1. How can perspectives from Applied Linguistic Historiography improve our understanding of innovation?

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Abstract

As an emerging interdisciplinary, plurilingual and intercultural field (McLelland & Smith, 2018), the History of Language Learning and Teaching – and associated considerations of Applied Linguistic Historiography (Smith, 2016) – can be expected to provide useful perspectives on *innovation*: how, when and why to attempt it and how to sustain it, but also, from a relatively philosophical perspective, how to define and assess it. Innovation, after all, is an activity, or a construct, which is inextricably bound up with views of the past, whether imagined or well-researched – a past seen to be in need of replacement or at least reconstruction. Researching the past can, indeed, give rise to considerations of whether – and, if so, why and how – innovation occurs, or is seen to be required at all. In this introduction to a book devoted to historical perspectives on innovation, we consider three specific ways in which Applied Linguistic Historiography can contribute to a revised understanding of innovation in language teaching and we identify ways in which the chapters in the book shed new light on its nature, causes, effects and rationale.

Why are Historical Perspectives on Innovation Needed?

By adopting a historical perspective, this edited collection of papers takes a new look at a key concept in the field of language education and (educational) applied linguistics, that of *innovation*. The nature of educational innovations is, as we shall see, more complex and problematic than may appear at first sight, but, provisionally, the OECD's frequently cited characterization of them as 'fresh ways of meeting outstanding challenges' (OECD, 2017: 17) can suffice as a working definition.

As *ELT Journal*'s privileging of 'innovation' for repeated treatment in its Key Concepts in ELT feature has shown (Wedell, 2009a; 2022), innovation is a highly valued and frequently invoked notion in the globalized field of (English) language learning and teaching – indeed, in this field, 'innovation' and 'innovative' are 'hooray words' (Harber & Davies, 1998: 110) – that is, words 'that evoke a cheer and which seem incontestably Good Things' (*ibid.*) – with affinities to others like 'current', 'new', 'progress', 'online', 'digital' and 'technology'. 'Innovation' is invoked in international journal and book series titles (most notably, that of the journal *Innovation in Language Learning and Teaching*, published by Taylor & Francis since 2007), celebrated in awards ceremonies (specifically, the British Council's ELTons Innovations Awards (British Council, n.d.), held annually since 2003) and frequently sloganized (Schmenk, Breidbach & Küster, 2018). Being innovative is used to justify both large-scale governmental reform efforts (see Wedell, 2022) and commercial sales of learning materials and systems worldwide, especially, perhaps in the ELT/TESOL field. Indeed, one of the globally best-selling ELT coursebooks – *Cutting Edge* (published by Pearson) – celebrates being innovative even in its title.

Given this prevalence, indeed dominance, of the notion of innovation – and of practices termed

innovative – in the field of language learning and teaching, the concept should be subjected to serious study within applied linguistics; at least, this is what we argue for in this introduction. Rather than positioning such study within the existing areas of 'management of innovation', or 'diffusion of innovations', which tend to take needs for innovation as given and investigate how best to implement educational reform, we adopt a relatively critical, or at least 'neutral' position, hoping to indicate that historical research can lead to new ('innovative'!) perspectives which may or may not support the notion of innovation. This is necessary, from our experience as teacher educators, because language teachers around the world seem to be under continual pressure to adopt innovations which come from outside their own contexts and from the 'top' down, via ministry directives and/or via academic and commercial blandishments. As Wedell (2022: 272) notes, the importance of the topic lies partly in the fact that large-scale innovations, specifically national curriculum reforms, 'occur very frequently, affect very large numbers of people, and (to date) remain extremely difficult to implement successfully'. If only because of the stress for teachers and financial outlay for governments which are involved in such reforms, the topic of innovation deserves to be fully investigated, not just to see how reforms can be better implemented but with regard to what motivates innovation, whether it is appropriate, and what it involves – all on the basis of reasoned research, analysis, deconstruction and critique.

As a starting-point for this endeavour, we note that '[h]ooray words such as […] "progress"' may mask any analysis of who exactly owns, chooses or makes progress' (Harber & Davies, 1998: 111). In other words, the interests served by the promotion of progress, newness and innovation need to be uncovered. As Wedell (cited above) notes, there is in fact a developing literature which investigates effects of curricular reform in relation to the motives of agents and which, in part, has ascribed failures of top-down reform to the 'hubris' of reformers (Henrichsen (1989) is one early example; Holliday (1994) another). We advocate an increase in *historical* research in this critical area, arguing that this is potentially useful in the following ways:

Firstly, via historical research, the present-day fixation on innovation can itself be deconstructed and shown to be contingent and not immutable. Investigations can also be carried out into how the promotion of innovation has arisen in the past, contributing potentially to a rethinking of the foundations of and the theory of language education (cf. Stern (1983), in particular pp. 75–116) while de-emphasizing the need to be new for newness' sake – an argument we develop further in the section titled 'How Did Innovation Rise to Prominence?' below.

Secondly, adopting a historical perspective can take us to a deeper level of reflection on the nature of 'innovation' itself, which often tends to be viewed uncritically in the language teaching field – see 'Characterizing and Identifying Innovation' below.

Thirdly, in the light of concerns surrounding the common failure of top–down innovations, there is potential for historical research to have a practical value in the field of 'managing innovation', in other words for lessons to be drawn, with circumspection, from the historical record. See 'Managing Innovation with Historical Sense' below.

As we shall show, the concept of 'innovation' necessarily relies on views of the past for its meaning. But *research* into the past is generally absent from the fields of applied linguistics and language education, meaning that the status of innovation remains unquestioned. This is despite arguments by, for example, Stern (*ibid.*) that rigorous historical research should underpin the theorization of language teaching. One explanation for the continuing relative dearth of scholarly work in this area could be that a historical approach which does not itself bolster new ideas (setting them off from what is out of date and old-fashioned) has itself never been in favour precisely *due to* or *in line with* the prevalent disapproval of the past and fixation

on newness, progress and innovation that we have been indicating. In attempting to counteract this situation by extending work in the area of Applied Linguistic Historiography (Smith, 2016), this book follows on from other publications which have, relatively recently, been seeking to establish History of Language Learning and Teaching ('HoLLT') on a firmer footing, including McLelland and Smith (2014, 2018), Smith and McLelland (2018), and Doff and Smith (2022). By means of the present book, produced as an AILA Research Network on History of Language Learning and Teaching (HoLLT.net) project, we hope that the status of historical research will become better established within the field of applied linguistics, informed by desiderata like the following (Smith, 2016; see also, Giesler, 2021; Doff & Smith, 2022):

– a rigorous examination of primary sources rather than over-reliance on secondary sources;

– a focus on practice, not just on what is seen to be 'ideal'; i.e., a focus on *impacts* in/on practice, not just apparent abstract 'influence' of ideas and theories;

– 'grounded' history: looking at the sources of ideas/innovations in particular contexts of production and, when they are implemented, assessing their effects in specified contexts.

How Did Innovation Rise to Prominence?

The idea that the history of language teaching is essentially a linear and teleological history of *methods* has been critiqued by, for example, Hunter and Smith (2012) and Howatt and Smith (2014) for the 'global' history of English language teaching, and by Giesler (2015) specifically for the German context. Historical research can play a similarly deconstructive role vis-a-vis 'innovation'.

As with 'method', the whole concept of innovation might be seen as a western construct, mainly – though not exclusively – founded in the teleological 'idea of progress' (Nisbet, 1994), whose dominance began to be established in the early Enlightenment (put simply, this is the idea that

'mankind has advanced in the past […] – is now advancing, and will continue to advance through the foreseeable future' (*ibid.*: 4–5)). Philosophers like Voltaire and Kant argued that science and reason were the driving forces behind both technological and societal progress. In making this argument, these thinkers built on even older ideas by further developing the teleological framework of early Christianity and individual ideas from ancient Greece (*ibid.*). What needs to be stressed here is that, historically, the idea of continual progress is a rather maverick conception when set against the cyclical views prevalent, for example, in ancient Chinese, Babylonian, Hindu, Greek or Roman philosophies (cf. Fay, 1947). Whereas Confucianism and Taoism venerate the past, the 'book religions' based on Judaism refer to a teleological worldview that addresses an idealized future yet to come. Throughout the world, modernization has often been modelled in a 'western' way in recent centuries; indeed, the worldwide spread of notions of progress and innovation – as well as the historical export of 'innovative products' – has strong connections with 19th–20th-century (and earlier) western imperialism.

The two 20th-century superpowers – the USA and the USSR – were both founded on their own specific ideas of technological and societal progress. In post-war Eastern Europe (and in left-wing intellectual circles of the west), a Marxist view of progress towards classless socialism and communism predominated (cf. Sayers, 2018). At the same time in the USA, the ideology/myth of 'American Technological Sublime' (Nye, 1994) merged conceptions of natural wonder and mechanical triumph with religious and moral improvement. First (especially from European migrants' perspective), the 'sublime' landscape was read as a 'second scripture' from a Calvinist viewpoint (*ibid*: 29); later, this was extended to technological achievements like the railroad system, thus defining the American nation through progress:

As technological achievements became central […], the American sublime fused with

religion, nationalism, and technology, diverging in practice significantly from European

theory. It ceased to be a philosophical idea and became submerged in practice. (*ibid.*:

43)

Such a view was (and is) not limited to the USA and has been exported as a by-product of

American cultural imperialism (see Tomlison, 1991), as well as through the adoption of US

policies as, for example, in the case of the OECD's influential educational policies favouring

'innovation' and accountability. [1] OECD views are themselves clearly derived from the

economic realm – initially, as part of Cold War competition with the USSR (see Tröhler, 2011:

144ff.), and, later, disseminated as part of globalization (*ibid:* 151ff.). Indeed, the fields of

language education and economics seem to overlap in the area of innovation: references to

newness, progress and innovation are often found precisely when teaching methods or

textbooks are marketed and advertised, in other words promoted for profit-making purposes.

This constitutes necessary background to the fact that 'progressivism' informs prevalent

conceptions of language teaching history, which tends to be presented as a kind of linear,

progressivist narrative, characterized by successive revolutions or paradigm shifts (e.g. Larsen-

Freeman & Anderson, 2011; Richards & Rodgers, 2014). In this view, methods are presented

as discrete packages or recipes, one by one being 'stigmatized as inadequate and dysfunctional'

(Giesler, 2015: 146) as innovation takes its course (cf. Hunter & Smith, 2012). Besse (2014:

42) ascribes the development of this view in particular to the period between 1960 and 2000:

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[1] Admittedly, there had also been more conservative notions in Europe, set against scientific
progress and the accompanying destruction of nature – as in 19th-century Romanticism (cf.
Levin, 1966) or 20th-century 'Limits to Growth' as propagated by the Club of Rome
(Meadows *et. al.*, 1972).

Entre 1960 et 2000 s'est développé dans les pays occidentaux un discours sur les méthodes pour enseigner / faire apprendre les langues étrangères ou secondes […] qui adopte souvent un point de vue diachronique, concevant l'évolution méthodologique comme une succession de méthodes spécifiques et supposées distinctes qui s'inscrirait dans un progrès plus ou moins continu.[2]

Such a view has, of course, been critiqued. Besse (*ibid.*) himself mentions the fact that it neglects the institutional contexts within which ideas emerge, presenting them as universally relevant, and he also indicates that ideas are sometimes not as new as they seem, a point to which we return below. Hunter and Smith (2012) present similar views, building on Pennycook's earlier (1989) post-modern deconstruction of the myth of continual methodological progress. Pennycook himself refers approvingly to Kelly's (1969) view that the stock of ideas available to language teachers has not fundamentally changed, despite appearances of progress; indeed, the idea that history goes in cycles – or shifts according to swings of a pendulum – has, perhaps, gained some currency since the heyday of 'scientifically based' audiolingual, audio-visual and situational language teaching in the 1960s. Nevertheless, in spite of post-modern critiques and arguments for post-method pedagogy (e.g. Kumaravadivelu, 2006), the field as a whole still seems quite firmly wedded to a teleological view of continual progress involving – and requiring – continuous improvement and innovation.

Indeed, in the absence of much historical research in our field, there have been few concrete suggestions for replacement of the still-dominant progressivist account of the past (and implied future). Use of the inadequate metaphors of pendulum shift and 'reinventing the wheel' / 'going

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[2] [Between 1960 and 2000, a discourse on language teaching methods developed in western countries […] which often adopts a diachronic point of view, conceiving of methodological evolution as a succession of specific methods which are held to be distinct and part of a process of more or less continuous progress.]

round in circles' may tend to betray a certain world-weary cynicism ('*Plus ça change …*') without providing guidance as to where appropriate ideas *can* come from or when they should be introduced; even post-method pedagogy itself (*ibid.*) can be seen to be predicated on an over-simplified conception of the past it is meant to replace.[3]

Showing the limitations of progressivism by indicating historically that supposed innovations are not as new as assumed is, indeed, one possible function of historical research, in a deconstructive mode. However, a major practical contribution to reconfiguring the field is unlikely to come if historians of language teaching confine themselves to erudite put-downs of claims to newness, since such critiques can reinforce another myth about the past – that nothing new is ever invented. Things do change, of course. New ideas may seem similar to practices in the past (see next section) but they are reconfigured, in conditions and contexts which are never the same as before. Thus, Musumeci (1997) points out that Communicative Language Teaching is not as new as supposed, given that in Renaissance grammar schools pupils engaged in conversation and role-play in Latin, with explicit teaching of grammar and rote learning of word lists, characteristic of what we know as 'grammar-translation', being more of a 19th-century phenomenon. This is important to recognize, but the very different context for, and characteristics of, 20th-century CLT also deserve to be highlighted. Similarly, while Giesler (2018b) shows that combining content and language learning (known now as 'CLIL' – Content and Language Integrated Learning) is a principle that has been established over centuries and yet has been 'discovered' again and again, it is also true that this has occurred in different forms in different contexts. Work like Musumeci's and Giesler's is useful for puncturing bubbles of complacency about the novelty and superiority of current language teaching but if the dominant

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[3] As, for example, in Kumaravadivelu's (2006: 97–157) account of 'language-centred' audiolingualism giving way to 'learner-centred' communicative language teaching, itself being, seemingly, supplanted by 'learning-centred', task-based methods.

myth of continual progression (and continual need for innovation) is to be replaced, it also seems necessary for historians to show, unanachronistically, how ideas and practices were *not* the same as those we have now, however similar-seeming. Cultivating understanding and appreciation of the past *on its own terms* (not simply as a precursor to better-known ideas or practices) must surely be the main means to counteract progressivism in our field. In sum, showing the limitations of progressivism via historical research can open up new possibilities, but perhaps new perspectives can only be developed via research which avoids anachronism and shows the difference between present and past ideas/practices, and the alternative validity of the latter.

In this connection, it also seems helpful to establish the difference between *radical* and *incremental* innovation (cf. Grandstrand, 1994). In language education, supposedly radical innovations are often termed 'paradigm shifts' or 'turns' – like, for example, the emergence of audiolingualism, communicative language teaching, task-based language teaching or intercultural language teaching (Schmenk, *et al.*, 2018: 3). A 'procession-of-methods' view of the past (Hunter & Smith, 2012) is connected with 'sloganization' in language education discourse (Schmenk *et. al.*, 2018), whereby new generations of language teaching theorists continually aim to distinguish themselves from their predecessors. In reality, though, incremental rather than radical change is to be expected in (language) education *practice*, as is well-expressed in Tyack and Cuban's (1995) notion of 'tinkering towards Utopia'. In many cases, self-branded slogans (Schmenk *et al.*, 2018: 2) which involve notions of 'innovation', 'turn', 'paradigm shift' or 'radical change' could (and should) – via a historical perspective – more cautiously and precisely be termed 'reconfigurations' in language teaching (cf. Giesler, 2018a: 242ff; see also, Howatt and Smith (2014) on periodization as an alternative to histories of discrete methods).

Thus, as an alternative to conceptualizing language teaching as a series of revolutions brought about by innovation, a focus on 'evolution' and tradition may be productive (cf. Smith and Imura, 2004). As Giesler has shown, from a *longue durée* (Braudel, 1966) perspective on the development of English language education in German institutional contexts, only the *moyenne durée* of the 19th century was dominated by grammar-translation (cf. Musumeci (1997), cited above), with more functional or 'communicative' methods being otherwise more normal.

Other ways of breaking away from the innovation / paradigm shift perspective on history might be to explain the past instead with reference to the persistence of 'dimensions' of language teaching (Stern, 1992; Thornbury, 2011) or of a relatively unchanging 'grammar of schooling' (Tyack & Tobin, 1994) in institutional contexts. We shall consider these possibilities further in the sub-sections 'Language teaching oscillating along a continuum' and 'Adaptation in specific contexts' below.

Characterizing and Identifying Innovation

Adopting a historical perspective on innovation can, furthermore, play an ontological role, in that history enables us to characterize what innovation 'is', and can potentially lead to revised conceptualizations of what innovation needs to involve. Indeed, innovation – as, supposedly, 'something new' – can only be characterized in relation to what has gone before, so historical research should be relevant and could be useful, though it is rare.

To show the actual complexity of the notion of innovation, we might go back to the OECD's (2017: 17) characterization of educational innovations as 'fresh ways of meeting outstanding challenges'. As we have already seen, innovations presented as such may not always in fact be completely 'fresh', so a distinction needs to be made between appearance and reality of

'newness'. Additionally, to what extent are innovations always motivated by challenges – contextual needs – as opposed to other determining actors or forces? Contextual need may be an aspect of the 'face validity' of an innovation – in other words, the need to seem to be meeting a real challenge, along with seeming new, may be necessary to qualify as a *perceived* innovation at the time of conception and introduction, but *appearances* of meeting challenges are not necessarily the same thing as actual motivations or effects, just as appearances of newness can be deceptive, and new effects may not result from new ideas. So, innovation in general – or a particular innovation – can be conceived in several ways: as *intention to be new*, as *actual change in theory*, and/or as *actual change in practice*.

This already constitutes a revised, more complex conceptualization of innovation, with greater explanatory potential than is normally evident in discussions of the concept, although Malerba (2000), for example, does differentiate clearly between 'invention' (something *intended to be new* and/or an *actual change in theory*, in our formulation) and 'innovation' (corresponding with our *actual change in practice* above), the former being new ideas, technologies or scientific discoveries which only become an innovation – in Malerba's terms – once they are implemented. According to this way of thinking, ideas or products do not have to be 'new' in themselves; for him, the most important characteristic of innovation is actual change in practice. This is, indeed, consistent with the OECD's overall view that innovation involves 'significant change in […] educational practices' (Vincent-Lancrin *et. al.*, 2019: 17). Whereas the OECD relies on its own large-scale performance tests (*ibid.*: 23) to assess impact, such a view is in itself one-sided and problematic as it does not take the 'multilayered infrastructure of curriculum' (Cuban, 2013: 50ff.) into account: What is intended in curricula or textbooks, taught in classrooms, picked up, and learned by students needs to be distinguished from what students actually show in achievement tests: one can no more derive degree of actual innovation from students' performance in tests than one can from the intended curricular demands, since

both ignore the 'complexities in teaching and learning that occur daily in the black box of the classroom' (Cuban, 2013: 12).

Thus, while the above discussion implies, in the context of language education, shifting attention to the *impact* that new methods, approaches, products or processes actually have or have had on teaching practice rather than focusing on their novelty – real or imagined – and influence at a theoretical level as commonly tends to be the case, we should be very wary of the OECD's own view that innovation involves only 'significant change in educational practices' (Vincent-Lancrin *et. al*., 2019: 17, cited above) at a particular point in time. Impact can be short-lived or longer lasting, relatively superficial or involving change at a deeper level, and these aspects need to be taken account of by the historian.

In illustration of the distinctions we are suggesting, we could refer again to Musumeci's (1997) research into antecedents of the Communicative Approach in language teaching, which, like many language teaching approaches, was generally conceived to be – and was presented as – something entirely fresh (*intended to be new*) at the time of its development and promotion in the 1970s–1980s. Musumeci's monograph sets out to show that it was not as *actually new in theory* as was presented at the time (although – it should be stressed – its advocates probably thought it was), in other words that a 'communicative' form of language teaching was common in the Renaissance and was not, therefore, as new in theory as presented in the 1970s. We need to turn to other studies, however, to see whether communicative language teaching has been a successful innovation in reality – in other words, involving *actual change in practice* – and here a relatively restricted range of historical perspective seems necessary, alongside a strongly contextual focus. Within the context of UK language schools, for example, it seems clear that there was a great deal of change in practice during the 1970s and 1980s, involving the addition of a third stage of 'communicative activities' to existing structural-situational types of

presentation and practice (hence, 'P-P-P' (cf. Anderson, 2017)). However, change has not happened so fast, or has hardly happened at all, across education systems worldwide (indeed, there has often been 'tissue rejection' of intended communicative reforms, for reasons memorably analysed by Holliday (1994)). So, from the perspective of innovation as *impact* or *effect* (rather than just intention to be new or actual change in theory), the extent to which communicative language teaching has truly been an innovation can only be answered with reference to particular contexts, at particular points in recent history. Impact evaluation might reveal that a particular innovation – while apparently attractive in theory – has failed to take root, or has had only a brief or partial effect; indeed, the fact that reform projects often fail (cf. Hall, 1997) has been the starting-point for a number of publications aiming to improve the situation practically in recent years (e.g., Waters, 2009; Wedell, 2009b).

We should probably not be surprised to find, via historical research, that intended top–down or outside–in innovations have failed to take root in the past. Cuban's (2013) multi-layered model of the curriculum again provides a plausible explanation for this – the 'intended curriculum' (often conveying intended innovations) is supposed to be translated into practice by teachers who may be unwilling to change when they cannot see the relative advantage of a particular new idea or product, or when it seems to contradict well-established routines and practices. At the same time, it might be beneficial to consider why certain intended innovations do in fact have an impact on practice without, seemingly, encountering so much resistance.

Managing Innovation with Historical Sense

As highlighted above, historically oriented research has already shown that certain top–down

attempts to innovate have been *inappropriate* in the past (Holliday 1994). To our knowledge, though, within work relating to the management of innovation in language education, only Henrichsen (1989) has devoted much attention to indicating that practical lessons can be learned from the past, whether these involve smoothing the path of an innovation, changing its nature, or dispensing with innovation altogether. Indeed, as Henrichsen (*ibid.*) has shown with regard to a particular attempt to reform English teaching within a school system – the introduction of Oral Approach by American experts into Japanese schools in the late 1950s – ignoring antecedents (in this case, prior initiatives led by the British applied linguist Harold E. Palmer in the 1920s and 1930s) was one reason for the reform's overall failure. Based on this, Henrichsen (1989) builds historical investigation into his model of innovation management, proposing that '[b]y looking back into history and learning from the experiences of others […] [promoters of innovations] can avoid many problems that plagued previous campaigns' (p. 201).

As we have seen, claims to be innovative depend on assumptions about the past which may be false or at least under-researched, and which may be held as questionable or one-sided by those in 'receipt' of an innovation. If we accept that something can only be defined as innovative in relation to assumed knowledge of the past, lacking historical knowledge about what innovations have or have not been attempted or implemented in the past in a particular context seems highly problematic. At least some innovations may constitute – and may be seen by some – as old wine in new bottles, as in the case considered by Henrichsen (*ibid*.).

This case also shows how innovators undervalue the persistence of local traditions at their peril. Indeed, the lack of awareness – or deliberate ignoring – of antecedents which has tended to characterize post-World War II applied linguistics centred in western countries can be – and has been – counteracted by a certain degree of what Smith (2013) has termed 'historical sense'

among (some) teachers in countries like Japan. Lacks in context-sensitivity are often recognized as at fault in the failure of outside–in reform efforts, but perhaps the perspectives of those who have 'received' innovations at the 'taught' and 'learned' levels (Cuban, 2013) have been insufficiently recognized, with too much attention having been paid to regrets at or critiques of the intentions of reformers. Greater access to the perceptions and voices of those directly involved in past efforts to innovate could provide a grounding for future reform efforts. Smith and Imura (2004) have made the further constructive suggestion that actually basing suggestions for change on careful consideration of local traditions of language teaching could be beneficial, given their persistence.

Finally, 'historical sense' can enable teachers to critically assess proposals coming from the outside, justifying appropriate resistance to inappropriate change, and enabling them to build their own suggestions for change on the basis of existing traditions and considerations of 'what works' in their own classrooms. There are needs for 'local' histories, then, but the best-known historical accounts of language teaching have so far tended to be written by western scholars writing from the 'centres' of innovation export.

Whether for international reformers or local innovators, historical sense is important. What seems innovative or new in one context may not be viewed as such in another. Indeed, an idea or practice is never innovative in itself but only in relation to a particular setting, which needs to be fully understood and described, including with regard to its history.

Aspects of innovation, from chapter authors' perspectives

The contributors to this volume all consider innovation historically, themselves making explicit how their studies relate to the overall concept of 'innovation' although not necessarily with specific reference to the considerations outlined above. The contributions address different and intersecting aspects of innovation and, although there is overlap in concerns among chapters, it seemed plausible to us to order them thematically into four separate sections, as described below

Some innovations in the history of language learning and teaching are obviously influenced by the introduction of new (material) inventions or technologies, and this might be termed *innovation through technological change*, or *product innovation*. Technology is, indeed, what immediately springs to mind for many people when they hear the word 'innovation', although new products do not always involve new technology. In other cases, innovation has involved new ideas or findings rather than technology or immediately usable products, being developed via social processes which can be termed *innovation through scientific research*.[4] Also, one might question whether what has conventionally been termed 'innovation' involves, rather, *oscillations along a continuum*, within the dimensions of methods which Thornbury (2011: 194) has defined following Kelly (1969) and Stern (1992). Finally, it is also worth investigating further the specific nature of the 'grammar' of schooling (cf. Tyack & Tobin, 1994) when thinking specifically about *adaptation in specific contexts*, particularly in contexts of (institutional) schooling which – from a historical perspective – have shown themselves to be robust against change, requiring a relatively 'conservative' (Arendt, 2006) or, at least, highly context-sensitive approach (cf. Wedell, 2009b), if innovation is to become embedded.

Product innovation

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[4] Stern (1992, 6) makes a similar distinction between 'technological innovation' and 'innovation through the language-related sciences and research'.

Going back to the issue of definition, we can see that the *Encyclopedia Britannica* makes a useful distinction between new 'products' and new 'processes'. Innovation, here, is defined as

> the creation of a new way of doing something, whether the enterprise is concrete (e.g., the development of a new product) or abstract (e.g., the development of a new philosophy or theoretical approach to a problem). (Boslaugh, n.d.)

In the context of education, the OECD, as the major global propagator of educational improvement, makes a similar distinction between product and process, defining innovation as:

> a new or improved product or process (or combination thereof) that differs significantly from […] previous products or processes and that has been made available to potential users (product) or brought into use […] (process). (OECD/Eurostat, 2018)

In this understanding, the introduction of 'new or significantly different products and services' (Vincent-Lancrin et. al., 2019: 21) marks *product innovation*. This can be identified in 'new syllabi, textbooks or educational resources, or new pedagogies or educational experiences (for example e-learning or new qualifications)' (*ibid*), often materialized in items which survive the course of time. These items can then be analysed thoroughly and need to be put into their respective historical, geographical, social contexts to evaluate their 'innovative character'. This means researchers have to find out whether anything similar had been known or used before, to ascertain the extent to which they were indeed 'significantly different' within their context and time.

Several chapters in this volume highlight characteristics of product innovation, especially in the field of lexicography (Iamartino & Berti, Nuccorini, and Heuberger). The influence of technological change is evident in this field, both in the diversification of dictionaries for learners, and in their broader distribution, which were initially consequences of the decreasing cost of books and printed matter following the invention of printing on the threshold of the modern European era, and cheaper production, especially after the Industrial Revolution. The role that the invention of letterpress printing played in the development of learning materials also potentially applies to every other technological innovation in the field of media, including audio and video as well as information technology.

The question does arise, however, whether cheaper and easier dissemination via new technology might only involve, in fact, cheaper and easier dissemination of information, that is, whether it primarily forms a quantitative advantage but without changing the content itself. This would, for example, be the case if a book that was previously only copied by hand is made available as a printed product, but also if books are scanned and made available online.

Qualitative effects are also conceivable, however. One example from this collection is the use of language corpora as a basis for dictionary production since 1987 (see Heuberger). With the use of corpora, the technical innovation of databases as a basis for dictionaries makes it possible to determine which language use is in fact empirical and authentic – something that neither individual authors nor larger teams had previously been able to ensure. Whether technological innovations trigger quantitative or qualitative effects on language learning and teaching thus deserves detailed investigation. On closer inspection, some celebrated 'innovations' might have been not much more than just transitions from one medium to another.

These considerations are largely at the level of *product innovation*; they do not provide proof of whether the *processes* of foreign language learning and teaching have also been innovated. Although the availability and dissemination of innovative teaching and learning materials could be an indication of their use, Banducci Rahe (in this volume) shows how quite a large quantity of apparently 'innovative' language teaching materials (e.g. records, record players, flashcards) were acquired by a Brazilian school in the mid-20th century in the course of modernisation of the school system. However, the mint condition they are still in today suggests that they – and thus any intended *process innovation* – have never actually been implemented.

Innovation through Scientific Discovery

In contrast to *product innovation*, *process innovation* is harder to trace from a historical perspective, as historians cannot always rely on material items when evaluating whether new processes have been brought into play. The distinction between product and process innovation seems similar to that drawn by Edquist and Johnson (1997) between innovation of material and innovation of immaterial aspects. Innovation not only bears on new technology but also on the introduction of new ideas or at least on new combinations of existing ideas.

Thus, another aspect that becomes visible in some of the contributions to this volume is how innovation might be triggered through scholarly or scientific progress and, thus, through the introduction of new ideas and new ways of seeing and understanding the world. In the context of language education, this development has been most obviously relevant during what has been termed the 'Scientific Period' from *c.* 1920 to *c.* 1970 (Howatt & Smith, 2014: 85ff.), when a series of scientific innovations in the field of second language learning theory led to a deeper (but to this day far from complete) understanding of how languages are learned. Whyte (in this volume) shows how these scientific innovations influenced the field of language

learning and teaching (research) in France. Prior to that, the late 19th-century Reform Movement had triggered teacher-led research and thus innovation at the level of classroom practice – at least among the teachers who were convinced of the Reform and willing to try out the new methods (see Klippel, this volume).

Generally (though not always), changes in understanding of processes involved in language acquisition may also give rise to new ways of language teaching and learning that can be tried and tested with the help of empirical research in the realm of *process innovation*. New scientific insights can also trigger *product innovation*, with dictionary-making again being a prime example within this collection. Thus, Iamartino and Berti show how, in the 18th century, Andree's dictionary was constructed on the belief that lexis is more easily acquired and memorized with the help of etymology of the Latin ancestor of English words. In the same way, Nuccorini traces the use of word combinations in phraseological dictionaries of the 19th century that include a didactical perspective on using words in context rather than just relying on word-to-word translations. Heuberger analyses how the innovative nature of monolingual learner dictionaries answered to the needs of monolingual instruction suggested by the Direct Method. In these examples there is usually a close connection (or even a personal union) between the proponents of scientific innovation and authors / publishers of a product innovation.

These lexicographical examples show how new insights into the way languages are (or should be) acquired and learned can trigger both *process* and *product innovation* and thus new ways of imagining language teaching and learning. However, what sometimes looks like a neatly ordered, universal 'procession of methods' (Hunter & Smith, 2012: 432) gains a more complex aspect when language education is considered in specific contexts, as in the chapters in this volume. Also, studies like Banducci Rahe's remind us that the mere existence of new and innovative ideas does not say much about their relevance and dissemination in the real world.

In other words, the influence of an idea on theoretical debate does not automatically prove its impact on teaching practice (cf. Giesler, 2021).

Oscillations along a Continuum

Instead of a linear progression of teaching methodology or a neat 'procession of methods', what we know about teaching practice both in the past and present looks, rather, 'eclectic' and oscillatory along a continuum between extremes as, for example, defined by Stern (1992) and Kelly (1969) and taken up in Thornbury's (2011: 192ff.) dimensions pertaining to methodology in language teaching and learning. It is hard to imagine fundamental innovation in a millennia-old trade like language teaching in which almost every approach imaginable seems likely to have been tried out, in one way or the other, already. Practitioners can be assumed to have always based their practice on what has seemed to work before or, at least, to have mixed 'innovative' ideas with their existing, relatively conservative routines, which may themselves be well-adapted to contextual constraints such as assessment.[5] Extreme ends of the continua proposed by Stern (1992) and Thornbury (2011) include a focus on formal aspects of language – as in the much-maligned Grammar-Translation Method – or on functional aspects and language use – as in 'direct' methods and those based on 'communication'; these, in turn, are often combined with a focus on metacognition and didactic interventions at the one end and attempted replication of 'natural' learning comparable to how children learn their mother tongue, at the other.

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[5] A more philosophical explanation of the conservative nature of schooling is provided by Arendt (1954: 11), who says 'it seems to me that conservatism, in the sense of conservation, is of the essence of the educational activity, whose task is always to cherish and protect something – the child against the world, the world against the child, the new against the old, the old against the new. Even the comprehensive responsibility for the world that is thereby assumed implies, of course, a conservative attitude'.

In this spirit, Giesler and Doff trace Direct Method traditions in the German school context back to long before the Reform Movement at the end of the 19th century. They also show how a discourse of 'newness' and innovation has typically been used to advertise ideas and delineate them from others. Pedrazzini, on the other hand, shows how the traditionally conservative Italian foreign language syllabus based on grammar-translation was challenged roughly a hundred years later through the idea of 'reflection on language'.

In both cases, reality turns out to be more complex than a 'procession of methods' view might suggest. Both direct methods and grammar-translation, as examples of extreme ends of a continuum, may have rarely existed in their purest form, nor were they strictly tied to a particular era. As both Giesler / Doff and Pedrazzini show, when evaluating the degree of 'innovativeness' of a specific teaching method, the historical educational context needs to be taken in account.

Adaptation in Specific Contexts

A number of contributions to this volume show how 'innovativeness' needs to viewed in close relation to the national, cultural and geographic contexts in which it might or might not occur. Giesler and Doff provide evidence that the dominant teaching methodology for higher boys education in 19th-century Germany was not necessarily similar to what was used in girls' or merchants' schools at the same time; Pedrazzini shows that, while communicative approaches may have generally become accepted internationally at a theoretical level from the 1970s onwards, the Italian school system continued to largely rely on grammar-translation methods. In yet another European context, Whyte describes the specific development of *linguistique appliquée* in post-World War II-France, which partly resembled and related to developments in

anglophone applied linguistics but also came to constitute a specific, national tradition of language teaching (and other) research.

Finally, moving beyond Europe, the need to consider particular contexts and traditions becomes even clearer: Gianninoto and Pu, in separate chapters, explore the Chinese context in the 18th, 19th and late 20th centuries to show how western paradigms of language education (either imported by foreigners or adopted by the Chinese themselves) met different cultural, educational and linguistic traditions and thus may have caused confusion, had to be adapted, in fact changed, and finally may have led to innovation through exchange and adaptation of ideas.

Indeed, language education as an endeavour organized by political institutions within nation states is always embedded in the respective political context of schooling, being subject to general educational pressures – as becomes visible in Pu's chapter in the different understandings and purposes ascribed to the notion of 'learner autonomy' in relatively liberal and relatively authoritarian societies. Educational traditions are known to be rather robust and often not very amenable to 'innovation' – as is vividly made visible in Tyack and Tobin's (1994) notion of a 'grammar' of schooling that (once introduced) develops only slowly. Schools are known as places which change reforms, not the other way around. It is thus worth continuing to explore the differences between an innovation's influence on theoretical debate and its actual impact on teaching practice. Cuban's (2013) 'layers' of curriculum offer a helpful framework here, as researchers can state on which layer the innovation occurred – and on which not (see Doff and Smith, 2022).

Conclusion

Although clichés like 'there is nothing new under the sun' certainly need to be avoided, and anachronism is an ever-present danger, some apparent innovations can turn out, from a historical perspective, to have been little more than turns of a wheel or swings of a pendulum, or, indeed, far less beneficial than was intended at the time; on the other hand, forgotten or disparaged approaches, methods, materials or *means* of change from the past can sometimes take on a modern form and emerge as potentially useful in relation to current concerns.

Ultimately, what is *genuinely* innovative, and beneficially so, cannot be identified or appreciated without the kinds of historical perspective offered by this book, perspectives which have hitherto been lacking in the fields of applied linguistics and language teaching research. 'Local' or 'glocal' historical developments in Brazil, China, England, France, Germany and Italy are considered in the book along with 'global' innovations in the field of language learner lexicography, while the taught or learnt languages considered in different chapters include Chinese, French, Italian, Latin, Portuguese and Spanish as well as English. The historical periods treated range from the early eighteenth to the late twentieth century, and expertise is contributed from a variety of disciplinary backgrounds. The book draws on work by established scholars in the fields of history of language learning, lexicography and teaching (e.g. Doff, Iamartino, Klippel, Nuccorini) and introduces scholars who are relatively new to these fields. Various methodologies and types of source material within the overall field of HoLLT are utilized, illustrating the possibilities of applied linguistic historiography for both students and academics new to the field.

The chapters in this volume contribute, then, to an emerging body of research in HoLLT and HoAL (the History of Applied Linguistics) by considering cases of successful as well as apparently ineffective innovation, and by both interrogating the notion of innovation and exploring the history of its rise to prominence in the field of language teaching. We hope that

the insights provided will enable readers and, perhaps, the field as a whole to see beyond limitations of the dominant discourse of perpetual innovation and progress and thereby adopt a more historically informed, critical perspective on change and innovation in applied linguistics and language teaching.

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