



# Supporting Italian Language Learning through Digital Tools: the 5 Most Common Difficulties of Greek Cypriot Dialect Speakers and Ways of Enhancing Learning through Technology

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## **Abstract**

*Nowadays there is a large number of available digital technologies to enhance foreign language learning (learning applications [15], digital games [22], etc.) and improve one or more of the four different basic skills (writing, speaking, reading and listening). Digital technologies are transforming the way a foreign language is taught, learnt, and used, such as creating contextualised learning scenarios [9], through dialogic interactive media for speaking [21], with the use of chatbots for improving writing skills [2], etc. In this study five of the most common difficulties that Greek Cypriot dialect speakers have, during Italian language learning are presented and the types of the errors are briefly analysed. Furthermore, ways of improving the process of Italian language learning through the integration of specific digital tools into teaching and learning are presented, aiming for the improvement of those specific difficulties. Language teachers today are faced with so many options for using technology to enhance language learning that it can be overwhelming and challenging to identify the tool for a particular goal [13]. The present study aims to demonstrate the most common learning difficulties Greek-Cypriot speakers face when learning Italian as a foreign language. As it is a completely under-researched field, the study also aims to propose technology-oriented solutions to these difficulties and challenges.*

**Keywords:** *Italian language; difficulties; digital tools; technology;*

## **1. Introduction**

Within the fascinating field of foreign language learning, many attempts have been made to explain challenges that interfere with success in learning a foreign language [8]. A variety of factors are affecting the levels of success in foreign language learning such individual factors: learners characteristics [6], learning styles [8], affective components [14], motivation [22], beliefs [12], attitude and character [22] and external factors: different types of technology for innovation [4], [19], political factors [22]. It is stated that first language interferes with second language learning through different ways. For example, the level of proficiency of the first language seems to have positive or negative impact in second language learning [22], the age [6], etc. Human beings approach any problem with an existing set of cognitive structures and calling upon prior experiences and cognitive structures to find a solution [6]. Regarding language learning, the interference effect of the native language on the target (the second language) is very common ([6] and one of the main consequences of this language transfer are the interference errors [24].

## **2. Literature review**

### **2.1 Linguistic Landscape of Cyprus**

The Greek Cypriot community is diglossic, or triglossic [17] as the language of instruction is Standard Modern Greek (SMG) whereas the mother tongue of the students is Greek Cypriot Dialect (GCD) [17], [18], and katharevousa, 'Puristc Greek' [19] (used in religious ceremonies) is simultaneously used. Furthermore, the English language has a spread and growing influence in Cyprus [20].

### **2.2 Second Language Acquisition and the Interference**

Even though the research on second language acquisition has been under the way for a long time and on a large scale, many researchers and educators try to find out the factors affecting second language Acquisition (SLA) [22]. Many theories have been created to meet the needs of the learners of specific



time periods [7] The Communicative language Teaching is one of the latest humanistic approaches [25] and is the prevalent approach of the last decades and it emphasizes on communication [8] as it makes use of real-life [2]. The first language interferes in the acquisition of the second language and it is applicable universally [1]. The native language interference is the most immediately noticeable source of error among second language learners, however, is often positively transferred as well [8].

### **2.3 Technology and Language Learning**

Computers have been used for language teaching since the 1960s [26] and are widely used. They are considered an important element of language learning and teaching [26]. Furthermore, information and communication technologies (ICT) have improved the quality of educational services provided [5].

## **3. 5 Most Common Difficulties of Greek Cypriot Dialect Speakers and Ways of Enhancing Learning through Technology**

### **3.1 The Formal Form – Lei formale**

Addressing someone formally in Greek, the second person plural is used (pronoun “You” in plural). In Italian language the second person singular, Tu (You) is used for informal, written, or oral interactions and the third person singular Lei, (She) is used to address someone formally in written or oral interactions. A very effective method to affront this difficulty is to offer to the students the possibility of interacting with both ways (formal and informal). This can be done through platforms and sites that offer the creation of interactive activities and creation of quizzes (multiple choice, true or false, short answers etc.) like Socrative, where both ways to address a person can be used and students can interact.

### **3.2 The Sound of The Letter H**

In Greek, the letter H, is always pronounced and it has two distinct pronunciations: [ç] and [x]. In the Italian language the letter H is not pronounced, it has a graphic meaning, and it is also used to give a stronger sound ([k]). This represents an important phonetic difficulty since one of the first verbs that a student learns in Italian Language is the verb “Avere”, (to have), that contains the letter H in 4 different persons (I, you, she/he, they). A very effective method of learning is to allow students to observe their written production and listen to it at the same time. This possibility is offered by Book creator. In this content creator platform, a student can create his book, add characters, images etc., and hear the books as well. Students can share their books through a link.

### **3.3 The e and the è**

An additional difficulty usually encountered by students and not specifically by students with Greek as their mother tongue, is the distinction of e and è. While the sound is very little different è is pronounced as /ɛ/, and é is pronounced as /e/, they differ in written production. “E” means “and”, and it is a conjunction used for connecting words and phrases. È is the third person of the verb essere (to be). Recording applications are very important to distinguish the differences between e and è, students have the possibility to hear their voice and reflect on the pronunciation (Audacity, Vocaroo).

### **3.4 The Noun Genders**

In Greek language there are three genders of a noun, masculine, feminine and neutral. In Italian language there are two genders of nouns (masculine or feminine), which are not associated with the characteristics of the noun. For example, il gelato (the ice cream eng., το παγωτό ελλ.) is masculine in Italian and neutral in Greek. This often confuses the students since there is not a similarity with the previous languages the learnt. A very interactive way of practising the classification of the nouns is practising gender division through applications and create short phrases with nouns and adjectives, through animation applications (like PowToon, Pixton, Storyjumber etc). In those applications short comics could be created, with dialogs, and the addition of context (characters, background etc.).



### 3.5 The Double Consonants

A difficulty that seems to remain even after years of learning the Italian Language is the recognition of double consonants in oral and in written production. The double consonants in Modern Greek do not have different pronunciation (only in few cases). The double consonants in Italian language are very frequent and they are representing a longer sound in spoken production and in reading. The importance of the double consonants relies on the fact that in some cases they can modify the meaning of a word, for example: cassa (cashier) and casa (house), nono (ninth) and nonno (grandfather) etc. One effective way of recognizing and learning the words is a flashcard activity, as students mentally link the image to the correspondent word and help them memorize the connection between them (Canva and Quizlet).

### 4. Conclusion

An understanding of the L1 syntactical structure and the type of errors made in L2 will assist the teaching and learning process by allowing an individualised learning program for each learner [5]. It is also suggested that teachers should always employ the appropriate teaching and learning methodologies and strategies based on the needs and expectations of their students [10]. It is very important to understand student's linguistic background and motivate them in learning a new foreign language and understand structures and uses.

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