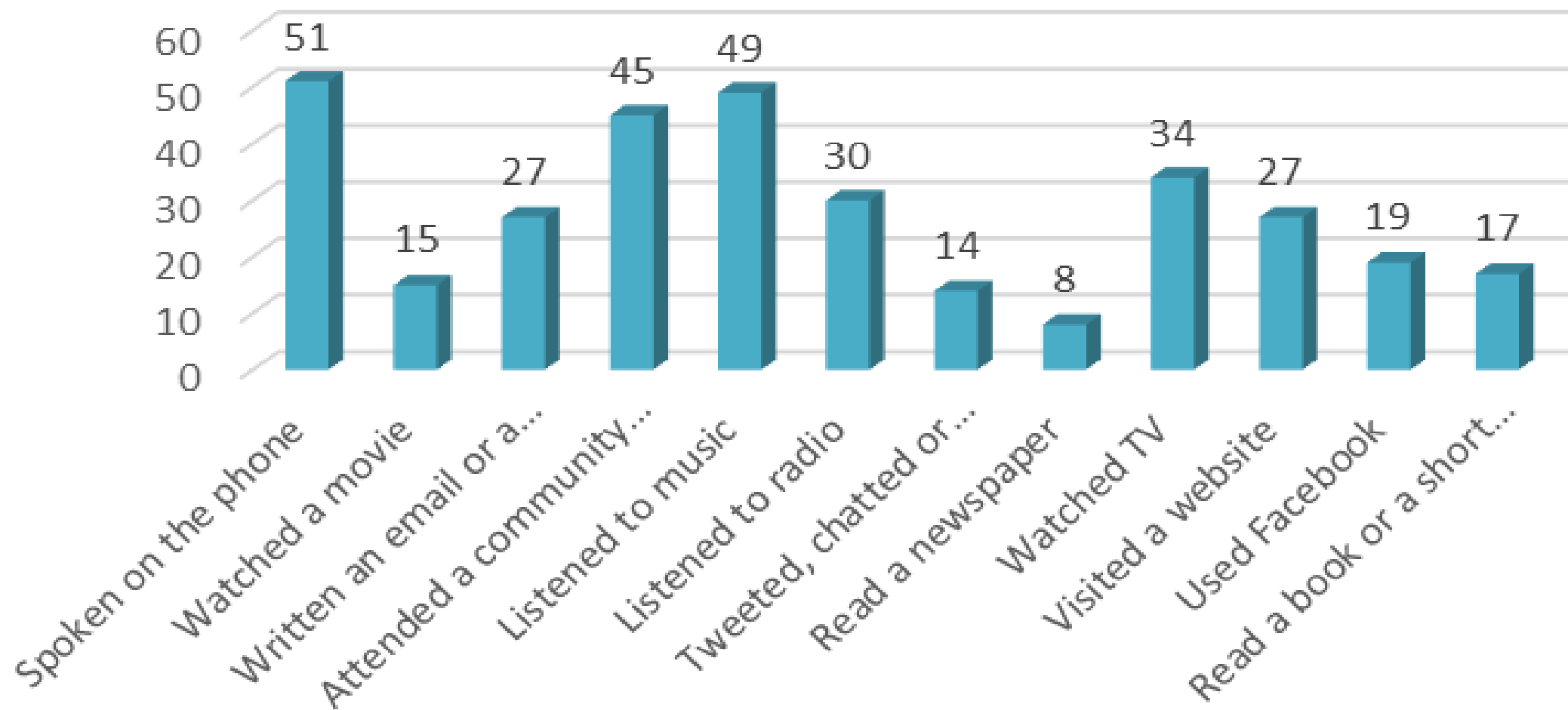
- Most respondents rated their writing as the least developed of their **skills** (low and intermediate 65%). It was followed by reading (low and intermediate 62.5%), speaking (low and intermediate 47.5%), and listening (low and intermediate 32.5%). (Gavriilidou & Mitits 2019).

- The **genres** that most respondents from the USA find most difficult to read are academic/technical papers, poetry, novels, theatrical plays, non-fiction and textbooks while flyers, dictionaries, letters and emails were rated as being easy to understand by most respondents. (Gavriilidou & Mitits 2019).

- When speaking in Greek the respondents reported that they find it relatively easy to very easy to accomplish most of the tasks, such as telling a joke, a fairy tale, a story, using polite language or being rude. Talking about current events or debating an idea show a moderate level of difficulty while only giving a formal presentation is rated as challenging. What we saw at the interviews was different

Discussion

- Second generation, are mainly simultaneous bilinguals who have been exposed to both languages since birth and have been given opportunities to stay in contact with their heritage language continuously and more systematically. The use of Greek in 3rd generation is inexistent.

- HL use diminishes with age especially after the age of 18 as a result of interrupted formal schooling in Greek but also because of language preference in various contexts (family meetings, conversations with friends, socializing, etc.).

- Strong positive attitude towards Greek as heritage language which is viewed as a symbol of heritage speaker's ethnolinguistic identity, culture and history that has to be maintained

The current situation

- Community Saturday or Wednesday Schools organized mainly by the Church. Effort to maintain Greek.
- Culture, traditions, and other content are often taught through the language, rather than focusing strictly on language as the object of instruction.
- BUT: old-fashioned methods, non updated school-books, non-specialized personnel often in a volunteer basis
- RESULT: Children do not want to attend Greek School. The program does not tailor the needs of GHS.

- There is little information available to the practitioner about how certain classroom practices—for example, consciousness raising about language and identity, the teaching of sociolinguistic principles, or the teaching of overall language skills—can contribute to students' views of themselves as lifetime Greek speakers who will make the effort to transmit the language to their children

The educational needs of Greek HS/HL

- Modern teaching methods (Content Led Integrated Learning, projects, playful activities for young learners, experiential learning, learning by doing)

- Introduction of technology in classroom

- New teaching material

- Specialized curriculum responding to the needs of this specific category of learners)

The role of the New Hellenic Studies Center

- Creation within this new Center for Hellenic Studies of a heritage language program for people of the Greek Community with home background in Greek. Duth can draft guidelines for a comprehensive program of heritage language learning if asked

- Courses could also be provided for students of University of Chicago who identify with Greek language and culture even if their home background is not Greek.

- Provide training to Greek Language Teachers who teach at Community Schools

- Promote research and curricular development in heritage language acquisition as well as teaching material

A few ideas

- recruit and motivate Greek Heritage Speakers (Cultural literacy and aural/oral proficiency are skills that should be valued and built upon.

- explore the possibility of instituting a University of Chicago Certificate of Professional Greek Language Competency. The certificate would not, of course, be limited to GHLs.

- Apply for a grant to develop a curriculum for appropriate instruction of HLs, not only meeting their linguistic needs but also educating them in relevant cultural and sociolinguistic issues.

- Creation of teaching material

Conclusion

- While the need for proficiency in languages other than English is greater than ever for social purposes, business, diplomacy and national security, education in foreign languages has produced few graduates with proficiency adequate for professional-level use.

- Because of their basis of knowledge, many heritage speakers, with the proper instruction, can reach professional level proficiency more quickly than foreign language students.

- However, in order to take full advantage of this resource and allow students to develop their abilities fully, we need to resolve a number of pedagogical concerns.

- Thank you!

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