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Using Online Platforms

From Textbooks to Communication

Pronunciation Tools

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*President's Corner*

This year?s conference theme **From our Classrooms to the World: Bridging the Gap** focuses on how to achieve our collective mission of preparing linguistically and culturally proficient students to successfully navigate our globally connected society. The theme aligns with the ACTFL 21st -century skills map focusing on the following areas of how world language classrooms should look today:

- · Ensure students learn **to use** the language, not just

learn about it - · Challenge students with meaningful and relevant tasks - · Share opportunities for learners to use their language

skills - · beyond the classroom - · Encourage learners to create work they can share and

publish to audiences beyond their teacher.

As world language educators, we should strive to implement concepts from the ACTFL skills map and the world readiness standards of ?Community? and ?Connections?. Doing so will not only benefit our students, but also raise the visibility and professionalism of world languages as a valuable and necessary subject area to administrators, community, and parents. I hope that the sessions and events of FFLA 2017 inspire you to innovate in your classroom and engage with local and international communities. By taking your students activities and your own professional development beyond the classroom walls, we can ?bridge the gap? and make others aware of all the valuable work world language educators are doing to better society.

Mary E. Risner, Ed.D. FFLA President 2016-2017

*Resources* ACTFL Skills Map https://www.actfl.org/sites/default/files/pdfs/21stCenturySkillsMap/p21\_worldlanguagesmap.pdf ACTFL World-Readiness Standards https://www.actfl.org/sites/default/files/publications/standards/World-ReadinessStandardsforLearningLanguages.pdf Lead with Languages www.leadwithlanguages.org Network of Business Language Educators www.nble.org ACTFL Workplace Proficiency Chart https://www.actfl.org/sites/default/files/pdfs/TLE\_pdf/OralProficiencyWorkplacePoster.pdf

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*Editor's Commentary*

This is my second year to head the editorialship of the Florida Foreign Language Journal. I am honored to be taking over the helm of this peer-reviewed journal from my wonderful colleague and predecessor Dr. Betty Green who served as Editor for 10 years and was on the editorial board for 20 years.

In this issue we have three articles that focus on questions that we, as foreign language teachers, always ask; (1) what is the best way to use online tools to promote collaboration, (2) how do we know that our textbooks provide foreign language teachers with the most suitable array of activities to promote meaningful communication, and (3) are there ways to improve the pronunciation of foreign language students.

The first article, by Alison Lai provides a very nice synopsis on the research behind language teaching and technology and the promotion of collaboration through online tools. Three tools are looked at; particularly how **thinglink**, **padlet** and **line** were used in a Chinese foreign language class. Lai looks at how these tools provide the scope to give students opportunities to receive input, provide output and engage in second language negotiation. She provides examples within her study and shows how students readily become, as Laakkonen (2011) put it, not just consumers of language but producers and creators of language.

In their article, entitled **Italian Second Language Teaching Textbooks: From Drills to Communication**, DeMil and Rukholm look into the nature of activities in six Italian textbooks. They offer compelling evidence that the instructional materials adopted in L2 textbooks (Spanish, French) ignore what is known about second language acquisition (SLA) and the teaching methods that support it. By categorizing activities according to type: mechanical drill, meaningful drill, communicative drill, input activity or output activity, DeMil and Rukholm unpack activities that teach the **passato prossimo** (present perfect) and the **imperfetto**. They conclude that the textbook they examined do not necessarily lead students to meaningful comprehension and thus to true communicative competence.

Lastly, LaOrden, provides an overview of a study conducted with 108 beginner learners of Spanish. She shows that through pronunciation practice students decreased their vowel error production from 20% to 47%, that they learned to auto-correct, gained confidence, and volunteered more to speak and read.

Now in October, we have our annual state conference in St Petersburg. I hope to see you there. For now, let me leave you with this thought: you are an amazing group of teachers and you do amazing work! Why not detail here in your very own professional journal. I look forward to receiving manuscripts from you to place in the next issue of the FFLJ.

sincerely,

Tony Erben, Ph.D. (Editor)

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*USI NG ONL I NE PL ATFORM S TO PROM OTE COL L ABORATI VE L EARNI NG I N A FOREI GN L ANGUAGE CL ASS*

Alison Lai Chinese Lecturer at the University of Scranton

*ABSTRACT*

Today?s students were born digital. Technology becomes an essential tool that they use and rely on in everyday life. Technology also plays an important role in language learning. It mediates language learning by forming a bridge between the authentic world and the language learners. Based on the idea ?to give students language input, provide opportunities for interaction, and encourage output?, the author gives three examples of implementing online platforms into a Chinese class. Student feedback shows that the online cooperative learning projects can expose language learners to different opinions, experiences and thinking processes. Students also gain a deeper understanding of the target culture through the online learning experience. With carefully deigned instructional activities via online platforms, technology can help students to become active participants and develop their 21st century skills.

**Keywords: online platforms, language and technology, 21st century skills, collaborative learning**

*Introduction*

Today?s generation, Generation Y, is the generation of ?digital natives?, a concept first introduced by Marc Prensky (?Policy Brief?, 2011). In his article ?Digital Natives, Digital Immigrants? (2001), Prensky commented that today?s students represent the first generations to grow up with new technology. They think and process information differently from their predecessors. They are all ?native speakers? of the digital language of computers, video games and the Internet. Some of the significant characteristics of digital natives are: They are used to receiving information really fast; they like to parallel process and multi-task; they prefer their graphics before their text; they prefer random access; they function best when networked; they thrive on instant gratification and frequent rewards and they prefer games to serious work. Technology, like language, is an essential tool that we use and rely on in everyday life (Chen and Wang, 2013). Today?s students are born with accessible technology at their fingertips, but are today?s educators ready to embrace technology?

*L anguage Teaching and Technology*

Described in ?Role of Technology in Language Learning? (2012), in recent years, technology has been used to both assist and enhance language learning. Teachers have incorporated various forms of technology to support their teaching, engage students in the learning process, provide authentic examples of the target culture, and connect their classroom to classrooms in other countries where the target language is spoken. For example, through Web searches, students can extend the input contained in the course materials and find written and spoken sources that are more up-to-date and of greater relevance to their own interests (Hampel and Pleines, 2013). In addition, some technology tools enable teachers to differentiate instruction and adapt classroom activities and homework assignments, thus enhancing the language learning experience. Those online activities give students the opportunity to practice and revise content and language introduced elsewhere and to expand and update the existing content. Technology continues to grow in importance as a tool to assist teachers of foreign languages in

facilitating and mediating language learning for their students.

Glisan and Shrum (2010) concluded that better and more effective use of class time, individualized learning and empowerment are three benefits of the planned and purposeful use of technology. Technology mediates language learning by forming a bridge between the authentic world and the language learners. Yang (2001) suggested that online experiences allow learners to participate in the culture of the target language, which in turn enable them to learn how one?s cultural background influences one?s view of the world. Digital learning environment opens up a broader range of connections and meaning-making among learners.

While technology can play an important role in supporting and enhancing language learning, the effectiveness of any technological tool depends on the knowledge and expertise of the qualified language teacher who manages and facilitates the language learning environment (?Role of Technology in Language Learning?, 2012). According to Hong and Samimy?s study (2010), students who showed a relatively more positive attitude toward the use of technology reported that their teachers were more actively involved in using technology. On the other hand, educators are increasingly under pressure to use technology to prepare students to live in a technologically interconnected, globalized world (Chun, Kern and Smith, 2016). Wu (2013) argued that many instructors often struggle to find the best way to teach with technology, because they are not sure what students like or dislike, and what works or does not work for them. Bourgerie (2003) explained that unenthusiastic teacher support and failure to integrate the materials into a larger learning environment contribute to students? negative attitudes toward technology.

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Dema and Moeller (2012) found that on some occasions, the majority of classroom students simply surfed the Internet rather than participated in learning.

Yang (2001) stated that the full educational significance of technology will not be realized by using it to present information to students, but by empowering students as multimedia composers, giving them new insights into organizing and synthesizing information. Those learners who show reluctance toward technologically oriented projects need careful guidance and support. Providing scaffolding, both in using Internet applications and in orienting the learners to the task, is vital to the successful implementation and integration of technology into the curriculum. When designing a course, teachers should provide students with enough structure to keep their studying on track while giving students enough freedom to work creatively and flexibly on the course (Guo and Guo, 2013). With the use of various technology tools and applications, teachers can tailor language learning to individual students as they interact, explore, and experiment with the target language and culture (Dema and Moeller, 2012).

*Technology and Collabor ative L ear ning*

According to sociocultural theory, learning is the consequence of interaction with other people, objects or tools and culture in socially organized and goal-oriented activities (Cole and Engestrom, 1993). Fung (2004) explained that learning takes place in a social milieu, within which the negotiation of shred meaning through social interaction will result in cognitive dissonance, allowing individual learners to restructure their own concepts. Without social and cultural interaction, the meaning of context and content would not exist. Therefore, collaboration serves as a

powerful vehicle of socialization in human psychological development (Wang, 2007).

Published in 2011, the 21st Century Skills Map for World Languages highlighted ?collaboration? ? students as collaborators use their native and acquired languages to learn from and work cooperatively across cultures with global team members, sharing responsibility and making necessary comparisons while working toward a common goal as one of the essential skills. Collaborative learning, either among students or between students and teachers, is essential for assisting each student in advancing through his or her own zone of proximal development- the gap between what the learner could accomplish alone and what the learner could accomplish with the help of others who are more skilled or experienced (Warschauer, 1997). Chen and Wang (2013) stated that the benefits of collaboration in learning are the promotion of deep learning, critical thinking skills, shared understanding, and high levels of participation, achievement and self-esteem. Collaborative learning requires learners to identify for themselves their common points of interest. Its success resides in the learners? intrinsic motivation to participate in group learning and the sharing of ideas.

Technology paves the path for the development of students? 21st century skills, including problem solving, critical thinking and collaboration (McKeeman and Oviedo, 2015). It enables the sharing of resources between students and encourages the interactions between teachers and students, and between students themselves during the process in which learning can happen (Guo and Guo, 2013). Technology allows for creative, dynamic and collaborative learning venues, both within and outside the school day (Haywood, Johnson, Levine and Smith, 2010).

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Chen and Wang further explained that online collaborative learning exposes learners to different opinions, experiences and thinking processes, and provides them with opportunities to interact with other learners, educators, experts and content. Supported by technologies, learning can happen anywhere and anytime. Kiddle (2014) also pointed out that digital language learning tools and materials can potentially support individual or collaborative learning in any physical location. Online collaborative learning creates a shared understanding of meaning through dialogue among learners. Learning communities can be formed at the local, national, or global level, expanding participants? global awareness.

*Using Online Platfor ms in a L anguage Class*

Technology promotes socially active language learning in multiple authentic contexts. It gives foreign language teachers various opportunities to create better and more effective instructional materials to teach both the language and the culture (Dema and Moeller, 2012). When it comes to cultural products, practices and perspectives, technology reinforces, encourages and provides the opportunity to interact and engage with culturally authentic materials. Shoffner (2013) suggested that technology offers various ways to support the development of higher order thinking skills. Students can use social networking sites to aid in their collection, questioning and evaluation of information. They can create, analyze and synthesize materials by developing multimedia projects that draw on multiple literacies. They can also collaborate with peers for meaningful discussions. Kaya (2015) commented that technology implementation increases student learning, understanding and achievement. Integrating technology into instruction transforms teacher-dominated

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classrooms into more student-centered classrooms. By sharing resources among group members, students save time in producing the resources on their own. In addition, students do their best and learn comprehensively as a group.

According to Frank and Golonka (2008), technology use has the potential to enhance five primary functionalities of foreign language learning and teaching. They are: organization, input, output and interaction, feedback and collaboration. Based on the idea ?to give students language input, provide opportunities for message-focused interaction and negotiation of meaning, and encourage output? (Hampel and Pleines, 2013), the author implemented three online platforms-ThingLink, Padlet and Line- into a Chinese class. As shown in the Input-Process-Output (IPO) model (Figure 1), at the beginning, the author provides language input and a comfortable learning environment. Next, the author interacts with students in the target language to encourage output. Lastly, students produce output through collaborative learning.

*Figure 1: Input-Process-Output (IPO) Model*

1. ThingLink

Traditionally, language teachers have given students vocabulary lists to memorize followed by pictures to label. While it is important that the students interact with visual content, a simple picture with a basic word or sentence does not engage students at his fullest capacity (Ousselin, 2013). ThingLink is a Web tool that allows students and teachers to annotate an image with video, audio and textual tags. The tool is useful for educators who wish to provide a more thoughtful introduction to vocabulary, grammar or culture with interactive elements. It is also an excellent assessment tool for learners as it requires them to demonstrate their comprehension of a concept beyond the basic translation. ThingLink provides a space for students to feel that they are learning through a self-guided investigation.

*Example: Students design an interactive poster of different symptoms*

The introduction of each platform as well as student work and student feedback are described below.

*Figure 2: ThinkLink Example*

Dema and Moeller (2012) suggested that when teachers integrate powerful technological tools into their instruction, students are allowed to personally interact with real data and solve open-ended problems. Based on the learner-centered approach, the author divided the class into several groups and invited them to compile their own vocabulary lists, create examples and upload images to ThingLink. Each group had to research online and upload two links related to the topic (traditional Chinese medicine). This approach flips the authority in the classroom from the teacher to students. Students take responsibilities for their own learning and apply what they learned in engaging, practical and collaborative ways.

2. Padlet

Padlet is a virtual pin board that allows students to upload a variety of files, including Word documents, YouTube videos, PowerPoint presentations, etc. It is an interactive platform that enables participants to write notes on and upload links to a shared page. It is a collaborative tool, which means that everyone with a link to the pin board can access it and add their comments. Harrison (2015) concluded the following benefits of using Padlet: It allows those who are less confident to have a voice in the larger classroom; it confirms that the student is on ?the right track? with the task; and it provides a snapshot summary of the various perspectives in the room. De Berg (2016) commented that Padlet motivates individuals to research a topic in more depth and also improve language skills.

Padlet is a good alternative to reduce the communication gap among students, teachers and peers. It provides a platform for generating new knowledge. Collaborative learning encourages cognitive processes as the

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learners acquire new ideas from sharing knowledge through Padlet (DeWitt, Alias and Siraj, 2015). In the Padlet collaborative project, the author provided a vocabulary list to the students and showed them an example of a birthday invitation card. Following the example, the author and the students designed a birthday card together. Then the whole class discussed major holidays in America and how people celebrate them. Next, each student was assigned a holiday (Halloween, Thanksgiving, Christmas and Birthday) to design an invitation card for and upload the cards together with a vocabulary list to Padlet. Apart from designing the invitation card, the students had to read each card and reply to it.

*Example: Students design invitation cards for different occasions*

*Figure 3: Padlet Example*

A few students gave their feedback on the online collaborative projects using ThinkLink and Padlet.

**-Student1: ?Being able to write and add to the Padlet could help everyone in the class become much better at speaking and learning Chinese. Padlet also offers a different way to learn a language instead of just listening to a teacher in class?.**

**-Student2: ?Overall I think that it is very helpful in learning a language. I like that the**

**online tool is customizable as it makes it seem like it would be easy to incorporate pictures and videos to learn about the culture of a county. I like that it is easy to share our work and be able to look back on how we and our other classmates progress?.**

**-Student3: ?It helps create stronger bonds between students and the teacher. It is a nice learning tool that makes it easier for us to share things within the classroom that is appropriate?.**

**-Student 4: ?I think both of these are useful tools for learning as they allowed us to diversify our learning environment. They forced us to better comprehend the information we had learned and be able to apply it?.**

**-Student 5 ?The collaborative project had us research traditional Chinese culture, immersing us in the culture. This helped us to learn more about China as a whole and not just about the language. Creating our own work made us go more in-depth with our sentence structure and vocabulary use. This was a great learning experience because we made the vocab sheets for our classmates to help them understand our invitation, demonstrating our knowledge of the topic?.**

3. Line

Line is the most popular messaging app in Japan, Thailand and Taiwan. It is similar to the likes of Whatsapp, Facebook Messenger or WeChat in China. Line users share inside jokes, send each other ridiculous stickers, and play games among themselves. What makes Line stand out among other apps is its unique stickers. Line stickers express a wide, complex and often bemusing array of ideas and emotions. They make it easy to express feelings you cannot spell out in words.

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Lauricella and Kay (2013) suggested that students feel more bonded to and think more positively about the instructor and classroom activities when receiving text messages from an instructor. Using instant messaging facilitates a more intimate student-instructor relationship. Learning becomes more real and permanent when tied to learners? lives outside the academic environment (Godwin-Jones, 2011). A student wrote in his learning journal: **?I have used this app in communication with my Chinese teacher as well as keeping in touch with my Chinese-speaking friends. Some of the stickers and the emojis that you can utilize while you have the app are tremendous for learning Chinese. As odd as it might sound, it is great to get a ?good morning? sticker sent to you and have to comprehend the message on the spot in Mandarin. The Chinese language stickers that are associated with the avatars on the app are both unique and help prople learning?.**

*Conclusion*

Laakkonen (2011) commented that technology changes the position of learners from consumers to producers and creators. By involving learners in the actual design of learning materials and structures through selected tools and applications, work modes and resources, learners no longer play the roles of passive recipients of information, but become active participants in the process of developing their own expertise through selecting, demonstrating, building and creating knowledge and new meanings together with their interlocutors.

Parmaxi and Zaphiris (2016) concluded that technology depicts a significant shift from the four basic language skills toward a body of skills that would enable our learners to succeed in today?s workplace. With the use of

technology, teachers can guide students toward thinking critically about what they are learning, building interpersonal communication skills, working more effectively in teams, creating and innovating new ideas, concepts, and products and developing students? 21st century skills.

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*ITALIAN SECOND LANGUAGE TEACHING TEXTBOOKS: FROM DRILLS TO COMMUNICATION*

Andrew DeMil and Vanessa Rukholm University of Tampa

*ABSTRACT*

Numerous current second language textbooks claim to promote second language (L2) communication by espousing such terms as communicative language teaching, communicative competence, meaningful and interactive, in their introductory remarks and in their marketing. However, recent studies (DeMil, 2013; DeMil & Aubry 2013; Fernández, 2011) offer compelling evidence that in reality, the instructional materials adopted in L2 textbooks (Spanish, French) ignore what is known about second language acquisition (SLA) and the teaching methods that should support it: that learners need opportunities to comprehend language to be able to communicate. This study considers six top-selling introductory Italian postsecondary textbooks and analyzes activities that teach the **passato prossimo** (present perfect) and the **imperfetto** (the Italian verb form to communicate habitual or repeated actions in the past) for their ability to lead learners to comprehend meaningful language. Activities are categorized according to type: mechanical drill, meaningful drill, communicative drill, input activity or output activity. The findings support previous research that the activities provided in introductory textbooks overwhelmingly fall short of leading learners to true communicative competence.

*Introduction*

Communicative language teaching is a term that, for the past two decades, has become ubiquitous in language teaching and learning circles as well as within the textbook industry (Fernández, 2011). Beginning and intermediate L2 texts almost unanimously include language suggesting that they offer learners the best opportunities for communicating in the target language through activities designed to lead learners to negotiate meaning. The provision of communicative contexts, for instance, has become commonplace among introductory textbooks as the sine qua non from which meaningful communication is derived. Upon closer inspection of textbook content, however, many activities, particularly those that are crafted within a context, reveal themselves to simply be examples of long-criticized mechanical or communicative drills camouflaged as meaningful communication activities. While these exercises may on the surface appear to be communicative, they do not, in effect, lead students to communicate. In fact, research in

SLA offers compelling evidence that existing textbooks are simply not adhering to what is known about effective language learning activities (DeMil, 2013; DeMil & Aubry 2013; Fernández, 2011). This article adds Italian texts to the growing body of data illustrating that introductory L2 texts do not, by and large, support or reflect established research in SLA, which suggests that learners require exposure to meaningful input as well as the opportunity to process that input prior to producing language (VanPatten, 2015). This study also fulfills the need for analyses of textbooks from a variety of languages so as to illustrate that the issues raised concerning the disconnect between SLA theory and textbook resources are applicable across languages and publishing companies.

*Input and SLA*

Research investigating SLA has moved forward from **whether** L2 instruction is effective, to **how** it is effective (Norris & Ortega, 2000). All major theories of SLA posit a fundamental role for input, that is, language

that learners are exposed to by listening or reading which has a communicative intent. It has become widely accepted that input is necessary in order for acquisition to take place (Ellis & Wulff, 2015; Gass & Mackey, 2015; Lantolf, Thorne & Poehner, 2015; VanPatten, 2004, 2015; VanPatten & Williams, 2015; White, 2015). Though fundamental to the L2 acquisition process, input is not, however, sufficient. This has been suggested based partly on the research related to French immersion programs in cases in which learners are exposed to large amounts of input but ultimately fall short of attaining native-like performance with some linguistic features (Swain, 1993; Swain & Lapkin, 1995). In order to investigate why this might be the case, a number of researchers working within cognitive or information processing approaches to SLA have examined how learners process input during comprehension to gain insights into why learners may not acquire certain linguistics features from input alone. It appears that when learners are pushed to obtain meaning during comprehension, they may circumvent the very forms they need for acquisition (VanPatten, 2004, 2015).

*The present study*

This study looks at six postsecondary introductory Italian textbooks to examine the main type of activity used to train learners to communicate in the **passato prossimo**, the Italian tense employed to describe completed actions in the past and the **imperfetto**, the Italian tense used to describe habitual actions in the past. We begin by giving an example and description of each type of activity and then offer an analysis of the types of activities provided by all six textbooks.

*Research Questions*

1. What types of activities are used to incite

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learners to practice the Italian **passato prossimo** and the **imperfetto** (e.g., input activities, output activities, mechanical drills, meaningful drills, communicative drills)?

2. Do the activities promote communication?

*Input Activities*

Input activities are designed to lead learners read or listen to language for the purpose of understanding a message. Example 1 is an input activity. The English is provided here but is not available to the learner.

***Example 1 I nput activity***

Instructions: Mark whether the action happened [**oggi (**today**)** or **ieri** (yesterday)] and then mark **Vero** (True) if the sentence describes the drawing, or **Falso** (False) if it does not.

1. **L'uomo ha parlato. oggi** / ieri **vero/falso**

[The man spoke.] [today/yesterday] [true/false]

2. **La donna ascolta. oggi** / ieri **vero/falso**

[The woman listens.] [today/yesterday] [true/false]

In this activity, the learner must be able to both comprehend the sentence as well as the grammatical form in order to complete the activity. The only clue for tense, or time of the

action, in this activity is the verb and as such, the learner must recognize the form of the verb. The learner must also rely on the verb for meaning. In this activity, learners must demonstrate comprehension of grammar and meaning without yet being asked to produce. As such, as this particular example illustrates, input activities provide learners with meaningful input, which allows the process of SLA to begin.

In the above example, the learner chooses the correct picture described by the Italian statement, in this case A. In this way, the learner shows comprehension of Italian without yet being asked to produce the form.

*Drills*

In spite of the strides that have been made in SLA and the growing research demonstrating how L2 pedagogy can support what we know about SLA, studies continue to offer evidence that drills, or exercises used to practice grammar without meaning, remain the most widespread type of activities used to practice grammar (Fernández, 2011). The drills that are most common are mechanical, meaningful, and communicative drills (Wong & VanPatten, 2003).

Mechanical drills consist of a type of activity in which learners are asked to use a correct grammatical form to complete the activity. In mechanical drills, it is not necessary to know the meaning of the language to complete the drill; learners need only pay attention to grammatical cues? for example, the subject-verb agreement? in order to arrive at a correct answer. The following example illustrates a typical mechanical drill aimed at supporting students? learning of the Italian **passato prossimo.** The English is provided here and throughout this article, but would not typically be available to the learner.

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***Example 2 Mechanical drill for the I talian*** *passato prossimo****.***

Fill in the Blank with the **passato prossimo** in parentheses.

1. Franceso \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ (nascere) a Roma. [Francesco \_\_\_(to be born) in Rome.]

2. Giovanna\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ (giocare) a Roma. [Giovanna \_\_\_(to play) in Rome]

3. Il giocatore brasiliano\_\_\_\_\_\_ (scrivere) un libro. [The brazilian player\_\_\_(to write) a book.]

In the above example, learners are asked to fill in the blank with the correct form of the given verb. There is no need for learners to read the entire sentence nor to understand its meaning. They need only look at the subject to discover the person/number (1st, 2nd, 3rd singular / plural) required then supply the form of the verb. Here, learners arrive at the answer by following a formula rather than by understanding the language. In short, learners simply mechanically plug in a form. For this reason such activities are called mechanical drills. These kinds of drills are thought to train learners how to produce a form correctly, however, it has been found that when learners need to comprehend the form when heard or read, these same learners are unable to do so (cf. Benati & Lee, 2008; Cadierno, 1995; Cheng 2004; Leeser and DeMil, 2013; VanPatten and Cadierno, 1993; VanPatten & Wong, 2004).

In the case of meaningful drills, as the name suggests, learners must pay attention to the meaning while also producing the correct form. This type of drill does require learners to understand the meaning of the language in order to interpret or answer correctly, and ideally, answer with the correct grammar. Below is an example one might find in a beginning Italian course.

***Example 3 Meaningful Drill***

Fill in the blanks with the correct verb, using the **passato prossimo**.

andare [to go] cadere [to fall] fare [to do] parlare [to speak]

1. Mara, cosa \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ questo fine settimana? [Mara, what \_\_\_\_\_\_\_ this weekend?]

2. Io \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ a Lucca. [I \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ to Lucca]

Here, learners must select the verb that best fits the blank then use the correct form of that verb. As a result, at first glance, it would seem as though learners are learning to communicate. However, although they must know the meaning of the verb in order to choose correctly, they do not need to know the meaning of the **passato prossimo.** In other words, this is a case of understanding the vocabulary and then mechanically putting the verb in the correct form. Learners do not necessarily know that they are using the past tense; they just know that something called the **passato prossimo** is used and they can look up the form on a verb chart. It is possible that the student could think this tense represents the present or future; what is clear is there is nothing in the activity that indicates that the learner knows anything more than the meaning of the verb by supplying its form.

Another common type of meaningful drill asks students to answer questions. These could be about the class, their life, etc. The example below uses the Italian **imperfetto.**

***Example 5 Communicative drill***

Use the prompts to ask your partner what s/he did yesterday using the **passato prossimo**. **Modello: guardare una partita di calcio** [Model: to watch a soccer game]

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Student 1: Ieri, **Hai guardato una partita di calcio?** [Yesterday, did you watch a soccer game?]

Student 2: **Sí, ho guardato una partita di calcio./**

**No, no ho guardato una partita di calcio.** [Yes, I watched a soccer game./No, I didn't watch a soccer game.]

2. leggere un libro [read a book]

Once again, at first glance it appears that students are communicating. After all, they are being asked to answer a question posed by a fellow learner. However, upon closer inspection, learners do not, in fact, need to understand what their partner has said. For example, if the above drill is modified using nonsense words, learners are still able to complete the activity:

***Example 6 Communicative drill with nonsense words***

**Esempio: \* lardare una partita di \* lalcio** (Example: to \***lardare** a \*lalcio game)

Student 1: Ieri, **hai \* lardato una partita di \* lalcio?** [Yesterday, did you lardato a lalcio game?]

Student 2: **Sí, ho \* lardato una partita di \* lalcio./**

**No, no ho \* lardato una partita di \* lalcio.** [Yes, I lardato a lalcio game/ No, I didn't lardare a lalcio game.]

There is no exchange of meaning in the above drill and therefore, it is simply mechanical practice of the verb form. Comprehension of the meaning is not required and therefore, communication is not taking place. In short, these type of communicative drills do not foster communication whatsoever. In the case of all the aforementioned drills they are not in line with what is known about SLA. First, learners are asked to produce language before they are asked to comprehend it. The ability to connect form to meaning is not practiced and therefore, learners do not gain the skills necessary to understand and speak the language. As Wong and Van Patten (2003)

1. vedere un documentario [see a documentary]

have suggested, "there is sufficient evidence to discard mechanical drills from instructional practice"(p. 403). However, in the years since Wong and Van Patten published this article, there has been little change in the methodology of language teaching presented in beginning and intermediate language-learning textbooks even though they purport to support communicative language teaching. As such, contrary to the richly communicative activities many textbooks state they provide learners and educators, drills continue to be the most prevalent types of activities being offered (DeMil, 2013; DeMil & Aubry, 2013; Fernández, 2011).

*Output*

Output is defined as language that learners produce by writing or speaking that has a communicative intent (Gass & Mackey, 2015). Output allows learners to practice fluency and discover what they lack in linguistic knowledge (Swain and Lapkin, 1995; VanPatten, 2003). During a communicative activity, as Lee and VanPatten (2003) point out, "it is important **not** to mistake 'getting or exchanging information' as the purpose of the task?(p.62); what is significantly more important is that ?[l]earners will not only get and exchange information--they will **do something with it**." (p. 62). In the analysis of textbooks, while many did provide follow up steps, (e.g. decide who in the group is more active/who had a busier weekend/who did an activity more recently) these questions don't solve the core problem: demonstration that the original exchange of information was understood? Consider the following example:

***Example 7****:* ***Output*** Now that you have spoken in groups, complete the sentence below:

**Il mio compagno/La mia compagna (Nome) era (molto /non molto) sano/a la settimana scorsa perché (lui/lei)...**

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[My classmate (m/f) was (very/not very) healthy last week because (he/she)...]

....**ha cucinato un pasto al giorno** [...cooked one meal a day.]

**...ha preparato il pranzo a casa.** [...made lunch at home.]

**...ha ordinato acqua a cena.** [...ordered water at dinner.]

**...ha usato spesso sale e pepe.** [...used a lot of salt and pepper.]

**...ha mangiato molti cibi grassi.** [...ate a lot of fatty foods.]

In the example above, learners can only complete the sentence if they have understood the information from their conversation partner, unlike questions such as "who was busier?? or "what do you have in common?", and so forth, that simply allow learners to ?plug-in? any information. This step helps learners demonstrate that they have understood the input from their conversation partner. This is output. (Lee and VanPatten, 2003).

*Input, Output and drills*

Input activities aim to train learners to correctly interpret new linguistic information before learning to produce. This input may help in restructuring the underlying developing linguistic system, and therefore allow learners to correctly interpret and produce language (VanPatten 2003). As can be seen in the Figure 1 below, mechanical drills begin with step III of the process of language acquisition, and skip over steps I and II. Input activities, on the other hand, provide meaningful input first in order to begin at what VanPatten describes as the first step in the second language acquisition process.

*Input Drills*

*? ?*

I II III

input > intake > developing system > output

I = input processing

II = accommodation, restructuring

III = access, production strategies

***Figure 1. Set of Processes in L2 Acquisition* (VanPatten, 2004)**

Many studies offer evidence that input activities are more effective than drills in training learners to comprehend written and spoken language, and as effective as drills in training learners to produce written and spoken language (cf., Benati, 2001; Benati, 2004; Benati & Lee, 2008; Cadierno, 1995; Cheng 2004; Lee & Benati, 2007; Leeser & DeMil, 2013; VanPatten & Cadierno, 1993; VanPatten & Oikennon, 1996; VanPatten & Wong, 2004). Learners trained with output perform at least as well as those trained with input activities (Benati, 2001, 2005; Farley, 2001; Farley, 2004; Morgan-Short and Bowden, 2006). In short, activities that ask learners to comprehend and communicate improve overall comprehension and production of the language better than mechanical drills.

*Previous Studies on Grammar Presentation in L2 Textbooks*

Numerous studies, including Walz (1989), Lally (1998), Ellis, (2002), Aski (2003), Fernández (2011), DeMil (2013), and DeMil and Aubry (2013) present evidence that the majority of textbooks used to teach English as a Second Language, French, and Spanish continue to employ mechanical drills more than any other type of activity. Walz (1989) noted the so-called communication activities in the textbooks under examination in his

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study were simply mechanical drills disguised in a communicative context, such as sports, home, or school, and recommended that exercises should lead to more communicative situations, starting with interpreting language, and argued that activities should be communicative exercises rather than mechanical drills. Of the six beginning French textbooks Lally (1998) examined, half had a preponderance of mechanical drills. Likewise, Fernández (2011) found that in six top-selling elementary Spanish university-level textbooks, the prominent features were explicit information and controlled production practice (i.e., communicative drills). Only half of the textbooks provided input as main activities. According to Fernández, "at least half of the textbooks [? ] overlook what is currently know in SLA: the central role of input in the development of an L2 grammar" (Fernández, 2011, p. 165). DeMil (2013) reviewed seven intermediate Spanish texts and the activities used to practice the Spanish preterite. The results of that study demonstrated that the majority of the texts use mechanical drills to provide learners with practice using the target structure. Finally, DeMil and Aubry (2013) examined the exercises used to practice the **passé composé** in six post-secondary introductory French texts. Of the six texts, only three of the 65 activities included input that the learner was asked to interpret. Of the 65 activities, across all textbooks, only three provided opportunities for learners to produce output, i.e. asked learners to demonstrate communication.

*Method*

Recent editions of six introductory Italian postsecondary textbooks were selected; those selected are published by major North American publishing companies (Cengage, McGraw Hill, Prentice Hall, Vista, Wiley). It is our sense, from a perusal of the syllabi of

introductory Italian courses at several well-known institutions across North America, that most postsecondary introductory Italian courses are adopting at least one of the textbooks examined in this study. As such, we submit that the textbooks analyzed here provide a representative sample. The textbooks included in the study were:

Aski, J. & Musumeci, D. (2014). **Avanti: Beginning Italian.** New York: McGraw-Hill.

Branciforte, S. & Di Fabio, E. (2011). **Parliamo Italiano.** Danvers, NJ: Wiley.

Cozzarelli, J. M. (2011). **Sentieri: Attraverso l'Italia contemporanea.** Boston: Vista.

Italiano, F. & Marchegiani, I. (2012). **Percorsi: L'Italia attraverso la lingua e la cultura.** Boston: Prentice Hall.

Merlonghi, F.C., Merlonghi, F., Tursi, J. & O'Connor, B. (2012). **Oggi in Italia: A first course in Italian.** Boston: Cengage.

Melucci, D. & Tognozzi, E. (2015). **Piazza.** Stamford, CT: Cengage.

These texts were published between 2011 and 2015 and all describe themselves as using the communicative approach, promoting communicative competence, or as containing communicative activities. The activities used to teach the Italian **passato prossimo** and the **imperfetto** were counted and categorized. Activity type was broken down into the following categories: input activity, output activity, mechanical drill, meaningful drill, or communicative drill.

*Results*

As Table 1 and 2 illustrate, the six (6) texts included a total of **70 passato prossimo** activities and 39 **imperfetto** activities. Of these 109 activities, 39 were activities in which meaning was necessary to complete the activity: 5 were input activities, 29 were

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meaningful drills, and 5 were output activities

*Table 1:* ***Analysis of passato prossimo Activities*** .

*Table 2:* ***Analysis of imperfetto Activities***

*Discussion*

As Table 1 and 2 suggest, the main type of activities used to practice the Italian **passato prossimo** and the **imperfetto** in these six

textbooks were mechanical drills devoid of meaning. Of all six textbooks, only three provided activities used with input to teach both the **passato prossimo** and the **imperfetto**, and only one text, Avanti, offered any output activities. Drills, as the literature suggests, do not lead learners to comprehend or produce meaningful language. Furthermore, learners who work with input and output to comprehend and communicate significantly outperform learners who practice grammar with mechanical drills (cf., Benati, 2001; Benati, 2004; Benati & Lee, 2008; Cadierno, 1995; Cheng 2004; Lee & Benati, 2007; Leeser & DeMil, 2013; VanPatten & Cadierno, 1993; VanPatten & Oikennon, 1996; VanPatten & Wong, 2004).

*Limitations*

This study is limited in scope to activities that are presented to practice the **passato prossimo** and the **imperfetto**. These two grammatical topics may be only a partial picture of the types of activities used in textbooks. However, it is usually the case that in a textbook, the activities used to practice one grammatical structure are typically adopted throughout the textbook. It is very unlikely that a textbook would present traditional mechanical drills for two grammatical forms and switch to meaningful input and output activities in the other parts of the text.

Second, this study strictly defines communication as asking learners to interpret information and demonstrate comprehension. No claims can be made here about how educators present the grammatical topics broached in the textbooks. Though experienced educators may adapt and modify grammar activities to create communicative opportunities for their learners, an activity itself cannot be called communicative unless the performance of the activity demonstrates

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comprehension.

*Future Research*

In the future, an interesting continuation of this line of research could examine to what extent instructors are adapting mechanical activities to make them communicative and whether these adaptations are actually resulting in communicative activities. In other words, are instructors able to make the necessary changes to ensure comprehension of language (input), meaningful production (output) when using a practice activity that does not provide these steps? What is the impact of these strategies on student learning? If instructors are not adapting activities, why not? Are there barriers impeding them from making these adaptations? If so, what are those barriers?

*Conclusion*

The results of the present study highlight that activities that promote communication continue to be largely absent from beginning language textbooks at the postsecondary level in spite of marketing by publishers suggesting otherwise. It is our hope that as a result of greater awareness among second language educators and textbook writers that grammar drills will be excluded from pedagogical materials in order to make room for activities rooted in research-supported methodologies such as processing instruction and output instruction, so that true communication can be supported and practiced in the L2 classroom.

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*THE EFFECT OF A PRONUNCIATION TOOL FOR ENGLISH SPEAKERS LEARNING SPANISH*

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*ABSTRACT*

This study addresses the reality that a learner?s pronunciation maybe an obstacle to the learner being understood. Spanish is practically phonetic. In other words, each vowel possesses a single sound. Vowel placement in a word does not alter its sound. The English speaker, due to his linguistic formation tends to blur the sounds of the vowels, thus sending an unclear message. One-hundred and eight Beginning I Spanish students at a Florida University participated in this study from 2013 through 2017. This study indicated that there was a decrease in vowel error production ranging from 20% to 47%. The learners learned to auto-correct, gained confidence, and volunteered more to speak and read. These findings provide evidence to further support the implementation of this pronunciation tool in Beginning Spanish I. By employing this tool, the learners may have experienced an improvement.

*Review of Related Literature*

Teaching pronunciation in Beginning Spanish I has been taught implicitly and explicitly. There are instructors who group words together based on practicing a certain sound or sounds. J. Butt and C. Benjamin (1994) grouped together /j/ words: de*j*é, el *j*ersey, la bu*j*ía and /a/ words: l*a* c*a*lle, el coñ*a*c, n*a*tural, el s*a*c*a*corchos. Azevedo (1992) reminds instructors that the vowel sounds in Spanish are sonorous. As a rule, the Spanish vowels are subject to a minimum in sound variation. The written grapheme and its sound are presented as a unit, not separate. Terrel & Cargil (1979). A Spanish vowel always voices its presence, regardless where it is in a word unlike English. There are rules that govern the vowel sounds in English. For example: 1) when a one-syllable word has one consonant between two vowels, the first vowel has a long sound and the second one is silent (VCV) as in the words ate, kite, cute, ripe, rope; 2) a word that is vowel, vowel, consonant (VVC), the first vowel is long and the second one is silent as in eat, float, reel, jail, blue, lie. Each rule has its exceptions. A part from there being a long and short sound for each vowel, each one has a schwa /? /. For /a/ the /? / is heard in

*a*round; for /e/ nak*e*d; /i/ typ*i*cal; /o/ gall*o*p; /u/ imp*e*tus. The fore mentioned rules plus the schwa /? / pose concerns for the native English speaker learning Spanish. Vowel distortions are possible; therefore, words are confused as in *cosa* and *casa* if the learner produces a schwa /? /. If the English speaker realizes that the vowel sounds in Spanish are pure then he is able to re-produce them. Piske, Mackey & Flige (2001) have demonstrated that pronunciation instruction has a significant elect on L2 production accuracy and Kissling ((2014) concurs that classroom based research has focused on production. This may take the form of grouping words together.

*Statement of the Problem*

As a Spanish Instructor, I have realized over the years that a learner?s pronunciation can be an obstacle to being understood in Spanish. That being said, it does not matter how long a learner engages in the study of Spanish if the listener cannot discern the words due to the miss pronunciation of the vowels. In Spanish, the grapheme and the sound cannot be separated Terrel & Cargil (1979). After attempting various pronunciation activities: 1) grouping words with the same sound structure,

2) demonstrating the differences between the vowels in English and Spanish, and 3) continuous modeling, it became clear to me that I had to employ a more direct and deliberate method.

*Significance of the Study*

It is important to aid the learner not only in obtaining vocabulary, syntactical structures and culture, but foremost to aid the learner in pronouncing the vowels clearly and concisely in all of these contexts. The findings of this study would add a new strategy in supporting the learner.

*Research Question*

Does the implementation of this pronunciation tool have any effect on the pronunciation of English learners who engage in learning Spanish?

*Hypothesis*

Knowledge of the A, E, I, O, U pronunciation tool, consonant vowel (CV) combinations, in Spanish does effect the learner?s ability to speak and or read with greater accuracy.

*Methodology*

This completely anonymous study was conducted at a Florida University in beginning Spanish I classes, SPN 1120C. From 2013 through 2017 one hundred and eight learners participated by recording a series of sentences on a CD the first week of class and then again the thirteenth week. The learners recorded the following sentences that I chose from **Mi Manuelito** by Vásquez-Terrones (2009).

1. Camina Pepe camina. Tu mama cocinó la comida. Tu mamá conoce como come Lalo.

2. La gatita juega a la pelota y una perrita mira y mira la pelotita.

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3. Dame la zapatilla derecha. Ya me puse una zapatilla. Mi zapato tiene suela de cuero, pero mi zapatilla tiene suela de goma. Corro, y corro y no caeré.

4. Le dije a Pepe que me diese ese libro rojo prohibido. No quiso.

5. Una figura atlética yace en la playa y mira como juega una flaca paloma plumosa.

6. Vivir carca de ese parque adornado de una flor rara como la orquídea era una forma de tener una vida apartada de la ruidosa carretera. No hay ruido aquí ni allí.

7. Por fin recordé la tonta pregunta de tu querido hermano Juan. Estoy pensando que quiso decir.

8. Contemplar la noche caer fue una trampa para mí.

9. A ningún animal se la hace fácil pasear por el temor de terminar en una celda.

10. De pronto reinicia la caminata. Ágilmente cabalgamos por el rústico camino disfrutando del paisaje agreste.

The learner needs these elements in order to be able to speak and read aloud Vásquez-Terrones (2009). **Silabario de San Miguel,** is the classic version of the alphabet method Freeman & freeman (2006). This method is CV combinations. Spanish is easily divided into syllables and the learners realize early on that when these CV combinations are put together they create words. After the first recording, the learners were given the A, E, I, O, U, pronunciation tool, which is the CV and with several graphemes CVV combinations:

Along with this tool, there was a power point so that each learner could listen to the correct pronunciation of each consonant, vowel

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*Table 3: Decrease in Error Production*

combination (CV). The learners implemented this tool throughout the semester. When a learner miss pronounced a CV, the instructor repeated each letter then gave the sound for this CV and the learner repeated the correct sound.

The total number of vowel sounds in the series of sentences are as follows: /a/ 122; /e/ 86; /i/ 52; /o/ 63; /u/ 25.

After listening to each CD, the number of errors for each vowel sound is documented. The same procedure is repeated for the second set of CDs. The difference between the first recordings and the second ones is calculated in order to measure the increase or decrease in errors.

*RESULTS*

Through the collection of recordings for one hundred eight learners of Beginning Spanish One, a better understanding of the implementation of the pronunciation tool was achieved. The data was divided into two groups: (a) prior to the implementation; and (b) after the implementation. The following tables indicate the total number of times a vowel was mispronounced.

*Table 1: Week 1*

*Table 2: Week 13* In order to perceive the impact these numbers illustrate, the following table indicates the percentage decrease in error production between week one and week thirteen.

*Conclusion*

This paper has explored data on the implementation of a pronunciation tool in a Beginning Spanish I classroom as a direct strategy for aiding the learners? to speak and read with more accuracy. The data shown emphasizes that the implementation of this direct approach from the onset of the course allows students to comprehend the consonant-vowel relationships. These relationships form words when they link together. The research question asked, ?Does the implementation of this pronunciation tool have any effect on the pronunciation of English learners who engage in learning Spanish?? The data clearly confirms that this tool has a positive effect on the English learners who engages in learning Spanish. The hypothesis wanted to explore if the A, E, I, O, U pronunciation tool, consonant vowel (CV) combinations, had any effect the learner?s ability to speak and or read with greater accuracy. The decrease in error production ranges from 20% to 47% indicating that the learners speak and read with greater accuracy. If course designers and instructors implement this tool from the beginning they can provide learners with the opportunity to auto-correct, gain confidence, and volunteer more to speak and read with greater accuracy.

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*Mission Statement*

The Florida Foreign Language Journal is the official academic organ of the Florida

Foreign Language Association. Its objective is to serve as a vehicle for expression by

teachers, students and the greater general public who have an interest in furthering the

instruction and knowledge of foreign languages. The journal seeks articles, reviews,

notes and comments concerning any aspect of foreign language acquisition. The era

where educational funding is often limited, where foreign, immigrant, and migrant

students seek instructional equity, and where a greater number of students are desirous of

learning a foreign language, it seems imperative to have such a journal. The journal

reaches out especially to those already teaching a foreign language as well as those who

are preparing for such a career. The demands on teachers are overwhelming today. There

is a plethora of methodological approaches, technical apparatuses, and multi-faceted

textbooks available, amidst a variety of instructions with diverse milieus and attitudes

toward foreign language instruction. Such an environment creates a daunting challenge

to practitioners of foreign language instruction. The goal of FFLJ is a modest one; it is to

serve as a sounding board and a reference point for those who teach and learn foreign

languages. It is hoped that the journal will help foreign language enthusiasts and

professionals form a community that shares its concerns, discoveries, and successes of

issue in the foreign language domain. It is further hoped that our voices will become

more numerous and ring more loudly as we proceed through what promises to be a

century of challenge and opportunity for foreign languages. Our emphasis will be

fostering better learning conditions and results for our students and teachers. FFLJ urges

all readers and participants to become ardent advocates to further and safeguard foreign

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1. Manuscripts must appeal to the instructional, administrative, or research interests of

foreign/second language educators at K-16 levels of instruction.

2. Be substantive and present new ideas or new applications of information related to

current trends and teaching in the language field.

3. Be well written, clearly organized, and carefully proofed.

4. Include a complete reference list at the end.

5. Be formatted according to guidelines in the Publication Manual of the American

Psychological Association, 5th Ed. (2001). APA Style Resource.

6. Be no longer than 12-15 double-spaced pages in 12 pt. Times New Roman typeface,

with 11⁄2 inch margins, black text on white paper.

7. Be sent in triplicate (3 copies are necessary for review purposes).

8. Be submitted with no authors' names indicated (for review purposes).

9. Include a cover letter with the name, postal and e-mail addresses, and phone number of

the first author (or other contact person) clearly noted.

10. Include an abstract of no more than 150 words.

11. Be sent with a biographical statement of 50 words or fewer for each author, including

information on current job or title, institution, degrees held, professional experience, and

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12. Be sent in both hard copy and electronic formats. The electronic version must be

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13. Include any figures and tables in camera-ready format. Photographs, graphics, figures

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